

Liskeard Town Forum

Dalva An Dre Lyskerrys

Liskeard Town Forum Update March 2021

It has been wonderful to see how well the communities of Liskeard and surrounding villages have pulled together to achieve vibrancy and spirit during what has been an extraordinary year of lockdowns and Covid-19.

Liskeard Town Forum has been unable to meet physically for over a year. The forum relies on being an open body, where representatives of businesses, community groups and residents can freely attend and voice their views on topics relevant to the market town and its surrounding area. This structure is the strength of the forum, but was its Achilles heel during the lock down.

Physical meetings were felt an unnecessary risk during the pandemic, and virtual meetings would have been impractical to hold, in a way that allowed strong discussion and accommodated individual members computing skills.

Liskeard Town Forum is for all residents, community groups and businesses in the area. With an online meeting it would've been impossible to verify where online attendees lived; with this in mind, it was felt there was a potential for online meetings to be hijacked by 'interest' groups and individuals from beyond our area, especially if an issue was highly contentious. It was decided then to pause forum meetings until the conditions were/are safe to meet.

In the absence of meetings, Liskeard Town Forum has still tried to be active with our objectives and influence matters throughout 2020 and the start of 2021.

At the start of the March lock-down in 2020, Liskeard Town Forum was quick to offer support for the local community, by making sure our grants were available for local groups and residents.

In line with the aim of the forum to see regeneration in Liskeard, and the surrounding areas, we made sure the forum website and social media was available to promote local businesses and their services. The forum is still here to promote your community groups and local business, so please feel free to get in touch.

Alongside supporting efforts to help Liskeard and the hinterland, we progressed the projects identified by forum members.

One such project was the issue of connectivity with the steps between Old Road to New Road being raised as of a particular concern. The forum has had good meetings with Highways England, and some positive progress to report as detailed in the following text.

Parking charges have been challenged in Liskeard, and Liskeard Town Forum was on BBC Radio Cornwall pushing for free parking during November and December. Our members identified

parking charges as a project for the Liskeard Town Forum, and we are currently involved in trying to setup a joint group of Liskeard voices, so as a community we can speak as one about Liskeard Car Parking charges and issues. Liskeard Town Forum has voiced support for the recent Cornish Times articles on parking charges, and we will continue to support campaigns to get a fair resolution for the Liskeard community, businesses and residents.

Below you will find letters from the chair and vice chair of the forum, and a summary of what Liskeard Town Forum has been doing during 2021 and the start of 2021.

Whatever happens this year, the Liskeard Town Forum is your forum, and we will continue to work in partnership with others for the economic and community health of Liskeard and surrounding villages.

If anyone has any questions about the Liskeard Town Forum, please feel free to get in touch with us on our website, <https://www.liskeardforum.org.uk/> or by letter at:

Liskeard Town Forum
3-5 West Street
Liskeard
Cornwall
PL14 6BW
Tel: 01579 345407
Fax: 01579 324429

Letter From Chair and Vice Chair of Forum.

Dear All,

It has been a great privilege to chair the forum over the last few years, and especially during the lock-down challenges of 2020.

As chair of Liskeard Town Forum, I have tried to lead the forum based around its core value of inclusivity, working to keep it open to everyone, no matter what views they hold. The Liskeard Town Forum exists to serve its members, which is every resident of Liskeard, and surrounding area, who decides to attend a meeting, in other words, you are a member of the forum if you wish to be?

During the three years of chairing, I have come to understand the forum not only as a body to promote regeneration, but to act in support, and occasionally as a challenger, to our local elected representatives and colleagues in other local bodies such as Liskeard Town Council and Cornwall Council.

The Liskeard Town forum is your forum, and as such we have tried to represent your views on topics including the environment, business, Liskeard library, and Cornwall Council parking charges. This at times has presented challenges to myself as a Liskeard Town Councillor. At times I have had to present the views of the forum to challenge the views or actions of the councils.

I strongly believe the forum should be seen as a body to promote our community objectives and work alongside, influence and monitor the decisions that might be made by our elected representatives. We aim to make sure all voices have an opportunity to be heard, and ensure everyone has an equal chance to speak. It would be wrong for the direction of Liskeard, and the surrounding area, to be dominated by an overly strong or aggressive group, or badly affected by unsympathetic policies and agendas. The forum can act as a check on this, should you want it to be? Based on this experience, one of the recommendations for when we can meet, will be to suggest the chair and vice-chair of the forum should not in the future be a serving local politician, town or county councillor. It is important the forum can speak independently and strongly for you.

