

CAMPAIGN

The Newsletter of
Warwick Chamber of Trade
September 2006

A New Era for the Chamber

From 1st October EVERY business in Warwick will automatically be a member of the Chamber. This reorganisation is necessary because we exist primarily as a lobbying group to campaign for the businesses of the town, and have successfully achieved this over many years, however the burden on the Executive Committee, and on other aspects of our work, has grown and we have to lessen the load. As a result, and because of our excellent relationship with our Town Centre Manager, Adrian Field, we have restructured the way in which the Chamber operates.

There will no longer be an annual membership fee, instead every business is now a member. To cover the incremental costs involved members can choose to pay for 'extras'. These will include Retail Radio, an entry on the Chamber web site and in the Shopping Guide. Campaign will be supplied FREE by email (in PDF format) or for a nominal charge we will post it to you.

The Retail Radio network, so successfully started and expanded over the last ten years, will be administered on our behalf by Adrian. (see Page 3)

The Shoppers Guide will be collated by the Chamber and published in conjunction with Adrian, the TIC and with the other excellent guides that Adrian has launched this year.

The Chamber will continue to maintain and expand the web site.

We will continue to publish Campaign. It will now be available FREE by email.

What will not change, but be enhanced, is our representation on local government committees and our commitment to fight for the best for the town and the business community. That, as we have said, is our main function.

How does this affect you? In a positive way, by sharing the load we can devote more time to what we are here to do.

Please, complete the enclosed form, get your business on the new web site and get involved!

This is a new era for the Chamber. Positive changes for a positive future.

Please see pages 2 & 3 for further information.

Retail Attack from Cyberspace!

Few reading this will be ignorant of the massive growth in Internet shopping. Equally, few will not have purchased something over the internet during the last 12 months. In so doing you will have become part of the attack from Cyberspace that threatens the very fabric of all City, Town, and even Village centres throughout the UK.

Abandoned High Streets

In effect massive Cyberspace Shopping Malls are being built at terrifying speed. Major companies trying to get a competitive edge build huge web sites, and in some extraordinary cases even use these to compete against their own High Street stores by offering extra Web Site only discounts (eg Comet). Such has been the devastating effect in some segments that major companies have abandoned the High Street altogether in favour of web based business (eg Dixons) Few if any of the High Street majors do not have web sites where it is possible to buy their products painlessly online with no price penalty and delivered to the door. Price comparisons throughout the UK are simply a few mouse clicks, and delivery prompt, direct, and usually cheap.

Through the use of some simple graphics the most basic garage enterprise can look huge and important, and even at the individual level sites like Ebay can turn anyone into a retailer from anywhere.

Can we survive?

The effect of these developments has been to generate millions of sq.feet of Cyberspace Shopping. The question is simple. Can High Streets survive this sustained and growing threat to their business base? Can major developments such as that proposed for Leamington prove to be full and at adequate rent levels to yield a return to developers without leaving 000's of sq. ft. empty in other parts of the Town? How can rent levels be sustained in the light of reduced profit/footfall (note many leases have no provision for rent reductions)? Why are we trying to solve traffic problems in Town Centres that will naturally decline as online shopping grows? We could go on, but more in future editions of Campaign. Remember you were warned here first!

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Business Improvement Districts (BIDS)

What is this?

What a boring name for what is one of the most important Town Centre initiatives for decades. Cutting through the "bureau-speak" this proposal allows for specific areas of individual Town Centres to raise a supplementary amount on the business rate which is then spent exclusively by the businesses concerned on developing and promoting their area. The whole thing is co-ordinated through Town Centre management systems, where it can be tailored to fit with other actions being undertaken by other agencies, eg Councils, Tourism, Highways etc. It is not, in any way, under the influence of local councillors so there can be no direct political influence on how the money is spent. The Chamber is very positive in its support.

What are the Advantages?

Local Councils and other agencies often have priorities that override the business community. The competition for ratepayers money is fierce, and since we cannot vote as businesses in local elections and therefore cannot threaten re-election of councillors our interests are all too often put on the back burner in favour of more "community based" actions. BIDS allows us to break free from this constraint and decide for ourselves actions that will best favour our collective enterprise and provide the financial muscle to actually deliver. It is also hoped that the businesses will take a positive role in shaping the BID priorities since it is their own money that is at stake.

