

## Vision Master Plan and Revitalising the Heart of Chesterfield

### Engagement and Recommendations

2<sup>nd</sup> January 2022

#### Purpose of Engagement

The engagement purpose is to involve key groups in the development of the Vision Master Plan; to better understand current issues and to critique the design response to those issues with the continuous aim of creating the most effective approach to Revitalising the Heart of Chesterfield. A secondary aspect to the engagement is to keep various groups of people informed of the work of Chesterfield Borough Council in respect to the town centre and the current state of progress with improvements to Chesterfield town centre.

There have been three main stakeholder groups who the Council has aimed to engage with. The public as users (and non users) of Chesterfield market and the town centre are an important stakeholder group, along with the traders for whom the market is their livelihood, and the businesses who trade across the town centre, for whom the market provides a catalyst to footfall.

The engagement process has been conducted through a series of meetings and two formal consultation exercises all of which occurred during some form of COVID-19 restriction including 'Lockdown', which has necessitated the use of digital platforms to run meetings or consultations, whilst also keeping people safe during the process.

During the engagement, plans or reports have been progressively shared that represent the most up-to-date status of the information available at that stage with the intention of being able to move to the next stage.

The most difficult issue to resolve during the process has been to establish a consensus of opinion on the optimal re-layout of the market itself.

#### Engagement Timeline

**Dec 2020 – January 2022**

1. 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020 – 'virtual' Markets Consultative Committee introduction to the project
2. December 2020 – Jan 2021 – 'virtual' Public, Traders & businesses engagement exercise (opinion surveys)
3. 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2021 – 'virtual' Markets Consultative Committee – presentation of engagement findings and design principles
4. 28<sup>th</sup> April 2021, 'virtual' officer / trader workshop – an attempt to resolve layout
5. 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021, 'virtual' officer / trader workshop – a second attempt to resolve layout
6. 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021 – 'virtual' Markets Consultative Committee – update on RHOC process
7. 10<sup>th</sup> June 2021 – Day 1 of staffed Trader Consultation – proposing a design to see if that helped resolve issues and find areas of commonality / outstanding issues
8. 11<sup>th</sup> June 2021 – Day 2 of staffed Trader Consultation – proposing a design to see if that helped resolve issues and find areas of commonality / outstanding issues
9. 20<sup>th</sup> July 2021 – Cabinet decide to consult the Public, Traders and Businesses on the concept proposals to gain broad feedback
10. 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2021 – 'virtual' Consultation starts

11. 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 – Letter received from a Trader advising of 1000+ signatures on a paper petition against proposals and requesting a meeting with Cllr. Gilby and Huw Bowen
12. 12<sup>th</sup> September 2021 – ‘virtual’ Consultation closes
13. 14<sup>th</sup> September 2021 – officer meeting with ‘trader group’ who were led by the author of the letter
14. 17<sup>th</sup> September 2021 – officer meeting with NMTF (National Market Traders Federation) to discuss the market design situation and ways to resolve it, learning from other market places in the UK
15. 6<sup>th</sup> October 2021 – follow-up officer meeting with ‘trader group’ on the market place with CBC Carpenters to create a brief of ‘ideal stall’
16. 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021 – CBC receives a ‘separate’ e-petition with 110 signatures
17. 13<sup>th</sup> October 2021 – Full council, three questions raised by traders on the proposals for the market
18. 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021 – Consultation reports and Annex completed by CBC Policy Team
19. 17<sup>th</sup> November – Markets Consultative Committee – presentation of CBC’s ‘Ideal Stall’ design proposal in response to trader-based design brief – which received a high degree of support from the traders present
20. 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022 – [planned at time of writing] trader / officer market layout workshop with NMTF

Plus – ‘trader-designed’ market layouts received from Bryan Towndrow during the consultation period and Nick Ibbotson on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2021

### **Summary of Main Findings**

More detailed information can be found at [appendix – opinion survey / August consultation report](#)

Over 80% of people, including market traders responding to the August 2021 consultation agree that revitalising the market is important to the town centre

#### **Public Realm**

- The look and feel of the ‘market place’ shown in the draft Vision Master Plan documents is likely to increase the frequency of visit of almost 51% of people who saw the proposals, with 26% saying that they would be less likely to visit as a result (*73% of market traders would be less likely to come*).
- The history and character of the town is important, and people are concerned that this is not lost in developing the town.
- The provision of new / more seating is welcome. This would be likely to improve dwell time as well as making the public realm a place to meet as well as shop, though there is a *strong* concern about the link between more seating and rise in ASB. Roughly 63% of people responding to the August consultation said that the provision of seating and space to relax would make them more likely to visit Chesterfield town centre.
- Uneven surfaces are problematic and need resolving – again with respect to maintain historic character.
- More greenery is desirable.

#### **Market and Town Centre Offer**

- People like the stalls, the traders, the people and the history of Chesterfield, but the existing offer is not sufficient draw for a significant number of people, and they want to see new businesses attracted to the town centre for the future of the town (increase in offer).

