



## Haverhill Area Working Party 11 September 2014

### Final report from Kent Business School on the "Destination Haverhill" project

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 In the summer of 2010 (and following approval by the Working Party in April 2010: Minute 106(2) refers) work began to bring the independent shop owners in Haverhill together with Professor Andrew Fearne from the Kent Business School (KBS). Professor Fearne is an expert in retail related research and is interested in how small independent traders can learn lessons from the large retail chains. The independent traders felt that before they undertook any training or master classes they needed to better understand the behaviours and opinions of the existing customers.
- 1.2 St Edmundsbury Borough Council committed £10,000 in total to the project which was matched by Suffolk County Council. In October 2011, the University of Kent confirmed a further £20,000 of match funding from its Innovation Fund and as a result, the total amount available to this project increased to £40,000.
- 1.3 Terms of reference were drawn up and incorporated into the legal agreement between the University of Kent and the Borough Council which was signed on 2 November 2011. The vision for the project was established as follows:-  
  
*"To ensure that the town centre of Haverhill attracts more visitors, shoppers and investment by providing a high quality **experience** for all and by providing a broad range of desired products and services such that visitors need not travel to other nearby local centres."*
- 1.4 It was also considered important that the project should have a specific identity and brand that would help with communicating and promoting the project. 'Destination Haverhill' was chosen as a title for the overall project and used in conjunction with the existing CB9 logo, it gave the project a recognisable identity.
- 1.5 KBS appointed Debbie Kemp in November 2011: a project manager with considerable retail experience and a lecturer in retail theory. Debbie drew up the project timetable which divided the project into three phases.
- 1.6 The first phase was data collection and included a detailed shoppers' survey; focus groups; retail audits and footfall counts. This phase also included

analysis of the information gathered and communication and promotion. The second phase looks to design interventions to address some of the gaps identified or issues raised in the data gathered in Phase one. Master classes were designed to provide local retailers with information about stock positioning in the shops, customer care, use of social media and marketing tips etc. Finally the last phase of the project was to assess the success of the project and it is this phase that this report relates to.

1.7 The report attached at Appendix 1 is the final report from Kent Business School.

## **2. Recommendation**

2.1 The Working Party is requested to **NOTE** the findings from the Kent Business School 'Destination Haverhill' project.

For further information, please contact:-

Andrea Mayley, Head of Economic Development and Growth

Telephone: (01284) 757343, or email: [andrea.mayley@westsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:andrea.mayley@westsuffolk.gov.uk)

T:\SEBC Democratic Services\Democratic WP Services\Committee\Reports\Haverhill Area Working Party\2014\14.09.11\F113 Final report of KBS on Destination Haverhill.doc



# Destination Haverhill

More shoppers, more visitors, more investment for Haverhill

## Destination Haverhill Revisited: KBS Shopper Survey, Master classes & Mentoring

AUGUST 2014

Debbie Kemp  
Kent Business School

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report will revisit the recommendations made by Kent Business School (KBS) to St Edmundsbury Borough Council and its Haverhill Area Working Party (HAWP) following a joint research project commencing in September 2011 called 'Destination Haverhill'. The vision for the project was 'to ensure that the town centre of Haverhill attracts more visitors, shoppers and investment by providing a high quality experience for all and by providing a broad range of desired products and services such that visitors need not travel to other nearby local centres.'

The project was commissioned following an allocation of £40,000 total funding provided by the Borough Council, Suffolk County Council, and Kent Business School's (KBS) Innovation Fund. It involved a shopper's survey of local residents and Retail Master Classes and Mentoring for local independent retailers.

In summary, the retail trading conditions have remained relatively static over the past 3 years with vacancy rates remaining below the national average in the town centre. There has been some variation in the retail mix of outlets with some shops closing and others entering the market. However the overall offer of fashion and sportswear products in the town continues to be poor with no investment from multi-chain retailers. This will continue to be a disappointment to the local residents; 76% of the respondents of the original survey requested a better range of shops in Haverhill as the main area of improvement.

There has however been a positive increase in the development of the market culture in the town with new initiatives and events. The town also won £10k from the Portas Pilot fund which the Chamber of Commerce team is currently managing. The One Haverhill team is also working very closely with the Borough Council (particularly in terms of engaging the community) to develop a Haverhill Masterplan to improve the town centre for everyone.

Visually the town looks very similar, the pedestrianisation works not having been progressed at this stage (however this will be part of the Masterplan process) and limited funding for other capital projects. There continues to be investment in the Research Park creating additional jobs and housing which is an opportunity to tap into.

