**Notes from Bill Grimsey’s Visit to Biggleswade 6th February 2019**

**Key Objective:**

Build a vision for the future – be ambitious. Look 20 years ahead.

**Ideas:**

* Build complete retail experience
* Increasing desire/demand for Fresh Food outlets
* Increasing need for Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP)
* Trend moving from traditional retail to café culture
* Events draw visitors and add to their experience
* Bricks and Clicks relationship will change
* Technology will advance to change retail experience and offer

**Observations from bus tour:**

* Eldon Way empty units - procure site, demolish and provide commuter parking within walking distance of the station. Ideal for commuters travelling in from Langford, Henlow etc that will reduce congestion into town. If necessary, consider offer to relocate businesses to new business park to add more space.
* Green space aspiration north of Potton Road – plant woodland.
* Lack of green space in Town Centre – need to clear sites to create green space to add to leisure experience.
* Empty/struggling buildings on periphery of town centre to return to residential, focusing retail/service offer in heart of town centre.

**Observations from Walkabout**

* Old Town Hall / Pizza Express: Purchase and convert to library / tech centre / town centre hub
* Market House Café/Restaurant: Extend café to upstairs instead of existing 1st floor restaurant.
* Market House shops: Need to rebrand and create new fascia in keeping with style of building.
* Charity shops: resist national charities in town centre taking advantage of huge rate relief. Allow local charities in right locations.
* Cancer Research: Relocate elsewhere instead of current prime site. Remodel shopfront to make more attractive as a key point on the High Street visible from gateway to town centre.
* Red Brick building (UK Fried Chicken, Coop Funeral, etc): demolish and create public open space/gardens
* Empty Banks (NatWest/HSBC): repurpose for residential and use as markers for extent of formal town centre.
* Aldi plus derelict site: Demolish and use site for health service hub plus accessible town centre accommodation for elderly
* Town Centre Signage: need good signage and waymarking to bring visitors in and direct them to key points.
* Events: Must have events!
* Leisure: Offer Bingo Hall incentive to move elsewhere and repurpose building for local cinema (eg in style of Odyssey, Saint Albans). Back to the future.
* Experience: Need good mix of experiences that support greater use
  + Tech hub/library -> shop
  + gym -> eat
  + cinema -> eat/drink
  + events-> shop
* Parking: Recommend 2 hour free parking (need to look at complete offer - note 2 hour free off street parking works in conjunction with 30 minute on street parking). Devise policy within Neighbourhood Plan to deal with parking for town centre flats
* Electric vehicles: Provide EVCPs to encourage these drivers into town centre.
* Wifi: Free wifi to encourage visitors to stay in town centre, engage with businesses.
* Data: Need to collect and process data!

**Data**

* Need to understand demographic needs
* What makes people come into Biggleswade or go elsewhere?
* Provide online/ecommerce offer to independent town centre traders
* Employ Business Development Officer or Team to develop commercial interest in town centre
* Consider health needs – bring health services and elderly people’s accommodation into town centre
* Consider young mums – big consumers! Need pram friendly access and breast-feeding locations
* Need survey of shops, businesses, ownership
* Need data for evidence when developing future plans and bidding for funds
* Acquire big data from ONS and commercial stats (eg from Ebay, etc via CBC)
* Use software, eg Mosaic tool BUT need a capable person to extract and analyse
* Get up to date data and review regularly
* Need to interpret in conjunction with local knowledge

**Residential Offer**

* Move retail into town centre and offer empty shops for residential
* Avoid developing ground floor residential in heart of town centre
* Encourage conversion of 1st floor and above into residential – this will support town centre businesses
* Town will continue to attract more commuters and young families

**Marketing**

* Tell the story of Biggleswade – Ivel Bicycle etc
* Publish regular news stories about individual businesses

**High Street Development Fund**

* CBC state only likely to bid for one town.
* Two rounds – CBC not likely to bid in first round. Second round not before 2020.

**Energy**

* Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP)
* Sustainable energy
* Green
* Younger consumers more sensitive to sustainable issues

**FINALLY**

* Stop the **THEY**
* Get on with the **WE**
* **Don’t wait for funding** to get plans ready
* Write **plan first** then look for funds
* **Get the Community involved and behind the plans from the beginning**