

## Record of Market Place Meeting – 4 Dec 24

### **Market Place additional Scrutiny meeting 04/12/2024**

**Attendance:** Cllr Waddington (Chair), Councillor Dr Barton (Vice Chair), Councillors Bajaj, Batool and Sigh Sangha.

Director of Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment, Head of Economic Regeneration, Senior Governance Officer (EB), Governance Officer (JB).

**Apologies:** Cllrs Osman and Rae Bhatia.

The chair explained that the reason for reconvening the meeting was to give scrutiny to the Market Place item which had originally been on the agenda for the 6<sup>th</sup> November EDTCE meeting. It had not been possible to give full consideration to the item previously, due to issues arising in the public gallery.

Public consultation on the matter would conclude on the 9<sup>th</sup> December so it was necessary for the item to come to scrutiny before then.

The Director of Tourism - Culture & Inward Investment provided an overview explaining that during a period of renovation, it had been noted that the market place area could have further potential and might be utilised in a more flexible manner.

- The Market had relocated to Green Dragon Square whilst work took place and currently remained in that area. Every trader wishing to remain trading was accommodated at Green Dragon Square.
- Engagement with the market traders had been ongoing and the matter had been brought to scrutiny.
- Four options had been considered initially. The recent proposal was not an initial consideration. The Market Traders had wanted to return to their previous location, and this is what the current proposal allowed for.
- The latest proposal would leave a large space next to the market, which could be adapted and utilised in a flexible manner. Pop-up stalls and celebratory events could be held there.

The Head of Economic Regeneration provided an update on the consultation, advising that:

- There had been around 1600 responses so far, 60% of which were in support of the proposal although the consultation had not yet closed.
- It would take some time to process the results as there was an open comments box and responses would need to be analysed. This analysis was likely to be completed by the New Year.
- The scheme could only be fully costed when the final option was confirmed .

The Commission was invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- The new proposal would focus on food stalls, with an emphasis on foods reflecting the communities of Leicester.
- 48 stalls would be created meaning there would be space to accommodate the same number of food traders in the new scheme.
- It was noted that the average age of the traders meant that some were due to retire or had already done so. The requirement for market stalls was not as substantial as in previous decades. Prior to the relocation to Green Dragon Square, a significant proportion of stalls in the previous market had frequently been unoccupied. One of the reasons for the vacancies being previous market traders retiring.
- Under the new proposal, the market would focus on food and non-food items classed as 'dry goods' would not be prioritised. All traders, including dry goods traders could remain at Green Dragon Square for a two-year period with discounted rents. This would provide time for each trader to consider other options. The current layout in Green Dragon square had container units for dry goods. The new proposed scheme would not include permanent units. The unit traders had varying needs and were being engaged with so that they could decide what is best for their business. Some may want to retire, some may want to find new premises, for example in nearby empty shops or arcades.
- Committee members discussed the benefits of having a diverse range of stalls and some felt that it would be more beneficial for the dry goods traders to be accommodated. Some members stated that the vibrancy of the market could be lost if the stalls were entirely food based. Others mentioned rent prices, questioning whether the dry good traders would be able afford to rent spaces within the arcades after the two-year period had expired. In answer to this, The Head of Economic Regeneration advised that circumstances would be assessed on a 'case by case' basis. It was also mentioned that there could be opportunity for the dry goods traders to sell at pop-up markets. Some traders were not currently operating at Leicester Market on a daily basis so pop-up stalls might provide a good working solution. These considerations were similar to the ones faced when the old market hall was demolished – dry goods traders were consulted and, some moved to the arcades or other retail areas within the city centre. Some traders had retired. A concern was raised

that under the current proposal, some traders could be forced to retire earlier than planned as their only experience was trading in dry goods.

A discussion took place as to whether or not the dry goods traders would be allocated a permanent stall if they requested one. Some committee members stated that this should be the case. The Chair raised concern about the lack of certainty for dry goods traders.

