

MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE VEM COMMITTEE,
HELD ONLINE WEDNESDAY 10th FEBRUARY 2021, AT 12.00 NOON

Present:

The Mayor Councillor M S Robinson

Councillors:

B J Canham, D Crawford, C Harvey, T J Jermy, S N H Wright

Officers in attendance:

David Brooks VEM Officer, Tom Scott Venues Coordinator

Chris Crimmen Committee Secretary

MINUTES

786/20	<u>DECLARATIONS OF ANY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS</u> None.
787/20	<u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u> Apologies were received from Councillor C Barreto.
788/20	<u>MINUTES</u> RESOLVED: The minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 13th January 2021 received by Full Council on 26th January 2021 be confirmed as a true record and signed/initialled by the Committee Chairman.
789/20	<u>MARKETING REPORT</u> The Marketing Report (see appendix A) was previously circulated to Councillors and was presented by the Venues Coordinator. The following points were discussed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacting all the Thetford's Community Groups. • Talking Up Thetford to be extended into other groups outside solely Businesses.
790/20	<u>BUDGET REVIEW</u> The Venues Officer reviewed the January Budget which had been circulated to councillors for month end January 2021. There was very little movement in the budget due to Covid19 restrictions. The team are planning ahead for the reopening of the Venues and this will be discussed under item number 796/20.
791/20	<u>COMMUNICATION OF KEY DATES IN THE GLOBAL CALENDAR</u> The Chair asked the committee to discuss and agree how the Town Council can recognise and communicate support for key dates in the global calendar. This item was suggested by a VEM councillor and the following three current days opened the discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Book Day 4th March 2021. • Mother's Day 14th March 2021. • World Poetry Day 12st March 2021. Other days were discussed and it was agreed that the VEM Officer would draft a report for the next meeting. To aid him with this and get a list of dates to be worked with councillors will send their choice of key dates to the Officer by the 28 th of February 2021.
792/20	<u>WEBSITE REVIEW</u> The VEM Officer reported the web design is proceeding as follows: <u>Stage 1 – Provided a steer for a clean and more simple design.</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillors agreed some example Council websites as a guide. • This enabled a clear brief to web designers. • The Council have been given an initial stage web brief which incorporate our ideas. • This enables the Council to have total in put without additional cost. • It will be compatible with PC, Tablets & Mobiles

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is accessible – it incorporates a ‘sticky’ menu feature which stays at the top of the page as you scroll down home page. <p><u>Stage 2 - Key tabs pages</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Council = Services; Councillors; Ward Map; Meetings. • Venues = Carnegie; Guildhall; Tea Room. • Events = Live@Carnegie; Guildhall <i>Live</i>; Box Office. • Places of Interest = Links to places of interest • History = Heritage timelines; Trail maps & info links. • News/ Gallery= Media stories; YouTube channel links; Photo gallery; Podcast/videos. <p>The only question raised was “will th be user friendly”. The Councillor was assured the new website will be able to be used by all. The progress was noted by Councillors.</p>
793/20	<p><u>APPLICATION FOR WAIVER OF HIRE FEES – CARNEGIE</u> This item was deferred to March meeting.</p>
794/20	<p><u>MARKET PLACE COMMERCIALISATION</u> The VEM Officer reported he had circulated the Marketplace Commercialisation Report (see Appendix B) and asked councillors to discuss opportunities to develop commercial projects going forward. The working group have followed the public support in a recent survey to close the car park to cars and this is being taken forward. The committee discussed the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed 4 electrical points in the Marketplace will allow specialist markets selling hot fresh food – such as night markets/Christmas markets. • The closure of the car park was significantly supported by the public survey. • Plans should include using both the upper and lower market areas. • This would provide a much-improved trading environment and safe public space. <p>It was noted that the ALP Committee have an interest in these changes and both committees and the working group will work together going forward.</p>
795/20	<p><u>GUILDHALL HERITAGE HUB</u> The VEM Officer reported on opportunities of use for newly refurbished Guildhall.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The internal refurbishments are near to completion – only exception is themed displays. • The external works are delayed because of Architect's revision of the ramp which has meant there has been a 6-week delayed lead in for additional facing stone needed. If weather permits, then the work should be completed by April 2021. • The internal space will be within four themed areas (see below) – although displays will also feature in the Guildhall entrance and ground floor landing. • It is hoped that as part of the marketing plan the Council can agree to rename the four main rooms – these were previously The Small Court, Large Court, Council Chamber & the Gallery. <p>There followed a discussion on renaming these rooms and it was decided the VEM Officer would draft an engaging brief to open a public consultation however the former Council Chamber would be named the Duleep Singh Room due to the long association with the Sikh community and their support of the successful NHLF grant application. This consultation would be a good publicity move letting residents know the Guildhall is in the final stages of the refurbishment.</p>

