



Minutes of Committee Meeting

Wednesday 7th February 2024 at 5.45pm in Quay House, Kingsbridge

1. Welcome & Apologies

Present:	James Spencer John Gardner Scot Baston Nicola Coulson Georgie Leonard Jane Tyler Alex Robertson Alison Theaker Kim Willis Catherine Gillen Cllr Mark Goodey Cllr Sam Dennis Dawn Blundell Cllr Sarah Wyatt	Chair Pebbles Group Treasurer Vice-Chair, Kingsbridge Cornerstone Photography Secretary Committee Member, Bochinelli Committee Member, The Winking Prawn Group Committee Member, IT Workhouse Committee Member, Live Life for me Committee Member, Marketing Manager Committee Member, The Brownston Gallery Associate Committee Member, Salc. Town Council, Mayor Associate Committee Member, SHDC Associate Committee Member, Kingsbridge Info Centre Associate Committee Member, Modbury Parish Council
Apologies:	Cllr Philip Cole Sarah Burnett Cllr Mark Long	Associate Committee Member, Kingsbr. Town Council, Mayor Associate Committee Member, KCC Salcombe Info Centre Associate Committee Member, SHDC (esp. Planning) & Salcombe Harbour Committee
Absent:	Cllr Rufus Gilbert	Associate Committee Member, Devon County Council

2. Guest speaker

Laura Eames, Project Manager, Place and Enterprise, SHDC, briefed committee on Community Economic Plans (CEP).

Background

- SHDC is working with towns across the district to help boost the local economy and improve sustainability.
- The Community Economic Plan (CEP) project is currently being rolled out in Ivybridge and will be expanded to other towns in the district - Dartmouth, Kingsbridge, Totnes and Salcombe - over the next 2-3 years.
- The project - led by people living, working, and running businesses in that area, and supported by SHDC - will build on existing Neighbourhood Plans to create a clear economic vision for each town.
- Economy and jobs are top priorities, so plans will focus on business growth, sustainability and providing more opportunities for local training, apprenticeships, and employment.

Ivybridge CEP

- Residents and local business owners are being asked for their views on Ivybridge now and how they want the town to look in the future. The views and opinions will be used to shape future plans for Ivybridge, in the short, medium, and long term. The consultation is open for public responses until the 29th February 2024.
 - Gathering statistical research, running public consultations, and developing future plans form the basis of the CEP.
 - A local steering group, chaired by Cllr Matt Steele, was set up last August and includes residents, business owners, Ward Members, and Ivybridge Town Council.
 - To help shape Ivybridge for the future generations, SHDC have worked with 6th form students at Ivybridge Community College to design and launch a survey for 16-24 year olds who live and work in the area. The school has its own steering group and platform (Cyber Bridge) to gather information.
 - Information gathering is done via the website - *My Town, My Place; Let's Talk about Ivybridge* - which features 6 sections:
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1. Comment Map
 2. Business Survey
 3. Residents' Surveys
 4. Business advice and support
 5. Current community projects
 6. What happens next?

- Stats are gathered using **Microsoft Power BI**, a data visualisation platform used primarily for business intelligence purposes. Power BI's dashboard is capable of reporting and visualizing data in a wide range of different styles, including graphs, maps, charts, scatter plots, and more.
- To date, they've had 3,670 people visit the site, 500+ people take part and 841 completed surveys and comments.
- The feedback data will identify short term, medium term, and long-term projects. Going forward, to help projects come to fruition, SHDC will try to find funding for projects or provide support to community groups and individuals to take charge of these projects and drive them forward. If grant funding becomes available, effectively the feasibility study has been done, which will make it easier to respond to funding when it comes through.
- Laura gave an example of how the CEP might drive change in Ivybridge, citing the fact that shops are shut on Sundays. One idea to attract more visitors might be to get retailers to work together on a 6-month marketing campaign promoting Sunday trading, something that would be quite simple and not too costly according to Laura.
- Laura reassured that the CEP supports the Neighbourhood Plans, and that any ideas and aspirations that have come from the individual town's Neighbourhood Plan would be incorporated into surveys.

AT asked what they envisage happening as a result of all this consultation?

- Laura explained that the steering group would look at the issues the community have identified and create short-, medium- and long-term plans and projects. There will be a community economic plan document as well, which they hope the town council will adopt, plus a vision statement and a marketing statement for the town.

AT asked how important the business community's input is?

