

Market Working Group

19 February 2013

Present: Mayor Thornhill (Chair),
Councillors Bell, Jeffree, Lynch, Meerabux and Sharpe

Market Representatives:

Grant Adams, Chair of Market Traders' Association
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

Also Present:

Martin Wills, Urban Space Management
John Burton, Urban Space Management

Officers:

Managing Director
Property Section Head
Property Development Project Officer
Market Superintendent
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (RW)

12 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies had been received at the time of the meeting.

Councillor Lovejoy subsequently e-mailed her apologies to all members of the Market Working Group.

13 **DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

There were no disclosures of interest.

14 **MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2012 were submitted and signed.

PRESENTATION BY THE PROPERTY SECTION HEAD

The Property Section Head introduced Martin Wills and John Burton from Urban Space Management and explained that they had held interviews and conducted a survey into the needs of the market traders. He then gave a presentation which included updates on the current market and expectations for when Capital Shopping Centres (CSC) took over the area in around Charter Place.

The Property Section Head explained that whilst CSC would be the landlord for the market, Watford Borough Council (WBC) would continue to send out invoices and collect market fees. He stressed that the Market Trade agreement would not change and advised that the market would remain open in its present location until June 2014. He further advised that, as CSC would in future be known nationally as 'Intu', the Harlequin would in the future be known as 'Intu Watford'.

Market Occupation: The Property Section advised that market occupation had remained stable during the previous year with 56 traders and just over 50% occupation of stalls. He added that £10,000 remained in the market budget fund and that during the next financial year it could be possible to offer traders a refund. This money could, alternatively, be used for other purposes and asked the group to offer viable suggestions.

Heating: Three extra infra-red heaters would be installed towards the front of the market. The Property Section Head explained that there was no spare capacity within the electricity supply to the market and consequently this would be the total amount of additional heating possible. He added that market traders had expressed a preference for no provision of screens.

Guest Markets: Insurance for Guest Markets was currently being resolved and it was anticipated that guest markets would continue in the future.

Market site: A canopy would be erected over the new market next to the T J Hughes building; surveys were currently in hand to look at drainage for the site.

Martin Wills of Urban Space Management explained that the group had visited four retail areas for comparison purposes: Borough Market, Greenwich, Box Park and Spitalfields. He presented photographs of different configurations of design and noted that the general conclusion was that modular units worked well. Refrigeration, where needed, would be situated next to stalls. He further noted that flooring was of minimal importance since visual impact would be derived from the stalls themselves. He informed on heating and also the design of the roof structure and advised that hot food could be served at an upper level where good access arrangements were provided.

Martin Wills then explained that, having spoken with current traders about minimum requirements, it appeared that accommodation would not be available for all traders. He noted storage requirements and explained that core trading days were key to the operation of the market. He stressed that core traders would be required to sign up for all trading days and added that most stall holders appeared to be keen to have extra involvement.

Martin Wills advised that the market manager would handle the application process and said that it was hoped to take as many traders as possible into the new market. He added that Sunday trading would also be possible and that existing traders would be encouraged to open on Sundays.

The Property Section Head then advised on the design and functionality of the market. He said that 56 stalls would be available and added that the landlord would be required to provide six car parking spaces.

In reply to questions from Members and Traders, Martin Wills advised that all permanent stallage would be covered and that approximately 50 sq feet would be 'lost' to the parking spaces.

In reply to questions from Councillor Bell, Martin Wills explained that the main entrance to the market would be from the High Street; this would be a gated entrance to ensure security. He added that it would be wise for WBC to consult with Herts County Council Highway Department regarding suitable signage for the market to be positioned on the nearby flyover.

One Trader noted the six parking spaces at the rear entrance and counselled that in the morning there would be a large volume of traffic in this area due to traders unloading goods. This would lead to a 'backup' of vehicles waiting to unload.

John Burton assured traders that this should not be a problem and advised that there would be space at the side of the T J Hughes building for vehicles to back in although this would need careful management. He agreed that it would be sensible for traders to have access to unload on non-working days.

The Property Section Head added that unloading time at Greenwich was 10 minutes; he advised that it would be wise for traders to consider changing their methods of managing supplies.

John Burton explained the distinction between day trading and core trading: Day Traders used a stall on a daily basis: they brought goods to the market and then took their supplies away at the end of the day whilst core traders engaged in 'kiosk trading' whereby they rented a permanent stall. He added that the new market would have a combination of both types of market trading. He added that the market capacity would increase through flexibility and that the management company would organise and run this aspect of the operation.

Martin Wills advised that the management company was keen for the market to trade on more days than at present. The market could be open all week allowing for different types of markets on Sundays. He also explained that the market site would provide an accepted 'walkthrough' for visitors to the area.

