

Bicester Vision – Partnership Manager’s Report – August 09

In this month’s report, I wanted to let partners know about some of the schemes and groups that I am involved with - to give you an idea of the help Bicester Vision is able to offer and how valued we are becoming as a resource as well as an influencer. I have not listed everything but given an idea of some of the groups so that you are reassured my time (and your money) is well spent.

Bicester Good Neighbour Scheme

Having spent a good deal of time working with groups targeting younger people in the town, I was recently asked by a Community Development officer at OCC to get involved with one for our older residents. The Bicester Good Neighbour Scheme has received a grant from OCC to offer a service to vulnerable older people whereby they can request visits from an army of volunteers to help with a variety of tasks including changing a light bulb, walking their dog, filling in a form or just having a chat and a cup of tea.

The scheme is being run from the Bicester Resource Centre and chaired by the Centre Manager, Catherine Blaxhall. The small group trying to get the scheme off the ground were struggling to make headway and we have had some great comments from them about the help we have given.

Rather than blow my own trumpet, I will quote them here:

[‘Is it just me that thinks this is a really brilliant public/private sector partnership? A really new way of working for us in OCC and one that we should highlight very strongly at the official launch in November’](#)

[‘this is so exiting and something we are already so proud of. The logo is inspirational – many thank Rachel – what a team’](#)

We are planning an official launch for the project on 5th November at lunchtime at the Resource Centre and I hope partners will be able to come along. It is worth having a look around the centre to see how well resourced it is. Quite a contrast to their next door neighbour – The Courtyard – which as many of you know is in a rather sorrier state.

The Courtyard Youth Arts Centre

As you are aware, Sue Mackrell, Lawrie Stratford and I all sit, with others, on the Advisory Panel and are doing our best to help the centre become a useful and essential resource for the town. This is slow work as they are plagued with staffing issues.

In practical terms, I have introduced the Street Wardens to the staff at the courtyard as they had previously not been working together and yet the links are obvious. To get the ball rolling and show our support, I, along with two of the Street Wardens and a volunteer from the Bure Park coop, stocked and ran a Fairtrade Café at their recent open day. The centre co-ordinator said that without our support, they could not have run that facility at all.

On a more strategic level, I set up a meeting with the centre and a representative from Oxfordshire Association for Young People (originally based at Heyford but just moved to Garsington) to talk about setting up youth clubs using OAYP's staff and the courtyard's premises. Although small steps are being made, it is frustrating that the centre still only provides for young people on selected weekdays and not at weekends which would seem more necessary.

I am also rallying local professionals to work with the centre offering their expertise and setting up courses.

You may have heard the recent story about the Youth Bus being grounded due to a bird's nest with eggs in the engine. This was very unfortunate but we managed to turn the story into a positive piece highlighting the work of the youth workers and the activities at the Courtyard during the summer.

Bicester Crime Partnership

I have been involved in the set up of the Crime Partnership in Bicester. A scheme that already works well in Banbury and many other towns across the country. The scheme recruits local retailers and equips them with walkie talkie style radios that connect all the members. If suspicious behaviour is witnessed then they can call to other members to be on the look out. Members have a photograph album with details of known or suspected offenders and the committee can make a decision to ban these people from all members' stores. The aim is to make Bicester a no-go area for shoplifters and let them know that retailers are working together to thwart their activities. The scheme was launched at the Retail Conference and is gathering momentum. I have been able to help them with publicity and encouraging retailers to take part.

I also involved the Street Wardens in the scheme and am currently trying to persuade CDC to fund a radio for them (£365 per annum) so that they can keep track of activities and form closer relationships with the town's businesses.

The meetings are lively affairs and allow us to talk about many other retailer issues. A fashion show was recently organised by members of the committee and Street Warden Trevor Lewis was one of the stars of the show.

We are planning another one in the autumn.

Bicester Fairtrade Group

I know this doesn't appeal to everyone, but I am working with the Fairtrade committee to try and get the status for the town. It would be a good bit of PR for the town and we hope is something that, once given, we could promote at the TIC to foreign visitors. We will be working more closely with the schools in the autumn term to get them more involved – although like many of these issues, younger people are already quite switched on to the idea of better and fairer trading for less advantaged producers.

The aim is to apply for the status early next year and there is still some way to go to achieve this. Any support from partners would be gratefully received.

Chiltern Railways have been fantastic – they are selling fair-trade products on their trains and one of the marketing team sits on the committee.

Trinity – restaurant opening

As some of you will know, Bicester now boasts a fine dining experience. Trinity has now opened at what used to be The Old Chapel. The new owners are experienced and enthusiastic. We were able to work with them to organise an opening party to which all ‘friends of Bicester Vision’ were invited. This gave us an opportunity to host another event (but not do any of the work) and helped them to promote the restaurant to a high profile audience. Thank you to those that were able to attend. Please do give it a try. Bicester really needs to increase its range of restaurants and as we all know, these are difficult times for the sector.

Bicester Events

I am part of the Town Council’s event committee and whilst not a voting member, I hope I have been able to help with commercial support. I have found them a much cheaper supplier of promotional material than the one they were using – it’s a Bicester company rather than the Witney one they were previously using.

I was able to persuade Bicester Toys to provide prizes for the Teddy Bear’s Picnic and flags to give away that gave visitors discount at the store. The council had a very varied programme this year and in almost all cases the weather has been extremely kind to them and the events have been extremely well attended.

Bicester Neighbourhood Action Group

This is another lively group which connects the police with the local neighbourhoods and other interested parties including CDC officers, Probation Service and Town Council.

The group has identified, through questionnaires, the key problems in various neighbourhoods across the town, not surprisingly these are mainly related to young people but also include littering, speeding and dog fouling.

We received double the amount of completed questionnaires this year and I put this down to fact that, with partners help, they were distributed direct to workplaces, such as Brita, Tesco and Wyevale.

I have invited representatives from the Courtyard and the Young People’s service to attend the NAG as their input is essential in looking at the facilities available to reduce young people hanging around with nothing to do.

Future plans/events

Chamber of Commerce

I attend the Chamber/Cherwell quarterly meetings – placing myself somewhere in them middle. At the most recent meeting we discussed, amongst many things, the walking link between Bicester Village and the town centre. There are suggestions that there could be a much quicker and more attractive pedestrian route and CDC asked the Chamber and Vision to produce a paper with suggestions for improving this route.

I am speaking at the Bure Park Residents Association meeting next month and have been asked to meet with a representative from Brackley Vision.

I shall also be attending Tony Ives next Future of Bicester meeting. Tony implied at his last meeting that Bicester Vision's relationship with CDC was too close and we should not be seen as an impartial voice for Bicester. I think it is important that residents understand that is not the case but it is important that we discuss our position with regards to the proposed expansion of the town.

We are looking at ideas for a **999 Day** in Bicester to mark the occasion of 9 September 09 – 9/9/09. I am in touch with the police and making contact with fire, ambulance and local schools to see what we can do to mark this one time only date. Any ideas welcome.