At the start of both lock-downs in 2020 I tried to visit as many businesses as possible in the centre of Liskeard, (these visits were carried out within the guidelines of the time). Firstly, I apologise for not getting to everyone, but from those I did speak to, it was clear the concern of business owners on the impact of lock-down, especially the November one. In response, it was a privilege to try and work with businesses to promote your services on the forum website and social media during these challenging times. Of course a frustration was not getting free parking for Liskeard during December 2020, but we welcome the fact Cornwall Council realised the need for free parking during the 2021 lock-down.

I strongly believe that the Liskeard area has a bright future, despite the current challenges, and Liskeard Town Forum should work to support this in partnership with residents, businesses and community groups in the town and neighbouring villages.

By working together, we can all bounce back from the impact of Covid-19 on our communities. Liskeard Town Forum was involved back in 2018 in working to develop community interest and businesses around the town. One conversation was about an open and transparent business forum. Sadly this didn't come about at that time but perhaps the Liskeard Town forum will rekindle this

conversation. Creating unity is about engaging with those we disagree with, it is not about setting up secret groups at the exclusion of others. It is my hope that the Liskeard Town forum will continue to work in an open and transparent manner, to consider diverse views and achieve a vibrant town and hinterland in partnership with others.

I look forward to working with you all, in whatever role, to achieve greater success for 2021 and the future. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments.

Regards,

David Ambler
Chair of Liskeard Town Forum.

VICE CHAIR LETTER

Dear All,

It has been a great privilege for me to assist David to promote the agreed objectives of the Forum over the last few years.

In doing so I have tried to comment to the appropriate bodies upon threats and opportunities concerning proposed developments and several planning matters that seemed to be have been of particular interest at Forum meetings.

These have been varied and range from long held concerns about the lack of maintenance and management of some prominent vacant street front properties that have remained vacant for many years despite having the benefit of planning permissions, to concerns about the poor standard of proposed new developments that have been promoted by property speculators in the interests of profit rather than community impact.

Local concerns have been raised about the lack of affordable housing in our coastal and market towns caused by the existing housing stock being reduced as houses are snapped for second homes and holiday lets. It is unfortunate that the promotion of alternative investment opportunities are not being explored by the national policy makers. At the moment it seems that the national proposals for tinkering with the planning system seem to reflect a property developers charter for relaxing rules to build new houses rather than addressing the problems with our local people being able to access the dwindling stock of housing for permanent residence. I have written to our local MP asking for help on this matter.

It is appreciated that positive efforts are being made in proposed legislation to enable more land to be built on for housing, and to date the Town Forum has been able to consider and discuss and comment upon the development details-- such as the adequacy of the proposed layout, design, landscaping and access to reflect local experience and local views about what constitutes attractive neighbourly developments in and on the edge of Liskeard. We are now hearing that there is widespread concern across the country about the proposed planning legislation and that local community views would not be sought, in an endeavour to enable developers to get a planning permission faster. I feel that this is a concern for us.

There are perhaps many lessons to learn from our experience of the pandemic and lock down. One lesson is surely that people do not want to be confined in box houses but value having gardens,

balconies and open space. Perhaps housing developers and politicians need to reflect upon whether a predominance of rooms built to minimum standards only adds to health and wellbeing issues across a local community.

In the past the Forum has worked in partnership with local community and business groups to clean up and encourage temporary and ‘meanwhile’ uses for vacant ground floor commercial premises on our principal shopping streets. I have let our local MP know that the government proposals recently announced to enable such ground floor premises to become flats without the need for planning permission in the normal way has the risk of reducing the variety and attractiveness of shopping for visitors and residents alike. It might increase the number of housing units –but at what cost? Breaking up an historic attractive shopping frontages with a peppering of small ground floor flats could make life difficult for traders struggling to attract passing custom.

I look forward to working with you and our partners to continue to promote our regeneration objectives and please feel free to contact me with your ideas and views on how I might assist the Chair and Forum with this.

Alan Hartridge MRTPI

Vice Chair and local resident.

Project Updates

Liskeard Town Forum has continued to push the projects identified by Liskeard Town Forum members. This includes work around footpaths, business growth, environment, supporting Safe 38, planning matters and encouraging a presentable Liskeard Town centre with well-kept buildings. The following is a brief update on our projects, please feel free to contact us for more details, or check our website here: <https://www.liskeardforum.org.uk/>

Liskeard To Moorswater Steps

Liskeard Town Forum members raised the issue of the steps between Old Road and New Road that made it difficult for those with limited mobility, cycles and prams to get to the centre of Liskeard from Moorswater and Dobwalls. https://www.liskeardforum.org.uk/?page_id=303

As chair of Liskeard Town Forum, I wrote a report and raised the issue of these steps with Highways England. This report can be read on our website here: <https://www.liskeardforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/StepsInitialReport.pdf>

Liskeard Town Forum presented the report to Highways England, and held a number of meetings with the Cornwall Council ward member, Cllr Pascoe, Cormac, and Highways England.

