**Minutes of the Chamber of Trade Meeting held Tuesday 20th October 2020**

**6-7pm via Zoom Video link.**

**Present:**

Trevor Backhouse Patisserie Vieonnoise

Simon Raybould Print Crew

Penny Fardell (Treasurer) Hollings Crowe Storr

Pippa Ridley (Membership Secretary) Entempa

Carole Drake (Minute secretary)

Ali Top Show Shoes

Cllr. Paul Carter OTC

Cllr. Colin Campbell

Katie Burnett Courtyard Planters/Dir. Otley BID

Andrew Hargreaves Westbourne House

Tom Hatley Christopher Little & Co /Chair Otley BID

Peter Heald Lunds of Otley/OTP

Richard Hughes Yorkshire Wordwright/Chair OTC

Cllr. Peter Jackson Mayor of Otley/Dir. Crown Services

Cllr. Sandy Lay

Cllr. Victoria Oldham Cranbourne Accountancy/Ward Cllr for Washbourne & Chair of HDC Licencing

David Robson Otley Courthouse

Tim & Helen Wilkinson Dowgill House

Les Winder Cranberry

Christopher Winpenny Winpenny Photography

1. **This was a special discussions meeting to see how businesses have been affected by COVID-19 and what advice the Otley Chamber could offer. The Chair of the meeting (SR) thanked all in attendance and said “we are here to support and help each other”.**

The Chair thanked all in attendance and Introductions were then done.

Panel members:

* Cllr. Colin Campbell
* Katie Burnett from the Town Co-ordination Team
* Tom Hatley from Otley BID
* Peter Jackson, Enforcement Officer
* Victorian Oldham, Help Line,
* Cllr. Sandy Lay, Nurse with Covid-19 experience

**QUESTION 1 - Dave Robson (Otley Courthouse/Otley Film Society)**

Following on from an email circulated to Otley Chamber members, Councillors and the Local MP,

DR quickly summarised his concerns. “If we get put into further lockdown the Courthouse will have to stop what we they are doing despite all the precautions they have put into place to ensure they are Covid secure. Hand on heart the Courthouse is very safe for people to come into and for people who want to use our room hire and other facilities. I started to think - was there any other way we and other business could be organised under the present circumstances? We have certification from Leeds Licencing as they have checked us out - so people can feel safe when they come into the premises and we have had this done on three occasions with the same result. If we had failed those checks then the authorities would have the right to close us down and they would be quite right in doing so - but there are some businesses that have done nothing at all to make themselves Covid secure. So it was a way of cutting across what is done at the moment which is a blanket approach. If this region goes down, we all go down no matter what we are doing, so looking at it another way. If an individual business could be said to be Covid secure, why could they not be assured to be able carry on for the next three months or until the next round of visits?”

**RESPONSES:**

SR – said “that was a great question, as it obviously applies to a lot of businesses in Otley and the surrounding areas.”

LW – “do Leeds have the capability to check the demands of the whole area as it would demand great resources from LCC?”

CC – “I think the issues are local authorities have been trying to have a conversation with central government about a local response in a situation in a particular area. The suggestion is a valid one, but there would be implications for the local authority in actually policing it. The issue of course is the Government approving (very difficult. You have the example of this in Manchester over the weekend as they appear to be talking to each other but not listening) so at the moment the restrictions are imposed by the Government, often with very little or no reference to local authorities. So whatever we might want to do locally, we can’t do because in effect, we are told what to do by the Government.”

SL- “Ward Member’s have been availed of some data that shows Otley & Yeadon wards over 12 weeks, has the lowest infection rate. There has been an increase in the last couple of weeks but still very flat compared to the rest of the city. Over a 12 week period we have had the leased cases over the three wards. It somehow feels unfair (re the Courthouse, pubs & restaurants) that we are compared with other areas that have got rising numbers. The problem we have in the local authority is going up the chain of command – as it doesn’t really get us very far when the Government do not want to listen to local authorities looking to have a scheme to make premises Covid Secure.”

“What we can do is: I can quite easily see as we come out of this second wave (winter) we will start looking to have some form of assurance schemes to say that some premises are safe. CC & SL to have a chat with some of their conservative colleagues on the Council who have the ear to Government, much, more than the administration does.”

RH – “Agree with what CC & SL says, but when an idea comes to you, you either sit on it or put it out there. I think it does have some credence, but I absolutely agree it is a big, big, ask.”

