

Market Improvements

Update Report

Guest Market

Since this idea was approved five "Guest Markets" have been held within the Indoor Market Hall, one in October and two in both November and December.

I believe that these can only be viewed as successful as the objectives were to bring in more foot-fall to the market hall and create a vibrant atmosphere both of which were achieved on all the event days.

The area created at the bottom of the market is both colourful and eye-catching and has given a redundant space a purpose and new lease of life and hopefully can be utilised further in 2012 to hold other events during the weekdays.

The five events each had approximately 50 tables each of which was rented for the day at a cost of £8.00 so an income of approximately £400 has been generated and whilst this is a drop in the ocean within the running costs of the building it goes to prove that alternative uses can generate further income for the market's account.

The original objective was to stage an event every Saturday with the idea that the profile of the market would start to increase and the public would start to wonder "What's going on in the market this week?"

With the positive feedback received from current Market Stall Holders, the Guest Market Stall Holders and the Public we intend on continuing these events throughout 2012 and with further council support I firmly believe these events can be grown and nurtured into a regular attraction for Watford, not just within the current Market Hall but either within or complimenting a New Indoor Market Hall within the Re-developed Charter Place.

With this in mind beginning in February the following Rolling program has been planned until the end of May at present.

1st Saturday of the Month – Artisan Market arranged and managed by Sophie Cady.

2nd Saturday of the Month – Antique, Bric-o-Brac & Vintage Market arranged & managed by Independent Source overseen by Mel Carrigan.

3rd Saturday of the Month – Art & Craft Market arranged and managed by Lynne Lawrence

4th Saturday of the Month – Mind, Body & Soul Market arranged & managed by Independent Source overseen by Carolina Castro

The rent charged for each table has been reviewed and we will now be charging £10.00 for each table therefore potentially increasing the income by £100 per event.

The key to these events being successful is marketing and advertising and we found leafleting on the day was a great driver of foot-fall. It's not necessarily the act of having a leaflet thrust at you, but the interaction that takes place between the public and the distributor that leads to attendance. With this in mind it is vital that the leaflet distributors at these events are of a certain calibre and I believe that a team of paid individuals perhaps dressed up or with some attraction is probably the best way forward as it is neither sustainable or as productive to rely on traders, well wishers, family or friends.

I'm sure this can be funded by the income produced by these events and in my opinion is money better spent than a simple newspaper or radio advert.

This scheme is a direct copy of one quoted within the recent Portas Review in which local people can trade within the local town centre at a reasonable price and express their artistic talents or entrepreneurial flair and so should be continued to be nurtured and supported.

In 2012 I would hope that the initial success of these "Guest Markets" can be built upon and events can also be arranged for weekdays, perhaps using the space for external sources and companies to take advantage of. It's worth investigating the potential other uses such as an advertising space, display space, information area or as has been previously suggested by Councillor Lynch using the area for a themed use for both Tuesday and Friday.

Tuesdays for mothers and toddlers introducing a crèche and/or activities targeting these customers and on a Friday target the OAP customers perhaps offering a knitting circle and discounted tea/coffee etc....

Again the only resources needed to make these ideas come to life and become a success are officers time. I believe it's vital to use the market hall as a community asset and think and use it for a wider variety of uses/events than it's currently used for.

Thursday Opening

The creation of a fourth market trading day has now been running for approximately four months and whilst opinion amongst the traders is split I believe that even some of the more sceptical traders who initially only supported this initiative to show backing for me have been pleasantly surprised with how they have done.

Whilst we are never going to achieve 100% attendance this initiative has been well supported in general with approximately 60-70% of traders attending every week.

Whilst trade has fluctuated from week to week many traders have commented to me how the Thursdays although not as busy as normal market days have helped weather the storm of these recessionary times and I myself can only concur with this feeling.

There are some who believe that trade has just been taken from other market days but all I can say that my weekly takings have increased since the trial has begun and I'm definitely not the only one this applies to.

