

BACKGROUND PAPER: ITEM 7(iv)

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Fri 11/02, 18:53
To: Berwick Info
Subject: Please give this to the Town Council

I find it astonishing at what a poor job you have made of Berwick. It has great historical interest and could be a wonderful town.

Instead since I have lived here in 17 years I cannot believe

1. The state of the Academy School this is sub standard. Get it replaced and up to standard like any Scottish school.
2. Lack of sports facilities now spending £20 million to put it on a round about with some god awful triangular cladding on a round about. New pool and extension would have sufficed with outdoor courts and running track for £10 million and spent the rest on the town.
3. The high street is awful. Team up with Farrow and Ball and get the place painted and tidied up.
4. No restaurants or decent pubs to eat in. They are ALL poor apart from The Maltings and Atelier but you need Pizza Express instead is lemon cello I suggested that 10 years ago.
5. Nothing to do for teenagers literally nothing. I go on the maltings website and there is never a current film.
6. You then have a new opportunity at Morrison's to create a new retail park and you are feeling it with the dreadful same shops that already exist.
7. Retail is gone you need to create things to do we all buy online. Cinema, bowling, roller disco, Nando's, Nike, Pizza express, would have been great.
8. Chandlery a waste perfect opportunity for Rick Stein sea container pizza box style restaurants and boat trips. Opportunity missed.

Think big, think hard and make it happen. The place is asleep and it's a result of your poor and lazy management

I did in business from nothing so I am sure you can!

So frustrating and such a waste.

Sort it out!

From: Gareth Davies LI.B MIPM MAC
Sent: Mon 14/02, 13:09
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Cty Cllr G Hill, Cty Cllr I Hunter, Cty Cllr C Seymour

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email. We always have a number of options when dealing with such an email; do we ignore it, do we simply acknowledge it, or do we provide a fuller answer to the points made? Given how many common misconceptions you appear to be under I think it might be helpful if I provide a fuller reply, and publish that reply as part of the correspondence we share at each council meeting.

1. The state of the Academy School this is sub standard. Get it replaced and up to standard like any Scottish school.

Responsibility for education provision rests with Northumberland County Council. We are aware that they are in detailed discussions with all the relevant groups to deliver new provision for the town; I think it is fair to say that, like many residents of the town, we are eager to hear what the new proposals will be, and for them to be delivered. I am forwarding this email to the three county councillors for the town and they may, in turn, provide you with any further information they have.

2. Lack of sports facilities now spending £20 million to put it on a round about with some god awful triangular cladding on a round about. New pool and extension would have sufficed with outdoor courts and running track for £10 million and spent the rest on the town.

The Leisure Centre is provided by a company called Active Northumberland, working on behalf of Northumberland County Council. We hosted one of the first consultations on the services to be provided by the new Leisure Centre in approximately 2016. The range of services provided is the result of that and other public consultations, and is the responsibility of Active Northumberland. We also supported discussions around an alternative proposal on the edge of Berwick for a new stadium and athletics facility, which attracted very little popular support. We are always open to new proposals but athletics has always seemed to be less popular than some would think.

3. The high street is awful. Team up with Farrow and Ball and get the placed painted and tidied up.

Contrary to popular belief, the Town Council doesn't own the town centre, and we can't simply start painting buildings that are privately owned. Neither can we direct landlords, many of who have no local connection to the town, to maintain their buildings to a decent standard. Where there is evident dilapidation, we speak to Northumberland County Council about it, but it's fair to say that the powers of any local authority to deal with buildings that are merely untidy or poorly kept are limited. Judging by the number of letters and messages we get on the topic there may be a case for the government providing local authorities with new powers, but that's a matter for the MP, not us. Out of courtesy, we are forwarding this email to the MPs office. Despite this issue of our limited powers, within the last six weeks we have contacted six landlords or their representatives about dilapidated buildings; one is now coming to market, which we hope may lead to either improvement or development of the site.

4. No restaurants or decent pubs to eat in. They are ALL poor apart from The Maltings and Atelier but you need Pizza Express instead is lemon cello I suggested that 10 years ago.

I don't want to sound sarcastic, but we're a council, not food critics. If Pizza Express aren't in Berwick that's their decision, not ours, and probably reflects their investment priorities. We've looked at the retail and food and beverage offer, and concur with most experts who say that the offer in Berwick is congruent with its population and economic profile. That's why, as a council, we have targeted economic growth through more profitable tourism and leisure activity, and stronger transport links to employment areas to make Berwick a better prospect for commuters. That seems to us to be the most likely way of changing the retail and leisure offer in the Town Centre, long term, as a consequence of the whole town becoming more prosperous. In the short term, we can work with partners like the Chamber of Trade to encourage businesses to look at the possible opportunities within the town to grow businesses - that's why we are negotiating with the County Council for funding for additional data collection about footfall and visitor numbers and times since we think there may be scope for growth via re-aligning business hours.

