

BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Tourism & Recreation Meeting held on Wednesday 22nd June 2022 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors Huw Cox (Chair) and Sylvee Phillips, and Judith Hart (Town Clerk).

In attendance: Val Browning (Valiant Soldier & Orchard Millennium Green), Sheila Phillips (William Pengelly Trust Caves), Wendy Hall (Head of Retail, Buckfast Abbey), Alasdair Page (Commercial Manager, South Devon Railway), John Bailey (Chair of Buckfastleigh Football Club), Paul Roberts (Christmas Fair Committee)

22/01. Apologies for absence: Cllr Sue Clarke, Chris England and Maureen Tuffnell (Orchard Millennium Green)

22/02. Councillors invited to declare any interests: None

22/03. Terms of Reference: Approved

22/04. Questions and comments from the public: No public present

22/05. Comments from local visitor attractions, businesses and organisations:

Huw Cox: We have returned following the Covid break with a renewed spirit of cooperation and working together to coordinate events for the town.

Paul Roberts: The Christmas Fair will be held on the first Wednesday of December following agreement at their first meeting after a 2-year break so they have committed to this year. They are seeking grants to support the event from local businesses and the Town Council who have always been supportive. Usually there are 35 stalls, mostly local, with approximately 1,000 visitors. There are currently 5 committee members but he will be standing down after this fair so they are looking for volunteers. The committee struggles to get the shops to open on the night, so they need to work on this. They are hopeful that the fair will continue. Nominal charge to hold a stall.

Huw Cox – Orchard Millennium Green (OMG): Jubilee events – there was the Duck Race and BBQ on the Saturday and a bring your own picnic and music on Sunday. The events were well attended, and it incorporated the launch event for the local nature group. The OMG made £1,600 over 2 days after expenses were deducted and are looking at organising a 2-day event again next June. 800 out of 1,000 ducks were sold. It is hoped that the apple pressing day would go ahead in the autumn. Would like to use the canopy more for music events.

Val Browning – Orchard Millennium Green: Members of the group are looking at holding tabletop/car boot sales with the first one on Sunday 17th July, weather permitting. If successful, they will do more.

Val Browning – Valiant Soldier: The health and medicine exhibition is currently on show in the museum. Entry to the Valiant Soldier is free to all TQ11 residents but they need more volunteers.

Sheila Phillips – Pengelly Caves: The site will be open on Wednesdays and Thursdays in August. with 3 walks each day planned. They can take booked groups any time from mid-April to mid-September and are hoping to encourage the local history groups to visit. An interactive nature trail is currently being created by a local veteran's group. A lot of work has been carried out on the site including the creation of a wildlife garden and new information boards. Income is mostly from

schools and residential groups e.g. some inner city schools, cavers and canoeists. The residential block can accommodate up to 25 residents. The trust is currently changing from a charity to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Alasdair Page – South Devon Railway (SDR): They are happy to support the community and can offer prizes for events. They have 500 volunteers, but their activities are restricted by their charity status. The site does have an issue with security and vandalism which is relentless. Criminal damage and anti-social behaviour are an ongoing and police response is poor.

It was confirmed that there is no longer a police representative at Town Council meetings and the monthly surgery in the Town Hall is on hold at present.

Cllr Phillips suggested talking to the youth workers in town. Unfortunately, it is viewed as a public area when it is private land.

SDR had a busy Jubilee and will be hosting a ‘Thomas the Tank Engine’ weekend in September. They also offer Heritage Open Days which gives visitors the opportunity to go behind the scenes and visit the workshops. The next Heritage Days are scheduled for Saturday 17th and Sunday 18th September. The Polar Express is run by an event management company, not South Devon Railway and operates from mid-November to 23rd December. This will be the second year of hosting this event which had 38,000 visitors last Christmas. A park and ride system was used last year which was costly so SDR are arranging on-site parking this year. This impacts on local hospitality too.

Currently their biggest concern is access to coal which did come from Russia. SDR uses coal from South Wales most of the time which is expensive. There is concern regarding the burning of coal and how this impacts the environment, especially the bat corridor. They are looking at other initiatives such as solar panels and electric car charging points. The heritage bus is used mostly for bus rides on a circuit from Ashburton to Buckfastleigh. SDR are exploring the creation of a visitor centre which could be used for information leaflets and promotions. They would also like to create a better link to the town and other organisations.

Suggestion to have a town diary again and the walking maps need to include the railway.

It has been noticed that many visitors use the train from Totnes to stay in the area. It is difficult to find places to eat after 2 pm and on Sundays and driving into Buckfastleigh is always a problem due to the one-way system and the dangers of crossing Strode Road as a pedestrian.

Cllr Cox thanked SDR for the Jubilee train ride.

Alasdair Page: SDR have a membership scheme for the railway which is connected to other organisations. They are also planning a beer festival and Sunday lunches and afternoon teas are available in the cafe. SDR may look at an evening train service so people can go for a meal in Totnes.

Wendy Hall – Buckfast Abbey: The Abbey is pleased to be welcoming visitors again with a noticeably higher footfall as more people have been staying in the UK rather than travelling abroad. They are happy to help with two-way advertising. The Devon Association of Tourist Attractions (DATA) is a useful link. DATA do have an advertising stand, but organisations must be a member to have publicity on their stand.

The Abbey is currently undergoing re-branding, changing their logo and product range and hot meals including the popular Sunday roast are again available in the restaurant.

The number of concerts and organ recitals have increased, and they are pleased to welcome back the Rotary Club of Ashburton and Buckfastleigh free Art Exhibition from Thursday 21st July to Wednesday 13th August. The Box Tree Theatre Company will be giving a performance of the Three Musketeers on 27th July which is an open-air musical and the Summer Fair is being held from Thursday 4th to Saturday 6th August with stalls and entertainment.

Buckfast Abbey is delighted that the Town Council has reinstated this committee and look forward to future meetings.

John Bailey – Football Club: The club won the South Devon premier league for the first time but they need larger changing rooms to be a venue for such significant games. The Club also hosts band nights, bingo and accommodate the scouts group. They are looking at doing super league darts competitions too. Currently renovating the bar.

All the groups are struggling for volunteers. The number of football teams have reduced due to a lack of members to run them, and it is a long season for such a commitment. The rules for teams are very complicated at amateur level with significant fines for non-compliance by the Football Association which clubs cannot afford. Young people will not commit to regular attendance at matches, committees, and the club.

Cllr Phillips suggested offering sports coaching courses/sessions.

22/06. Feedback from the Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2022 celebrations in Buckfastleigh:

There has been positive feedback from the events that took place over the Jubilee weekend which demonstrated how local groups can effectively work together.

22/07. Planning, management, and communications issues for projects within the remit of this committee.

It was suggested that the town has an informal volunteer base who do not have to commit to membership to a certain group – a volunteer pool. Volunteers can offer help at individual events if available but no commitment.

Volunteer work experience is also a useful addition to CVs. More young people should be encouraged to be involved for e.g. young people from the Bungalow Youth Project helped with the running of the Duck Race. Young people undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and A-level students may also be interested in volunteering.

Actions:

- To set up and maintain a general volunteer pool
- To look at creating a Town diary of forthcoming events

22/08. Items requiring urgent attention: None

Next meeting Wednesday 27th July at 7.00 pm in the Town Hall.

Meeting closed at 8.45 pm.