



REVIEW

February
2004

MEETING
DATES
2004

Review of Chamber Meeting at the Metro Restaurant, Harrogate College on 4th February 2004

20 February

COUNCILLORS' QUESTION TIME

- Councillors Richard Cooper and Julian Sturdy answer members' questions.
- Budget cuts - Chamber proposes re-structuring and freeze on vacancies.
- Liquor Licensing - concern at cost of new responsibility for the Council.
- Highways funding arrangements via NYCC are not satisfactory for our needs.
- Traffic light sequencing to be optimised to improve traffic flow with your help.

3 March

7 April

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

- New Licensing proposals under scrutiny - highlights need for evening car parking and public toilets.
- Business development - high level of demand reported for smaller offices and industrial units.
- Urban Housing Study - Council looking for local "brownfield" sites for housing development.
- Elected Regional Assembly - proposals would cause radical change for Harrogate Council.

5 May

2 June

7 July

BUSINESS WATCH

- Virus Warnings; Domain Name Scam Warnings; Police warning to Hotels

4 August

1 September

Future Meetings 2004

6 October

Friday, 20th February: Ascot House Hotel, Kings Road, Harrogate
DEBATE OVER DINNER

"The Future of Local Government for Harrogate - District or County Council?"

Some places are still available - why not book a table, bring along clients and colleagues and be kept informed on this important subject?

3 November

1 December

Wednesday, 3rd March: Ascot House Hotel, Kings Road, Harrogate

FOCUS GROUP BREAKOUT SESSIONS

The main discussions at this meeting will be at separate breakout tables for each Focus Group to determine their action plans and priorities for the year ahead.

COUNCILLORS' QUESTION TIME

Councillor Richard Cooper has been on Harrogate Council since 1999, has been **Deputy Leader** since May 2003 and also has responsibility for **Planning**.

Richard said he wanted to hear from members what they felt about the Council and to learn what businesses needed from the Council. He added that Harrogate Chamber of Trade & Commerce was one of the most valuable bodies in Harrogate to give the Council advice on all aspects of business.

He said a unique relationship had been formed in May when he had met Chamber representatives along with the new Council Leader, Mike Gardner, where all parties were able to express their aspirations freely.

Budget Cuts

In relation to the Council's budget, Richard said that the Government had recently written saying that a rise in Council Tax by 7.9% is too high and has to be lowered. This in turn will dictate how much the Council ultimately has to spend on public services, etc.

Vice President, Brian Haines, proposed the Council should undertake a **major re-structuring** of the organisation of the Council in order to **cut costs** and **improve efficiency**.

Richard Cooper said, since he had been in the majority group from last May, the Council had undergone a Comprehensive Performance Assessment by the Government, which has now been completed. They will now be able to look at the major organisational structure, as North Yorkshire County Council had recently done, resulting in a lower Council Tax rise than in previous years. He fully expected the same procedures would take place within Harrogate Borough Council.

Brian Dunsby raised the point that the Council is often advertising vacancies for what could be perceived as "unnecessary" jobs, **vacancies should be frozen**.

Richard said many of the positions arise because the Government says certain tasks have to be carried out. Failing to do so would result in funds being taken away from the Council.

Council Tax

Tim Coleman of Artlink asked why Harrogate had one of the **highest Council Taxes** in the country.

Richard Cooper replied that the Council had been running services over and above the level it should have been and propping it up through drawing money from the working balances and budget "underspends". It has now got to the stage where there is no such money available to spend.

Licensing Changes

Peter Armitage referred to the Liquor Licensing responsibility being transferred to the Council. He was concerned that the task was being handed to the Council with **no extra resources** to cover the extra work involved for the Council.

Richard responded that the Government said the procedure should be self-funding. The Council will charge the Government-fixed price for the service, but this amount will not cover the cost of administration, which was of great concern.

Traffic Congestion

Councillor Julian Sturdy, Council Member for Public Works, responsible for **Highways and Traffic Management**, stated that in the short term the Council will **review the timing of traffic lights** at any junctions and pedestrian crossings which are not optimised to allow traffic to flow more efficiently.

Highways Budget

When Julian joined the Council he arranged twice-yearly meetings with North Yorkshire County Council to discuss the Highways budgets for Harrogate and they now have an input into these decisions. Most of the funding for the Highways comes from the **Local Transport Plan Fund** for traffic calming, pedestrian crossings, etc.

