



Tuesday, 3 September 2024

Report of Councillor Paul Stokes,  
Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet  
Member for Leisure and Culture

## Review of South Kesteven's Council-led Markets

### Report Author

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### Purpose of Report

To provide an update on the High Street Retail Market Review. The review has been undertaken by the High Street Experts and provides an overview of the current weekly street market operations at Bourne, Grantham and Stamford together with specific recommendations for improvement.

### Recommendations

#### The Committee is asked to:

1. Note the findings of the recently commissioned Markets Report and Action Plan and provide feedback on its contents, and;
2. Agree the timescales for an Action Plan including financial analysis and timescales to be presented to a future Committee meeting.

### Decision Information

Does the report contain any exempt or confidential information not for publication?

No

What are the relevant corporate priorities?

Connecting communities  
Enabling economic opportunities

Which wards are impacted?

All Wards

## 1. Implications

Taking into consideration implications relating to finance and procurement, legal and governance, risk and mitigation, health and safety, diversity and inclusion, safeguarding, staffing, community safety, mental health and wellbeing and the impact on the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency, the following implications have been identified:

### ***Finance and Procurement***

- 1.1 The costs of the associated action plan need to be financially assessed to ascertain whether any additional budgetary allocation will be required to implement the approved actions.

*Completed by: Richard Wyles, Chief Finance Officer (S151) and Deputy Chief Executive*

### ***Legal and Governance***

- 1.2 Aside from agreeing the timescales for a revised Action Plan, there are no significant legal or governance implications arising from the report.

*Completed by: James Welbourn, Democratic Services Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer*

### ***Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion***

- 1.3 A key theme of this review is accessibility. Each market has its own identity and the spaces in which they operate are very different. Some of the issues have been identified through the review process. To be certain that these and any other issues detected are effectively addressed equality impact assessments and access audits should be carried out for each market prior to further actions being undertaken to ensure the needs of current and future users are met.

*Completed by: Carol Drury, Community Engagement Manager*

## 2. Background to the Report

- 2.1 The High Street Experts are a consultancy company with a specialist knowledge of independent retailers and markets; they specialise in supporting independent retailers and markets to maximise income. The High Street Experts approached the Council in early 2024 to ask if they would consider taking part in a fully funded pilot project which focussed on reviewing the performance of local markets and working with those markets to create an action plan for improvement.
- 2.2 This review, covering the Authorities three markets (Bourne, Grantham, and Stamford), was undertaken throughout spring and early summer 2024. It is based

on independent research alongside the surveying of traders, shoppers, retailers, and council Officers. Factors such as retail mix, footprint, assets, branding, marketing, general kerb appeal and ease of access were considered.

- 2.3. Each of South Kesteven's three Council-operated markets were included in the review – Bourne, Grantham and Stamford. For each market, a list of recommendations has been developed; these recommendations have been pulled into a draft Action Plan which can be viewed in Appendix 1.
- 2.4. The brief given to the High Street Experts by the Council was:
  - To review the performance of Council owned charter markets, sited through the district of South Kesteven, and
  - To generate a clear picture of the opportunities and growth areas for each market.
- 2.5. The review provided an overview of the current state of UK markets and highlighted that there are 1,225 retail markets in the UK with around 84% of these being operated or controlled by a Local Authority. Particular attention was drawn to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on how people shop, leading to increased localism and a greater level of commitment to small, independent businesses. This trend quickly reversed post-pandemic. The following figures highlight some of the issues being faced by the sector (covering the period 2018 – present):
  - Stall occupancy is down from 77-72%,
  - Only 8% of traders are under 40 years of age, and
  - Only 40% of markets make a financial surplus.
- 2.6. The review highlighted that there are three key phases which, if implemented, should allow a market to be as successful as it can. These are:
  1. **Current trading footprint** – this phase reviews the current trader landscape, access points, retail mix, price range, external presentation and layout ideas, and barriers to trade.
  2. **Identity** – this phase reviews market equipment and assets, branding, marketing, wayfinding/signage, local heritage, quality of traders and collaboration with high street retailers.
  3. **Operations and opportunities** – this phase reviews market finances, visitor economy opportunities, training needs, Wi-Fi access, promotion, sustainability and the overall market offer.
- 2.7. The next section of this report will provide an overview of the main findings from each market (Bourne, Grantham and Stamford) for each of the three phases highlighted above. Each market is benchmarked against a successful market which is based in a similar sized town with a similar demographic.

## **Grantham**

### **Phase 1: Current Trading Footprint**

- 2.8. The current trading performance of Grantham market is in decline and has been for some years. The area available to develop the market is sizeable and well placed on Westgate. The current layout is very linear with minimal seating and studded with vehicles. The wide spacing between clusters of traders made the market feel sparse.
- 2.9. Currently, public realm work is being undertaken to improve the space and improve amenities such as re-opening Conduit Lane toilets and creating an events space.

### **Phase 2: Identity**

- 2.10. In the second phase of the market review, identity was the focus. This phase delves into the unique characteristics and distinguishing features of a market and identifies what sets it apart from others.
- 2.11. Key areas of consideration for this phase are:
  - Place branding – key components include identifying uniqueness, creating a brand strategy and visual identity, promoting the market, engaging with stakeholders and monitoring progress and evaluating effectiveness of changes.
  - Trader branding and merchandising – key components include deciding on the branding of the market e.g. providing traders with bespoke pre-erected stalls.
  - Wayfinding and signage – key components include clear signage, consistent branding, accessibility, comprehensive mapping and interactive elements.
- 2.12. The review highlighted that the current equipment used, across all three markets, requires reviewing. The review suggested an 'Asset stocktake and review' to quantify the issue and assign a value for improvement. This recommendation has been included in the Action Plan (Appendix 1).
- 2.13. Equipment, such as stalls and marquees, can be essential to the identity of a market and therefore it is recommended the current equipment is reviewed to ensure it fits with the identity and desired place branding of each market.

