

**Report 2: Summary of COVID 19 situation being addressed by Malmesbury Town Council based on latest government guidelines**

**A: Situation as at the 18<sup>th</sup> July**

**B: Malmesbury Town Council and Heals Partnership (community welfare).**

**C: Working with Malmesbury Town Team (business support: Malmesbury Town Team and Malmesbury Town Council Task Force).**

**D: Malmesbury Town Council Community and Civic Events and COVID 19.**

**A: Situation as at the 18<sup>th</sup> July:**

1. The easing of lockdown has allowed non-essential shops and hospitality businesses to open over the last month, albeit with strict operating procedures in place to prevent the spread of COVID 19 virus infection. The Jackdaw Café in the Town hall has re-opened.
2. No end date for physical distancing to prevent spread of the virus is in sight although there has been a change from 2m to 1m plus. Face coverings will be required to be worn in shops from the 27<sup>th</sup> July.
3. The major steps taken, in partnership with Malmesbury Town Team and Wiltshire Council, to support making shopping in Malmesbury safe and welcoming, have generally been well received. Only two negative letters have been received from residents at the Town Hall.
4. MTC parks and the outdoor gym were able to reopen on the 4<sup>th</sup> July.
5. Demand for direct support from the MTC and Heals Partnership with shopping and prescription collection is declining while the needs for support towards the most vulnerable members of our community is continuing.
6. The government is announcing changes to COVID 19 safeguarding measures on an almost daily basis. It has also announced a range of employment support packages. However, it is clear that unemployment will rise significantly in the months ahead.
7. Schools are currently expected to return in full at the end of the school summer holidays.

The consequences of the above are:

- a. COVID 19 caused welfare support for the most vulnerable members of our community of all ages will continue to be required for the foreseeable future.
- b. The type of issues being faced by residents are changing. For example, we are seeing evidence of increased mental health issues for those who are most isolated or under financial stress. The full situation around school re-opening is still uncertain. Some children will continue to be home-schooled through necessity (they live with a shielded person) or their parents will not allow them to return to school. Economic hardship will increase for those not able to return to work, or who become unemployed, or whose financial losses from not being able to work are not covered by the government's emergency support.
- c. Some local businesses can only operate on a severely reduced basis. For others the opening is not resulting in a return to full demand. On average High Streets are operating on <>% of previous footfall.
- d. There is increased social activity in open spaces. This is leading to increased loading of waste into the on street collection system and increased littering in open spaces.
- e. It is clear that in Malmesbury, and elsewhere, there is a part of the community which is concerned by the loss of immediate convenience caused by the loss of free car parking

spaces on the Upper High Street and the effect it will have on High Street sales over any other consideration. The Q and A response published to explain the changes in Malmesbury addressed all the main points raised against the changes made and there has been no alternative proposed that would also allow Malmesbury High Street to meet government guidelines to avoid the spread of the virus. (The changes made are, of course, subject to review and development as more businesses reopen and we gain more experience of what and how shoppers and visitors are behaving in the 'new normal'.

- f. Local residents who are shielding (approximately 300) or are at higher risk of death or serious illness as a consequence of catching COVID 19 will be continuing to great care and avoid the minimum of contact with others to avoid exposure to the virus. A significant proportion of other residents will only be returning to additional activity with great care.

This suggests that as a Town Council we should:

- I. Continue to manage our operations in accordance with the latest guidelines. Further re-opening of the Town Hall can now be planned. The availability and operation of public toilets is a high visibility activity.
- II. Continue our grounds operations with some changes in focus because of COVID 19. In particular we need to look to best manage the increase in waste and litter we are handling.
- III. Look at the most suitable work locations of office/ town hall based staff currently working from home.
- IV. Actively continue our support for the evolution of the Malmesbury Town Council and Heals Partnership. This includes looking to work with other local agencies to ensure we secure for the community the learning points of having to act to provide essential support through the lock down phase of the pandemic. (See Report part B).
- V. Continue to work actively in partnership with the Town Team to support the business community and the safe return of business operations. Following the immediate safety and welcoming work the challenge is to make sure that the advantage we have created for Malmesbury retailers as a whole is recognised through footfall and sales. We, of course, need to be responsive to issues that arise and find reasonable solutions where we can.
- VI. Continue to identify grant and other opportunities to offset the damage to MTC finances as a consequence of COVID 19 and its impact and to enable funding of essential community support while the situation continues. P&R are maintaining a review of developments and appropriate actions.

