

Business Group Report 2003

Much work has been directed towards endeavouring to revitalise the local economy through engaging local businesses and my report majors on that.

Been a busy and productive year building on the results of the Business Survey issued to circa 400 business with premises.

Meetings were held with the various business support agencies and key local authorities as well as the police to asses how they could each support businesses

All business with premises received a contact list of many of the local support agencies that could be contacted if they needed business related information or advice

A successful bid for funding to WDC resulted in a grant for £826. An anonymous donation of £250 was received from a business to contribute towards the running costs of the Group.

During 2003, £479.09 was spent on such things as hire of hall, printing, stationery, mileage allowance @10p per mile (£25.20) – all these expenditure transactions went through my personal account and there are receipts/cheque book stubs / credit card statements available. The outstanding balance at year end was £596.91. There were no receipts Just for the record: the recent buffet lunch charge of £9 per head was requested by cheque payable to The Crowborough Partnership. The proceeds were handed over to Hilary this evening. Although expenditure was incurred, I have yet to claim that back.

3 Business Newsletters have been distributed during the year

One of the most influential initiatives was the ‘kickstart the local economy’ evening attended by over 60 people that resulted in agreement that

1. Quarterly business lunches would be held
2. Informal breakfast meetings would be held monthly
3. Market Sector meetings would be held
4. An annual Networking evening would be organised (possibly coupled with a ‘Meet the Crowborough Businesses’ event)

A Calendar of Events was organised and issued

But probably the most significant and welcome results from the ‘kickstart’ meeting was about 15 people indicated they would be prepared to work together and enhance the local economy.

They are action people; not talkers for the sake of it. They want to take action and see action – which is brilliant.

- 2 meetings of those 15 people have taken place. 3 priority actions were identified and are being actively pursued. 3 other meetings have been arranged to follow up action agreed and progress being made.
- A meeting was also held with WDC Head of Regeneration and Community Services and Sarah Pascoe just before Christmas
- Informal Breakfast Meetings were held in November and December.

Bringing you up to date

- Continuing with the Sherlock breakfast meetings and going to structure them more as a networking event

- The Jarvis Brook breakfast was not supported and I took the decision to abandon it
- The January business lunch was attended by 52 people and I am told by others it was successful – I thought it was
- Also, during January, a few of us had a meeting with Max Goodison from East Sussex Economic Partnership as we see them as a potential source of funding to support the group's priorities for action

Looking to the immediate future:

- The 3 priority actions will be closely monitored
- A bid for funding will be made to WDC to support work associated with the Business Database and Societies
- A Market Sector meeting is being organised for 26th February and a Newsletter is being distributed to 400+ businesses
- A very helpful meeting was held last night between Chris Grose and 5 of the business men about the web site, the business section and the business database and how they can achieve its potential as far as the local economy is concerned
- Work is going to be undertaken with WDC about reconciling the 1200+ businesses on a database I acquired with the up to date WDC database.
- A mailshot will be undertaken to the up to date listings to promote the web site to all businesses. Need to keep more spend within Crowborough. Need to create more networking. Need to generate more local purchasing and selling. Need to ensure that the web site is a 'live' tool, easy and useful to use, is a source of up to the minute information, marketed and thought of by businesses and residents alike as the first port of call if they are thinking about buying anything.
- Need to talk with Ray Casey about getting together in a more formal way with the Business Association

Looking a little longer term:

- Continue to work through and empower business people to set the direction and make things happen, build on the excellent partnership working that is taking place at present, actively and vigorously identify and attract sources of funding, introduce a simple financial process and set up a Business Group Account for all related transactions once things settle down and more major funding comes our way.
- Keep a very close eye on the wider range of priorities already identified and which ones can be/are being affected by our shorter term aims and actions.

One other item to mention:

The Crowborough Signing Strategy that was started a while ago and has involved partnership working over recent years has been signed off, some funding £5k is available for immediate spend before 31st March and a further £25k is budgeted for the coming financial year.

Finally, thanks to Clive, Penny, Linda and her team, Chris Grose and Debbie for all their help, comments and support. Sarah Pascoe has been a tower of strength also. Di Phillips helped me out with the lunch and will help me with other events – thank you.

And a very big ‘thank you’ to those business people who are working so hard and well to make things happen for Crowborough. Only today I had 2 other business people say that are keen to become involved and help in some way. I really believe we are seeing the start of something very important as far as enhancing the local economy is concerned. There is enthusiasm and commitment to deliver.

Paul Mepham, Wally Lambert, Steve Horton, Jason Cook, Rob Smith, Paul Kemp, Damon Wellman tend to be the leading lights but others contribute well (Tony Wright).

My involvement with the Partnership Board will stop next May and it would give me the greatest satisfaction if I gradually faded away in to the background knowing and seeing that Business People continued to drive forward the local economy for the benefit of all the businesses and the residents of Crowborough.