

Chair's Report by Joy Bassett, May 2021

Since our AGM in July 2020, despite the pandemic and most of the year spent in Lockdown, I am pleased to report that we still managed to achieve a great deal.

1. Holding our meetings via Zoom, in addition to our monthly meetings we managed to continue with the twice monthly breakfast meetings to help maintain contact with members of the business community and to help keep them encouraged, informed and provided with a space to share thoughts and ideas. Our MP, Scott Mann, came on the first Tuesday of each month to hear from business owners about their concerns and to keep us informed of any new COVID support and updated guidelines. During the last year, we have had some interesting and informative guest speakers attend the breakfast meetings. These include Darren Buckley from Cornwall Chamber, John Negus also from Cornwall Chamber to talk about making the most of Brexit, Cllr Jayne Kirkham on Cornwall Council's Procurement Policy and her proposed motion to spend more of the Council's budget with Cornish suppliers, Cllr Tim Dwelly, as the Portfolio Holder at the time for Culture, Economy and Planning on investment in Bodmin as well as local business owners such as Dan Dicker from Circular & Co and Russell Cosway from Gydeline.
2. Bodmin Chamber took part in the Cornwall Virtual Festival of Business on 3rd November with the spotlight on Flann Microwave, Cornwall Dairy Vets, Cornish Lime, Bodmin Jail Hotel & Resort and Proper Cornish. Five successful local Businesses that Bodmin is proud to celebrate and boast about!
3. We have been working with the Bodmin Vision Group (now known as the Town Team) and Bodmin Town Council to apply for a Town Vitality Fund of £100,000 that will, if successful, enable us to undertake a number of projects that we have been discussing since the creation of the Bodmin Vision 2030 Document in 2019, such as:
 - A feasibility study into the pedestrianization of Fore Street.
 - A review of the empty shops in Bodmin, including creating a register of absentee Landlords.
 - Setting up a Community Benefit Society as a vehicle to attract investment and funding to buy/lease, run and manage community assets.
4. We have been involved in the development of Bodmin's Neighbourhood Plan. It is important that businesses also get a say in the future development of Bodmin so the planners understand what is needed to help business in the town.
5. Bodmin Chamber of Commerce became a Registered Company, now known as Bodmin Chamber of Commerce & Industry Ltd. We currently have four Directors on the Board, Myself, Carol Randall, Phil Gale and Phil Brown. We are delighted to welcome Russell Cosway, a former Director of Better Bodmin, to join us.
6. We took the step of registering as a limited company by guarantee because we wanted to become a partner in the government's Kick Start Scheme and thus to help smaller businesses access the scheme so they would be in a position to offer 16-24 year olds a positive and rewarding work experience, adding to their employability. Carol Randall produced comprehensive briefing notes which initially attracted a lot of interest from the business community, many of whom wanted to take part. Member Paula Hutchens from Amber Training worked with us to develop an excellent training package for the businesses taking part in the scheme. Unfortunately, contrary to the advice we received at the outset about who can take part, it wasn't until DWP announced the closing date that we learned that we first had to become a registered company. This turned out to be a lengthy process as we had to get approval from Cornwall Chamber first, then register through the British Chamber of Commerce, which meant that we could not submit our application to DWP

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before their deadline. On a positive note, however, we are now in a good position to be able to respond to any future government schemes.

7. This also led to us to produce a 5-year Business Plan which will help us in our growth and development, so that we can become an effective partner working with other official agencies and government bodies to bring economic growth and prosperity to Bodmin and Cornwall. A copy of our Business plan is available on our [website](#).

We had a new logo designed by local designer, Al Shiner, who used it to create a Bodmin Chamber Member window sticker for our members to display. These will be available to members at the AGM on the 21st June or sent out in the post to members who are unable to attend. We have seen our membership grow to 36, despite the pandemic restrictions. We are delighted to welcome new members Al Shiner representing Design by Lead, Ian Crane representing Flann Microwave, Andrew Kirk representing PKF Francis Clark, Rev'd Paul Holley representing Bodmin Way, Jane Tily (Architect), Natalie Swift representing Swift HR, Samuel Ryan representing Social Sloth Games, Lowenna Dyer representing Cornwall Dairy Vets, Daryn Dodge representing DMD Management Services Ltd, Peter Robinson from representing Fire Safety in Order and Penny Robinson representing North Cornwall Talking Newspaper.