**The details of the additional steps it is proposed Malmesbury Town Council should take are detailed in the Reports B to D.**

## **Report B: Malmesbury Town Council and Heals Partnership (community welfare).**

This report follows the decision taken by Malmesbury Town Council to create the Malmesbury Town Council and Heals Partnership at Full Council on the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and the update and decisions taken by Council at its meetings on 19<sup>th</sup> May and 16<sup>th</sup> June.

The Partnership continues to operate in accordance with the resolution passed by Council on the 24<sup>th</sup> March, with amendments agreed on 24<sup>th</sup> April and the 19<sup>th</sup> May and the extension of the Partnership to the 30<sup>th</sup> September agreed on the 16<sup>th</sup> June.

### **1. The key developments to note since the 16<sup>th</sup> June are:**

1. The Supervision Team has been able to reduce its meetings from twice a week to once a week. Separate discussions may take place on development matters such as appropriate service developments and longer term planning.
2. A call will be held with Malmesbury Medical Partnership (MMP) to discuss the longer term plans for the continuing Partnership work and to understand how they see their role and responsibilities in the areas where the Partnership has been providing support in the future, including, for example, the application of NHS funding for social prescribing.
3. Direct support of the Partnership (in the form of donated staff time and services) continue to be gratefully received from the Co-Op, Virtual Business Services, Malmesbury Marketing, The Red Bull, Atema IT and others.
4. Regular reports have continued to be issued to volunteers and copied to councillors and Community Groups to summarise key Partnership activities and the development of future plans. The last weekly report was issued on the 13<sup>th</sup> July; reports will become fortnightly/ three weekly to the end of August.
5. The Partnership continues to link to good effect with Community Groups, local retailers and pharmacies, local schools, other COVID 19 support providers, Wiltshire Council, and Malmesbury Town Team. The next call with Community Groups is scheduled for Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> July.
6. The Heals Hardship Fund appeal, supported by Malmesbury Town Council and mayors past and present, has so far raised over £20,000 and requests for support are being dealt with. Additional donations are being strongly encouraged. In addition, Heals are experiencing an increase in demand for more complex support.
7. The Ready Meals service has reduced to 70 meals a day, two days a week, purchased at ingredient cost price from the Red Bull. This level of provision is sustainable by Heals until the end of the school holidays.
8. The Partnership's shopping solutions are continuing and will be managed through the TIC team.
9. The Partnership friendship calling team has been set up and is running effectively.
10. The supply of IT equipment and internet access for children most in need of this support to assist their home education has continued and 40 piece of kit are operational. The cost of refurbishing equipment and internet costs are being met from the Heals Welfare Fund.
11. The emphasis on COVID 19 matters on the new Malmesbury Town Council website has been reduced and the site now has a more normal appearance.
12. As previously reported, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government has written 'all who serve on Parish and Town Councils' promising a share of the £3.2bn of additional funding for councils will be allocated to lower tier councils. No information about the allocation we will receive has been received from Wiltshire Council. In

addition Wiltshire Council has received some additional government funding to replace income loss.

13. The continuing commitment and effort of our Town Clerk and our staff team towards progressing the work of the Partnership while also continuing MTC operations deserves to be noted.

