



BODMIN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

— Building a better Bodmin in Business for the Community

Minutes of General Chamber meeting held on Zoom on 15th March 2021 at 6:30 pm

Present: Joy Bassett, Carol Randall, Phil Gale, Phil Taylor, Phil Brown, Rob Wood, Andrew Kirk, Jane Tily, Daryn Dodge

Apologies from Paul Miles Rogers,

Minutes

Minutes of the February meeting were accepted as an accurate record

Matters Arising

Bude Business Voice and CLLD

Phil Gale asked for Carol to update the meeting about her visit to the Bude Business Voice meeting and also asked for news about Community Led Local Development (CLLD) grants. Carol reported that she attended the Bude Business Voice focus group meeting on the 25th February, at which Scott Mann was a guest. James Thomas from CLLD was also at this meeting. CLLD had made a grant to Bude Business Voice of £13000 to pay for consultants to set up an organisation to represent the Bude business community. It was disappointing to learn that although CLLD still have money available they are now able to support only capital expenditure but not revenue expenditures, etc. This means that they can support purchase of equipment, etc., but not pay for consultancy or assist with payments to staff, rents etc. However, James asked for anyone with a potential opportunity seeking financial assistance to get in touch with him as he would be happy to advise about other funding sources.

Treasurer's report

Phil Brown was not present at the meeting in time for this report. Joy said she had two invoices to pay. £40 to the Information Commissioner's Office and £180 for our affiliation fee for the Cornwall Chamber of Commerce.

Membership report and issues

Phil Taylor reported no change from the previous meeting

Correspondence

Joy mentioned that she had been sent an invoice from the Information Commissioner's Office for payment of a £40 data protection fee which was subsequently passed to Phil Brown to action.

Joy also mentioned that she had received a letter from Kim Conchie, passed to her by Phil Ugalde. It concerned plans that Cornwall Chamber of Commerce team has for the G7 summit and how to showcase Cornish business interests. One suggestion Cornwall Chamber made was to have hubs in towns, including Bodmin, across the County where people could watch proceedings on a big screen. Several possible venues

were suggested including the Cinema, Bodmin Jail and Shire House Suite. Phil T reported that the Westberry does not have the facilities for large screen projection.

Another possibility was an expo where businesses from different areas could be showcased. Suggestions for Bodmin representatives included Flann Microwave, Trewithen Dairy, Bodmin Jail, Cornwall Dairy Vets, Cornish Lime, Proper Cornish, and Callywith College. It was agreed that any business we put forward should be a member of Chamber. Phil Brown was not enthusiastic for Cornish Lime to be represented as he could see no benefit to his business as he exports very little and is very busy already.

Louise Midgley is being employed by Cornwall Chamber as PR Campaign Manager for this project.

It was unanimously agreed that we should explore further to see how Bodmin Chamber might get involved

Action: Joy to respond to Kim Conchie to register our interest.

Better Bodmin

Joy reported that Phil Ugalde is considering winding up Better Bodmin as it no longer fulfils any obvious role. There is currently a fund of around £1600 in their account and Phil Ugalde asked Joy if Chamber would accept the fund if it was ring-fenced to be used as seed-funding to regenerate business in the town. This has yet to be agreed by the Better Bodmin members.

Joy suggested that we should offer the current members of Better Bodmin a year's free membership in return for the fund. It was unanimously agreed that we should do this.

Action: Joy to discuss with Phil Ugalde

Business Directory/Town Portal – Discussion of Document

Prior to the meeting Carol had circulated a short paper to all members with some ideas proposing that Chamber develop a business directory/town portal as a revenue-generating initiative. The paper is appended to these minutes.

Carol explained that this proposal expands the idea of a Business Directory that Chamber had looked at briefly, pre Covid, and was intended to be a town portal that would give comprehensive coverage of events, issues and activities going on in and around Bodmin. She added that there are currently no other websites that address this need so there is a clear gap in the market.

There was a consensus of approval to explore the idea further. Andrew, Phil T and Phil B and Rob all expressed reservations about a forum as this would need to be carefully managed to avoid offensive or damaging comments. Carol agreed that this is an issue that is manageable with effective moderation and pre-approval of all posts. Phil T suggested that this could be mitigated if only members of the Directory were permitted to post in the forum. Andrew also said that we need to satisfy businesses that there is benefit to them to participate – the WIFM (What's In it For Me). He also commented that anyone working on this would probably need to be DBS checked to reassure people that it was secure.

