



Somerset Market Towns Forum
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PRESS RELEASE

RELEASE: IMMEDIATE

TITLE: Somerset Market Towns learn how to work with local businesses to revitalise their communities

INTRO TEXT

Towns from across Somerset came together in Axbridge last week to hear how businesses can successfully be involved in revitalising places, which benefits both the local community and local businesses.

BODY TEXT:

Axbridge Town Council hosted a meeting of Somerset Market Towns Forum on October 2nd, which focussed on how to involve local businesses in 'regeneration'. After a guided tour of key local businesses and recent developments, some of which were identified in Axbridge's recent Parish Plan, members of the Forum heard presentations from three Chambers of Commerce. Axbridge, Burnham-on-Sea and Shepton Mallet Chambers explained their initiatives, including how they revived their Chamber into a thriving organisation in Burnham's case, and how they were connected to community-based regeneration groups in their towns (these being respectively Axbridge Town Council, Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge Regeneration Partnership and Shepton 21 Regeneration Partnership).

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Other members attending heard about maximising opportunities when supermarkets are developing new town-centre stores (including public realm improvements), improving the retail 'offer' with a wider range of shops including niche shopping, and events that Chambers are organising, such as Shepton's 'Food Crawl' of specialist food shops on October 24th and the switch-on of Burnham's Christmas Lights last year, where the Chamber invited local schoolchildren which helped to make it a successful event. Another area of work is marketing – Axbridge successfully negotiated with Bristol International Airport to show a large poster in the Terminal promoting Axbridge to visitors. Axbridge Chamber are also very involved with the wider community - one example is that they are funding 3 places on the Tall Ships Race for local young people.

Matt Day, Information Officer for Somerset Market Towns Forum, said 'Our members enjoyed the informative tour of the town, and were impressed by the local businesses they saw. The presentations by the Chambers of Commerce were very interesting, with some good ideas exchanged. Local businesses are a key element of what makes Market Towns successful and we are here to help towns share their experiences.'

Somerset Market Towns Forum promotes and supports community-based revitalisation of Market and Coastal Towns and large villages, through the sharing of experience between communities involved in improving their towns across Somerset. They organise regular events like this one around the County for members and provide information-sharing, networking and training services to member towns and information-sharing to others involved in regenerating communities. They are funded by Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership, Somerset County Council and the Market & Coastal Towns Association and are hosted by the Community Council for Somerset.

More details about the Forum and its work can be found at www.somersetmarkettowns.co.uk

PRESS RELEASE ENDS

PHOTO/IMAGE OPTIONS

Attached to email. Credits reqd on No.3.

1. Barry Hamblin of Axbridge Town Council leads members of SMTF on a tour of the town
2. Members of SMTF visited local businesses, a new health centre and Axbridge First School
3. King John's Hunting Lodge, home to Axbridge's superb Museum (photo by Jeremy Gall)

FURTHER INFORMATION – CONTACT DETAILS

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

Somerset Market Towns Forum was established in late 2003 with the aim of bringing together representatives of all the market towns and larger villages across Somerset in a network, to share issues of common concern, and help in the economic, social and environmental regeneration of the local communities.

Objectives

1. To promote mutual support and collaboration between Somerset Market Towns and the larger villages – by sharing good practice through visits, invited speakers and the circulation of information.
2. To develop the capacity of the Forum and its members to serve and assist Somerset's communities – by organising appropriate seminars and training for its members.
3. To establish an active role for the Forum in promoting regeneration in Market Towns – by acting as a 'voice' from across the County in discussions with other bodies and forums.

The Forum is based in Langport. We currently have 15 Members, these are:

Axbridge, Burnham-on-Sea & Highbridge, Chard, Crewkerne, Ilminster, Frome, Langport, Martock, Minehead, Norton Radstock, Shepton Mallet, Watchet, Williton, Wincanton, Wiveliscombe.

Somerset Market Towns Forum is hosted by the Community Council for Somerset. The Community Council for Somerset is a registered charity (no. 1069260) and a company limited by guarantee (no. 3541219). It believes in confident and sustainable rural communities. Its mission is therefore to counter the threats to rural communities and enhance rural life throughout Somerset by equipping and supporting them to effect positive change using their inherent resources, abilities and commitment. The Community Council for Somerset was founded in 1926 and is headquartered in Taunton.

'Building the Network' is the latest phase of the Forum's development, delivering new ways to spread information between Market Towns and large villages in Somerset, and is funded by the Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership.