

West Suffolk Markets Review Update

Report number:	OAS/WS/24/011	
Report to and date(s):	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	18 July 2024
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Decisions Plan: **This item is not required to be included in the Decisions Plan.**

Wards impacted: **All**

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee **note** the content of this report.

1. Context to this report

- 1.1 In July 2022 Overview and Scrutiny Committee concluded its review into the provisions markets run by West Suffolk Council. The action plan was approved by Cabinet (previous administration) at its meeting in July 2022 and this report provides a summary of the progress achieved in the implementation of that action plan, so far.

2. Background

- 2.1 The action plan has the following overarching banner: - "Creating Successful Markets - maximising the potential of markets and special events on the markets to support the vitality and viability of town centres."

The actions fall broadly into five themes:

1. Grow the customer base for markets by raising awareness and attracting new customers and traders to West Suffolk markets.
2. Provide opportunities for shoppers and members of the public to engage in community and wellbeing activities through markets.
3. Increase footfall in town centres more widely by improving their vitality through markets and events.
4. Support effective running, growth, and ongoing financial viability of West Suffolk markets.
5. Reduce the environmental impact of West Suffolk markets and promote more sustainable shopping habits.

3. Progress

- 3.1 The following actions have been completed:

Theme 1 - Grow the customer base for markets by raising awareness and attracting new customers and traders to West Suffolk markets:

- 3.2 A dedicated communications officer is now in post and a communications plan is in place. The dedicated officer is working with the teams to ensure there is clear and regular communications regarding the Council's markets, which will be incorporated in regular updates of the communications plan.
- 3.3 In addition, the social media platforms have been streamlined including changes to the Newmarket and Mildenhall market pages. These are now managed by WS Comms and have the WSC corporate approach.

- 3.4 The Markets website has been updated with new images and events and there is a process in place to ensure the current events schedule is kept up to date. Work continues with the National Market Traders Federation (NMTF) to promote our trader incentives.
- 3.5 Another action under this theme is for officers to deliver a development plan for each of West Suffolk’s markets which should be kept under review and monitored regularly. This action is covered by section 4 of this report below.
- 3.6 Benchmarking and best practice research has been undertaken to help inform the possibilities and options for our markets. Both NABMA and the NMTF have helped with the benchmarking exercise and particularly with pitch fees, through regular liaison with both bodies. We also attend regular Zoom meetings with the NMTF and other market operators.
- 3.7 A range of initiatives have been introduced, such as new trader incentives, additional specialist markets e.g., Young Traders and Community Markets. These incentives have raised the numbers of traders on the markets across the district.
- 3.8 Start Up Offers are to encourage people who would like to try market trading the opportunity to trial our markets at little or no cost. Trading is free of charge for 12 weeks for Haverhill, Mildenhall, Brandon and Newmarket and we have a £60 deal for 12 weeks at Bury St Edmunds Wednesday market. Due to being oversubscribed, the Saturday market remains the standard rate.
- 3.9 These deals started in November and many stalls are still within their 12-week period but currently the figures are:

Town	Number of New Traders - Nov	Number of New Traders still trading – Feb
Brandon	3	2
BSE	6	5
Haverhill	8	4
Mildenhall	3	2
Newmarket	7	4

- 3.10 The current period covers December and January, which are not the best months for new businesses, so we will have a better understanding of how this is working later in the year.

3.11 Special Markets - Number of traders (approx.)

Town	2020-21 June-Oct	2021-22 April-Dec	2022-23 March-Dec
Brandon			20
BSE	50	70	100
Haverhill	10	15	30
Mildenhall			
Newmarket	6	10	15

Theme 2 - Provide opportunities for shoppers and members of the public to engage in community and wellbeing activities through markets:

- 3.12 In 2023 Makers Markets were organised in Haverhill, Bury and Newmarket from March 2023 until December 2023. All were promoted via our website.
- 3.13 The Young Trader competition 2023 was held in Bury and Haverhill. For 2024 we have local heats in Bury on Wednesday 12 June and Newmarket on Saturday 13 July. The regional final is being held in Bury on Wednesday 31 July.
- 3.14 West Suffolk College took part in a 'market takeover' event in April 2023. The Market Development Officer talked to business study students to promote market trading. This year we have a 'Students Operating Sustainably' market event on Friday 24 April.
- 3.15 Customer and trader feedback forms were designed by West Suffolk College students who conducted market research in April 2023.
- 3.16 For 2024, we have makers markets planned from March until December, as opposed to April to October in 2021 when the review commenced, in Newmarket, Bury and Haverhill and are introducing monthly community markets in Brandon on Saturdays in June, July, August, and September this year.
- 3.17 Newmarket market will be taking part in the Newmarket Food and Drink Festival 26 – 28 July 2024 in partnership with The Guineas management and Love Newmarket.
- 3.18 Additional Sunday markets in Bury during November and December are being discussed and will be confirmed following our next market trader liaison meeting.
- 3.19 Additional special events in the school holidays and in December are being considered in all towns and we are working with town councils and other organisations.

