

MARKET WORKING GROUP

9 OCTOBER 2012

Present: Mayor D Thornhill (Chair)

Councillors N Bell, A Lovejoy, H Lynch and M Meerabux

Market Representatives:

Grant Adams	Chair of Market Traders' Association
Michael Davis	Treasurer of Market Traders' Association
Toni Davis	Secretary of Market Traders' Association
Darrell Fyne	Market Trader
Lynne Lawrence	Market Trader
Michael Rockman	Vice Chair of Market Traders' Association

Officers: Managing Director
Property Section Head
Property Development Project Manager
Melvin Carrigan
Committee and Scrutiny Officer

7 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Peter Jeffree and Iain Sharpe.

8 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

9 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2012 were submitted and signed.

10 PRESENTATION BY THE PROPERTY SECTION HEAD

The Property Section Head provided an update on the Charter Place development and proposals for a new Watford market. The presentation set out information about the management handover to Capital Shopping Centres (CSC), the options for a new market as discussed with the Sub-Group and the vision for the preferred option at the T J Hughes Car Park site. He included details for inclusion in the design brief, including those raised by the Sub-Group.

The final slide provided an indicative programme for the new market at T J Hughes Car Park and CSC's new indoor market.

Location of new market

The Property Section Head informed the Working Group of the four locations which had been presented to the Sub-Group. He explained the difficulties with some of the proposals and how this had led to the preferred option of the site at T J Hughes Car Park. Officers had found only four realistic sites in the Town Centre. He explained the capacity at the current location and the proposed stall size at the purpose-built enclosed market at the T J Hughes Car Park site.

The Chair of the Market Traders' Association stated that many of the traders had more than one unit. Another Trader asked about the height of the new site.

The Property Section Head explained that the new proposal was in addition to the stalls available in the CSC's new market. The new market could be as high as necessary.

A Trader was concerned that if there were only 35 units in total, this might mean only 12 businesses could be located in the new market at T J Hughes Car Park.

The Property Section Head responded that the first action was to get a vision for the market which would link to CSC's proposals. Following this it would then be possible to consider the transition from the existing market to the new sites.

The Chair, Mayor Thornhill, advised that originally the proposal had been for the market to only be located at the CSC site. Following discussions with Members and other interested parties it was recognised that further market space was needed and officers had looked at additional options. This had been an extensive piece of work.

Following a question about completion dates, the Property Section Head confirmed the proposed completion date for the T J Hughes site was late summer 2013. He could not provide a date for the CSC market, but the company had indicated that it would be part of the early phase of the development, which could potentially be in 2014.

Traders were concerned about the fragmentation of the move from the current location to the new markets. They felt it was preferable to move once rather than to the new market at the T J Hughes Car Park and then to the market in Charter Place.

The Chair suggested that those moving into the T J Hughes site on a long term basis should be a priority. With regard to the other stallholders, consideration would need to be given to who moved into the site on a temporary basis.

Following questions from Councillor Lynch, the Property Section Head explained that the market in the regenerated Charter Place would possibly be able to house approximately a third of the traders in the current market. The new site at

T J Hughes Car Park could accommodate approximately half of the traders. He reminded the meeting that the current market was not fully occupied.

The Property Section Head informed the Working Group that the landlord for T J Hughes was intending to spend in the region of £2.5 million on redeveloping the building. The Council could indicatively be spending approximately £1 million on the development of a market on the car park space.

The Chair of the Market Traders' Association enquired about the £1.8 million referred to from CSC.

The Chair advised that this was not additional money. The Managing Director explained that prior to the current economic climate the Council received an income of £2.5 million from Charter Place. This had fallen dramatically in recent years to a figure of between £1.5 and £1.6 million. The £1.8 million income was a safety net and there would be no financial benefit overall.

The Managing Director added that with regard to the T J Hughes Car Park, the Council was in advanced negotiations. The landlord preferred that the main unit on The Parade was open six or seven days per week. The Council would be using money from reserves to fund the development of the market.

