
SHOP AT MY LOCAL

1 SUMMARY

This report provides Members with details of the purpose and function of the Shop At My Local campaign, and an update as to the direction of travel and plans for the future.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Shop At My Local (SAML) was launched to businesses in August 2009. Its aim was to work with local traders to deliver a range of projects, events and incentives to attract people to the main shopping areas in the Rochford District. SAML helps to raise awareness of the need to use and sustain local shopping areas and local traders. SAML also seeks to encourage traders to use other local businesses in their supply chains.
- 2.2 Whilst Rochford Council took the initial lead, SAML is actually a partnership between Rochford District Council, Parish and Town Councils across the District, the Chambers of Trade and Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) together with a number of businesses based in the district. The partnership is run by a steering group that meets quarterly, with all decisions being made jointly. The Shop At My Local mission statement is:-
- “The Shop At My Local Partnership will deliver a range of projects and assistance that will encourage residents to buy locally and that will facilitate local supply chains. The initiative will work to ensure that Rochford District’s main shopping areas meet their full potential by creating thriving community centres that offer a unique and enjoyable shopping and social experience.”
- 2.3 SAML seeks to create more dynamic, experience-led shopping environments that continue to attract residents and visitors through these difficult economic times and into the future.
- 2.4 The scheme was launched to shoppers towards the end of 2009, with the aim of encouraging members of the public to sign-up to take advantage of the discount vouchers being provided by businesses.
- 2.5 Membership of SAML is free; once shoppers have signed up, they have exclusive access to vouchers and offers within the District. The website also provides news from the District, local information and regular competitions.

3 MEMBERSHIP

- 3.1 In August 2011 there were 567 shoppers and 414 traders signed up to the scheme.

- 3.2 Since that date, and after promotion at various events including Christmas Lights celebrations, Business Breakfasts and other community events, shopper membership has nearly doubled to 775 members. Trader membership has remained stable at 414 members – this is due to businesses relocating out of the District, withdrawing from SAML, or closing; however, the number of new businesses joining has been equal to those leaving.
- 3.3 In order to promote the SAML campaign, various initiatives have been introduced including a weekly bulletin. This is sent to all Shop At My Local members – both shoppers and traders – and details all the new vouchers that have been uploaded for the week. This has proved popular, with an increase in vouchers being seen after this was launched. However, as time has passed the number of vouchers being uploaded has decreased, and a number of shoppers have responded to the weekly emails asking to be removed from the database. This is now being trialled as a less frequent bulletin.
- 3.4 In 2010 3000 bags for life were purchased with the Shop At My Local Trademark printed on. As of 23 September 2014, RDC have one box of these left (approximately 200 bags), although it is likely that Steering Group members may also have a box. The aim was to sell these bags at £1.75; however they did not sell, and even when reducing the price down to £1 there was little interest. The decision was taken to give them away at events to help publicise and promote the scheme, and they were filled with leaflets and information from a number of Shop At My Local trader members.
- 3.5 Shop At My Local also has a page on Facebook, as well as a feed on Twitter, providing another method of engaging with local shoppers and traders and advertising events and initiatives. This has not proved overly successful with only 78 “likes” on Facebook despite significant promotion. The Economic Development Team have been unable to access the SAML twitter feed – the person responsible for updating this has left the organisation he was working for and hasn’t responded to any emails; Twitter are currently looking into this.

3.6 New Website

A new updated and improved website was launched in 2012, along with a host of publicity exercises. Despite this, and despite renewed efforts from the Steering Group to promote SAML it is clear that the scheme in its current guise is not effective, nor providing value for money. Consequently, RDC is no longer able to fund the website (approximately £2000 per year) as of the end of the current financial year.

As such, it was determined that a new focus for SAML was required.

4 WAY FORWARD

- 4.1 The SAML Steering Group on 18 September 2014 considered several options for SAML. A copy of the report submitted to the meeting is attached at appendix 1. At the meeting it was decided to adopt option 1 which was:-

Rochford District Council currently own the trademark for Shop at my Local. Allow the Town and Community Teams across the District, as well as the three Chambers to use the Shop at my Local trademark on any events/initiatives that promote the local area and promote local businesses, effectively using the Shop at my Local brand as a marketing tool. The website would be reduced to a home page only, with Rochford District Council having access to the membership database in order to promote the above events/initiatives to current members. There would also be a Shop at my Local page on the Rochford District Council business website.

