



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 6 DECEMBER 2023
Subject	REVIEW OF WEEKLY MARKETS
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Duncan Enright Executive Member for Economic Development Email: duncan.enright@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andy Barge, Assistant Director - Communities Email: andy.barge@publicagroup.uk
Report author	Emma Phillips, Market Towns Officer Email: emma.phillips@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the outcome of a review of the outdoor markets of West Oxfordshire as completed by the consultant.
Annexes	Annex A – report: Retail & Charter Markets at Carterton, Chipping Norton & Witney, June 2023
Recommendation(s)	That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Economic Development, to undertake an Expression of Interest exercise to select a commercial market operator to run the weekly retail markets in Witney and Chipping Norton.2. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Executive Member for Economic Development, to the appointment of a commercial market operator for an initial period of two years.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A Good Quality of Life for All

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	External consultation was undertaken by the consultant during the review of markets, evidence of this is presented in their report.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Charter Markets in Witney and Chipping Norton have been managed by West Oxfordshire District Council's Environmental Regulatory Service since 2016. The Council has delivered a basic administrative service which includes the collection of fees, processing of new applications, and the provision and maintenance of the gazebos. Carterton Town Council manages its own weekly market.
- 1.2 All three markets have less than 15 stalls each and have scope to both increase stallholder numbers and overall vibrancy.
- 1.3 Well run retail markets offer a multitude of benefits to towns and their communities, ranging from economic growth and support for local businesses, relatively low cost products for customers and sustainability. With low barriers to entry, markets are excellent incubators supporting new business. Retail markets contribute to the overall vibrancy and appeal of a town, potentially creating an enjoyable and memorable experience for both residents and visitors alike.
- 1.4 The vision set out in the West Oxfordshire District Council plan 2023-2027 is for the district to be a thriving and prosperous place. One of the top priorities is to help the local economy to grow, providing more jobs for local people. Improving the viability of the outdoor markets will play an important role in supporting town centres, attracting footfall and contributing to these objectives.
- 1.5 In February 2023, the Council appointed Wild Property Consultants to undertake a review of the weekly markets and to set out options for their future management. Carterton market was included in the review following discussion with Carterton Town Council for their information.
- 1.6 The key points from his report are summarised below and the full report is attached as Annex A.

2. REVIEW OF THE MARKETS

- 2.1 The review was derived from desktop analysis, site visits, interviews and observations. Visits were also made to neighbouring market towns to create a comparison. The

observations concluded that all three subject markets had a comparatively low mix of traders compared with neighbouring market towns.

2.2 The analysis is summarised in the table below:

Town	Population	No of Stalls	Occupancy (%)	Trader mix	Frequency	Footfall (per market)
Carterton	17,000	10	50%	0.25	Weekly	108
Chipping Norton	7,000	12	60%	0.40	Weekly	272
Witney	30,000	14	70%	0.45	Twice weekly	470
Banbury	50,000	22	73%	0.40	Twice weekly	615
Bicester	38,000	29	91%	0.69	Weekly	780
Cirencester	20,000	25 - 50	80%	0.80	Twice weekly	800
Deddington	2,000	44	96%	0.70	Monthly	1,044
Moreton	5,000	49	95%	0.57	Weekly	2,050

Key:

- **No. of stalls** present (on days visited, with an average taken if necessary).
- **Occupancy** (the Capacity divided by the No. of stalls present, expressed as a percentage).
- **Trader Mix** (the No. of unique stalls in relation to the Capacity, as a factor of 1).
- **Footfall** generated (market customer counts over an hour, multiplied for the duration of the market).

2.3 The consultant reflections on this data are:

- The markets at Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney are by far the smallest in terms of stalls and occupancy.
- The footfall at Witney market is reasonable, compared to its comparatively small market size, suggesting this is a strength to build upon.
- Carterton not fulfilling its potential, given the overall size of the town's population and has by far the lowest score for Trader Mix.

2.4 Interviews were conducted at each of the three markets and the views expressed are summarised below:

2.5 Carterton

- Limited size and limited stall variety with poor footfall.
- There is no regular Carterton based trader at the market, the closest is Wantage based.
- No in-town market signage.
- Opportunity to bring in more customers looking for a bargain who are shopping at the nearby supermarkets and parking adjacent to the market.
- Special events draw in 4,000 people – demonstrating the town's support for gatherings and events.

