

ENHANCING CHILHAM SQUARE - THE STORY SO FAR ...

For many years there have been local aspirations to enhance Chilham Square and its environs.

In 2006 we commissioned a feasibility study that proposed an approach to delivering a revitalised community square - with the benefit of a Defra grant this cost us less than £1000.

The study identified a number of community aspirations including:-

- (a) increase visitor numbers, encourage tourism, local crafts and businesses and the sale of local produce whilst respecting The Square's historic and rural heritage,
 - (b) reinvigorate the village whilst improving the quality of life of residents, all parishioners and visitors,
 - (c) contribute to the promotion of public health and safety and make the square a more inviting place for all concerned,
- and concluded that:-

"Through public consultation, it is clear that Chilham square represents the state of the community at present but definitely not their aspirations. There is now an almost unanimous call for change as the community realise what has become important to them and what are the key priorities.

The development of a vision and design of a space must be developed closely with the users of a space and experts from a range of disciplines. This holistic approach aims to translate political aims and spatial visions into a functional design that respects the sensitive historical setting and does justice to the various meanings of public space."

Chilham's Future Delivery Board (CFDB) was set up to take forward these proposals on behalf of the parish council. Their website www.chilhamsfuture.co.uk provides more details on the progress they have made.

In 2008, leaving CFDB to progress the wider project that was to enable achieving benefits to the local economy and local community, we approached Kent Highways Services (KHS) with the aim of delivering an interim solution to a small but important part of the problem - parking and traffic control in Chilham Square - stressing that any proposed measures should be sympathetic to the unique nature of the square

As a result, a study incorporating traffic surveys was conducted by KHS. It suggested that the main problem was where and how people park and proposed a minimalist and cost effective solution with safety as the key objective – the proposed measures included use of road studs / block sets to delineate parking bays and introducing parking restrictions at pinch points, where access can be adversely affected using the narrowest form of yellow line and toned down material colour to minimise visual intrusion.

The Parish Council supported the report with minor qualifications as it represented the best opportunity to reduce parking and traffic problems in the square and included enforceable parking restrictions at access critical pinch points. However a survey of residences and businesses in and around the Square rejected the proposals and the Parish Council withdrew its support at its meeting in December 2009 and advised KHS of its decision.

The Parish Council continued to pursue a resolution to the problem and, following a suggestion by KCC Cllr Andrew Wickham, an application was submitted to his Members Highways Fund of £25k to address the following problem:

“Poor signage and road layout is resulting in HGVs entering the Square and the feeder streets and visitors parking in the Square rather than the FREE car park at the bottom of Taylors Hill.”

KHS have responded to KCC Cllr Andrew Wickham and he has approved expenditure of £1k on the following proposed course of action: -

“A number of investigations have already been undertaken by KCC, Chilham Parish Council and others regarding the development of Chilham Village Centre and how to encourage the development of the villages’ economy. A review of previously undertaken investigations will be required to evaluate the various proposals, shortlist the alternatives that are possible under the Member Highway Fund and to produce a schedule of proposals.”

We are currently waiting for the results of this review.

All these initiatives are intended to be complimentary to the work being undertaken by CFDB. They have been advised that the next step in their project should be the identification of a single scheme supported by the community and that this should be achieved by a community engagement exercise. A long and rigorous process to obtain funding has now been successful and CFDB have arranged an open meeting on 25th March at 730pm in St Marys Church to present the reasoning behind the community engagement exercise and what they hope it will achieve.

Chilham Parish Council
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