



ALTON CHAMBER NEWS

The Voice of Alton Business

September 2011

TESCO'S £1 MILLION: WHERE WILL IT GO ?

Tesco are required, as part of the planning consent for the Mill Lane development, to contribute £1 million+ to support Town Centre Initiatives and Infrastructure.

There are additional significant sums of money which have to be provided by Tesco for other works. The Chamber committee has its proposals for how the money should be used and is currently inviting opinions from Town Centre Businesses.

Click on the icon below for more information on this item



Financial Report



Secretary's Corner



TESCO'S £1 MILLION: WHERE WILL IT GO ?



MEET THE COUNCILLORS



Business Network Meeting



**Programme (1st to 8th October)
Adult Writing Competition**



**Alton Herald
CLASSIC CAR SHOW**



Curry & Race Night



BARBER OF SEVILLE

EDITORIAL TEAM

and regular contributors

Editor	David Gay
Business	Mike Baker
Financial	Alison Fleming
ACE Ltd	Stephen Lewis
Community	Pat Lerew
Local News	Stephen Lewis
Entertainment	David Gay

THIS MONTH'S MEETING

MEET THE COUNCILLORS



at
Alton House Hotel
on
Thursday
22nd September

6.30 pm – 8 pm

Click on the icon on the left for more information

There is no charge to attend this meeting. Tea and coffee with light refreshments will be served at 6.15 pm.

Member are encouraged to bring colleagues and guests !

Those wishing to dine can do so after the meeting.

It would be helpful if you would advise the Secretary by Tuesday 20th morning, if you wish to attend.

CLICK ON ICON FOR MORE INFO

TRYING TO STAY CLEAR OF TROUBLE !

A Financial report from HSBC Bank

While the UK has been on the sidelines of the recent debt crises in the Eurozone and the United States, it cannot escape the fall-out. The confidence of British consumers and businesses is just as liable to be sapped by the gyrations of the financial markets as in other countries, and neither group were feeling exactly sanguine before the latest panic took hold.

That doesn't mean that a slide back into recession is now the most likely outcome, although the odds have plainly shortened. Quite apart from anything else, the natural variability of economic activity from one quarter to the next means that when growth is sluggish there is always a chance of the economy dipping into negative territory, as indeed it did in the final three months of last year. Given the time it takes for the Office for National Statistics to collate the GDP data and their habit of revising it later, the key indicators to watch in the coming months will be the results of the various business surveys and developments in the labour market.

On top of the depressant effect on economic activity from relentless financial market turmoil, Britain also faces more specific risks and uncertainties arising from the unfolding events, especially in the Eurozone. For all the exhortations that companies should do more business with the BRICs and other large emerging economies, these still account for a small share of overseas sales, while in 2010 the 17 countries of the Eurozone accounted for 50% of goods exports and the United States for another 11%. Growth that is sluggish, or worse, in these economies will only make it harder for British firms to win new business abroad and assist in the long-vaunted process of rebalancing the economy away from household consumption and government spending.

There are also clear downside risks for British banks, and hence their ability to keep lending to individuals and businesses. While the bold move by the European Central Bank (ECB) to buy large quantities of Spanish and Italian government bonds has helped to stabilise the situation for now, it can be no substitute for action by politicians to implement quickly the measures that were agreed to at the Summit on 21st July, and then to expand the size of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). Unless these things are done, there is a real possibility that banks in the UK will have to make further provisions against holdings of peripheral government bonds.

In the meantime, the Government finds itself with little room for manoeuvre. Britain's fiscal position is hardly anything to be proud of. Last year the government's deficit was just over 10% of GDP, much the same as in the US and Greece, more than in Spain and Portugal, and twice as big as in Italy. But what the UK has that some of these other countries don't have is a plan to get the deficit down, which the markets (at least for now) regard as credible. It is also fortunate to have retained its own currency, which can be allowed to float lower; its own central bank with the power to print more money if needed; and to be home to one of the world's premier financial centres.

