

DORCHESTER MARKETS INFORMAL JOINT PANEL

NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29 JANUARY 2020

Present: Cllrs Tony Alford, Alistair Chisholm, Janet Hewitt, Susie Hosford, Tony Lyall, Robin Potter, Molly Rennie, Roland Tarr and John Worth

Apologies: Cllrs Dave Bolwell and Nick Ireland

Officers present (for all or part of the meeting): Greg Northcote, Ben Lancaster, Dave Martin, Roger Greene, Adrian Stuart, Chris Evans and David Northover

11. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Bolwell and Nick Ireland.

12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 June 2019 were confirmed and signed.

13. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest to report.

14. Public Participation

There was no public participation at the meeting.

15. Budget/Financial Outturn 2020/21

The Dorchester Markets budget and financial outturn for 2020/21 was considered by the Panel the detail of which was explained by officers in how this budget was allocated and applied and what income had been generated and expenditure incurred. Appendix 1 to the report set this out in detail.

The Panel noted that projected outturn expenditure was £42,087, compared to an approved budget of £41,587, with the projected outturn income being £165,941, compared to an approved budget of £182,374 – this reduction resulting largely to a further projected fall in income from the market operator. The market operator's accounts to 30 September 2019 showed market rents received for the year to date of £69,795, compared to £81,055 in the previous Year, with the proposed distribution to the Panel, after expenses, being

£14,000 less than budget.

The income from farmer's markets was also less than budgeted and was explained in the market management report. The income for car boot sales was slightly down too, compared to the same time last year.

All this meant that the sum available for distribution was £123,854, compared to the budgeted sum of £140,788, with Dorset Council receiving £68,220 compared to a budget of £78,642. Dorchester Town Council would receive £36,734, compared to a budget of £42,346, after setting aside the car boot proceeds into the markets grant reserve.

The proposed expenditure budget was £41,926, the proposed income budget being £165,198 on the assumption that the market operator's contract income was the same as the 2019/20 projected outturn of £48,000, bearing in mind that this had declined steadily over recent years.

Overall, this meant that the surplus available for distribution was £123,272: with Dorset Council due £67,842 and Dorchester Town Council £36,530.

The Panel acknowledged how the budget was comprised and the reasons for this and took the opportunity to make their observations known. They understood and accepted what part circumstances had played in the budget position and recognised that officers had managed this as effectively as they could so as to enable the surpluses to be allocated as beneficially as they might.

Resolved

That the annual budget for 2020/21 be approved.

Reason for decision

To ensure the governance of the Dorchester Markets finances was applied.

16. Distribution of Grants from the Dorchester Market Car Boot Fund for the Financial Year 2018-19

The Panel received an update on the distribution of grants awarded from the Dorchester Car Boot Fund during 2019, together with an illustration of the type of organisations; local projects; initiatives and activities which benefited from the fund, as a result of the income generated by the weekly Sunday Car Boot Sale held at Dorchester Market.

The Dorchester Market Car Boot Fund was financed entirely by the income from the car boot sales with applications for it being made between 23 January 2019 and 31 March 2019. Information about how to apply to the fund was accessible locally and on the Dorset for You website. A total of 45 applications had been received; 8 fewer than the previous year. The Grant Awarding Panel had met in July 2019 to consider the applications, and assessed them against the necessary criteria and on the merit of each, being allocated on their relevant necessity and benefit. How initiatives were being

delivered and the benefits they brought were critical considerations in the way in which the fund was allocated.

In total, 31 community and voluntary organisations had been successful, and the total amount awarded was £15,739. Any unsuccessful projects were directed to where they could gain access to alternative funding streams as necessary to see if they might be able to benefit from those. Successful projects also had the opportunity to access these, as necessary, so as to supplement their funding options.

Mention was made of the celebration event held the previous autumn for all those successful groups in being able to interact with each other and discuss what benefits their particular projects brought.

The Panel were pleased to see how the fund was being used and how beneficial this would be to the viability and success of projects and initiatives in them being able to contribute towards what Dorchester had to offer.

Resolved

That the distribution of the Dorchester Market Car Boot Fund for the financial year 2018-19 be endorsed

Reason for Decision

So as to ensure the available funding was allocated so as to be as beneficial as it could be to Dorchester.

17. Market Management Report

The Panel received the Dorchester Market Management report on what arrangements were in place for it to operate, the basis for this, and how it worked in practice. The report set out the relationship between Dorset Council, Dorchester Town Council and the operators, Ensors; the details of the Market Agreement by which the operations were governed and; what were the management arrangements that were overseen and monitored by the Panel. How the market was performing; what could be done to improve how it was operated and; what it could achieve were set out in the report along with evidence as to why performance was as it was and the reasons why this was not as it might be.

Arrangements for the lease of the site were outlined with Ensors having the rights to hold a weekly market on Wednesdays and a Car Boot Sale on Sundays. Ensors undertook the management of the market and were required to provide periodic financial reports, the latest being set out in the exempt appendix to the officer's report. Market tolls were set by agreement with the Council.

