

# MINUTES OF TOWN CENTRE HERITAGE TASK GROUP

27 JULY 2017

## PRESENT:

Councillors Mrs Avis, Mrs Bragg, Gillias, Miss Lawrence, Sandison, Mrs Simpson-Vince, Srivastava and Ms Watson-Merret

## OFFICERS:

Victoria Gabbitas (Arts, Heritage and Visitor Services Manager), Matthew Deaves (Communication, Consultation and Information Manager), Michael Beirne (Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader), and Linn Ashmore (Democratic Services Officer)

## ALSO PRESENT:

Chris Stanley, Unlimited Communications

## 5. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2017 were approved and signed by the Chair.

## 6. CURRENT TOWN CENTRE HISTORY AND HERITAGE

The Arts, Heritage and Visitor Services Manager gave the task group a presentation on the current history and heritage in Rugby. A copy of the presentation is attached at Annex 1 to the minutes (slides 1 – 7).

In addition to the presentation the following points were made:

It was important to distinguish between heritage and culture. For the purposes of the review heritage was defined as being something tangible from the past that was worthy of preservation, and culture was defined as being something much wider and more intangible that related to traditions and the way people live.

It was acknowledged that heritage and culture often overlap and were closely intertwined.

The key questions were; what assets does the town have that are worth preserving, what represents the essence of Rugby, and how can benefit be drawn from it?

It would take considerable resources to produce a complete asset register.

There were a number of collections within the Art Gallery and Museum (AGM) containing objects with stories about people and place they related to.

A large piece of work has just begun on the redisplay of the museum but this was still at the initial planning stage.

A brief overview about the history elements included:

- Geological history – collections would need to be borrowed from the County Council, including fossils from Newbold Quarry and material reflecting the history of the cement works.
- Rugby sits on the edge of the Jurassic ridge that runs from Dorset via the Cotswolds towards the Wash. The closest point to Rugby is the dip in the ridge known as Watford Gap. Over centuries travelling people have followed this route to move north to south. The A5/Watling Street, canals, the railway and motorway all pass through this geological feature.
- This traveller route had a big impact through commerce.
- Rugby was based at the centre of an important web of road, railway and canal links.
- Communication (former Mast Site) - Rugby was the centre of worldwide communications.
- Rugby is the centre of a network of cement pipelines.
- Romans – this era was well covered by the museum.
- Rugby as a market town – this was important feature of the town's history. Many streets names were linked to the market and this is still reflected today with the former cattle market site. Market towns were located 12-14 miles apart which was the distance people were prepared to travel to buy or sell.
- Rugby School – recognised as an important part of the town's history. The school rose from small beginnings and went on to attract the local gentry and raise the profile of the town.
- Previous headmasters have raised profile of town and school.
- The game of rugby was well represented by the Hall of Fame and links to Rugby School.
- Canals – an important part of Rugby's history but not located in the town centre.
- The canal and railway industries brought unskilled "navigators" (construction workers) and skilled engineers to town.
- Railways - a very important part of the town's history. The London to Birmingham railway line created in 1839 brought people to Rugby and resulted in the rapid growth of the town.
- As the local population increased the town centre also grew. This growth saw Victorian buildings replacing the existing Georgian properties.
- Rugby as an engineering town – from the influx of people brought by the railways and skilled engineers industry grew.
- The geology and skilled workforce links to the cement industry.
- Invention, innovation and design – people of note included Gabor and Whittle.
- The growth of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is reflected in museum and also through the Redding collection.

It was not possible to cover everything in the review and the main focus was on heritage.

During further discussion, the following points were made:

- Maps of the time show that in the 1700's Rugby was not a town of great importance and was only the size of a village.
- Concerns were raised that heritage would be lost through the development of the town centre. Buildings of historical interest should be protected through the planning process. An example of this was the Grazier's Arms on Railway Terrace, formally known as the Central Hotel.

- A report was produced by the Victorian Society in 2010 which listed historical assets which could be a source of information.
- Buildings worthy of protection included the 1960's parade opposite the Clock Tower and the Squirrel Inn.
- The focus should not remain on modern history. There were opportunities at St Andrew's Church and gardens.
- Stratford upon Avon was an example of a well-planned town centre. The placement of sculptures and the pedestrian walkways provided connectivity and similar improvements could be made in Rugby.
- The Public art in town was good but better context could be created.

The redisplay of the museum was a key factor. Connections should be developed to link the inside exhibits with the outside. Funding was being sought through Heritage Lottery Fund.

## **7. TOWN CENTRE EVENTS PROGRAMME**

Chris Stanley from Unlimited Communications gave the working party a presentation on town centre events and how heritage was represented (slides 8-13 of the attached presentation).

In addition to the presentation the following points were made:

Rugby has some great heritage but the challenge was how to bring it to life and tell that story. There was a need to identify the key stories and what is unique to Rugby, and there was a danger of this becoming diluted.

There were a number of well-established annual events taking place in the town centre and there could be opportunities to enhance these. One example was to link the association of the motorcycle manufacturing industry to Bikefest.

