

President's Notes September 2012

Much has been said and written about the Red Lion Quarter, with the recent announcement about the closure of the Sage Restaurant following on from the Food Hall closure six months ago, and now the sale of the building for £2.4m. I had to re-read the Council Inquiry to remind myself of the actual costs involved. This states that the building cost was in excess of £7.5m. The funding of this came from a variety of sources including the East Midlands Development Agency, Lincolnshire Enterprise, Lincolnshire County Council and the Learning and Skills Council. All are tax payer funded organisations. In addition there was £1.2m contribution from South Holland District Council so it doesn't matter how you spin these figures, or who was the source of funding, this building has lost the taxpayer £5.1m.

I recently received a request from the Civic Society asking how I thought Boston College could best deliver their commitment for a Food Heritage Centre and the development of new businesses. These covenants were put in place for the development of the Red Lion Quarter and are still in place following the purchase by the College. I suggested that the entrance foyer could feature permanent displays of old photographs and farming equipment, accompanied by explanatory text plus videos shown on plasma screens depicting the history of agriculture in the area. The food heritage interpretation display would have to be of a high enough calibre that it will attract visitors and must be well signposted throughout the town. The College's ongoing commitment to the food covenant can be best expressed through their continued organising and funding of the Food Festival. This year's event was well organised and successful and they should make an early commitment that the Festival will continue. The Chamber of Commerce would like to see the College provide courses that reflect the employment needs of local companies, particularly within the food growing and processing industry.

I recently attended the AGM of Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce and was asked to summarise our past and present projects. Listed below are a few highlights:

What we achieved last year:

- Chamber has created a united voice for local business and has a seat at SHDC Cabinet and the Town Forum. We also liaise with Highways and the Police.
- 80+ businesses attended two successful sponsored Networking events. We will be having our next event on the 15th November at the Broad Street Business Centre.
- Launched Shopwatch, this was formally CRASH (shop radio system), with cheaper radio costs and best practice operating procedures.
- Organised the first Christmas Festival linked to the lights switch-on by Santa. This year we will do it all again BUT better (on Saturday 1st December). Chamber will be responsible for this year's NEW Xmas lights in Spalding town centre.

Going Forward:

- Chamber will continue to be the "business voice" for South Holland.
- We have been involved in discussions with the owner of Holland Market and will be actively involved in the Planning Consultation process should a planning application be submitted.
- Our aim is to represent over 100 businesses in the district. We are also involved in supporting a number of Business Forums – Tourism, Logistics, Retail and Business Networking.