

Report for Festive Thursday and Late Night Shopping.

When the Town Centre Manager mentioned the idea of a 'late night shopping' event the feedback from other officers was positive. However upon speaking to prominent and respected traders in the town centre, it was felt that the event would fall flat. That it had been done years ago and was not well received.

The Town Centre Manager worked with MHA on this project to ensure buy in from local businesses and an opportunity to showcase offerings from around the town.

MHA used their contacts and skill set to source entertainment in the form of Gemma and the Voicebox, and food/drink stalls.

MTC managed the road closure, engagement with shops and businesses, the provision of the marquee, additional bins, and all promotional material on social media, in the local press, flyers, posters etc.

The weather on the day of the event was dry and bright, but very cold, which discouraged people from hanging around, but it did mean that the food and beverage outlets selling hot mulled wine/cider and hot food did well.

Feedback on the singer was very good and has emphasized the need to pay for professional/semi-professionals. Using someone with a local connection was also good as she even brought along another local duo who complemented the offering incredibly well. She has also had several new enquiries on the back of it, one which wanted the tipi too!

In terms of the food and beverage traders:

- Franglais had a great evening, far busier than they expected but they were the only hot food trader in the Market Place. Would look to have another next year.
- Brewbox who did hot mulled cider, beer etc, said sales were ok but not amazing. Overall it was worth it for them in terms of raising his profile and generating new enquiries.
- Owltree Farm weren't very happy being round the corner on Castle St, felt it lacked atmosphere and footfall. Their pitch fee from the outset reflected this and we had made it clear this was the first time we had done this event and we couldn't say how it would go.
- Caravanbar said similar in regards to being on Castle Street, however they enjoyed themselves, played Christmas music, were fun and jolly, and said at the end that as a newish venture it's all about getting themselves out and being seen, not just sales on the day!
- Kickback Coffee didn't sell loads but appreciated that it was a brand new event and will take time to evolve and footfall to grow as word gets about. He did say he thought it would work well over two or three days instead, as people who perhaps couldn't make one day come down on another.

The marquee itself garnered a lot of interest, and there were a lot of people stopping to ask what it was as it was being erected, taking photos etc. There was an issue in terms of heating the marquee and that was related to the lack of adequate power supply in the Market Place (Town Hall supply and St Michaels supply are not robust enough to cope with the draw). There was also an issue with a fuse blowing, but working with MHA and the Town Hall BSO we were able to get it sorted, but were only able to have 2 of the 5 heaters on throughout the night.

Feedback from traders was mixed but definitely more positive than negative. Shops along the far end of Chestergate did not do so well, but the ones closer to the Town Centre did see an increase in trade that would not normally have been seen on a Thursday evening. Boots, Fat Face and PR Jones all reported a good night and feedback was that it was great to see something happen in the town. Button Warehouse took the opportunity to host a small craft fair on that evening and have said it went really well and they would definitely do it again.

There were some comments about how it would have been good to do it over a weekend, or have it on more than one Thursday, however it was always the plan to start small, see if the concept worked and then grow and improve on in future years.

Overall, feedback from Town Centre Manager and MHA is that it should go ahead next year.

- Castle Street did not provide the right sort of atmosphere despite having a brass quartet and food/drink options to encourage dwell time.
- The Market Place worked very well in terms of a hub for the marquee, bars/food etc
- The electricity supply issues from the Town Hall and St Michaels need to be improved before trying to run this event again as the temperatures were not compatible with getting people to stay
- This year it was marketed as 4pm – until late. Next year we would have a definitive end time
- Ensure there is something for the children for that after school hour.
- More marketing. Despite having some very good reach figures on our social media channels, there were lots of comments after the event that people didn't know it was on. More flyers, posters in shops etc.