	The Officer will send his brief to all VEM Councillors to agree prior to starting the public consultation.
796/20	<p><u>VENUES REOPENING MARKETING PLANS</u></p> <p>The VEM Officer reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No definitive date is set yet for events & hospitality venues to re-open due to Covid19. • The VEM Team have had meetings with several 'partners' in terms of quick win events that can be delivered once government restrictions allow. • The VEM Team have used down time to conduct extensive refurbishment programme around the venues. • Purchase of necessary equipment to realise opportunities already discussed – Chairs for tearoom, teacups & tea pots. • Large court for weddings/events - Wedding chair sashes & flower centres. • Staff uniforms for different settings need to be finalised. • Furnishings need to be completed in the Carnegie bar area • Large wall vinyl images within the Guildhall and Carnegie. • Commission professional photographer to produce portfolio of venue. <p>setting photographs</p> <p>The key focus for the VEM Team was to ensure that all final stage preparations were completed in readiness of the venues reopening.</p> <p>There were no questions and councillors noted this report.</p> <p>At this point Councillor T Jermy left the meeting.</p>
797/20	<p><u>VEM AGENDA FORWARD PLAN</u></p> <p>The Chair reviewed the VEM Agenda Forward Plan (see Appendix C) and discussed the plan for the next three months. The Forward plan was noted by Councillors.</p>
798/20	<p><u>COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT</u></p> <p>None.</p>
799/20	<p><u>COMMITTEE OFFICERS UPDATE</u></p> <p>None.</p>

Chairman.

APPENDIX A MARKETING REPORT - 13/12/2020

Written by – Tom Scott (Venues Coordinator)

ACTIONS

Video Projects

One of the major actions the VEM team have undertaken over the past few months was a vastly increased number of video projects. This ranges from a long-term project series such as Talking Up Thetford, to one-off videos that help to push activities and groups in the town, such as the Knitting Box video, and the Remembrance Tree video.

The reason we created these videos is to showcase the great number of positive actions happening that the Town Council are directly affiliated with and improve our image with the public. The Knitting Box is a local group of volunteers that develop various knitting projects usually to fundraise for good causes, in our case they supplied the majority of knitted Christmas decorations on display around the Market Square.

Talking up Thetford

As mentioned in the previous point, one of the major projects was the creation of the 'Talking Up Thetford' series. The concept behind this video was to get all councillors to reach out to local businesses in their wards and arrange time for a short video where the councillors talk to the business owners about how they have managed through the Covid 19 restrictions and what they were doing leading up to Christmas. By the end of this campaign, 4 councillors completed their arrangements & interviews, and we managed to get 10 videos of local businesses out before Christmas.

The success and reach of these videos have varied depending on how involved the business owners themselves were. It is worth noting that while 10 videos are a good number in the short period of time we had, there are still quite a high number of locally owned businesses who could still be featured in this video series if the desire were to extend the project. We are currently restricted by the more rigid tier 5 conditions, however focus going forward could be about how businesses plan to rebuild into 2021 and extend the brief to include the Museums as they reopen and other places of interest. Our view is that if Councillors do not want to get involved then the VEM team will continue to pursue the project.

EVENT/PROJECTS MARKETING CAMPAIGNS (JANUARY 2021)

There have been a wide variety of small projects taking place over the past couple of months, most of which being part of the lead up to Christmas. It goes without saying, as the Christmas period was under national COVID restrictions, and all our regular events did have to change how they operate in order to remain safe.

Mark Webster has continued to keep his conservation projects up to date on Town Council social media. Included in this is a post made showcasing how the volunteers created a new habitat on Ramsay Close, and a post showing them clearing the gorse at Barnham Cross Common. The latter of these two posts reached over 1k views

We created a short online campaign regarding the Tree of Remembrance at London Road Cemetery. An initial poster and video were created for when the tree was installed. We then periodically posted updates showing the tree filling up with messages from the public, with hugely positive feedback on each post. Mark Skinner Funeral Services were sponsors of the Tree of Remembrance and were featured in the video campaign to recognise that.

