

Report for SWWAB March 2014

Introduction

This is the second report on the activities under Project Sunrise-Mere and covers the period from September 2013 to March 2014. The major activities have been to progress the various sub-projects and to organize a programme of training courses and meetings for the next year for the business community.

Progress against Objectives

Project Sunrise-Mere effectively had twin objectives: improvement of trade, and encouragement of tourism. It addresses these through eight sub-projects. Substantial progress has been made on all of them. Subsidiary to this were the aims to increase membership of the Chamber of Trade to make it into a viable organization for the future, and to encourage more businesses to set up in the area. Membership now stands at 22 with a further 23 concerns identified which are being approached on a personal basis with an invitation to join.

This follows the development of a **Membership Benefits and Incentives** package to encourage local businesses to see the value in belonging to the Chamber. These include:- a programme of business meetings with Guest Speakers; training courses and social networking events (some in collaboration with neighbouring Chambers); Free registration on the Chamber's website, which will also showcase members and provide updates on any news; Provision of links to local businesses and organizations; Free listing on updated Community Signboards.

This programme of events will run throughout the year and is currently booked up until September 2014. Progress continues on the identification of local businesses for inclusion in a local directory, and these activities will contribute to the Chamber identifying and recruiting them. Assistance for new businesses in finding suitable premises has commenced with a local survey being commissioned.

The results of the cooperation with the AONB are disappointing, but a link has been established with **Visit Wilts**, possibly a more appropriate organization.

Finance

| No: | Project | Budget | Spend | Committed | Total |
|-----|-------------------------|--------|--------|-----------|--------|
| 1 | Business Directory | £1,500 | £1,000 | £300 | £1,300 |
| 2 | Business Website | £1,200 | £500 | £550 | £1,050 |
| 3 | A303 Signage | £1,200 | £90 | £750 | £840 |
| 4 | Stourhead Link | £600 | | £400 | £400 |
| 5 | Community Signboard | £800 | £300 | £700 | £1,000 |
| 6 | Encourage Tourism | £700 | £450 | £575 | £1,025 |
| 7 | Encourage Local Artists | £300 | £400 | £400 | £800 |
| 8 | Encourage New Business | £300 | | £250 | £250 |
| 9 | Contingency | £400 | | | £0 |
| | | £7,000 | £2,740 | £3,925 | £6,665 |

More information on spend and commitments is included in the detailed sub-project reports overleaf.

Comment

The Committee of the Chamber of Trade has been much encouraged by the willingness of individuals to help. Mainly these are retired persons who have experience and skills (and time) to give of their knowledge and enthusiasm to identified needs of the project. In the current climate, our business members, while willing to help, are finding that running their business leaves little time for other activities. This will no doubt reflect on the future viability of the Chamber.

Information collated on behalf of Mere & District Chamber of Trade, by Hamish Bell, President. (Final Version)

Detailed Reports for Project Sunrise-Mere

1 & 2 Local Business Directory and Business Website

This is proving more difficult and time-consuming than anticipated. Many businesses operate “beneath the radar” for a variety of reasons and so the main sources of information are personal knowledge, casual information from vehicle signs, advertisements in small local publications, and even cards in shop windows.

The Chamber is therefore considering what type of directory would best suit Mere and District and how this could be tailored to benefit our local businesses. There has been a further suggestion that a Tourism Directory advertising Mere as a destination and containing details of local businesses, establishments and places of interest i.e Stourhead and Longleat, should be developed that could be distributed out of the area to encourage visitors into Mere. This links with the **Visit Wilts** discussions.

The dedicated portal website for business has now been outlined with a designer and a trial model assessed. A quotation has been received and accepted and funds committed. This covers further work and will result in a viable offering in the next two months.

As part of the encouragement of businesses to join the Chamber of Trade and the definition of the benefit of membership, new training courses have been identified and commitments made to run these in the next nine months. They include catering hygiene and the use of social media in marketing.

3 & 5 Signage A303 and Community

Cooperation with **Visit Wilts** has emerged as a more useful avenue than with the AONB. A subscription for membership of the town is being arranged which will enable Mere and District to feature in the organization’s publicity. Local businesses will be encouraged to contribute as well. Links will be made to the website.

Visit Wilts are also more aware of the operations of the Highways Authority regarding signage processes and costs. An estimate of £1750 per sign has been obtained. Clearly provision of these signs is outside the financial scope of the project, but effort will be directed to encouraging local business and other contributions.

Initial estimates of some costs for the community signs and for re-painting local signs in the car parks have been made and are included in the committed spend.

4, 6, & 7 Encouraging Tourism and Artists, and links with Stourhead

The provision of walking and cycling route information to AONB for inclusion in their new website has had a disappointing result. The site is overwhelmed by Tisbury and to a lesser extent, Wilton with only two walks shown from Mere. Additionally, the map of the Nadder Valley (as the website is named), excludes Mere and its surrounding area. The Mere routes will be included in the Mere Chamber website currently being constructed.

The small booklet ‘**A Mere Meander**’ has had to be re-printed as the initial run of 100 copies has been used. A local printing firm gave a competitive quote to print 1000 copies, along with an topical insert describing local WW1 involvement, and these have just been delivered.

A flyer supported by the project and describing the local **Artists in Mere** group has been produced. It will be distributed to local shops, libraries, and businesses, showing the products and contact details for commissions and purchases. An exhibition space is still being sought.

The group is to be commissioned to design a similar flyer to be used at Stourhead, advertizing the facilities and attractions of Mere town.

8 New Business Activities

A specification is in process to enable the commissioning of a professional report on commercial space available in the area for new business activities.

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