



Somerset Market Towns Forum



The Context

Small towns in rural areas have been and are often affected by:

- the decline in traditional industries such as agriculture and engineering
- competition from larger shopping centres
- lack of affordable housing
- lack of facilities for young people and vulnerable groups
- reduction in local services (transport, health etc)



Part of the solution: Community Planning & the Forum

- MCTi, strategic town plans & parish plans
- MCTA, Local Authority & Community Council for Somerset support for these
- Common issues, concerns and problems to address across towns
- Town/Village Plan groups can feel isolated
- Late 2003, move to set up a forum of CPP's
- Staff and Steering Group



The Forum's 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.

Achievements to date

Network meetings – 4 a year

Emails – relevant regeneration news,
funding & training news

Training - Community Ventures sessions
& Consultancy, 'hard to reach groups' training,
website & IT training

Signposting

Promoting Market Towns Feasibility Study –
sustainable tourism development

Brand development



'Building the Network'

- Phase II of the Forum. Objectives include:
- Information provision, information exchange and contact through an accessible interactive website
- Access to relevant training through the provision of information, brokering and direct provision
- Access to advice and consultancy through 'Community Ventures' service and through brokering and signposting
- The Forum's regular networking events to be made available to the wider range of target groups

Building the Network

- Consultation and representation on key issues of economic importance to market towns across Somerset
- Collaboration between groups from different towns on specific projects through identification of opportunities and facilitation where links cross District boundaries
- A sustainable funding strategy for the Forum
- Strengthen the capacity of SMTF
- Raise the awareness and understanding of economic & business development issues amongst groups
- Raise the awareness and understanding of social inclusion issues amongst groups
- Business Plan – mapping, useful services, other Forums

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<http://dev.somersetmarkettowns.co.uk/>