The main theme of each event was the big draw for large numbers of visitors and it was important not to weaken this and lose the essence of the event.

Rugby has a strong association with authors and this could be one way to encourage a new audience. Other towns have had success with literary events.

Some suggestions for events, and points to consider included:

- A literary festival
- Open heritage weekend
- Literary walking tours, living history or theatre productions – this could include storytelling authors
- Heritage Open Days – this could be a quick win
- Themed events
- Link events or tours to related buildings
- Use a similar model to the Festival of Culture
- Explore ways of promoting events and an improved visitor approach
- Connection to the centenary of WWI and war poets
- Link the Hall of Fame to written material such as a book launch
- What is the ideal target market?
- What is Rugby's unique heritage?

Planning for a literary festival would need to commence soon. Rugby School could be key partners for this type of event and different locations around the town centre could be used.

Marketing and how to attract visitors would be a key element.

Raising the awareness and building a sense of local pride in local people and children was important.

Events could piggy back onto the success of the Rugby World Cup and maintain that impetus. Having something bigger and more visual would attract visitors. One suggestion was to re-enact the Mad Hatters Tea Party with characters in costume.

The use of old photographs and maps could be used to enhance events.

Members acknowledged this year has seen the best Festival of Culture so far, but local press coverage had been disappointing.

## **8. PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES**

The Communication, Consultation and Information Manager gave members an update on the approach to engagement with the public and the online questionnaire responses.

Copies of a briefing paper, information on the online questionnaire and responses were circulated to members.

During discussion the following points were made:

A press release was produced that appeared in both local newspapers, though the piece was small. The online consultation form, based on the following topic areas, was published on the council website:

- Reviewing the extent to which the current [town centre events programme](#) focuses on heritage and making initial recommendations on how this can be improved.
- Improving access to information and marketing activities for existing activities, for example the [Blue Plaque trail](#), [Pathway of Fame](#) and [Rugby town guided tours](#).
- Reviewing the [blue plaque scheme](#) and whether there should be additional plaques.
- Investigating the use of technology to allow people to view town centre environments through smartphones, with additional content.

Information about the consultation was also covered on radio by Rugby FM and would be raised again during an extended interview with the Leader next week.

Information about the online consultation was shared through the Rugby Town Guides and with some visitors to RAGM.

The online consultation reached 4,720 people via social media. Of these 181 clicked on the link, 74 looked at the survey, and four people completed it.

Although the number of completed responses was low, the number of people reached was acknowledged as successful.

The task group considered the copies of the four responses. In general, these were as follows:

- There was general agreement that town centre events could include a clearer link to the town's own heritage. One respondent provided examples of how this could be done.
- No respondents felt the need to provide more blue plaques, though there were various ideas for other sites of very local interest.
- Most respondents had ideas on how to make information about the Blue Plaque trail and other heritage assets more accessible, including using web technologies.
- There was general agreement that smartphone technologies should be used, with various ideas of how this could be achieved.

It was clear more could be done to promote Rugby through the town's heritage and it was agreed that the online consultation should remain open and continue to be promoted.

It was difficult to target Facebook pages that contained links to the town's past or history as this would need to be done by an individual with their own profile. It would be possible for councillors with their own private profile to do this if they wished.

The Communication, Consultation and Information Manager would provide regular updates on the responses.

The task group were informed that Unlimited Communications were beginning to receive feedback on the recent Festival of Culture which could provide useful evidence for the review.

There was a variety of material available online such as photographs of past Rugby which could be used for promotional purposes. However, these were often subject to copyright laws.

It was suggested that a photograph be sourced and used to help publicise the review, but it was stressed the Redding collection could not be used as it was too fragile.

Photographs could also be a way of linking people and the past. One suggestion made was a photographic competition based on 'your heritage', and possibly link this to producing a calendar.

## **9. FEEDBACK FROM MEMBERS**

Members of the task group gave feedback on their experiences of attending the Festival of Culture events, completing the Blue Plaque trail and taking part in one of the Rugby Town Guide walking tours.

The following points and comments were made:

### *Festival of Culture*

- The brochure was excellent.
- It was delivered to homes but some residents mistook it for a trade magazine and disposed of it.
- One councillor ordered 50 copies which proved very popular across their local community.
- The musical events were fantastic.
- Some events were poorly supported, but this could have been due clashes with more popular ones.

- St Andrew's Church was a good venue for musical events due to the excellent acoustics but mainly attended by older people.
- The venue for the performance of the Reluctant Dragon was unsuitable and uncomfortable as it was cramped, meaning it got very hot, and children were expected to sit on the floor rather than with their parents.
- The concerts at the Temple Speech Room were very good and were all sold out.
- There was a good range of events and the outdoor musical events were very popular.

#### *Blue Plaque trail*

- The plaques were not numbered which meant it would be easy to add to.
- The map was not clear and it was difficult to see where the plaques were located.
- The use of modern technology as a way of bringing the locations to life was widely supported.
- It could get boring and would benefit from an upgrade.
- Positioning of the plaques was an issue. Some were high up, covered by shrubbery or only visible by stepping out into the road.
- The information contained in the leaflet was good.
- There were a number of historically interesting buildings which do not have any form of plaque or signage.
- An enhanced plaque scheme would include a number of other sites of interests and the use of App's would enhance the visitor experience.