2.6 Chipping Norton

- The market site location is a disadvantage.

- The orientation of stalls and curation is poor.
- The main road is a barrier and traffic emissions for traders is a concern.
- Existing building works is an understandable short-term disruption but has acted as a catalyst for traders to leave and reduce size of market.
- Nothing to encourage shoppers to linger (dwell time is low).
- No electrical supplies for stall holders.
- There is no CN based trader at the market.
- No messaging on approach or in town to announce the market day.
- Limited promotion of the market through adverts or social media.
- Market stall holders self-manage, in terms of curation and organisation.
- Christmas in Chippy market event is an example of how well a special event market can be delivered.
- Ease of pedestrian navigation around the town is poor.
- The market doesn't reflect well on the town.
- Local businesses want to see a successful market but recognise changes required.

2.7 Witney

- No messaging on approach or in town to announce the market day.
- Limited promotion of the market through adverts or social media.
- Reduced footfall at this end of town due to shop closures.
- Limited local business taking part in the market.
- Market stall holders self-manage, in terms of curation and organisation.
- Stalls holders have to self-erect the stalls, which are cumbersome, heavy and require a van for transportation.
- Stall holder financial takings are positive, demonstrating potential for market expansion.
- High Street closure and lack of clarity about it, creating town wide uncertainty and impacting customer satisfaction.
- No obvious connection between the charter market and other market events, such as the Town Council's running of the Corn Exchange (and their indoor craft markets) and the proposals at Marriotts Walk.
- Thames Valley Farmers Market restricted in their efforts to promote Witney Farmers Market with much reduced signage permitted compared to other towns in which they operate

3. CONSULTANT'S RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1** The Wild report sets out a series of over-arching recommendations for the way the markets could be managed within the context of active town partnerships and fitting in to a coordinated series of town centre events.
- 3.2** These recommendations correspond with the key recommendations of the Markets Towns report commissioned through the UKSPF scheme. Officers are already undertaking work to form partnerships in each of the towns. These partnerships will consider some of the wider issues including public realm, signage and opportunities for new businesses. They will

also play a key role in the coordination and promotion of events that will draw people into the town centres including the weekly markets.

- 3.3** The report recommends reviewing the location of Chipping Norton market with a potential move to the High Street or 'Top Side'. This would be a significant step which would need to be undertaken in partnership with the Town Council and other town centre stakeholders as well as a full public consultation before a decision could be made. That is beyond the scope of this report but can be raised with the Town Partnership for consideration.
- 3.4** The two key recommendations specific to the running of the markets are forming a 'Markets Team' and appointing a commercial market operator to run the operational side of the markets. These recommendations are based on the successful model for running the market in Cirencester which the Wild report cites as an example of very good practice.
- 3.5** Officers have visited Cirencester market to look at the operation further and the observations are as follows:
- Cirencester Town Council is responsible for the market rather than the district council.
 - The Town Council's Markets Team organises and coordinates a full calendar of different markets and events in the town centre which draws people into the town. This includes indoor markets (in the Corn Hall), antiques and collectables, craft markets, seasonal markets, farmers market, vintage and artisan markets.
 - These markets are run by other organisations – the Town Council team coordinates them, produces a monthly calendar and promotes them.
 - The regular Charter Market sits within the calendar but its operation is contracted out to a commercial operator - Cotswolds Markets
 - The Charter Market is well run, the stalls are bespoke double fronted stalls laid out in rows, there is a wide selection of goods and produce on sale and, when officers visited, the market was busy with high footfall.

4. OPTIONS FOR MEMBERS TO CONSIDER

- 4.1** It is clear that maintaining the status quo will not rejuvenate West Oxfordshire's markets and allow them to draw in greater numbers of visitors to the towns. There are three fundamental options to consider:

Option 1

- 4.2** The first option is to retain operational control of the Witney and Chipping Norton markets in house and manage them better. At present the council has neither the staff capacity nor the skills or experience to deliver the step change in markets delivery that the Council is seeking.

Option 2

- 4.3** The second option is to contract out the running of the retail markets to a commercial market operator. The operator would be responsible for all operational aspects of the markets including the provision and erection of stalls, curation of the market with access to

a large pool of stall-holders and the removal and disposal of waste. The operator would collect and retain the fees from the stallholders.