- 4.2 This option would enable the promotion of SAML through a variety of different vehicles, and would also dovetail with work being undertaken by the Town Teams currently being set up across the District.
- 4.3 Rochford District Council were asked by the Steering Group if they could cover the costs of the website domain names, at approximately £50 per annum (awaiting quotes), and it has been agreed this can be funded through the economic development budget.

5 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Rochford District Council are the trademark owners of the Shop At My Local brand, so any risk to reputation can be mitigated through Rochford District Council having final say on how and where the SAML logo is used.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There may be some initial modest staff resource required to implement Option 1, but thereafter staff can focus on the implementation of the Council's economic growth strategy action plan.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There may be legal implications through other groups or organisations using the SAML logo and brand. A legally binding contract will be required to set parameters for the usage of the Shop At My Local logo and branding.

8 RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 It is proposed that, subject to comments from Members, the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the contents of the report.



Shaun Scrutton

Head of Planning and Transportation

Background Papers:-

None

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Shop at my Local Steering Group Report

Introduction

The Shop at my Local scheme was set up to:

“Deliver a range of projects and assistance that will encourage residents and businesses to buy locally and that will facilitate local supply chains. The campaign will work to ensure that the District’s shopping areas meet their full potential by creating thriving community centres that offer a unique and enjoyable shopping and social experience.”

Representatives from local Councils, Hockley, Rayleigh and Rochford Chambers, and the Federation of Small Businesses worked together as the Steering Group to:

- deliver initiatives and events that attract people to the main shopping areas
- become a forum to engage local stakeholders in discussion and collaboration
- shape and influence organisational activity to develop a shared approach to the District’s main shopping areas
- facilitate access to funding and resource opportunities to enhance the shopping areas
- help to deliver cleaner, greener and more attractive shopping areas

Membership

In August 2014, the membership stood at:

Traders – 389

Shoppers – 1099

Over the past 12 months the number of Shoppers has slowly grown, with large increases seen in specific months due to promotional events. The number of Traders, however, has decreased; there are a range of reasons behind this including streamlining the database to ensure there are no duplications, address checks to ensure that the businesses are still operating in the District, and business closure. New businesses have been encouraged to join Shop at my Local, where possible, but take up has been low.

Informal feedback from residents, collected through Shop at my Local publicity events, showed that they shop locally because it’s convenient, that they will travel if the local shops don’t offer what they need, and that they would not check a website for vouchers before going to the shops. Some residents also explained that they do not own computers and/or don’t have access to the internet.

Vouchers

The voucher scheme had, at one time, been a key focus of Shop at my Local. This provided an incentive for Shoppers to visit local shopping areas and to use local businesses.

Between January and July 2014, there were 10 new vouchers added, this is a decrease of 28% when compared to the same period in 2013.

One business explained that it was more effective to use Groupon because it attracted a wider audience.

The 2014 Trader survey showed that 86% of respondents who had used the voucher system did not feel that it had a positive response.

Events

The Steering Group agreed for Shop at my Local to be promoted at various events across the District over the last 12 months. The levels of input into this has been skewed towards the Economic Development Team at Rochford District Council who spent approximately 50 hours preparing for Independents Day. Work included:

- preparing a project plan
- meeting and responding to Steering Group members
- liaising with businesses and Rayleigh Town Team
- delivering posters to businesses
- preparing press releases, arranging photo calls and marketing the events
- arranging the competition and judges
- preparing the competition certificates
- visiting Hockley, Rayleigh and Rochford on the day and providing photo calls
- preparing the newsletter

Steering Group member input was approximately 20 hours through:

- delivering posters to businesses
- meeting and responding to Rochford District Council Officers
- running a stall on the day
- being a judge in the competition

Some Steering Group members have given a large amount of their time to the scheme over many years and this should be acknowledged and appreciated.

Steering Group Consultation

The future of Shop at my Local has been discussed and considered at Steering Group meetings over the last 12 months. More recently, the Steering Group were asked to respond with their opinions and ideas for the scheme so that an agreeable action plan could be implemented before the end of the website contract with Weave-a-Web. The Steering Group were advised that, as a decision needs to be made, any non responses would indicate that the member did not want the scheme to continue. Of the 12 Steering Group members, 4 responses were received. All the respondents represent the local Chambers of Trade.

Below is a summary of their responses, which have been collated to demonstrate the suggested actions for moving the scheme forward. The full responses can be viewed in Appendix A.

All respondents agreed that the current format for Shop at my Local was not fit for purpose.

Two of the respondents would like to incorporate the scheme into the local Chambers of Trade.