Theme 3 - Increase footfall in town centres more widely by improving their vitality through markets and events:

3.20 By revitalising the markets with the initiatives (also mentioned in Theme 2), and increasing the number of traders, we are encouraging additional footfall and a better perception of the markets. The Makers Markets are held on non-market days in some towns, but are held on existing market days in Haverhill and Newmarket to drive footfall back into the town:

- Special events including young trader markets and makers markets raise the profile and awareness of our markets and encourage additional footfall as well as encouraging a different demographic to visit our markets.
- All new traders are given help and advice on trading. This includes practical advice, help with funding and the next steps. Trading on event markets gives stallholders a platform to trial trading without having to commit to a regular market and enables them to learn, gain confidence and make contacts.
- Event markets benefit our regular markets by increasing stallholder numbers and widening the offer of products and produce available. They encourage traders to look at trading at our regular markets and if required help them with the next steps to locate premises within West Suffolk.
- We have had approximately 12 market traders which have moved into their own premises during the last four years, and this has included three stallholders which were originally trading at our young trader markets. Some of these traders with premises still trade at the markets on a casual basis.

Theme 4 - Support effective running, growth, and ongoing financial viability of West Suffolk markets:

3.21 There are two types of traders – Casual and permanent traders. There are different conditions for both types and work to review these classifications has been undertaken. This piece of work is linked to the wider piece of work related to the review of the Market Licence Regulations.

3.22 Market Liaison Meetings are held regularly with traders, and these have been expanded to trader representatives from all WS markets. These meetings provide the opportunity for WS to gain important feedback from the traders and to enable the traders to raise important points with the teams.

3.23 Work has started with regard to the review of the Market Licence Regulations (MLR). There are two parts to this including the main

document and also a “plain English” version. The aim of this work is to increase the clarity, consistency and offer across all of the markets. The rules and regulations will be looked at to make sure they are still current and consider the changing role of the High Street, retail patterns and lifestyle changes. These include flexible trading, additional market days, locations, and timings. Consideration is being given to common issues such as severe weather, attendance, sanctions and compliance.

- 3.24 The issue of trader parking at each market has been investigated. There were different approaches to parking depending on the location. After some consideration, there will be some changes to trader parking, but it will not be appropriate to have one unified approach for trader parking across all our towns. As we often mention, the towns, their infrastructure and circumstances are very different, and a one size fits all approach does not always work.
- 3.25 Market officers continue to provide their contact details to traders across all markets and the Market Supervisor is available during market hours. As well as this, market officers are in attendance at the markets.
- 3.26 With regard to the action to review the charging structure for markets, including the potential use of incentives and a review of the costs of supplies. A full review has been undertaken into:
- Pitch fees
 - Waste collection needs
 - Casual v Permanent fees
 - Electricity usage
 - Licence changes
 - Fines
- 3.27 A charging structure proposal was drafted and suggested increasing the pitch fees to market traders, in line with the UK RPI increase. It was also proposed to increase the electricity charges to reflect the rise in UK electricity charges as currently there is a flat rate applied regardless of usage. Occupancy levels across all of West Suffolk markets were reviewed and viable options considered to encourage traders and footfall. Market pitch fees have not been increased for the year 2023/24 following agreement with the relevant Portfolio Holder.
- 3.28 Progress has been made with transferring to electronic payments rather than manual cash handling. Testing is in progress and some errors have been identified. Further work is required to ensure that this approach will work in practice. Various options are being considered including online payments, aiming for a self-service approach further down the line.