The Council are given a budget to spend on pedestrian crossings, for example. If this amount is not spent on pedestrian crossings it cannot be made available for spending on other aspects, it has to be returned. Julian said this was **not satisfactory** and Harrogate Council are currently negotiating a more flexible way of using these funds, possibly in other areas where the Council is under-funded.

Traffic Study Group

Other aspects of traffic problems in Harrogate were discussed and Julian Sturdy said **it would be helpful if members could submit details of traffic lights that cause problems on routes they use regularly** and details of other problem areas. He would like to attend a meeting of the Chamber's Traffic & Transport Focus Group to discuss the various options and suggestions to improve these areas.

Please submit your suggestions to the Secretariat.

Future Meetings

The session ended with President, Peter Armitage, inviting Richard Cooper and Julian Sturdy to attend personally, or send a representative along, to informally sit-in on any future Chamber meeting.

Richard Cooper welcomed the invitation and said if the Chamber had any particular issues he would arrange for himself or a representative to attend future meetings either formally or informally. **He was keen for the Council to have an open and flexible relationship with the Chamber, which should be of benefit to all parties concerned.**

Local Plan Review

Harrogate Council's Local Plan is being reviewed and formulated in 2004/05. We now have the opportunity to influence before it is finalised. Please contribute any suggestions you have, for example, car parking should be under review, could a Park & Ride scheme help?

Also low-cost transport from out of town areas like the Dales needs to be investigated to enable potential employees from further away to gain access to and from the town early morning and evening for work.

Elected Regional Assembly

Chief Executive, Brian Dunsby, represented Harrogate businesses at a recent meeting in Leeds on the proposed Elected Regional Assembly. This proposal will have a radical impact on local government throughout the area.

At the meeting the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, set out the Plan of Action, which will consist of **an Elected Assembly covering the whole of North, South, East and West Yorkshire**. It is quite possible that the political complexion of South, West and East Yorkshire is going to outweigh the political complexion of North Yorkshire. This may favour the Government's proposal for an Elected Assembly.

An Elected Regional Assembly is claimed to devolve power from Westminster to the Region. The Deputy Prime Minister claimed it would not take the power away from Local Authorities and believes that the Regional Development Agencies, such as Yorkshire Forward, would be more accountable to an Elected Regional Assembly.

The principal functions of the Assembly would focus on the following key issues:

- Business and Jobs
- Skills and Training
- Housing and Planning
- Transport
- Fire and Rescue
- Public Health
- Culture Tourism and Sport
- The Environment

This covers most aspects of business, as distinct from the local domestic situation. It will cost about £30 million to set up with an annual cost thereafter.

Instead of the present two-tier system of a County Council and District or Borough Council, these will be merged into one. That would mean Harrogate Borough Council would no longer exist - it would either be Harrogate & Craven or Harrogate, Craven & Richmond, or revert back to a pure county-wide authority.

The key point is that we may, by 23rd February, be able to influence which Unitary Authority we should have across Yorkshire, i.e. which options will be put on the voting paper for the Autumn Referendum.

Businesses in particular need to be informed and need to add their comments at the planning process. That is why the **Debate over Dinner on 20th February** has been arranged, where you will be able to listen to the pros and cons of the four options of Unitary Authorities.

Places are still available - booking form herewith.

Digital Industries Forum

Brian Haines outlined the Digital Industries Forum on which he has volunteered to represent the Chamber. He feels it will enable more people to invest in training for people in IT matters, which is essential if local people are to have the appropriate expertise to support local businesses.

The contract is being funded by the Learning & Skills Council and delivered by Harrogate College.

Interested members should contact the Secretariat to be kept informed of developments.

Economic Development Forum

Vice-President, Brian Haines, reported on the recent EDF Meeting, which he had attended.

The main focus of the meeting was the Licensing Act 2003 where the responsibility formerly rested with the magistrates and now moves to Harrogate Borough Council to oversee. Guidelines have been drawn up and will be available from Harrogate Borough Council.

Businesses are now able to object to a licence being granted to a new establishment, whilst a licence for a one-off event will be easier to obtain than in the past.

Brian Dunsby was also present at that meeting and he had expressed Chamber's view that the **main problem with regard to Licensing was a saturation of licensed premises, particularly in the town centre** and after midnight. The lack of public toilets exacerbates the problems.

Brian Dunsby made the point that off-street secure car parking into the evening was important. He also stressed to the Council that the cost of a Licensing Scheme must be curtailed within the fee income generated so it does not become a burden on the town's taxpayers, as at present.

