

# Chepstow Society – Town Planning Roundup for May & June 2021

Simon Maddison, 29<sup>th</sup> June 2021

## Introduction

This month, the main part of this roundup is a 'photo essay' on Chepstow High Street.

## The High Street

There was publicity a few weeks ago that Chepstow High Street was deemed the '3<sup>rd</sup> worst in the UK'.

This seems to me to be very hard and rather unfair. Sure, the High Street has its problems, but so do those in many towns and cities. Investigating a little further shows the report to have been published in February and is an annual report on the 'Vitality Ranking' of Britain's towns and cities retail locations by a retail consultancy called Harper Dennis Hobbs.

The summary of the report is at the following location:

<http://hdh.co.uk/retail/vitality-rankings-2021-beaconsfield-named-britains-leading-retail-destination/>

A very detailed report which provides a comprehensive analysis as well as details of the methodology can be downloaded from:

<http://hdh.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/HDH-Vitality-Rankings-2021-Commentary-and-Methodology.pdf>

Interestingly this lists out the top locations, with various other analyses by region, but I am unable to find in it any mention of Chepstow or anything about a ranking of the worst locations. Apparently the information was obtained by iNews (<https://inews.co.uk/news/consumer/britains-worst-high-streets-2021-girvan-south-ayrshirewales-retail-six-of-the-top-10-1056070>), the article states that normally the complete index is published, but this year only the top locations were listed. According to the article, the full list was shared with iNews but does not appear to be available on the HDH web site. Presumably it was this revelation that prompted the flurry of reports in June, several months after the original report was published.

Well, this is my take on the High Street, some pictures taken on a recent Sunday when the weekly market was running. I hope no one caught in my photos is offended for being included, if so, I apologise.

I leave you to draw your own conclusions, but this looks to me an attractive and reasonably busy high street, with potential for improvement and some imagination needing to be applied in terms of encouraging other businesses to get established and flourish. Is this the town council or the county council who are responsible?

One big issue is that the major supermarket in town, Tesco, is completely isolated from the High Street. If having done your major shop there, you want to pop over the road for something special, or go to a cafe, the distance that you have to walk and the route to take is a major disincentive for doing this. The limitations and cost of parking in the town are also a disincentive for shopping in the town centre. I think this is something that requires a good rethink, so that a shopping experience in the High Street can be combined with a supermarket shop at Tesco. The same does not apply to

M&S, where the car park is much closer to the town. I don't know whether the parking policies for these businesses could be arranged to support such a shared experience.

## Moor Street

Moor Street has an interesting mix of shops and businesses, including of course the award-winning Queen's Head pub. The old Green Dragon is still sadly empty and one or two other shops are vacant on the same side.



There have been changes going down Moor Street relating to planters, and the blocking of the Town Arch:







The Arch is now blocked with a bollard and some planters loaded with culinary herbs.





## The High Street

White Lion Square is an attractive space with quality street furniture and seating. The trees are maturing too lending it an additional attractive quality.



The market seems to be established now, and some of the permanent businesses in Chepstow are taking advantage of the additional footfall on a Sunday. In my view the market lacks somewhere you can buy everyday food items, but the food stalls seem to be popular.





Seating on the street for cafes and restaurants lends the street a relaxed and perhaps a continental feel?



Marmelade House have brought the wonderful frontage of this shop to life again.



A lot of work is taking place on the old Herbert Lewis building. It is good to see that they put priority on renovating the fine frontage and roof. The retail spaces fronting on the High Street are currently vacant, but they have endeavoured to use some of the space to visual effect. The addition of residential accommodation so close to the town centre should be positive.











The new crossing has been controversial, but it does seem to be working well when I have been there. It helps to create a coherent sense of space in Beaufort Square. The seating outside the coffee shops and the Beaufort Arms are also popular.





The planter bike stands acknowledge how popular the town is for cyclists, particularly in this location.





## St Mary's Street

St Mary's Street has been semi-pedestrianised for several decades. This was also very controversial at the time. The paving used makes a good visual impression. It is an attractive street and the businesses there seem to be doing alright. I patronise several of them including the Book Shop.







Interestingly there are two art businesses near the bottom, perhaps sign of change to Chepstow's retail landscape?







## Vacant Businesses

Sadly, there are some vacant shops as well. Some look really unappealing and let the street down. A well-managed shopping mall would permit such a shabby appearance, but endeavour to make the space look attractive rather than an eyesore. What can be done to change this?









But it is good to see that trouble is being taken to maintain such landmark buildings as the Bell Chambers in Bank Street (taken from the rear in Rifleman's Row).

