



May I take this opportunity to welcome you all to the 144th Annual General Meeting of the Port of Falmouth Chamber of Commerce and the first here at The Falmouth Hotel. Firstly, I would like to thank the members of the Committee Malcolm Farrar and Jane Thomas for their continued support and efforts throughout the last year.

It is very clear from the present economic reports that the coming year is likely to be a difficult one for everyone, and this will no doubt impact on the local community. With rising fuel costs, forthcoming strikes and airport fiascos, it will be interesting to see how the town copes with the economic downturn. No doubt in such times there will be winners and losers but I think here in Falmouth we are well placed to survive. We have a thriving shipbuilding industry and a really diverse high street full of individual and unique small businesses who have a strong will to succeed.

This last year of office has been a mixed affair with member numbers rising and falling. Our membership currently numbers 46 which is one of the largest in the County. That being said the numbers of members attending regular meetings has diminished over the last year or so and we are working towards improving attendances.

We have informally polled those who attend to establish what improvements they might wish to see and accordingly we have moved the venue from the formal surroundings of the Town Council Chambers to the more relaxed surroundings of the Falmouth Hotel, and have attempted to make meetings more varied by inviting guest speakers such as Simon Leek today. Likewise the committee have met separately to deal with minor housekeeping matters to deal with the Chambers finances and other paperwork to ensure such routine matters are not dealt with by full members meetings.

I regularly attend the Town Traders meeting and Town Forum. The size of the committee limits the amount of active work we can undertake, but in many respects the Town Forum now acts as a good sounding board for formulating issues relating to parking, development and infrastructure issues and I fully endorse their work.

The projects we have been involved in this year have been diverse:

Prior to the launch of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) we consulted with Falmouth Breakfast Club and put forward our proposals to Cornwall Council with disappointing results. We remain of the view the process of consultation was deeply flawed and rushed. It remains to be seen whether the LEP successfully achieve its goals, I deeply hope it will, but remain sceptical.

Earlier in the year we collaborated with Plymouth School of Tourism & Hospitality (part of Plymouth University) in a project whereby their students would focus on Falmouth for their degree project on tourism and hospitality. In October 2010 a conference was held at the Falmouth Hotel and later students reviewed the towns facilities. Since then I have met with several groups of students to provide my views on the town. I hope this information assisted them in realising the many positive aspects of the town. However, their projects were not simply limited to this, as they were required to also look for negative factors such as signage which might deter visitors to the town. The Chamber agreed to provide a £100 prize to the best student project. We will shortly begin judging the projects and hope to announce the results shortly.



Our website remains a good focus for businesses and consumers alike. In an average month the site receives 230-260 visits and in May 2011 the site received 486 visits which is nearly double the previous year. Perhaps more importantly we have 204 followers on Twitter, we have done 81 tweets and are listed 15 times by other Tweeters. It appears to me that this is something members could exploit in terms of letting us know when they have sales promotions and wish to attract a wider audience because anything that is posted on the website is automatically posted on Twitter thus ensuring an immediate wider 'audience'.

Looking at the subjects searched 505 hits (the highest) related to our employment questions answers. Whilst, 482 hits, related to our members directory. This proves how valuable the website is for members and why they should pay the extra £10 for the full listing on the site. Google proved to be the most popular search engine used by visitors to the site.

We also carried out a members survey which received a favourable number of responses, 21 members returned the forms. From the statistics we are able to determine that:-

- 76% of members polled had visited our website.
- 90% thought we should widen our activities.
- 71 % said they regularly attended meetings.
- 76% thought we should run networking events for members.
- 76% thought we should collaborate with non business and educational establishments although only 67% thought we should develop international links.
- 43% considered the Chamber adequately represented the local business community.

As can be seen from the figures there is generally a positive attitude towards the Chamber and what is expected from it and we will be studying the results in more detail and acting on our findings over the coming year. However, improving on the last point with whilst experiencing the declining meeting attendances will provide a challenge to reconcile!.

Earlier in the year the Radio station BBC Channel 5 came to the town and I was one of the few people to be interviewed on Budget Day. I have also spoken to journalists ranging from The Packet, Western Morning News to The Sunday Times about issues impacting on our business community.

In the coming year we will continue to review our role and how we might more successfully promote the Chamber within the local and wider Cornwall business community. However, this will be constrained by the level of involvement by members in the meetings and a willingness to participate in Chamber activities in developing its role further.