

## ***Bicester Vision. Chairman's Report. August 2009.***

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Despite it being the holiday season there has been plenty of action involving Bicester Vision as you will see from the Partnership Manager's report. Lots of activities involving a wide variety of organisations in and around the town – and plenty of preparation work going on in readiness for a very full autumn programme.

Obviously we are facing a range of new challenges, with unemployment rising, the local job club needing plenty of professional support and the challenge to support our businesses, retailers and those involved in the hospitality industry in any way we can.

Rachel and I, within the next few days, will be holding a meeting with members of the Chamber of Commerce executive to see how best we can utilise our joint resources for the benefit of the town. We wish to ensure that there is no duplication of effort and that our objectives are aligned.

Since our last meeting the Market Square steering group has met and a short list of alternatives have been agreed to be worked on ahead of a public consultation programme this autumn. We are currently enlisting the help of John Liggins/Sainsburys, to find a suitable empty shop in the town centre. What is of concern to me and several councillors is that an outside consultant was appointed by OCC to do this work without any budget being agreed and currently £30,000 has been spent on these consultants with no clear end figure of their costs. We shall need high quality visuals for the public exhibition. This is eating into the budget of the overall project and we should bear in mind that a firm of local consultants offered their services free of charge and these were not considered.

We also learnt at our recent meeting that of the original budget for hard artwork given to Gordon Young, originally set at £60,000 now only has £27,000 left to spend. Gordon attended our meeting and certainly gave us an enlightened presentation about what is possible in the Market Square. We have asked that he work closely with OCC and their consultants on the final options to be presented.

I am also very disappointed to report that Charles Shouler, chairman of the town's traffic advisory committee is not prepared to call another meeting of this group ahead of its next scheduled meeting in November. Many of us feel there are pressing issues which just cannot wait until then – when our suggested change of agenda for that committee will be discussed. That will take us well into 2010 before there is any action. I find this unacceptable and propose to board members that we hold our own meeting of interested parties – particularly those traffic generators in the private sector and local councillors so that we can hear a range of views re current traffic issues. In this way we will have a clear agenda to take to the TAC when they do eventually meet.

A further issue which needs airing is how best we can improve linkages between the 4 million visitors to the highly successful Bicester Village and the town centre. We need to look at the current route and a second route that is now possible via the new car park facility at Bicester Town station. We will have recommendations and large scale plans for discussion at the board meeting. Coupled with this we need to ensure the best possible offer in our town for visitors. On a visit to Chipping Norton this week (population just 6000) the town was crammed with visitors, the restaurants, shops and pubs were busy and there was a real feeling of bustle in the town which boasts its own town centre TIC and museum. The new town centre Sainsbury's was also doing a very good trade. I recommend the town website for your perusal – we have much to learn from this small town which has two free long stay car parks (both full) which brings us back to the debate of making visitor/local people experiences to our town as welcoming as possible.

We hope to show you a live display of work in progress on our website at the board meeting and coupled with this will be an update from our Partnership Manager on the shopper's guide which will share much of this common information when completed. We have some additional help to speed the process of getting our data base up to date and data on to the website.

I have set Rachel a target of mid October to present to the board an update of our mission and constitution. Pressure on other projects has delayed this update for which we apologise. There is a prospect of a couple more new partners coming on board this autumn and we will keep you updated on progress.

**Bob Langton**  
**Chairman. August 2009.**