The paperwork is available via the Secretariat if any members would like to have sight of it.

The Best Value Review Process has now been completed. This is a process where the Government attempts to drive the Councils up to a better level of quality and performance. Councils benchmark themselves against similar sized communities and areas. A **Service Improvement Plan** has now been put together, will be agreed within the next month, then implemented and monitored.

Business Development Sites

The EDU have reported a lot of activity at the smaller end of the market, with businesses looking for offices and small industrial units in the Harrogate area. There is currently a high demand and it is expected that in the not too distant future there will be a shortage of small properties available for rental.

Included in the EDU's long term Business Plan is the **need for more business sites**. There is a perceived preference to keep employment land for this use and not allow it to be changed to housing. It cannot be changed just for developers' financial gain.

A recent Planning Application for the former Nidd Vale Motors site on Westmoreland Street illustrates this. The Council are pressing for business sites to be retained for business and not released for housing development.

The Chamber is now receiving regular notification of Planning Applications with employment implications.

Members interested in being kept informed should contact the Secretariat.

Virus Warnings

Following the issue of Scam Check List 2 with last month's *Review*, a new virus has emerged - the **MyDoom Virus**. The malicious code has spread to millions of in-boxes and one security firm said it intercepted more than a million attacks in the first day.

MyDoom infiltrates e-mail systems and harvests randomly selected addresses, which are 'spoofed' so people receiving the virus cannot tell where they originated. An unwelcome offshoot of the virus is that thousands of users are **receiving messages telling them that they have been infected**, when they most likely have not.

For more information visit the following web sites:
www.microsoft.com/security/antivirus/mydoom.asp
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3441525.stm>

The **Microsoft Software Update virus** is again on the rounds. This comes in the form of an e-mail claiming to contain a link to update your software. That link then leads to your computer being infected with the virus.

More information on: www.microsoft.com/security/antivirus/authenticate_mail.asp

Domain Name Scam Warning

One of our new members, **Gwen Puckrin of A Tactile Business**, was recently caught out by one of the "Domain Name Scams" and wanted to warn other members of this aggressive sales scam from a domain registry company. They telephone and say that someone on their other line **wants to buy a domain name** with your company name included. You are pressed to make a decision there and then, or lose the name to someone else.

In Gwen's case a payment of £117.50 was made followed by an e-mail confirmation saying she had agreed to pay for two years at £235 a year! The postal receipt had a web site address, which offered domain names for £25. Gwen phoned to complain about the gross overcharging, this was followed with a return call saying she would be refunded. The company involved is called **First Class Communications Ltd**. Gwen Puckrin reported them to Trading Standards Office who were unable to trace them.

Members are urged to pass the Scam Check list around their staff to ensure everyone is aware of the various cons and viruses that are around. Extra copies can be provided by the Secretariat on request.

Warning to Hotels

We have recently received a warning from the local Police that a male has been ringing hotels in the area purporting to be a plumber stating he will be at the premises the following day to carry out some work. He then arrives at the hotel in the early morning and **requests cash payment for the work he has alleged to have done**. The male is described as white, approx. late 40's-50, about 5ft 11in tall with short messy hair and speaking with a local accent. All hotels should be aware and inform the Police if they have any phone calls regarding any plumbing work they have not requested.

To contact Harrogate Police Tel: 01423 505541

Disability Discrimination Act

We reported at an earlier meeting the effect of the Disability Discrimination Act in requiring businesses to give **equal service to people with any disability**.

One of our new members, Smith Smalley & Co has drawn to our attention that they are working with a number of local authorities to bring about changes to their properties. They are willing to give advice to Chamber members on the compatibility of their property with the requirements.

For further information contact:

**Duncan Smith, Divisional Director
Smith Smalley Architects Ltd**

Tel: 531100 Fax: 531449

E-mail: duncansmith@smithsmalley.co.uk

Planning Objection Appeal

It was originally expected that the new Harrogate Bus Station would become part of an integrated transport interchange between bus, rail and taxis. However the car park site has been sold to Coalhouse Properties Ltd, who put in a Planning Application for a two-storey retail building on the site, which would block any hope of an Integrated Transport Interchange.