It will be a real test over the next few months as we enter the post Christmas period and historically the worst trading period of the year not only for trade but for attendance.

I do however feel that the extended trial of six months needs to run its course before a decision is made on whether to make this a permanent arrangement.

I do however wish to point out that the original reasoning behind this trial was two-fold, firstly to assist traders in this poor economic climate by making the rent charged better value for money and secondly to help bridge the transition to a new Indoor Market Hall which will undoubtedly be open for at least 4 trading days. This cementing of a fourth trading day will take time to get into the general public's psyche as well as the traders but I firmly believe great inroads have been made here.

Taking this into consideration, I would implore you to consider when making the final decision that this will not have been achievable, viable or agreeable if any extra rent is applied however minimal.

I would urge you to keep the fourth market day as this makes the rental package for new traders more appealing, helps the current traders, by making their rent greater value for money and will certainly aid the transition to the new Indoor Market.

General Market Improvements

The introduction of a new directional map at the front of the market all be it in poster form is certainly helpful and I would hope this can be duplicated this year so that it is not just positioned on just one of the 3 entrances at the front of the market hall.

The painting of the market floor has made a great impact as the public perception has started to change from "What's happening to this market – it's falling apart" – to one of "they are putting some money in – the markets on the up"

I would hope that these low cost improvements could be built on this year with a couple of the central pillars being repainted in perhaps Watford Yellow. This would not only have a drastic visual impact but would help continue to mould the perception that the market is cared for and is changing.

Another low cost improvement that could be implemented which could not only have a visual impact but could attract retain traders is the creation of small food retail units in the area of the old Gibson's Stall.

We have attracted many and varied food outlets over the last few years but with very few exceptions these stalls do not last. The main problem having spoken to these traders is that they cannot survive with the overheads charged as they generally only have business from lunch time's and Saturday's.

The idea is to create a "Food Aisle" of small 6 foot trading counters with a sink and prep areas and electrics for rent at £20-30 a day. I'm sure these can then easily be let and the traders will be able to make a success.

I would suggest that these ideas could be funded predominately from the £5,000 the traders were contributing to the initial works.

The survival of the market and high street in general begins with the encouragement and nurturing of local entrepreneurs and the indoor market hall provides the perfect platform for Watford to promote this. I would hope the council along with Henry Boot can consider the upcoming redevelopment of Charter Place as an ideal opportunity to provide the town centre with a new and sustainable indoor market hall in which a variety of affordable trading options are available for local and independent businesses to develop and flourish.

Trader Recruitment

This is a continued high priority and any red tape that is currently in place needs removing so that it is made easier and quicker for people to become traders. Whilst I understand that it's important to ensure that any new trader provides a safe and legal service or product to the wider public, it's also vital not to delay and risk losing potential new traders.

I understand that within the terms and conditions the decision process is supposed to take up to two weeks but after this was raised in a previous MWG this was accelerated to a decision being made just 3 working days from when the application was received.

It seems at present for whatever reason this is not the case as I have had reports of potential traders still not having had a decision after a month which seems unforgivable in this economic climate.

Whilst I understand that some applications can be complicated I also see no reason why this accelerated approval process cannot be maintained as not only does the introduction of new trades bring much needed revenue to the council but provides both a moral boost for traders and a creation of a "Something New" atmosphere.

This atmosphere is vital as it provides the shake-up required to help stop the market going stale and mundane, far better to have a regular influx of new traders (some of which who don't stay), than risk losing a potential trader and a source of income.

A variety of trades still need to be targeted and again I stress the importance of visiting neighbouring towns markets as well as advertising in the trade press for these.

Unrepresented Trades should always take priority and in most cases should be approved very quickly and without delay.

It is also important to stress however, the need to implement the council's right to introduce conflicting trades, whilst this is an unpopular and emotive subject, carefully implemented competition can be a good thing for the market as a whole.

