

Area West Committee – 19th November 2008

6. Operation of Markets in Area West (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

To update members in Area West on South Somerset Markets in Crewkerne, Ilminster and Chard.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- (1) pitch fees be increased for Ilminster and Chard Markets by 4.5% from 1st April 2009;
- (2) in order to promote Area West Markets and encourage new traders a one off introductory offer be made reducing pitch fees by 50% for the first 4 weeks.

Background

SSDC manages weekly outdoor markets in Yeovil, Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster.

Review

General

It has been a difficult year in the high street with a unique combination of circumstances; rising fuel prices, the credit crunch, and food price increases, notwithstanding the extreme weather conditions that have been experienced over the summer. This has had an impact on market income.

In the last 4 months, Junction 24, a new market place, has opened up at North Petherton. However, this does not seem to have adversely affected the markets at present.

Crewkerne

As part of the agreed plan to accommodate the new Waitrose Store, the market was moved from South Street Car Park in September 2007.

It was envisaged that a new location would be found either in Falkland Square or in Market Square outside Victoria Hall. Other Markets had been, and continue to be held at these locations. However, the owners of Falkland Square subsequently refused permission and a solution has still to be found to the County Highways objection to the use of Market Square on safety grounds.

The latest position is that a planning application for the Market Square option has been submitted and is currently being processed. County Highways have provided a safety audit for the market proposal, raising points including the following:-

- details of signage for the A356 adjacent to the Town Hall;
- exact position of bus stop;
- overnight parking on the western side of the A356 potentially interfering with the closure;
- clear and safe routes for pedestrians;
- parking of traders' vehicles;
- deliveries and collections at the business premises;
- short term parking.

These concerns have been addressed in a response dated 24th September 2008. A reply is still awaited. Additionally a safety audit for the whole site has been requested from an independent assessor, again the results are awaited.

Meanwhile the Market was relocated to the temporary car park in Henhayes field. This site was a far from ideal solution and trade suffered, especially early on before problems of site and shopper traffic conflict were resolved. During this year the market has reduced to 2 regular traders who are patiently awaiting the move to a more permanent site. Although other traders have attended the market they have not stayed because of the problems and the low footfall.

The market is currently situated in the part of South Street car park which, before the redevelopment began, had previously been the location of the recycling area. Although it has not been operating here for long the response from traders and customers seems to be favourable. It may be possible that this will prove a successful location for the market, but to keep the option open the Market Square proposal is being pursued through the planning process.

Ilminster Market

Ilminster market has remained steady. Occasional casual traders have added variety over the year. The new Tesco supermarket that opened in the last year does not appear to have affected the market's trade, despite concerns that it would.

Chard Market

Over the last year Chard has remained steady. Through the year different traders have become permanent and the market is filling up.

Income from Pitch Fees

Comparative income figures for 2007 & 2008 are as follows;

| Market | Income April – September 2007 | Income April –September 2008 | Variation |
|-----------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Chard | 4004 | 3489 | (515) |
| Crewkerne | 2508 | 579 | (1929) |
| Ilminster | 2058 | 2385 | 327 |

The current pitch fees are:

| Market | Casual Rate (per 10ft) | Permanent rate per 10ft |
|-----------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Chard | £13 | £11 |
| Crewkerne | £13 | £11 |
| Iminster | £9 | £9 |

In their last report, Internal Audit recommended that pitch fees should be reviewed annually.

Taking into account the level of other market rents in the region, the current viability of each market and national trends for markets, it is proposed:-

- (i) to maintain Crewkerne pitch fees at current levels until a permanent market location is agreed and
- (ii) to increase the pitch fees for Iminster and Chard by 4.5% from 1st April 2009.

Promotion

Biodegradable carrier bags advertising SSDC markets as a whole, with each market listed and the days of the week they operate, have been ordered and will be supplied to the market traders for use on their stalls in the markets in South Somerset and in any other markets they attend.

A comprehensive press release for Area West markets is planned when the situation in Crewkerne is resolved.

The proposed introductory offer will hopefully encourage new traders to try the markets in Area West the idea being that they will have time to establish themselves and become permanent. Income levels should increase because of the offer being taken up.

Financial Implications

Assuming a similar outturn to 2007/08, the 4.5% increase would bring in an additional £481.60 income.

However there is currently a budget deficit this year. The final income figures for the year will depend somewhat on the success of the scheduled Christmas markets.

Corporate Priorities

Aim 2 – Increase economic vitality and prosperity

Aim 4 – Ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities

Background Papers: None.