



High Wycombe Market

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Overview

This paper is provided as an update to the High Wycombe market report presented to this Committee in September 2019.

Following this meeting, the Economic Development Team was tasked to appoint market specialists Quarterbridge to carry out a review of the market and develop future delivery options. The remit of the work also included a perception survey on usage of the wider town centre to help inform the business case for the Future High Street Fund that was submitted to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government at the end of July 2020 (we await a decision in the autumn).

The Quarterbridge report is still in draft. This is because the trader survey element was not able to be completed ahead of the March Covid-19 lockdown that resulted in the temporary closure of the market as per Government rules. This market began operating again in July and engagement work with the traders is progressing at present.

Due to commercial sensitivity of parts of the Quarterbridge report, it will not be fully released to the public. Key points from the draft report are provided to Members in this paper as an update, and it is intended that once the final report is received, that a presentation be made to this Committee at the first appropriate opportunity.

With the move to unitary on the 1 April, the Council now has the ability to take a strategic view on the operation of markets across Buckinghamshire. This will enable us to learn lessons on what works well in other towns and also set the direction for how we want the market offer to develop in the future – and hence inform the delivery model for High Wycombe given the current contract status.

Strategic market management has moved from the Property and Estates Team to the Economy, Growth and Regeneration Service and will sit in the Local Economic Regeneration Team. With the advent of Covid-19 and the important role that markets played in helping provide essential perishable food goods and the potential that they play as a seedbed for new business ideas to be trialled, there are broader considerations to take about how we develop our vision for markets. This strategic direction work is starting to be developed in the autumn.

Market Review by Quarterbridge

Member feedback

Two engagement sessions were held on the 6 March 2020 to understand the perspective of local Councillors from High Wycombe Town Committee – in respect opinions of the market as it is, and aspirations going forward.

Across the two sessions five Councillors attended, all of whom expressed fond memories of visits to the market in their youth, and concern for the current state of the market.

The following were reported as improvements that Councillors would like to see:

- an increase in the number of traders
- a greater variety of traders, including more fresh food produce
- the market to become a focal point for the town centre and
- the introduction of specialist markets i.e. farmer's markets and art fairs etc.

Sentiments were mixed about the addition of street food, though all appreciated that this is popular offer and enjoyed by many people – especially the younger generation.

Views were split on increased seating and the introduction of a 'cafe culture' atmosphere alongside the street food offer.

Higher quality goods, especially fresh food, were the preferred new trader choice.

Concerns were raised that the market was not promoted enough and that the market was market was kept tidy and operating as it should be.

Public feedback

An online survey ran from 21 February to 20 March 2020 and attracted 1,126 responses which Quarterbridge reported is an excellent engagement rate for a survey of this type.

The survey asked a series of questions to help understand both the opinions and usage of the street market and also how people use the wider town centre. These views are key to help inform both the future development of the market - but also future event programmes and public realm / space use to attract more visitors to this area of the town centre. This will increase footfall for existing businesses and help enhance dwell time.

What have we been told?