- Independent shops, national chain shops, the outdoor market, cafés and services are the primary reasons people give for visiting Chesterfield town centre.
- People of all age ranges have said they would be strongly interested in attending 'Farmers', 'Craft', 'Locally-Made', 'Street Food', 'International Cuisine' and 'Christmas' markets as well as live music 'gigs'.
- 78% of people responding to the August consultation, including market traders, said they would be more likely to visit Chesterfield if live music, family entertainment and specialist or branded markets were available more frequently on the outdoor market, but about 10% of people are deterred by the thought of loud music.
- 68% of people would like to see an 'International mix of Street Food' as part of the market.
- 73% of people would like to go to 'Major Events' in Chesterfield town centre (outdoor theatre for instance).
- 65% of people would be more likely to visit the market if there was an event on in Chesterfield town centre.
- The public, traders and businesses perceive that the promotion of Chesterfield as a place to shop or visit, including signage, as well as the current range of events and speciality markets is 'average'.
- The 'undesirables' that gather in the town centre and anti social behaviour including drinking and fighting in the marketplace is a significant detractor for people thinking about or visiting the town centre, and these aspects hinder Chesterfield's ability to grow footfall and dwell time.
- Of the general public, almost 60% of people would visit Chesterfield for activities and events during the day at the weekend, with 30% of people likely to midweek. In the evening at the weekend, 20% would be likely to visit and 14% on a mid-week evening.

#### Market Stalls

- Draft Vision Master Plan proposals for the market stalls are not supported by a significant proportion of the traders, as they are considered too small to trade from with insufficient weather protection for the stock, the traders or market customers.
- Traders want better electrical supply, improved lighting and weather protection. Improved access to power will increase the amenity of the stalls and make it possible for new traders to trade at the market – those who might need refrigeration to trade for example.
- Traders and the public like the existing wooden stalls, they are strong and resist the wind.
- Traders and the general public believe that the presentation (look and feel) of the market needs to be improved having become tired and shabby.
- Traders like the existing tables / boards, and consider their strength and sturdiness essential to trading, but the trestles that support them are wider than the boards and this makes movement around them unnecessarily difficult.
- Pop up stalls are not desirable to regular traders.

#### Market Layout

- Draft Vision Master Plan proposals for the market layout are not supported by a significant proportion of the traders, they believe the event space is oversized, in the wrong place and 'cramps' the market space, that the potential removal of stalls from New Square and around the Market Hall is un-desirable and will lower town footfall from those places. Additionally the traders believe that 100 smaller stalls is not sufficient to cater for the current Thursday 'Flea Market'.
- Traders significantly dislike a back-to-back trading layout.
- A layout that consolidates the traders to one space on days when the market is not full would be more inviting and less confusing for customers.

- In the August 2021 consultation 68% of people said they would be more likely to visit Chesterfield if the outdoor market was held in one location where the stalls would be easy to find and more enjoyable to explore, with better protection from the weather.
- A new layout needs to improve accessibility through the removal of the tapered aisles between stalls which produce 'pinch points' that reduce accessibility.
- The current internal/middle/central stalls do not trade well – and are not popular – probably due to reduced visibility caused by other stalls being in the way and a lack of effective sightlines.
- The location and size of the space for events needs to be balanced with the needs of the market and those of events, taking into account the frequency and type of events, and the need to effectively drive footfall – 67% of people responding to the August consultation said they like the idea of having events and space to relax next to the market.

The majority of respondents to the August consultation were between 25 and 64 years old, with about 5% being younger than 25.

It is evident from the protests, petitions and questions to Council around the end of the consultation period in September 2021, that the market trading cohort will strongly represent itself if it believes that it's needs are not being sufficiently taken into account as designs for the market are developed. Of the traders who responded to the August consultation, 73% said that they would be less likely to visit Chesterfield with the proposals looking like the draft vision master plan.

**Recommendations** to develop the Vision Master Plan and to support delivery of the Revitalising the Heart of Chesterfield project, based on the feedback received during the consultation period and with reference to the engagement process as a whole.

There are many aspects of the revitalisation concepts proposed through the draft Vision Master Plan that received cross-stakeholder support, however, whilst the 'look and feel' of the draft Vision Master Plan proposals for the centre of Chesterfield have strong support, proceeding with the plans for the market elements as drafted for consultation would be in conflict with the needs that the traders expressed during the exercise. It is possible to design in detail many parts of the draft Vision Master Plan as per the concepts that went to consultation, whilst also revising others to addresses concerns raised. This can forge a stronger Vision Master Plan by adapting it in the light of the engagement findings to be more effective for Chesterfield.

These recommendations are intended as a guide.

**Recommendation 1;** In line with the support received during the consultation process, take the following Public Realm elements of the draft Vision Master Plan through a detailed design process as per the consultation plan:

1. Paving Upgrade
2. Street furniture and features except seating
3. Lighting
4. Trees and soft landscaping
5. WiFi
6. Utilities upgrade

**Recommendation 2;** In view of the high level of support, but also concern about increased Anti-Social Behaviour, take the following Public Realm elements through a detailed design process with extra focus on reducing potential ASB and undesirable activity.

1. Seating areas

2. Playful aspects

In addition, the council will work with partners to seek to collectively and constructively reduce issues associated with ASB.

**Recommendation 3;** Referencing the support received during the consultation process for adjustments to the customer-facing aspects of the market proposals, take the following Market elements through a further design process with traders to ensure best fit between trader needs and the town centre adaptations required in the present day to support more people choosing Chesterfield, visiting more often and staying in the town for longer.

1. Market stall re-design
2. Market stall and 'events' spatial layout, including an assessment of the layouts proposed to the Council as mentioned above.

**Recommendation 4;** That following the findings of the engagement process, the council will draw up a schedule of speciality markets and events / activities to support the animation of the town centre and will work with partners to effectively promote this offer.