There were a variety of posts showcasing the addition of Christmas decorations and/or trees to public areas. Each of these posts had a very positive reception and all posts reached over 1k views.

Mayor's Christmas Carol Service

The event was delivered from St. Cuthbert Church as usual however only to a specifically invited guest list and unfortunately not open to the public in order to comply to Covid restrictions, however we broadcast the Service via Facebook Livestream.

An initial poster went out a few weeks in advance explaining that the event was livestream-only and was shared to all major local groups/pages. This poster received just shy of 4k views

The actual live broadcast was viewed by 750 different people, with a peak of 25 viewers at one time. We also had quite a lot of engagement in the chatroom of the live broadcast, albeit most of this was viewers saying Merry Christmas to each other.

Chilterns Letters to Santa

During Late November, the team from Chilterns and Thetford Town Council's VEM team arranged filming of the content for the Letters to Santa Campaign. This included all advertising material, and the videos that were sent to everyone who took part.

The advertising content was released slowly throughout the first half of December, along with multiple updates thanking the public for taking part.

Due to the fact this content was published and released through Chilterns own social media rather than our own, I am unable to get insights into how many people viewed/interacted with their posts. However, we can see from posts made by them (<https://www.facebook.com/chilternsltd/posts/3623569077699926>) that the campaign was well received. Chilterns also stated that they received quite a high volume of letters, while we also received several at the Town Council offices.

However, it should be noted that the campaign in 2019 the Town Council received 330 letters partly due to the Santa Workshop visits over the Christmas Lights weekend.

Christmas Light Switch On

Same as with the previous events, we were sadly unable to run a traditional Christmas Light switch-on event. In its place, we created a video, edited to enable the Mayor to virtually turn the lights on from inside the Father Christmas scene within the Carnegie.

The video (<https://www.facebook.com/Thetfordcouncil/posts/3604640052933507>) went out on 4th December and received over 2k views.

While the initial video post reached a moderate number of people, switching on the Christmas lights did not go unnoticed in the town, as there were a high number of individual posts on Facebook and other social media from Thetford residents, thanking the town for the display.

MONTHLY OBSERVATIONS

The most viewed post over the past few months was the initial announcement of 'The Remembrance Tree' being placed at London Road Cemetery (<https://www.facebook.com/Thetfordcouncil/posts/3561357380595108>).

This post reached over 5.5k overall, with over 1.2k interactions and 50 shares. The next most viewed post also belongs to one regarding the Tree of Remembrance (<https://www.facebook.com/Thetfordcouncil/posts/3601429403254572>), which reached 4.5k individuals.

Our 3rd most viewed post is also our most watched video, this being one of the 'Talking up Thetford' videos regarding Cre8ive Hair on the Ladies Estate (<https://www.facebook.com/Thetfordcouncil/videos/170684834785645>). This video reached over 3.9k viewers.

While it will be tough to mention all of them, it is worth noting that a total of 16 different media posts received over 1k views. This is a significant step up from prior months, where typically only a handful of posts per month hit that much exposure.

The Town Council Facebook has gained 55 more total followers since last month, now up to 1549.

UPCOMING PROJECTS/CAMPAIGN

Media Suite Completion

The decoration of the Media Suite has been completed and the final stages of preparation, which is the assembly of the media workstation and equipment is underway. Although the tier 5 restrictions will delay the actual use of the Media Suite as we propose in the future, it will provide an excellent facility to further improve our Media activities when normality returns.