What are the Dis-advantages?

It is a matter of constant regret that despite our major contribution to local councils through the business rate very little actually comes back. The Government have tried (unsuccessfully) to disguise the amount of money it returns to local authorities from Business Rates, and we know that around 25% of local political spend is provided by businesses who have no political representation. However this will not change. Consequently BIDS can only be funded from an incremental rate (for example 1p in the pound), so everybody in the BID area will pay towards the common pot.

There is also a natural reluctance to believe that any money generated will not simply be used on projects previously, or reasonably, funded by local authorities. A classic example of this mis-placed trust is the National Lottery. However since the fund is controlled by business for business this can only happen if we are silly enough to allow it.

Does it work?

In Warwickshire there is already a major scheme operating in Rugby. Some of the schemes that they have introduced include street rangers (they have no police either), CCTV developments, special graffiti cleaning machines (hired out to the local authority!) and a number of promotional schemes. In our area proposals are being developed for Leamington, Kenilworth and for us. We hear that Stratford are also developing plans.

So what next?

There is a long way to go, and it will be some years before a scheme can be fully working in Warwick. To be successful a scheme must get a positive vote from more than 50% of the businesses affected, and this must also represent more than 50% of the rateable value. Once committed all businesses will be obliged to participate through the Business Rate system. We can be certain that our rival Towns will follow the lead of Rugby, and if only as a protection to stop further loss of business to them we should also develop our own proposals. However this is not a defensive scheme and offers us all huge opportunities currently denied to us through the iniquitous Business Rate scheme. You will hear and have the chance to read much more over the coming months, but if you want to read the background papers go to www.ukbids.org. Alternatively contact Adrian on 410815 or e-mail Adrian.field@warwickdc.gov.uk.

Waste Re-Cycling and Plastic Bags

As we all know, we get sod all for our business rates (not even a policeman any-more!!) and that includes waste disposal. Most of us have contracts with waste collection companies and most of this waste goes straight to landfill. The government makes much play about domestic recycling and yet does absolutely nothing to make it possible for the business community to do the same; indeed the government actively discourages local authorities from getting involved in business refuse matters, and if we take it to the tip we are forced to pay, again, for disposal.

We have written to WDC, WCC and to James Plaskitt. All have admitted that there is a problem but only vague solutions have been suggested, despite the fact that we have suggested that local government should get involved in solving this problem. But, we have good news. We have contacted a number of people who are interested in talking to local businesses about recycling, amongst them Fortress who will launch a card and paper recycling scheme for smaller businesses in the autumn. We will update this as and when we have further news – but, at last, it is looking hopeful that we can contribute to reducing our land-fill waste, even if we must pay.

Meanwhile, there is the terrible problem of plastic bags and the customers desire to have everything wrapped (often twice). We do not pretend to have the answer to this. Plastic is cheap, paper is not. The government seems blind to the problem and has rejected calls for a national tax on plastic bags (which has worked so successfully in Ireland). Any ideas? Please let us know at: info@warwickchamberoftrade.co.uk

Campaign goes Electronic

From 1st October Campaign will be available FREE by email (in PDF format). Please ensure we have your email address.

For those that prefer to receive it by post there will be a nominal charge of £5 per annum to help towards print and postal costs. Please complete the relevant sections on the enclosed form.

Web Site

The new-look, revamped, hi-tech chamber web-site will (re)launch on 1st October. Redesigned to make it much easier to change information quickly, the site is open to everyone for the nominal charge of £10. We will report hit rates and web statistics in future editions of Campaign. Please complete the details on the enclosed form and return as soon as possible.

Town Centre Management

The Town Centre Management Group is undergoing a revamp and wants to have more businesses represented. If you think that you could spare around 1.5 hours a month to attend the monthly meetings and have your say on issues such as Decriminalisation of Car Parking Enforcement, Traffic Management, Neighbourhood Policing, Events, Safety and Security as well as working towards achieving the projects in the Town Centre Action Plan then the group would like to hear from you. Please contact Adrian Field, Town Centre Manager (410815) or the Chamber of Trade's representative Sue Butcher (492249) in the first instance.

