

Item 4

Feedback from site visits to Stevenage Indoor Market 19 07 2017 & Luton Market 24 07 2017 & Emerging Recommendations

Speaking to the Market Traders the issues that affect them appear to be:

- Location linked to footfall was seen as the biggest issue – anecdotally when medical staff were provided with parking in the multi storey car park when Lister Hospital was being rebuilt there was an upturn in customers for fresh produce

Options – That the Committee make a recommendation that the future alternative location of the indoor market be included in the town centre regeneration plans

- Since Boots and (former Woolworths) Wilkinson's have closed the pedestrian access from the back of their shops leading to the multi-storey car park this has had a major impact on the footfall for the market

Options – Many attempts have been made with these shops to open discussions regarding re-opening the access from the back of the shops to the carpark & indoor market without any success. The shops are not interested in opening up these access points for customers as they are not convinced there is a business case for doing so and only a security risk to them.

- If the Market is not moving venue (Town Centre Regeneration?) then the Council should look at the fabric of the building/quality of the pitches/shutters.

Options – Depending on the long-term decision regarding the car park then the Committee should consider a recommendation to improve the fabric of the indoor market and the shutters for the pitches and the floor surface.

- Continuity of pitches opening times is an ongoing issue “make traders trade”

Options – Recommendation that Officers look at incentives for Market Traders to keep to the opening trading times and days.

- The general economic climate/squeezed incomes
- Competition from online and discount retailers (affects some traders more than others)
- Changes to shopping patterns / older shoppers not being replaced with younger demographic
- Car parking charges – The Market Traders Association (MTA) asked if the Council could make a concession on the parking charges for market

shoppers (e.g. if they were to shop over an agreed value in the market then their chip coin could be validated in the indoor market to provide free parking?) – However, this issue is linked to legal agreements with Westgate Shopping Centre Car Park (currently there is a price match between the Council and Westgate, so the Council can't offer a lower fee without Westgate's agreement/renegotiation).

History and Options - The MTA Committee requested in January 2017 for free parking in the MSCP, but the Council decided to give them 30 minutes for 50p, with a promise this would be reviewed after 3 months. The MTA Committee have asked again for free parking in the MSCP and a meeting has been arranged with Cllr Joan Lloyd and Tom Pike in August 2017. As above any agreement would need to be negotiated with Westgate.

- MTA reps spoken to Arthur Howard and Dave stated that the last year was a particularly hard year (down 40% on takings)
- Rateable Value – thresholds changed in 2012 when the rent and rates were split (12/20K threshold?)
- Members/officers met traders of fruit and veg/ethnic food, fishmonger, accountant/health food, records stall, cycles, gifts, bespoke cakes, blinds

Positives:

- Events in the market, armed forces day, school treasure hunt, Easter event (although some of the traders were not keen on these events and described them as not adding much value to their business)
- The MTA suggested that pushing the food offer and arranging more food related/diverse/ethnic food events could be an option if they are well promoted. Another option could be the promotion of themed events such as wedding events, which could be promoted between traders in the market
- The progressive traders do a lot of self-promotion/offers. Demi's Cakes and the Fishmonger were very attractive pitches and had very enthusiastic traders (as were many that we spoke to)
- Importance of online presence and use of social media

Current temporary issues

- Park Place construction – the market traders/officers have done what they can re temporary signage but it's having an impact on customers accessing this way.

Follow up & info requested:

- Provide stats to Members on the period of free Saturday parking (April – July 2014) (see separately circulated papers)
- Following the site visit it was suggested that perhaps we should speak to Tina Benson re relationship with the activities in the town centre - The Garages and Markets Manager has reported that the "Town Centre Manager said in February when she started that she would look into ways

of how to incorporate the Indoor Market with town centre events. SBC attend monthly meetings with the Town Centre working group and I did bring it to the attention of the TC Manager that the Indoor Market was supposed to be included in the TC events and it is not, and the events have been planned from April until the end of this year.”

