



High Wycombe Market Update

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Overview

This paper is provided as an update to the High Wycombe market report presented in January 2021. It is focused on activities undertaken post the third lockdown in December 2020 to date – with the new reopening phase from April 2021. It also sets out, by way of reminder, an update on strategic market management and the development of a Market Strategy for Buckinghamshire.

The advent of a second lockdown in the autumn and the rapidly changing tier system placement for Buckinghamshire up to the December national lockdown caused a challenge for all retail in the town and impacted on the market, bringing a return to a smaller ‘essential goods’ only offer. The market has not fully returned to the number of casual traders seen in the Autumn but active work is underway to address this including new takes on the space and animations to draw additional footfall.

Update

Reimagining our market space

Last autumn we worked with Saunders Markets to reimagine the physical market space and set the future direction for attracting niche and specialist traders to High Wycombe. This is an activity that takes time to embed and with Covid trading restrictions changing over the winter has unsurprisingly been a bit stop start.

As part of reimagining the space we have divided the footprint into designated zones that can be branded and promoted separately to target attention:

The Guild:

The undercroft of the Guildhall, playing on the term ‘Guild’ for crafted and artisan ‘merchant products’. We have learnt from this experience, noting the ‘wind tunnel’ effect on traders ‘Under the Guild’ during the winter and had to place new traders within the main body of the market while the weather was cold. This increased the vibrancy and offer in the ‘Market’ space

and will be maintained as new traders become established (see also new Business Tuesday below).

The Square:

The small area adjacent to the Guildhall in front of The Falcon which is edged by the granite balls. This was successfully used for artisan foods and handmade goods in the run up to Christmas. Since reopening in April the use of the space has been pivoted as a small events space for pop up entertainment (primarily music on a Saturday) and story-telling events as run by the museum and Bucks Culture.

The Food Court:

Located front of Little Market House. A new speciality coffee vendor has started trading in April boosting the offer for visitors.

The Market:

Our traditional mixed market and fresh produce area on the High Street. Casual trader numbers have not yet reached the level of last autumn and active promotion is carried out by Saunders to attract a new offer that compliments the established trader base.

As part of the wider reopening work a temporary traffic regulation order (TTRO) was sought to close off the High Street to vehicles from 11am to 3pm on market days to enable the Food Court and Market area traders to expand the space they take. A separate TTRO was put in place for Paul's Row on a Thursday to Sunday to again enable our independent businesses to extend their outside seating further

Social media

Saunders continue to take a proactive stance on social media with the new Market Manager reinvigorating the posts and messages. The organic reach of the market's Facebook page continues to grow. Positive messages have also been posted on the High Wycombe page and on Instagram – as new people are recognising the change in traders and offer and are letting others know of the positive changes that they have seen. The newer traders to High Wycombe – including the new local start-ups, are all active on social media and this has raised awareness and brought new footfall into the town and market as a result.

HWBIDCo ran a successful 'shop local' campaign over the festive period with a short video of independent shop keepers from across the town saying thank you and merry Christmas. We will be working with Saunders and HWBIDCo to create a similar video to introduce our established and new traders to a wider audience – we have some interesting stories to tell that may encourage other start-ups to give the market a go.

New initiatives and animations

We are currently developing a suite of new initiatives to trial in the market space. These offer additionality and will help target different a demographic, increase footfall, improve the experiential offer and enhance dwell time. Some of these will be ready to advertise and programme from late Summer / early Autumn:

- **New Business I Start Up Tuesday** (9am – 4pm)

One of the benefits of our market is the low entry cost to trade for people who want to start up a new venture. Following the ease of restrictions last summer, we saw five new local people make a start with a market stall: whether as a result of making things during lockdown, losing a job, taking a career change or have a job that is on pause due to Covid restrictions. The move to reopen again this April has resulted in a number of our ‘new additions’ taking the decision to move back into employment.

The re-focus on this seedbed space concept enables us to re-promote and encourage new start-up traders. Start Up Tuesday will also encourage a ‘Made in Wycombe’ vibe to develop too.

- **Foodie Thursday**

Exploring use of demonstration kitchen for displays / workshops (as employed by Princes Risborough Town Council at their markets) for local restaurants / chefs / new food vendors. This has to potential to be grown into a Food Festival in future years.

- **‘Friday Night at the Opera’**

An opportunity to compliment the wider ‘live after five’ offer on Paul’s Row that is led by HWBIDCo by providing classical music and opera performances ‘On The Square’. Seating and tables to be provided under ‘The Guild’ with and Italian food provision from traders who are in operation at the general market time.

- **Soulful Saturday (Live after five ‘warm up’)**

Extending the current Saturday afternoon acoustic music trial on ‘The Square’ through to the early evening to support the ‘live after five’ vibe on Paul’s Row. Seating will be provided under The Guild.

- **Sunday family fun and specialist market days**

In June HWBIDCo arranged a second vegan market on a Sunday, building on the success of that held (in poor weather and Tier 3 restrictions) back in December. The market was again very well supported with much positive feedback. This will be repeated later this year.

We are continuing to explore specialist markets and other family day out activities such as vintage buses; classic cars; memorabilia; model making; vintage / retro and collectables for example.

Charity stall space

At the previous meeting Members requested that the re-introduction of a dedicated space for charity stalls be investigated. A 6m x 3m area (two gazebos) has now been instated adjacent to the Guildhall facing toward the Eden entrance and will be bookable for a three-day period: Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. A gazebo can be provided for small local charities if needed – with larger national charities able to bring their own.

Market Strategy

At previous meetings it has been noted that with the move to unitary, the Council has the opportunity to look strategically at the market offer across the whole of Buckinghamshire and consider management arrangements looking forward. 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).

The Economic Growth and Regeneration Service is now in the 'Better Buckinghamshire' service review process, with formal consultation on a new structure and roles starting on the 6 September 2021. Strategic market management remains an activity in the service under the currently proposed Economic Development area.

The current Local Economic Growth Team will continue to actively work with the market operators and other agencies as required to bring about changes to improve the current market offer as the strategic work is carried out and will continue to report back on progress to this Committee.