## **2. Proposals on the above:**

1. To note the above.
2. To formally request guidance from Wiltshire Council and the SoS when the funding identified by the SoS in 12. above will be quantified and paid to Malmesbury Town Council.
3. To continue to identify and apply for grants Malmesbury Town Council may be eligible to receive.
4. To agree to continue to circulate the volunteer reports and offer additional briefing meetings with councillors as appropriate

## **3. Financial Implications of these Proposals**

The allocation of funding as indicated by the SoS would help offset the loss of income being experienced by MTC as a result of COVID 19.

Campbell Ritchie

Mayor

Malmesbury Town Council

18<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## **Report C: Supporting the work of Malmesbury Town Team.**

Malmesbury Town Council partners with Malmesbury Town Team to support the promotion of Malmesbury as a place to visit and the economic well-being of our High Street and local businesses.

Malmesbury Town Team is continuing to undertake a wide range of activities to support local businesses and business people during the COVID 19 situation.

These include:

1. Regular video calls with local business leaders
2. Regular newsletters and updates
3. Topical and relevant 'how to' guides for businesses
4. Complementary population of the MTC and Discover Malmesbury websites with relevant information for businesses
5. Specialist virtual training sessions
6. Free one to one coaching and advice to businesses by Town Team specialists
7. Investigation of and support for the introduction of online shopping tools and other service line extensions for local businesses

In addition, the Task Force consisting of members of Malmesbury Town Team, the Malmesbury Town Council and Wiltshire Councillor representatives on the Town Team and representatives of the local business community have ensured the implementation of essential Phase 1 temporary changes in the High Street and other areas to ensure the central area of Malmesbury was safe and welcoming during the governments phased lifting of lock-down restrictions from the 15<sup>th</sup> June. This has required an increase in some pavement widths, major changes to parking arrangements and additional signage plus a new disabled bay in Market Cross.

Phase 2 represents work held back by Wiltshire Council on resource grounds and may be implemented at a later date. Of this second phase, the most important elements remain the speedy implementation of the long term changes to entry and exit to the Cross Hayes car park, the change on the bus stop location on the south of Cross Hayes, and the increase in parking spaces in the Station yard car park and on street near the Old Bell.

The Task Force has since been meeting weekly to review and progress the effective operation of the High Street and the development and implementation of additional activities as reflected in the Town Team's 'Malmesbury Recovery Plan'

MTC expenditure to date on signage, maps and leaflets and shop local marketing development is approximately £8,500 from the £10,000 budget agreed at our May meeting.

The changes to the High Street have been generally well received although there has been some vocal social media opposition on the grounds that the changes are not required to provide a safe shopping environment and will damage the viability of some retailers. Two letters of concern have been received from residents.

The questions raised by those opposing the changes have been addressed by a Q and A and a number of meetings and discussions. The Q and A have worked well and improved acceptance of the changes. No alternative proposals have been made that would allow the return of parking on the High Street without breaching government safe distancing guidelines.

Trading levels and retailer feedback is being closely monitored. The scheduled call with retailers on the 9<sup>th</sup> July did see some retailers expressing concern that some customers were opting not to shop

on the High Street if they could not enjoy. However, in the context that overall footfall in UK High Streets remains 40% to 50% below that of 12 months ago there is no evidence that other than as described in the Q and A Malmesbury High Street is faring worse than elsewhere. This said, our aim is that Malmesbury High Street performs at least as well or better than other High Streets and additional work is being undertaken to achieve this.

This includes:

1. Developing additional car parking proposals (see A. below)
2. Positive retailer focused PR
3. The active promotion of 'shop local'
4. The active promotion of the Malmesbury Gift Card
5. Plans to improve signage to free parking in Station Yard
6. A meeting with a Wiltshire Council economic advisor to ensure that Malmesbury receives all support available
7. A 'Welcome Back' leaflet being distributed before the end of July highlighting the breadth and depth of our High Street offer and the other attractions in Malmesbury over the summer including family trails, Malmesbury in Bloom and Carnival
8. Accelerating the display of banner signage encouraging visits
9. Developing supporting ideas such as 'Click and Collect' and online ordering
10. Promotion of Cloister Gardens as a picnic area
11. Facilitating busking under the direction and management of Malmesbury Life Arts (see B. below)

