

High Wycombe Town Committee Report

The report to Town Committee in June from Saunders Markets provided the annual update on the current challenges faced and initiatives to be trialled. Following this members of Town Committee have raised a number of additional questions to which we provide a response below.

1. What income does WDC receive from HW Town Market?
The net income from the market is split 70:30 between WDC and the operator respectively. This generated a net income of £29k to the Council in 18/19.
2. When is the contract renewal date for the market?
The current contractual arrangements come to an end on 31st March 2021.
3. What involvement was there of Members, if any, with the latest renewal and was there any consultation with the local members, HWBIDCO, The High Wycombe Society, the High Wycombe Town Committee, or the Chairman of the HW Town Committee in agreeing any extension. Renewal?
The extension in 2016 came within delegated powers. SMB and Cabinet Member consulted. HWBidCo were also aware of the extension of the current contract.
4. What investment has WDC made in the HWT Market over the last 5 years; 10 years?
Investment by WDC and the operator over recent years has included the following: -
 - Assistance with forward funding/providing gazebos to traders and availability of gazebos to on-the-day traders
 - Interest free payment plans agreed with traders for gazebos over 6-12 months with additional incentives on pitch fees during this period.
 - Improvements to the electrical boxes to improve capacity and support air quality/reduce pollution from generators
 - Signage and flags. These are to be renewed.
 - Furniture provided for the street food area. These are to be upgraded and improved
 - Free parking provided for traders
 - Actively reducing operating costs to avoid an increase in pitch fees
5. What improvements have been sought by WDC to the market and were these made and has any further worked been undertaken to see if this has helped the market?
See 4.
6. If not, why not?
See 4

What rules has WDC agreed with the Market Contractor in the way of: market stall siting; market stall covers; market fees in particular on days when the market cannot work due to adverse weather conditions?

Market stall siting - Market stalls are to be focused around Little Market House and the Guildhall and then up the High Street.

Market stall covers – There is no formal requirement for these, however it is requested that they are used by all traders.

Market Fees – see 8.

If the market cannot happen – are the market stall holders still having to pay the stall fees.

If the market cannot happen for reasons outside the stall holders control and is called off by the operator/WDC no fees are due.

The use of the canvas covers – it was suggested that ALL market stall holders use the green and white striped covers, yet there are often stalls without them, why?

See 7.

What are WDC Officers doing to ensure uniformity for all market stalls, as those street food offerings appear not to always use the market stall coverings? Is there a licence fee to pay for the use of chairs and tables on the highway as is applied to restaurants, bars and food outlets if they have chairs and tables on the footpath (which is construed as the highway?)

The provision of managed and WDC/operator provided gazebos is being reviewed at present. However where traders have their own 'branded' stalls this is to be encouraged. There is no licence fee charged to the traders for the street food furniture.

Who would benefit from the collection of this fee – is it considered an income for HW Town Committee, or WDC, or BCC?

See 10.

7. Likewise, the income for the market itself? Who benefits from this is it considered an income for HW Town Committee or WDC?

See 1. This is an income to WDC.

8. Likewise tables – there have been times that market stall holders have used the pavement, which does not show a particular high regard by the Market Contractor in following the set rules?

This is no longer permitted except where the product is not suitable for being presented on a table/rack (e.g. bulky products).

9. What work has WDC done with BCC and TVP to ensure that large HGV lorries do not frequent the High Street – if, as is noted in the report, their complaint of large lorries using the High Street?

BCC have undertaken works recently to improve the bollard operation. HWBidCo due to previous involvement with BCC over the bollards and access control have agreed to approach BCC to review prohibited (not just controlled) access to the High Street during set hours.

Has there been the use of CCTV to assist, if not why not, as it is a WDC asset?

As evidence of any incidents this can be utilised if needed.

The Street Food operators often clean their cooking utensils using the cold- water tap situated by the Pepper Pot and they add congeal fat and food debris which runs into the drains, what is The Market Operator and WDC doing to stop this practice. We are told that Market Operator has issued the street food traders with plastic boxes to take away their greasy waste and water. Do you have proof that the rules for cleaning their utensils is happening?

All food vendors are issued with strict operating guidelines with signed appendices to state what is and what is not permitted. Should there be a breach they are given a formal warning and any subsequent breach will result in their trading pitch being terminated with immediate effect. The operator and WDC have no reason or evidence to believe that these are not being adhered to.

10. Can we be told how many market stall holders there were, excluding the street food offer in 2016, 2017, 2018?

See previous Appendices supplied to the Committee for these years – Each Trader Data Collation spreadsheet has a column titled *commodity* which stipulates product sold.

11. What is the number for street food stalls in the same years?

See 17.

12. How is the Market Operator advertising space for the HW Town Market to increase the offer – there is often adverts by the Market Operator in the Marketing journals, but no mention of High Wycombe, yet other locations are mentioned, why is this?

