

“Markets Matter”

West Suffolk Markets Development Plan 2024

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Executive summary

In July 2022 Cabinet approved the action plan recommended by the Overview & Scrutiny Markets Review Working Group

In April 2024 West Suffolk Cabinet continued to show support for the action plan by requesting that a Market Development Plan be created to support the transition of West Suffolk markets into the future.

Building on the existing Market Review, with an emphasis on how we develop individual market offers, engagement was conducted with residents, traders, and visitors to each of the six markets to support previous finding and further inform the development plan.

The results showed that shoppers, visitors, and traders continue to care about the markets and want to see them thrive with increased events, variety of stalls, increased environmental awareness and a pleasant and friendly atmosphere.

The “Markets Matter” Development Plan sets out a three-year ambition for the future of our markets with the individual needs of the towns, their traders, and their residents at its heart with a vision objective to shift the focus from servicing to active development; support and nurture the markets; protect and preserve; provide a vibrant space; engage with partners and stakeholders, encourage more sustainability; and be resilient and adaptive.

An overarching framework and individual town plans, set out improvements and initiatives to be carried out by a dedicated markets team that will focus on developing our markets such as encouraging more traders through initiatives offering more variety, themed markets, more events, increased support for traders, and more community and engagement.

Actions Summary

- Assemble the dedicated markets team
- Provide a more robust customer service experience for traders inc. business support
- Market officers to use social media platforms to promote markets
- Review and update the market licence regulations geared towards growth
- Develop a clear Inclement Weather Policy for traders
- Encourage local businesses to use the market as a shop front
- Expand the Young Trader Markets
- Provide additional seating, music and activities
- Explore new themed and events markets
- Explore new initiatives to retain existing and attract new traders
- Improve the appearance of the town centre and market area

Appendix A

Measuring the impact of this plan will be a key element with regular monitoring and local engagement to ensure that the plan remains suitable and impactful for each town.

1. Introduction

West Suffolk is home to six key market towns with strong rural communities surrounding them. The six regular markets in towns across the district are supplemented by a variety of event markets from Makers Markets to Young Trader competitions. These markets are steeped in history, with Bury St Edmunds tracing its market back to the times of William the Conqueror, Newmarket holding a market for over 800 years and Mildenhall market having been granted a royal charter in 1412. The rules and regulations for the markets are set and enforced by West Suffolk Council and were last reviewed in 2019.

Markets are currently operated by West Suffolk Council across the six towns (Brandon, Bury St Edmunds, Clare, Haverhill, Mildenhall and Newmarket) and are operated between twice weekly and monthly with c. 123 permanent traders between them.

Makers Markets are operated between March and December in Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Newmarket with additional events leading up to Christmas. They represent an opportunity for independent businesses and talented local residents to showcase their locally produced food, drink, and other merchandise. A farmers' market is also delivered under contract in Bury St Edmunds by Suffolk Market Events between March and December.

Across the towns there is a need for the markets to be developed rather than serviced by working with the traders, both old and new, to expand the offer, attract new customers, promote the offer, and protect the history and heritage of the markets.

In 2022 a review of markets investigated the role of West Suffolk Council, considering how to align the operation of the markets to the council's strategic vision and support their development to meet the corporate priorities. A Market Review Action plan "Creating Successful Markets" was developed which outlined measures to improve the markets, such as improving communications, marketing to reviewing fees and waste provision and creating town specific development plans.

This Market Development Plan builds upon the 2022 Market Review with the production of town-specific development plans for our markets.

With the aim of improving the way that markets are operated based on lessons learned, the market review and the invaluable input from our residents, traders, and visitors of the market, these frameworks, supported by an overarching plan, outline a variety of measures and initiatives ranging from short to long term timescales with bespoke place-based interventions.

By delivering these changes and providing increased and individualised support to our towns we will support West Suffolk markets into the future, with the resilience to further adapt and evolve over time.

