



MALVERN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

THE MALVERNS



Summary

- 1 Malvern has been in decline ever since the end of the 19C when the Doctors retired, and the Water Cure was discontinued.¹
- 2 Malvern, including the Link and Barnards Green, was built round the Water Cure as its USP – Unique Selling Point.
- 3 It is unlikely to fully recover unless another USP can be found.
- 4 The town's key attractions are its history and heritage and the Hills. History and heritage provide a good general attraction for an interesting place to visit but something more specific and populist is needed in order to attract the general public.

Some time ago HSM studied this problem of the Malvern USP and decided that a cable car system to the Worcestershire Beacon would do the job. The Victorians reached the same conclusion a century ago as well as the Malvern Hills Conservators, supported by the District Council, forty years ago.



This paper is not about whether you like cable cars or not. It is providing an answer to the USP dilemma. Do you have a better idea?

- 5 Consensus has been difficult to find in Malvern in recent years- partly because no one has had any viable ideas - and paralysis has set in among politicians and retailers alike.
- 6 This paper is focussed on [a] agreeing a USP and [b] getting everyone to support it.
- 7 Recent legislative changes have made community involvement more acceptable and there are already a number of towns who have taken the initiative successfully.
- 8 This paper is 'need based' – the community should agree what services are needed in the town and the Councils should steer potential developers in that direction.
- 9 It is proposed that High Street Malvern should provide a platform for liaison with the Councils based on its past experience and current membership and be regarded as a Community Panel.

Ante sunt nobis arbitrium rei publicae

¹ Except during the war years

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1. THE BACKGROUND

Malvern towns have been lacking attention for some time. The situation is now acute with shops and significant buildings remaining empty.

- Council priorities have dictated that any emphasis on tourism has been run down due to lack of funding and, more important, lack of political will.
- Associated priorities such as attention to the state of the town have been neglected. No attempt has been made to build bridges with shopkeepers to maintain their premises. The Waitrose steps to Worcester Road have been closed for some time. The fountains on Belle Vue Island do not work.
- Promotion of heritage assets such as the administration of a Local List and maintenance of the Conservation Areas have not had any priority.
There has been reluctance shown towards any offers that the Councils might be assisted using the expertise of local groups and.
- Councillors – both District and Town - have been preoccupied with the onerous work of administrative committees and have not been able to dedicate enough time to local issues.
- There seems to be no policy of using local services.

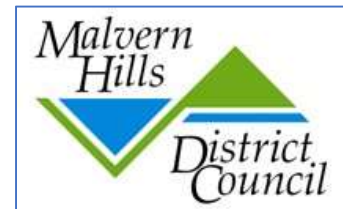
2. UNIQUE SELLING POINT

Malvern has to decide how it manages its future.

Success

The towns are not lacking in successful enterprises:

- The Theatre contributes many millions to the economy of the town but there is little ripple effect as most of the attendees do not stay in the town and/or use the shops. It is well supported by the District Council.
- The Science Park has an international reputation and should be a reservoir of people to use the town centre.
- The annual Festival of Innovation is now a national event.
- The Portico Scheme has been running for six years and has attracted over seven thousand cards among local retailers – a stimulant for local traders – and with much potential; seems to have escaped the attention of the Councils.²
- The Hills are a major attraction and are in danger of being too popular, but the visitors do not visit the town – the Councils do not have a policy in this direction – the Hills Hopper was discontinued some years ago.
- The events arranged by the District and Town Councils have been very successful – Craft Markets, Christmas Lights, Bands in the Park, Mayor's Bonanza – have all attracted large number of local visitors



²> On average the annual spend through the card has been £1 million & once again on average we redeem circa £1000 of vouchers each month We still feel that what we offer is unique & much more real than say the Bristol £.

High Street Malvern

The commercial success of the towns has been the focus of High Street Malvern since its inception as part of the Civic Trust fourteen years ago.

The writing has been on the wall most of that time – with Mary Portas campaigning ten years ago – and the District Council has engaged with a number of national initiatives, the most recent being in early 2019.

Although the lack of funding is important, the lack of political will to do something has inhibited any initiatives.

In 2014, after a detailed assessment of the options, it was agreed that the one thing that would have the desired effect on the fortunes of the town would be the installation of a cable car from the town centre to the Worcestershire Beacon.

