

**Crawley Borough Council**  
**Report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**30 June 2014**

**Report to Cabinet**

**2 July 2014**

**Crawley Markets**

Report of the Head of Planning and Environmental Services  
Report No: PES156

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**1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This report details the current situation concerning the operation of general and specialist markets in the Queens Square and the High Street. It suggests continuing with the current approach for the time being, then suggests how recommendations for improvements to the current offer in order to compliment Town Centre activities in general and grow the retail circuit might be considered, starting with consultation.
- 1.2 A number of meetings have already taken place between representatives of the current operators of the regular market and Crawley Borough Council and feedback has been provided by way of a petition. It is also proposed to consult with the wider stakeholder group, including retail traders present in the Town Centre, members of the public, the market traders currently working in the town, the current market operator, the Town Centre Partnership, commercial property agents, the Chamber of Commerce, elected members, West Sussex County Council and the Town Access Group.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 To the Overview and Scrutiny Commission

That the Commission consider the report and decide what comments, if any, it wishes to submit to the Cabinet.

- 2.2 To the Cabinet

The Cabinet is recommended to:

- a) request the Head of Planning and Environmental Services to use her delegated powers to give individual consents to market traders to trade in Queens Square each Wednesday until such time as the Square is required for improvements works to begin. In doing so, she

may require traders to also commit to trading in the High Street on other days.

- b) commit to consulting with a range of interested parties, as set out in section 6 of this report, to seek views and evidence on the operation of the existing market and the potential for markets in other locations.
- c) commit to using the information gained from this exercise to inform a future decision on permanent arrangements for the market within the context of an overall master plan for the town centre and the design of improvements to Queens Square.
- d) request the Head of Planning and Environmental services to review the terms of the lease with the market operators and assess options for the future management of the market.

### **3. Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 3.1 To provide certainty on the locations of the market until such times as works in Queens Square commence. To instigate an informed analysis of the impact of the current operation of the market and inform future decisions on the location, design and management of the market.

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 A traditional general market currently operates in the High Street on a Friday and Saturday each week. This market is operated by Urbanism Ltd, using a lease with Crawley Borough Council. Market traders at this market have stated that they do not feel that this is a good location for their market and that this location significantly affects the profitability of their stalls.
- 4.2 Other markets have been trialled in the High Street, including a number of Farmers Markets and a Continental Market but the operators did not find this location successful, at that time.
- 4.3 Businesses in the High Street have indicated that they value the presence of markets in their area, as they feel it increases footfall there.
- 4.4 New advertising, improvements to the street scene and events such as the open air Cinema in the High Street have also recently increased footfall. Further improvements and promotion are programmed for the area, which would also attract people to a market, if situated there.
- 4.5 A trial arrangement with Urbanism Ltd. has been used to allow the traditional general market to operate in Queens Square on Wednesdays, using street trading consents on an ad hoc basis. Market traders at this market have stated that they do feel that this is a good location for their market.
- 4.6 A Farmers Market was subsequently trialled on the same basis in Queens Square but this proved unsuccessful.
- 4.7 Continental Markets were also held in the Queens Square on a regular basis as opposed to the High Street location and these proved successful.

However, Continental Markets on Queens Square were suspended after concerns were raised by the existing market traders

- 4.8 Major improvement works are intended for Queens Square, which will involve redesigning the area in which the Wednesday traditional market now operates.
- 4.9 The Town Centre manager reports frequent requests from potential new stallholders to operate in a market in Crawley. This indicates that there may be potential to expand the general market in the future.
- 4.10 There is evidence that communication between the current market operator, the market traders and the Council have not been working properly. This situation needs to be improved for the benefit of all parties.
- 4.11 It is critical to the overall success of a revitalised Town Centre that a way be found for the traditional market to be profitable and to co-exist with existing and future shop operators/leaseholders. The impacts of the market on the shops and vice versa need to be taken into account while addressing the needs of both.

## **5. The Potential Within the Town Centre for Market Locations**

- 5.1 Queens Square is currently used for a number of promotions and is a prime location for events which often place take in the Bandstand. The promotional events, current markets and some of the Bandstand events generate income and the current market is keen to continue in this area.
- 5.2 Queens Square is a large area and it is possible to hold simultaneous events. However, the areas considered as “prime sites” by local stall holders and promoters are located on the periphery close to permanent shops. Both the market and promotional space occupiers operate on a Wednesday and competition for the best ‘pitches’ is encountered on occasion. This indicates that there may be a limit on the potential for further growth.
- 5.3 Queens Square is also a popular location for formal and informal group activities. The latter include using the area as a meeting place to have lunch in good weather, but have also included buskers which caused tensions with other users of the Square on a number of occasions in 2013 and skateboarders in 2014, for example.
- 5.4 In summary, there are a range of views on the future uses of Queens Square and the “Summer of Fun” events organised by Crawley Borough Council are being used to generate interest in how this space might be used in the future. The extensive consultation that will be carried out prior to the redesign of the Square should help to provide greater clarity on this issue.
- 5.5 The High Street has a strong night time economy but the day time retail offer and footfall has diminished significantly. A large number of visitors to the Town Centre appear not to be aware of the location of this conservation area and its special character. It may also be the case that the changed nature of the High Street now predicates against it being the best site for the traditional market, from the market operator’s perspective due to the lack of footfall currently experienced.