### **Phase 3: Operations and Opportunities**

- 2.14. The third phase covered future opportunities and highlighted points of focus. This section made the same recommendations for all three markets, there is a detailed outline of the recommendations from this section in the Action Plan shown in Appendix 1. High level areas of improvement were:
  - Visitor economy opportunities – expand the use of media, improve networking opportunities,
  - Address the training needs of the team to ensure our markets have the right people, with the right skills, in the right places,
  - Address inconsistencies in infrastructure (Wi-Fi, sustainability and promotions), and

- Sustainability – there are many sustainable benefits to outdoor markets including reducing waste and small energy usage requirements.

## **Bourne**

### **Phase 1: Current Trading Footprint**

- 2.15. Bourne market is losing traders at an alarming rate, with a small footprint and an edge of town placement, this market is at its lowest. Having moved to the car park behind the Corn Exchange, this market has been reduced to a handful of traders. The High Street Experts interviews with shoppers revealed that they now go to Stamford Market instead.
- 2.16. The review identified that Bourne has the potential to regain traders and grow its trading footprint, these suggestions have fed into the Action Plan (Appendix 1).

### **Phase 2: Identity**

- 2.17. An outline of the background and findings affecting all three markets is outlined in points 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12.

### **Phase 3: Operations and Identity**

- 2.18. The third phase covered future opportunities and highlighted points of focus. This section made the same recommendations for all three markets and an outline is available in Section 2.14, there is also detailed outline of the recommendations from this section in the Action Plan shown in Appendix 1.

## **Stamford**

### **Phase 1: Current Trading Footprint**

- 2.19. The Stamford market footprint is rambling and takes advantage of the whole high street, trailing its traders throughout the streets. This market is the current jewel in the SKDC portfolio of markets. With access points all through the town and an enhanced retail cluster on many of the side lanes the market footprint boasts a presence in the town. With excellent parking facilities and a loyal local following this market is well attended. The local narrative around the market is one of loyalty and love. The market layout made it easy to get around to see all of the traders using the existing retailers and cafes to interject the dwell space and weave points, which encourage lingering shopping moments. With the tourist economy blooming, Stamford attracts out of towners every week, on mystery coach tours and service breaks on longer haul trips. A dedicated bus park provides an ideal drop off point directly into the mouth of the market. Consideration has been given to the retailers along the lanes by staggering the layout to allow for windows not to be blocked by the stalls. However, despite this, interviews with the traders suggested that visitors aren't spending money, social media coverage is limited, and Wi-Fi access is inadequate.

2.20. Stamford hosts around 80 stalls and whilst there is a repetition of traders it doesn't appear to be an issue. The Saturday market consists of more gift and specialist stalls to appeal to families and visitor economy.

### **Phase 2: Identity**

2.21. An outline of the background and findings affecting all three markets is outlined in points 2.10, 2.11 and 2.12. A specific action for Stamford market is that the '*Yard has outbuilding that could be converted to an office with toilet*'. This would provide the markets team with a base to run operations.

### **Phase 3: Operations and Identity**

2.22. The third phase covered future opportunities and highlighted points of focus. This section made the same recommendations for all three markets and an outline is available in Section 2.14, there is also an outline of the recommendations from this section in the Action Plan shown in Appendix 1.

### **Summary**

2.23. The consultant-led review highlighted numerous actions for each of the three phases which could be used to improve the markets. The Action Plan in Appendix 1 has taken these actions and synthesised them into a draft, high-level Action Plan. The next phase of the work will be to evaluate the recommendations from the review and use this information to create a fully costed Action Plan with more specific actions and timelines. It is estimated this will take around 6 months to complete and the results can be fed back to this Committee in early 2025.

2.24. In brief, the key recommendations for the three markets are:

- Phase 1:
  - Increase trader variety,
  - Improve communications and marketing,
  - Optimise layout,
  - Improve accessibility, and
  - Look at alternative trading models.
- Phase 2:
  - Undertake a place building exercise,
  - Improve wayfinding and signage and collaborate with local businesses.
- Phase 3:
  - Explore visitor economy opportunities,
  - Establish a training framework for Markets Officers and traders,
  - Improve access to Wi-Fi, and
  - Explore themed events e.g. Foodie Friday.

A more detailed breakdown of the actions related to each recommendation can be found in Appendix 1.

2.25. The Economic Development team is working with the Operational team to create a funding bid from the Shared Prosperity Fund, this bid will use the review and

associated Action Plan as a guide. However, should the bid be unsuccessful, the Council will need to fund any actions that are required to be completed.

### **3. Key Considerations**

- 3.1. To fully understand the feasibility of the recommendations from the review and the associated Action Plan, stakeholder consultation and a full financial analysis is required to highlight a strategic plan and the full cost of improving the markets.

### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. **Option 1** - Take no action – leave the markets as they are and risk the decline of the markets over time.
- 4.2. **Option 2** – following consultation and cost review, adjust the Action Plan to remove unaffordable actions to allow a focus on actions which are supported, feasible and affordable.

### **5. Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 5.1. The recommendation for further financial analysis has been made to enable the committee to understand the costs of adopting the action plan before a commitment is made.

### **6. Appendices**

- 6.1. Appendix 1 – Action Plan