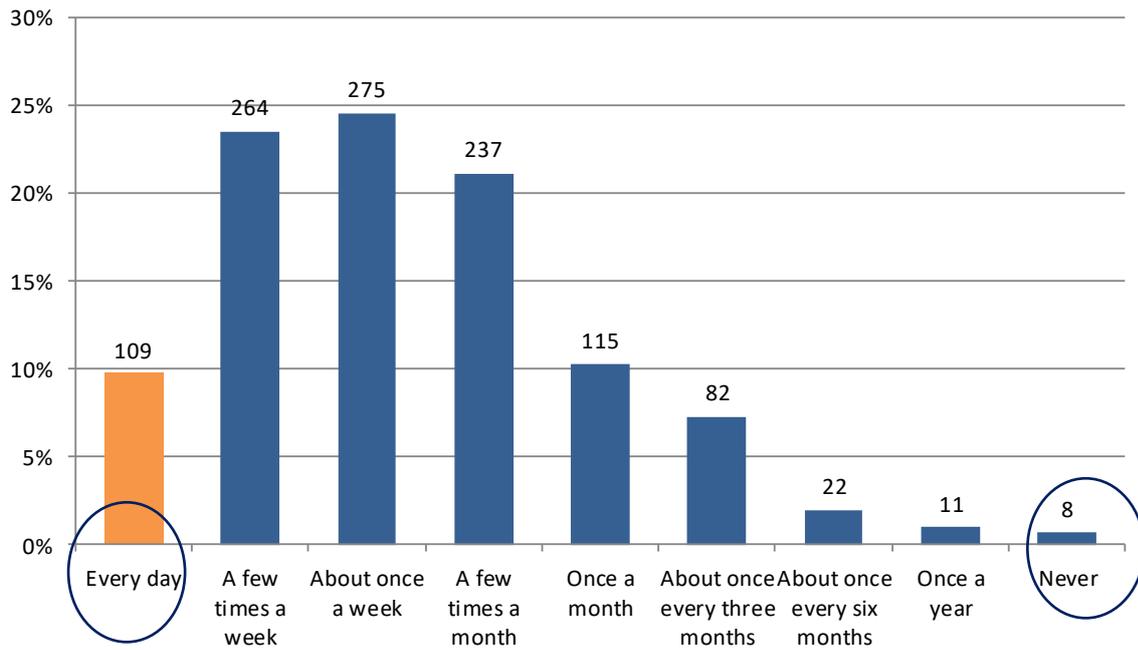
A selection of key findings on the market are presented below. As mentioned at the start of this report it is proposed that a fuller presentation be given to the Committee at the first appropriate opportunity when the final report is released.

Please note the 'n' number quoted next to the question is the number of respondents who answered this question – not everyone chose to answer each question, hence the variation.

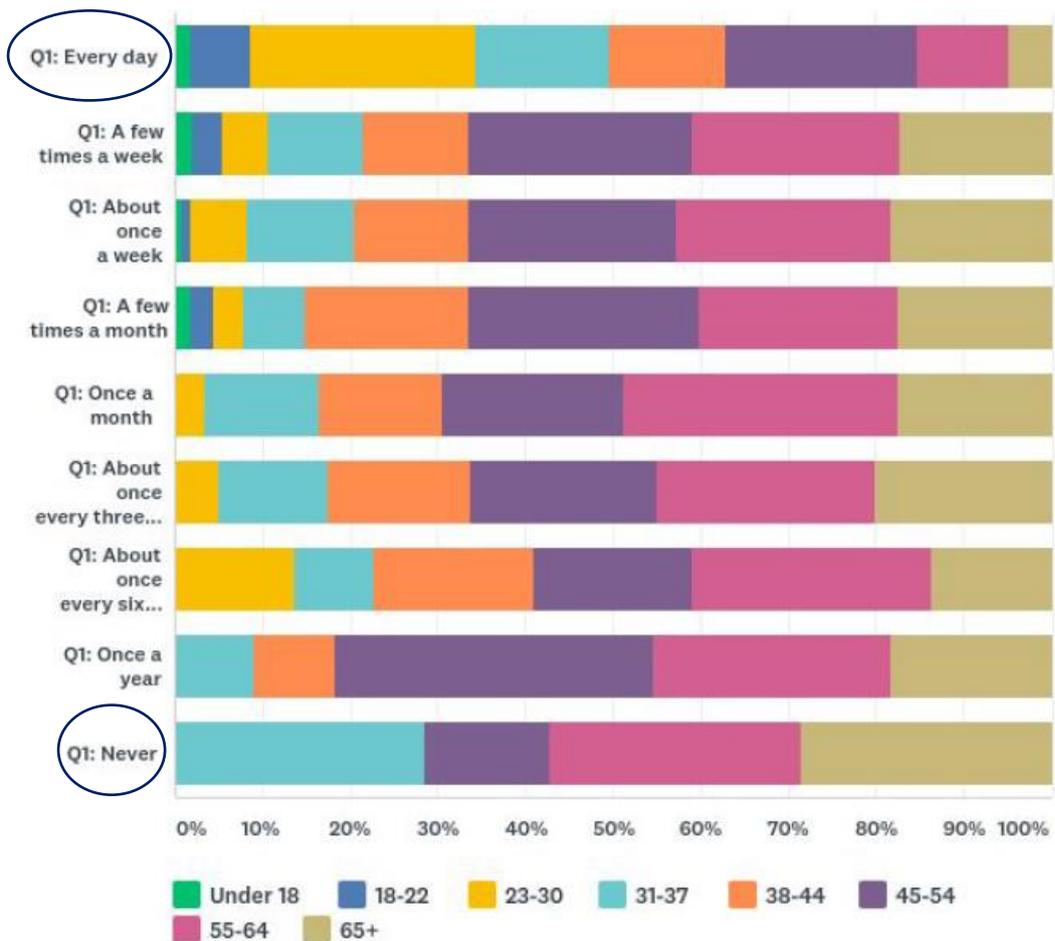
The number above the bars on the graph is the number of respondents to that answer. These are provided to put the percentages in context.