HW – “Visit England do a Covid secure certification (self assessment) that you can add on to your website saying ‘we are Covid secure’ but it doesn’t hold much weight - but it does reassures people.”

VC – “Harrogate BC is Tory controlled and does have the ear of certain Government people, possibly easier than Leeds at the moment. VC said she is more than happy to raise this issue, as obviously certain public houses & restaurants are affected by this. From a political point of view it is for the good of businesses as a whole, but it does put a lot of pressure on the licencing teams and enforcement officers.” A comment was made a Covid secure certification ‘it is only as good as an MOT’. VS emphasised she would do what she could.

PJ – “I visit a lot of premises as I am the regional representative for the National Pub Watch and my region is the whole of Yorkshire and Humberside. Clearly I have seen issues within the hospitality and the problem with visits by local authorities, in that, when Government starting implementing the lockdowns and conditions. They put the onus on local authorities to do site visits and inspections and I was signed up to be part of a team doing these visits of licenced premises throughout the Yorkshire & the Humberside region. The Government is issuing instructions to Local Authorities to do these visits and the Local Authorities have not got the manpower, as a lot of people across the board are still working from home. Harrogate in particular, there has been issues and in the Ripon area issues need dealing with now under licencing matters, but unfortunately we are getting no assistance from the Local Authorities because they are not working.”

VO- ask PJ ”if he would kindly copy VO in with these issues. VO went on the say that officers are out and about in Harrogate, they are working extremely hard and the ones out on the road are making the visits.”

PJ – “we have got to understand that Local Authorities are stretched to the limit on everything and to get extra resources out is not possible the moment.”

SR – “I suppose where we stand at the moment is the Government are encouraging people to police themselves in a sense. If a pub (for instance) is misbehaving they are expecting the public to report it. Unfortunately there is no way of saying, a place is good and It is just a places where conditions are bad at the moment, also some of the public would may feel uncomfortable reporting any issues.”

**QUESTION 2 (more of an observation that a question) - AH Westbourne House**

AH – “at Westbourne House we usually serve our hospitality on 6’ tables. Under normal circumstances those 6’ tables would seat 12 people. But I know before these most recent changes I could still socially distance three groups of two around one table and still would be socially distanced. But since the change of rules, I have had to put up really small tables (which are very uncomfortable) and these are 1.5 meters away from another small table and so on. If we could use the bigger tables there would be a better atmosphere in the room and people would feel more comfortable. This is really an observation and this current blanket cover the Government has put forward affects us and the way that people feel about coming to Westbourne House.”

SR – asked “if any of the panel member could respond to this” – there was no response.

**QUESTION 3 – Anonymous**

“I work in an office and one of the ladies has just started a relationship from a different household. She also has a daughter, who is at college who knows people who have had symptoms of Coronavirus and it seems they have no idea about social distancing or social bubbles. I fear that my colleague may bring the virus to our office. What should I do?”

**RESPONSE**

TH – “the first thing to do is raise the issue with the line manager, in an informal way. Express your concerns and go from there on what the line manager proposes as a course of action. In this way, it could be resolved in an informal way and that colleague you have concerns about who is in the workplace might be able to work from home for instance, and if that is not possible it should be how you can manage the work space or split shifts.”

**QUESTION 4 – Anonymous**

“I own a café and do a lot of outside catering. Since the end of March my business has almost collapsed. We can only fit a small proportion of customers in our café compared to the amount we used to do and all our outside catering is completely finished. The Government have been supportive with furlough, but when this finishes at the end of this month I don’t know what to do. We are desperate and almost at the point of ruin. My health is affected through worry. If we were to go into another lockdown this would be the end of us, unless we get further financial help from the Government.”

**RESPONSES**

LW - “one of my concerns is probably very similar. Most of the small café’s around Otley and elsewhere have suffered, but managed to come through the first lockdown. If there is no serious help from Government and if a second lockdown occurs then this is going to have a drastic effect of many small catering businesses – so I would echo that concern. I don’t know what the solution is other to pressure the Government to provide more support.”

