

## Keep Trade Local - Thames Valley Update

Since its launch nationally just over 2 years ago the Keep Trade Local campaign has helped support local Thames Valley business organisations and high streets fly the flag for local businesses. We wanted to stem the tide of business closures and defend the choice and diversity on the high street that customers deserve. After all, that's us!

Briefly, the campaign addresses several issues that affect small businesses. These are:

- Planning
- Parking Charges
- Business Rates Relief
- Crime Prevention
- Post Office Closures
- Public Procurement

We were tasked on a regional level to engage with other business interest groups and local government to try and improve the lot of small businesses locally.

In Burnham local traders wanted help promoting the high street with its unique collection of independent boutique, specialist and essential services shops. Where so many towns have become 'clone' towns, Burnham has a unique character that they wanted to preserve. With help from the campaign I am happy to report that they have a 100% occupation rate and no chain stores, ensuring plenty of choice for local shoppers.

In Banbury and Bicester Tony Baldry MP turned out to support local businesses and to promote the Keep Trade Local message. This support from politicians was reflected in a number of towns where the campaign was launched, thus raising the profile of the FSB with national politicians and the local press alike.

In Buckingham John Bercow MP (now Speaker) was presented with his award for promoting small business at the launch meeting. In Buckingham the campaign raised the profile of small businesses with the town council. We were able to explain to the council how important it was to consult and consider smaller businesses when considering planning applications and parking charges. The campaign has subsequently opened channels with several other town councils and local authorities, especially in the area of public procurement.

In Stone local businesses appeared on the front page of the Bucks Herald, reminding readers of the importance of local business to local communities, both in terms of services and the support they give to local schools and projects. Linda Walton, chair of the South Bucks & Aylesbury branch, was quoted in the Bucks Herald saying: "Small businesses and independent retailers are at the heart of our economy and local communities, creating growth and jobs. They must be sufficiently supported."

In Reading the campaign was backed by the Reading Post and was given huge support locally by the paper. They covered the launch of the campaign on the front page and used it as a spring board to encourage readers to support local businesses. Rob Wilson, MP for Reading East, added his support to the scheme.

So two years on there is no doubt that the Keep trade Local Campaign has had a very positive impact on public perception, raised awareness with the local press and politicians and encouraged the buying public to 'Keep Trade Local'.

The campaign is still going and we aim to extend it to other towns in the region. If we can help **your** community raise awareness of its local businesses, please get in touch.