Q1: How often do you visit High Wycombe?

n = 1,123



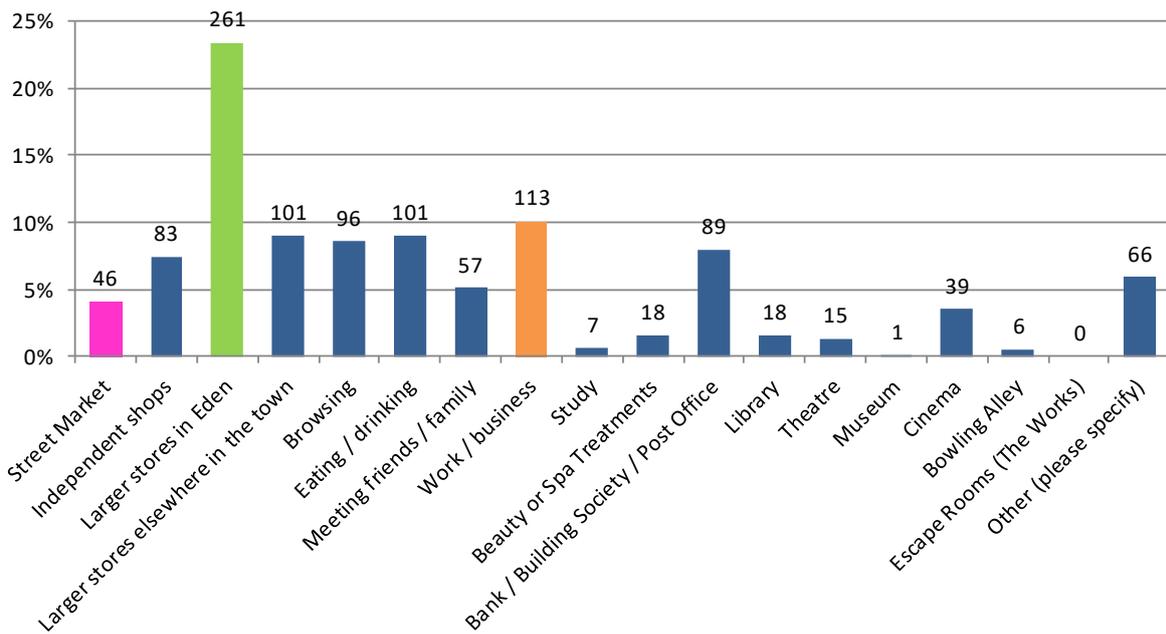
Q1: How often do you visit High Wycombe? (by age)



This shows that opportunities to pivot the offer to have broader appeal to the under 30 year olds.