SL – “it is the collateral damage, that is why northern leaders are lobbying the Government for more than 2/3rds support. After sitting in the Council’s Health Group meeting this afternoon we need to accept that Tier 3 is coming. The Director of Public Health is quite clear, that all though we have flattened out as a city we are not on declining numbers. To me it looks like why we haven’t already gone into Tier 3 is because we cannot agree with Government. But we now know from today that there is a point where the Government will over rule local councils. It is going to take out loads of these business, and this tme round they will not have the benefit of summer (when people can sit outside) it is going to be horrendous with huge poverty throughout. That is what Andy Burnham, Steve Rotherham and Judith Blake are having conversations and are saying. In first lockdown you had all this support for business and employees but this time round there is not that support. The current furlough programme is coming to an end and the next package instead of being 8% it is going to be 2/3rds. I don’t know what the answer is for café’s like the above who have posed the question as Central Government are not prepared to throw the money at them.”

PJ – “we are seeing a Government with a support package for hospitality for the Pub Co’s and that operates OK for the corporate businesses, but there are thousands of pubs around the country that are operated by the managers. Those managers are payed on a commission basis on the turnover of the public house. Out of these commissions, they have to pay the manager, the manager then has to pay the staff out of that, and there is no support there whatsoever for that type of employer and if we end up in another Tier 3 lockdown or even further lockdowns we will see a drastic demise in the hospitality industry.”

HW – “taking about hospitality, there is very little regarding accommodation. If we go into the Tier 3 we will get absolutely nothing. People are advised we will not be forced to close but after this weekend we have no further bookings and we are fearful for the future as people are not travelling. For us imparticular; the majority of people who book into the B&B are visiting families and they are not able to do this at the moment. So it gets us down a bit when people look at hospitality as only being pubs & restaurants – there is a wider a picture to consider!”

TW – “we have followed the above fairly closely since March, and certainly since the Covid numbers have been going up again. We have never heard of the hospitality sector before, suddenly we hear it on every news bulletin which features exclusively the pubs and restaurants with the occasional café thrown in. No one ever mentions hotels. Following on from what SL has said, in terms of financial support, there was the 10K for small business allowance and don’t forget there have been 2 self employed allowances (application for these closed yesterday) but there are a further 2 allowances coming at a reduced level.”

SL – “I get some self-employed who tell me that they have not received any help at all. I had one today who is a tradesman, they do not have any help at all, but they are ok for the moment as they are continuing to work. I think my question is, there seems to be quite a lot who are self-employed who do not qualify for those grants, or do they not know they are available?”

TW – answered the above by saying “with his respected BID hat on, when it came to helping/ assisting with the 10K small business grants, there was a list towards the end where some Otley businesses did not appreciate that this was available to them. BID did physical go round knocking on doors, encouraging people to apply. It is a fairly simple application procedure – but if you work from home you may not have that clarity if you are entitled to it.”

SR – “the only support I have had is the self-employed grant and I have had that twice, but there are also other grants available, from Local authorities in helping people who need it and who cannot get any other type of loan and this is up to 3k” he believed. “If members were here in this forum they would be hearing all this.”

PF – “there are some people who fall through the gaps . If they had not done a tax return last year because they were not self-employed but this year they are self-employed, they do not get anything at all. There are people who might be employed and self-employed as well, but their self-employed income is less than 50% of what they get – they get nothing. People who are operating through limited companies get very little out, also people who get more than 50K a year get no help at all, so there are quite a lot of people who miss out.”

TW – “I know someone who is a self-employed builder, who didn’t think he was due anything, but having spoken to his accountant, was told he was. If people don’t want to join sessions like this then they are making things worse for themselves. Information is available on the Government website and we tell them of this often enough.”

SL – asked “PC how do we get more footfall in Otley to make businesses such as the only B&B, restaurants, cafes and pubs etc., in town, more approachable? Getting visitors to feel more comfortable about coming here as a day/overnight visitor?”

PC – “we discussed this matter every couple of months at one of the local council’s meetings. At the moment we are going through a benchmarking process, and looking at tourism in the town just so we can assess ourselves against other similar towns up and down the country and that gives us a bit of a benchmark, really as to where we are. The first process is giving us a clear picture of where we are now and how we can improve. On the back of that we need to look at what we do strategically to target the things we need to improve. Second phase looking at various pots of money to apply for. The other thing we are looking at is trying to push the on-line presence. This will offer a potential for a booking platform for businesses to expand. That digital presence is going to be very important in going forward and we need to do this in conjunction with all the businesses.”

SP – “the huge problem (apart from Covid) is time. The Government acted very quickly on giving people some financial help, but very early on in March. By the time we have acted it may be too late. Is there any quick measures we can implement as there are £5,000 people who work in Otley every day, or there used to be pre March?.The workforce from out of town have to park, eat somewhere, shop, how do we get these people back into the cafes, restaurants, bars shops etc?”