It would attract a considerable number of visitors from a catchment area that would extend between the Birmingham and Bristol conurbations. It would have a significant and beneficial effect on the shops, restaurants and hotels.

In 2014 the reception was mixed, and the idea was not taken up by local councillors – no political support.

The Conservators were not supportive although they had themselves agreed a similar scheme in the early 1990s; their problem was one of governance and the contradictions of the Malvern Hills Acts.

Five years later, the situation has changed:

- the need to rejuvenate the town is now acute
- the Conservators are revising their governance
- Public opinion has relaxed – young people think that it is great idea and older people relish the idea of walking the Hills once again.

3. THE NEED

This list is not exhaustive and not in any order of priority.

a. **BARNARDS GREEN ENHANCEMENTS**

To ensure that this area receives the same attention in terms of flags, decoration and Council services.

b. **CABLE CAR**

Could run from the south end of Rose Bank Gardens or the Firs up Rushey Valley to the Beacon.

c. **HERITAGE AND CONSERVATION AREA COMMITMENT**

Malvern and the adjacent areas are all interesting from a heritage viewpoint because they were built at the same time in the late 19C. Whereas the District Council, to its credit, has promoted a number of Conservation Areas, and the overall appearance of the towns is good, there is much that needs to be done to make further improvements.

For example:

- West Malvern should have Conservation Area designation
- the Malvern Link Conservation Area needs a higher profile – it is the poor relation in the town
- there is a need for a Local List – although the SPD is in place, nothing has been done to progress it.

d. **ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS**

See <http://high-street-malvern.org.uk/> separate HSM paper.

Both the District and Town Councils are developing their own plans.

e. ELGAR SQUARE

One of Malvern's lesser problems is that it lacks a town centre although it has been an aspiration of the Councils for some time. A planning application is imminent for the Foley Arms car park site and, if the concept of a town centre is to be realised, it is imperative that the Council underwrites the Civic Society Elgar Square concept plan – submitted to the District Council in 2018. This includes a Spa Centre and MHT/AONB Centre.

f. MALVERN HILLS NATIONAL PARK

The Hills are under threat from over use – the number of people and their dogs visiting the Hills has increased considerably in recent years. An audit of flora and fauna shows that this has had a serious effect on the job of protecting the Hills; the stewardship of the Hills has been carried out diligently by the Conservators and the AONB, but their powers are limited. It is suggested that the Hills and its wider area should be designated a National Park and brought into convergence with the Abberley and Malvern Hills GeoPark.



g. GREAT MALVERN CEMETERY

The Civic Society is working with the Town Council to enhance the Victorian Cemetery and make the records accessible. Research into family records and their availability on-line is a popular activity and of interest to visitors.

h. MUSEUM AND HERITAGE CENTRE

The Museum is short of accommodation and the current building in the Abbey Gateway is inconvenient. Some work is already in train to identify alternative accommodation.

i. HOLLY MOUNT

This Church is surplus to requirements and could be suitable for a heritage centre.



j. HOTELS

One of the reasons why the town centre is ailing is that it is short of hotel accommodation. It has lost three B&B – a total of twenty eight room nights - in the recent past.

k. LOTS – LIVING OVER THE SHOP

In Church Street, there is scope for converting accommodation over shops into flats; people who live in the town centre use local shops and facilities.

l. MALVERN LINK PARKING

The shops in the Link suffer [a] from their location on a main road and [b] from a shortage of parking. Land is available to the south of the Worcester Road, but it requires a concerted effort by councils and residents alike to make it happen.

m. AONB AND MHT VISITOR CENTRE

Although the offices of both organisations are located in the centre of the town, neither have any public presence. In view of the importance of the Hills to the economy of the area, this is a major shortcoming which should be remedied in any town plan. A Visitor Centre would also encourage walkers to visit the town.

n. PROUD TOWN

A survey by the Civic Society in 2017 identified eighty-five problems with pavements and street furniture and photographs were taken of the problems. The report was submitted to all three Councils. No action has been taken and the situation has deteriorated. Even Council owned furniture has been allowed to deteriorate.

We understand that the Town Council is now addressing the problem and look forward to the outcome.

Many shop fronts in the town are dirty and unpainted; no effort has apparently been made to engage with the shopkeepers to improve the situation.; shop front grants to subsidise maintenance were available until 1999 and are still offered in Herefordshire.