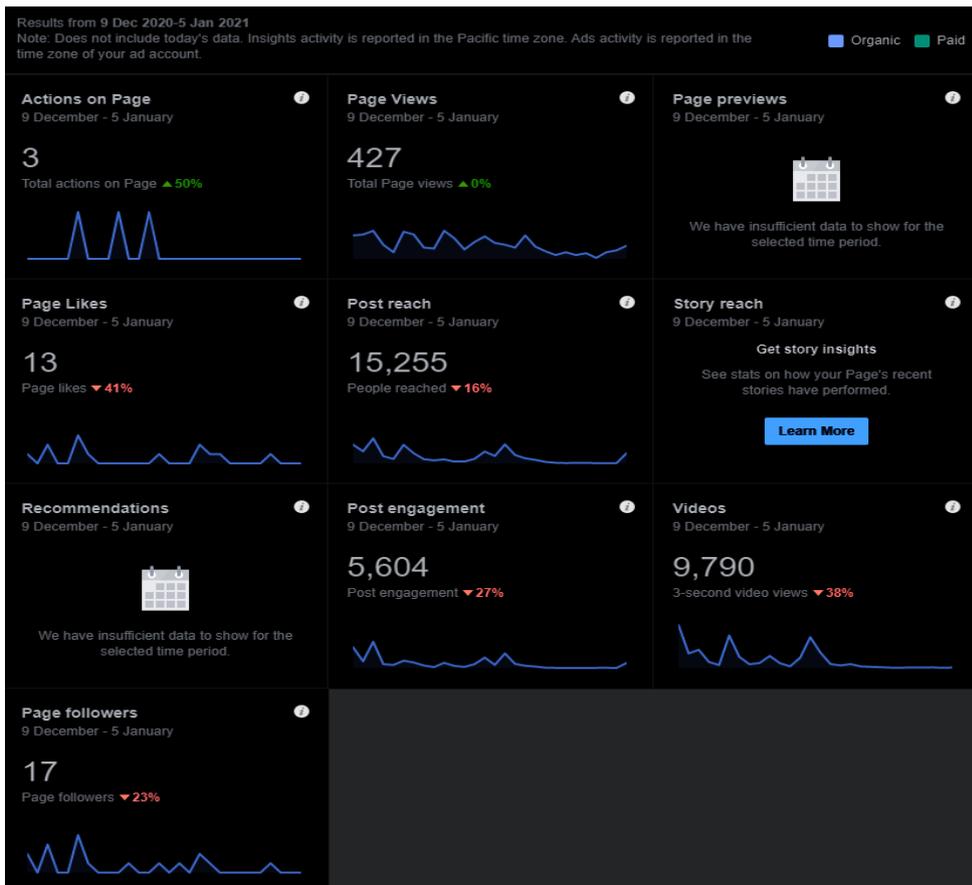
In preparation for the eventual launch of the Media Suite, The VEM team are currently preparing schedules for programmes and additional content will be made using it. One notable change will allow us to continue creating the content we have been thus far, but without needing to rely on our personal equipment. This will also enable further expand production of projects such as Talking Up Thetford and allow us to adapt this and other community partnerships into a regular podcasts/video/etc.

SOCIAL MEDIA DATA

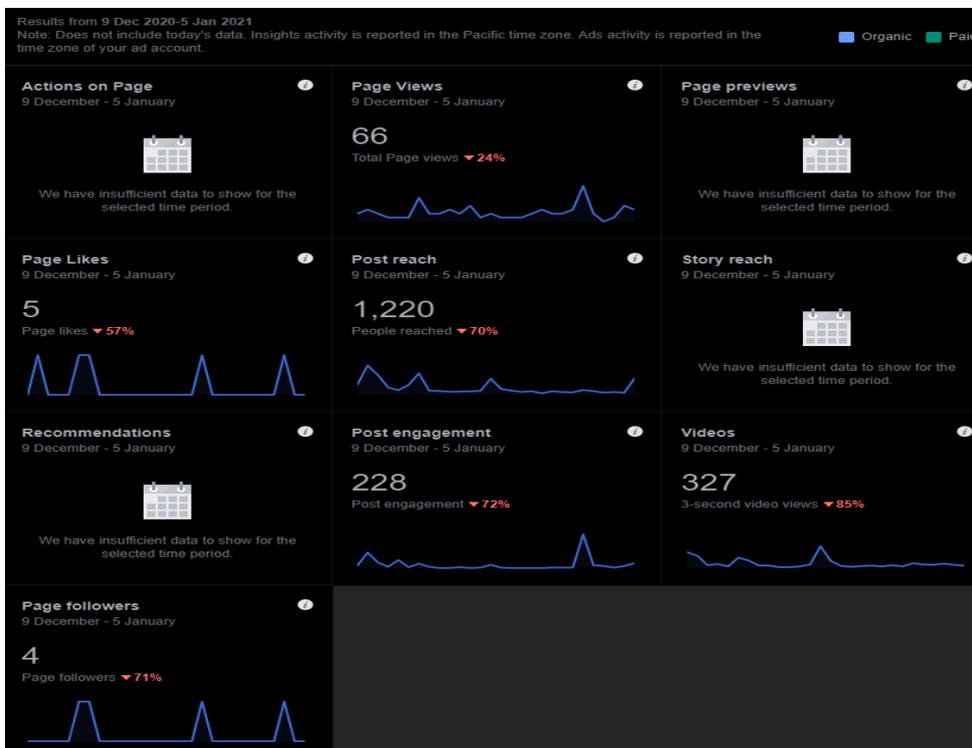
(Note: It is worth realising that this information also includes the Town Council shutdown period. As such, the 'percentage increase/decrease' arrows will make this look worse than it is)

