

MARKETS REVIEW GROUP

13 March 2014

PRESENT – Councillors Carson, Cossins, Long (in the Chair) and EA Richmond.

APOLOGIES – Councillors Grundy, Harman and Lawton.

OFFICERS – Ian Thompson, Assistant Director, Community Services, Mike Crawshaw, Head of Culture and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

Purpose of the Meeting – To advise the Review Group of the findings of the site visit held on 4 February and to consider views of the Traders gathered by Councillors Long and Cossins.

Points Discussed and Considered -

- The Chair advised that she had, with Councillor Cossins, addressed the stallholders and listened to their views and concerns surrounding the Indoor Market. The Head of Culture advised the Group that the Traders had since made positive comments and valued the visit;
- The aims of the site visit were to gain an understanding of the heritage, architecture, layout, use and potential of the premises. To appreciate Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) analysis, as covered market with the 'bookends' of two important 'heritage' buildings – the clock tower is listed;
- Several comments had been made from traders regarding removal of the external WC sign as there were no longer any public conveniences;
- Councillors had been impressed with the detail of the building including tracks to assist the fire appliance out of the basement when used as the fire station, the imposing entrance steps to the Old Town Hall, generously proportioned staircase leading to the 'balcony room' with arch detail, frieze, coving, picture rail and ceiling roses;
- The issues raised included the immediate change of impression at the top of the entrance steps where a partition presented two entrances, one to the Market Hall and one to offices, possible commercial use of the upper rooms with access to the balcony area for civic events, hiring of the rooms as meeting rooms or a conference facility with potential arts and cultural use. It was stated that there was restricted space which could be opened up and utilised, however access was difficult and there was no fire escape route. A suggestion was that the room could be adapted as one large area and a possible use could be a dance studio;
- There were access issues, via the clock tower, with the rooms above Timpsons which were currently utilised by Timpsons as a Training Room. Members agreed that the Clock Tower was an underused fabulous asset with access issues. Group were advised that there was a possibility of HLF funding for the two 'book ends' of the Market Hall but not the Hall itself;

- The clock tower was very interesting, a 'hidden gem' although it was very dirty, dusty and currently locked. Members were advised that investment was needed prior to any further usage, DDA involvement was required in relation to access issues and HLF funding could possibly aid any renovation;
- Members noted that the Basement are contained toilet facilities and a windowless staff room area which was appreciated and used by market staff;
- With regard to the Basement Cellar Storage Group were advised that each stall holder rents storage space for which they were responsible. Some of the area was used for food preparation and it was accepted that this was not ideal. There were two lifts to the market floor one of which was specifically used for meat transportation. The passageways were well managed and tidy and it was also noted that the electricity substation for the Town Centre was incorporated into the basement;
- Discussion ensued around ventilation of the Market Hall and surrounding areas to alleviate any unpleasant cooking or food smells circulating and lingering. It was again stressed that nothing could be done in the interim until future plans were known for the Market Hall although it was suggested that fresh bread and coffee smells would be welcoming and encourage foot fall in the Hall;
- The Group were keen to relocate the refuse and recycling area away from the café as it was felt this was not the correct location for waste;
- Following a question by a Member the Group were advised that the cast-iron columns were last inspected several years ago and that the last structural survey of the Hall had taken place in 2008. Another inspection of the columns would be organised;
- In relation to the Stalls themselves Members considered that sight lines along the aisles could be improved by the control of displays including those above eye level and were advised that a sub-contractor has recently looked at the potential to replacing existing stalls with smaller de-mountable stalls with a view to reducing sight lines and controlling displays; and
- Traders currently rent the space and infrastructure but have the flexibility to do what they want within that pitch, it was an aspiration to have boundaries and unity within the Hall although it was accepted that displays would differ due to the goods on sale.

The Review Group then discussed the following issues highlighted by the traders when visited by Councillors Long and Cossins.

- Lack of parking was an issue for many traders especially as goods purchased could be heavy i.e. meat, fruit and vegetables. Some traders have an appointment time with customers who telephone their order and collect at a given time at the back stairs. Half an hour parking was not considered enough time to do market shopping and it was felt that the parking enforcement staff were a little too 'enthusiastic';

- The suggestion of 10 minutes free parking for market customers would be raised with relevant staff. Concerns were expressed that market traders themselves were taking up too many car parking spaces and it was suggested that the Parking Enforcement Co-ordinator be contacted for clarification on the use of the spaces available;
- One suggestion from a Stallholder was the provision of a 'Save Our Market' donation box either on each individual stall or at the exits to the Market Hall but it was felt that, as the Traders give to BID, they should liaise with them once the aspirations for the Market were known. Some traders pointed out that the recent BID Television Advert made no reference to the market or independent traders;
- Other suggestions included teaching this history of the Market to local school children, busking in the Market Hall, advertising of the Market on roundabouts in the Town, provision of more stalls, healthy competition between traders, provision of lightweight stalls, provision of a pavement café and the need to place the Outdoor Market outside the Market Hall as the Markets complemented one another.
- Some traders thought that the Market Hall would benefit from re-painting but understood that finance was a major factor;
- Reference was made to the eight week National Market Campaign starting 2 April to promote local Markets and the use of social media to support and endorse markets and the goods offered;
- Particulars were provided of the Have Your Say on Darlington Town Centre event scheduled for 27 March from 5pm to 8pm organised to seek the views of businesses and residents on the future of Darlington's Town Centre; and
- Members were keen to invite Traders to the next meeting of the Group in order to seek their views on the regeneration and development of the Market.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That steps be taken to remove the wc sign outside the Market Hall.

(b) That any future refurbishment includes the provision of a recreation room for Traders.

(c) That arrangements be made for an inspection of the cast-iron columns in the Market Hall.

(d) That the parking issues raised be passed to the Parking Enforcement Co-ordinator.

(e) That consideration be given to placing the Outdoor Market Stalls outside the Market Hall.

(f) That the Market Traders be invited to the next meeting of this Review Group on a date to be agreed in consultation with the Chair and Officers.