Two of the respondents would like to focus more on Town Teams and possibly link the Shop at my Local scheme into this new format.

Some specific ideas included:

- Keeping accountable through meetings with the Portfolio Holder for Enterprise.
- Spend money saved from not continuing the scheme on reducing car parking charges.
- Needs a refresh and reminding of Vision, Direction and Defined Goals for the next 12 months.
- Needs weekly administration and promotion both electronically and in leaflet form (update to the privacy in line with Data Protection for subscription - email needs to be sent out to all subscribers to allow sending of newsletters directly, with their agreement).
- Needs a refresh in design to make it more appealing or potentially cut down as a bolt on to Town Team based sites - it simply becomes a voucher system. Perhaps it should be funded via Town Team's once grants have been applied for and the Town Team has a clear vision and direction.
- Introduce a face/character to Shop at my Local 'Sam Local' the character, which the town teams can brand accordingly...Rochford's Sam Local could be based on Henry VIII or Anne Boleyn or some other person of significance to the area. The characters can then be used for promotion and events.
- More collaboration and buy-in from the Business Networks & Town Teams who should be the drivers and gain support from members/subscribers and push the vehicle and its benefits.
- Subscription fee is an option but needs the offer to appeal to Traders in order to encourage them to subscribe, and provide them with a clear set of benefits if they join, and with an offering that is attractive and fit for purpose.
- Explore grant funding.

Traders Consultation

A short questionnaire was sent out to Shop at my Local traders. A number of questions were asked including whether the members would be prepared to pay a subscription fee (to cover the cost of the website. Options included £5 a year up to £20 a year). Out of 12 responses received only one indicated a willingness to pay to subscribe, highlighting that the likelihood is that if a subscription fee was introduced the number of traders subscribing would be very low and the website costs would not be covered.

Advertising offer

In recent months an advertising offer was introduced, reducing the costs of having an advert on the site. Despite much publicising of this to Steering Group members, traders and shoppers alike, only one business took advantage of this. This highlights that businesses are either unwilling to pay the prices, unwilling to pay to advertise on the site, unconvinced that paying to advertise on the site would benefit them or provide any leads.

Suggestions for The Future of Shop at my Local – Steering Group discussion required

It should be noted that Rochford District Council no longer has a budget to support the website costs each year of Shop at my Local.

Option 1

Rochford District Council currently own the trademark for Shop at my Local. Allow the Town and Community Teams across the District, as well as the three Chambers to use the Shop at my Local trademark on any events/initiatives that promote the local area and promote local businesses, effectively using the Shop at my Local brand as a marketing tool. The website would be reduced to a home page only, with Rochford District Council having access to the membership database in order to promote the above events/initiatives to current members. There would also be a Shop at my Local page on the Rochford District Council business website.

Option 2

Rochford District Council and Three Chambers could promote Shop at my Local without offering a membership service. The Three Chambers could utilise the membership service and promote it by use of the logo for individual businesses that are members of the Shop at my Local scheme. Rochford District Council will not renew its contract with Weave-a-Web and the website will be reduced to a home page (until the contract for the domain names finish) directing visitors to Rochford District Council and Three Chambers websites.

Option 3

Close Shop at my Local. Rochford District Council to remain owners of the trademark, website to run until domain name lease expires.

Option 4

Any other ideas/suggestions from Steering Group to be discussed.

For the above options Shop at my Local members will need to be notified of the changes. Rochford District Council will draft a letter for approval by the Steering Group before being sent out.

APPENDIX A – FULL RESPONSES FROM STEERING GROUP MEMBERS

Response 1:

Frankly in my opinion SHOP AT MY LOCAL should be limited to an area linked to both the Council website and Chamber's site as a brand name relative to both groups trying to support and encourage new & existing local businesses of all types. If funding available.

Who get behind Independents day, Small shops Saturday, various Lights events etc.

That's how I see it. With discussion and planning during our meetings with Mike Steptoe?

Adverts on SHOP AT MY LOCAL site – no.

Members subs – no.

Voucher scheme – no.

Response 2:

My personal opinion is that SHOP AT MY LOCAL has had its day and in reality there is no money available through the chambers or RDC to keep the website ongoing.

I feel the traders and shoppers signed up to the scheme could somehow be incorporated into the chamber of trade. Hopefully this may give some continuity to people using the chambers website.

Response 3:

Speaking only from knowledge of **Rochford Land Based retail Shops** traders.

