

Open Market Reconfiguration

MEETING: Community, Customers and Organisational Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 26 June 2014

REPORT BY: Town Centre Operations Manager

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

1.1 One of the key priorities of the Council's Corporate Plan 2014/15 is to make Chesterfield a thriving borough and, to succeed in achieving this aim, Chesterfield town centre needs to be attractive and vibrant for both residents and visitors.

1.2 Town Centres are facing many challenges, the needs of shoppers are changing and several alternative shopping options are now available and widely used, such as the internet, out of town shopping centres, etc.

1.3 The Council has recently invested over £4 million on the refurbishment of the Market Hall and there are several regeneration plans which will impact on the retail offer of the town centre in the future, including the Northern Gateway and Waterside. It is important, however, that there is a sustainable future for the outdoor market as it has a pivotal role in creating the unique offer of Chesterfield town centre.

2.0 **CURRENT SITUATION**

2.1 The current occupancy levels for the outdoor market are as follows:

- Monday – 48%
- Friday – 50 %
- Thursday – 85%
- Saturday – 59%

Although the general market occupancy figures are low, there are still over 100 stalls let on a market day, between Market Place and New

Square. Chesterfield does have a strong market offer, despite the poor perception of empty stalls.

- 2.2 The current layout of Market Place comprises 151 stalls set out in 12 horizontal rows. This is split into quarters by walkways from north to south and east to west, with the east to west walkway having seating and weather cover protection (Appendix 1).
- 2.3 Only the top row and bottom row of Market Place have stalls that face outwards onto the street, all the rest face inwards into the aisles. Therefore, out of 151 stalls only 27 can be classed as having an open aspect with clear sight lines and good footfall. Of these, 10 are permanently occupied by 2 fruit and vegetable traders and the remaining 17 are occupied by the same trader each week, through a licensing agreement.
- 2.4 The next best positions are at the end of rows and there are 18 in total, and they command the same rents as the top and bottom rows. However, they do not have the same prominent position as the short edge of the stall faces Market Place. Again, the majority of these are occupied by licensed traders.
- 2.5 The remaining stalls are poorly situated with no open aspect or clear sightline, and have poor access for shoppers. Although these stalls are available at a lower rent, traders are not interested in them as they would find it difficult to earn income in these positions.
- 2.6 As a consequence of the above, new traders are unable to establish themselves on the prominently positioned stalls in Market Place and, because of this, do not stay. They may trade for short periods on the aisle facing stalls in the inside of the market but few find it a successful and viable option.
- 2.7 Due to this situation, street markets have developed on Central Pavement, Packers Row and the top of Vicar Lane. Street markets are unpopular with many local residents and retailers, as they feel that they make the town centre 'untidy', and would prefer them to be incorporated into the main Market Place and not to block existing shop fronts. In reality we cannot offer these traders good stall positions in Market Place and, if we force them to take up what are considered to be poorly situated stalls, they will go elsewhere.

2.8 It can be concluded that Chesterfield market continues to have an important role to play in the retail offer of the town centre but, to retain the market we must improve conditions for both traders and shoppers.

3.0 **CONSIDERATIONS**

3.1 Through the Markets Consultative Committee, market traders have highlighted the main areas for improvement. These include:

- Poor sightlines – more open aspect needed, and this will require a change to the market layout.
- Accessibility – a wider space the stalls is needed to encourage greater footfall and dwell time.
- Weather – changes to the stall design should incorporate better bad weather protection.
- Any new layout should retain the traditional nature of an outdoor market.
- Street traders – the layout needs to encourage street traders back into Market Place.
- Reduction in stall numbers to reflect demand but, the agreed layout must retain flexibility to accommodate the higher occupancy of the flea market.
- Electrics – an upgrade of power to stalls is needed to allow greater versatility and better lighting. Only stalls on Central Pavement have access to an electrical supply for fridges, etc.

3.2 For the Council, the challenges are:

- Maintains or increases income streams – at present, the open market generates an income of £650,000 per annum, with an operating profit in excess of £120,000.
- Sourcing funding to implement any changes.
- Ensuring that the revised layout delivers all the requirements of the traders and is popular with shoppers. The proposed changes should not result in any reputational damage to the Council.
- The market is in a conservation area and this may limit what can be achieved.

4.0 **THE WAY FORWARD**

- 4.1 A business case needs to be developed to demonstrate that a reduction in stall numbers and revised layout will result in a new pricing structure that will reflect the level of potential earnings available at each position. In the long term, this will increase revenue, which will help offset the cost of the necessary investment.
- 4.2 After a procurement exercise, a consultant would be appointed in July/August 2014 who would be responsible for putting forward a revised layout that would be popular with both traders and shoppers, and deliver the necessary outcomes. By December 2014, the designs for the new layout would be agreed.
- 4.3 In 2015, it would be hoped that the necessary funding could be secured to implement the new market layout. A submission for just under £1 million has been made to the Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership, as part of the Chesterfield infrastructure plan and, if successful, some of this funding would be allocated to the work on the market.

APPENDIX 1 – CURRENT LAYOUT