- 3.29 A proposal has been drafted for new start-up deals for Newmarket, Brandon, Mildenhall, Haverhill and Bury (Wednesday markets) – to maximise occupancy. This deal has been implemented and will continue for the near future. We will review the demand and impact of this deal once it has been running for 12 months.
- 3.30 A review of the provision of waste and cleansing services at each of our markets has been progressed. As a result of this work there has been a 25% reduction of bin provision in Newmarket and a further 20% is being investigated.
- 3.31 Waste arrangements in Bury St Edmunds have been reviewed and the full impact is to be assessed. Recycling options were part of the charging proposals that have not been progressed.

Theme 5 - Reduce the environmental impact of West Suffolk markets and promote more sustainable shopping habits:

- 3.32 We have completed an assessment to understand:
- What are the environmental impacts of the market? – standard indicators may include waste generation and contamination, water pollution i.e., spillages and run offs, CO2 emissions via vehicle movements, electricity usage and air pollution?
 - How does it relate to WSC's Net Zero plan?
 - How do other markets within Suffolk reduce their environmental impact?
 - Are there any incentives we can provide to traders to encourage them to change – we could offer pitch fee incentives if waste is disposed of appropriately.
- 3.33 Information on new environmental legislation has been sent to all permanent traders and all new enquiries including information on communications plan and website. We have investigated the viability of purchasing recyclable or biodegradable bags to sell to market traders. We have been encouraging local recycling groups (similar to Clare and Haverhill) to provide recycling points for hard to recycle items on our markets. In addition, WSC/SCC recycling officers regularly attend our markets giving information and to promote recycling.
- 3.34 We work with organisations such as "Still Good Food" and "BSE Eco Carriers" to encourage traders to donate waste food and offer delivery service during the cargo bike.

Conclusions

- 3.35 Retail remains extremely challenging, and our markets are not immune from this. Patterns of shopping have changed over recent years with behavioural and demographic change having accelerated since the pandemic. Our markets continue to evolve to reflect

changing demand and offer a very cost effective and low risk environment to try new retail initiatives and products.

- 3.36 The majority of the actions identified through the Markets Review work have now been undertaken and completed where appropriate. Some of the actions are on-going and are now part of the operational approach to the delivery of our markets.
- 3.37 There are three actions that have not been completed in their entirety, the first is the redrafting of the Market License Regulations and the second is different trading patterns for different markets and the third is the move to electronic payments instead of cash handling. Each of these actions are reliant on other elements of the Council and are matters that take longer to implement. Work is well progressed on all three actions, and they will be completed in the coming months.
- 3.38 There have been some really good outcomes as a result of this work. The communication and information surrounding the markets has been improved significantly. We now have a dedicated communications officer who is working with the teams to help promote and elevate the markets. New trader packages have been implemented to encourage additional market stalls. It takes a while to see the benefits of this type of action however there is the potential for some of the smaller markets to grow as a result of these initiatives.
- 3.39 The Markets Liaison meetings are now attended by representatives from some of the other towns. This is a very efficient model of liaison and enables each of the markets to have a clear communication route and provides the traders with support and access to the wider network.
- 3.40 There have been significant reductions in waste collected from the markets and further improvements are possible in this area too. Work will continue to help our markets to continue to become even more environmentally sustainable.

4. Market Development Plans and Engagement

- 4.1 As mentioned at para 3.5 above another part of the action plan was for officers to deliver a development plan for each of West Suffolk's markets which should be kept under review and monitored regularly.
- 4.2 Work is currently underway to prepare these Market Development Plans and a period of engagement with stakeholders has commenced to help provide content to the plans and to enable them to be bespoke to each town.

- 4.3 To change the focus from servicing to developing, a 3-year development plan will aim to grow each market individually while delivering from a single team with the right people in the right positions. This plan includes a proposal for additional investment into the market infrastructure. This investment will allow for additional capacity, product development and marketing and promotion.
- 4.4 To ensure the market development plans are as comprehensive as possible we conducted a survey for the general public, stakeholders, traders etc to complete. This survey closed on 31 May and information from the survey responses will be used to finalise the development plans.
- 4.5 In addition, a series of engagement sessions have been held with stakeholders from each town and also with the traders. This information is being used to ensure each development plan is fit for purpose. Note the sessions for Brandon and Clare were not held due to no attendance from these towns.

5. Background documents associated with this report

- 5.1 Report number [OAS.WS.20.017](#) and [Appendix 2](#) work programme suggestion form.
- 5.2 The link to the action plan document is as follows:
Cabinet: 19 July 2022 - [CAB/WS/22/037](#) and [Appendix A](#) Action Plan