2. Challenges and opportunities

West Suffolk Council's Strategic Priorities 2024-28 identifies sustainable growth as one of the four priority areas. Within this area is a focus to "continue to support West Suffolk's local high streets and markets as the vibrant centres of thriving local communities." It also sets out a wider engagement strategy with plans for improving our town and village high streets and town centres, including markets.

This engagement focus has allowed the Market Review 2022 to be built upon further by returning to local stakeholders, traders and the public to understand more about the challenges and opportunities in each town to ensure that the correct measures are proposed, developed, and implemented in each town.

West Suffolk's towns vary in size and offer. These differences are evident in their markets, from a small monthly market in Clare to a large twice weekly market in Bury St Edmunds.

These markets have different needs, requirements, and ways of operating, which are observations made in the 2022 Market Review. A range of other challenges have been identified, such as:

- a. **The way markets are operated.** With a primary focus to date on servicing the markets there has been less resource available to develop the markets and the traders which presents a key opportunity to shift this approach to develop thriving markets.
- b. **The changing nature of retail.** In some towns markets are not as frequently used as others in addition to the reliance and convenience of online retail and the role of markets in 2024 needs to be understood.
- c. **The Market Licence Regulations.** These regulations require updating to suit the role of markets in 2024 and beyond and the way in which traders.
- d. **The type of market in each town.**
- e. **Market locations.** Traders and residents in some towns highlighted that some markets could perform better and be more attractive if they were situated in a different location in the town.
- f. **Attracting new traders and customers.** A lack of variety and stall numbers was a criticism across a number of markets and there is an opportunity to broaden the offer and support new businesses across the markets.
- g. **Adverse weather policies.** The weather has caused issue for traders in recent years with high winds in particular causing early or total closures of the market affecting their incomes and a clear approach is needed.
- h. **Engagement with traders and town stakeholders.** The engagement with traders and towns has operated through several channels and has often caused mix messaging but there is an enthusiasm in the towns for clearer and greater engagement.

Appendix A

In order to protect and preserve West Suffolk markets the Council will undertake this shift, increase its investment in markets, and in partnership with the towns, drive the Markets Matter vision, detailed in section 4.

This change presents an opportunity to shift the way in which markets are operated across West Suffolk from servicing to development for the benefit of all, to provide a vibrant space for markets and communities which are resilient to future challenges.

3. Engagement

The purpose of the engagement was to gather the views, insights, and opinions from a wide range of people in order to inform the Market Development Plan. The work started with the council's 2022 Market Review, with an emphasis on how we develop individual market offers and building on the characteristics and potential customers for each of our six towns.

The council ran an online survey from 14 May to 31 May 2024 and received a total of 189 responses.

It was communicated through local stakeholders, the press and targeted social media posts inviting traders and the communities to "Have Your Say! Markets Matter!"

In addition to the survey, a series of stakeholder sessions were held to gather the thoughts of local stakeholders in each town with the opportunity to discuss the questions posed in the survey and to offer their wider insights and opinions. A session was held for each town on MS Teams between 21 and 24 May 2024.

Survey findings

The engagement supported the findings of the 2022 Market Review: overall, market users are satisfied with the location, timings and frequency of the markets and they visit to support local businesses, to shop for groceries and to enjoy the outdoors, however there are clear individual differences between the towns.

While Brandon, Clare and Bury St Edmunds reported high satisfaction rates of the market, visitors, and traders in Haverhill and Mildenhall were dissatisfied. A number of challenges and opportunities were highlighted and considered as part of the action plan creation with these individual issues at its heart.

The engagement sessions provided more in-depth feedback from town stakeholders, highlighting that markets need to be protected and preserved, are key to their local communities and that the shift in focus from 'servicing' to 'developing' is what the markets need.

In addition to the desire for the markets to become more environmentally friendly and sustainable, the demand for an increase in event and special markets remains high.

It was clear from the recent survey that marketing and promotion of the markets has increased, with fewer respondents noting this as a negative. However, physical promotion, such as signage, was considered an issue in several towns.