The operators advertise HW Market through all social media platforms and through a text-based advertising service to known market traders. Managers also visit surrounding markets to recruit traders with an invitation flyer offering various trader incentives. Market journal advertising is not considered to be cost effective.

Why does there appears to be no interest in the HW Town market by other stall holders other than street food?

This is not just associated to HW Market, it is a pattern across many markets. While retail spending remains constant, this spend has moved away from bricks and mortar to online platforms. With regard to everyday, non-food items online platforms compete on price which has traditionally been an area where market traders had a commercial advantage and flourished. This is compounded by the advent of 'discounters', pound shops and discount supermarkets. As a result, the number of traders seeking to trade has reduced and the type of offer they have has become food orientated, niche and service based. Many of these people only trade seasonally and this is not their primary source of income now.

Across the industry the existing business model for markets is changing, it has moved away from a position where demand exceeds trading space to a position where a trader can pick and choose their venues and trade on an adhoc basis. This growth of food-based and service-based business can also be seen within the Eden and the High Street where increasingly retail property has also been let to food-based businesses.

13. Why is it so poorly occupied with the usual market fare of fruit, vegetables, flowers, etc and fresh produce? Has there been any consideration of including a farmers Market?

See 20. The introduction of a specialist day, including focused themes such as produce, crafts, antiques etc is being discussed between HWBidCo, the market operator and WDC. This will be an opportunity to experiment with a farmers-type market event without alienating any of the few remaining regular traders, before rolling out on the existing market days if successful.

Other local markets, such as: Wendover, Princes Risborough, Beaconsfield, Aylesbury, Amersham and Thame, have a much better market offer than HW - why is this? Have Officers been to look at these markets and ask advice from these Towns?

Officers regularly visit Wendover and Princes Risborough markets. They are one day a week in towns without competition from 'discounters' and have very different demographics to High Wycombe. However, the creation of the new Buckinghamshire Council will bring together a number of these markets into a single Councils control. This will enable greater sharing of information and operation.

Should WDC be seeking a different operator as it appears the HW Town market is slowly dying? Indeed, what, if any, assistance has been sought from HWBIDCo, who are interested in ensuring the market is an attractive offer?

There is no evidence to show that fault lies with the operator or that other operators are available/keen to take over. Previous HWBidCo managers did not engage effectively with the market operator. Since the appointment of Melanie Williams there has been an improved relationship and quarterly meetings have been arranged to create greater collaborative working.

Is HWBIDCo in support of the suggestion of an extra day, which appears to only support the street food offer?

On the basis of a specialist day trading similarly to the existing market HWBidCo are not in support, but neither are WDC. The extra day is to innovate and provide a higher quality more focussed offering. See 21.

Why is it considered that an extra day would assist the already dying market in achieving better results, other than an income for the Market Operator and a plethora of more street food offer?

The concept of running a specialist day on a Thursday is not intended to be a permanent additional day, but one in which new innovation can be trialled without impacting on the existing market days and traders. If successful this can then be implemented on the existing market days and the specialist day ceased.

14. Questions regarding kebab vans on the High Street in the evening:

What rent do the Kebab Vans pay?

Do they pay any towards rates?

What agreements do we have with them?

What time do they start and finish ?

Any special arrangements made for them?

The kebab vans are not managed by the market operator but are licenced by the Council's Environmental Health team under individual street trading licences. Current street trading fees are c.£4,100 pa with c.£1000 pa for use of the electric boxes. No business rates are understood to be payable. Operating hours are Monday - Wednesday 18:00H - 01:30H, Thursday - Saturday 18:00H - 03:00H, Sunday 18:00H - 00:30H. There are no special arrangements with them.

15. We have a footfall counter in the town are we using this for looking at the footfall for the market days, is it more? How far back can we monitor the footfall on market days?

We are unaware of a current footfall monitor for the High Street.

16. Has there been any consideration to relocate the market into the Chiltern Shopping Centre? If not, why not?

The Chiltern Shopping Centre is not in the ownership of WDC and forms part of a planned major development.

17. The market has visibly been declining in front of our very eyes for the last few years, surely officers must have realised that changes needed to be made and hence did they ever consider of taking back the market into their own control? If not, why not?

A reduction in the number of market traders is a national trend and not specific to High Wycombe. The existing contractual arrangements run until March 2021. The Council does not have the necessary internal resource or experience to bring the market back in-house.

18. Why has WDC never thought it would be a good idea to increase footfall and sales within the market by a) subsidising the parking on the east side of the town b) offer free parking if people parked in the west side of the town and shopped in the market?

Parking charges are administered for the town as a whole. These were most recently reviewed in early 2019 having not previously been changed for 10 years. Short stay parking (30 mins) at Wycombe Swan MSCP is 50p. Administering any subsidy would be highly complex to manage.