

DORCHESTER MARKETS INFORMAL JOINT PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY 2021

Present: Cllrs Jean Dunseith, Alistair Chisholm, Janet Hewitt, Susie Hosford, Tony Lyall, Robin Potter, Dave Bolwell, Simon Gibson, Jill Haynes, Nick Ireland, Molly Rennie, Jane Somper, Roland Tarr and John Worth

Also present: Cllrs Stella Jones and Ray Bryan

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting): Adrian Stuart - Clerk to Dorchester Town Council, Graham Duggan, Bill Wilberforce and David Northover

Public Guest Speaker

Grant Jones

15. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence received at the meeting.

16. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2020 were confirmed.

17. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of pecuniary interests.

18. Public Participation

There was no public participation at the meeting.

19. Cornhill Market arrangements

The Panel were pleased to hear from Grant Jones – on behalf of the Cornhill market traders – about what was happening in Cornhill; how things were being done there and what his experiences – and those of other traders - were.

Given the limitations in being able to run the market as had been done prior to the pandemic, trade - in terms of sales, browsing and passing trade – had all been curtailed significantly over the recent months. Whilst this was generally understandable, every effort had continued to be made to ensure what trade possible was maintained, with social distancing rules being applied. Despite the hardships experience, there was still a keen appetite for pitches when

these became available, with up to 20 further prospective traders being known of and this was being actively pursued. A meeting between Mr Jones and officers was due to take place to discuss this and see what might be achieved. It was hoped that more pitch sites might be able to be identified if at all possible to accommodate the interest shown, but this could only be achieved if practicable.

Options for how this market – and Dorchester markets generally – could remain vibrant and viable going forward were considered and where any expansion might be able to be accommodated - i.e. the bottom of South Street near the Cenotaph, but road width constraints; the need to take account of competitive vendors in established shops and; access issues all being factors for consideration.

The Panel saw this as welcomed news and in recognising how popular the Cornhill market was hoped to see a resurgence in trade and interest when normality returned. They acknowledged there was a loyal and dedicated patronage of the stalls - having been located there as The Barrow – for numerous years – and saw no reason why his shouldn't continue to thrive into the future.

The Panel thanked Mr Jones for his valued contribution and positive approach.

20. **Finance Report**

The Panel considered the current projected outturn position for 2020/21 and were asked to agree the 2021/22 budget proposals.

What the operational issues and financial implications had been for the Dorchester Fairfield market, the Cornhill Market, the Farmer's market and the Car Boot, the reasons for this and how these had been managed were described, together with what influences there had been on the budget being presented.

The total projected expenditure was forecasted to be marginally over Budget: a potential cost of £44,118 against a budget of £41,958. The main reason behind the slight overspend was due to electricity costs, of which there was no specific budget, now being addressed as part of the proposed 2021/22 budget.

There was projected to be a significant deficit on the gross income budget. Current projections indicated potential income of £79,530, against a budget of £123,240.

At Ensor's request, and so as to better reflect current trading conditions at the Market and to assist Ensors with their cashflow, it had been agreed that the monthly on account payments received from them would be reduced from £5,000 to nil per month with immediate effect, for the remainder of 2020/21, with payments reverting to £3,000 per month from April 2021.

From proceeds gained, the sum available for distribution was forecast to be £79,530, against a net budget of £123,240 with the allocation of this being:

- Dorset Council - £46,722 (against a budget of £67,821),
- Dorchester Town Council - £25,158 (against a budget of £36,519) and
- the transfer to the Car Boot Reserve of £7,650 (against a budget of £18,900).

In particular, mention was made of the condition of Fairfield's The Linnies and its practical application. Whilst in a state of disrepair and with significant repair work required for the northern Linnies in particular, the southern ones were still regularly used on market days and for car boot sales. Although an ongoing maintenance commitment, there were seen to serve a useful purpose and contributed to the historic and cultural landscape of the market. In seeing the benefit of them, a suggestion made that they might be adapted to accommodate some artisan craftwork i.e. pottery workshop or the like, was taken on board by officers in any discussion they had with Ensors in addressing the practicalities of maintaining these features for such purpose.

Whilst not being listed, as they were in the Conservation Area, how they were managed would need to be addressed in that context, with consent being necessary for any alterations. The Panel asked that they be provided with a report – following discussions with Ensor's – over how The Linnies might be best managed going forward and what considerations needed to be taken into account in doing so.

What was happening with town centre retail and custom and significant changes to retail habits accounted for much that was being seen with the finances, as well as the part the pandemic was playing in the ability to operate the markets as beforehand and the consequent reduction in footfall.

Whilst disappointing, the Panel recognised, and accepted, the reasons for this and the bearing this had on the budget.

Resolved

That the current projected outturn position for 2020/21 be noted and the 2021/22 budget proposals be agreed.