Phil T suggested that the Business Directory database could be printed on a yearly basis as a kind of Yearbook and Joy suggested that this could form part of the Chamber's annual report.

Phil B wondered if businesses would use it. Jane said she would because although she has as much work as she can cope with, she would prefer to do projects in Bodmin to save travelling to other areas to work on projects.

Carol said that this could not be done using only voluntary manpower so we would need to find funding. She said that she was happy to do some more research and write a short prospectus to be shared with potential funders and collaborators if everyone was supportive of the project. Joy proposed and Phil Taylor seconded, and all were in favour that we should go ahead with this further research.

Jane mentioned that Al Shiner (who designed our window sticker) also designs websites, so we could speak with him about it.

Brexit Breakfast Meeting

Joy reminded everyone about the Brexit-themed Breakfast meeting to be held the next morning and reported that there were few Eventbrite registrations. Phil T asked where the links were for the meeting as he had not been able to find them. Carol said they were on the programme that was sent to all Members and the Eventbrite link was on the press release that was sent out. Phil said he had not found it because the word Brexit was not in the subject line of the email.

Action: Joy to send out an email containing the link to all members

Future of Breakfast Meetings

Joy reported that Callum, Scott Mann's assistant, had been in touch saying that in future Scott would attend the Breakfast meetings once every two months rather than monthly. Joy said he has been very supportive and attended almost every month since we started them.

Joy suggested that we change the frequency of the Breakfast Meetings to once a month. Several people commented that the 3rd Tuesday meeting was inconvenient as it followed the Chamber meeting on the 3rd Monday. It was agreed that we would drop the 3rd Tuesday meeting and hold only the Breakfast meetings on the 1st Tuesday of each month, alternating each month with Scott Mann and a themed meeting of some kind.

New logo

Carol reported that she had had some discussions with Al Shiner, the designer who did our window stickers for us. Most of the members liked the logo that was on that sticker so Carol asked him if he would send us some logo variants, for use for different purposes, to be considered as a new logo. He agreed to do it in turn for a year's free Chamber membership.

Window stickers

Joy said she had picked up the unclaimed window stickers from the Westberry and was going to send them to members. Phil T suggested that when writing she could ask if they were going to renew and if not, why not.

Action: Joy to send out stickers and ask about renewal.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Joy asked when we should hold our 2021 AGM. She suggested that we delay from April to allow us to, hopefully, have a proper physical meeting at the Westberry and a meal after (optional). Phil T said that the earliest the Westberry would be able to host this would be May 17th, so June 21st was suggested. Phil T checked and confirmed that the hotel could accommodate the Chamber on this date. So, it was agreed that, Covid restrictions permitting, the AGM would take place at the Westberry on June 21st.

Any Other Business

Rob asked if Fore Street would be closed when the shops re-opened as for the first lockdown. Joy said there were no plans to do so.

The meeting was closed at 7.45 pm

Next Chamber Meeting will be on Monday, 19th April at 6.30 pm

Next Breakfast Meeting is on 6th April at 8 am

Appendix - Bodmin Town Portal and Business Directory – Discussion Document circulated to members prior to meeting

This document contains some initial thoughts about the possibility of building and running a Bodmin Business and Town Portal as a way of raising revenue for the Chamber to expand its support to the Bodmin business community.

We have now completed our Business Plan and we need to start fleshing out some ideas that will take this forward, generate revenue and successfully market Bodmin as a destination to do business, looking for investment and trade with the rest of the UK and abroad.

The Bodmin Virtual Market that we started last year, in collaboration with Dave Birch of Bodmin Way has proved to us that there are many micro and small businesses who could benefit from additional support to help them expand their businesses.

Bodmin also has many companies based in the various industrial estates who would benefit from a stronger and more prosperous business community. This is about creating the rising tide that will lift all the boats, irrespective of their size.

We have also learned from our discussions with Cornwall Council, the LEP and other funding sources that a collaborative project that involves members of the community is more likely to attract funds. Those towns that can demonstrate that there is sufficient support for projects to be delivered well are always at the head of the queue when it comes to receiving development funding. It is possible that the Bodmin College Digital Media Dept might be interested to participate which would certainly add another dimension of added value to its development.

