

Community and Stakeholder Engagement: Walsden Gateway Cycling Hub: Business interest and feedback from 'Walsden Residents Forum' Facebook Group

The project proposers have received expressions of support and interest in collaboration from a number of successful operators in:

- Electric and traditional bike sales, repair and hire
- Electric cargo bike sales, repair and hire
- MTB skills training and guided rides in Calderdale and beyond

Further detail of each business's communications with the proposers is available on request.

In addition, enthusiastic local resident Andy Hollier has engaged Todmorden's business support and networking organisation 'TodConnect' <https://www.todconnect.co.uk> to develop possibilities for the shared business space, and has received expressions of interest from businesses including an accountancy firm and a provider of educational services.

On 7th January 2021 Chipps Chippendale posted on the 'Walsden Residents Forum' Facebook Group asking for feedback on the 'Walsden Gateway Cycling Hub' project proposal. Chipps is a Walsden resident himself, an internationally known mountain biking journalist, and the editor of the Todmorden-based UK mountain bike magazine 'Singletrack'¹. He invited opinions about the overall concept of the project, and about the individual elements of shared office space/meeting rooms, café, community garden, and active travel hub.

The response from residents was very positive and encouraging, and a number of people, including some with property regeneration and business management experience, offered practical help with the project should it be taken forward.

All the individual elements of the plan were supported. Regarding office space, one resident suggested this kind of provision tends to be most viable when part of a larger and more diverse operation, but Chipps pointed out that that would be the case with the proposed scheme. He also acknowledged the importance of making sure the café element would not be in competition with or damaging to existing nearby refreshment providers, and stated his belief that the increase in visitor numbers and economic vitality in the area the centre would expect to create would be of benefit to all local businesses.

Several contributors mentioned the limited car parking in the vicinity of the proposed centre. This was recognised as a challenge but it was pointed out that visitors would be encouraged to arrive by public or active transport modes.

Some comments from the thread that illustrate these themes are reproduced below.

¹ <https://www.singletrackworld.com>

General comments

"Fantastic idea"

"Wonderful idea and the best of luck to you"

"Like Skipton in the Dales, Walsden is in the unique position of being the 'Gateway to Adventure', with its access to the Pennines and canal network. Some great ideas."

"Something for Walsden would be great. I would be interested in getting involved if you think we could get something off the ground. Please keep us posted."

"Definitely need more of a 'central feel' around the rail station area to supplement the excellent village store. It would be great to see these buildings transformed and being used."

"Cracking to hear so much enthusiasm and support. Here's to a brilliant bringing together of the community and a new vibrance."

"Thumbs up providing there's a business case for demand that can be sustained. + business incubator that runs through MVP > startup > initial scaling in partnership with a serious partner (Business School) with the ambition to provide jobs that pay above that national average. Success with it all. Please let me know if I can help you."

"I like the ideas and happy to help any way I can."

"I love the idea of a community hub and would be interested in helping."

"There were lots of firms here employing lots of people on wages that were high for the UK. We only get that back by starting new ones that are relevant to today and we ought to have something to motivate a school leaver to have ambition, get outstanding training and be able to have a solvent and freestanding life here."

Community Garden

"A community garden with wellbeing and edibles and sensory features really appeals to me on a personal level. Best of luck."

"It would work in very nicely with the garden proposed by the neighbourhood watch on the library corner."

Café/comeptition

"Sounds good. There is definitely space for another café."

"Sounds a great idea. And the food for the cafe can all be bought locally from our village shop."

"Don't forget The Sandwich Shed in Walsden! We're take out only and already get lots of passing trade from cyclists as well as local customers."

Response: "That's very good to know and we should sit down (if the money comes through) to make sure the plans are for something different and the buildings mean more visitors in total rather than taking trade from existing businesses. The more cyclists and walkers we can get coming to the area, the better for all Walsden businesses (especially ones with nice food and drink!) It would be nice to think you could fill up with snacks at the Village Stores, have a sarnie, ride in the hills and finish with a pint at The Mill..."

Offices/meeting rooms:

"I imagine a lot of home workers would welcome the chance to be an away worker, but nearer home."

"I like this idea a lot. Expect my balance of commuting and working at home will change as we have reduced office space in Manchester during last year and switched to some home working contracts."

"We've looked at serviced offices ourselves, but the numbers don't add up. The cost of making them, maintaining them, internet, electric, heating, insurances and staff, aren't covered by what you can ask to rent a desk, even with a reasonably high occupancy rate. This'll be why most hot desking facilities are part of existing businesses, utilising unused space, rather than being stand alone businesses. Best of luck with your plans, as you say, aim for the sky!"

Response: "Thanks for the feedback. Hebden Town Hall is currently fully filled, so there's hope there. The incorporation of other services (bike shop/rental, cafe etc) should help keep the building working. I think combining with a hub makes it more viable. Also being a social enterprise/ CIC means there is a bit less pressure on return on investment."

Parking

"My only concern would be parking, there isn't much scope for visitor parking in Walsden - particularly around school pick up times."

"As already mentioned, parking will be an issue."

Response: "Parking might be an issue, although we'd be trying to encourage people to arrive by train and bicycle where possible, of course."