

Report for SWWAB September 2014



Introduction

This is the third of the six-monthly reports on the activities and their outcomes under Project Sunrise-Mere, the production of which was a condition of the Grant Funding for 2013/14/15. Further progress has been made in delivering the Vision of the project, to enhance the links with tourism and attract business to the district. The intention is that Mere becomes a “destination” in people’s minds, thereby providing opportunities for increasing trade in the district. Regular articles in Mere Matters have maintained the connexion with town and people. The Chamber is fortunate in having a committed and efficient Secretary who has provided excellent suggestions and support throughout.

Signage

At a point about two-thirds of the way through a project, progress seems to slow down. The initial actions providing quick returns have been completed and the more complex ones are still to show a result. The signage project has reached such a stage with three separate threads in action.

The Willoughby Hedge signs have been inspected and some strong arm action (assisted by strong detergents) by Councillor Jeans as his Bank Holiday relaxation has resulted in them looking cared for again. More action is needed to update them but at least they are now readable.

The sign on the Stourhead road has been inspected and is awaiting clearance of undergrowth before it can be updated, in conjunction with the Parish Council.

A review of the maps in the town has been discussed by the project team and two possible means of implementing the necessary changes considered. Removal of the first sign for closer examination was awaiting receipt of suitable tools to remove the tamper proof screws. An initial indication of price for manufacture of new maps has been obtained.

Encouragement of Tourism

A small booklet entitled "A Mere Meander" has been reprinted and is selling well to visitors to the town. It describes some of the older and interesting buildings. The Parish Church has several features which could be publicized to help make Mere a destination as well as a convenient stopover point for west-bound traffic. Publicity further east, and in London, in conjunction with Visit Wilts, is progressing. We are liaising with the Mere Museum to introduce QR codes on to buildings and businesses. These will link to web resources giving either information about the building or the businesses. It will also link with the new Chamber website which uses a more accessible updating system, enabling it to be modified by more than one authorized person. This along with a dedicated supporting Facebook page is now seen as the preferred method of implementing a viable business directory. It is expected that the QR codes will also be used on the town map.

Training Courses

Further training courses have been arranged for First Aid and Catering Hygiene. A course on the use of social media for marketing was well received as well as one on time management. A related course by the same lecturer is planned, probably in conjunction with another networking meeting in November. Tuition on administering the website has also been received.

Artists' Group Initiative

As a result of a suggestion from the Artists' Group, a glossy A5 leaflet has been designed and printed. This is now available in B&Bs and other public locations. It is both a means of attracting visitors and an opportunity to sell the artists' work.

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

Industrial and Office Sites

A local review has shown that there is little availability. The eventual move of the Hill Brush Company may result in some starter accommodation being included. This is a chicken and egg situation, but Mere is not immediately obvious as a centre for small manufacture or other light industries. Most ultra small businesses are working from home premises or garden offices.

Future Funding

The direct funding provided by the SWWAB has enabled not only the costs of the individual projects to be met, but also the administrative effort to support the operation of the Chamber on a day to day basis. This has resulted in an attractive membership benefits package to be offered to potential members. Current membership stands at 24 with another five businesses considering joining. We expect to reach 30 by year end.

Our efforts are now turning to consideration of funding sources for next year, as the last two years have clearly shown that the Chamber would otherwise have viability issues. We are grateful to SWWAB for their support. It has enabled us to carry out a number of actions of direct and lasting community benefit.

Outline Financial Information – March to August 2014

The majority of spend is made up of administrative support particularly in searching out businesses. The Social Club continues to support the Chamber by providing free facilities for Committee meetings on a regular basis. The following table includes committed as well as actual spend.

ITEM	INCOME	EXPENDITURE			
Grant from SWWAB (March 2014)	£ 7,000.00				
Website Hosting and Development		£ 400.00			
Mere Matters Advertizing (Committed for Sept.)		£ 100.00			
Project & Training Course Meeting Expenses		£ 550.00			
Project Support Admin		£ 2,400.00			
Mere Meanders Printing (final charge)		£ 330.00			
Artists' Leaflet		£ 120.00			
Totals	£ 7,000.00	£ 3,900.00			
BALANCE	£ 3,100.00				

Expenditure committed for the remainder of the year will be for signage modifications, support to a First Aid training course, Ensuring Customer Service course, extensions to the website, and development of the QR codes with their supporting resources.

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