Reason for decision

The need for a budget for 2021/22 to be agreed.

21. Appointments to Car Boot Fund Panel

The Panel made appointments to the Car Boot Fund Panel in its role as providing the means for assessing and allocating proceeds to successful applicants. Officers provided a brief understand of how this Fund was managed and explained that the composition of the Panel had historically been two members each from both authorities i.e. these being the Chairman/

Mayor and Vice Chairman/ Deputy Mayor. On the basis that this Panel might benefit from a more local representation it was agreed

Resolved

That Dorchester Town Councillors Molly Rennie and Susie Hosford and Dorset Councillor John Worth be appointed to the Panel for the ensuing year.

22. Administration of the Panel

The Panel were updated on the provision of how, and by whom, the Panel was to be administrated going forward and noted that discussion was still on going in that respect – particularly in terms of legal responsibilities and commitment - with a recommended outcome on options being presented to the Town Council in the first instance as soon as practicable.

23. The future of Dorchester Markets

The Panel considered what options there were for the future of Dorchester markets - in terms of trading activities; locations; popularity and footfall; access; legal and contractual commitments and obligations; and cultural and social community considerations - with a report from the Town Clerk facilitating this discussion and the panels understanding.

The fundamentals of the market – its purpose, its heritage and its legacy – and what it had to offer to the town in terms of economic, social and civic benefits together with how it had been managed, how it was being managed and what visions there were for its future, were all considerations.

As a market town, of the County Town, it was something of which to be rightly proud and was considered an asset in providing an opportunity for traders, a boost for the local economy and was a business seedbed. The Panel understood they all played their part in attracting footfall locally and from visitors afar and acted as a means of social service - providing value for money goods that were not necessarily able to be sourced by other means. It was community focused, vibrant and stimulated local contact, being adaptable in reflecting changing needs and trends.

The Panel appreciated having the opportunity to be able to review of issues considering that, as well as the economic benefits to be gained, the social and welfare benefits of the market were of considerable value too. Whatever options were available, it was accepted that the markets should be invigorated so as to provide something unique and relevant to the customer of today, to meet their expectations - were that be more street food outlets, demonstrations or heritage exhibitions.

This would go a long way to ensuring their viability was maintained and gave a valid reason for people to continue to visit it in the numbers previously seen. It was accepted that the pandemic had seriously affected what could be done in the recent past, but they saw no reason why this trend couldn't be reversed going forward.

Consideration would be given to the differing scenarios and various options with regard to trade, performance and management of the different market entities, in identifying and assessing how this could be best achieved so as to serve as some basis for how the markets could operate successfully going forward.

The Panel acknowledged the benefits of what the markets brought to Dorchester and what they each had to offer in their own way, not only as an entity – as a means of trading goods, services and produce which might not otherwise be readily accessible directly between suppliers and public - but their wider value and contribution too, in attracting visitors to the town and as a social and community asset. Moreover, in being an historic market town, the essence of maintaining a viable and successful market was critical to the fabric and vitality of Dorchester.

Issues for consideration would be how the markets operated; how they could best adapt to meet the needs of today's consumer; what the means of doing this would be; what arrangements were necessary to achieve this; what rental, licencing and contractual arrangements were necessary to secure their continuation; and how they could improve their efficiency to ensure viability was maintained.

Most importantly the Panel wanted to see them successful and continue contributing to the economy of the town and be seen as a social and community asset for years to come and there was a considerable will to see these valued assets succeed.

It was considered that with the backdrop of the pandemic, now was the right time to reassess and re calibrate what was being done and the process for doing it. Whilst the principles on what to do, how to do it and, where it should be done were accepted, it was recognised that there was a need for any further detailed discussion at this stage should be held by a Working Group in confidential session so that finances and commercial contract arrangements could be discussed, whilst respecting the sensitivities of this. This would allow Members to increase their understanding of the current position and to express a view on which of the options for managing the market should be examined in more detail. This, in turn, would allow officers to gather evidence to answer Member questions and develop options that might be considered more formally at a future meeting. It would also allow a more detailed proposal to be discussed when Dorset Council commenced its Asset Review programme.

An assurance was given that whatever options were considered, there would be a need for this to go through a formal decision process – in a public forum setting – with no decisions being taken discretely. For now, those options would be considered and assessed, with any recommendations being then formally considered by both the Town Council and Dorset Council before any implementation was considered.

Resolved

That the future of the Dorchester markets be noted and the principles behind what was trying to be achieved accepted with any Working Group consideration and assessment of options being formally recommended to Dorchester Town Council and Dorset Council for their consideration and, as necessary, implementation.

Reason for Decision

To ensure the transparent governance of the assessment and decision making process.

24. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items for consideration at the meeting.

25. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as Wednesday 30 June 2021.

Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 3.10 pm

Chairman

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