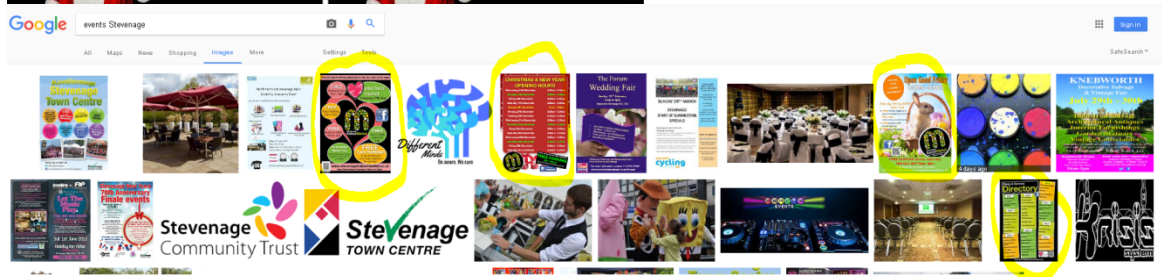
- Also Martha Levi-Smith be asked to comment on the work that is happening on the wayfinders in the town centre. The Garages and Markets Manager has reported that “We received an approval for chalk spray adverts on pavements. We have durable stencils and washable chalk spray to advertise market location. (Please see attached which was a trial advert we did a couple of months ago) – it had positive comments from both traders and customers. The spray stays on the pavement for approx. 7 day or longer (depending on weather) and we can re-do it when needed.”



Follow up & info requested:

- The Scrutiny Officer asked if QR codes have been used which are picked up by smart phones advertising the Indoor Market. The Market and Estates Officer has stated that “the Council have already been using QR codes – please see attached examples of leaflets/adverts. Also we do SEO on all our photos, i.e. can be seen below (when typing ‘events Stevenage’ 4 of our adverts will come up in the first two rows in Google Images section (highlighted in yellow). All of our Facebook posts are also focus around Stevenage and surrounding area to raise brand awareness amongst local people.”





- The Scrutiny Officer met a trader who was less confident and did not have an online presence. The Garages and Markets Manager stated that the particular trader has been offered help on their business like moving from a poor area of the market to a better area; going to WENTA for free training on Websites, Social Media and marketing. Each new trader has a 3 Month New Trader interview. This is approximately a 15 minute meeting to see whether they follow what they stated in their business plan/application form and check whether there is anything we can help with.” It is up to each trader to listen to and act upon the advice provided by SBC Market Officers and WENTA.

Visit to Luton Indoor Market

During August the Scrutiny Officer and Councillors Jim Brown and Laurie Chester visited Luton Indoor Market. Luton Market currently has 117 traderable stalls which cover just under 21000 sq ft of space (just the market stall areas). There are currently 20 empty market stalls. The lowest footfall week was 16000 customers through but they are averaging around 18900 a week. The Markets Manager can draw up licenses for varying lengths from 1, 3, 6 or 12 months lengths and can discuss discounts with traders as each stall is priced differently according to size and location, which is reviewed regularly.

Advantages compared to Stevenage Indoor Market:

Location - The entrance to the Market is from the multi-storey car park which also is the same location for the Shopping Mall. This creates a natural footfall for the market with shoppers walking through the market from the car park on their way to the shopping mall. It also benefits from the facilities for lifts and toilets being directly at the entrance/exit from the market into the mall.

Floor Levels - all the same and have a professional uniform colour. The requirement to have traders on raised plinths in Stevenage due to flooding issues at the location is negative as looks messy in comparison.

Uniform look and quality of the pitches – The signage above and around the pitches look professional, attractive and colourful. The shutters are of a high quality.

Options:

As noted earlier a possible recommendation that the plinths and pitch shutters be replaced with a uniform style and design. A further recommendation could be made to invite design/graphic design/photography students from North Herts College to work on a “live brief” to enhance the images on vacant pitches and around the market.

Greater number and diversity of traders – The quality and selection of traders is more diverse than Stevenage.

Food offer - The food offer is extensive in Luton Market with a wide range of food offers clustered in one area of the market and also a large, more traditional café/restaurant in another location in the market.

Options: Officers to look at ways that a more varied food offer could be provided at the market. Perhaps an invitation to catering students from North Herts College or other establishments to have an occasional food stall at the market to provide an alternative food offer could be investigated. This would give students a place to trial their own catering and provide a real business opportunity and could be linked to themed events at the Market.

Footfall – The number of shoppers at Luton Market is far greater than Stevenage Market, this is primarily due to a better location, the design of the car park moving shoppers through the market on their way to the shopping mall. Also the overall diverse and attractive offer of the market helps.

There is no parking concessions given to shoppers using the market and it is run by a specialist independent market company.

Observations of Watford Market

The Scrutiny Officer has arranged a site visit for interested Members in September but undertook an informal visit earlier in July. The new location of the Watford market is not popular with traders and was moved from its former site for commercial purposes but is now cited in a different area as an external covered market. Pitches are very small and open to the weather from the sides so in winter months this would not be attractive to shoppers or the traders. One of the entrances to the market is accessed from the pedestrianised Watford High Street which is positive, but this is under a road flyover which is less attractive to potential shoppers. As well as the street access covered market, which wraps around a commercial building, there is also a steel structure offering stalls on 2 storeys where the food offer is located.