Publicity and Guides

If anyone can to stock copies of the leaflets for Warwick Parks and Gardens, Warwick Events Diary, Eating Out in Warwick or Warwick Words who does not already have a stock, please contact Adrian Field, Town Centre Manager on 01926 410815 or email adrian.field@warwickdc.gov.uk - It all helps to get people to return to our town centre and spend money! Stocks of the Shoppers Guide are held at Torry's, Vintage Antiques and Present Days. Please collect some or email info@warwickchamberoftrade.co.uk and we will deliver.

We all need to pull together to keep our visitors in town. Relying on others to distribute leaflets is selfish and, ultimately, self-defeating, so please help.

Improving our Looks

The streetscape in the town has been greatly improved with the recent painting of many of the town centre's bollards and lampposts. Along with the benches being revarnished, this much needed work helps to brighten up the area and gives a better impression to the people who live, work and visit the centre of Warwick.

Retail Radio Progress

As part of the Chamber's re-organisation, we have agreed that administration of the Retail Radio Network will be undertaken by Adrian on a Town wide basis, and that membership of the scheme will be extended into new areas of the Town. The Chamber will continue too be the license holder and will work directly with Adrian on further development of the Network.

We are aware of discussions to modify policing arrangements in the Town, and in the light of the possible loss of a CBO for the Town the network will play an increasingly important role in ensuring Town Centre safety and security with the support of CCTV. It remains a scandal that having paid for policing, and having contributed 25% of the local police budget, Warwickshire Police do not think that we are worth proactive policing, and are expected to simply get on with it. In turn they will not be surprised when we take our radios back from the Police if there are no Town Centre police to use them! In this context PCSO's (who cannot actually arrest anybody) do not count.

Alison Rowberry adds to the TIC

With great delight we report that Alison Rowberry, our hard-working manager of the TIC, has given birth to a girl (name unknown as we go to press.) Congratulations, Alison, and best wishes from us all.

New market trial layout

The Chamber supported the new look which, after consultation with neighbouring businesses, stallholders and the Market Operator EG Skett & Co., has led to this new layout being run until October 7th when it will revert back to its original layout until May 2007.

The need to look at a new layout was a result of the demand for stalls exceeding supply, particularly in summer, bucking a national trend; to attend to the feedback from the 2005 Market Place Review encouraging people to linger and spend more time in the Square.

In addition to the revised layout, entertainment is also being laid on over the summer months to encourage local families back to the market and to entice younger visitors to the town.

Godiva Awards

Thousands of people have voted for Warwick businesses in the Godiva Awards. As we go to press we do not know the results but the fact that so many businesses took part and achieved so many votes is a great tribute to the quality that we offer in the town.

Among those taking part are:

Torry's; Rose & Crown; Hair Management; Present Days; Brethrens' Kitchen; Thomas Oken Tearooms; Wyleys Cafe Emporium (Warwick Tea Rooms); Giovanni's; Prym's; Aspire; Shandaar Restaurant; Art Kitchen; Castle Balti; Cellar Restaurant; Bridge Theatre; Dream Factory & Playbox; Warwick Arts Centre; Lord Leycester Hospital; Warwick Castle; Warwick Racecourse; Ardencote Manor Hotel

Good luck to all and we will announce the results in the next newsletter, or visit <http://www.godiva-awards.com>

Tesco

As we go to press there is no change in the status of the Tesco application for shop premises expansion. We will keep you posted but experience teaches us that these threats do not go away and as Tesco now outsells every other shop in non-food items this proposal is more a question of when, and not if, since our local council planning department seems reluctant to refuse the wishes of any of the 'big boys' because of the threat of them seeking compensation if their applications are refused but subsequently allowed on appeal. These companies are ruthlessly out to dominate all the markets and our council is toothless to defend us. We must be vigilante and put up as much of a fight as we can.

If you go down to the woods tonight.....

If you felt slightly spooked at the end of August it could have been because the good Doctor Who has been here, saving us all from fates worth than death.

The BBC has been filming his latest adventures at the Lord Leycester Hospital for the second episode of the new series, due to go out in March/April next year. But, of course, we don't know if he won his latest battle with the aliens so - be careful if you go down to the woods tonight.....

Talk To Us

Want to send feed back? Contact us at: info@warwickchamberoftrade.co.uk

The Victorian Christmas Evening

Thursday 30th November

5.30pm - 9pm



The preparation for the 2006 Warwick Victorian Christmas Evening is gathering pace and now we need your support.