It's vital however that the agreed procedures are adhered to in these cases and obviously careful consideration on the effect a duplication could have on the existing stallholder. There is little point in introducing a duplicate trade and within 3 month both it and the original trader leaving due to lack of business (As trade has simply been shared).

Applications of a duplication of trade should fit certain criteria to be considered and the process of approval/denial should understandably take longer say two weeks. The criteria and processes that need filling/following in order for a duplicate trade to be considered should include :

- Bringing something new to the market place and enhancing the shopping experience of the market hall rather than just a carbon copy of an existing trader.
- The affected current trader should be consulted before a decision to introduce a competitor is introduced, with the new trader under consideration providing details of what cross over would occur and management ensuring that this is adhered to if they are successful.
- If the duplicate applicant is successful their stall should be situated in a position that is at least two whole aisles away from the existing trader and in most cases on the opposite side of the market hall.
- The existing trader should have a right to appeal against a decision with a face to face meeting to explain the decision and/or their concerns if required.

I would also like to stress the need for flexibility in accommodating traders for example single day trading which surely must be catered for, although I would stipulate certain conditions in these cases as to ensure those permanent full time traders are not disadvantaged. By this I mean for example a position is not guaranteed for these traders and no discounts or promotions apply. Perhaps a certain area should be allocated for these "Casual Traders".

The successful introduction of the Guest markets will also provide a new and alternative revenue stream as well as different trading platform and/or opportunity for new traders. The involvement of external sources/operators could also provide a useful relationship for the scheduling of future events within the market hall and long term the new development.

I believe that by adopting my "Food Aisle" concept you would also attract and retain some further traders.

Other Issues

Lifts

The ongoing issues with the lifts continue with repairs and breakdowns on a seemingly weekly basis. The rolling contract with the current maintenance company has to be reviewed as I'm sure that the costs here are spiralling and the service is to say the least appalling. Whilst I understand the lifts are old and probably nearing the end of their working lives this is an area where I'm sure savings and improvements can be made. Simple things like the oiling of the safety cage, so that these can be lifted more easily would help ease traders frustrations.

Timekeeping & Attendance

Despite encouragement from both the traders committee and the market management this is an ongoing issue with a small percentage of traders and whilst we must take care not to potentially lose any existing traders, we do feel that perhaps the council need to look at how the minimum trading hours are adhered to as verbal encouragement does not seem to be working. It is vital that every Trader is open from 9-4.30/5 as the regulations state and are open on every Market Day. I would suggest that in any future development those minimal trading hours are written in the terms and conditions with non-compliance leading to financial penalties.

Saviour Fayre Event Markets

Having expressed my disappointment in the events Saviour Fayre have staged in the town especially the so called "Christmas Market" I have a suggestion that may provide both a welcome boost to a few of the towns traders as well as creating an event within the high street. Over the Christmas period a few of the indoor market traders were given the opportunity to support Charter Place and created a small Christmas Market in the courtyard. This was generally well received, attended and the atmosphere created was appealing. I think could with a few additions provide a Christmas event for the town.

In Hitchin every year the full time market traders are given the option to trade (on non-market days) within the high street area along with some traders which are brought in to compliment the event (generally food stalls).

I would suggest adopting this policy with traders allowed to trade within charter place and perhaps stretching down within the high street using an external operator to provide complimentary traders.

As I have mentioned in a previous email John Perriton of the NMTF has contacts with sympathetic private operators that could perhaps provide something beneficial for both Watford and the permanent traders.

These operators I'm sure could also provide the other "Event" Markets within the town which would comply with the agreed concept.

Electric & Rent Charges

Vat receipts are still an issue here and although I understand that producing these weekly is probably time consuming and costly surely a quarterly statement of each traders account could be issued.

The Electric charges within the market also need accountability as currently each trader is simply given a figure due, no explanation of how this figure is calculated is given, IE: Number of Units Used and Cost Per Unit. The way this charge is collected also needs addressing as surely this should be done by direct debit for most, not the cheque or card payment currently required.

