

Environment & Economy Select Committee, 7 November 2017
Revised Emerging Recommendations for Indoor Market Review

PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATION - That officers be requested to engage an external company to carry out market research in order to find out what kind of market offer is required by the Town.

Reason – This tackles the fundamental question regarding the indoor market, what type of market is desired by shoppers and what type of market does the Council wish to support. This would provide some data on which to inform future decisions, and without which the other recommendations of the review could have some impact on improving the fortunes of the market but do little in the long run if the market is not supported by shoppers. It is recommended by the Committee that following the outcome of the independent market research that the remainder of the scrutiny review recommendations be revisited to see if they are still relevant at that time.

The following recommendations would be considered by the Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources and by the Strategic Director and other officers when the outcome of the independent market research has been completed.

RECOMMENDATION 1 - That options for a future alternative location for the indoor market be included in the town centre regeneration plans.

Reason - Location linked to footfall was seen as the biggest barrier to Stevenage Indoor Market being a success.

RECOMMENDATION 2 – That the Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources discuss with officers the possibility of a future ~~open market~~ acquisition of the freehold for a suitable town square retail establishment creating an arcade linking the town centre square with the Indoor Market entrance.

Reason – Creating a walk way link between the Town Centre Square and the rear of the shops and the entrance to the Indoor Market would break the physical barrier to the Market and car park from the Town Centre Square. The building would be used as an arcade creating income for the Council. Members are aware that there could be a number of issues that would be obstacles to this happening, including the commercial considerations and the physical floor levels for disabled access. However, if these obstacles could be overcome, creating a physical access to and from the Town Centre Square would be a potential transformative development for the Indoor Market as it would then have a link to the regenerated town centre which it currently lacks. **2 October Update** - Officers to identify costings for the recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION 3 - That officers revisit this issue with the shops to see what incentives would be required to restore access to the multi-storey car park as this would significantly improve the potential footfall of the market and would also restore a much needed pedestrian route to and from the car park to the town centre.

Reason - Since Boots and (the former Woolworths shop) 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. Until now the shops have shown little interest in re-establishing this link, siting storage and security as their main issues. If security could be improved then the shops would also benefit from increased footfall.

~~RECOMMENDATION 4 - If the Market is not moving venue as part of the Town Centre Regeneration Plans, then the Council should look at improving the fabric of the building including upgrading the quality of the pitches removing the raised floors, replacing the shutters and upgrading the floor surface which could be linked to a future upgrade to the car park.~~

~~Reason— The current infrastructure of the car park and the indoor market is an uninviting environment. If the market is to continue in the current location then the building should be improved. There could be scope for more of the building being openly visible from the service road such as the butchers and blind shop, which makes it more obvious to potential shoppers that there is a Market operating in the building.~~

Recommendation Removed – it was considered that improvements to the fabric of the building would not increase the footfall to the market and would therefore be of little benefit and at further cost to the Council.

RECOMMENDATION 5 - That officers look at incentives for Market Traders to keep to the opening trading times and days. Members would recommended that the Garages and Market Manager discuss with the MTA altering the current rules of 'rewards and punishment' to Market Traders to see if this issue can be improved.

Reason – Continuity of pitches opening times is an ongoing issue. It is confusing for customers who may have visited to use one particular stall if that stall is not open when the rest of the market is open. It doesn't help the reputation of the market and can generate negative publicity.

~~RECOMMENDATION 6 - That the Executive Portfolio Holder for Resources discuss with officers in Finance and the Car Parks Manager the options open to varying the parking charge for Market shoppers, looking at free validation or free/discounted parking.~~

~~Reason— The Market Traders Association (MTA) have requested that Council consider concessions on the parking charges for market shoppers, from free parking to chip coins, to discounts to aid footfall. The Council has introduced a low cost short stay option in the MSCP and Westgate and is reviewing effects in the two car parks. Members would like officers to explore options suggested in the recommendation to see if there is anything that can be done regarding parking to help the Market Traders.~~

Recommendation removed - as these measures would need to be introduced to all car parks but officers to identify costings and data for the usage of the car park.

RECOMMENDATION 7 - That officers look at ways that a more varied food offer could be provided at the market.

Reason – Compared to the food offer at Luton Market which has a variety of different foods available, Stevenage Market food offer appears far less appealing. The review does not wish to be prescriptive about how a more varied food options should be provided but 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.

Recommendation removed - as food offer within the market could not be increased unless another location could be found to accommodate other street food traders. The cost to support the existing food offer is expensive in the building as it is currently configured.

RECOMMENDATION 8 - That officers discuss with the Town Centre Manager further ways to further incorporate the Indoor Market with Town Centre events that are organised by the Town Centre Manger.

Reason – It appears that close liaison between Town Centre activities and the Indoor Market is not happening as often and as routinely as Members would expect. Members would like to see more active links between town centre activities and the Indoor Market. Members are aware that officers attend monthly meetings with the Town Centre Working Group so are asking that this issue is looked at this meeting.

RECOMMENDATION 9 - That officers discuss with the MTA ways to encourage a wider diversity of traders available in the Market.

Reason – It was apparent to Members that there was a wider variety of traders at the Luton Indoor Market than at the Stevenage Market. A wider selection of traders helps with the appeal of the Market as a shopping experience.

RECOMMENDATION 10 – That officers be requested to consider the safety concerns referred to regarding the physical access to the market including crossing points and speed limits.

Reason – The current pedestrian access to the Market is not ideal so any measures that can be implemented to improve this would be welcomed. However, Members recognise that there are physical and technical constraints to what can be delivered at this location.