All that said, there is no room for complacency. Britain came close to losing its AAA sovereign debt rating in the run-up to the last general election, and could find itself under renewed scrutiny if economic growth continues to underperform and if the government starts to back-track on its austerity plans.

Already the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has warned that it will need to downgrade the UK's growth outlook in advance of this autumn's pre Budget Report, with obvious negative implications for spending and revenues. Should the fiscal arithmetic become stretched to the point that the ratio of outstanding debt to GDP can no longer be expected to begin falling, as previously envisaged, in 2014/15, then the ratings agencies will surely have something to say.

A downgrade isn't the end of the world, especially with the cost of raising 10-year money now at an all-time low, but it is vitally important that the UK doesn't come to be tarred with the same brush as the peripheral countries of the Eurozone. As has been demonstrated time and again during the Eurozone's debt crisis, credibility is everything for the financial markets.

So although George Osborne will come under mounting pressure to change tack, with the recent riots and looting also feeding into the debate, there isn't much he can do beyond a few inexpensive headline-grabbing announcements. The fiscal ammunition was used up in mitigating the worst effects of the last recession, and while there is plenty of scope for structural reforms to improve the functioning and competitiveness of the economy, such as the proposed reforms to the planning system, these measures take years not months to bear fruit.

So in the meantime the onus will be on the Bank of England to offer whatever support it can. Like the Federal Reserve it could make an explicit commitment to keeping its policy rate at 0.5% for an extended period, or could launch another round of quantitative easing. Unless the situation deteriorates to the point that an emergency meeting of the MPC is called, the next policy announcements are due on 8th September. Certainly, the date of the first rate increase has been pushed further into the distance by recent events, until later next year or even 2013.

For all the dangers of the current financial and economic situation, it is not without silver linings. In the UK, as in other advanced economies, the remainder of 2011 will be hard going, but there are glimmers of hope for next year. In particular, falling commodity prices, especially for fuels and metals holds out the prospect that inflation will recede quickly, albeit that the increases in gas and electricity prices that have already been announced are likely to push it a little higher during the next few months.

One of the biggest head-winds currently inhibiting Britain's recovery is the squeezing of households' disposable incomes by rising prices. With the annual rate of inflation now more likely to fall back to its 2% target, or even lower, during 2012, consumers will find that their incomes will be expanding again in real terms, which might induce them to start loosening their purse strings.

The proviso, of course, is that they aren't confronted by a daily diet of gloom and doom from the financial markets. Panics of the sort that we've seen in the last few weeks usually blow themselves out quickly. But it's vital that politicians and policymakers act boldly to ensure that there aren't more confidence-sapping bouts of turmoil.

TESCO: THOUGHTS ABOUT S106 MONEY

As you'll see from the editor's article on the next page regarding Tesco's S106 contribution, there is a lot of money in the offing. Naturally, everyone has their ideas of how this should be spent and the problem the town council and district council will have is working out which projects best fit the aims stated in the agreement.

Sanya Ward, the leader of the Chamber's Retailer group, has been working hard to ask retailers which of the Chamber's proposed projects are important to them. I have yet to see the results, but I gather that having a Town Manager is top of the list. I happen to agree and I know that Sanya has put some thought into what such a person would do.

We are not just talking about reinstating the AIM Town Manager. For a start, this time retailers are demanding a Town Manager, and from experience, this is a far better way of starting any project. Also, the thought is that we need to concentrate harder on promoting the Town and its businesses, including tourism, as well as running events. Finally, the method of funding will be different, be it from the Tesco S106 money, or by other means. The previous Town Managers demonstrated their value to the town, so this new initiative would build on that work.

Whatever your views of Tesco, the windfall being offered to us can and must be used to do all we can to make the town centre a better place to shop. As David Gay mentions in his piece, we have got to guard against using the money for large infrastructure projects. However, one cannot deny that the appearance of many roadsides and alleyways leading into the town centre could do with improvement. Really we need to test the town using some 'mystery visitors' to see what things they identify as being important factors that would improve their visit.