- In response to a point made about the historical significance of the market, and the interest that different generations would have regarding the market, it was noted that a mural had been put in place by Town Hall Square that celebrated the history of the Market. Further to this it was planned that through the redevelopment, the online offer would be improved. It was noted that other markets around the country had good online information and that people often research markets online before visiting them. Improving the online offer could also help celebrate the history and heritage of the market. It was further suggested that the newly created event space in the proposed option could provide an opportunity to celebrate the history and heritage of the market through festival and event activity.
- It was noted that whilst market trade was something that was important to the city, the role of the market had changed over the years and would change again in the future. It had been noticed that many markets across the country had a focus on food and more traditional dry goods had often shifted elsewhere. It was suggested that the reality was that lots of shopping people had done for dry goods was done in places other than a market, including online. In the longer term, the most profitable and attractive market would be food-based as a core offer, but other things could also be brought in to add to this.
- Concern was raised that if dry goods/unit traders were moved to other premises, they could struggle with high rents that could jeopardise their survival.
- Open space was supported as there was the potential for companies investing in delivering events in the city.
- The existing temporary market in Green Dragon Square would continue whilst the market development took place, but once this was done, it would return Green Dragon Square to an open space. Having both the new event space in front of the Corn Exchange and Green Dragon Square would allow things to be done on a bigger scale, for example hosting the Christmas market currently on Gallowtree Gate.
- Concern was raised that not all market traders could be accommodated in the proposed scheme. It was clarified that traders often had more than one stall. It had been calculated in terms of stalls open on different days and the number of stalls taken up during the week that on the old market there were 215 stalls occupied by permanent traders and 35 by casual traders across the week, and on Green Dragon Square there were currently 254 stalls occupied across the week. In the new market, based on 48 stalls operating over 6

days, there would be a maximum of 288 stalls across the week, but this did not include units.

- It was noted that there had previously been empty shops near the clock tower that had contained stalls selling dry goods.
- Concern was raised that the positioning and design of the planned structure was not used to the best advantage in terms of improving the view of historical buildings. In response to this it was explained that the scheme had been a compromise between creating event space and keeping trading space and also respecting views of the historic Corn Exchange Building. It was further clarified that the traders had generally approved of the proposed structure that had demountable stalls inside so that the space inside could also be used to support events. The placement of the structure was close to the popular food hall which could help attract further trade for stalls in the new structure. In terms of the design of the roof of the proposed structure, there were pros and cons for different designs. It was also clarified that if the proposed structure was on the other side of the site, it would obscure the view of the Corn Exchange when approaching from Granby Street, which could potentially draw people into the market.
- The Chair stressed that it was important for other design options to be considered and that alternative designs should be produced for consideration.
- It was clarified that the choice of porphyry flooring was favoured by traders due to ease of cleaning. The previous flooring had been flagstones.
- It was suggested that the recent Christmas Market had shown that there was demand for a diverse range of goods. It was further stressed that it was important to consider the needs of consumers as well as traders, particularly with regard to the cost-of-living crisis. The market was a source of cheap diverse goods which people could find cheaper than those available in shops.
- With regard to a query about a charter for the market, it was clarified that Leicester City Council holds market rights under the Food Act 1984, which grants the Council rights to operate a market, but did not specify the commodity. This was a licencing policy, and anyone operating a separate market required a licence.
- It was aimed to mitigate Anti-Social Behaviour by having most stalls occupied in the day and having shutters drawn at night.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS:**

The Chair summarised the points made through the following recommendations and observations for officers and the executive to consider:

- There was no opposition to part of the market area being open for events.
- Whilst the proposal for 48 stalls equated to the current level of the lettings of stalls, there was concern around the exclusion of dry goods sales from the stalls. It was believed that diversity of goods had not been considered in the

proposals, and it was requested that this be looked at again, taking into account concerns that dry goods traders may not be able to find shops to trade from due to high rents.

- It would be beneficial to have a diverse range of goods in one place, as with the old market. There should be diversity in the new offer.
- There was concern about the uncertainty of the future for dry-goods traders.
- Clarity was needed over whether dry goods traders could make a case to operate from a stall in the proposed structure.
- Other design options should be considered and that alternative designs should be produced for consideration, with particular regard to the aesthetics of the structure.