The Property Section Head advised that the landlord needed to be satisfied with the quality of the market and its management. If the market was not professionally run, and did not attract customers, it would detract from their (institutional pension fund) investment in their building. He commented that the landlord was negotiating with retailers for the various floors in the building. The aim was to pre-let the building and then invest in the refurbishment. It was not proposed to change the building's façade. Using the space at the side of the building for the new market would add to this and create even more of a destination.

The Chair informed the Working Group that the proposal would also include improving the walk way linkage from the new Beechen Grove entrance to Charter Place to the new market at the TJ Hughes site. A proper streetscape would be created. This would be beneficial to all businesses and the public.

The Chair of the Market Traders' Association was concerned that the new location was not near to most of the retail premises. He also asked whether CSC could provide additional funding for the new location.

The Chair responded that she had spoken to many older people who had said that ideally they would prefer it to be within easy walking distance of the bus stops which the location would be [including improvements to the linkage from Beechen Grove/ Palace car park].

With regard to the additional investment from CSC, the Chair stated that the T J Hughes Car Park site was the Council's responsibility. The CSC's market would be suitable for different people and was something the company believed in.

The Chair of the Market Traders' Association said that it was difficult for traders to make a decision without seeing CSC's vision. The Property Section Head advised that it would be linked to the retail mix within their development and that this could not be determined yet since CSC were currently in the early stages of negotiating with a range of retailers.

A Trader questioned whether £1 million would be a sufficient investment for the new market at T J Hughes Car Park. He referred to the redevelopment of Southport market which had cost £3.2 million.

The Managing Director explained that the Council would need to follow a process. It would engage with the Market Working Group about the concept of the development. The Sub-Group had been working well. The options discussed at the Sub-Group had been brought to the Working Group to obtain a broader view. If there was general agreement amongst the Working Group further work would be carried out. The plans for the site would need to be costed. The Council would seek best value through procurement. A report would then be presented to the Mayor with actual costings. Currently the Working Group had been given an indicative cost as it was not possible to be certain at this time.

The Chair suggested it might be possible to consider using Section 106 monies.

The Managing Director added that further discussions would need to take place with CSC. Section 106 monies might be an option and it might be possible to seek a grant from the County Council for local highways works. The Council would try to make sure that all aspects of the public realm fitted together.

Councillor Lynch said that she was pleased to hear about the plans for the streetscape.

The Property Section Head described the initial visuals to the Working Group. He advised that the new market would be given a prominent entrance. He explained that the streetscape design guide for the public realm would be important and CSC would be made aware of it.

The Chair stated that the Council would not want a fragmented scene. The area would be viewed as a whole.

Following a question from Councillor Lynch, the Chair explained that CSC's vision for its market was different. The clear vision was that different traders would not be competing but complimentary. The Council's market would be a more traditional market but in modern premises. CSC's market would be more 'chic' and would fit in with Charter Place. This had been the reason the Council had looked for a different option. She wanted both sites to work.

The Property Section Head commented that some traders would be in CSC's site and others in the Council's new venue. Stallholders would be given the chance to have business support advice. Discussions were already in hand with a potential training company, who was based in Watford, to provide this support.

A Trader said that he appreciated that it was difficult to have a new market hall built in the town which all current traders could move into. He commented that if a retailer was asked whether they preferred to pay a top market rent in a good position or a lower rent in a less prominent place they would prefer to pay the higher rent. The current vision did not place the market in the centre. It needed to be presented to the other traders.

The Chair reiterated that there was no other place suitable for a market. Officers had looked at options in the whole of the Town Centre. Everyone needed to make this option work. The Council would like to give the traders what they wanted but acknowledged that it was unlikely to be possible to please everyone. She said that the footfall to the top of the town would be changing but that the current location was clearly not working for traders. All parties needed to try to make the proposal work. It was a finely balanced matter. There was no one clear vision that would suit everybody but the Council was putting considerable money into the new market to make it work.