The process for choosing projects is being overseen by Alton Town Council, as stated in the S106 agreement. They have set a date of Friday 21st October 2011 to receive submissions of ideas. They are also asking that ideas are evidence-based, either by offering your own research or by offering information that demonstrates that a concept has worked elsewhere. Collecting your own evidence generally involves asking people what they want, which is why the recent retailer's survey is so important. We are also talking to Hampshire County Council to see what ideas can be drawn from other towns, as well as re-examining the 'Alton 2020 Town Plan'. Once submissions are received, the projects will need costing so that the town and district councils can decide which are the most viable and worthwhile in light of the objectives. If you've got an idea that you think would help encourage people to shop here, please don't hesitate to let us know.

'BT INFINITY' LEAVES OUT BUSINESSES

Alton Town Council recently received an E-mail from a company located in Omega Park asking if they would make a representation to British Telecom demanding an improvement to their broadband service. Deputy Town Clerk Greg Burt forwarded the message to me and I did a bit of research. I found that whilst Alton has a telephone exchange that's been upgraded to 'ADSL2+', the promised increase in speed is soon lost if you're more than 1Km from the exchange. The answer is of course to have a fibreoptic connection, dubbed as 'BT Infinity'.

There are vast areas of the country that have yet to receive BT Infinity, but luckily for us, Alton was upgraded. You may have noticed one or two extra green telephone cabinets by footpaths – these are for the new service. The problem for businesses is that BT decided that they would aim the system at residents, as the current trend for Internet televisions is growing all the time. If you were unaware of this, you can now buy a TV with a network socket and I think some have Wi-Fi connectivity built-in. This means that you can use your Internet connection to watch YouTube videos and the BBC iPlayer, as well as receiving digital TV via your aerial or satellite dish.

Wonderful for 'the people', but BT doesn't seem to think that businesses warrant the extra infrastructure expense. We can ask our MP, Damian Hinds, if he could lobby for us, but given the present economic climate, I would be surprised if he makes any headway. The only realistic alternative is to set up a Business Improvement District (BID). This is already being considered for the Town Centre, but in this case, it could be used to fund the fibreoptic infrastructure for Alton's commercial district. This issue is country-wide, so we could lead the way by showing how the cost can be fairly and affordably borne by those who stand to benefit.

Those that work from home are more likely to be able to have the BT Infinity business service. At present it costs £30 +VAT a month and offers download speeds of up to 40Mb. I note that for my house in Alton, BT only promise 31.7Mb download and 7.5Mb upload speeds, whilst those in Holybourne are down to 29.7Mb/5.6Mb. Meanwhile, people with fibreoptic cable TV will soon have the choice of Virgin Media's 100Mb service. Sadly the original Nynex cable routes missed Alton, so this is not an option.

To sum up, I think that this is an important issue that deserves the Chamber's attention. The committee has yet to discuss the matter, but I believe that it is likely to be something that many businesses will support. Whether they are prepared to pay for the installation remains to be seen. However, it could be a lot cheaper than relocating, as suggested by the initial correspondent.

Next ACCI events

Thursday 22 nd September:	"Meet the Councillors"; 6.30pm, Alton House Hotel
Thursday 27 th October:	Business Networking event; 6 – 8pm, Swan Hotel
Thursday 24 th November:	ACCI & ACE Annual General Meeting (venue TBA)



TESCO'S £1 MILLION, WHERE WILL IT GO ?

a report by David Gay

As part of the planning consent granted to Tesco, after appeal, for the building of a new superstore in Mill Lane, it is required that Tesco provide a sum of £1million+ which is intended to be used to mitigate the impact the development may have on the viability of the Town Centre.

The Chamber committee has discussed how the money could be most effectively used to the benefit of existing town centre businesses and is currently consulting with those businesses to gain feed back regarding the initial Chamber views and to consider any new proposals from those businesses.