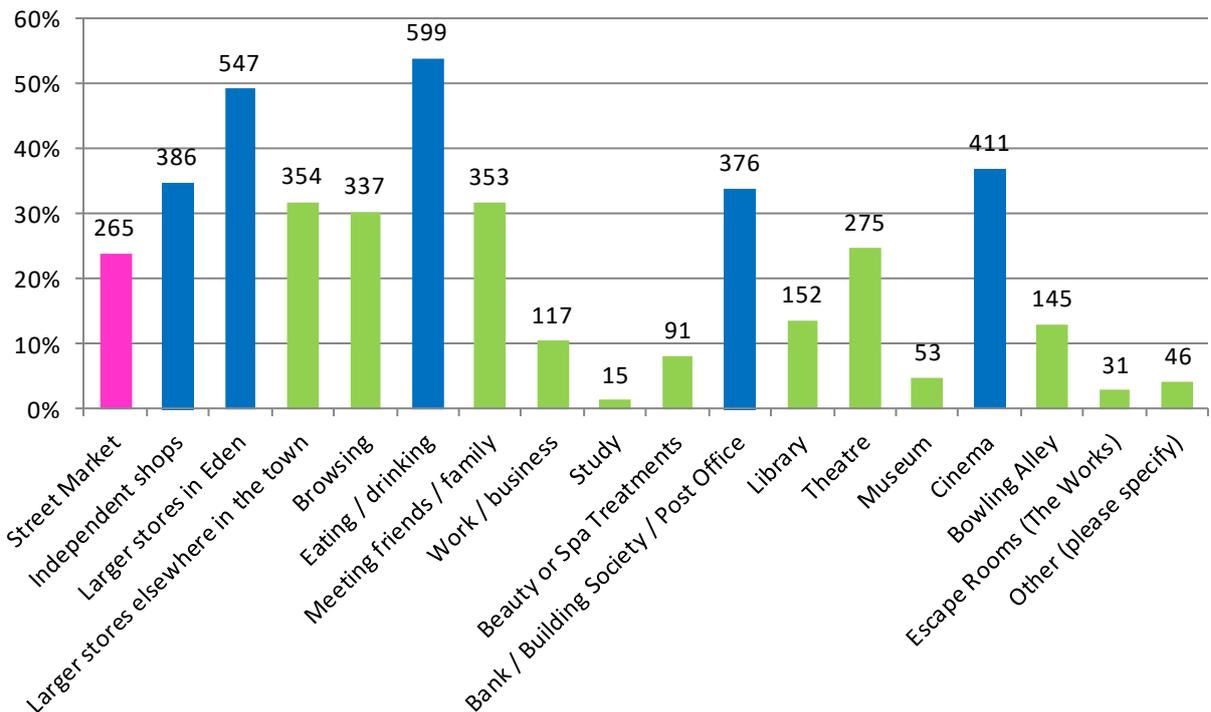
Q3: What was the main purpose for your last visit to High Wycombe?

n = 1,117



Q3: What other reasons do you visit the town centre?

n = 1,111

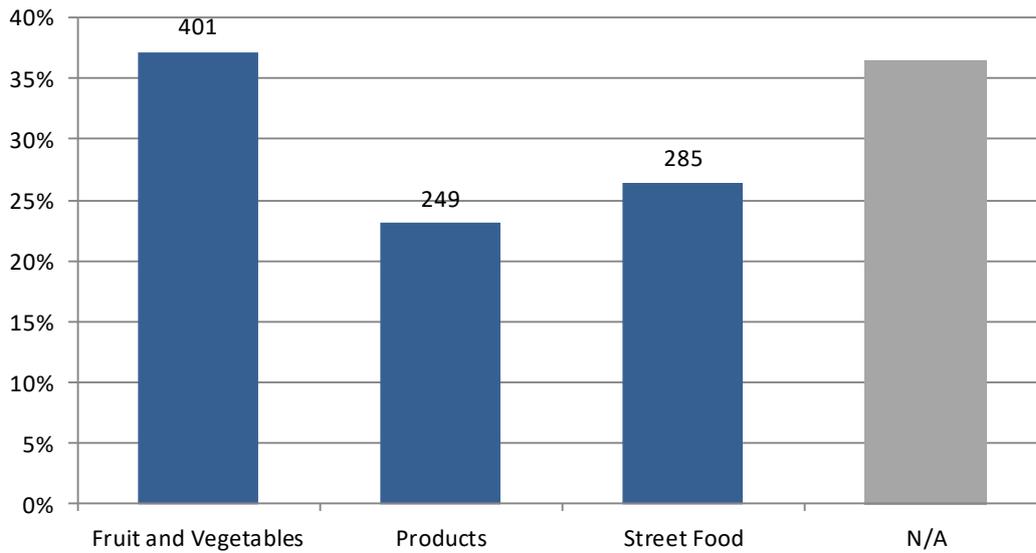


A visit to Eden and enjoying the food and drink offer are the key primary and secondary reasons for a visit to the town centre. The street market (first column / pink) as a primary and secondary reason for a visit to the town centre scores higher than a number of activities.