Following these meetings, Highways England have agreed to progress feasibility work for this scheme during their financial year of 21/22

Though this is a small step, (pun intended) it is a necessary part of getting the issue of the steps resolved.

There are a number of similar problems across the Highways England area, and it will be important for the forum and other interested parties to push this important project for Liskeard.

Supporting Business During Lockdown

Liskeard Town Forum was at the forefront of supporting Liskeard during the start of lockdown in 2020 and we have continued to support the community wherever possible.

At the start of lock-down 2020, as chair of Liskeard Town Forum I tried to visit as many shopkeepers and cafe owners as possible. I apologies again to those I didn't get to. These visits raised serious concerns over the impact on the Liskeard shopping centre.

In response to these concerns, Liskeard Town Forum offered the use of the Liskeard Town Forum social media pages and website to promote local businesses from Liskeard and the surrounding area.

Liskeard Town Forum welcomes any business that wants to promote itself through our social media platforms, and wishes to share their details on our website.

Liskeard Town Forum will continue to push for support for Liskeard and businesses in the surrounding area.

Liskeard Town Forum was invited to support discussions on the reopening of Liskeard after the summer lock-down of 2020. Liskeard Town Forum supported these discussions, making sure every business and voice was treated equally.

Liskeard Town Forum believes every business should have an equal voice, irrespective of our personal relationships. As chair of Liskeard Town Forum I pushed this point.

Lockdown Grants

Liskeard Town Forum responded quickly to the lock-down situation, and our finance team readily understood the need to be able to support local residents and groups.

As a Liskeard body, we were one of the first to provide a grant, and I feel as a forum member, you can be proud we could act so quickly. Within the first week of official lock-down the forum provided a grant to Cafe Abundance of: £158.82

Later in the year we supported Liskeard Lights Up: £300 and Liskeard Radio: £300. We also provided a grant to Liskeard Lions of £100 to support their Santa tour costs.

As Liskeard Town Council, and other bodies, caught up with their response, the forum was able to stand aside, as these bodies have far more funds and larger teams to offer the correct support as required.

A summary of the Liskeard Town Forum budgets can be seen in the appendix.

Safe A38

Liskeard Town Forum supports the campaign for a safer A38. Liskeard Town Forum has continued to attend meetings and support the campaign by contacting relevant agencies and political groups.

Liskeard Town Forum has written to Highways England to raise the issue of the dangerous junctions, traffic movements, and the need to improve the A38.

Liskeard Town Forum has also supported the recent Highways England consultations about the future of the A38 from Saltash to Bodmin. You can read about this work on our website: https://www.liskeardforum.org.uk/?page_id=55

Car Parking Charges

Liskeard Town Forum has continued to raise the issue of the parking charges in Liskeard town centre. At the start of 2020, Liskeard Town Forum attended a Cornwall Council 'consultation' on the proposed parking charge increases for Liskeard. We objected strongly to the format of this consultation, and the fact the proposed parking charge increases could not be discussed.

During the November 2020 lock-down Liskeard Town forum led a campaign for free parking for December 2020. It was felt free parking would support local business, boost Christmas trade and help the town centre compete with online and out of town trade. Sadly the forum was not successful, but it was good to see Cornwall Council providing free parking during the 2021 lock-down.

At the start of 2021, Liskeard Town Forum, along with Cornwall Councillor Craker, wrote to Liskeard Town Council to suggest a joint working group be established with the purpose of arguing for a fair arrangement on parking charges for Liskeard. We hope to establish a joint body to campaign with one voice. The Liskeard Traders and Chambers of Commerce will be contacted, once we get a response from Liskeard Town Council.

Community Cohesion

Liskeard Town Forum has worked to support the community of Liskeard and surrounding area. Our social media pages have been used to promote articles that might be of help during the lock-downs.

Our social media posts and shares have covered topics including home-schooling, business growth, Cornwall Council advice, hobbies for lock-down, environmental projects, advice from local police and Safer Cornwall.

Our Vice Chair developed a project to record how local groups had worked during the year of Covid-19. Writing to as many groups as possible, our vice chair got responses from groups such as RIO, the Liskeard Foodbank and Plastic Free Liskeard. These reports were shared with The Cornish Times for a series of articles.

Liskeard Town Forum is always happy to share posts about Liskeard events, business and resident topics.