PH – “where I live in Headingley/Weetwood there are two cafes there that have re invented themselves and one of them actually seems busier now than before the lockdown. Now the actual shop is closed but selling cakes & coffee from their front door and quite a few businesses have re-invented themselves. Yesterday when I was in Otley I went round to a Health Food Shop and it was locked up, so I went round the corner to another shop in New Inn Court and they were also locked up. I also bumped into one of my customers a couple of week ago on a Wednesday and the customer said I have just been to your shop and you are closed. So shop opening times have got very fragmented, and maybe if we could just publicise and ask people if they could open on the same day if possible. It would be much better if shops opened, if possible on the same day (even if it is limited opening times) of the week. People need to know in advance who is open and who is not. Between ourselves the BID and Partnership we could promote that quite a bit more. People who are open for business, what days and times and what they do/sell.”

PC – “in answer to the above we did some analysis of hits to the website just recently. There were a great rush of hits that came in re ‘Eat Out to Help Out’ Scheme. One of the things we (Town Co-ordination Group) discussed at the last meeting; could we do our own version of that and for them to do a collecting thing and push it on the website - if café’s/restaurants could get together and do a deal then this would be something we would push. This would encourage people into cafes/restaurants/pubs who do food.”

Ali – “I know the Government have helped some businesses but I have seen no help for the retail businesses. Basically by business was not running from March through to June and then the summer months when lots of people were going on holiday. Unfortunately in that 4- 5 months we have been opened, I have had very little business and no help. Added to this we are also competing with the larger businesses. I would like to know how businesses like my own can survive over the next coming months?”

SR – “said you have made a good start by joining this forum this evening as it is an opportunity to share your pain and fears. There is a lot of self-help people can do for themselves.”

HW – “we have publicised in the past, asking businesses to let us know about changing their working hours whether you are a retail, café, whatever business you are and we can share that information on Facebook/twitter. I emailed all the members saying ‘make sure you follow us on Facebook/Twitter and tag us a post which we can share’.”

TW - said “throughout the lockdown from March 23rd onwards, through businesses to business and on social media HW has been communicating what businesses are doing, what is available for people . HW has been doing this every single day, without fail, so now we are suggesting we let people know! “

SR – “said he must apologise, as at one point he did say he thought the Chamber were not doing enough. But he said that he did not see those Facebook messages, but now I am on Facebook I have seen them. It’s a bit like the grants that are available to people, not everybody knows they are there, but I don’t know how effectively we could communicate this to people.”

TH – “I would be interested to know what businesses want to happen. The next thing will be Tier 3 and Manchester are negotiating hard. Do we want Tier 3 as would that offer greater financial support for businesses and some businesses might be better off going into Tier 3 for four weeks or however long it is, than this limbo we are in under Tier 2?.”

HW – “Tier 3 would mike no difference at all to our business, we would be forced to close. The news headline from a Government conference this afternoon says they are over ruling Andy Burnham.”

TH – “at the moment with these new negotiations going on it looks like basically Manchester is going to be a benchmark for anyone else. I don’t know if Andy Burnham is going to negotiate anything for B&B’s or hotels for example. If we did go into total lockdown, businesses who are leasehold and pay rent on a quarterly basis, as far as I know, there is no requirement for landlords to ease-up on their requirement for rent. As I have said earlier total lockdown would mean a complete loss of income with ongoing expenses, so that would have a serious implication for the future in general. Without further assistance I think it is doing to have a really drastic effect on the town and the businesses within the town.”

PH – echoed what has just been said, “although I am doing quite well, business wise’ at the moment at the approach of Christmas, but there are a lot of fixed costs that have to be met. Rent tends to be one of these. Even if you have rent relief, you still have insurance and various other costs which are fairly fixed over the year. You need income and to that end you need customers through your door, so whatever support comes from the Government would have to be more than just for paying staff as there are a lot of other costs as well. If it is for a fairly long period then this has got all sorts of problems and it is going to put a lot of people out of work and they are potentially all our customers across the board.”

LW – “just to comment on what PH has just said, that he is doing alright at the moment but my concern would be the longer term effect would affect many, many more businesses. As more people start being out of work, there will be less and less customers going into retail businesses, so I fully support what PH says.”

TB - “can I just reiterate for those people who do need help. We may not have all the answers, but the Chamber of Trade is offering through VO a confidential Help Line for people who feel they need a private conversation. So just contact TB or SR and we will pass VO Help Line number on to them.”

