

## Markets Forum

A meeting of Markets Forum was held on Wednesday, 30th April, 2008.

**Present:** Cllr Robert Cook(Chairman), Cllr Bill Noble(Vice-Chairman), Cllr Mrs Jennie Beaumont, Cllr Ian Dalgarno, Cllr Mrs Suzanne Fletcher, Ms E Hutchinson, Mr P Johnson, Mr J Mason, Mrs P Mason

**Officers:** S. Burgess, C. Watson (DNS), M. Jones (LD)

**Also in attendance:** Market Traders, The Circuit

**Apologies:** None

**MF  
1/08**      **Appointment of Chair 2008/9**

RESOLVED that Councillor Cook be appointed Chair of the Markets Forum for the Municipal Year 2008/09.

**MF  
2/08**      **Appointment of Vice-Chair 2008/9**

RESOLVED that Cllr Mrs Fletcher be appointed Vice-Chair of the Markets Forum for the Municipal Year 2008/09.

**MF  
3/08**      **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interested declared.

**MF  
4/08**      **Minutes of the Meeting Held 19th March 2008**

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2008

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2008 be agreed as a true record.

**MF  
5/08**      **Christmas Four-Day Market Fair Event**

The Town Centre Manager presented proposals to hold a Christmas Market Fair and Festival Event for discussion.

It was explained that Cabinet had approved funding of £550,000 over a three year period to hold a Christmas Market Fair and Festival Event. The event was seen as an opportunity to build on the success of Stockton Sparkles, which had been running for two years, and lead up to the 700th anniversary of Stockton's Market Charter in 2010. It was hoped that the event could be financially self-sustaining after 2010. It was proposed that the 2008 event be held over four days, 27th - 30th November, following the Christmas Lights Switch-On activities. The licensing and legal issues relating to the event were being dealt with and discussions were underway with the potential suppliers and operating companies. The next steps of the process were to promote the event, sign up key partners, and offer opportunities for sponsors. Discussion with Market Traders at the forum meeting so that they could benefit from the possible opportunities for success from the event was seen as key to this process.

The Christmas Market event proposals focussed on four main areas of the

Town Centre, as follows:-

\*Parish Gardens could accommodate craft stalls, food providers, community seating and a stage for entertainment.

\*The south end of the pedestrian area of the High Street provided possibilities of being an area exclusively for Stockton Market Traders. The plans included the provision of marquee stalls for the traders in this area, rather than traders bringing their own stall. It was proposed that the marquee stalls be erected by SBC and the sizes available would be 3m x 3m or 3m x 6m.

\*The north end of the pedestrian area of the High Street could accommodate a Continental Christmas Market. It was believed that this market could complement the south High Street area and sell differing products. The Town Centre Manager had secured one of the top two Continental Christmas Market providers in the country who were coming for a site visit on 7 May.

\*Church Road/Splash area could house a range of entertainment and there was a possibility for a full size ice rink somewhere in that area.

The proposals included buildings in each area being illuminated for atmospherics. The Cultural Quarter was due to be made over in summer/autumn of 2008, and it was hoped that there could be street cafes and performers, possibly linked to the Georgian Theatre, in that area to complement the event.

A handout was distributed noting the opportunities for and proposed involvement of Stockton Market Traders, and members of the Forum and Market Traders were given an opportunity to ask questions.

P. Johnson expressed concern that Market Traders would be displaced by this event, and that there would not be enough spaces for current Market Traders. The Town Centre Manager explained that this was a four day event, and while she hoped that all Market Traders would take up the opportunity to participate she was aware that some won't wish to stand for the full four days required. Therefore she had planned a smaller space for the Traders. She anticipated that they could accommodate all those that wished to participate.

Traders were doubtful whether a Christmas Market Event could be as successful in Stockton as it had been in other areas of the Country, due to the number and nature of the shops in the town. It was commented that it was not appropriate to compare Stockton to bigger areas such as Manchester, where the Christmas Markets were particularly successful.

The Market Traders queried whether they would be compensated for the loss of trade from the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday Markets if they decided not to take part in the event. It was noted that the traders had commitments to other Markets in the area and therefore may not be able to commit to a four day event in Stockton. The Town Centre Manager stated that it would not be possible to compensate traders for a loss of earnings and therefore she was aware that they would need to make a business decision on whether to take up this unique opportunity that was on offer to them. She anticipated an increase in trade for all traders during the event due to the number of people expected to be attracted to the town by the activities that were planned to take place.

Traders believed that any movement of regular pitches could affect trade, as

regular customers were used to their pitches. The Town Centre Manager explained that the Christmas Market proposals were not to hold a regular market but an event to attract a different audience in addition to regular customers. A further part of the proposals included the suggestion that all markets in the Borough be cancelled for the period while the event was taking place so that all resources could be focussed at the event and traders would not be faced with conflicting demands. Under the terms of the Market Charter SBC could cancel the market giving only one days' notice; however the Town Centre Manager believed that by giving the Market Traders several months notice and involving them in the event, both sides were be able to gain the maximum benefit. The Town Centre Manager emphasised the promotion for the event, which was planned to be aimed at both regular customers of Stockton Market and new customers, and therefore no loss of regular trade was anticipated. Cllr Beaumont highlighted that as this was an opportunity to attract new customers to Stockton, customers which could be unaware of the trader's regular pitches and therefore not realise that they were possibly displaced. It was noted that it was proposed to measure footfall at the event via counters and surveys.

Traders questioned the proposed timing of the event, which was at the busiest time of their year. They requested that an event be planned in January or February instead, when business was slow. The Town Centre Manager explained that traditionally people did not spend during January or February therefore it was unlikely that an event at this time of year could attract as many customers. She added that the increased footfall for the event could increase footfall for other times of the year, as national research has shown that when new customers visit an area to participate in an activity, they were likely to return.

The Town Centre Manager explained that the Market Traders had been given the opportunity to reserve a space at the event before any other town centre businesses, and that she had felt it was important to inform and involve the traders at the earliest possible occasion. However, if there where spaces available after the deadline for the regular traders to reserve their space, other businesses could be recruited and the spaces filled. She reassured traders that if they decided to take up the opportunity to trade at the event, they could keep the same pitch that they had been allocated, on the reserved site for the full four days.

The layout of the event was discussed, and Traders were concerned that as the proposals were for the Continental Market to occupy the bigger site, customers might not visit the proposed site that they had been given and remain in the bigger area. Examples were given of Christmas Markets where the additional stalls had run alongside the regular traders. E Hutchinson noted that when the French Market visited Darlington they had insisted the French Market integrated into the normal market, which had worked well. The Town Centre Manager stated that if the Christmas Market was to succeed then it had to be ensured that the asset of the High Street was filled with the type of activity that those visiting a Christmas Market expected to see, just in addition to a regular market. The possibility of requesting that the Continental Market integrate with the regular traders on the High Street or switching the sites available on the High Street was discussed. The Town Centre Manager agreed to approach the Continental Market operator regarding switching the proposed sites so that Stockton market occupied the north end and the continental Christmas market,

the south end, perhaps integrating at the meeting point. This was well received by several traders.

Cllr Dalgarno suggested that the Market Trader Representatives discuss the Christmas Market Fair proposals with the traders outside of the meeting and bring back a list of the contentious issues. He also suggested that the deadline for Market Traders to reserve a place at the event be moved to allow for these issues to be resolved first.

CONCLUDED that:-

1. The Town Centre Manager discuss the sites with the Continental Christmas Market Operator
2. The Market Trader Representatives bring back issues to the next meeting
3. The information be noted