Development issues

Our Liskeard Neighbourhood Development Plan focuses on the key planning issues facing Liskeard, and the priorities we have agreed focus around the concept of Liskeard as a thriving, modern market town acting as the sustainable social and economic heart of the wider community of

South East Cornwall. With this in mind the Forum has been supportive of improvement proposals within the town centre and planning applications such as proposals for the redevelopment of the Cattle Market.

Those making planning applications for new development and change of use of buildings in the town centre should recognise its distinctive architectural and heritage character that makes it an attractive place to visit, and underpins the potential to market the centre as a shopping and tourism destination. The Forum has raised concerns about the number of properties in the town centre that have planning permissions for conversion to other uses but stand vacant. The street frontages of listed buildings in the Conservation Area should be maintained and should not be allowed to become eyesores. This has a knock-on effect for other businesses struggling to retain and attract customers and undermines the efforts of bodies such as Liskeard in Bloom trying to improve the attractiveness of town centre spaces. The Forum has recently had some success in highlighting particular frontages that detract from the town's character and, in partnership with others, has obtained the help of some property owners and Cornwall Council to achieve improvements to the appearance of the street scene. Properties require maintenance whilst standing vacant. The construction industry is not in lock-down and although some estate development is underway on the edge of town, we might have expected alterations and redevelopment of various premises in the town centre to have taken place by now as planning permissions were granted several years ago.

The Forum is aware that our Neighbourhood Plan points out that the housing market is dominated with smaller dwellings, and a better mix is required and yet planning applications have still come forward in the last year or so for inserting additional numbers of small flats (many devoid of gardens or balconies) in the town centre. The Town Forum has, on occasions, commented upon the standard of homes that can result from such planning applications and have also expressed some concerns about the loss of some community facilities –such as banks and pubs when the town's population is increasing and, with it, a growing demand for places for people of all ages to meet and be entertained post lock-down. It is important to remember that the community facilities in Liskeard town centre have served many more residents than the 9,400 or so that live in the town, as it has a catchment population of up to 36,000 people who live within reasonable driving distance and are potential customers for its shops and services. The new houses within the estate developments add to the numbers.

The local planning authority has to evaluate whether the claims of unviability are well founded or not when applications are submitted to change their use. The strength of community backing for retaining a community facility is an important factor. It could be said that it is a bit late in some cases but that this is still an important consideration and role for the Town Forum when considering the likely community impacts of particular planning applications in the near future.

Environment

Liskeard Town Forum has an objective to support the sustainability of our environment around Liskeard. We are represented on a number of projects.

Birds and Bees

Following a requirement submitted to Liskeard Town Council to improve the habitat for birds and bees around Liskeard, LTF agreed to take on the development of bird and bee boxes for the community. (Reference, Liskeard Town Council minutes, Facilities 17 July 2018 ref 126/18 C&E 4 September 2018 ref 189/18)

LTF wanted to develop a joint project with a local school, but sadly lock-down has prevented these discussions going further.

Instead, LTF has contacted suppliers of Bird boxes, and insect hotels, and has now supplied a number during the spring of 2021.

Liskeard Town Forum has now found a local supplier of bird boxes and bee hotels, and we are ordering some units as soon as practical.

Liskeard Library

Many forum members have expressed an interest in the Liskeard Library project. It has been a year where there has been progress, with the Real Ideas Organisation receiving the keys for the building. It is with concern that we see RIO did not succeed with their grant application to cover the interior of the building. The forum has asked questions about the situation and received an update from RIO, which is attached in Appendix 1

Liskeard Pub, (Barley Project)

Some residents brought the idea of renovating the Liskeard Barley into a community asset and pub. Sadly, this project did not progress during lock-down.

The LTF remains open to supporting similar projects, should they be brought forward.

Accounts

The Liskeard Town Forum has had very few costs since the start of lock-down. We have supported a few grant applications as outlined above.

I have had a few costs related to our website security, hosting, and Microsoft Office.

The full set of accounts are attached in the Appendix. Any questions on these, please feel free to contact the forum on: info@liskeardforum.org.uk

Summary

This is a summary update on The Liskeard Town Forum involvement in events since January 2021.

I would like to send a big thanks to Alan Hartridge our Vice Chair for his work on planning matters during the last year.

I would also like to thank our minutes clerk for all of your hard work and diligence.

Accounts

LISKEARD TOWN FORUM					
Income & Expenditure Report - 30 June 2021					
Deposit Account		Current Account	Cheque Number		
Balance 31.03.21	6,032.07	Balance 31.03.21			906.25
Interest		PCKernow - Microsoft Subscription	99		-135.36
1 April 2021 to 30 June 2021	0.10	Liskeard Lions - Grant	100		-100.00
Income	6,032.17	Expenditure			670.89