We have had some discussions in Chamber before about creating a Business Directory for Bodmin and this may well be a good place to start with our expansion.

The principal objectives would be to

- raise revenue for the Chamber to reinvest in business-related projects
- provide a comprehensive searchable directory of local businesses to help consumers find the supplier they need, thereby helping to encourage people to buy local
- offer small businesses an affordable and effective way to showcase and promote their business
- provide a modern, easily accessible, and well maintained one-stop shop for anyone looking for information about Bodmin whether they are tourists, residents, potential investors, or people looking to pursue a business interest
- encourage people to buy from local businesses
- provide a platform for the local tourist attractions, voluntary organisations, charities, schools, and businesses to reach out to tourists and residents and showcase special events and activities
- strengthen the Bodmin business community by hosting an online forum/meeting place for businesses to discuss, share, network and collaborate
- help businesses to recruit staff and job seekers to find the right job
- help businesses to find premises

The current Chamber website is ready for an update so this may well be a good way to start to build a foundation for our events and activities going forward.

What could a directory look like?

At a basic level this could be a portal that people could visit to find businesses and services they need in the Bodmin area and local businesses could put their details on it. There are online directories, like Yell but they lack focus and are not updated so information is often inaccurate.

Managed well, and creatively, a Bodmin Business Directory could be an online focus for the business community, encouraging collaboration and good practice. It could also help tourists to find out more about what Bodmin has to offer. Local residents could use it to find that plumber, wedding planner, decorator or whatever they need.

A calendar function telling people what is happening in and around town could include details of regular events as diverse as football practice sessions to Council meetings It could also be the perfect vehicle to advertise and promote cultural and art events at the Old Library special events such as the Riding Festival, Fireworks, Tour of Britain, Alstock etc.

Bodmin does not currently have any kind of town portal or directory that gives comprehensive coverage of events, issues and activities going on in and around Bodmin so this would not be competing with any existing websites.

Business Related Content

The Directory would be designed to have information about businesses in and around Bodmin that would be held in a robust database with a user-friendly search function enabling users to easily find what they are looking for.

A basic level entry could include

- Contact person
- Name of business
- Phone number
- Address
- Business type/category
- Website /Facebook page
- How to contact

Entries could be expanded to allow businesses to add more detail, for additional fees, such as testimonials and special promotions, events news, job vacancies etc, images and videos.

Customer reviews are now an accepted feature of business directory and transaction websites. These could be included but would have to be moderated and managed very carefully to avoid abuse and offense.

The Directory could also include a forum for general discussion about business and local issues and ideas to be put forward. This could be very helpful to organise and inform local businesses and organisations about events like the Tour of Britain, for example. It could be a great tool to encourage collaborative initiatives.

Forums are not difficult to develop but do need to be moderated on an ongoing basis and require strict rules for participation to avoid abusive and offensive content.

The Directory could also contain

- Calendar function where businesses could promote their own events such as sales, special offers, workshops
- Jobs vacancy page and job seekers page
- Premises available and premises wanted page

It could also offer voluntary organisations and charities an opportunity to publicise what they do.

Costs

There are two main costs to establishing a website directory of this kind. The first is the cost of setting up the website with a suitable database and search structure and the other required functions e.g., calendars, with possibly a forum. This needs to be done by someone with the expertise to develop a structure that can be easily maintained, moderated, and updated daily by people without programming expertise.

The second, ongoing, cost is the need to market and maintain the directory once it is set up. This cannot be done with only voluntary help so will require paid staff positions. It may be best served with a manager, possibly part-time whose role it is to manage, develop and grow the Directory with the help of a tech savvy assistant who can upload and moderate content, keep content current and manage the technical features and database.

Funding

Employing staff will require some initial funding to pay for the development stage and keep it going until such time as the Chamber can generate sufficient revenue to support staff.

It is proposed that the ongoing costs would be met by subscriptions from businesses and there is also the potential to look for corporate sponsorship. Subscriptions would be kept at an affordable level to encourage as much participation as possible.

As a first step we need to put together a short overview that we can share with potential funders such as Community Led Local Development and Growth Hub. This will need to include some preliminary costings and forecasts. It will also be necessary to speak to some local business owners and organisations and do some demand evaluation research.