A Trader referred to comments made by the Mayor three years ago. She said that the Mayor had stated there would be an indoor market in the centre of town. It appeared that this was being pushed aside.

The Chair said that it was each market trader's choice where they traded. This was the same debate as when the market had moved before. The Chair added that she had to think of all Watford residents. Market traders would need to consider their own individual options. She added that she was unable to guarantee that everyone would continue to trade in the future.

The Managing Director commented that there were clearly advantages and disadvantages with the proposed location. It was understood that the site was not absolutely in the heart of the existing shopping centre. The Council was starting the market from the beginning. It would be given a brand. There would be a change in the footfall. He added that these were real opportunities for the market traders. There was chance to give the Town Centre added value. The new market would have colour and vibrancy and be integrated into the public realm. There would be strong marketing of the new site. The suggested location would be adjacent to the area the Council intended to hold outdoor events similar to Imagine Watford.

The Chair reminded the Working Group that the original report to Cabinet, in September 2009, had proposed closing the current market and moving to an outdoor site. She assured the traders that the new market would be covered.

Councillor Meerabux said that he had a lot of sympathy for the traders. He felt it would be difficult to obtain a smooth transition and that there was potential for fragmentation. He asked whether it would be possible in the interim, during the disruption, for the Council to make some form of rental adjustment.

The Managing Director commented that it was necessary to look at the scheme in the 'round' with Members and the traders. There were a number of facets

which needed to be set out to be able to give a true view of the proposals. Traders would be provided with business support. He acknowledged that some traders may decide that the location was not suitable for them. Clarity about any rental offers for both locations would need to be researched.

The Property Section Head explained that the costs quoted at the meeting were indicative. The £1 million did not include marketing or the business support to traders.

A Trader thanked Councillor Meerabux for his suggestion. He said that it was important that the transition was carried out properly. There needed to be continuity.

The Property Section Head informed the Working Group that officers were liaising with officers in Blackburn and learning from their experience.

The Chair of the Market Traders' Association asked how long it would be before the traders would have a choice between the schemes. The traders would need to make their individual decisions soon.

The Managing Director advised that as a result of this meeting the proposals would be public. Further discussions needed to take place. It would then be clearer for traders in the New Year.

The Property Section Head highlighted the design brief which had been prepared with the Sub-Group. This included a second view of the new market from Beechen Grove. Officers would work with the traders on the designs for the stalls. The stalls would be of a uniform design in varying sizes. There would be a canopy over the top of the market so it would be enclosed with an outdoor feel.

Following a question from a Trader, the Property Section Head explained that the new market would go back as far as the T J Hughes building and in line with the flyover. It would be possible to extend further into the car park space at a later date. The expansion would be considered earlier if necessary, if there was clear demand.

The Property Section Head informed the Working Group that the Council would lease the land and it was expected that a market management company would be used to meet landlord's requirements. There was potential for the market to be open six days a week. He set out the indicative programme for the next steps. He added that the traders' comments would be taken on board. He advised that traders would have between six and eight months to clear their stock if they did not wish to move into one of the new sites.

The Chair confirmed that the Council's market was likely to be called Watford Market. She was unaware of the name CSC would give its market. She added that people would visit the market if it had the goods people wanted to buy.

Following a question from a Trader, the Managing Director agreed that it was important the information was shared with the other traders and that they were consulted on the proposals.

Current market issues

A Trader commented that there was possibly an issue regarding maintenance prior to CSC taking over the management role.

The Property Section Head advised that the Council's Building and Projects Team would continue until the final handover to CSC.

The Trader commented that the market hall had not had any heating since January. Traders had complained at the beginning of the year and had been assured that the work would be done.

The Property Section Head suggested that this would possibly need to be discussed with CSC. Following a further comment, he said that officers would check whether any work was due to take place on the heating.

RESOLVED:

that the comments be noted.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Managing Director suggested that the next meeting should take place towards the end of the calendar year. He added that he valued the work undertaken by the Sub-Group.

Chair
Market Working Group

The Meeting started at 6.00 pm
and finished at 7.15 pm