The text under the 3 headings below is taken verbatim from the Section 106 (S106) agreement that explains how the money can be used (text in grey is taken from the "Schedule 1 Obligations on part of the Developer"):

TOWN CENTRE CONTRIBUTION

The sum of £1,000,000 (one million pounds) to be paid to East Hants District Council and used in consultation with Alton Town Council on improvements to the town centre within the town centre boundary of Alton (Policy TC1) such as public realm enhancements in the town centre, grants for independent retailers in the town centre to improve their premises, town centre management initiatives and to public realm associated with the route of the proposed bus service (which is being offered to Hampshire County Council as part of the Application pursuant to a separate agreement under section 106 of the Act) particularly at key public transport interchanges within the town centre, train station and elsewhere.

To pay the Town Centre Contribution to the Council prior to Occupation of the development.

MILL LANE IMPROVEMENT CONTRIBUTION

The sum of £20,000 (twenty thousand pounds) (Index Linked) to be paid to Hampshire County Council towards environmental improvements on Mill Lane including (but not limited to) improved signage, planting, lighting and landscaping.

To pay the Mill Lane Improvement Contribution to the Council prior to Implementation of the development.

MONITORING CONTRIBUTION

The sum of £3,000 (three thousand pounds) (Index Linked) to be paid to Council for the purpose for monitoring compliance with the obligations of this deed.

To pay the Monitoring Contribution to the Council prior to Implementation of the development.

The Chamber committee has particularly concentrated on the phrase "town centre management initiatives".

The committee is of the opinion that what is needed is a Town Centre promotional organisation which could employ a town manager with sufficient financial backing for several years. One of the prime purposes of this town manager would be to organise Town Centre events which promote the town both to local residents and tourists.

Other organisations in the town may well be looking at using the money to improve the physical appearance of the town and the Chamber would support using some of the money for those purposes. All three levels of Councils may well propose capital projects which should otherwise be funded from other budgets. The Chamber would generally not support this. As stated at the beginning of this report, the prime intent of this money is to mitigate the effect Tesco may have on the viability of the town centre. So let's keep the focus there.

The Chamber committee is keen to hear from members, particularly those who think they may be adversely affected by the Tesco development. Let us know your thoughts, ideas and proposals (see also article in Secretary's Corner).

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MEET THE COUNCILLORS

at Alton House Hotel
on Thursday 22nd September

6.30 pm – 8 pm



This open forum meeting will have in attendance

Councillor Andrew Joy representing Hampshire County Council and East Hants District Council
Councillor Ken Moon representing East Hants District Council
and members of Alton Town Council.

The previous “Meet the Councillors” Forum was very successful with most members who attended feeling that they did get straight answers to most of the questions – even if they weren’t always the answers that were hoped for !

There is no charge to attend this meeting.

Tea and coffee with light refreshments will be served at 6.15 pm.

Member are encouraged to bring colleagues and guests !

Those wishing to dine can do so after the meeting.
It would be helpful if you would advise the Secretary
by Tuesday 20th morning, if you wish to attend.

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Business Network Meeting

sponsored by  **Recenseo**
Software, Marketing & Financial Management

at the Swan Hotel

on Thursday 27th October 6pm until 8pm

Recenseo, in partnership with Alton Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI), is to host a new networking evening for businesses in Alton and East Hampshire.

The event, which is entirely free of charge to members of ACCI as well as non-members, is designed to encourage greater networking amongst the areas businesses. Whilst other smaller networking groups exist, ACCI is keen to play a more active role in bringing businesses together and stimulating trade referrals. With experience of hosting such events before, Recenseo is delighted to step forward and offer to host the inaugural event. The evening will include a light buffet and an introductory drink.

As well as providing businesses with a chance to network with other local firms, there will also be chance to learn more about Recenseo and the work of the Alton Chamber of Commerce on the evening with representatives from both in attendance.

