

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Tuesday, 7 November 2017

Time: 6.00 pm

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair) (Chair), Matthew Hurst (Vice-Chair) (Vice Chair), Laurie Chester, James Fraser, Liz Harrington and John Lloyd

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00 pm
End Time: 7.30 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors D Bainbridge, R Broom and J Brown.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 2 OCTOBER 2017

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 2 October 2017, are approved as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

3 FINAL INTERVIEWS FOR THE INDOOR MARKET REVIEW

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting including Tina Benson – Stevenage Town Centre Manager, Clive Taylor from DC Collectables and Shaz Setoudeh and Louis Lobjoit from Lenny's Fresh Fish Stall.

The three Market Traders raised the following challenges regarding the Indoor Market:

- Concern was expressed that a lot of new traders did not last more than six months. As a way to help traders last beyond six months, it was suggested that the increase in the rent payment for new traders could be staggered to help them manage their income through the initial start-up period, which was most critical to new traders;
- Could more casual traders be encouraged to use the void spaces for the indoor market for a fixed one day fee;
- Could the specialist markets be encouraged to take up void spaces in the indoor market;
- Could other alternative uses be found for void stalls such as Charities, Schools or other public sector promotions offering free use of the stall. It was

suggested that contacting these groups in person rather than in writing could be more fruitful;

- Could the Council relax its rules on duplication of traders in the Indoor Market as it was considered that competition could improve the offer;
- Could free WiFi be offered to Indoor Market customers as an incentive to shoppers?; and
- Could the Council target market traders from other markets to offer products that were not currently available.
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In response to the comments by the traders and representatives, Members were advised by the Garages and Markets Manager and the Town Centre Manager that

- The possibility of staggering the payments for new traders would be investigated;
- Offering void spaces to casual traders would need to be carefully managed as this could be seen as a disincentive to other traders;
- External market traders from specialist markets might not want to take void stalls in the indoor market as it was suggested that their primary concern would be footfall which was greater in the town centre;
- Schools and Charities had been invited previously to take void stalls but only two schools due to limited capacity;
- There had already been some relaxing of the rules around the types and numbers of trades in the market and further discussions with the MTA would be undertaken to move this forward;
- The cost of providing free Wi-fi would be £20,000 with £2,000 a year running costs. However, the Town Centre Manager would be looking at introducing free Wi-fi in the Town Centre in the future which would cover the indoor market; and
- Targeting traders from other markets would need to be handled with sensitivity.

It was **RESOLVED** (i) that the comments from the Market trader representatives and the Town Centre Manager be noted;

(ii) that the comments from officers in response to the traders set out above be noted;

(ii) that the representatives from the Market trader representatives and the Town Centre Manager be thanked for their attendance

4 **OFFICER RESPONSE TO ISSUES MEMBERS RAISED AT THE LAST MEETING**

In addition those issues raised at the last meeting, which were (i) safety concerns and access arrangements; (ii) discussion with Wilko regarding opening their rear door; and (iii) the height of the plinths, the Strategic Director Tom Pike updated Members on the indicative costs of purchasing a commercial property to provide a walk way to the market.

Currently the corner unit of Market Place is on the market for £900,000, fitting out a shop of comparable size is approximately £300,000 with business rates of circa £40,000. Smaller units would be commensurately cheaper than these figures.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report and the officer update be noted.

5 AMENDED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INDOOR MARKET REVIEW

The Scrutiny Officer provided an update to Members on the report.

With regards to Recommendation 4 (upgrading some features of the infrastructure) which Members had previously suggested removing, officers provided more information regarding this issue. It was accepted that not all options could be pursued. However, the Garages and Markets Manager provided Members with indicative figures for the cost of renewing the roller blinds and facia which would be circa £50,000 new secure shutters would cost in the region of £100,000. Members were minded to retain this draft recommendation as an option as some improvements to the look of the market could provide a better shopping experience.

Similarly, Members were minded to reinstate an amended recommendation 6, “that officers consider as part of the budget process an improved car parking offer for all Council operated car parks which could benefit potential market shoppers”

In addition to the draft recommendations in the report, Members wished to added an additional four recommendations including:

- (i) considering a staggered rent for new traders;
- (ii) approaching other traders from different markets;
- (iii) consider approaching an independent company to administrate the market on a commercial basis for the Council and
- (iv) further promote other uses of void spaces and to casual traders.

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft recommendations at item 5 with the above amendments be agreed with the addition of the four additional recommendations listed above.

6 URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS

None

7 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not needed

8 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

CHAIR