

Market Working Group

19 June 2012

Present: Mayor Thornhill (Chair),
Councillors Jeffree, Lovejoy, Lynch (for items 1 – 4),
Meerabux and Sharpe

Market Representatives:

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

Officers: Managing Director
Head of Legal and Property Services
Property Section Head
Property Development Project Manager
Market Superintendent
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (RW)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Nigel Bell and from Grant Adams, Chair of the Market Traders' Association.

2 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no disclosures of interest.

3 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st February 2012 were submitted and signed.

4 CHARTER PLACE REDEVELOPMENT

The Property Section Head explained that it was hoped that work on the redevelopment would start in the near future. He suggested that a Market Working Group sub-group should be inaugurated and begin to meet in the Summer of 2012.

The Managing Director summarised Capital Shopping Centre's (CSC) plans for development based on a new combined lease and advised that the proposal would connect the Harlequin Centre with Charter Place and that CSC would then manage both areas. He advised that at their meeting of 18th June 2012, Cabinet had approved the recommendation of officers to switch to CSC as development partner.

The Property Section Head said that CSC, rather than the Council, would manage the market; he added that, when formulating development schemes, feedback from the survey conducted with the Market Traders had been taken into account.

The Property Section Head then addressed the question of where the new market would be situated. He advised that an indoor market would be established within Charter Place; one entrance would be from Beechen Grove. An outdoor market, managed by Watford Borough Council, could be based in the St Mary's churchyard area. He reiterated that it would be prudent to initiate a Market Working Group sub-group who could enter into consultation with CSC. He added that the Council would also determine in what way they could support traders and develop ideas.

In reply to a question from Councillor Lynch, the Property Section Head advised that the indoor market would indicatively have capacity for 25 uniformly sized stalls, however no detailed designs have been proposed at this early stage. Capacity for the outdoor market would be flexible and dependant on numbers of traders.

One Trader noted that 25 stalls would be provided in the indoor market and asked whether these would be larger than the current stalls. He also expressed concerns with regards to the outdoor market.

The Chair assured the Trader that the outdoor market would not be run in competition with the indoor facility; rather it was intended that a more traditional outdoor market would complement the 'niche' market within Charter Place. She added that the initial survey had indicated that residents wished to see an outdoor market established in the town.

The Managing Director advised that the redevelopment would provide the opportunity to design and install an outdoor market with a suitable range of provision. He explained that the determination on where individual stalls should be sited would depend on traders' interest and suitability to the 'mix' of goods on sale.

A Trader noted that whilst there had been three or four additional traders holding outdoor stalls for a few days before Christmas 2011, this was insufficient evidence to conclude that an outdoor market would be viable. He asked for the sizes of the units in the new indoor market and advised that it was unlikely that all existing traders could be accommodated.

The Property Section Head reported that CSC had not advised on sizes of the stalls; he added that this issue and the layout for the market were issues which the sub group and CSC would consult on.

Councillor Jeffree referred to the survey on the market and noted that whilst the views of traders had been sought, there had so far been no engagement with members of the public.

The Chair replied that this would be effected through the planning process.

Councillor Jeffree advised that an ideal situation for the market would be one which would allow both indoor and outdoor stalls in very close proximity; this would provide flexibility.

The Chair responded that there would be synergy between the indoor market and the new Charter Place shops. She added that the two markets would be quite different; one would be a traditional outdoor market, the other would provide 'one-off' goods. She advised that residents had stated that the current market was not what they wanted and had professed a wish for an outdoor market. She said that it would be wise, and useful for councillors, to look at the original survey.

In reply to a question from Councillor Lynch, the Property Section Head said that the locations for individual traders, whether inside or out, had not been decided and that this would be an evolving process.

Councillor Sharpe noted that there were some smaller stalls in the Harlequin Centre itself and suggested that there could be scope to extend this provision to allow existing traders to take such stalls. He added that it was important to recognise that the market also provided a social function - as a meeting place - and that this should be maintained.

In reply to a question from Councillor Lovejoy on the smaller size of the new indoor market, the Chair advised that the current market was too large and that other retail sites were needed in Charter Place. Councillor Lovejoy counselled that were the two markets closer together this would lead to an exchange of footfall between the two sites.

A Trader asked whether a facility for deliveries had been considered.

The Property Section Head assured the meeting that this aspect was considered in CSC's designs and could be further explored in the Market Working Sub Group.

In response to another Trader, the Managing Director advised that the scheme could be completed by Christmas 2015.

The Trader expressed concerns regarding his conception of a 'niche' indoor market; he said that he felt existing traders would need to either take a place in the outdoor market or cease trading. He added that it was important that there was no duplication of stalls.

The Chair assured the meeting that it was the Council's wish to accommodate as many traders as possible. She noted that there were problems for the current market and that the redevelopment would provide an opportunity to consider solutions.

The meeting discussed the proposed design for Charter Place. The Property Section Head explained specific details and the method in which the indoor market would 'fit' within the site.

Councillor Meerabux noted that there were many vacant stalls in the current market and asked which areas had shown either growth or a decline in sales.

Councillor Sharpe said that there would have been good reason why traders had left the market. He added that in future the market would be next to a significant section of the town's retail outlets and that this should have a positive effect.

In reply to queries from members of the meeting, the Managing Director explained that it was necessary that the lease and terms or agreement be finalised; work could then be started and delivery planned. It was anticipated that this work would start during the Autumn of 2012. He recommended that a facility for dialogue be organised between CSC, traders and the Council in order to influence design and delivery.

One Trader requested that:

1. There should be at least six months notice prior to the market moving to new premises.
2. The next meeting take place relatively soon

Another Trader asked how stall holders would cope if they were unable to continue trading in an outdoor market.

The Property Section Head replied that the Council would ensure those traders who did not wish to continue would have sufficient time to 'wind down'. He added that this could be a discussion item for the sub group.

The Chair agreed that it would be beneficial for councillors and traders to meet to debate such issues.

RESOLVED:

that a sub-group of the Market Working Group comprising Members and Traders be formed.

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

1. Duplication of Stalls

One Trader questioned a decision on the letting of stalls for the sale of goods already available in the market.

The Property Section Head replied that he would investigate this issue and then provide an answer for the trader.

2. Guest Markets

The Trader asked for an explanation of the delay for the guest market because of insurance.

The Managing Director assured the Trader that this issue would be addressed immediately.

3. Business Rates

The meeting discussed the rating system applied by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) to stalls at the market.

One Trader gave details of the fee he was required to pay which he considered to be excessive.

The Chair and Property Section Head agreed that it would be advisable for the trader to make an appeal to the VOA. The Chair added that the trader might also wish to contact the National Market Traders' Federation to establish whether this body could offer any assistance.

4. Watford's Jubilee Celebrations

The meeting noted that the market had closed over the Jubilee weekend. However, traders felt that the charging policy for stalls on the day had been inconsistent. The Section Head for Property offered to look into the matter.

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DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting will be confirmed.

Chair
Market Working Group

The meeting started at 6.00 p.m.
and finished at 7.35 p.m.