#### *Heritage walking tours*

- Last year's Mayor organised a tour to raise funds for the mayoral charity which included the tours, a visit to the Hall of Fame, and afternoon tea at RAGM. This promoted these activities with civic guests for other local authorities.
- Each tour held was different and it was suggested that the guides used the same information.
- The pace of the tour was very good and the time passed quickly. It was an excellent way of drawing attention to the architecture of the buildings.

#### Other points and suggestions made included:

- The Visitor Centre and immediate area was not well signposted.
- There was no obvious information station at the Visitor Centre and information material was hard to find.
- An interpretation board, perhaps situated in the new café area, could display information on APP's and Q Codes to allow visitors to carry out self-guided tours, particularly during times when the centre was closed.
- The art trail was very good.
- Advertising on social media and hoardings on the roads entering into the town was suggested.
- Hoardings and banners could be replaced.
- A Green Plaque scheme would be more participatory and residents would be able to vote for which locations should be included. It may be interesting to hear the less obvious suggestions people may make.
- The Town Centre and Tourism Team Leader was currently working on ways to enhance the visitor experience at RAGM. This was an on-going piece of work.
- There were a number of sporting heroes that could be linked.

#### The following possible review recommendations were noted:

- AGM to extend its current displays to offer a more comprehensive history of the town's heritage.

- Explore ways of extending the number of listed buildings with planning officers.
- Extend the Rugby Festival of Culture by exploring ideas of a Rugby Literary Festival, to possibly coincide with the WW1 commemorations for 2018 and Rugby Open Heritage Days Festival, which could incorporate and extend the Heritage Open Days scheme.
- Update the current Blue Plaque trail and possibly introduce a Town Heritage Walk/Trail.

## **10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the task group's next meeting be held at 5.30pm on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> August.

The meeting would focus on:

- Enhancing access to information and marketing activities for existing initiatives i.e. the Blue Plaque trail, Pathway of Fame and Town Guides; and
- An update on responses to the online consultation; and
- A summary of feedback on the Festival of Culture.

**CHAIR**

# TOWN CENTRE HERITAGE TASK GROUP JULY 2017



# Today's presentation

1. What heritage have we got in Rugby?
2. What is the difference between heritage and culture?
3. Town centre events programme



## Defining heritage:

- “We decided that [the question] was unanswerable; we could no more define the national heritage than we could define, say, beauty or art ... So we let the national heritage define itself. We awaited requests for assistance from those who believed they had a part of the national heritage worth saving” (NHMF Annual Report 1980-81)
- “anything that is or may be inherited”; “a nation’s historic buildings, monuments, countryside etc., esp. when regarded as worthy of preservation” (Oxford Concise Dictionary)

## Defining culture:

- “the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively” (Oxford Concise Dictionary)
- Examples: tradition, belief, custom and practice, youth culture, café culture, bikers, pub culture, skateboarders, Goths, Mods and Rockers

## Defining culture:

- “the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively” (Oxford Concise Dictionary)
- Examples: tradition, belief, custom and practice, youth culture, café culture, bikers, pub culture, skateboarders, Goths, Mods and Rockers
- Culture (intangible) vs heritage (tangible)
- What is cultural capital? What is on Rugby’s Asset Register?

## Town Centre Heritage Assets

- Buildings in the town centre
- Domestic architecture
- Railway architecture
- Churches
- Rugby School
- Public art



# Rugby Art Gallery & Museum Assets

- Collections
- Stories, objects, people and places



# Town Centre Events Programme

- Rugby has a fantastic & unique heritage to be celebrated
- Variety of well established annual large scale themed town centre events take place (Rugby Bikefest, Rugby Festival of Culture, Rugby Food & Drink Festival)
- Heritage elements within some of these...but limited!
- No large scale heritage events in town centre

# Enhancing Existing Events

- Opportunities to weave heritage story within some existing events
- Rugby Bikefest (Old bikes built in the local area)
- Rugby Festival of Culture (Heritage walking tours, Rupert Brooke etc)
- Important though not to dilute the theme



# Developing New Heritage Themed events

- A couple of ideas...
- Rugby Literary Festival
- Open Heritage Weekend



# Rugby Literary Festival

- Strong association with writers (Rupert Brooke, Lewis Carroll, Thomas Hughes, Salman Rushdie etc)
- Ideal target market
- Successful in other towns
- Link to venues and existing groups (similar model to RFOC)
- Literary walking tour, storytelling, author interviews, book signings, workshops, poetry slam etc

# Heritage Open Days

- Well established
- Clear theme
- National marketing
- A quick win...but opportunities to grow
- Similar model to RFOC



# Summary

- Rugby town centre has some unique heritage
- Opportunities for better promotion & packages
- Possible to weave heritage story into some existing events
- Opportunities to develop new town centre heritage themed events
- Objectives: increased footfall, awareness & spend in the town centre