

Visit to Borough market: 10th July 2009
Meeting with Chris Denning: market manager.
The interview was structured around the following topics

- Mix of stalls - food-non-food
- Food mix (fruit and veg/meat/fish/cheese)
- Specialist (continental/farmers etc)
- Non-food - range of stalls and variation
- Who uses the market and when
- Cashless trading
- Changes to the profile of the market over the last few years
- Likely future changes/challenges
- How the market fits into the local retail economy, including any planning issues
- Links with health and healthy eating campaigns/connections to schools and other local organisations (like the Old Vic, perhaps!!), the PCT etc.
- Management of the market - rents/occupancy - rubbish disposal!!/links to council/traders etc.

Construction of the interview differed from the order outlined but covered all or most of the issues.

- 1 **Site:** 4.5 acres near Southwark Cathedral at the south end of London Bridge, where it has been in various forms for more than 250 years, in the London Borough of Southwark. Part of the site is devoted to a wholesale market, one of four in London.
- 2 It is a registered **charity**, own by the nation effectively, though in time of crisis it is likely that the borough would step in and take control. The aims of the charity are to reduce the rates of the citizens of the local parish, though Chris reckons that this is now a marginal activity (“probably reduces the rate by 0.00001p.” It is not driven by a need to make profits.
- 3 Trustees have changed significantly in the last few months, and there is a new chief executive. Other changes have been made following comments by the Charity Commissioners.
- 4 These include changing the make-up of a committee which vets applicants to come onto the market. There are around 100 applications per quarter to be on the market, while around one of two a month leave for a variety of reasons, including economic conditions, but there is also a disciplinary system which can evict traders who, for example, have a poor environmental health record (food handling/hygiene issues, for example).
- 5 Applicants are now vetted by a food advisory panel, which is at arms’ length from traders to ensure there is no conflict of interest. A previous vetting panel has been disbanded - part of the changes arising from the Charity Commission review of the market’s operations.
- 6 The relationship with the council is arm’s length and broadly neutral. Sometimes there are negotiations over issues of overspill from the site during loading and unloading, for example.
- 7 **The mix of stalls** is overwhelmingly food (and drink)-related. There are just two non-food stalls, which have been on the market since it was reconstituted in 1998, and no further non-food stalls would be contemplated under current policies and arrangements.

1997...

- 8 At this time the market was a wholesale enterprise which was “dying on its feet”. [Henrietta Green](#)) established a weekend food lovers’ fair on part of the site, from which the current market, known as a centre of fine food excellence, has grown to its current state and status. (see also link at end of note).

Structure of the market

- 9 There are 90 stalls: Rates are £20 a day on Thursday, £35 on Friday and £45 on Saturday. Where these stalls sell hot food additional rates are £15 a day on Thursday, £20 on Friday and £25 on Saturday. Therefore a food franchise trading for the three working days of the market would pay £160 a week.
- 10 There is no security of tenure on the stalls and no licensing arrangements.
- 11 There are 25 stands, which range from 120-360 sq ft. They are fenced and caged and subject to three year leases. Leaseholders have security of tenure and can sell on the leases - with the permission of the market management. Rates are £19.50, plus £8.50 service charge, per sq ft per year. These rates have recently been increased from £12.50 and £3.50 respectively as part of a business review of the market under a new chief executive.
- 12 There are also ten surrounding shops, mainly restaurant and café-style outlets.
- 13 **Main operating days are:**

Thursday (30-40% occupancy)

Friday (80% full)

Saturday (at capacity).

Who uses the market...?

- 14 Southwark has a highly diverse community, expensive developments across the road from some of the poorest communities in the country. The latter are unlikely to be frequent users of the market.

Thursday: Mainly office staff (“the lunchtime crowd”) and takeaway customers

Friday: Lunchtime office crowds but also commuters taking food home - helped because the market stays open until 6pm.

Saturday: Serious food buyers, some coming from well outside London, have bought products and left by 10. Thereafter it becomes very crowded with mostly tourists. These however, do not necessarily buy much and one trader described the day as “overcrowded.” However, the market is near to some of the most iconic tourist images in the country - HMS Belfast and London Tate, for example, and will continue to be under pressure from tourists.

Rubbish disposal

- 15 On-site compactor. It is around the size of a small room and deals with 16 tonnes of waste a week. Emptied twice a week by a contractor it is sealed and there are no obvious smells from it. Waste composition is 30% food, 20% cardboard and 50% general.
- 16 No recycling is currently done and composting is currently more expensive than sending waste to landfill. The Market is committed to full recycling and an in-depth feasibility study has been carried out and will be implemented in due course.

Future challenges

Sunday?

- 17 Around 30 traders have expressed an interest in a Sunday market as a future development trial. A feature of the market would be that there would be no fast food/drink facilities. This would be an attempt to attract back food enthusiasts put off by the crowds (and fast food) that are a feature of Saturday trading. A three month trial is being considered.
- 18 Network Rail is to start a major development which will take out part of the market for three years. Traders are being moved into the nearby Jubilee market as a temporary measure, and the outcome will involve another overhead line (We've already got two over us..").
- 19 Local interests used the possibility of a threat to the market to try to oppose the Network Rail plans, but the market management has said this threat never existed and has worked with NR to secure future funding for market developments, plus more land to expand the trading "footprint".
- 20 There will not be continental markets - an early decision was that these would dilute and confuse the image of the market.
- 21 Prices on the market are high. Traders will have to consider reacting more fleet-footedly to market conditions, which are currently still depressed, although there are signs of recovery.
- 22 Healthy eating and fresh food campaigns are conducted directly between schools and traders, rather than the market as whole.
- 23 Funding has been identified and offered to establish a not-for-profit healthy eating shop outlet, but is not considered a high priority at the moment and certainly not before the completion of the Network Rail programme, which starts in November 2009.

Jerry Connolly

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