The traders also reported on the positives of trading in West Suffolk, such as the camaraderie with fellow traders, interacting with customers and being part of the community. Nonetheless, traders wanted more support around trading in adverse

Appendix A

weather, increased support, as well as updated rules and regulations to suit trading in 2024.

The overall engagement approach resulted in proposed actions and initiatives for markets – both in terms of an overarching strategic approach as well as bespoke actions for individual towns. These have been integrated into the appropriate development plan.

The summary report from the public engagement survey is available in appendix 2.

4. The Vision - “Markets Matter”

Markets provide a space for businesses to start and grow, to provide local goods and act as a hub for communities. Markets are in a period of transition and support is needed for future development, led by West Suffolk Council but supported in partnership by local stakeholders, traders and visitors across the towns.

Building on the success of West Suffolk Markets and to support them into the future we want the following outcomes:

A wider variety of traders and events operating in the towns

This will provide a draw to attract new customers to the market, which in turn will entice new traders to operate across the district.

More traders engaging in business support

Our traders will continue to be nurtured and developed by signposting them to appropriate business support and funding opportunities to support their business growth ambitions.

Increased awareness of West Suffolk markets

With a focus on the history, heritage and uniqueness of each town, more people locally and further afield will associate West Suffolk as the home of thriving market towns.

A positive community narrative around the markets

Traders and communities will speak positively about the markets, encouraging others to visit and trade and enjoy the social environment created by the markets.

Increased footfall to our markets and town centres

The thriving markets and associated events will provide a key draw for visitors into our town centres providing an increase in footfall which will benefit both the market and neighbouring town centre businesses.

Reduced environmental impact from the markets

Working with traders there will be a reduction in the waste generated from the market, which requires disposal, and these positive behaviours will be rewarded.

5. The Development Plan

Building on the 2022 Market Review in addition to the 2024 engagement, the Markets Matter development plan proposes a variety of actions and initiatives under the following themes:

- Supporting businesses
- Working with the community
- Marketing the markets
- Providing an experience
- Caring for the environment

The development plan has an overarching framework applicable to all West Suffolk markets in addition to providing place specific plans that set out a tailored approach to suit each individual town. These actions have been developed through engagement and best practice and will act as a roadmap for the markets team to work with traders, local stakeholders, and communities.

The key objectives of the development plan are to:

- a. **Shift the focus** from servicing the market to actively developing it with new markets, initiatives with additional resource.
- b. **Support and nurture the markets** by attracting new traders and support the existing.
- c. **Protect and preserve** the value, history, and heritage of the markets, by focussing on the individual towns.
- d. **Provide a space for vibrant markets** to serve our communities with a positive narrative.
- e. **Engage with partners and stakeholders** in each town in the practical delivery and promotion of our markets.
- f. **Encourage more sustainability** and environmental awareness by rewarding good trading behaviours and reducing waste.
- g. **Be resilient and adaptive** to change by regular evaluating and monitoring to ensure the appropriate support is in place.

The overarching framework and development plans for each individual town are set out in further detail in appendix 1.

6. Evaluation

A key element of this development plan will be to evaluate the impact of the actions over time. This is to ensure that the measures implemented are successful and making a difference, and to consider if a different approach is needed in some circumstances.

This evaluation will involve a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data to gain an insight into the following key measures identified through our engagement.

- A wider variety of traders operating in more towns.
- Raised awareness of West Suffolk markets from marketing and promotions.
- Reduced environmental impact of markets.
- A positive community narrative around the markets.
- Increased footfall to our markets and town centres.
- More traders engaging in business support.
- Higher trader satisfaction

Regular engagement with members, town stakeholders, traders and shoppers will also be a key element to ensuring the success of the markets.

The proposed timeframes in the plans are based on the key actions that are required to implement the specific town initiatives in addition to the resource available and reported urgency from the engagement sessions. These are subject to change through member and local consultation.

Markets Matter is not intended to be a short-term fix to address the issues raised during 2024 but will be a 'living' document and subject to regular updates and modifications.

The market development plan will return to members of Cabinet after the first six months to provide an update on progress and any new initiatives. A regular update will then be provided as appropriate as progress is made.