Work/business is highlighted on the first graph as with Covid-19 the work from home direction will have impacted footfall in the town – although the converse of this is that we will have had a boost to residents who usually work elsewhere being at home and able to access the town.

Q3: What do you buy at the street market?

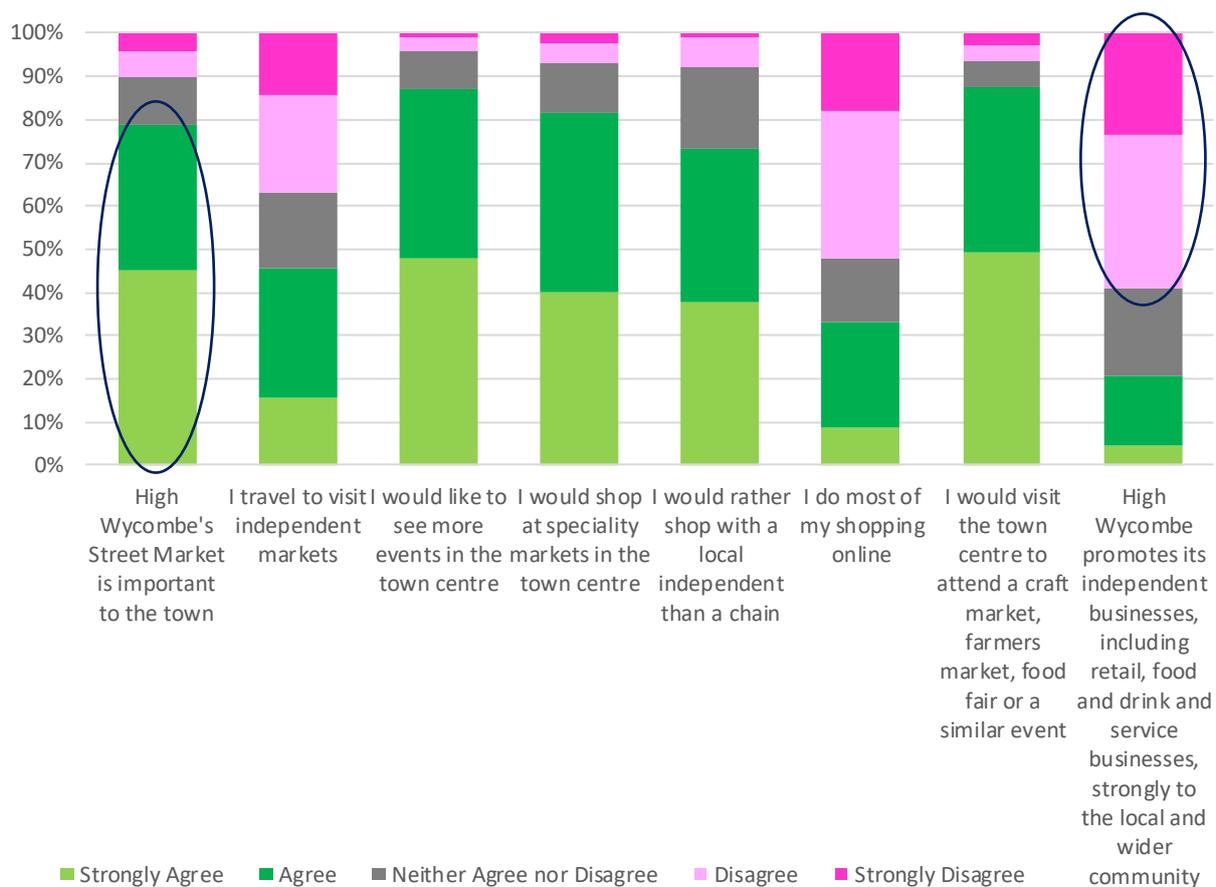
n = 1,117



Fresh produce and street food are the most popular purchases on the market.

QX: How much to you agree / disagree with the following statements?