Alton has a vibrant business community because of the excellent work undertaken by the Chamber of Commerce and it is hoped that this event will help to strengthen that bond.

It is hoped that the event can become a regular fixture in the calendar and that other local businesses will take turns in hosting future events to get their name recognised, help promote networking and enhance the work of the Chamber.

For more details or to register, please contact Elliott Ross –

elliott@recenseo.co.uk

During the evening there will be two 5 minute addresses.

Pat Lerew, the Chamber President, will outline the current actions and plans of the Chamber of Commerce.

Elliott Ross, Financial Director of Recenseo, will give a brief overview of the company's activities in Alton.

The major part of the evening will be allocated to general networking.

It is hoped that as many Chamber members as possible will attend and, of course, members are encouraged to bring along their colleagues and representatives from other local businesses.

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PLAYS
SONGS
POETRY
WRITING
STORIES
READING

ALTON
**WORD
FEST**



ALTON **WORD FEST**

1st – 8th October 2011



www.AltonWordFest.org.uk

PROGRAMME

Sat 1st Craft Book-making at Little Green Dragon

Sat 1st Harvest Supper & Concert

Sun 2nd Literary Lunch & “Inspiration Workshop”

Mon 3rd Farnham Speakers’ Showcase

Tue 4th “Stone Soup” Story-telling & Open Mic

Tue 4th “Speak Up!” Schools event

Wed 5th “Pint Pot of Fire” Story-telling Competition

Thu 6th “Frances Burney for Smarties” Talk

Fri 7th Children’s Writing Awards / Spelling Bee

Sat 8th Sophia Hillan talk about new book

Sat 8th Drama Workshops – Adults & Children

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PLAYS
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ALTON
**WORD
FEST**



ALTON **WORD FEST**

1st – 8th October 2011



2011 Adult Creative Writing Competition Theme: “If this is the end, what was the beginning?”

Competition Rules

1. The Adult competition is open to anyone 17+ living, working or attending a writing group in the Alton area.
2. Entrants will be required to write a short story, opening chapter of a novel, or non fiction piece in no more than 2000 words on the theme of this year’s competition
3. Entries will need to be received by 1pm on Monday 26th September 2011 at **Alton Community Centre**, Amery Street, Alton. GU34 1HN.

First Prize £25 Book Token
Second prize - £15 book token
Third prize - £10 book token

A visit to a publishing house is being arranged for the winners and there will also be a certificate for any entries that are highly commended.

Competition is sponsored by Alton Herald

Winners will be invited to receive their prize at the Literary Lunch on Sunday **2nd October 2011**

ENTRY FORM

Name:

Title of story:

Home address:.....



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CLASSIC CAR SHOW

**Saturday
September 24th
in the Town Centre**



Classic Car Rally plus non-participating classic cars, American Cars & Army vehicles descending on Alton for one of the most popular days in the Events Calendar.

Live music in the Market Square.

organised by

The Alton Herald

with support from

Alton Chamber of Commerce & Industry

and **Alton Town Council**

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Curry Night with Race Night Entertainment

7th October

At Alton Community Centre

7.30pm-11pm

Tickets £12

**(Ticket price includes
food & a glass of Pimms)**

For Tickets or enquiries, call Alton Community Association on 01420 85057

An Alton Community Association Activity Reg Charity Number 266673

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Sung in
English

The Barber of Seville

by Gioacchino Rossini

Translated by: Amanda and Anthony Holden
Directed by: Rae Leaver
Produced by: Jane Mabbitt

“What a success,
what talent!
It was beautiful
and most
amusing!”

“The highlight
of our year!”

“Once more,
we were
astonished
by the
quality.”

“Absolutely
brilliant!”

Friday 14th October 2011
7.30pm
Alton Maltings

Buy tickets online at
www.avidlite.co.uk/acatalog/barber.html
or ring Jane on 07866 765088
or email operaloki@gmail.co.uk
Tickets: £10

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