



REPORT FOR TOWN COUNCIL GRANT FEBRUARY 2021

The aim of Todmorden Information Centre is to promote the town and support local businesses and organisations. In 2019/20 Todmorden Information Centre supported over 16 different local organisations with their ticket sales for events as diverse as Todmorden Country Fair to Hebden Bridge's Frou Frou Club, the 3 Valley's Gospel Choir to Frogbox Comedy Club. Many more organisations from the Scouts to Age Concern were aided or publicised through other means; posters, exhibitions, social media and web promotion.

2020 dawned with plenty of plans, ideas and excitement for Todmorden Information Centre. A rebranding, a new website and a refurbishment were all in place to kickstart the traditional tourist season from Easter.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 stopped everything and everyone in their tracks in March 2020 and the Centre, as a non-essential business, had to close from April to July 2020 plus the whole of November 2020 and from January 2021 to present day. During the first closure the Centre was used by Age Concern as a space to store food parcels before delivery and they also used the Centre's windows to display their doorstep photographs. Once the Centre was allowed to reopen their doorsteps photos were displayed in the exhibition space.

The Centre, as a key central location, is also used by other organisations as a drop off/collection point - St Mary's Church's key is held here - it is a Todmorden Food Bank drop off point - the Citizen's Assembly used it as did Lamplighter. Handmade Parade/Lamplighter are a key partner for the Centre - the windows are regularly used as part of Lamplighter as they were throughout October half term 2020 and the Centre continues to be their preferred location for collection and drop off for their projects.

As result of the restrictions imposed to tackle the Coronavirus epidemic, Todmorden Information Trust has seen a huge decrease in both footfall and revenue during the past year. In the period between April 2019 and March 2020, the turnover was just over £48,000 with a projected deficit for this year likely to be around £30,000. This reflects a lack in face-to-face trading but particularly emphasises the lack of events bookings and ticket sales suffered by organisations in the town such as the Hippodrome and Country Fair.

In the current climate all of the town's arts venues and other voluntary organisations have suffered without the ability hold events and this is especially apparent at the Information Centre with its links in supporting the many groups within the town. It is quite clear from the amount of financial disparity between the two periods how much the groups within the town have been affected and how much the partnerships the Centre has cultivated are needed by all parties.

Despite the challenges faced in 2020/21 Todmorden Information Centre has still managed to support, promote and provide display space for local artists, producers, artisans and community groups. The Centre has held exhibitions showcasing our beautiful, diverse, fascinating and intriguing landscape, history and population. The ever-popular Cards for Good Causes once more found their only home in the local area within the Centre's four walls, where they sold nearly as many charity cards and goods as they did in 2019. The Centre continued to support the local Scouts, supplying walking leaflets for distribution to members during the first lockdown and at Christmas with their Scout Pot.

Moving forward, with the prospect of restrictions being eased, Todmorden Information Centre is hopeful for a huge upsurge in events and therefore in business both in person, online and over the phone. This will not only benefit the Centre but the organisations involved and the town itself. Without the Centre local organisations would suffer irreparable damage on their reopening - for example even with the option of buying tickets direct from the organisers, the Centre accounts for between a quarter and a third of all sales of tickets for the Hippodrome Theatre.



Since the first lockdown in March, Todmorden Information Centre has been the only Information Centre operating within the local area and will continue to be the only one following Calderdale Council's decision to close their remaining centres and the reduction of the tourist information services in surrounding areas. This leaves the Trust with the challenge of promoting both Todmorden and its wider area to a regional, national and an international audience.

With challenges come opportunities - the Trust is looking to build on the lessons that have been learnt through the COVID-19 epidemic. During the lockdown in November, it successfully implemented a click and collect service for all the goods, including Charity Christmas Cards, that could be sold online, something which had not been done before. The service proved so popular that customers have requested the service continues even when restrictions are lifted. The promotion and increased presence of both the Centre and Todmorden itself online will be a top priority for the coming year. The Trust anticipates a surge of visitors and a continuation of the staycation trend throughout 2021 and the first task will be to entice travellers to Todmorden. In order to help with this, the Trust has successfully applied for and received a grant to improve the technology it has at its disposal and to provide consultation with a social media expert, including training for all staff. It is also exploring the possibility of improved accessibility, with audio described walk leaflets.

However, the Trust does not anticipate the majority of its customer interactions to be virtual. With the expected increase in visitors to the area, coupled with the fact there are no other Information Centres operating, it expects the footfall to be one of the highest in its 33 years. This has already been seen with requests for information covering the wider area increasing. For example, a couple from Nottingham found the Centre online, contacted the staff over the phone for details about how to get to Oxenhope and the walking books they would need during their stay. As a result of that call the couple made a special trip to Todmorden, somewhere they were not planning to, in order to purchase the walking books suggested. They then spent the majority of the day in Todmorden and have plans to return.

As a result of the closure of the valley's other Information Centres the Trust intends to be proactive in offering its services to local organisations that may have previously used the Halifax or Hebden Bridge Centres. It also expects to expand its offering of local products online to fill this void. To more effectively research the gaps in provision and how best the Centre can plug these, the Trust is planning on renewing its business plan. This will be done in conjunction with the social media and website consultation that is being provided via the grant mentioned previously. Whilst the Centre may be able to provide links to the wider area, the promotion of Todmorden and Todmorden businesses will remain a priority.

Todmorden Information Centre is a beloved institution within the town, established in 1987 by a group of Todmordians who wished to see Todmorden rightly claim its place in the top destinations within Yorkshire, the North and the UK. This desire is continually being realised as more and more people choose the town to spend a day, a holiday and their future. The evidence can be seen in the Trust's Friends of the TIC scheme which, even during lockdown, has been well supported. With further work being planned by the Centre and other organisations Todmorden's star will continue to rise, making the Centre an essential first point of contact for visitors and potential residents, as well as a regular first call for the local, regional and national media.

Todmorden Information Centre is an essential signposting organisation promoting recreational, heritage and food tourism and is a door of opportunity for visitors and businesses alike. Without the Centre's presence many other organisations would have suffered more than they have due to Covid-19 and would suffer in the future. The value provided by the Centre in these interesting times cannot be underestimated - by investing in Todmorden Information Centre you are investing in Todmorden itself.