

## Report for Advent Trail

Last year the Town Council commissioned the Hamilton Project to coordinate the Advent Trail. This year, with the introduction of the Town Centre Manager role it was felt that the Town Council could organise this in house.

The Town Centre Manager started in September and decided on the theme of Christmas Songs. A list was devised which had plenty of 'easy' Christmas Songs that would translate well into a window display.

The Town Centre Manager put out a social media post, asking shops to get in touch if they wanted to take part, and emailed everyone on the list from last year, and on our own shop contact list. Flyers were also distributed to shop owners and discussions were had face to face.

By the middle of October there were 28 shops taking part. One unfortunately had to drop out, as they were part of a chain and could not get permission from head office.

Schools were contacted to see if they wanted to be involved, with 5 responding positively.

Christmas songs were allocated to shops and those that required assistance were teamed up with a school.

Social media posts and adverts in the press went out telling people about the trail from the end of October as part of the wider Step Into Christmas campaign.

At the start of November MTC were contacted by Local High Street, who wanted to see if we would be interested in partnering with them, to deliver the trail via app as well as the traditional paper version. As this was still something relatively new for them, there was to be no charge to the Council, and Local High Street turned out to be a great help. They came up with a short animated social media post, they helped design the paper version of the map, they provided QR stickers for all the shop windows, they spoke to the shops and businesses directly in order to put as much information on the app as possible.

Figures provided to us by Local High Street show that they had 102 downloads of the trail from their app. They were surprised at the number and considered it low considering the amount of activity. However as we are all aware the weather during December was not the best and maybe did not encourage as many people as it might have otherwise done so. Also last year, the trail took place during a full lockdown, which meant that people had nothing to do. This year, whilst there were COVID measures in place, we were far from a full lockdown and so people may have had other things to do.

Feedback from Local High Street was that there were too many shops/businesses. This feels a little counter-intuitive to us, but can understand that the far spread of shops may have discouraged people, but it does mean it can be completed over the

course of the month. Local High Street also feel that it should be made more of a challenge, with a prize for completing the trail, but also the windows should be judged and a prize awarded. Overall the proof of concept worked and they would like to work with us on an Easter Egg hunt in a similar format.

We know that by the first week of December around 100 paper versions had been given out from the VIC, and the majority had been given out by the end of December.

The Town Centre Manager spoke regularly to shops face to face and by email, to check they were ok with their plans, whether they needed help etc.

Last year Hamilton Project did an unveiling every day at 4pm on social media. It wasn't felt that this was the best way to promote the trail, as often it was dark, the shops shut around 4-5pm, and so often they were dark windows with shutters down.

This time round, MTC decided to just post pictures of the windows on it's social media channels, with no set order. We reminded people to take part in the trail, to take advantage of special offers that the shops had that were available on the app. We listed coffee shops/food outlets on the trail and encouraged people to go for a walk and then stop for a hot drink for example.

Rather than just being a trail, we made it more interactive, and the Local High Street app added a 'gamification' element. It was also about increasing awareness of the shops and businesses involved, and reminding people to shop local and support the high street in the run up to Christmas.

Overall the trail ran very smoothly and didn't require lots of work for Officers. Part of this is because we were ably supported by two volunteers who helped deliver the QR code stickers, and who designed and printed the accompanying posters with numbers.