

SAFFRON WALDEN INITIATIVE ACTION PLAN

As at 17 March 2021

1. Background

Saffron Walden Initiative, established in 2002, is an independent, non-political, non-profit making organisation which works in partnership with residents, local groups, businesses and public bodies.

The objectives are broadly to improve the quality of life in Saffron Walden for residents and visitors. The aims are set out in the Constitution and are six fold. They are:

- a. To enhance the town's appearance
- b. To promote the town and area
- c. To provide facilities and activities for all ages and interests
- d. To improve accessibility for residents, visitors and shoppers
- e. To increase the variety and quality of shopping services
- f. To develop community spirit

2. The 2005 Action Plan

In 2005, the Initiative produced an 'Action Plan' which included a 'Healthcheck' vision which said 'A town where our special heritage is valued and enhanced and community spirit is strong. An attractive and lively place, offering a good range of shopping and services for residents and visitors of all ages. Easy to get to and to get around in, with housing and leisure for all sectors of the community.'

The Action Plan was accompanied by 7 key objectives. These Objectives are still relevant some 15 years later, although the priorities may well have changed, primarily for two reasons.

First, the town has seen the introduction of a number of organisations established to improve the amenities of the town; in particular, Saffron Screen, Saffron Hall, the Skate Park, the indoor bowling green, Fairycroft House, Fête de la Musique, the BID, and improved play areas.

Second, and of considerable importance, there is now a pressing need to help the town in its recovery, in both social and economic terms, from Covid-19.

Also the town has seen considerable growth since 2005 and it is expected significant further growth is to come in the next decade. This will likely alter the adequacy of some existing facilities and may identify new needs.

We consider each of the 2005 key objectives in turn.

Objective 1. Create a robust, effective, cross-sector partnership to support community involvement in planning Saffron Walden's future.

The Initiative should try to play a part whenever meetings take place involving the key political personnel, leaders of the many and diverse sporting, recreational, cultural and religious groups, and the business community. These meetings should be aimed at supporting community involvement in planning Saffron Walden's future.

This work could build on the Neighbourhood Plan prepared by the Saffron Walden Town Council and the Local Plan being developed by the Uttlesford District Council. In addition, the Initiative may be able to play a role in the work being developed by the Community Stakeholder Forum.

The initiative should ensure that an impact can be made both in the short term and in the longer term. It may be necessary to consult with the BID, the Round Table, Fairycroft House, the Arts Trust, Citizens Advice, Saffron Hall and Saffron Screen, the TIC and others, to identify areas where they feel there could be a role for the Initiative.

Objective 2. Provide for the accommodation needs of young people, key workers, and those on modest incomes.

There remains a pressing need for improvements in this area, and the post pandemic scenario is troubling. The role of the Initiative in this context would be to gather data, by way of conducting surveys, to help ensure that all housing proposals take full account of young people, key workers and those on modest incomes, to provide the statutory authorities with information that will help to ensure compliance with S106 requirements.

Objective 3. Better engage and provide for the needs of children, teenagers and young adults.

Although the situation in 2021 has much improved from 2005 so far as young people are concerned, for example, the Skate Park, children and young person's films at Saffron Screen, the improvement of play areas on the Common, and the work of Fairycroft House, there is still a perception that the town lacks a co-ordinated youth policy.

The Initiative could champion events by working with local organisations such as the Camera Club, Fairycroft House and Running Clubs to provide Young Persons activities such as an under 18 Photography Competition, under 18 Litter Picks and under 18 Park Fun Runs.

The Initiative should take into account the opinions of young people represented on the Uttlesford Youth Council.

Objective 4. Address growing congestion problems and local concerns about weak public transport.

The transport provision in and around Saffron Walden is still problematic. For example, the bus service to Audley End station still does not link up with the trains to London and Cambridge. Cycle lanes are either non-existent or, as in the case to the station, still perceived by many as very dangerous. Provision for the parking of bikes in town is limited. Pavements are narrow and, especially in a post pandemic 'normal', require widening.

The Initiative should have a part to play by way of providing information from surveys to enable the statutory authorities to address these concerns.

The Initiative has a part to play, also primarily through surveys, to improve some of the key planning and traffic issues, for example to identify places for electric charging points.

The Initiative should continue to supply the TIC with town trail visitor leaflets to encourage visitors to walk around the town.

Objective 5. Support and improve the long-term vitality of the town.

Many of the projects and activities identified in the 2005 Report have been developed by groups such as BID and others.

The Initiative should continue to expand its work on the Blue Plaque scheme. It should also work with the Heritage Development Group and others to provide signage and information at key points in the town by providing information at the site of the history that took place there. The signage about the Ditches, the Castle, and the WWII emplacements are but three examples of what has already been achieved. But more could be done and, with the support of the TIC, leaflets could be provided for cycling tours etc.

The Initiative already provides Welcome Packs for new residents, maintains the oral history Listening Bench and the Maze at Swan Meadow.

Objective 6. Enhance the appearance and accessibility of the town and public spaces.

The town's appearance can be enhanced by regular litter picks, the cleaning of Highway signage, the identification of redundant street furniture, and support for the display of flower tubs. It could provide publicity for the public footpath network.

Objective 7. Promote a sense of community and belonging.

The Initiative should continue to develop community spirit through events such as the Dance in the Square, Societies Showcase, Christmas Charity Stalls, Community Social Quizzes, Christmas Shop Window Displays, and the talks and visits for Members. Other possibilities include an annual Photography Competition and the examples highlighted below.

3. The Immediate Future

In addition to these 7 objectives, all of which fit into the aims of the Initiative as set out in its Constitution, the pandemic has highlighted the need to provide support for the Digitally Hesitant, be they elder people or youngsters. The Initiative should have as one of its major aims to encourage support facilities in this area, and to provide appropriate publicity for any schemes which are introduced.

The pandemic has also highlighted the need to provide activities outdoors. One suggestion, working with Saffron Screen, could be to provide screen events on the Common, when circumstances allow. These could be accompanied by a food fair, inviting many of the food stalls that provide food at the Saffron Hall jazz/folk evenings. These events should be open to all, possibly with a small contribution to cover some of the costs.

The Initiative should also support a Story Reading event planned to be held in Bridge End Gardens, primarily by providing volunteers on the day and help in publicising the event.

The Initiative should continue to provide activities for its Members, namely talks, social events, and visits. It may be possible to structure these events by developing themes. Examples could be Nineteenth century SW, SW and the Quakers, Politics and SW.

Visits could concentrate on parts of the town, such as the Shire Hill businesses, the Cemetery, the Gibson Library, and other areas of interest. It could be helpful to liaise with groups in Saffron Walden that have similar programmes such as the History Society, the Museum, the Fry Art Gallery, the Gibson Library, the U3A, Saffron Walden Speakers, the RA Butler Society, etc.