1. They have shown no interest at all in SHOP AT MY LOCAL
2. They would not pay a membership or advertising fee (a lot will not even pay a chamber of trade subscription).
3. Our last town team did a great job, but was totally ignored by RDC, and not one recommendation was carried forward.
4. Weave-a-Web seem to have been the only beneficiaries of this scheme, which has bought in a lot of work from parishes etc, allow them to continue with the website, at no cost, but with the strict proviso that all entries must have actual trading address in the RDC where the the public can visit if necessary, and this would include internet and home based traders. If they agree to this SHOP AT MY LOCAL can be used under a free license.

For the future the town teams to be formed by the local chambers and should not include any councillors, (they have shown a total disregard for the community they represent by voting on party lines, parking charges, and not on what is required to stimulate business).

There should also be a requirement for the RDC. to act on the town teams reports, to be taken seriously and acted on in a timely manner. Providing the sums spent do not exceed current expenditure, which would include all officers' time costs, and councillors expenses and allowances, this should give a reasonable budget

SHOP AT MY LOCAL is not fit for purpose, it has had an appalling take up rate. the public do not want it and have not supported it, Just spending this money on extending free parking would produce far better results for the shopping centres.

Move forward with town teams.

Response 4:

Shop at my Local is a great concept. It's not working to its full potential because, there is no buy in from local traders, and limited promotion to the wider public. I assume this is because of lack of funds to promote.

The uniqueness of Shop at my Local is the fact it has Council support, a voucher system, low cost advertising and web presence all of which is not easily accessible to most local businesses and start-ups through other such sites. In addition it is not controlled like Groupon and Wowcher, in that it is very difficult to get an offer listed (particularly if there is a similar offering already listed), is costly, and the money raised through such global sites is not going back into the local community to generate

more foot traffic, thus more revenue for business and ultimately the council - this is where it should be pitched.

So here are my thoughts....

The current positives are that Shop at my Local has a database of businesses and subscribed users, these need to be utilised more with the correct tools to maximise its capability, this includes weekly administration which I know is a premium and a luxury but am happy to help here.

- Needs a refresh and reminding of Vision, Direction and Defined Goals for the next 12 months.
- Needs weekly administration and promotion both electronically and in leaflet form (update to the privacy in line with Data Protection for subscription - email needs to be sent out to all subscribers to allow sending of newsletters directly, with their agreement).
- Needs a refresh in design to make it more appealing or potentially cut down as a bolt in to Town Team based sites - it simply becomes a voucher system. Perhaps it should be funded via Town Team's once grants have been applied for once we have a clear vision and direction for the Team.
- Introduce a face to Shop at my Local 'Sam Local' the character, which as I think I mentioned before, the town teams can brand accordingly....Rochford's Sam Local could be based on Henry VIII or Anne Boleyn or some other person of significance to the area. The characters can then be used for promotion and events.
- More collaboration and buy-in from the Business Networks & Town Teams who should be the drivers and gain support from members/subscribers and push the vehicle and its benefits - I hope to do this with Rochford Town team.
- Subscription fee is an option but needs the above first to ask members, and with an offering that is attractive and fit for purpose.
- Explore grant funding, again happy to get involved with this to get it moving.

I am happy to get more involved with the site in terms of design etc, work with Keith, or potentially submit a separate proposal and sponsor the site subject to terms in collaboration with Weave-a-Web, if necessary to get the vehicle working (clearly need to cover my own costs too as I feel it may need a bit of time and effort).

APPENDIX B – TRADE SURVEY SEPTEMBER 2014

Trader Survey Questions

(12 responses in total)

Why did you sign up to Shop at my Local?

We are a community magazine who support local businesses

To help promote our business.

To be involved as a business at a local level

To promote our business.

Seemed like a great way of reaching local people

To support and encourage the use of local businesses

Within last 12 months

Was asked to

For our business to be seen

To see bargains and to advertise my services

To encourage shoppers to support local shops.

How often do you visit www.shopatmylocal.com?

Every day 0

Every week 0

Every month 2

Occasionally 8

Never 2

Do you advertise vouchers on www.shopatmylocal.com?

Yes 7

No 5

Following your previous answer, have you had a positive response?

Yes 1

No 6

Not applicable 5

Did you know that Shop at my Local provides advertising space?

Yes 12

No 0

Comments?

The advertising does not reach a big enough audience.

Would you consider using Shop at my Local if a subscription charge was introduced?

Yes 1

No 11

If 'Yes', how much would you be prepared to pay per year?

£5	0
£10	0
£15	0
£20	1

Other amount?

**Don't consider the reach is good
enough for a charge**