- Laura reiterated that this is very business focused. The survey has been promoted to the business community, and as well as gathering economic data, there has been an audit of the businesses in the town. Ivybridge has about 300 businesses and about 30 have taken part in the business surveys, which Laura didn't think was "too bad".

AT asked about grants.

- SHDC's Andrew Elliot, on Laura's team, works with businesses to help them find funding from the UK Shared Prosperity funding, or the levelling up funds, or a few other funds that come through that are relevant for businesses.
- Laura explained that if the CEP has already identified projects in need of funding, the feasibility work will have been done. With a 12-week turnaround on grant assessments, a CEP will allow a community to respond more quickly when funding becomes available. She reiterated that the CEP is also about educating people about their community, about identifying needs, and bringing people together to further ideas or work together in certain areas.

SB asked whether the feasibility studies have a certain life span, e.g., if a grant comes through in 3 years' time, would the study still be relevant?

- Laura responded that it would depend on the funding.

JS asked about resourcing for the CEP team and how long the team would be in place?

- Laura couldn't give a definitive answer but explained that they will be working with each town for at least 11-12 months to do the consultation, run the steering group, establish the projects and the vision. They have already met with stakeholders in Salcombe and begun the process of setting up a steering group there, with a view to launching the consultation in April.
 - She also wondered if Kingsbridge would consider being next and referred to engaging with young people, from 16-24 years old; those in school, further and higher education, even those who have left the local area but come back for holidays.
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SB asked about data collection.

- Laura explained that all the data is collated from the surveys. The data is not currently available to the public; it is shared with the project team and steering group.
- Laura explained that they have been using a third-party online platform, **Commonplace**, to engage the community, gather data and generate results. Commonplace is designed to “help you reach your community, engage them in conversation, analyse their feedback and collaborate on future ideas.” The team is still refining the way in which the data is presented. Additional data collection has been done face to face, so the team are also collating paper forms to feed into the main data source.

JS asked about future funding. If SHDC is investing so much in gathering ideas, does that mean that they think money is going to arrive in the next few years? Is there an expectation that government is really going to invest?

- Laura explained that whilst there are always grants available, this project is more about galvanising the community to work together and decide what they want from their town. SHDC sees this as a community project, so whilst Laura’s team is there to help facilitate the process, it is down to the individual towns to decide what they want/need and how they want to operate.

JS thanked Laura and said that when steering groups for Salcombe and Kingsbridge are formed, the Chamber would like to collaborate.

3. Minutes & Actions

Minutes from 3rd January 2023 approved.

Given the time pressure, JS proposed that we take out January actions as all are either completed or covered below.

3. Treasurer’s Report

Draft Budget for 2024

JG introduced his draft budget for 2024.

Overview

Income last year was £13,500, spend was £12,300, therefore our surplus is £1,300. JG pointed out the anomaly of the employer’s liability insurance, which didn’t show up in last year’s accounts, so it’s been added to our expenses for 2023. JS reminded committee that after discussion with Wessex insurance earlier this year, it was decided that, going forward, we didn’t need it.

Event losses

JG remind committee that he had committed to try to break even on events. However:

1. When members buy event tickets, the payment is taken by Stripe which charges a fixed fee of 2% for each transaction.
2. The Chamber covers the cost of providing complimentary speaker meals, which impacts on the overall cost.
3. Very occasionally there are unexpected costs e.g., we received a bill for broken/missing crockery after the AGM.
4. Occasionally people don’t pay the bills.

JG’s recommendation is to adopt a 10% surcharge for every meal for future events, to allow us to break even.

After a general discussion about pricing, bartering with venues to get the best prices and provide value to members, JS concluded that there was a definite appetite to support the recommendation, subject to agreeing a price point that is still affordable and offers good value to members.

To be picked up at March meeting.

Banking

JG explained that there are two HSBC accounts - a current account with £14k and a deposit account with £3.2k which is currently not giving any return. The current interest

rate is 1.95% which is not competitive. JG recommends that he transfers the £3.2k into a higher interest fixed savings account. A 5% interest rate would give us c.£100-£150 interest per year, which would at least offset the £60 annual fee to bank with HSBC.

MG asked if we needed £14k in the current account. JG said not, so MG raised the idea of transferring the money from both accounts into an instant access high interest account which would allow us to withdraw money quickly and easily.

Alex suggested keeping a working balance of £3k in the current account and the rest in a savings account (Monzo are offering 4.1% instant access and Starling are offering 4.9% if you wait a day). JG concurred that this would be a sensible solution.

