

Scrutiny Group Report on the Issues Arising from the Ideas and Vision Group Open Meeting on Retail in Buxton, January 2013. Executive Summary

Background:

- 1 The Scrutiny Group decided to investigate concerns expressed by several members of Buxton Town Team (BTT), including the directors, following a paper that was circulated prior to the January Ideas and Vision (I&V) Group open meeting on Retail in Buxton
- 2 The report does not 'apportion blame' but identifies some ways in which BTT can continue to act as a positive agent in promoting the development of Buxton.
- 3 The Scrutiny Group met with some key players involved in the events surrounding the meeting and also with the Strategic Director of Buxton Campus and with the Leader of HPBC.
- 4 The Scrutiny Committee has conducted its investigation entirely freely and without direction by anyone. It is grateful to all those who have responded positively to a request for a conversation.

Brief Chronology:

- 5 The December meeting of the Ideas and Vision Group decided to hold an open meeting on retail issues within Buxton and deputed two members to organise this.
- 6 As well as preparing a power-point presentation, the two members circulated by email, a 'discussion paper' that had been written earlier and that contained some negative statements about the University and the Borough Council. Although the email indicated that the paper was a discussion paper, it was not flagged as a personal opinion.
- 7 There was a strong reaction to the paper and the directors took rapid steps to explain that the paper was not a BTT position statement and to apologise to the University and to HPBC for the negative impressions created by the paper.

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All together, better

- 8 In addition, the plan for the meeting was restructured and the power-point was edited. The intention was to make the power-point more factual and to encourage discussion. The meeting was held at the Buckingham Hotel in January.

Effect on BTT:

- 9 Those spoken to did comment on a tension within BTT over its relationships with partners and other agencies, such as HPBC, the University and Nestle. Some members believe that most progress can be made by working in collaboration, whilst others believe that BTT can operate most effectively as a pressure group.
- 10 BTT has to manage both roles: of being a partner and of holding others to account. This is a difficult role and will, inevitably, lead to directors being sometimes fairly or unfairly criticised.

Effect on BTT partners:

- 11 The events caused upset, annoyance and frustration amongst many councillors and officers at HPBC. Other staff were largely unaware of the issues. The action taken by the Directors was appreciated and HPBC continues to see BTT as a key player in the future development of Buxton.
- 12 There was considerable upset at the University. However, the actions taken within the University, together with those of the Directors, were able to correct the misperceptions. The University continues to see its future very much bound up with the well-being of Buxton and to see BTT as a key player in achieving development to mutual benefit.
- 13 The actions taken by the directors have been highly successful in rebuilding relationships with both HPBC and the University. Indeed we perceive that, following from the need to communicate frankly, the relationships are stronger than before.
- 14 Both external partners see BTT as having a dual role . as a constructively critical friend as well as a partner.

Recommendations:

- 15 No member nor director of BTT should circulate (or place on the website) a paper as a position statement, on behalf of BTT, without it first being endorsed by a majority of the directors.
- 16 No member nor director of BTT should circulate (or place on the website) a paper to promote discussion without it first being approved by the directors. (If the directors do not endorse all the views expressed or points made then they must make this clear.)
- 17 Any group, electing to hold an open meeting, should approve the plans and papers for the meeting before they are circulated outside the group.
- 18 The directors should develop a clear vision of how BTT will operate the dual role outlined in 10 (and 14) above.
- 19 The directors should consider ways to enable BTT to explore its remit (currently perceived as largely economic).
- 20 Members should be encouraged to use the forum on the website to debate issues, explore strategies and to influence the thinking of directors.
- 21 The directors should consider holding occasional but regular members-only forums where members may raise any issue concerning BTT in an open but confidential session.

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