See below:

Thetford Town Council Facebook



The Carnegie Facebook



MARKET PLACE COMMERCIALISATION

Rationale:

APPENDIX B - MARKET PLACE COMMERCIALISATION

The Amenities Land & Property committee stood up a working group to look at and report back on Market Place Improvements. The group met on 14th January 2021 and after considering the feedback from the Guildhall Heritage Hub & Markets Improvements survey conducted in late Summer 2020 which asked four questions, amongst others, that were specific in respect of the Market Place. These included suggested improvements such as installing a public water tap to the Cornell Fison Water Trough, and the future use of the Market Place which may mean closing it as a car park and creating a pedestrianised, social space that people could enjoy, interact and utilise for events and activities.

In that survey question 4 asked:

“The new access to the Guildhall will mean changes to the layout of the Market Place. How would you like the Market Place to be developed in the future?”

- The Market Place becomes a flexible pedestrianised area for seating and events. 38.12%
- The Market Place becomes a pedestrianised space with more permanent stalls. (Like Norwich Market) 31.68%
- That the Market Place does not change and be kept as a car park with unrestricted use. 23.27%
- That the Market Place has restricted parking for paid parking for 2-hour shopping and free disabled parking. (To increase footfall in the shops). 6.93%

The results show there was significant support from those respondents of the survey to the suggestions for a pedestrianised space over a car park.

Therefore, the working group did discuss this as part of their initial meeting, however after a good and robust discussion, the working group concluded that they felt the overall vision was not challenging enough and wanted the focus to be on a wider scale and include the area that has traditionally been called “The Lower Market” which extends to the surrounding outside space around the Carnegie and between it and the Guildhall.

To that end the working group reported back to the ALP committee on 3 February 2021 and requested the committee to provide a more specific next step brief to enable the group to make tangible and realistic suggestions it needed with a more focussed brief.

The ALP Committee overwhelmingly agreed that the Working Group should.

- Initiate seeking quotes for the installation of 4 electricity ‘hook up’ pillars on the Guildhall Street side of the Market Place as a matter of priority.
- That they discuss and work up a report to support the closure of the Market Place as a car park and to outline how it can function as a viable and usable pedestrianised public space for

events, activities and including 'green' spaces that can be enjoyed safely by residents, families and visitors.

The Working Group membership was originally offered to all Thetford Town councillors, not just those members of ALP, and five Councillors came forward of which Cllrs. Brame, Canham, Robinson & Wright attended the initial meeting, the group will meet again in the forthcoming weeks to further the aims of the more focussed brief laid down by the ALP Committee.

Market Place Commercialisation:

It is important that VEM Committee also understand the progress of the working groups recommendations as this will be vital as to what commercial opportunities may be open to us to develop and exploit within one of important assets.

It is part of the Venues & Marketing Committees brief, as it will be known from April 2021, going forward as it will take control of any commercial opportunities or commercial partnerships that may be developed.

One area ALP committee has approved is to seek quotes for the installation of 4 electricity supply pillars on the Guildhall Street side of the Market Place, so this will be a major improvement and enable new opportunities for this committee to work up.

The successful Guildhall Heritage Hub NHLF bid committed to a number of specialist Markets per year and some of the feedback comments from the public survey suggested this is something that would be welcomed, additional electricity points would enable us to deliver a programme of specialist markets including.

- Farmers & Food Markets.
- Vintage & Arts & Craft Markets
- The return of the Night Markets
- Christmas Market

All of the above can be greatly improved with this addition.

Live Music & Open -Air Theatre were also strong suggestions within the survey , and although it could be argued that in the context of our agenda topic – Market Place Commercialisation – we could not ticket these events, but they would certainly provide support for other activities to be successful. Live music was a key component of the successful Night Markets not just from an event perspective but as a commercial opportunity.