The challenge for the Local Authorities in partnership with the local retailers continues to be how can they work together to ensure the high street is regarded as the centre of the community. The appeal of on-line shopping and the larger shopping centres in Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge will not go away. However if Haverhill Town Centre can create a unique experience with the right retail, leisure and service mix it will be able to compete and grow.

## CONTENTS

Background to the Destination Haverhill Project	p 3
Recommendations Revisited:	
❖ Improving the Shopping Environment	p 4
❖ Town Centre Improvements to support the Retailers	p 5
Further Recommendations following this review	p 6
Summary	p8
Appendix	
❖ Updated Case Studies for the Master Class Retailers	p 9

## BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The Research Project evolved into two stages:

1. **Shoppers Survey**
2. **Retail Master Classes and Mentoring**

---

### ENGAGEMENT OF SHOPPERS – PHASE 1: SEPT 2011 – FEB 2012

- ❖ Shoppers Survey - KBS researched and evaluated the shopping habits of the local residents in Haverhill in order to identify what changes needed to be made to improve the shopping environment and the shopping experience and thus encourage them to shop more locally more often.
- ❖ KBS also organised and conducted six focus groups, relayed the findings to the partners and agreed a strategy to address any issues identified

---

### ENGAGEMENT OF RETAILERS – PHASE 2: March 2012 – FEB 2013

- ❖ KBS conducted a retail survey to determine the views and the needs of the local Retailers. (We had also hoped to carry out Key Performance Indicators, for example stock availability, waiting times, for the independent retailers to establish a benchmark against which the impact of any changes made as a result of training/intervention can be measured. However the retailers were not responsive to sharing data.)
- ❖ Following the results from the shopper research and the retailers survey, KBS focused on improving the strategic business planning, product offer, customer service, visual appeal and marketing of the local independents by offering free local Retail Master Classes to the Independent Retailers. They were designed to fill the knowledge gap by offering training and support as well as a platform for networking and sharing best practise.
- ❖ Five retailers were then offered one to one mentoring to help apply the learning and support the changes identified by each retailer following the Master Classes. Visits were organised to each of the retailers over a period of 6 months and individual action plans were produced and followed up.

## RECOMMENDATIONS REVISITED

Interviews have been carried out by KBS with members of the SEBC team and the five retailers who participated in the Retail Master Classes and Mentoring to determine the impact of the action taken. (Feb 2014 – July 2014)

---

### IMPROVING THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

#### More product choice locally for shoppers

- ❖ Although the vacancy rate remains below the national average published by the ATCM the product choice for fashion and sportswear locally is still very limited. Morleys, the only independent Menswear retailer, and New Look closed in 2013. Residents will continue to shop on-line and in other larger towns to meet their needs.
- ❖ Business rates nationally have gone up in the past 2 years and entrepreneur's are discouraged to invest in empty outlets. Progress has been made to encourage the market community to expand. With the appointment of a Market Development Officer new initiatives have been developed such as 'Love Your Local Market Youth Market', Farmers Market, Motor Show, and 'trade for a tenner' which has encouraged 4 new stalls with a diverse range of products to start selling. This is highly encouraging as it helps to bring additional footfall into the town centre and create a vibrant atmosphere.
- ❖ The 'Co-Op' building remains empty, located on prime footage adjacent to the Jubilee Walk car park.

It is difficult to limit the glut of betting shops, charity shops, hair and beauty salons and take away food shops which are currently taking up a disproportionate amount of space on the high street compared to the shoppers needs. However the Council team have established a public register for landlords, which has now been handed over to the Chamber of Commerce who are actively encouraging them to engage in the town to support their investment.

### **Current Independent Retailers encouraged to ‘up their game’.**

- ❖ The Retail Master Classes and Mentoring had a positive impact on the five retailers, who were involved, but due to the low percentage who signed up for the trial; this has had a limited impact on the Town Centre. All five retailers continue to trade well however, Tony Strowger Jewellers, has moved their business to Bury St Edmunds to benefit from the increased footfall. (Please see the updated case studies of these retailers on p 9). Engaging with independent retailers to work to benefit from the resources and support often available continues to be a challenge.
- ❖ No further action has been taken on longer opening hours and Sunday trading needs to be discussed again with the benefit of the additional footfall that the new housing will create.
- ❖ Following the Master Class programme the 5 retailers had planned to meet regularly to continue the networking support and to encourage other retailers to be more involved in local initiatives and group promotions. This started off well with the group organising a ‘Ladies night’ at the Arts Centre to promote local products and services for women. However over time the retailers have internalised and focused on their own business needs.
- ❖ All of the retailers found the strategic planning tools useful and had actioned parts of their strategic plans with two completing everything. The mentor follow up after 6 months was a useful ‘prompt’ to revisit their plans. However left for the last year without interaction they had often resorted to short term ‘crisis’ management. They all felt that they needed further business management support preferably on a one to one basis to ensure continuous reflection and improvement.