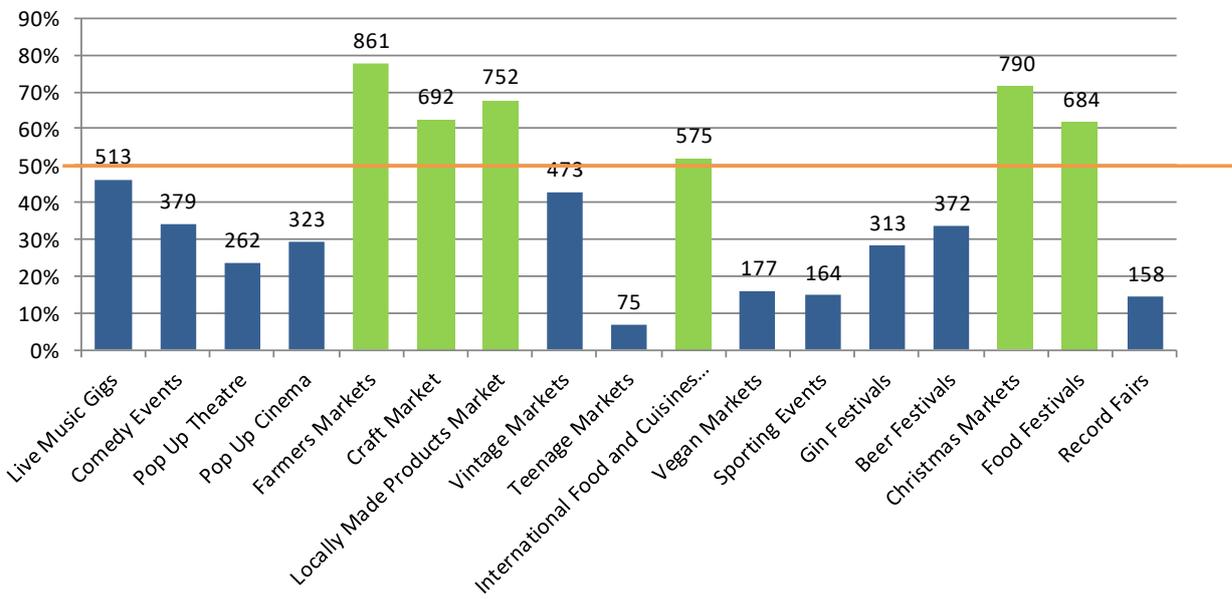
n = 1,122



33% of survey respondents said they 'never' shop at the street market, with a further 20% saying they make a purchase once a year or less often. **Despite this, 79% of respondents agreed that the street market was important to the town.**

The perception of a lack of promotion of High Wycombe was also identified by the respondents as an area of improvement – as mentioned by the Councillors too.

Q11: What kind of markets and events do you like to attend? (select all that apply) n = 1,108



Most popular markets / events to explore: Farmers markets / Craft markets/ locally made products market / International food and cuisine / Christmas markets / Food festivals



46% of respondents travel to visit other independent markets, and 82% agree or strongly agree that they would shop at speciality markets in the town centre. 88% said they would attend a craft market, farmers market, food festival or similar event. **From this we can conclude that there is an appetite for markets in High Wycombe, which is unfulfilled by the current offer.**

Representative comments from market users

Frequent users (every week / every other week):

“Multicultural experience, independent businesses, friendly atmosphere”

“Vibrancy, culture, street food, diversity and cheaper products”

“Fruits and vegetables sold at good price. Food stalls are very good especially they offer variety in lunch time”

“The old sweet and cake stall, the flower and plant stall, a general greengrocer stall in addition to the one there now, more variety please.”

“Better stalls with proper covers, a better selection of traders, and more advertising. Perhaps playing on the history of the charter market? The town has become all about Eden and the high street is dying because of it.”

“Any [events] would be welcome. Kid’s activities would be appreciated, not much there for kids to do. Not many parents can afford to take the kids out far, would be nice to have something to do locally”

“In my opinion, in order to create a more attractive town centre, the pedestrian area needs to be extended permanently. Allow local bars/restaurants to have more permanent sitting areas outside and introduce more green features, potted plants and trees are an option.”

