

LET'S GET TO WORK

TRADERS turned out in force last Thursday for crunch talks aimed at revitalising Helensburgh's "dying" retail scene.

They packed the Commodore Hotel's Operry Suite to form action aimed at saving the Borough's town centre.

Representatives of organisations including Helensburgh Community Council, the town's Retailers' Association and Royal Bibles all attended the event, organised by Borough woman Melanie Andrews.

Chairwoman Melanie and speaker MSP Jim Mather fielded questions from the audience.

Derek Anderson, Chief Executive of the Helensburgh Partnership and Chair Bill Blackledge, sat alongside the audience, alongside many of the area's Argyle and Boat Council representatives.

Presented traders spoke of a dip in trade and demanded immediate action.

Many asked what they perceive as the lack of investment in the town — from organisations including Argyle and Boat Council — as others list out at the various

issues faced out in the town over the years, addressing aspects of retailing, environment and issues such as parking, without any changes coming to fruition.

Helensburgh Partnership chairman Bill Blackledge told the meeting that the solution commissioned by the organisation was currently being carried out.

He added: "The Helensburgh Partnership was set up to bring investment to the town centre and the whole town. It would be totally wrong for the Partnership to give treatment without a proper diagnosis."

But his statement met with criticism from one member of the audience, who fired back: "Do you want to wait for the patient to die?"

Partnership bosses, however, are adamant that the future of retailing in the town could be a bright one. A spokesman for the body added: "Our most consistent tech is that the prospects for retail in Helensburgh are very, very good."

"The population in Helensburgh is the indicator to retail as is the size and style of the area which are available. What



OUT IN FORCE: Interested parties listen to organiser Melanie Andrews open the meeting. Inset shows: Jim Mather and Melanie Andrews.

By Tracy-Ann Carmichael

Helensburgh needs it if it is going to satisfy the demand for bigger, modern units. If we do, people like Sainsbury's, Marks and Spencer and the Tesco group and all the rest are very, very keen to come to Helensburgh."

One member of the audience disagreed, however, saying that a change to bigger units and national retailers would be "sterilising the town".

Business systems called for Helensburgh to be locked by specialist marketing highlighting it as a tourist town with a single identity and called for a "Helensburgh brand".

One woman told the meeting that the town has to be encouraged to spread to tourism, saying: "The approach into Helensburgh has to look better. We've got

woods growing out of the gutter, weeds growing out of walls and small trees and saplings growing out of buildings. Even the approach looking into Helensburgh from Cambus looks terrible, you've got the old petrol station there."

"I think it's an utter disgrace that approach to the town should be in such a state."

Captain MacGill, chairman of the Helensburgh Retailers' Association, said: "We are focusing just on bringing people into the town, most of the customers we should be looking at are people in the town already. I believe the critical mass of the town is too small. It has to be created."

"When we look at a major retailer whose invest-

ment is thwarted because of the ground planning process, surely Dobbies, what message does that send out?

"For this town to come forward we have to increase the critical mass as we don't have a major retailer coming out of the town, having jobs elsewhere in Dobbies here."

Tell us what you think – do you shop in Helensburgh? If not, why not? Use the contact details on page 4 to get in touch.