Whilst we've accrued a credit this year, he foresees that the next couple of years are going to be tough. He also pointed out that the chamber is not a 'rainy day' organisation stockpiling for the future; the capital needs to be accessible to use.

Taking on board the suggestions, JG committed to come back to committee in March with a definitive proposal.

JS summarised by saying that there's support for maximising a savings account, where funds could comfortably be put to one side for a period.

Modbury Funds

JG has been speaking to CG about the funds. The proceeds from the Barrel Markets came as a lump sum at the end of 2023, which was paid into the account. JG also reminded committee that we'd contributed £300 towards Modbury's Christmas lights. He'd also taken out event insurance for the whole chamber. Neither of these has been offset against the Modbury funds, so he asked if Modbury would be happy to offset some of the profit they've made to put back into the bigger pot for those two? CG and SW agreed to allow the £300 to be offset, and a proportion of the event insurance.

JG also pointed out that his predecessor kept separate insurance for Modbury, which came out of the Modbury funds, which he doesn't consider necessary.

SW wanted to be clear about what the policy covered; JS suggested Modbury are given a copy of the policy. SW pointed out that Modbury Parish Council covers the cost of insuring the Christmas lights.

Moving forward, Modbury are hoping to put some of the funds towards regeneration of the town, making the town a bit more presentable and encouraging tourists after weeks of upheaval.

JG said that if all the funds are invested together, they will get a greater return which benefits all of us.

Kingsbridge Traders

Funds have been regularly drawn down, with £2.6 remaining.

Balance sheet

Nothing to report.

Draft Budget

JG has put an estimated inflation rate of 5%, for expenses for expenditure, and for the future forecasts as well. We are just about breaking even with the current annual sub of £65. There are two reasons for that. Firstly, the administrative expenditure is going up, and secondly, the number of donations that we've talked about over the past few months have gone up, and I've put them in there.

New role - Membership Administrator

JG raised the idea of a membership administrator function, which is a proposed new role, to boost membership numbers. We had 187 members, which dropped to 153 members in 2023. The grants played a part in this, but a membership administrator could really focus on recruiting and retaining members.

SB was in favour and suggested a membership administrator could keep the directory up to date.

JS gave a bit of background on Chums, our Client Relationship Database, which was devised about 18 months ago. He pointed out that when a member's direct debit bounces or they cancel, there is little follow up in place to stop the leakage. We need a decent process in place to reach out to departing members, and to follow up with potential new members who have attended Business Clubs as visitors.

There is a genuinely high value opportunity in this context of membership retention, stopping leakage of old members and gathering new ones. JS supports this new role, for which two hours a week has been budgeted and feels it would be a good return on investment.

The proposal is to invest in an administrative support to focus solely on the database and making sure we're building the membership and not leaking money. No objections raised.

Expenditure

JG highlighted 3 proposed initiatives - (1) KCC online work experience/Jobs Board; (2) South Hams Chamber rebrand and (3) Electronic Notice Boards - and pointed out that we don't have the budget to do it all.

JS asked JG what solutions he saw.

If we were to get grant funding for the electronic notice board, that would offset some of the cost. JS confirmed this would be a collaboration with Salcombe Information Centre, to replace 3 existing boards in Salcombe and one in Kingsbridge with something more hi-tech and interactive which could be updating remotely, so we can keep it current. However, if we were to receive £10k grant funding, we would also need to find £10k of match funding.

SD said that that whilst it hurts a little bit of being one of the recipients of these Chamber donations, she feels that the Chamber would be better to spend money on proactive projects related to our strategic priorities, rather than a series of indirect donations.

A discussion about donations ensued. SD said she would be happy to support one-off events or a start-up event to get it going.

Catherine said she felt that the Christmas lights and Kingsbridge in Bloom do help businesses by enhancing the towns. If there is a benefit to the businesses, then they should stay.

JS concurred that a review is needed.

SD added that rather than a one-off donation, it might be more beneficial for the Chamber to provide a platform for the organisers to reach other potential business sponsors. They could come to the business clubs and use the newsletter to detail sponsorship opportunities. So, whilst they may no longer receive a donation from the Chamber, we could facilitate them reaching a wider business audience and potentially accessing considerably more funding.

JS suggest there is clearly a very strong appetite to review who we're giving money to, and there are opportunities to offer in different, possible more strategic ways. We have two options:

Option 1

We completely revisit this and ask all concerned to reapply for funding, to be considered case by case. But there needs to be justification of what we're getting in return.

