**Test Valley Borough Council and Romsey Future’s Citizens’ Assembly**

**Romsey from a Town Centre Manager perspective**

**The Here and Now.**

* Successful Town Centre, retail vacancy rate below 4%, nationally over 11%
* Outside of town centre 6 retail units of 8 built remain available on Abbotswood development – perhaps suggesting need for new units is specific to Town Centre
* Nationally only 20% of goods are currently purchased over the internet, 80% brought through physical shops
* Bradbeers as the flagship store draws in customers from around 50 mile radius
* 60% of retail units in Romsey are independents or very small chains, often in family ownership.
* 3 of 7 vacant units close to having new tenants
* Romsey is seen by National chains as a target town but lack of medium / large available units is a barrier. Currently no sites designated for new retail units within Romsey area.
* Apart from large items of furniture it is possible to purchase almost any item for the home in Romsey (town centre and industrial estates), ladies fashion and menswear outlets offer a range of clothes but range is limited for children and no store selling quality sportswear
* The abundance of ladies hairdressers are well used some increasing hours of opening into the evening to suit client availability
* Our cafes and coffee shops are full suggesting we are not at capacity yet for this type of outlet
* Charity shops are successful and offer people the opportunity to recycle / reuse clothing and homewares and purchase affordable goods. Feel good factor of supporting a charity also important.
* We run around eight very successful town wide events a year that cater for residents and visitors

**Opportunities**

* We have a “zero waste business” and potentially a cycle business looking for 1,000 sq ft plus units in or near town centre, currently we have none available
* To develop tourism opportunities, we appear to need additional hotel / B&B bed space in locality
* We need to offer space for new business start-ups, affordable small units let on short leases or under license. Must have easy in / easy out option
* To promote more cycling / walking into the town we need a more joined up cycle network
* Currently working on building the general market into a more reliable / sustainable offer
* There are opportunities to further develop markets like “Romsey Makers Market” and “Romsey Country Market
* Would Town Centre residents tolerate more days of road closures each year for specialist events like the Antiques Fair & French Market?
* We could develop a local loyalty card scheme
* Would a local hop on hop off bus service encourage more local residents to use Town Centre?
* We will see further reduction in number of banks releasing fairly large retail unit for new businesses (the reuse of HSBC as a very successful kitchen business is a perfect example)
* Night time economy is small compared to some towns might suggest opportunities for other leisure sector businesses, great choice in range of restaurants

**For me delivering a successful “place” means**

* A place that is uniquely Romsey, reflecting our history and culture
* Opportunities for businesses to prosper
* Provides a range of job opportunities for all ages and skill levels
* Retailing and services that cater for a broad cross section of our community
* An inviting location that people are happy to visit and “dwell in”
* A safe environment
* Space that is multi- functional
* An area that can be maintained to the highest standards in an affordable manner

**Mark Edgerley**

**Romsey Town Centre Manager**

**Email: tcm@romseytc.org.uk**