

AGENDA ITEM 5

REPORT TO COUNCIL

7TH SEPTEMBER

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT

MARKETS PETITION

Summary

This report outlines the context to the presentation of a petition to the Council from market traders regarding a proposed relocation of part of the Stockton market. Covered in the report is a recognition that the market remains an asset to Stockton Town Centre, but that by making a number of improvements to the market as part of a wider range of measures to boost the economic performance of the High Street, an improved offer for a wider range customers could be achieved and additional complementary activities and markets could take place leading to an increased overall footfall for market traders to benefit from.

Background

The Petition

On 7th June 2011 market traders presented a petition entitled, 'Leave our market where it is. Tell the Council', to the Mayor. The petition contains 2,828 valid signatures and therefore exceeds the threshold of 2,000 signatures required for petitions to be debated at Council.

Stockton Market

Stockton has a rich history of markets in the town dating back to 1310 when the original Market Charter granted the Council rights to hold a Wednesday market to the south of Dovecot Street. These rights continue today by virtue of various legislation passed in the 1970s and 1980s.

The Saturday market became a franchise in 1984 under the Food Act, giving the market the same rights as on a Wednesday, it also operates under the same acts as the Wednesday market. The smaller Friday market is operated as a statutory market under the 1984 Food Act when every authority was granted the right to hold a market within its own boundary.

The Wednesday and Saturday markets currently attract in excess of 60 traders stretching some 300m from Marks and Spencers in the north to 99, High Street (Labyrinth) to the south. The Friday market attracts around 10 traders who are dispersed across the same broad area.

The layout of the Wednesday and Saturday markets was revised in 2007 when part of the market immediately outside the Castlegate Centre was moved across the High Street and accommodated within the main market area. These markets have continued to trade in the same location with the exception of when SIRF takes place, necessitating the need to relocate approximately 25 traders. The first Christmas market festival also resulted in 15 traders being relocated to the front of

Castlegate Centre. When traders are relocated to accommodate these activities, then the Council faces a reduction in income received as relocated traders are given a free pitch.

The changes to the market brought about by the 2007 refurbishment have led to a more haphazard and less regular layout which does not lend itself to easy access and thoroughfare, whilst the differing stall sizes that prevail and lack of uniformity in canopy design contribute towards a somewhat untidy appearance.

Why change the market ?

The importance of the market in Stockton is widely recognised, indeed it remains a significant cornerstone of the plans to regenerate the High Street. Stockton High Street, like most high streets up and down the country, is however suffering at present in terms of low footfall, high vacancy rates and high numbers of charity shops. To do nothing to the High Street is not an option as new life and vibrancy needs to be injected if the economic performance of the High Street is to be improved. The future vision for the market is therefore to enhance the current offer and appearance so that existing and new customers are attracted to Stockton market, thereby arresting the slow decline in market stall numbers and quality of goods, and also enabling the Council to operate complementary activities including specialist markets which will further drive up footfall and vibrancy in the town centre.

Given the space currently occupied on the High Street by the Wednesday and Saturday markets, it is difficult to attract other activities such as events and specialist markets without relocating part of the regular market. These activities require a prominent location on the High Street and usually include a Saturday, one of the market days. A permanent relocation of part of the market will ensure that the market is given a dedicated space from which they will no longer be required to move and freeing up space north of the Town Hall for the creation of a high quality public realm and multifunctional open space in the High Street to accommodate events and specialist markets.

A relocation of part of the market also provides an opportunity to enhance its appearance and layout, as well as mix and offer. Canopies need replacing and made more uniform, whilst the stalls themselves if grouped alongside stalls of a similar size will create more of a linear feel to the market without appearing overly regimented yet offering improved pedestrian circulation and servicing opportunities. In reconfiguring the market layout there will also be an opportunity to specifically target certain types of goods currently underrepresented in the market so that a more diverse range and mix of goods can be provided thereby appealing to a wider cross section of the shopping public. Inevitably these improvements would drive up the quality of the overall market offer in Stockton.

Proposals for the market

Stockton Town Centre Prospectus was introduced in March to showcase a number of projects designed to arrest the decline of the economic performance of the centre. As part of these proposals the market would be concentrated to the south of the Town Hall and in front of the Castlegate Centre. Despite less gross space in which to trade, all market stalls could be accommodated in this space due largely to some de-cluttering of street furniture and phone boxes, as well as a more functional use of space leading towards improved pedestrian flow. Marketing assistance for traders will be made available so that existing customers are able to find traders in any new layout.

A report was taken to Cabinet in July 2011 outlining the results of the consultation. The following paragraphs dealt with the market issues.

It is proposed that the regular market will run from the Town Hall southwards to the end of the High Street. This proposal was presented at public consultation and to the Markets Forum with 50% of

106 of the 212 respondents who gave a view on proposals supporting the idea of redesigning the layout of the market as proposed and a further 13% supporting the need to redesign the layout but not as proposed.

The concepts presented to the Market Forum received mixed reviews with some traders voicing their concerns around the amount of space that would be available for the market, potential conflict with bus stands and bus operations and the idea that putting stalls in front of the Castlegate Centre will create a sense of separation from the rest of the market. However, support was also given to proposals with some traders citing the need to 'move with the times' and adapt a more modern approach to trading. This view was supported by the predominantly supportive comments posted on the popular Gazette Live website by residents and users of the market. Furthermore, the proposals received support from the owners of the Castlegate Centre, who were keen to see stalls located adjacent to their shopping centre.

Comments from the public, partners and market traders are being taken into consideration in designing options for a new layout and location for the market. Further discussions will be held with market traders and the market operations team to ensure that the revised layout functions properly and meets the needs of the traders, users of the market and other stakeholders and businesses in the town centre. Whilst the new proposal could differ from that included in the Prospectus, there is still in all likelihood a need to move traders.

Nigel Laws
Regeneration Projects Manager
23.08.11