For some years the Civic Society promoted the 'Facelift' scheme to improve the appearance of the main streets but received no political support.

Belle Vue Island is the focus for visitors to the town yet neither of the key attractions – the Malvhina Spring or the Enigma Fountain are working.



o. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY CENTRE [RADAR]

With the development of radar in WWII being just as important to the war effort as code breaking at Bletchley Park, the Councils should promote its history to the benefit of the town. Due to the considerable effort by the MRATHS Group there is now a better understanding of the history of radar.

p. SPA CENTRE

Visitors to the town ask, 'where are the spa facilities?'.

The Councils should be underwriting the building of a spa centre with running water, drinking facilities and the story of the water cure.

See HSM paper on Elgar Square.

q. TRANSPORT SYSTEM

See <http://high-street-malvern.org.uk/> separate HSM paper

The local transport system needs to be designed around residents and visitor needs:

- to/from shops
- to/from medical facilities
- manage cars away from the town centre – park and ride
- make it easy for visitors to park and access the Hills – Hills Hopper

The current transport system is expensive to run, bureaucratic and does not meet the needs of town or outlying village dwellers.

For some time, HSM has been promoting the idea of an Uber type system based on mini cabs which would accept bus passes.

This would be privately run, would release considerable funding which could then be redirected and, most important, would provide a flexible service.

See <http://high-street-malvern.org.uk/> separate paper



4. STAKEHOLDERS

AONB and Malvern Hills Trust

The scheme to develop the commercial success of the town needs widespread support. This would not necessarily mean attending meetings but considering the options individually and promoting the initiatives that need to be taken. Most important, the Councils need to agree between themselves that something needs to be done.

Two key stakeholders are the Malvern Hills Trust [Conservators] and the AONB. In the past, the MHT reaction to a proposal for a cable car has been disappointing quoting that their Acts do not allow any special account to be taken of their support for the town and multiple environmental concerns.

They will need to revisit their response to a cable car system bearing in mind that it was originally their idea.

Environmental concerns and the protection of the Hills is most important, but these types of concerns have been addressed successfully in other places such as the Cairngorms which have an equally sensitive habitat.

Town Support

Civic Society

Churches

Community Partnership

Eastnor Castle

Great Malvern Priory

Local Enterprise Partnership

Malvern College

Malvern St James

Malvern Family History Society

Malvern Hills District Council

Malvern Museum

Malvern Showground

Malvern Theatres

Malvern Town Council

MRATHS

Portico

Schools

Shopkeepers

Societies

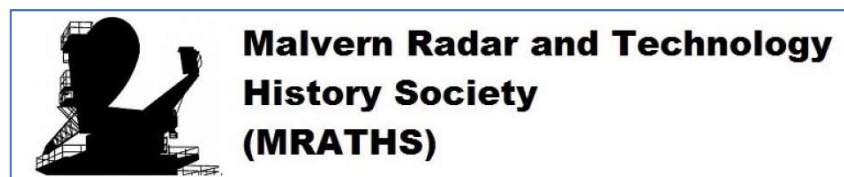
U3A

West Mercia Police

West Midlands Trains

Worcestershire County Council

and many others



5. BUILDINGS AT RISK

A town plan needs to identify not only those sites at immediate risk but also include those that, at some stage, may become surplus to requirements and make some suggestions for use in order to achieve a balance in the town.

At Risk

It should be possible to find homes for some of the 'needs' in the buildings at risk eg some of them would lend themselves to become heritage and historical centres.

Adrian Ward Arcade a town art gallery

Belle Vue Terrace shops

Brays

Burleys

Foley Antiques

Holly Mount why not a Town Museum?

NatWest much better as a Town Council Office.

Old Tourist Office owned by the District Council – important site and access

Prior's Croft an ideal AONB/MHT Visitor Centre

The Grange why not an annexe for the Theatre

Risk Assessment

Boots very ugly 1960s building constructed of poor materials and lacking any design attributes; should be replaced

Exchange Buildings in danger of falling down due to lack of maintenance

Graham Road Shops as Boots – should be replaced

Post Office site a Post Office Sorting Office should be replaced in this most prominent position; could be moved to Spring Lane.

Waitrose this shop will go at some stage and in view of its vital role in the town, some thought should be given to its replacement.

