

BICESTER VISION. Chairman's Report. August/September 2009.

The past two months have been an exceptionally busy time for Rachel and I and there will be much to report at our Partnership Board meeting. One of the most exciting developments is that the Bicester Business Awards are to be revived. Two highly successful sell-out events were held in 2002/2003 and having taken the temperature of the water with our board members and the Chamber of Commerce we have already gone ahead and booked April 23rd, 2010 for the gala dinner and awards evening at the Bicester Country Club who will be one of our main sponsors and have already pledged to sponsor one of the ten Award categories, whilst Business Link have already taken another and Vision will sponsor a third. An initial announcement will be made in October with the launch of entries commencing at the beginning of January. The Chamber will provide the judges, Business Link will take care of the entries and the Country Club will deal with the tickets. Now I am looking for sponsors for the other seven award categories.

By the time we meet I will have held a traffic and transport forum with what I call the "traffic generators" of the town. The idea was to have an open debate on the short and medium term priorities for the town and to discuss the best structure/format for dealing with transportation issues in future. Currently the Traffic Advisory Committee is planning its next meeting for November and we hope encourage that committee to change their future agendas to take a wider more strategic and holistic approach to the transportation needs of Bicester and its hinterland.

The Market Square project has been aired through the CDC Executive and some of the option details have got into the media ahead of when we would have liked. Budgets and professional fees need to be robustly controlled and the process of public consultation handled in a sensitive way. Public Consultation will be held in an empty in the Market Square on Friday and Saturday 27th and 28th November. Lawrie will no doubt wish to give board members an update at the meeting.

2

Some of you may have seen a short letter I wrote to the Bicester Advertiser concerning the town's A level results. I commented that for a town of 32,000+ it was surprising that only 41 pupils took A levels and there was need for a robust debate as to why this was and what could be done to encourage more young people to take their 16+ education in Bicester rather than choosing other schools outside the town's catchment area. This view was supported by Councillor Michael Waine, Education portfolio holder for the County Council who added in a letter to the Bicester Advertiser that Cooper is to shortly get a new 6th form which will, in time encourage a greater number of local pupils to take A levels. Where I have got myself into hot water with the Head of the Community College and a number of Governors is that firstly I should not have written the letter as chairman of Vision, for which I sincerely apologise to all board members, but also for debating this in the media. Cynthia Bartlett has written to me at length about this and I have fully responded, assuring her and the Governors of our full support and wish to look at ways of remedying this situation. I have suggested that both heads be invited to future partnership board meetings and that we should look at a new strategy of working better and more closely with our local schools. A copy of both her letter and my reply is available upon request.

A number of events that have, are or will shortly be taking place will be reported elsewhere by Rachel, but I want to congratulate her on a number of initiatives such as the 999 day on September 9th, 2009 – 09.09.09! She has also given a great deal of energy to a number of

projects where the profile is with another organisation rather than Vision. In this way we build relationships with a wide range of organisations and give them support which can make a difference to their event. Rachel's boundless energy is really appreciated by many people in the town who really do now look upon her as the Ambassador for Bicester.

We have worked hard to build a stronger relationship with the Chamber over the summer and that is now bearing fruit. We have offered to give them a high profile in the Business Awards and have provided them with all the leads for a retail seminar this autumn for shop assistants or budding shop assistants (particularly those older pupils who wish to do part time work in our many retail outlets) based on skills around customer service. We await further news of when this is to take place.

During the coming weeks we hope to be working very closely with Mary and her team on the planned Bicester Summit later this year. No doubt it will be around the Eco Bicester plans, but no doubt there will be more of an update at the partnership board. Finally can I thank all partners for their continued strong support over the past few months during difficult economic times? It is at times like this when the Vision partnership must be really strong and play an important role in the current and future development of our community.

Bob Langton.