- 5.6 The character of, and available space in, the High Street lend themselves to a number of street based activities. These activities could also complement the existing day time, leisure offer there and act as a draw to reinstate this area as part of some visitor's retail circuits and Crawley Town Centre's general offer. As such an improved market may and should, of itself, be the generator of primary footfall in to the area, if this can be organised.
- 5.7 A focussed, partnership approach has been pursued over a period of time, with extensive promotional activity, to reinstate the High Street as a day time, destination and extend the Town Centre's retail circuits.
- 5.8 A Traffic Regulation Order is also being progressed in relation to the High Street which will enhance this area and remove problematic parking. This will also provide additional opportunities to maximise this location to include market operations.
- 5.9 Other areas of the Town have also been used or proposed for use for Markets. These include the Broadwalk, the Broadway, the Pavement and the potential for an indoor market in a large retail unit.

## **6. Description of Issue to be resolved**

- 6.1 There are divergent views regarding the impact of the current arrangements on the viability of the market, on businesses within Queens Square, the High Street and the surrounding areas, and as to whether the market attracts or deters companies considering investment in Crawley.
- 6.2 Consultation with interested parties will provide a balanced picture of the current situation. The consultation will seek views on the type of market that residents and visitors would wish in terms of goods sold and location. This will be set within the context of the economic viability of operating a market, the profitability of the market from a stall-holders perspective and the impact of a market, both positive and negative, on other businesses. In parallel with the consultation officers will research options for the design of the market, and evaluate options for the future management of the market.
- 6.3 In the meantime, the report provides the traders and public with certainty regarding trading days until such time as works commence in Queens Square.

## **7. Proposed Information & Analysis Supporting**

- 7.1 Information in the form of petitions raised by the current market stall holders has been provided. This indicates that at least some of the traders would prefer to trade solely in Queens Square, rather than the High Street.
- 7.2 The Town Centre Manager and other officers have spoken with local retailers and property agents who have mixed views. Some businesses in the High Street would like the Market to remain, or preferably increase and become more popular, as they feel this would bring a benefit for all, for example. More formal consultation and feedback would, therefore be useful.
- 7.3 It is, therefore, proposed that consultation should be carried out regarding the current market within Queen's Square

7.3.1 The proposed consultation would have three objectives:-

- a) to gather views to understand whether people would support a market in the town centre
- b) to better understand what sort of market people would use and where they would prefer this to be located within the town, and,
- c) to understand what impact the current market in Queen's Square has had on local retailers and landowners adjacent to the market and in the High Street.

7.3.2 A range of methodologies would be used including an online questionnaire for the general public and paper questionnaires to immediate retailers and landowners. However, it would be important to keep a watching brief on the response from this particular group of stakeholders. If participation rates remain low one to one interviews could be chosen. With regard to the general public, face to face interviews could be organised within the town centre supported by fieldworkers. Full consultation with the existing market traders themselves and/or their representatives would be included. Members would also be able to contribute their views to the consultation.

7.4 A review of the existing lease and management arrangements in the light of this consultation would be beneficial to all parties. This will identify the best longer term option for the growth of the market and could include; e.g. a new lease or license to trade, options for additional in house support and investment, for example.

7.5 To allow people time to take part it is recommended that consultation lasts for at least 8 weeks. Consultation would be completed and reported on by the end of October 2014.

## **8. Staffing Financial and Legal Implications**

8.1 In the short term, the current lease agreement for the use of the High Street generates income but is found restrictive by the current market operator. However, the option of utilising a license would provide greater flexibility for the operator should they continue to trade in the High Street. If individual traders wished to trade in the High Street individual street trading licenses could be issued.

8.2 The short-term operation of any market on Queens Square would be managed by CBC issuing individual street trading consents per trader per day.

8.3 If a market is operated solely using consents as opposed to a lease agreement it is possible that the absence of a market manager may result in a need for increased inputs from the Council directly. This could nevertheless be supplied using current resources such as the Community Wardens without greatly increased staffing costs.

## **9. Ward Members' Views**

- 9.1 Local Ward Members views are awaited further to this paper having been forwarded for their perusal.

## **10. Risk Implications**

- 10.1 The current leaseholder might choose to terminate their agreement if they are not willing to either add additional elements to the High Street to compliment and abut their operations should this be a desired eventual outcome. This may result in a loss in revenue income.
- 10.2 The termination of the current lease agreement by either party may result in the total absence of any market offer in the High Street for an unknown period of time whilst alternative arrangements are pursued. It would also be uncertain as to whether any of the existing traders would return after such a situation.
- 10.3 Choices to use or prevent the use of locations have the potential to impact adversely not only on currently successful businesses and their livelihoods, but also the enjoyment of the community of their Town Centre.

## **11. Environmental Impacts**

- 11.1 Larger or busier markets may lead to more street cleansing requirements. This could be resolved through additional sweeping which could be paid for from increased revenue income.

## **12. Conclusions and Reasons for the Recommendation**

- 12.1 Continuing to use the Head of Planning and Environmental Services' delegated powers to give individual consents to market traders to trade in Queens Square each Wednesday until such time as the Square is required for improvements works to begin gives a degree of certainty to the Market Traders regarding their work.
- 12.2 The ability to require traders to also commit to trading in the High Street on other days will help to support businesses in the High Street who value the presence of the market.
- 12.3 As views over the best location and type of market for Crawley Town Centre are mixed, consulting with a range of interested parties would help to clarify the best route forward.
- 12.4 Committing to use the information gained from the consultation exercise will provide positive support to informing a future decision on permanent arrangements for the market within the context of an overall master plan for the town centre and the design of improvements to Queens Square.
- 12.5 Reviewing the terms of the lease with the market operators and assessing options for the future management of the market may offer the opportunity to look at new ways to support a market in Crawley Town Centre.
- 12.6 The Council wishes to ensure that the existing market traders are fully involved in all consultation arrangements and that their views get taken in to account in the decision making process.

### **13. Background Papers**

13.1 Minutes of the Full Councils of 26 February 2014 and 23 April 2014.

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