

Protecting and renewing our community assets and services

Since mid-March when the COVID crisis started the Town Council has acted quickly and effectively to contribute to the local provision of emergency support, by setting up an Emergency Fund, an Emergency Helpline and strengthening its partnerships with organisations that are leading the emergency response locally like Faversham Foodbank, West Faversham Community Centre and Swale Borough Council. The current evidence is, that as a result of partnership working and community engagement in volunteering and donating, these organisations are coping with emergency support needs.

However as the weeks go by it is becoming increasingly clear that the current lockdown and the likelihood of ongoing limits on public activity for an extended period, will result in a major economic dislocation. This is likely to lead to increased unemployment, the failure of small businesses and voluntary organisations, and reduced demand for a range of local services.

Particularly worryingly there are already concerns about the survival of key Faversham assets like the Swimming Pool, the Town's markets and the Umbrella Centre. Other physical assets like the Royal Cinema, the Alexander Centre, the Post Office, The Fleur Museum and Gallery, Creek Creative and the West Faversham Community Centre and popular events like the Carnival and the Christmas Lights could face a difficult future as well. If these assets are allowed to fail there will be a further decline in both the economic well-being and quality of life of local residents.

The Town Council can't protect and renew our local services and assets on its own. But it can work with other organisations in a cooperative way to try and effectively harness the enthusiasm and commitment of local residents to make Faversham better.

In order to try and get this process going I would propose the following:

1. The Town Clerk to write to a range of local organisations including the main community assets in the town, the main local charities, the Faversham Society, Swale Borough Council asking that they work with us in order to protect and renew our community assets and services.

2. We agree four initial priorities for renewing the town after lockdown

- Raising funds to ensure the survival and renewal of local assets and services and to minimise economic hardship
- Encouraging more community volunteering
- Encouraging more use of local services and locally produced products
- Encouraging more visits to the town

but revise these based on feedback from other organisations

3. We provisionally agree that any un-earmarked funding that becomes available during the year is used to support the achievement of these objectives by providing training, networking, promotion rather than being used to make grants to individual organisations.

4. We review the responses from other organisations at our next Policy and Finance meeting and decide whether there is the basis for launching a 'Town Renewal' project with other organisations.

Councillor Julian Saunders 5 May 2020