The Chamber objected to this proposal along with other businesses, and the Council rejected the application for planning permission. The owners have now appealed and the matter will be referred to the Secretary of State. **Any views to the Secretariat.**

Urban Housing Study

The Government have required and the Council have commissioned a professional study of opportunities for **developing property on unused land within Harrogate**. This means spare corners of vacant land, large gardens and empty fields, etc within the town are being studied.

If you want to see some land developed - or don't want to see some land developed - the information is available via the Secretariat on request.

Harrogate & Knaresborough Integrated Transport Study

This study is being carried out to investigate transport problems in the Harrogate and Knaresborough areas and to develop an integrated transport strategy for the period 2006-2016. The County Council and Harrogate Borough Council will use this strategy to identify **proposals for new and improved transport provision and highways needed in this area**.

The work will also contribute to future planning policy in the area. At our request a copy of the local questionnaire was recently sent to all Chamber members and we would like to remind members of the **deadline to complete and return the form, which is 24th February 2004**. It is most important that you take part in this survey so the study receives the maximum feedback from businesses in the area as well as from local residents.

Further details are available from the Secretariat.

ARRIVA Trains Update

Services on the Harrogate Line will benefit from the completion of the 3-car Pacer unit refurbishment that is due to finish around the beginning of April. This should ease the standing problem seen on some peak hour services, as 2-car trains have been used as substitutes during the programme.

The new Northern franchise, due to start in October, **should not affect the current service levels** and will see more integration with other forms of transport and improved rail connections.

Plans to modernise Harrogate station by Arriva have been put on hold while the announcement of a new operator is awaited.

Further information from:

Drew Haley, External Liaison Manager, Arriva TN

Tel: 01904 524853 Fax: 01904 524566

E-mail: andrew.haley@arrivatn.co.uk

Christmas Lights

The Soroptomists are gathering information and support for Christmas lights in the town for Christmas 2005. Peter Armitage attended a recent meeting and asked that **anyone willing or able to assist should contact the Soroptomists** direct as follows:

Pat Shore Tel: 01423 526077

patjshore@btinternet.co.uk

Can you help the Chamber?

Peter Armitage called for more members to become involved and act as deputies to attend some of the numerous external meetings the Officers and Management Group are sometimes unable to attend due to business pressures.

Also, if you have a particular interest in one of the four Focus Group areas, please contact the Group Leader or Secretariat to offer your assistance as appropriate.

Business Development Focus Group

Group Leader, Brian Haines, stated that he joined the Chamber and a number of other forums to identify new income, cost savings, learn from others and share best practice. We have now regenerated the Business Development Focus Group to facilitate **new business introductions and effective networking**.

The Focus Group needs to increase in number to be fully effective with members from different but complimentary business sectors – currently we have property, accountancy, financial services, IT/consultancy, education and retail.

They will also consider what Best Practise is and how it might effectively be used to improve business performance.

Members with an interest in joining this Focus Group should contact the Secretariat so we can pass your interest on to Brian Haines.

Note that next month's meeting will include a Focus Group Breakout Session, which would be a good opportunity to meet other members of the group and share your ideas.

NEW MEMBERS

A Tactile Business (*Complementary therapies*)

Gwen Puckrin, Proprietor

30 Rayleigh Road, HARROGATE, HG2 8QR

Tel: 541171 **Fax:**

E-mail: gwen@atactilebusiness.co.uk

Web site: www.atactilebusiness.co.uk

Black & Wade (*Textiles Sales Agent (Upholstery)*)

Paul Wade, Proprietor

18 Southway, HARROGATE, HG2 0EA

Tel: 504305 **Fax:** 528415

E-mail: paulwadetextiles@yahoo.co.uk

Dauids of Harrogate/Ripon Ltd (*Peugeot Dealerships*)

Stephanie Fretwell, Fleet Sales Manager

Broughton Way, Starbeck, HARROGATE, HG2 7NY

Tel: 886555 **Fax:** 01765 601946

E-mail: steph.fretwell@peugeotmail.co.uk

Web site: www.davidspeugeot.co.uk

TREASURER'S REPORT

The Chamber's Accounts for the third quarter were tabled for those present showing a surplus of £4,581 compared with only £10 last year. The Treasurer highlighted that the October Shared Mailing had produced a very positive return for the Chamber and Members alike.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

The Membership year ends on 31st March and we will shortly begin the preparation of the invoices for the 2004/05 subscriptions. Enclosed with this *Review* is a "Membership Update" form, which we would ask you to **complete and return** for the following reasons:

1. Purchase Order Number - we need to receive your purchase order number if this needs to be quoted on the subscription invoice.
2. The value of your membership subscription depends upon the number of people in your company (or Harrogate Branch). Please update this number for us.
3. We need the correct description of your business activities. This is particularly important this year because we will be including details of all members on the new Chamber web site. Some of the longer-standing members have not submitted this information in the past.
4. Please ensure your company's information is up to date on our database - including the nominated representative's name and e-mail address, where applicable.
5. If you have a separate address to which we should send your invoice this ensures we have the correct information so the subscription invoice can be settled efficiently.