Whilst unfortunately market revenues had been falling for many years owing to the changing pattern of retailing, internet purchasing, and general trends of markets failing to meet the requirements of today's consumers, its core business was still seen to provide a valuable, and valued, contribution to the

vitality of Dorchester, not least from the numerous visitors it generated - some specifically coming to Dorchester on coach trips for this sole purpose - with it being agreed that the market remained successful in what it had to offer.

To assess how to optimise how the market was run, officers had previously commissioned for the Panel a report from NABMA in respect of the market operations, a Dorchester Market Survey to assess the public's view of the market and had presented a discussion paper called a Vision for Dorchester Market. These proposed operational improvements and site maintenance works to support the market. Members considered that this might now prove to be enlightening and that it could be revived to see what part it might play in improving the market's performance.

Ensors Market Operators Report cited poor trading conditions and bad weather throughout the autumn along with the perceived dilapidated condition of the site had all contributed towards the poor level of performance being seen. However the Panel were informed that the allocated budget had been fully apportioned with reserves being drawn on to address essential repairs to the roofs and gates and security improvements had been made - with a new CCTV system in operation. Sub metering of the electric and water supplies on the site also enabled a more efficient and accurate measurement of power consumption so that any recharging was more accurate to users for the first time. How other maintenance works was being undertaken was explained, with any maintenance underspend being proposed to be allocated to replenish the Maintenance Reserve Fund.

Ensors had reported declining revenues for many years and the Panel had reviewed means to improve performance. The Panel were invited to instruct officers of both Councils to review the Ensors report and what proposals were being made, assess this and report back what they considered to be any meaningful proposals that could address the declining revenue arising from the market operation.

Cornhill Market - how this was operated and the licences in place were outlined, as well as the annual fee and rents paid and was seen to be successful, operating on most weekdays and Saturdays.

The Dorset Farmer's Market operated on occasion between New Road and Cornhill and unfortunately experienced a challenging year owing to, a combination of the lack of demand from stallholders and inclement weather. Whilst committed to maintaining their presence, agreement between the Panel and the Dorset Farmer's Market on what progress could be made had failed to materialise for practical reasons as well as concerns on the part of traders at the reduced footfall from the closure of integral town centre shops; spending habits being suppressed; how the market had to be configured; logistical constraints and; food hygiene. How this could be addressed was being actively considered and it was anticipated that a satisfactory solution could be found, including a rationalisation of the tolls required so as to encourage increased participation by traders.

The Farmers Market in Poundbury continued to be successful with its cliental being satisfied with the produces available and prices charged.

Cornmarket – providing a popular alternative and additional means that the public were able to access goods and produce, their terms of the lease governing this - with Duke's Auctioneers continuing to hold over under the terms of their expired lease. The reasons for this was explained and how this was proposed to be addressed drawn to the Panel's attention.

The Panel noted the differing scenarios with regard to trade and performance of the different market entities. It was disappointing to see the decline in performance and returns from the weekly Dorchester market but the reasons for this were understood and recognised. However, the Panel considered that, in recent years, significant investment had been made in the infrastructure of the site to benefit Ensors and what it was able to offer. The point had now been reached where emphasis could only be placed on maintaining the conditions of the site, rather than being able to make further improvements.

The Panel welcomed the opportunity for an informal briefing before their next formal meeting in the summer on what options there were for the market's operations and management in the future and how this could be best achieved. Having access to the previously commissioned NABMA report - which had subsequently been shelved – might well prove to be of some value in options for consideration and serve as some basis for how the market could operate successfully going forward.

The Panel acknowledged the benefits of the market and what it not only had to offer in itself 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 its wider value and contribution too, in attracting visitors to the town and what that too had to offer. 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 market operated; how it 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 its continuation; and how it could improve its efficiency to ensure its viability was maintained. The Panel wanted it to be successful and continue contributing to the economy of the town and be seen as a social and community asset for years to come.

Some members considered that it could take a lead from what the Cornhill market was doing and the way in which this was operating successfully.

Whilst recognising the challenges the market faced as a commercial enterprise the Panel considered that there was a considerable will to see it succeed. Maintaining a positive relationship between both Councils and Ensors was essential in this being achieved and members saw no reason why this shouldn't be the case. It was in the interests of all parties for this to happen and, by holding the informal briefing, a means of doing this might be identified so as to ensure the long term successful future of this valued asset.

Resolved

- 1) That senior officers from both Councils be instructed to review future strategy and management arrangements to address the declining trend in market performance.
- 2) That the financial settlement and revised stall tolls for the Farmers Market be approved.
- 3) That the content of the report be noted.
- 4) That any underspend in the repairs budget be transferred to the Market Repair Reserve.

Reasons for Decisions

- 1) To reconcile the financial position and future licensing of the Dorset Farmers Market.
- 2) To ensure that Members are kept informed of progress in respect of management and development of the various markets.
- 3) To ensure that maintenance liabilities are being addressed and that funds held in reserves can be applied to fund maintenance if required.

18. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items for consideration at the meeting.

Duration of meeting: 2.00 - 4.00 pm

Chairman

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