PJ – “an important thing to remember (and I am not advising anyone to do this) but obviously one of the biggest issues is commercial rents. If people have got premises they still have to pay the rent. However, new figures came out and this affects my business as a lot of my business is my bread and butter - commercial distress and commercial rents and re-possessions. We have been instructed by the High Courts not to accept and not to do any re-possessions for the foreseeable future - that is commercial and residential. No applications are being dealt with and the new data that has come out, which took effect in September 2020 is a commercial landlord CAN NOT take proceedings against a tenant on rent until they are 353 days in arrears. It can help some tenants (short term) by not paying it, but it is a pain for commercial landlords who have also got a business to run. So it is difficult on both sides, to wait 12 months before anybody can take any action on rent arrears.”

HW – “just want to reassure people, if this helps, but Tier 3 is not a total lockdown. Shopping and retail will continue and I think in Lancashire they agreed that gyms & beauty can stay open – but they did not do that in Liverpool. So whether they will do that on a regional basis? On hospitality all it mentions is pubs & bars must close unless they serve a substantial meals. So restaurants can still operate so it is not a complete lockdown.”

LW – “what PJ said was interesting about the rents. The other thing I had forgotten about was earlier in the lockdown I looked at our commercial insurance policy and it does cover loss of business/revenue but it doesn’t mention pandemics pacifically. So I contacted our insurers and it seems that all business Insurers have gone to the High Court to try and find out if there is way they do not have to pay out on this. I imagine they will probably find a way out! I haven’t heard anything back from the insurers, as yet.”

TB – “said that for his business they did exactly the same and our insurance company wrote a very nice letter but the bottom line was - NO WAY! I may be wrong here but, I don’t think the Government are accepting the insurers answer. As a business (like most) we have been heavily hit, and not just us all the ancillary businesses like florists, painters, musicians etc., because there have been no weddings as they have not been going ahead. We use that for our case, but they were having none of it.”

PH – “just to follow on - there is a court case regarding Hiscox Insurance, who specifically had a clause in where the customers were covered for a Pandemic, but they still refused to pay out, but hopefully they are on a sticky wicket, but it has broadened out to a winder principle where businesses have business interruption.”

Ali – “the Bay horse Court businesses actually plan to do a fayre and erect stalls on three Sundays in December 2020 to try and improve their businesses. RM who is actually dealing with this has approach Otley BID and COT for some funding. As we are so tucked away in Bay Horse Court, and we have not seen much improvement, as the footfall is really low. We have got a quote from an electrical re putting up some Christmas lights, so on behalf the businesses in Bay Horse Court I am asking again if we could get some help from the COT/Otley BID, but I think the Otley BID may have already replied saying they are out of funds for this year?.”

TH – “said he had not seen any email from RM, but if they want to put a proposal together and submit it to the Otley BID they will take a look at it. Obviously what we have to be careful and take into account is, all of the businesses in Otley, but that is not to say we might not be able to get some funding to support you.”

PC – “said he would go the Tourism Board as see what they could do regarding some financial help for Bay Horse Court’s Christmas Sunday events.”

SR – “if we have one part of Otley that lights up then it is a magnet for pulling people in, obviously all of Otley is going to benefit, so sometimes spending money on one area promotes everyone else and at the end of the day we are trying to help/support and keep all of our businesses going.”

SL – Local Health Service and the demands on it. “As of Friday there was 144 patients in Leeds Teaching Hospitals all Covid positive and they have re-opened Covid positive wards. Yesterday morning only 11 patients in Harrogate Hospital with Covid. Harrogate is seeing a rise in admissions but we are nowhere near the number that are in Leeds. Most of the Covid patients are over 60 and concern within the health care, and you hear from Boris Johnson and the chief medical officers is that it is the over 60’s that are disproportionately affected and are hospitalised. It is statistically likely that you will end up in hospital the older you are. All this talk about ‘heard immunity’ has never worked, I had a quick look today on the site and the last ‘herd immunity’ was highlighted and that was the Black Plague, over 300 years ago and we know how that worked out! The scientists all agree we cannot have herd immunity - we need a vaccine. The World Health Organisations estimate 5% of us have antibodies so there are still 95% of us to get it. My message is from the Health Care point of view is we must keep protecting each other.”

**Communication information for Otley Chamber Members. Pipper Ridley (Membership Sec.) will now send out all communications to members through Mail Chimp from** **info@otleychamber.co.uk** **email address.**