---

### **TOWN CENTRE IMPROVEMENTS TO SUPPORT THE RETAILERS.**

#### **Go back to the basic principles of a market town and create a ‘meeting place’ where the community can come together.**

- ❖ The Art Centre continues to be a focus of activity for the Town Centre and there is a planned programme of events to increase footfall. The plans for pedestrianisation are on hold currently however the Masterplanning process will provide a mechanism to address the recommendations that were made to create more social space, al-fresco dining and more greenery which was requested by residents in the shopper survey.



### **Improve the visual appeal of the town centre.**

- ❖ Haverhill in bloom continues to do well but little else has changed in the overall appearance of the Town Centre. It was suggested that unused shops should have displays or photographs in their windows to improve the visual appeal, which works well in other High Streets and therefore continues to be an option as relationships develop with the local landlords.

### **Encourage restaurants to open in the centre of town.**

- ❖ The town continues to lack restaurants which would encourage a vibrant night time economy and engage with residents who do not currently shop locally. Partners need to consider what conditions are necessary to encourage restaurants into the town including; the availability of suitable units; favourable licensing conditions; improved lighting; evening events; and possibly a subtle police presence to encourage a desirable and safe night time culture.

### **More positive marketing and publicity.**

- ❖ Positive publicity has been achieved with the success of the Arts Centre and the Market events.
- ❖ The 'free after 3' parking initiative on Fridays is another positive step to drive footfall into the town and this initiative could be promoted more.
- ❖ There is also a great opportunity with the additional housing to engage with a new community of residents.

## **FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS FOLLOWING THIS REVIEW**

### **ENGAGING/SUPPORTING THE RETAILERS & MARKET TRADERS**

- Chamber of Commerce and One Haverhill teams to ensure engagement and consultation with the independent retailers to create a unique experience and improve footfall onto the high street. An option to tackle this is to use retail 'ambassadors' who are keen to engage and gaining support from the local chain retailers such as Boots, who have knowledge of other high streets, to drive initiatives and communication.
- Local council teams to determine what centralized support can be given to the retailers to develop business skills further. One initiative is the launch of monthly

'Retail Top Tips'. This is in recognition that many independent retailers did not originally engage with the Master classes due to lack of time available to leave their businesses. Therefore the 'Top Tips', inspired by the feedback from the Master classes can be delivered in a print or virtual format to support business planning and prompt action. Further Master classes could be considered if there was enough interest from the independent retailers.

- KBS are also considering running a Retailers Blog which the Haverhill retailers could be encouraged to join for support and networking. This would also be appropriate for the Market stall holders

---

### IMPROVING THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE

- Continue to identify and target entrepreneurs/businesses that could provide under represented products/services to improve the retail mix particularly in fashion. A flexible approach taken to trading i.e. Current retailers encouraged to take a market stall to extend their footage and try new products and Market traders encouraged to test a pop up shop in vacant units for a semi-permanent retail offer.
- With the increased investment and population, actively promote Haverhill to targeted restaurants and retailers who will improve the offer on the high street. Landlords can and should play their part in this.
- Co-ordinate and promote the programme of events planned by the Arts Centre, the Market, the Retailers and other community groups. If there is a month with no events then make one up uniquely for Haverhill.
- Further promotion of the 'Free after 3' car parking should be undertaken to encourage increased footfall.
- All of the retailers should be encouraged to join forces with co-ordinated window displays at key times in the year to add 'theatre' to the high street. A competition would encourage this with free publicity and the local residents acting as judges perhaps!
- Other competitions could encourage retailers to improve the shopping environment. For example 'Customer Service Expert' of the month - members of the public to nominate or vote for a member of staff from any of the local retailers on the high street.

## IN SUMMARY

Haverhill as a town is growing and continues to attract investment with an increase in jobs and housing, which sets it ahead of many other towns in the UK. The challenge is to encourage all of these residents to support their local town centre by providing the unique experience with the right retail, leisure and service mix to ensure it can compete and grow.

The competition from larger towns continues however developing a unique identity for the Town Centre continues with the investment into supporting the local Market and the further development of the Arts Centre and the activities around this.

There remain many opportunities to encourage more local residents to shop more locally more often which was the original intention of the Destination Haverhill research. In the residents view attracting more fashion retailers is critical for this, but realistically this gap in market will need to be filled in the short term by an independent retailer or an entrepreneurial market trader. A night time economy offering restaurants and events would also encourage more residents to engage with the town centre.

