

Open Spaces and Town Centre Regeneration

Notes from Working Group Meeting

30th January 2025 (Griffin Alley 4pm)

Present: Cllrs Power, Exton and Wallis. **Guest:** Mr. David Drake, Chair of the Town Team.

Apologies: Cllrs. Doody, Grant and Ritchie.

Also Present: Reps from local retailers and service providers from the immediate area. Bitsy; The George Vets; Persephone Violet; Dorothy House Hospice; Skippers Fish Bar;

Notes:

The group with guests met in Griffin Alley to look those areas which could potentially be improved to encourage more visitors/ footfall. We discussed both issues, suggestions and possible improvements. Retailers and Service Providers were very happy to be involved. We concluded with 5 main options, with additional notes as follows.

1) Signage

- a) The large sign between the Sue Ryder Shop and back of E & S in the Cross Hayes Car Park. Everyone was in agreement that a new sign, based on a map and indicating shopping areas would be an improvement, especially as the current sign has been there for a couple of years now. It was mentioned that the Sue Ryder large industrial bin is there too, more or less in that area. There is apparently nowhere else for this bin to go and also given the 'busy-ness' of the view from the car park, it isn't as noticeable as the bins in the alley itself.
- b) Directional signage to and from the High St/ Cross Hayes Car Park, (at both ends of the alley) was felt to be a priority.
- c) Heritage style small shop signs could add character to the alley way, instead of the current signage there. This was thought to be an option, but would involve individual retailers and possibly financial investment from them.
- d) It was also mentioned that there was a Signage Project and it would be appropriate for this signage to fall in line with that work, even if commissioned separately.

2) Bins

- a) It was agreed that the bins in Griffin Alley are not attractive for the street scene we looking towards, but with nowhere else to store them, then it is a question of disguising them as much as possible. The bins include Persephone Violet – industrial bin and also flat bin; flat bins near to Bitsy; Skipper's Fish Bar bins, being used fat tubs and an industrial bin.
- b) Storage of the fat bins and the industrial bin in the alley to the side of the Fish Bar were discussed. These do not enhance the entrance to the alley way. Members of the working party are not experts on the safe disposal of waste products. It was suggested that a cover could be built to disguise the bins, but materials used for a cover would need to be assessed against the safety regulations applying to the waste bins.

- c) Persephone Violet's waste bin is from an eco-company, who collect and return it every week to the same spot in the alley. A wooden bin shelter with a top lid and end access could work, but would need to be checked that their waste company could still collect and return it.
- d) Covers for flat bins would need to be agreed with the owners.
- e) There are some off the shelf bin housings available for ordinary domestic type wheelie bins, however very little for waste bin covers. It would be worth investigating the cost of having them made from scratch by a local company, which might lower the overall cost and also provide continuity of the materials and 'look' of the bin covers, even if the designs are different.

3) Walls

- a) A lot of the wall space is cream painted skimmed pebbledash. This does give the alley way a continuity and light walls help with the dark situation there. However towards the High St end there appears to be damage where the front of the wall facing has come off to the depth of about 2 cms. This could possibly be caused through damp or being knocked by passersby?
- b) One solution mentioned was to take off the pebbledashed facing from the floor to approx. 40cms and leave the wall flat. This would require initial enquiries with Wiltshire Council Planning/ Conservation Officer to see if this could be a possibility. Costs for this and repair work be incurred and an estimate would be required, but likely the cost would be for the owner of the wall.
- c) Another suggestion would be just to repaint the damaged area with cream. This would be followed by painting the walls black from the floor upwards for about 25-30cms and all along the alleyway. This would match the wall on the other side and reduce the visual awareness of the area which has lost the pebbledash facing.
- d) Whilst the alleyway itself is fairly litter free, the bottoms of the walls and the edges of the pavement show some mossy/ dirty algae growth. It was suggested that this is cleaned off before any painting take place. It's possible the footpath itself could benefit from something like a pressure wash, but care is needed with the pebbledash walls so as not to cause any more damage. (Agreement from owners would need to be sought in advance, in case of any damage).

4) Floral, Foliage Baskets and Tubs

- a) There was a consensus of opinion that hanging baskets would bring some natural life and colour to the alley way. If they could be included in the Malmesbury In Bloom scheme, that would ensure they are looked after, and perhaps nearby businesses and retailers might like to donate towards these and have their names noted.
- b) Tubs were considered to be attractive, but in all it was considered that they would not be appropriate in the alley for two main reasons. This would be due to reducing the size of the available footpath. Also, given the alleyway is enclosed and people can be out of main view there, then they are open to being purposely damaged, or even just brushed against, which defeats the object of making the alley more attractive.
- c) Emily from Persephone Violet mentioned that we would need to source the correct type of plants for such a dark alleyway, even if higher up on the wall. There are plants suitable for shady places and advice would need to be sought from a horticulturalist/ supplier especially if supported by Malmesbury in Bloom.

5) Lighting

- a) The consensus of opinion is that additional lighting is needed. There were three main options discussed, starting with smaller festoon lighting across the alleyway side to side and suspended from building eaves or higher. Whilst this was considered a pretty option the options of hanging festoon lighting was hampered by the lowness of the roofs, especially the building which used to be the Hairdressers shop. It was considered too low and especially vulnerable to vandalism.

- b) Lighting just under and along the eaves, that is along the walls rather than crisscrossing the alley. Again it was considered that this might end up being too low and vulnerable to vandalism, as well as not perhaps being the most attractive option.
- c) Additional public lamps, similar to the one half way down the alley and at the car park end. It was thought that these could be achieved given the connections with the existing lamps are already there, they would be in keeping with the conservation area. Another issue reported is that with the current level of lighting, there are some people, including local staff and particularly women, who feel very unsafe and vulnerable going through the alley on dark mornings, afternoons and evenings. This is a discouraging factor for night time economy too. Plus items such as door wreaths have been stolen. Therefore more public lighting is considered to be needed regardless of the look and feel of the alley. It was also noted that during festive seasons, shop owners often decorate their windows with Christmas lights etc anyway, which will make Griffin Alley appear extra festive.

6) General Items

Two other general items were mentioned, being drains and smells. Emily from Persephone Violet advised that issues with the drains underneath the paving had been reported on many occasions, there is a sort of hitch in the piping, however they are currently OK. It was also mentioned that sometimes there are smells from the bins in the alley, especially in the summer and when overloaded. All at the meeting noted this for future reference, however should the bins be in housings, then perhaps this will also reduce the ability for bins to be overloaded and their tops not to close fully.

7) Next Steps

It was discussed that Cllr. Power would put forward these five main recommendations to Policy and Resources Committee with a view to requesting agreement to go ahead with investigating and costing the five main areas of improvements mentioned above. The £3,000 set aside for this project from the Wiltshire Council grant is to be spent by mid-March 2025 and therefore priority be given to going forward with the new signage, bin covers and planting, depending on costs. Permission is to be requested for the Town Clerk to authorise the spend.

Cllr. Kim Power - Chair of Working Party 1st February 2024.