

DORCHESTER MARKETS INFORMAL JOINT PANEL

27 JANUARY 2021

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF DORCHESTER MARKETS

1. There are a number of markets in Dorchester operating under the control of the Markets Panel, including
 - The Wednesday Market based at Fairfield – while this has declined significantly since its peak in the early 2000’s, the weekly market operated by Ensors as the Panel’s agent is still one of the larger markets in Dorset, with between 80 – 120 traders operating from the internal shed and from outdoor stalls depending on the season
 - The Sunday Car Boot Sale – again operated by Ensors, also smaller than it has been in the past, the Boot Sale is currently generating a surplus of c. £15,000 pa which is distributed to local community groups
 - The Monday-Saturday Cornhill market with a changing mix of up to 12 stalls trading, this has been a success story in recent years, offering many of the benefits that NABMA attributes to a well run market and paying a rent of c.£25,000
 - The Panel also benefits from income from car parking at the Fairfield Car Park on a Wednesday (£48,000) and from two properties on the site (c. £25,000). It receives occasional income from Dorset Farmers Market and “rival” markets
2. For some years the Panel has been considering options relating to the future of the Wednesday Market
 - The current operator, Ensors, approached the Council some years ago with proposals to invest in the Fairfield site in exchange for a longer lease and increased trading days. The Panel was initially receptive, but no progress was made as West Dorset DC officers were concerned about the impact a long term arrangement might have on alternative uses for the site
 - West Dorset District Council received advice from consultants regarding the relocation of the Wednesday Market to an alternative site, the Acland Road Car Park, which would require significant new investment in infrastructure – this option has been dormant for c. 2 years
 - Following the repaving of lower South St five years ago the Town Clerk has noted the potential for an improved offer in South Street on a more regular basis, which might in the long term present an alternative location for stallholders from the Wednesday Market. It’s weakness is lack of space for larger traders
3. None of these options has ever commanded the shared support of the two Councils, the market operators and traders, so no progress has been made to set the market on its next phase of operation. The current Ensors agreement ends in 2026 and Ensors have recently outlined plans for a move away from their historic Wimborne

site, signalling a change in their approach to market operations. One of the historic strengths of Ensors to the Panel has been the synergy between their offers in Wimborne and Dorchester.

4. Noting all of the above, and also the number of new Members on the Panel, a separate briefing session has been arranged to 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.
5. 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 will also allow a more detailed proposal to be discussed when Dorset Council commences its Asset Review programme.

Adrian Stuart
Town Clerk