



Our towns
Our future

Leading a local revival



photos are provided courtesy of Torfaen CBC

One in five people in the UK live in or around small rural towns

– many of them traditional market towns, others former industrial or coastal towns.

Our small towns will face many problems in the future: the loss of variety and closure of shops in town centres; increasing centralisation of health services, causing access problems for an ageing population; inflated housing prices driving young people out of the

towns where they were brought up; the decline of traditional industries; and the pull of jobs in cities, which means that many towns are becoming dormitories for their bigger neighbours.

But all need not be gloom and doom. Towns have many positive points – they are good places to start businesses, popular places to live with cohesive communities. In a new burst of local energy, thousands of projects have been developed through local initiative

and community-led planning, most often led by town partnerships of businesses, community organisations, local councils and individual volunteers, helping to tackle the difficult issues of change.

Supporting this local effort is Action for Market Towns – the national charity committed to the vitality and viability of our small towns, which offers training, consultancy, a range of member services and national advocacy for the policies needed to help our towns.

... come and join us!

It can be lonely trying to plan and deliver future improvements in your town; but as an Action for Market Towns member you are part of a family of people who, like you, are trying to put something back to help their towns.

AMT is there to help you, with a wide range of member services which can save you both time and money. In different ways, our services help to meet the needs and aspirations of community partnerships, town councils and local authorities.

We bring people together, through the annual **National Convention**, *THE* market towns event of the year, and through regional and county events to share information and experience.

AMT is in the forefront of using new technology to link-up people with an interest in market town issues – through our monthly e-newsletter *Insight*; by a continually updated website with special features for members; and through electronic forums and community networking.

Linking all AMT activity is the Towns Alive programme

– a five year Big Lottery-funded scheme to raise the game of our market towns in four ways: sharing experience and best practice through the Towns-4-Towns programme; providing vital training through the Market Towns Academy; analysing and developing policy through the Knowledge Hub; and providing a National Voice for market towns.

AMT members enjoy free or discounted access to services.



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The discount on the delegate fee at the National Convention or the cost of our partnership insurance alone makes it worth joining Action for Market Towns. All the other member benefits really help us develop our skills and share experience with others.

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Len Turner
Chair of Wiltshire Forum of Community
Area Partnerships.



LOTTERY FUNDED

Learning from experts and each other

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The study tour in Thirsk brought people from around the area to share their ideas and aspirations - and let us showcase an award winning cinema project in the town. Study tours are a good way of raising people's aspirations and sharing ideas.

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Steve Leatherbarrow,
Economic Development Officer,
North Yorkshire County Council



Community-led planning, through local organisations such as town councils and community partnerships, has a proven record in helping plan for the future of our towns. But all organisations, particularly those relying on volunteers, have training needs to improve the skills of their members and their effectiveness in delivering their objectives. That's where the Towns Alive **Market Towns Academy** comes in. A diagnostic programme on the AMT website helps to assess training needs and then a relevant programme of training can be proposed – much of it delivered online.

One of the greatest resources of Action for Market Towns' national network is the towns themselves and the innovative projects local people devise and implement. Each year, the **National Market Town Awards** (in association with the Press Association) celebrate the diversity and imagination of projects to revitalise our towns. AMT member towns can share good ideas and good practice with each other through the innovative **Towns-4-Towns** programme and take part in discussion forums and a community networking site linked to the AMT website. Members also get a discounted price for attending study tours and seminars.



influencing the policymakers

Action for Market Towns was formed in response to a national neglect of our small towns and the problems they face. Through its **Knowledge Hub**, AMT coordinates research and develops policy proposals to assist and influence national, regional and local decision-makers.

Working in association with local authorities, businesses and third-sector organisations, AMT is leading campaigns to establish a **typology of small towns** and champion **community-led planning**. Together, these will provide a bedrock of a new localism

and ensure that planning at a town level complements wider strategies. Other key policy campaign areas include **economic development**; **affordable housing**; and the **provision of rural services**.



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Communities and Local Government recognises the valuable support Action for Market Towns provides to small towns and their residents. With the support of CLG's Empowerment Fund, they will be enabling communities to engage even more effectively in shaping planning decisions, including issues such as planning for new affordable housing and tackling climate change. We look forward to working with them as their projects progress.

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Dr. Henry Tam, Deputy Director, Community Empowerment Delivery, Communities and Local Government.

amt-i: a helping hand for towns



Local initiative is at the heart of market town revitalisation. But often, local partnerships may not have the knowledge, skills – or the time – to undertake vital work. Action for Market Towns has established a research and consultancy arm – **amt-i** to help. It can provide towns with

a range of services – from loyalty cards to car parking surveys. amt-i also has the expertise to design and run community consultation events and surveys.

Nationally, amt-i has undertaken a variety of research, from the health of local markets to how towns have

coped with the recession. amt-i also manages the award-winning town benchmarking programme which enables towns to track the progress of their economy from year-to-year and compare it with others.

■ Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a web-based system managed by amt-i that can help towns capture and track progress for twelve key performance indicators including the variety of shops, business confidence and the provision of adequate and convenient car parking facilities. A group of 15 neighbouring towns in the Welland area of the East Midlands is amongst the towns that have been using the benchmarking process for regular year-on-year comparisons. More towns are joining all the time.

■ BASE

Through the Base training initiative, amt-i provides short, snappy and totally relevant business training courses, seminars and workshops tailored to meet the needs of anybody who owns or works in an independent business in a market town or village in the UK. During its first year, Base trained in excess of 1000 people from over 25 towns across the country.

■ Strategic Analysis

amt-i's strategic research work has included a joint piece of research with the Centre for Local Economic Strategy on the impacts of the recession of market towns. Undertaken on behalf of the Commission for Rural Communities, this work typifies how amt-i can draw-on extensive member contacts and link to AMT's existing bank of case studies.



To see how amt-i can help YOUR town, go to: www.amt-i.co.uk



Come and join us

and take advantage of a range of membership services and benefits that will help you to lead a local revival in your town:

- learning from experts and each other: Towns-4-Towns and the Market Towns Academy
- influencing policy: Knowledge Hub and National Voice
- a helping hand for towns: amt-i

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During nearly 20 years on Countryfile I've visited just about every corner of the British countryside and come across many dedicated, enthusiastic people who, by their efforts, have been responsible for the success of their local communities. But their work needs to be highlighted, to be brought to a wider public - which is why I am delighted to be involved with AMT's Towns Alive programme. It rewards some excellent projects and hopefully will encourage others to get involved in their own communities.

John Craven, broadcaster and presenter of BBC One's "Countryfile" programme, speaking at the launch of the Towns Alive programme.

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For details of services and membership, visit www.towns.org.uk



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Action for Market Towns is an independent, national membership organisation dedicated to maintaining vibrant and viable small towns. AMT's work is funded by subscription from members; contracts to deliver specific programmes and the profits from amt-i's research and consultancy. AMT's success is measured in the health and vitality of local organisations and the impact that they have on the ground in making their towns better places to live and do business.

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