

ACTION FOR MARKET TOWNS RURAL SUMMIT

13 – 14 OCTOBER 2009

Melton Mowbray was really placed on the map, with the hosting of the Action for Market Towns Convention on 13th and 14th October.

195 delegates attended the two day convention at Pera, on 13th and 14th October, with delegates from as far afield as Somerset, Hampshire and Lancashire. (Final attendee list attached).

The theme of the convention was “Beyond the Recession”, during which delegates looked at practical steps which towns could take to get through the recession and to prepare for the upturn. The convention, on the second day also sought to help the process of drafting a Rural Services Manifesto, which will be launched in November.

37 bedrooms at Scalford Hall, Melton Mowbray were booked on the evening of 12th October as AMT staff prepared for the convention. On 13th, a total of 108 bedrooms were booked at three of the key town centre hotels, with additional accommodation reserved in Rutland.

As delegates arrived on 13th, they were also greeted with a flurry of national media; with live television coverage and interviews by East Midlands Today, The Times newspaper and local media. Live interviews were also aired on the morning of the convention by Chris Wade, Chief Executive of the Action for Market Towns, on BBC Radio 4, Radio 2 and BBC Radio Leicester. BBC Radio Wales and Oxford also contacted the organiser during the event, for live feedback.

Study Tours

All delegates were led into the town centre (with the exception of Melton Learning Hub), on study tours, on the afternoon of 13th.

Melton Mowbray – Rural Capital of Food & Drink
Cattle Market as Potential regeneration
Neighbouring Towns working together in the Welland
Tackling Financial Exclusion in a Credit Crunch
Masterplanning in Melton Town Centre
Think Melton Shop Melton Borough Council Melton Learning Hub

The response and feedback to all the study tours was overwhelming. Attended by a number of Councillors, Partnerships, Town Centre Managers, the tours

sought to give a real insight into the town centre and how the town and Borough have striven to survive the recession.

Delegates were overwhelmed by the busy and bustling nature of the town centre, the busy and vibrant markets, and the community spirit of our town centre. Key topics that were raised were:

Study Tour Feedback

- Amount of shops/businesses in small market town – 446 compared to many towns attending of 220/280
- Low number of vacant units (7.6% of total town centre units – 446)
- Empty shop scheme – launch of Melton & Arts Crafts trail within vacant units on Tues 13th Oct, for the convention – total of 6 units, with artists in each unit. Number of towns/partnerships keen to pursue the scheme, have also been approached by Nottingham City Council Mgr to replicate scheme with their 16% vacant unit rate
- Degree of Marketing and Promotion of town – for a small town and Borough we were seen to have a true vision and theme, which was well marketed and promoted, eg Borough Visitor Guides, Town Centre Shopping Guides
- Excellent example of partnership working between MBC, LCC, Welland etc – eg best practice shared amongst LCC Town Centre Managers, Welland Market Towns / Benchmarking
- Thriving and busy markets, with particular interest in the Cattle market and farmer markets, which many towns had now lost, eg Evesham. Sudbury, for example, who have a strong Town Centre Partnership wish to contact the Town Estate directly to gain advice on how to maintain standard of market stalls, mix and quality of market
- Shop Front Grants and Business Improvement Grants – particularly impressed with the visual appearance of the town centre, and the business support that had been provided, both by MBC and MTCP. Through LCC Place Shaping Funding this financial year, 30 grants, totalling 13K had been given back to businesses, in 2008/09 28 grants given via Welland Challenge Fund. Again, key feedback was our strong partnership working and business support

Excellent feedback was also received with regards not only the study tours, but the venue itself. The service and facilities offered by Pera were first class, exhibitions were successful within the foyer area, speaking to exhibitors and also offered fantastic networking opportunities over both lunch-time periods.

Dinner/Entertainment

Stephen Hallam, compered an evening's entertainment, with a local food/drink quiz themed around the menu. Suppliers and key speakers were invited to speak over the courses, including Tim Brown of the Melton Cheeseboard, Di Login of Belvoir Brewery, Jan McCourt of Northfield Farm. The winning table received miniature hampers. The evening then concluded with an excellent performance by Encore, celebrating this year its 90th Anniversary.

John Pole, of AMT was “blown over by how good the study tours were, and how great the quiz and music at dinner were”.

Catherine Hammant, Chairman of Action for Market Towns said “Thank you so much for all your hard work which meant that the convention was such a success. I heard no end of compliments about Melton and the study tours, as well, of course about the evening entertainment, excellent food, comparing and fab singing - Mary Popins rules! Thanks also for organising the stand in the centre of town and the goody bags”

Day 2, saw key speeches by Professor Ray Pahl, AMT Board Member, Graham Biggs, Chief Exec of the Rural Services Network, with delegates then dividing into a number of workshops throughout the morning and afternoon. Excellent feedback, incidentally was also received from Graham Biggs, for the evening's entertainment, who stood to applaud “Encore at the end of the evening”

Again, good feedback was received as regards the quality of workshops, the Pera venue for the size and quality of syndicate rooms, and again excellent feedback with regards the buffet lunch. During lunch, a number of delegates also returned to the town centre to shop, for example at the Melton Cheeseboard, Dickinson & Morris.

The closing debate was themed, “Should Climate Change be the Main Driver for the Future Development of the Rural Economy and Services”

There was mixed views at the beginning of the presentation, with a mall majority in support of the above statement, but a number of delegates against. By the end of the debate, there was a motion to carry forward the above statement, by a greater majority.

The convention concluded with closing words of thanks by Catherine Hammant, and each delegate then presented with a goody bag, on behalf of Melton Borough Council; a parting gift from Melton Mowbray, which all delegates were thoroughly surprised and appreciative of.

Good feedback was received by Chris Wade, Chief Executive, John Pole and Catherine Hammant of AMT; and Anne Buchanan, event organizer upon departure.

Pera was also praised for its excellent venue, facilities and service.

Evaluation

AMT have collected evaluation forms from every delegate at the close of the convention, and we will receive a summary of this evaluation when complete.

This will include organisation of convention, study tour feedback, workshop feedback, and overall impression of the convention.