The event takes place on Thursday 30th November between 5.30 and 9pm and will include a stage kindly provided by BBC Coventry and Warwickshire, who will broadcast the event live, and will be adorned by numerous school and community choirs. The Chamber of Trade are playing a key role in organising the event, along with Warwick Town Centre Management, Lions, Rotary, residents and many other people, all helping to raise the profile of retailing in Warwick and of the town.

We are also indebted to our main sponsor the Warwick Arms Hotel.

Traditional rides and stalls will be in place including a Galloper, Fair Organs and Big Wheel, Can-Can dancers, a Barber Shop Quartet and much more. Plus, of course, Father Christmas.

Here's a brief outline of how you can help:

Open until 9pm (or later) on the night. This is a great opportunity to reach out to people who may not know your business exists. People may not buy on the night but will know where you are when they need you in the future!

Window Dressing Competition - enter into the spirit of the event by dressing your shop window (and yourself) in a Victorian theme. The winners will receive the handsome cut-glass bowl made for the original Victorian Evening, to keep for a year as well as good media coverage.

The lights will be switched on at 7.15pm with charity and craft stalls alongside the traditional roast chestnuts, pig roast and mulled wine so please do your bit to support an event which will benefit everybody.

Raffle Tickets - a Grand Raffle, which has prizes kindly donated by local businesses, has been set up by the Victorian Christmas Committee and enables participants who sell tickets to retain 25% of the receipts from tickets sold. Community groups and businesses, including Chamber members have been given the opportunity to raise money for themselves as well as supporting the Warwick Victorian Christmas Evening. The more you sell, the more you make. The remaining monies go into the cost of staging the event and hopefully forming reserves for next year's event to make it even better.

Money will also go towards the Mayor's Charities.

If you are interested in selling tickets (or know of a local group who would like to do some fundraising without the hassle of arranging prizes, a license and printing,) please contact Adrian Field, Town Centre Manager on 01926 410815 as soon as possible. The draw takes place on Monday 4th December

The response to the return of the Victorian Evening has been fantastic with the majority of shops planning to open AND dress up! One of the reasons cited for its previous demise was the lack of interest in joining in the spirit of the evening. It would appear that the vast majority are really looking forward to this revival and are doing their utmost to make it a success for themselves and for the town.

If you have any queries please speak to Adrian Field, Town Centre Manager, on 410815.

Shire Hall- What Next?

The Chamber has reported over many years the persistent whispers that change is imminent at Shire hall, and the possibility that Warwickshire County Council may vacate the Town Centre. This has always been denied by the inhabitants of Shire Hall (at least officially) and we have even received a written confirmation in the past that this is not true. However these whispers have now become an "open secret" with discussions taking place about the future of Shire Hall and the Crown Courts. More than 1200 people are employed by WCC in the Town Centre and the Courts are well known to bring in a large number of different visitors (lawyers, juries, families, witnesses etc) each and every day that the Courts are sitting. The economic significance to the Town from these WCC facilities cannot be understated. It is therefore surprising that WCC have chosen not to invite the participation of the Chamber in any discussion. However since we do not vote it seems that we do not need to be advised or consulted!

Logistical problems

In a change of this magnitude there are all numbers of issues to consider apart from the obvious logistics problems. Trades Union interests, alternative use/sale of the buildings, car parking for the Staff, planning permissions, the list is endless. We will do what we can to ensure that the economic interests of the Town feature somewhere on the list and hope to have the opportunity to talk to WCC soon. In the meantime, in the absence of this discussion with WCC, we are free to speculate to our hearts content!

More Car Parking?

An important consequence of any change will inevitably focus on the public use of Barrack Street and Cape Road car parks. It is to be hoped (and the Town should reasonably expect) that these car parks will be released to public use and not bundled up in some secretive property deal for the exclusive use of developers.

Any joined-up thinking?

Given this news, and the known development of Northgate Street, Longbridge Roundabout, other residential development (Print Works, Police Station? etc) and the S. W. Warwick development amongst others, is this really the time to be casting in concrete decisions about access, traffic plans, and decriminalisation. Common sense says no, but why should that stop it!