#### **A. Developing additional car parking proposals.**

We are dealing with the effects of a health emergency and have been seeking support from Wiltshire Council so we can operate 1 hour free parking in the Cross Hayes car park but this has so far been rejected. Free car parking is deemed important during this health emergency to support the recovery of the High Street and to maintain the maximum convenience element to High Street shopping visits while on street parking restrictions. WC have however invited us to pay for this free parking and the cost quoted by Wiltshire Council is £8,527 per month (£102,324) per month. This would represent around 22% of our annual precept.

**Note:** We are aware that Corsham Town Council has a temporary free parking scheme until next April but have not had confirmation of the charge being levied by WC. We know from press reports that Marlborough Town Council have been offered town wide free parking at an annual cost of £330,000.

We are therefore seeking other options including:

(a) Direct action/ subsidy by WC in support of the High Street and the long term protection of rateable income, and.

(b) Alternative arrangements for between 20 and 30 one hour free spaces in Cross Hayes, which would be expected to have a cost of between £1,800 and £2,400 per month before any direct action/ subsidy by Wiltshire Council or consideration of the application of our limited number of 'free space' allocation to this option and the roll over of the Station yard free allocation 'lost' in the period all charges were suspended.

As of the date of this report we have no indication of any willingness by WC to engage in serious discussion on this matter.

## **Proposal**

- a. To note and recognise the continuing work of the Town Team to provide support to local businesses during the current COVID 19 situation.
- b. To note the success of the Task Force in enabling the safe and welcoming lifting of lock down restrictions on retailers, hospitality businesses and business in general in Malmesbury and the support received from Wiltshire Council by implementing essential changes in and around the High Street.
- c. To note the actions being taken to promote local businesses and the experience of shopping in Malmesbury.
- d. To take all reasonable steps to secure a proposal from Wiltshire Council that would enable the operation of a meaningful number of one hour free spaces in Cross Hayes car park while social distancing measures are required.
- e. To bring back any such proposals requiring funding support by MTC for consideration by MTC, including at a special meeting of Council if required, as quickly as possible.

## **Financial Implications**

Proposal e. may result in a spending decision by MTC

Campbell Ritchie

Mayor

Malmesbury Town Council

13<sup>th</sup> June 2020

## **Report D: Malmesbury Town Council Community and Civic Events and COVID 19**

Transitioning MTC community events into virtual events is continuing:

### **June:**

**Mayor's Charity Event:** The Virtual Malmesbury Pub Crawl. Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> June. This was very well attended and generated a contribution to charitable causes of over £250.

### **July/ August:**

**Malmesbury in Bloom:** Publicity is well advanced. This will include and children's art competition. The awards ceremony on 18<sup>th</sup> September will be held as a Virtual Event if necessary.

**Busking/ Open Air Events:** Small scale busking/ open air events are under development to take place in August.

**Family Trails:** At least two Family Trails around town will be launched in later July.

**VJ Day: 15<sup>th</sup> August.** A small commemoration is being planned for 11:00am on the 15<sup>th</sup> August.

### **September:**

**Friendship Civic Reception:** Friday 25<sup>th</sup> September. We have invited our twin and friendship towns of Gien, Niebull, Bad Hersfeld and Malmesbury SA to meet virtually with us for a fantastic celebration of friendship. Details will be finalised over the next month.

**Under consideration:** Schools Art Competition, Afternoon Tea Party for older residents, Youth focused summer activities.

In addition, Community Groups looking to develop and promote virtual community events are being supported.

### **Proposal**

To note and agree the above arrangements.

### **Financial Implications**

There are minimal financial implications as a result of these proposals. It is expected that costs will be maintained within existing agreed budgets. Income may be reduced on the same basis as if the events were not running (e.g. reduced ticket sales and bar receipts).

Campbell Ritchie

Mayor  
Malmesbury Town Council

18<sup>th</sup> July 2020