

SHREWSBURY TOWN COUNCIL
FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
Monday 7th April 2025

Officer: Ian Thorpe – Commercial, Markets and Events Manager

MARKETS UPDATE

Purpose of Report

To update the Council on the current situation within the Indoor and Outdoor Market

INDOOR MARKET UPDATE

Following the award of ‘Britain’s Favourite Market’ at the end of January it has been noticeable that the market has been extremely busy, particularly on a Friday and Saturday, with footfall reports showing levels historically associated with the weeks running up to Christmas. Obviously, this is extremely encouraging news and provides a solid platform to build on for the rest of the year. It also presents some logistical and infrastructure challenges given the age and condition of the building, which must be managed and addressed.

There has been a concerted effort put into developing a collaborative working relationship between the Town Council and Shropshire Council management teams, and this partnership approach is proving beneficial for the market as a whole. There are a number of joint initiatives which are being developed in conjunction with various trader groups, as we look to build on the positivity of the award win and improve the general environment.

The new canopies were installed as planned during February and the feedback received has been extremely positive from both traders and customers alike. The new coverings match the existing market colour scheme and are fully compliant with the latest fire retardancy regulations. It is pleasing to note that because of the installation plan that was agreed and implemented with the canopy company, there was no adverse impact on the operating hours for our traders.

The rental charges for the new financial year have been successfully rolled out and once again it can be reported that the Indoor market continues to operate with 100% occupancy of regular traders and no rental arrears. There have been a number of recent trader changes within the Shropshire Council units which has resulted in an improvement in the mix on offer and enhanced the overall internal appearance.

Another positive element is that we have been included throughout the process of selecting these new tenants, which is extremely important in maintaining the overall mix of traders. Again, this is testament to the collaborative approach we have adopted.

The level of demand for trading space and recent footfall reports would suggest the Market Hall remains in a very healthy position, although it is important we continue to look forward and continue to improve.

The first two ‘late night’s in the market’ events for 2025 have already taken place with the participating traders reporting positive feedback on customer numbers and no security or logistical issues. Preparations are continuing for the celebratory events in September to acknowledge the market building turning 60 years of age.

SUNDAY MARKET UPDATE

The new operator 'Places for Community Spaces Ltd' have continued to manage the Sunday Market since deciding on a pre-Christmas launch.

They have continued to report difficulties in attracting and retaining significant numbers of stallholders and as a result footfall has remained relatively low. In the circumstances this is not particularly surprising given the weather at this time of year and the relatively exposed nature of the site. However, officers have discussed with the operator a number of measures that could be adopted to try to improve this position, which will hopefully coincide with improving weather conditions.

Officers have continued to maintain an open dialogue with the management of 'Places for Community Spaces Ltd' to discuss any improvement ideas, including market research, site preparation, marketing and promotion opportunities, whilst the town council remains fully committed to providing assistance wherever possible.

In their original tender document 'Places for Community Spaces Ltd' categorically stated an intention to solely focus on improving and developing the market operation. This was a position they re-iterated in the pre-launch review meetings held with officers. This approach was consistent with the town council's preferred point of view, given the previous concerns of potential reputational damage from car boot sales and conflict with other long standing local operators.

Immediately after the very first market on 15th December 'Places for Community Spaces Ltd' raised the possibility of reversing their original plan and introduce a car boot sale element. To date this has been based solely on anecdotal feedback they have received from traders and prospective customers.

Officers have invited 'Places for Community Spaces Ltd' to provide more reliable and quantifiable supporting evidence that car boot sales will result in an increase in footfall and would be happy to present this evidence to committee for comment and consideration after the May elections.

In the meantime, officers have re iterated the position that car boot sales are not permitted on the Sunday Market site and any prospective traders must be turned away

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the report is noted.