More stalls and more variety of stalls the most frequent comment.

Infrequent users (once a month – every three months):

“[I like] Nothing it’s a disgrace it’s all foreign foods I won’t get anything from there I would like to see a good market like it was in the old days”

“The multicultural hot food available. Things on the stalls you can’t buy elsewhere. Fresh fruits and veg that isn’t prepacked.”

“More vegan & eco-friendly options, more independent/micro business markets.”

“Arts and crafts. Homemade stuff. From food to clothing But this needs subsidising as it could take a year of more for it to get established”

“[I would like to see a] Pedestrian area and more cafe culture with pop up events”

“[I would like to see] Markets, festivals, events celebrating the community and bringing people together.”

“It's cool to see the centre more lively during Market days! The Mad Squirrel brewery's outside area was amazing, would be nice to see more of that.”

“There needs to be more for the local community to get involved with. More quality stalls. Events for local businesses starting out”

More stalls and more variety of stalls was also a key theme. There was a dichotomy between extremely positive and extremely negative comments about food offer. This strongly correlates with the respondents' age.

Comments from respondents who do not shop at the market or shop very infrequently:

What do you like about the Street Market?

“Nothing” (this was by far the most frequent answer)

“The cheery market traders.”

“It brings atmosphere to the town – something that High Wycombe majorly lacks (sadly)”

“There is a bustling food area”

“Fresh fruit and vegetables”

What would you like to see changed about the market in the future?

“More stalls and better stalls” (most frequent answer)

“A pannier market would be an attraction – with different themes on different days of the week i.e. antiques/bric-a-brac; fruit/veg/local produce; etc.

Weekend entertainment to attract people back to the High Street”

“It is too down-market. I would like to see more that appeals to the "middle class".

“Better looked after stalls with clearer signage”

“Make it so cars, vans and lorries don't go through even though it's supposed to be pedestrian only”

“More independent interesting stalls.”

“I don't think it has the variety like the market in Berkhamsted for example. Loughborough Market is another example of a good market. Wycombe has mostly street food. It's nice but that doesn't define a market.”

“To complement the existing market (which for me isn't great) a new craft/artisan/Farmers market that operates once/twice a month on a Sunday perhaps to encourage visitor engagement and visits. I think you would have to pay good quality operators initially to come to Wycombe. I don't think the priority for the council should be to generate income but to provide a quality service to the town that complements the existing uses.”

“Would like a proper market - variety of stalls (food / clothing / crafts etc)”

“More stalls like fish meat veg”

Overwhelmingly the response was that there were too few stalls and stalls of a low quality.

There was a universal desire for more varied, quality stalls and more fresh food produce, a return to a more traditional market style, but with a lively atmosphere and events to supplement the range of food stalls.

What could the future market look like and how could this be delivered?

The survey feedback and engagement with Members recognises the potential that exists for a revitalised market offering in High Wycombe: focussing on more stalls, a diversity of offer and extended themed events and activities in the high street space. We also recognise the potential that markets play as a seedbed for new business ideas to be trialled and developed.

With the move to a unitary authority, the Council now has the opportunity to look strategically at the market offer across the whole of Buckinghamshire. There are a range of market delivery options in place that include a concession contract with a private company (High Wycombe), a trader cooperative approach (Amersham and Chesham) and in-house provision (Aylesbury). Combined with the Quarterbridge work, this information will enable us to identify what works well in other towns and set the direction for how we want the market offer to develop in the future.

Work is starting now on strategic market management and what the offer and ask of our markets for Buckinghamshire should be to enable the right delivery model to be adopted. At the time of writing this report the detailed timeline for this work is being scoped. The management contract for High Wycombe comes to an end in March 2021. The Economic Growth and Regeneration Team, who have taken over the management of the market contract from the Estates Team will be actively working with the market operators to bring about changes to improve the current offer.

Next steps

Quarterbridge to complete trader engagement and present final report to Council (September)

Strategic overview of markets carried out to set the future direction and operating models – that will include High Wycombe (starting September)

A presentation will be made to High Wycombe Town Committee / High Wycombe Community Board at their next meetings to provide a fuller update.