- 4.4 WODC would still have some strategic control of the markets through its contract and relationship with the operator. The Wild report stresses that a successful market requires a proper working relationship between the managing local authority and the operator – a relationship that is purely contractual will not allow the markets to reach their full potential. If this option is accepted, then time allocated to working with the operator needs to be formally written into an appropriate officer's role.
- 4.5 While the council would lose the stall fee income (currently circa £56,000 pa), we would charge the operator a fee which would recoup a proportion of that loss. This is covered in more detail below.

Option 3

- 4.6 The third option is to transfer the responsibility of running the markets to the relevant town council should they wish to take their market on. The town council would then be responsible for either running the market in house or contracting out to a commercial operator in the same way Cirencester Town Council does.
- 4.7 Initial indications are that both Witney and Chipping Norton town councils would be interested in discussing this option although the outcome of those discussions is unknown.
- 4.8 Were WODC to pursue this option and transfer the responsibility to either or both of the town councils, WODC would also be transferring strategic control and influence over future decisions to the towns themselves. The income from the markets (either stall or operator fees) would go to the relevant town council rather than to WODC.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The marginal cost of running the markets undertaking is set out below. The marginal cost is quoted rather than full cost in the budget book (which includes overheads etc) as this is the relevant measure for making a decision on whether to continue with the service provision or seek alternatives.

Current

Business Rates	£7,000
Cleansing	<u>£34,000</u>
Total Cost	£41,000
Income	£56,000
Net Income	<u>£15,000</u>

- 5.2 The financial implications of the alternative options open to the Council covered in Section 4 are set out below:-

Option 1: Retain Markets (Additional Cost to the Council)

Current Net Income is £15,000 but investment is required to improve marketing, administration and cleansing arrangements which will likely move this into a net zero position at best.

Option 2: Contract Out to Commercial Operator (Net Saving to Council £8,000 - £15,000)

The costs of cleansing and potentially business rates will be picked up by the new operator who will also retain all income receipts. It is anticipated based on soft market testing that an operator will pay up to £30,000 for the markets concession therefore the net income will be £30,000 giving a net saving of £15,000 (or net income of £23,000 if business rates liability stays with the Council giving a net saving of £8,000).

Option 3: Agree Transfer to Town Councils (Net Cost to Council £15,000)

The costs will reduce to zero but all income will be lost therefore there will be a net loss to the Council of £15,000.

- 5.3 Option 2 represents the best option in terms of Value for Money and offers both the potential for revenue savings and an improved markets offer subject to the outcome of the procurement process.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 Option 2 looks to offer the best balance in delivering on the strategic objectives required by the Council whilst not impacting on the finances of the Council. If this option were chosen officers would run an expression of interest exercise to select the operator in consultation with the Executive Member for Economic Development.
- 6.2 While there are advantages to exploring Option 3 with Witney and Chipping Norton town councils, the loss of income to WODC renders this option financially unviable.
- 6.3 It is important however that the town councils are involved. It is recommended they be invited to take part in the process to select the operator and be invited to regular review meetings too so their views and ideas can be discussed and acted upon. In other words, the town councils be invited to be part of the 'Markets Team' for each town.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1 Option 1 to retain the operation of the markets in house would require additional investment in staff resource as it has neither the skills nor experience to deliver the step change in markets delivery that the Council is seeking.

7.2 Option 3 to transfer the control of the markets to Witney and Chipping Norton town councils is discounted because the loss of income from the markets financially disadvantages WODC.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Other than the need to enter into a contract with a commercial operator, the report does not give rise to legal implications.

8.2 It is understood that the requirements of The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 for street trading consents do not apply because the markets have been established by charter.

9. RISK ASSESSMENT

9.1 The main premise of the report is that well run and busy markets have the potential to draw people into the towns and help to support the businesses already there. The risk of retaining the markets in house is that they continue to decline and ultimately fail. This goes against the Council's stated aim of doing what it can to support our town centres.

9.2 There is a reputational risk associated with contracting the markets out if the existing stallholders are unhappy with the situation. We will try to mitigate this risk by talking to the stallholders and working with the operator to safeguard their position.

10. EQUALITIES IMPACT

10.1 The options in the report have no particular impact on equality.

11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There is no evidence to suggest that there will be any negative climate or ecological implications resulting from the options in this report.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None

(END)