

## **MARKETS REVIEW GROUP**

**23 April 2014**

**PRESENT** – Councillors Cossins, Harman, Lawton, Long (in the Chair) and EA Richmond.

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Carson and L Hughes

**OFFICERS** – Steve Petch, Place Strategy Manager, Mike Crawshaw, Head of Culture, Albert Nowicki, Senior Markets Officer and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

**Also in attendance** – Robin Blair, representing the Indoor Market Traders, Angela Smedley, representing the Outdoor Market Traders and Samantha and Alex Blackham representing Darlington Sunday People's Market.

**Purpose of the Meeting** – The meeting has been arranged for Members of the Group to hear and consider the views of Indoor, Outdoor and Sunday Market Traders

### **Points Discussed and Considered -**

- The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and, following introductions and an explanation of the role of Place Scrutiny Committee, stated that the meeting had been convened in order for Members and Traders to have a full and frank exchange of views in relation to Darlington's Markets. She further advised that it was hoped that the discussions would put forward suggestions on how best to proceed with the Markets on a partnership basis and the role of Councillors and staff within that process.
- The Cultural Manager began by highlighting that the general consensus was that a refurbishment of the Darlington Covered Market was essential to take the retail offer forward. The Council (DBC) was aware of the conditions for both Indoor and Outdoor traders, and the effects of on-line shopping and retail parks to Markets Traders.
- It was stated that the Indoor Markets was last refurbished in 1979 and was now considered out of date, with mechanical, electrical and structural refurbishments being required. Cosmetically, the Indoor Market was also in poor condition. It was important to work with Partners to develop the Markets in order to regenerate Darlington Town Centre.
- The Retail offer in most Town Centre's is similar, however, Darlington Markets are what makes our Town Centre distinct. Our 150 year old Covered Market is special and should be the cornerstone of Darlington's retail offer making the Town a destination for day visitors from across the Tees Valley, North Yorkshire, South Durham and beyond. The Cultural Manager advised that a business case was required to be developed but in the current economic climate it was not straight forward.
- It was stressed that although the Markets Heritage had not been coveted and celebrated there is now a growing realisation that the Covered Market can play a

pivotal role in the on-going regeneration of Darlington Town centre. All Outdoor Markets were in different stages, the Sunday Markets were a different type of trader, and it was a niche market which animated the Town Centre. It was accepted that the Saturday and Monday Markets had been under-valued by DBC and Darlington although the key was to look forward; a thriving Market Town needed a thriving Market. The Cultural Manager was convinced that this could happen with a joint effort.

- Mr Blackham supported the Cultural Manager and in doing so stated that Darlington's Pedestrian Heart could have been extended to utilise the area in front of Waterstones which would have been ideal for Traders.
- Following a question by a Member the Outdoor Traders advised that they preferred the current location of the Market as opposed to outside the Indoor Market Hall, although they stressed that it was confusing for customers when the Market was moved around the Town Centre. It was also highlighted that it should be amongst the pedestrian heart to get the best footfall from circulating customers with Northgate being the preferred location.
- Traders were concerned that High Row was not the best place for Stalls as it was high and during windy conditions was not safe.
- The Senior Markets Officer advised that the Market Square was not the best location as there was less footfall in that area, people no longer came to the Town Hall building to pay rent or Council Tax and business would be lost. The Indoor Market was hidden from view of customers when the Outdoor Market was on West Row hence its move to High Row and Northgate/Prospect Place. There was a much larger footfall and the Traders were a lot happier. It was also suggested that on Market Days, Road Closures could be put in place to buses at Priestgate and Tubwell Row as this increased footfall and helped Traders
- Following a question regarding the Markets complementing each other, Mr Blair, representing the Indoor Market Traders advised the Group that the Indoor Market Hall was not welcoming and had no visual impact or attraction to encourage people into the Market Hall. He stated that if the Market Hall was refurbished footfall would increase as people would be curious to see the changes and be encouraged to shop in the Market. The DfE were coming to the Town Centre and they need to be attracted to the Indoor Market shopping experience. Concerns were expressed that people did not shop in the Indoor Market as it was unattractive and had poor visual displays. It needed to be more open, cleaner and more modern stalls provided with no roofs on them. The Plinths the stalls stood on also needed to be removed and a level playing field provided for all. Surmountable stalls could be removed but the existing plinths restricted how the space could be utilised, it was not conducive for entertainment or café use.
- The Cultural Manager responded that he agreed with most of these principles and felt strongly that the wonderful heritage features both externally and internally were not currently exploited. This must be addressed during any restoration programme. The Group were informed that Leeds 1904 Covered

Market was an excellent example of a Heritage Market.