We also should not eliminate the possible secondary commercial opportunities of these kind of events. These events create footfall, not just of passing footfall, but that will encourage attendees to stay and enjoy the event over a period of an hour or two therefore food and drink sales, ice creams etc. could also be provided.

The benefit a pedestrianised Market Place would also elevate those tenants' businesses within the Shambles, as they would now have a vibrant space on their doorstep not a car park for 5 days per week. This could also open-up the idea of having retail pods installed in selected areas of the space which would increase revenue for the Town Council and improve the space as attraction overall.



The events team would also have an additional dedicated space to work with, and a space that is logistically realistic to work with due to the link to both Guildhall & Carnegie equipment, not necessitating additional TTC staff and vehicles to be seconded to move equipment around the town.

An increased event programme on the Market Place would also have a beneficial impact on footfall to the Guildhall and the tearoom; in fact, an outside seated area for the Tea Room would become a more viable proposition, not least because visitors would have a 7-day opportunity rather than on Market days only.

Wetherspoons have also used the closed Market Place during periods of the lockdown when they were able to trade, it was a welcomed opportunity, but they also feel that post-pandemic a closed Market Place would be a space they would like to utilise, and in fact have already purchased four extra-large gazebos to support that idea. Clearly on a more permanent basis, if the space is dedicated pedestrianised area, it would need to be agreed on a commercial footing.

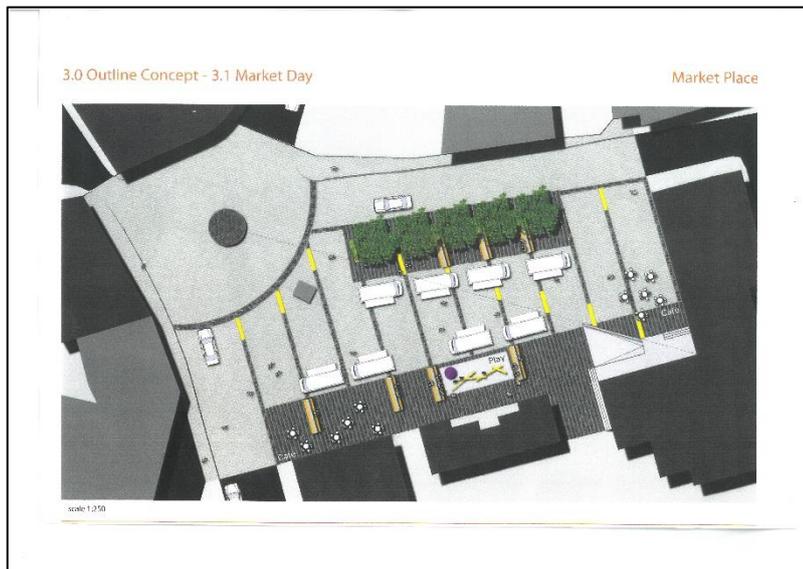
There has been suggested that we may not be able to exploit the Market Place fully if the space was a dedicated pedestrianised safe space for events and activity; in my opinion I would agree that it is a challenge but one that can be realistically achieved; It has been proven in the past that when we have delivered events it has drawn good attendances, and I feel confident that we can create a programme that would allow us to utilize the space for family orientated activity during each school holiday periods, deliver a programme of specialist markets per year, but more importantly we need to create a more inviting space on the doorstep of the Guildhall to ensure that the regular footfall realises and uses opportunities that it will also afford.

Summary:

As with the ALP working group, it is for this committee to set a more defined brief as to what they would like to pursue and develop.

The Town Council has pursued the possible development of this area in the past – the image below shows a proposed concept produced 10 years ago as part of the wider consultancy work around the Carnegie, Guildhall & Market Place redevelopment.

The image below depicts a space that is pedestrianised, albeit including features that we may not want to replicate such as a play area, but interestingly it shows outside areas servicing the Red Lion & a Guildhall Café.



VEM Councillors are encouraged to bring their ideas to the committee meeting on 10th February 2021 at 12noon.

APPENDIX C – FORWARD PLAN – NEXT THREE MONTHS

Mar	Apr	May
17 th	14 th	12 th
Website review (stage 3) To agree final layout & launch Guildhall Operational and marketing plan (stage 2) Market Place Improvements and use. (Stage 2)	Market Place Improvements Development Plan (stage 3)	Mobile catering and bar services TTC Open space commercialisation report