Option 2

We approach it as and when we get closer to the events, on a case-by-case basis.

SD pointed out that a few years ago, applications for funding were invited and Salcombe Wind Project received a donation. So, there is a precedent for requesting applications.

£1,650 is the amount available for donations to ensure we have no deficit. JG to email current recipients to invite them to apply for a small amount of funding. Committee will discuss each application on its merits and make a strategic judgment and hope that there are funds left in case a new event presents itself. CG confirmed that Modbury are happy to follow the same process as Salcombe and Kingsbridge and reapply for funding.

Subscription rate

If we want to start building up a surplus, we need to increase the subscription rate. Rather than introducing massive increases, JG suggested increments of £5 in 2025 and £5 in 2026.

JS concurred that it is no surprise that the cost base is now outstripping our income, which is why we're about to hit a loss-making position when we've had inflation of 15 to 20% over the last four years, cumulatively. By not increasing our membership fee, we have put ourselves in this inevitable position.

Secondly, discussing a raised price point and what value the Chamber can offer needs more time than we have tonight. Given the price point isn't relevant to 2024, because

the bulk of membership is collected in January, we have already missed the opportunity to raise the fee. Given that this conversation is relevant to 2025, we need to pick it up again, possibly halfway through 2024.

JS suggested that we postpone this conversation until March or April to ensure we have sufficient time to make an informed decision.

JS thanked JG for his very detailed report and all the work that had gone into it.

Action #1: To add Donations and Subscriptions to March or April agenda

JS/NC

4. Council reports

District & County: South Hams District Council | Devon County Council

Devon County Council

No representation

South Hams District Council - SD

- SD reported that there is a full council meeting next week, at which they're being asked to support the new council plan and the associated budget and vote on an increase of council tax to 2.99%. So, if anyone's got any strong feelings on those things, SD invited members to let her know so that she can represent their views.
 - SD also due to have a scrutiny meeting with Fusion Leisure Centre.
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Town: Salcombe | Kingsbridge | Modbury

Salcombe Town Council (STC) - SD

- MG reported that work has commenced on the CEP.
- 80th Anniversary of D-Day: Council is working on D-Day commemorations, but nothing has been approved.

Kingsbridge Town Council (KTC)

Apologies from PC

Modbury Parish Council (MPC) - SW

- Main Road should be completed on Friday 9th, although there are still some side roads that will be affected.
 - The works have negatively impacted businesses because it's been very quiet. Hence, MPC will be working with traders and residents on a regeneration project to put Modbury back on the map and make it a destination.
 - On a positive, new shops are breathing new life into the high street, include *FFS Fresh Fish and Shellfish*, a new wet fish shop opening this week. The White Hart has been closed but is due to reopen shortly and another shop is becoming a pottery, so there's a sense that there are good things to come. In addition, a new premises is coming up for sale.
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5. Business Clubs

Deferred to March meeting.

6. Chamber Rebrand

We agreed in June that the Chamber would rebrand as the South Hams Chamber for Kingsbridge, Salcombe and Modbury.

A domain has been bought, and there is now a roll out plan, ready for a soft launch at the AGM in June, followed by an official announcement the following day.

7. Ongoing Projects

Field of Lights

- Delighted that this is going ahead, and we are looking forward to enjoying the lights when we host our November Business Club at the Harbour Hotel.

Impactful Info Panels project

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- The grant application has been submitted and we await a response.

Collaboration with KCC / Digital Careers Board

- SB updated committee. It will be a simple system, sitting on our system but administered by KCC students. It will list jobs and work experience opportunities.
- Tina Graham, KCC's Principal, will be joining us at our next **Chamber Business Club on Thursday 21st March** to talk about the substantial benefits of KCC and local businesses working together more closely. We will launch the new website innovation then.
- JS asked Scot about the cost of setting up and hosting the page. He pointed out that KCC would do the behind-the-scenes admin. SB suggested KCC would also need to promote.
- JG was very supportive of the idea and pointed out the huge potential.
- A Steering Group is to be set up, to include SBa, JG, SB.

Action #2: A Steering Group is to be set up, to include SBa, JG, SB. SBa.

SBa/SB

SB to work with KCC to establish agreement for ongoing administrator to receive and review data for the page.

10. AOB

- AT announced that, after 3 years of service she would be stepping down from committee to pursue other projects. JS thanked her very much for her contribution and said we would miss all the good discussion and debate she's provided during her tenure!

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 6th March 2024