The local retailers and landlords need to play their part in the development of the town and engaging with both of these communities continues to be a challenge. Further support can be given to the retailers in the form of workshops, forums and business planning 'Top Tips' where deemed appropriate.

The action taken over the past 2 years has been positive with still more to achieve. As one of the residents said in a focus group; 'this town has potential, we just need to tap into it and promote it!'

### *JEWELLERY BY TONY STROWGER*

This family owned business has continued to develop and challenge the way they manage their business. They actioned all of the points from their original strategic plan after their mentoring programme but although sales did improve it was not significant enough to sustain their business in Haverhill. Therefore in February 2014 the business relocated to Bury St. Edmunds where the footfall and customer profile was more in line with the needs of their business.

They have continued to focus on their unique selling point of bespoke jewellery made by the owner and the rebranding image they created following the Master Classes. They have also made improvements to their online presence and continually advertise particularly on social media. They now employ an additional two part-time staff but training and developing staff continue to be a concern for the owners and more support in this area would be welcome. Since the move, footfall has increased three fold and sales and profit are in growth with the peak season still to come.



Haverhill shop before the re-branding



Bury St Edmunds shop after the re-branding

## C&B BEAUTIFUL



The C&B Beautiful team of two owner/managers, continue to run two successful salons in Haverhill and Bury St Edmunds. They made considerable progress after the Master classes and mentoring and actioned 13 out of 15 points on their strategic plan. The major impact of this has been to focus on the commercial aspects of their business. Using their point of sale system they now monitor sales and profit every month and have identified and promoted high margin products to increase profit. They have also established a process for managing regular stock clearances to reduce stock levels and improve cash flow.

Their issues continue to be staff related which is often the case in this industry. They have recently lost 4 members of staff who have taken customers with them reducing current sales figures to level on last year where previously they had been tracking ahead of last year. The owners when interviewed discussed how they would like more business advisory support to help them develop further as business managers. They were ambitious to grow their business further but recognised that without the encouragement of a 'mentor' they had a tendency to focus on short term goals rather than plan ahead.

## THE GALLERY



New shop in Queens Street



New branding

The owner of the Gallery embraced the support given in the Master classes and Mentoring at a time when he was struggling with the high levels of competition entering the photography market and sales and profits were reaching a critical point. 18 months on, his sales and profits are now growing and he expects this growth to continue. He implemented 10 out of 14 of the points on his strategic plan particularly working on developing his team and his product mix. He also took the bold step of re-locating from a studio which was too big for his needs and in a secondary location, to a smaller shop on the main high street which had a higher footfall but importantly, a lower rent.

He has improved his online presence which has generated new business. He has focused on his Baby Club range and launched a membership card which has loyalty promotions with 12 other Haverhill shops with related products. The business has also added video and commercial photography to the range to diversify from the competition. As with Chapmans and Sons, the absence of a Point of Sale System limits the detailed analysis of sales information and promotional activity. When interviewed the owner highlighted financial restrictions, time restrictions and lack of management skills as barriers for growth in the future. He again would like to have further business support every 6 months to ensure he is on track and planning ahead.

## CHAPMAN & SON



Chapman & Sons is run by its 3rd generation of family members and is now 92 years old. When reviewing the strategic plan they have made the least progress despite having jointly written it with KBS only tackling 4 out of 10 action points.

They have reviewed their product mix; which was disparate with Electrical goods, toys and bicycles; and have reduced footage to toys and launched a new range of white electrical goods. They have also made some improvements to their visual merchandising techniques, window displays and online marketing to promote the products and services they offer.

Finally they have also launched a click and buy scheme with Euronics. However, the owner/manager remains cautious to change and reluctant to develop or delegate to his team. They also have not improved their processes to capture sales data which when analysed would help to identify areas of opportunity and decline and thus influence their commercial decision making.

## AMANDA JULIA COUTURE



The owner was not available for interview for this review but having reviewed the website and from the previous communication, Amanda had actioned all of the points from her strategic plan following the Master classes. She had needed support in developing her business skills to match her creative skills of designing and selling wedding dresses. She had just secured additional ground floor footage when she first came to the Master Classes but was struggling with cash flow and did not have a business plan. She gained the tools to plan ahead, budget and review her product offer to maximise the additional space. This led to her sourcing new product areas such as accessories, mother of the bride and grooms wear to hire. She also embraced e-retailing as a means of clearing old stock and now uses social networking to market her products and events. The website and visual merchandising of the shop continue to be this business's strength as well as choice of product and bespoke alteration service.