5. Nothing to do for teenagers literally nothing. I go on the maltings website and there is never a current film.

The programming choices made by the Maltings are theirs, and theirs alone. I will forward this email to their Chief Executive. As a Town Council we have flagged up the possible need for an alternative cinema offer, perhaps on the scale of Jamjar cinema in Whitley Bay, but discussions that we had pre-pandemic stalled because of the pandemic. We await with interest the return to the new normality, and to see if that offers the possibility of more demand for cinema that might tempt an independent entrepreneur. We have looked at multiplex operators like Reel Cinemas, but note that they tend to prefer larger towns with a more commuter demographic and better transport links (Chippenham, for instance). Even in Northumberland, Reel's planned investment in Ashington gives it half the county's population within ten miles of their site, including some of the county's most prosperous areas (e.g. North Cramlington).

On the issue of activities for teenagers in general, we'd like to have a clearer dialogue with young people about what they want. We're in discussions with various partners about wheelsports provision, and we'd like to move that forward, but we're acutely aware we're at risk of doing what adults think young people want, not what young people actually want, and we're going to work on that this year.

6. You then have a new opportunity at Morrison's to create a new retail park and you are feeling it with the dreadful same shops that already exist.

Contrary to your apparent belief, the Town Council doesn't own the new development at Loaning Meadows, and has no influence over who moves into the units. Given that some of the brands involved are fast growing and keen to open new outlets, it's arguable that not everyone shares your view of them as dreadful. I should also point out that the tenants, as promised at the inception of the project, who may share owners with some brands based in the town centre, are not the same brands as currently trade in the town centre.

7. Retail is gone you need to create things to do we all buy online. Cinema, bowling, roller disco, Nando's, Nike, Pizza express, would have been great.

We share with Graham Soult the view that retail is not dead, but boring retail certainly is. Like Graham (who is consultant to a number of towns like Chester le Street and Durham, and who is also one of the advisors to the High Street Task Force) we see independents as the key to retail growth in the near future, and we have seen new independents open in our town centre in the last 12 months. It will be interesting to see if large scale leisure is attempted on the soon to be vacant Aldi site, but we'll leave the marketing of that to the professional agents appointed by the owners of the site.

8. Chandlery a waste perfect opportunity for Rick Stein sea container pizza box style restaurants and boat trips. Opportunity missed.

The Quayside is a microcosm of the larger problem in the town centre of fragmented ownership, lack of master planning because of conservation issues and interests, and the over-dominance of car parking in town centre land use. The idea of using shipping containers on the site has been raised before; leaving aside the economic and marketing issues of such a plan (and the conservation issues involved) I would be concerned that such a plan might founder on the simple reality that it's impossible to get shipping containers onto the quayside via the archway to Sandgate and that vehicular access via the Bridge End ramp might also be challenging. As I say, it's an issue that has been explored, including the use of pods similar to those at Amble, but so far the lack of any enthusiasm to fund such a scheme probably says more than I can about its viability.

I am sorry that you feel that the Town Council is responsible for all the things you don't like about Berwick, and that this is a symptom of poor and lazy management. As Town Clerk I routinely ask myself if there is more that we could or should be doing, but our powers are limited and prescribed by parliament. I am proud of the attitude and work ethic of our staff, and of the approach we have taken to building partnerships and collaborating with other local authorities, the voluntary and community sector and private investors. I'm sometimes reticent about our role, because I remember well the old maxim about success having many fathers, while failure is an orphan, but in the last five years we have been part of or have supported

- Improvements to the harbour to allow the cruise ship trade to commence
- The re-development of the leisure centre
- The securing of Borderlands funding to re-build the Maltings
- The development of a new plan for the future of the Barracks
- The development of a new branding and identity for the town by Wayne Hemingway
- The growth of our autumn festivals, and the introduction of new events via Berwick Music Series

I'm sure partners too would point to schemes like the re-development of the hospital site as contributions to building a better Berwick. None of these things would have happened without the support and commitment of Northumberland County Council and our partners within the town, but I am confident the Town Council can feel proud of its role too.

Regards

Gareth Davies LI.B MIPM MAC

Town Clerk

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Council