A Trader pointed out that the Harlequin attracted 70% of those who came to shop in the town and asked how these shoppers could be encouraged to go through the back entrance to the market.

The Chair replied that market customers used the current market's back entrance from Sutton Road and that this would continue with the new site. She added that there would now be two possible entrances.

Councillor Lynch stressed the importance of high visibility of the market and convenient access. She suggested that appropriate landscaping would facilitate easy access and good flow from one area to another.

John Burton agreed that good visibility and no barriers to accessibility were key; he added that this would be managed by the management company and traders.

The Managing Director advised that traders would be asked to share their vision of the new site in order to make the market a successful venue. He explained that Charter Place would be refurbished to contain a cinema, high quality retail and a small indoor market. Investment would also be made into the top of the town which would undergo a transformation to include event space.

Councillor Bell noted the concerns of traders with regard to the back entrance to the market. He counselled that practical co-operation with Hertfordshire Highways would be required as it was imperative that the entrance be highly visible.

The Chair said that customers would visit the market if it was attractive to them but that it was important that goods on offer were commodities they wished to buy.

The Chair of the Market Traders asked at what point in time the traders could make an informed choice on the options available to them.

The Property Section Head advised that this aspect would be the next stage in the process. Survey works on the car parks would be accomplished within the following two months. He then advised on the timetable for works on construction and stated that completion would be in the Summer of 2014.

In reply to a question from the Chair of the Market Traders, the Property Section Head assured the meeting that there was confidence that the work would be completed on time and advised that there was built-in

contingency. He added that time-scales for completion of the canopy and the modular units had been agreed.

Councillor Meerabux suggested that the market be linked to Palace Theatre through later opening times; he considered that this could increase footfall.

Councillor Lynch considered that blocking the subway could be an option as this would increase ease of access.

The Managing Director advised that the subway could be either demolished or enhanced; it was important to consider which would be the optimum choice.

The Chair of the Market Traders asked whether there would be a public consultation. He also commented on the relocation of the Market Supervisor and the Market Administrator to offices at the Town Hall; he considered that this would not be helpful for the operation of the market.

The Property Section Head advised that there would be a public consultation. With regard to the relocation of officers, he said that there would be insufficient room for a designated office at the market but that staff would attend frequently and would be a highly visible presence.

One Trader asked whether it would be necessary for existing traders to apply for stallage in the market.

The Property Section Head explained that all traders would need to apply for a stall as the intention was not to simply move the old market to a new destination but to create a totally new market.

The Managing Director advised that the Council's objective was to create a new concept for the market with new stallage and new operating days.

The Property Section Head added that the new market would offer opportunity for both permanent 'kiosk' stalls for core traders and day stalls for entrepreneurial traders.

Councillor Lynch advised that it would be wise to consult with residents to see what they wished for in the market. She considered that it would be sensible to ask why footfall had decreased.

The Property Section Head considered that this would not be useful as it was difficult for customers to envision improvements until offered suitable ideas.

The Chair advised that it was too late for consultation as the majority of decisions had already been determined. She added, however, that final 'tweaks' would be possible.

One Trader noted that the core traders unloaded their goods daily and that this would create massive transport difficulties.

The Chair advised that the management company would make decisions on this issue and that the traders could then decide how they wished to proceed.

John Burton said that there would be centralised storage which traders would be able to rent. He added that core trading was essential. He explained that it had been proved that markets were only successful when customers were confident of opening days.

A Trader asked whether the existing building would be developed immediately and whether storage would be in close proximity to traders' stalls.

The Chair advised that with regard to the existing building it would be for CSC to decide how they would proceed but that it was unlikely that they would wish to prolong redevelopment.

John Burton said that day traders could move their goods back and forth and set up their stalls on a daily basis. Core traders, however, would have kiosk units on which they could pull down the shutters at the end of the day.

The Chair of the market traders asked for an explanation of the process for deciding on the management company.

The Property Section Head explained that it was important that the company had had previous experience and could successfully envisage what was required in Watford. He stressed that the decision would not be determined merely on cost.

The Chair added that a good company would be willing to talk to traders and elicit their opinions.

The Managing Director said that it would be useful if some of the Market Working Group were to be involved in the selection process.

ACTIONS:

1. The Property Section Head said that the next step in the process was for survey work to be undertaken. Following this, the design could be finalised and construction could commence.
2. There would be a Market Traders' newsletter in April 2013.

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DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting was scheduled for 28 May 2013.

The Chair advised, however, that the meeting could be rescheduled in the event of there being no new information to report.

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

Chair
Market Working Group

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