Please return the form by fax or post **by the end of February**. Thank you.

Pathfinder Report - Careers Awards

The latest copy of Pathfinder Report has been received by the Chamber and includes information on the GEG's prestigious "Careers" Awards 2004. In particular the "Work-based Learner of the Year" award. They ask if there is anyone in your organisation who should be nominated for this award.

More information from:

The Pathfinders Careers Charity Limited

Tel: 01285 760591 Fax: 01285 760355

E-mail: mail@pathfindercareerscharity.co.uk

Web site: www.pathfindercareerscharity.org.uk

HARROGATE JUNIOR CHAMBER

Louise Howson, President of Harrogate Junior of Chamber & Commerce, brought along flyers for their Open Evening on Tuesday, 10th February. This information was e-mailed to all Chamber members and we hope that some of you and/or your employees were able to attend the event.

British Junior Chamber is a dynamic successful national organisation that is making a difference by developing Leaders. They deliver innovative exciting programmes enhancing citizenship, fellowship and self-development, leading to sustainable success in your life, organisation and society.

The link between local business and Junior Chamber is absolutely vital if their organisation is to grow and develop in the future. Louise said that businesses cannot afford to ignore what young people are thinking and what their needs are and businesses cannot afford not to encourage any organisation that is developing the leadership skills that companies need to survive.

Louise challenges Harrogate Chamber members to identify one person in their company who would benefit from membership of the Junior Chamber. Their members range in age from 18 to 40. If each member responds to this challenge membership of Harrogate Junior Chamber would double in the next two months and you will have helped that happen.

For further information contact Louise Howson, President, Harrogate Junior Chamber Tel: 526522 E-mail: louise.howson@eu.nabgroup.com

FUTURE OF OUR COUNCIL? FINAL REMINDER!!

The future of Harrogate Borough Council and the North Yorkshire County Council will change radically if Yorkshire votes for an Elected Regional Assembly.

If you want to know more - and perhaps influence the future of our local government - come to the Chamber's Debate over Dinner on Friday evening 20th February.

BUSINESS BRIEFINGS

Domain Name Scams Warning

Police have warned small businesses to be on the alert for companies demanding a fee to renew their domain names. A domain reseller in Cambridgeshire this week fell foul of the law when it sent out unsolicited mailshots demanding a £60 fee to renew domain names and save them from suspension. Unscrupulous resellers are increasingly attacking small businesses and police have urged business owners not to send any money to a company they are unsure about.

More info from: www.vnunet.com/News/1152080

DTI re-vamps Home Computing Initiative

The Government has announced new guidelines on its initiative to improve computer literacy in the UK. The Home Computing Initiative (HCI), which aims to increase household penetration of PCs, has had a slow take-up rate among UK employers since it was introduced in 1999.

Under the initiative, employers provide each of their staff with a new PC to use at home, and the employee then pays back a small amount each month from their wages. Employers can receive sizeable tax exemptions and reductions on National Insurance contributions in return for participating in the scheme.

More information on: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/news/2004/040119_cominit.asp

Direct Mail Help

Royal Mail has re-launched its web site, Direct Mail Online, to help small businesses plan, design and send promotional mail to customers. The site has step-by-step guidance for producing a creative and professional direct mail campaign.

Visit the web site on: www.dm-online.co.uk

Tribunal Compensation Increase

Employment tribunal compensation limits rose on 1st February. Employment tribunals resolve disputes between employers and employees over a variety of employment rights; it is imperative to keep up-to-date with employment law requirements to avoid any expensive litigation.

Employment law advice on: www.emplaw.co.uk

Preparing for the Euro

The Government has published its seventh report on preparations for a Euro changeover. The report includes a check-list for businesses to consider and information on the progress made in preparing the UK economy for possible membership of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). A further report will be published in spring 2004. The following web site has more information: www.euro.gov.uk/

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