Worcester Road West shops the ugly frontages should be removed to expose the Georgian houses behind

6. NEW PLANNING GUIDANCE

States that civic societies can now set up community panels to represent the voice of the community

A recent success and something all civic societies need to be seriously looking at is the new national Planning Practice Guidance. Under **How can community panels or forums be used to effectively engage local communities?** the new guidance clarifies that: 'Community panels or forums can be set up by local planning authorities or third sector organisations, **such as civic societies**, to represent the views of local communities by scrutinising plans, policies or applications... Insights from community panels or forums can help support local planning authorities' decisions on planning applications, inform design review, and be used as evidence during the examination of plans and policies.'

The key point here is that local civic societies have to engage wider than their own committee. Please urge all civic societies to look at this new guidance. We are now mentioned specifically in national planning guidance due to our campaigning. Now is the time for civic societies to seize the opportunity.

The **National Design Guide** and **Design: Process and Tools planning practice guidance** were published this week on gov.uk.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/design>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/design#design-review>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

7. APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

Models for mixed tenure communities

A STAKEHOLDERS

Royds in Bradford, Stockfield in Birmingham and Manor and Castle in Sheffield show the benefits of identifying the full range of stakeholders who will be involved in a community-based initiative early in the process. This may include the local authority, other statutory agencies (particularly health, education and the police), any private companies involved, social landlords and, crucially, residents. The team also visited Woodgate Valley in Birmingham as an example of an entirely different contribution to community governance, made by a particular faith community. This area shows the considerable impact that a faith group can have on the wellbeing of a neighbourhood and the importance of ensuring that faith communities are involved as significant stakeholders in any governance mechanism.

B EARLY RESIDENT INVOLVEMENT

The team considered two neighbourhoods in which residents were involved in the planning stages of major regeneration involving either demolition or extensive refurbishment – Stockfield in Birmingham and the Royds estates in Bradford. Early resident involvement is perceived by all concerned to have significantly improved the quality of life in the area. While both regeneration initiatives have their shortcomings, it is widely felt that the achievements would have been less if the projects had not been actively overseen by a group of potential or actual residents from across different tenures.

C GOVERNANCE VEHICLE

The report considers in detail the range of structures available for resident-led organisations. The research team concluded that a company limited by guarantee was probably the most effective way to allow residents to participate in, and even exercise control over, major decisions about their neighbourhood, while protecting the individual residents from liability and retaining the option to

involve a range of other stakeholders on the board of the company. Royds, Stockfield and Manor and Castle all used this model.

Parish councils were also considered as an alternative governance mechanism. The team concluded that they have a number of features that may make them a useful vehicle for community governance, while acknowledging the constraints, as laid down by Parliament, under which they operate.

The research team found that residents' perceptions were transformed when there was a majority of residents on the board of a governance vehicle, as in the Royds example. The Royds experience also illustrates that other stakeholders need to be involved to ensure that residents have access to appropriate advice, guidance and expertise.

By contrast, in the Blackbird Leys estate in Oxford, the absence of a strong mechanism for involving residents in community governance has led to a feeling of disempowerment among some residents.

D ACCOUNTABILITY

Both Stockfield and Royds Community Associations are known nationally for their pioneering work on community governance and for their good practice. In both Stockfield and Royds an independent legal vehicle was established, which directly involved residents on the board. Residents have a majority 'stake' in the company. Resident board members are directly accountable by means of democratic elections to the community and this was observed to create a sense of legitimacy and accountability.

The work of the Manor and Castle Development Trust on the Manor and Castle estates in Sheffield is also nationally renowned for its achievements. However, the research team encountered deep rooted alienation among some residents on the estate, and a perception that, while there were a small number of residents who are actively engaged with the Trust, there are others who have been left behind by the regeneration process. This merely emphasises the long-term difficulty of turning around neighbourhoods that have suffered years of deprivation and poverty, and where even the most laudable attempts to make progress are regarded with suspicion and hostility unless they are truly 'owned' by a wide proportion of local residents.

E FUNDING MECHANISM

Manor and Castle and Royds both show the strength that control of core funding can bring to a resident-led organisation. The Poundbury management companies and the parish council models both offer alternatives to this approach. In the case of Poundbury, the funding mechanism is an annual service charge payable by residents. Parish councils are able to levy precepts on Council Tax payers.

F FULL DOCUMENT

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/jr135-mixed-tenure-governance.pdf>



Poundbury