

Area West Committee – 15th June 2011

11. Update on SSDC Street Markets in Area West

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Purpose of the Report

To update members on the work of the Area West SSDC Street Markets Improvement Group.

Public Interest

In January 2011 SSDC set up a Market Improvement Group to look at ways to revitalise the Council's street markets in Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster. This report provides an update of the work carried out so far.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report.

Background

In the past two years there have been three reports on SSDC street markets in South Somerset with one focusing on Area West markets in particular. The reports highlighted the need for better promotion, improved working with traders in relation to marketing and promotions and the need for a more strategic approach in relation to the future development of Area West Markets. A report to Area West Committee in November 2010 recommended the setting up of the Markets Improvement Group with the remit to reinvigorate the SSDC markets in Area West and help create a vibrant market town atmosphere. The committee agreed in principle to allocate funding towards the delivery of the action plan, subject to prior approval by the committee of specific proposals.

Area West Markets Improvement Group (AWMIG)

This group was set up in January 2011 and is made up of the following people:

- 3 SSDC Councillors (one from each town)
- 3 Town Councillors
- SSDC Markets Supervisor
- SSDC Area West Community Regeneration Officer
- Market Traders

The group has met five times and looked in detail at issues affecting the viability and sustainability of the street markets. It was recognised by the group that the success of a street market is mainly down to the buying public and whether they choose to shop there. The group felt that over the past few years the public's relationship with street markets and High Street shopping has changed due to the advent of pound shops and internet shopping. It was decided to carry out a survey to establish what people want

from their local market. The results of the survey will be used to inform future work of the Markets Improvement Group.

Street Market Survey

Street surveys took place in Chard, Crewkerne and Ilminster between Wednesday 6th April and Thursday 14th April. In addition an online survey was available for people to complete on the South Somerset District Council website for the first two weeks in April. Altogether there were nearly 280 responses, most of which were obtained on the street by the survey collectors.

The detailed results of this survey are currently being written up into a report but a summary of the main findings are:

- The vast majority of people felt that street markets were either important or very important to life in a market town. In Ilminster in particular there were a number of comments made, such as:
“I wouldn’t like to lose the market, it adds to keeping the town alive”
“Very important and part of what keeps smaller towns alive”
- However most people who responded to the survey were not attending their local market on a weekly basis, although they did use the market on occasions and only 33 people (12%) that did not use markets at all.
- To encourage them to use markets more often people primarily wanted to see a wider range of goods on sale and local produce.
- People were asked what they currently buy at the market and fresh produce, flowers and plants were the favoured items.
- People were asked what they would like to be able to buy at their local market and 34% wanted more food items and/or local produce. Many others said they did not know as they liked to browse at markets and see what is on ‘offer’.
- In the past six months 66% of respondents had visited markets elsewhere, although the vast majority had only visited one once a month or less.
- Many people commented that they did not specifically visit a town just to go to the market but instead if they happened to be in a town when a market was on then they would go along to it. The markets elsewhere that people do visit reflect this as they tend to be in larger towns where there is more employment and a wider retail offer e.g. Bridport, Yeovil and Dorchester.
- The types of markets people use are primarily street markets and farmers markets and both Crewkerne and Taunton Farmers markets were talked about favourably.

The initial results of the survey suggest that food and local produce is an area to focus on as a way of revitalising the street markets. In terms of marketing and promotion the results suggest that as a market is just part of the retail offer of a town, and not the only thing people visit, then the town as a whole should be promoted and the street markets should not be viewed in isolation from the rest of the town.

Action Plan

One remit of the group is to develop an 18 month Action Plan detailing what needs to be done to revitalise the three street markets. The group have identified a number of themes with some specific actions to be worked up into their Action Plan. The themes and actions have come out of discussions at the meetings, as well as being informed by the survey results. Those themes and actions are:

Marketing & Promotion

- Work with Area South to further develop a marketing strategy that can be used for all SSDC street markets.
- Identify and purchase new banners or similar signage that can be used on market days in each town.
- Work with partners in each town to look at promoting and marketing the town as a whole.

Local food

- Explore the feasibility of including more local food stalls in each market.

Crewkerne Market

- Explore the feasibility of relocating the market. The feasibility study will include talks with landowners, risk assessments and Equality Impact Assessments. Once an appropriate area has been identified and agreed SSDC would need to apply for planning permission, attract new stall holders and relaunch the market with appropriate promotion and publicity.

Market management

- Locate a no parking sign to stop cars parking in market stall places in Fore Street, Chard on a Saturday morning.
- Carry out an audit of existing shops in each town to help identify where there are gaps that could be filled by market stalls.

The above themes and actions will inform the direction of the work over the next few months and these will be progressed and monitored by the group on a monthly basis.

Financial Implications

At this stage of the project the Markets Improvement group have not identified specific items with costs. As this work progresses there will be proposed actions that will incur costs and at a later date a more comprehensive plan with those details will be brought back to Area West Committee seeking members approval.

Corporate Priority implications

SSDC Corporate Theme 1 is about increasing economic vitality and prosperity, this project relates to Key Target Area:

1.11 a vibrant and sustainable Yeovil, market towns and rural economy

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

Markets provide the opportunity for local produce to be sold and bought, thus reducing food miles.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Markets have the potential to promote diversity, they enable all sections of the community, especially those on a low income to shop and set up business.

Background Papers: *AW Committee November 2010 – Area West Street Markets
Audit Committee August 2010 - Markets Audit Action Plan Update
JAC West October 2009 – Management of Street Markets in Area West
SW Audit Partnership draft discussion document 2009*