Some things have been put on hold during the lockdown, but which we intend to pick up:

1. Owing to COVID we were unable to arrange a meeting with any representatives of the LEP to talk about their industrial strategy.
2. Small Business Saturday was cancelled. We were planning a Christmas Market to take place in Fore Street on 5th December as part of the Small Business Saturday Campaign. Because of COVID, we decided to start a Virtual Market instead. With the help of Dave Birch from Bodmin Way, volunteering to run the Facebook Page, Bodmin Virtual Market was launched and turned out to be very successful. Thanks to Dave's technical skills, he was able to create a very simple platform for traders to join and start to trade. Each stallholder could create a photo album for their products and arrange the payments directly with their customers. There is no charge to stallholders which helped to attract a variety of local artists, crafters and food producers, some of whom found themselves having to reinvent themselves and start their own micro businesses during lockdown. We decided to keep the virtual market going until we can have a real street market, which is something we are working on with Bodmin Town Council now that they have become a market authority, for the summer.
3. We made contact with Louise Brooks-Curry, from CROUST, who is a keen advocate of local food producers, and we will continue to work with her to bring together food and drink producers and hope that they will take part in the local food markets which we are planning for later in the year in Fore Street.
4. Owing to COVID, Cornwall Council and the LEPs had to re-prioritize their list of planned projects, which meant the plan for an Agri Food Hub in Bodmin is no longer high on their list of priorities. Conversations were beginning to take place with Cornwall Chamber and others in the food & drink industry around plans for an Agri Food Hub, but we suspect that it will be based in the west of the County. Now that we are coming out of lockdown, we hope to resume the talks with Cornwall Chamber and hope to direct the conversation back towards Bodmin and the original vision of an Agri Food Hub based here. That would serve Cornwall by bringing together food and drink industry related suppliers from packaging, bottling, and engineering plants to marketing, a brilliant business school and incubator units for start-ups and be a major hub for shared distribution. This requires working with our local colleges,

Chair's Report by Joy Bassett, May 2021

Duchy College, Falmouth and Plymouth Universities to deliver the scientific, technical and engineering skills that will be needed. It will also require a lot of investment.

5. We agreed last year to take out an annual subscription with Cornwall Channel which would give us a number of sessions through the year in their TV studio talking about business projects and development in Bodmin, and bringing members onto the show giving them an opportunity to promote their services or products. We were not able to do that due to COVID restrictions, but now, coming out of lockdown, we have our first session planned for June 11th coinciding with the G7 meeting in Carbis Bay. More information about that below, under point 6.

Additional Projects:

1. A comprehensive electronic directory of Bodmin Businesses, Local Government departments, places of education, health services and community organisations including a portal with an e-Calendar of What's On. The directory will be on a platform that will provide information for both locals and visitors. This project will require a paid post to keep the platform up to date and maintained. Income will be generated by selling listings. Members will have preferential rates and there will be a variety of rates, from basic business contact details, links to websites and other digital platforms to promotional videos and being featured in the Bodmin Chamber TV Sessions with Cornwall Channel. I am very grateful to Carol Randall for the work she has already put in, researching and gathering in all the information we need. She is currently trying to identify someone with the digital skills to undertake the work. If you know of anyone, or any local company, please do let us know. We hope that once we have a successful template, we will be able to make it available to other towns.
2. Working with *Into Bodmin* to explore the use of empty shops as a start-up space for stall holders and micro businesses.
3. We are embarking on a programme of research to find out what support and advice local businesses might need in order to make their businesses more successful. This will help us to identify what we can do to provide practical help and support to local business owners. It is important that we are offering meaningful support that will enable us to recruit more members and have an active membership community.
4. As part of our subscription to Cornwall Channel, we will be hosting a Bodmin Chamber G7 TV show, in Cornwall Channel's studio, on 11th June. We will have a live link to the G7 Summit with VIP guests, including MP Scott Mann. We plan to create the opportunity to shine a spotlight on some of our more successful businesses, and show why Bodmin is the ideal place to invest, to start a business, or to which to move your business.

The G7 themes on which we will focus are:

- **Climate Change and The Environment. The points we want to bring out:**
 - Explore what we must do to mitigate the damage and change the way we think and work.
 - Shorten our food miles by increasing local productivity.
 - Change our farming methods and use of the soil.
 - Drastically reduce our imports, learn to eat more of what we grow and catch.
 - Renewable energy – attract investment to start building back our manufacturing base.

Chair's Report by Joy Bassett, May 2021

- Work with Cornwall Council and the British Chamber to lobby for change in planning policies and legislation, both to remove the existing barriers that prevent local communities from producing their own energy and to address the problems with the National Grid.
- **Scientific and Technological Development - looking at:**
 - How to apply cutting-edge technology and engineering to both the food and drink sector and to renewable energy in order to increase local productivity and put Cornwall on the map as a significant provider.
 - Creating highly skilled, well paid, local jobs.
 - Local places of education delivering the skills and technical training needed.
- **Building Back Better – pulling it all together:**
 - This has to be based around a green industrial strategy. We will focus on the points that come out of the discussions on the two themes mentioned above.
 - Discussing the big question being asked by the LEP, “If you had a sizeable investment, how would you like to see it spent?”

It has been a year to remember, that is for sure, but despite COVID and with many thanks to our committed and hard-working team of executive members, we have still managed to make some progress. I am very much looking forward to our AGM on June 21st when we will, for the first time for some considerable period, be able to meet in person. I very much hope that you will be able to join us.

Joy Bassett

Chair

Bodmin Chamber of Commerce & Industry Ltd

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