- The Outdoor Traders and the Peoples Sunday Market Traders advised that some customers were not aware that some Traders were on West Row and some on Northgate, it gave the impression of a split market, however the Group were advised that all Traders were happy to move to Prospect Place whilst the Freedom of the Borough Parade took place on Saturday, 26 May. Feedback from the Traders on the relocation was encouraged by the Senior Markets Officer.
- Mr Blair commented that the pedestrianised ramped area from High Row to West Row was facing the wrong way and footfall naturally carried on away from the Market Hall. He also commented that the bus needed to be away from Tubwell Row, however, was advised that during consultations the public had stressed that the buses remained in the Town Centre.
- A Member of the Group suggested that more adequate signage and visuals was required to encourage shoppers to the Market Hall, further comments were that the signage should be on all access roads to Darlington and not just in the Town Centre and stress that Darlington had a vibrant Victorian Market.
- The Group were all unanimous in the view that customers needed to see across the Indoor Market Hall, not have views obscured by stalls with canopies and all stalls should be colourful, vibrant and welcoming. It was further suggested that an el-fresco bar with a liquor licence would be a pleasing addition.
- Mr Blair commented that he could not do justice to his stall's display – the stalls needed to be ultra-modern and user-friendly, he also stated that he had 1,000's of photographs of Darlington Market Hall both old and new.
- Mrs Blackham proposed banners advertising the Darlington Markets with slogans such as 'shop local' and 'support your market' be placed on the vacant banner posts normally utilised for Christmas marketing, however, the Cultural Manager advised that this was already in hand and the banners would be in position shortly. It was stressed that Saturday and Monday Markets should also be advertised.
- Further proposals included moving the existing doors to the front of the building and replacing with a lighter material thereby lighting up the whole of the Market Hall and making it more welcoming; entering the Indoor Market through the shops on West Row and opening the back up so that customers got the impact of the Markets colours, vibrancy and smells immediately.
- It was commented that £750k had recently been spent on the new Customer Services Centre at the Town Hall to give 'a better experience to customers' and 'a better experience' was what Traders wanted for their customers however the Group were reminded that capital investment of several million pounds would be needed to refurbish the Indoor Market Hall.
- The Group were also informed that the Indoor Market had been self-ruling, self-governing and self-supporting but it now needed help, traders could go out of

business; canopies needed to be removed, they attracted dust, couldn't be kept clean and there was no maintenance budget for the Market Hall. Current leases state that the Hall would be painted every five years – it was last done 25 years ago, the traders would like to see the doors moved for a better visual attraction for customers. When money ran out the Markets suffered.

- The Town Clock, Market Hall and Old Town Hall were all listed buildings.
- With regard to surmountable stalls, Group were advised that stalls come in modules, basic stalls were provided and customised by individual traders; any new stall would be welcomed by Traders as this would generate trade. Butchers would need to replace all refrigeration which could be very costly.
- The Senior Markets Officer stressed that the infrastructure of the building required investment prior to any changes to the layout of the Market Hall; the roof needed to be looked at as it currently leaked and could ruin any new stalls and displays.
- Regulation of temperature in the Market Hall was also vital, it could be 100 degrees in the Summer and -10 degrees in the Winter, it was suggested that louvers could be installed on warmer days to alleviate excessive high temperatures.
- The group all agreed that the Market Hall was in need of significant investment, the Street Scene offices within the Old Town Hall Building have dirty windows and curtains which gave a bad impression of a building selling food stuffs.
- Mr Blackham stressed that pride needed to be taken in the building, clean it up, remove litter and kill weeds, show that DBC cares – make it welcoming and inviting.
- The Cultural Manager advised that a vision, coupled with a route map detailing what was needed and how it could be achieved, needed to be developed; this could be done by DBC in consultation with Traders and residents.
- Mr Blair recognised that there were pressures on DBC with staff redundancies and the economic climate but suggested that a Working Group be established to keep the Market Hall looking nice and tidy, public involvement should be encouraged and an artist's impression provided of the vision. He also suggested that the Consultants' report prepared in 2006 be utilised as it had cost £35k and had many valid suggestions.
- The Senior Markets Officer highlighted the importance of involving the Darlington Retail Stallholders Association in any future meetings and negotiations as they had many ideas for the Market Hall.
- Mr Blair also suggested that companies that produced stalls be requested to do the vision for Darlington, they would possibly be willing to produce the vision for nothing in the hope of gaining a contract for provision of stalls. The Market Hall had to be modernised with the Victorian image being protected. All markets

complemented, and were important to, each other

- The Chair concluded by saying that the meeting had been excellent with plenty of debate and discussion; a meeting will be held with relevant Officers to discuss long, medium and short-term progress, with the challenge being to fight and make the case to Cabinet and relevant funding being made available.

**IT WAS AGREED** – (a) That the next meeting of this Review Group be held on a date to be agreed in consultation with the Chair and Officers.

(b) That Darlington's Markets are fundamental to the on-going regeneration of the Town Centre and should be central to the Town's retail offer.

(c) The Review Group recognises the need for a major capital investment/restoration programme for Darlington's Covered Market, acknowledging the building's central role within the Town Centre economy.

(d) The views of the Traders and Members of this Group be taken into consideration when formulating a vision for Darlington's Markets.

(e) That the provision of advertising banners be welcomed by the Traders.

(f) That steps be undertaken to clean up the Market Hall steps and Street Scene Offices to encourage customers.