

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 30th November 2023

Report Title: Ashford Town Centre Market Review and 'Best of Kent' Market Motion

Report Author: Andrew Osborne, Head of Economic Development

Job Title: Keli Nolan- Lyons, Town Centre Regeneration Manager

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Heather Hayward

Portfolio Holder for: Performance and Direction



Summary: This report considers the Motion put forward by Cllr Diccon Spain to create a 'Best in Kent' market, sets the context to existing markets operating in Ashford Town Centre, and other markets and shops that operate within the borough and sell local produce.

The report sets out initiatives undertaken by the Council previously within this area, and the potential opportunities moving forward.

This report seeks approval to set up a Members Task Group to investigate these opportunities (considering the opportunity inside the context of the Town Centre Reset) and undertake the relevant due diligence to develop considered proposals that can be presented back to Cabinet.

Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: Victoria Ward

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- I. Approve the setting up of a Members Task Group to investigate the opportunities for market activity in Ashford Town Centre, alongside the Town Centre Reset.**

Policy Overview: This proposal supports the Council's Corporate Plan objective under the theme of Targeted Growth, "TG5: Stimulate vibrant, accessible and sustainable Town Centres for residents visitors and business"

This proposal also supports the concepts of Enterprise, Community, and Animation within the Ashford Town Centre Reset Strategy and Action Plan 2022.

Financial Implications: Any financial implications for new proposals will need to be reported back to Cabinet as part of a business case.

Legal Implications: <i>Text agreed by Solicitor to the Council on 17th November 2023</i>	The Task Group will need to have consideration of Licensing, Planning and Highway laws and regulations as part of their review of proposals. Support will be provided by Legal to the Task group as part of their investigations.
Risk Assessment (Risk Appetite Statement):	As part of the development of new proposals, a risk assessment will need to be developed alongside an impact assessment on existing businesses and markets.
Sustainability Implications:	Sustainability will need to be considered in the formulation of any new proposals for market activity in Ashford Town Centre.
Exempt from Publication:	NO
Background Papers:	
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Introduction and Background

1. This report responds to the request from the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Direction, Cllr Heather Hayward, for officers to look at how markets can support the revitalisation of Ashford Town Centre, alongside the Motion presented to the Council by Cllr Diccon Spain, to "Revitalise Ashford Town Centre with a Weekly 'Best of Kent' Market".
2. Ashford Town Centre currently has three main markets that take place within the town centre on a regular basis. These are:
 - a. **Ashford Market Lower High Street** (Tuesday, Friday and Saturday each week) These traders include: Fresh fruit & veg stall; Fast Food Stalls; Clothing Stall; and other retail and services.
 - b. **Makers Market, Park Mall** (Saturdays, once a month 10am-4pm, run by Craftship Enterprise CIC & their market manager) different creative businesses selling Kentish made designed or created products, including local bakery and food products.
 - c. **Independent Makers Market, Coachworks** (Sundays, once a month 10am-4pm) art, craft, jewellery, food & drink
3. There are also a number of further markets or farm food and local produce shops within the Town Centre or more widely within the Borough. These include:
 - a. **Ashford Stall Market / Boot Fair – Orbital Park**. Sat & Sun from 6am. Variety of stalls from fast food to a range of retail products.
 - b. **Farthingloe Shop** – upper high street, Ashford Town Centre – fresh fruit & veg, pies, bakery, juice etc
 - c. **Made in Ashford shop** – Park Mall, Ashford Town Centre. Run by Craftship Enterprise CIC - retail outlet for local creatives to sell locally produced craft items. Open 10am to 5pm Mon-Sat and 10am to 4pm Sun.
 - d. **County Square** – fruit & veg daily stall within the shopping centre in Ashford Town Centre.
 - e. **Tenterden Town Council Friday Market** – Tenterden High Street. 2x Fridays per month. Crafts etc. Operated by TTC. Gazebos provided.
 - f. **Market Square market, Tenterden** – every Friday selling fresh produce – fish, bakery, fruit & veg
 - g. **Perry Court Farmers Market Shop** – fruit & veg, local produce, bakery etc-daily
 - h. **Silcocks Farm Shop** – St Michaels, Tenterden
 - i. **Nightingale Farm Shop**, Gibbet Oak Farm, Tenterden
 - j. **The Farmers Market – Wye** – 1st & 3rd Sat of month
 - k. **Rolvenden Craft and Farmers Market** – Rolvenden Village Hall, every Thursday 9am to 11am.

- I. **Egerton Farmers Market** – The Millennium Hall, Egerton. Every Friday from 2pm to 4pm.
4. In addition the Council is piloting a Christmas Festive Market (trial 23rd- 26th Nov in Lower High Street, and in Elwick Place until 6th Dec, run by RR Events Ltd www.rrevents.co.uk a reputable nationwide market provider) providing a mixture of food and craft products for the festive season. This market is being organised and managed by this company at no cost to the Council. If successful there is the opportunity to work with this operator to deliver further themed event markets in the future, such as Continental Markets.

Previous Market Activity and support for Entrepreneurs within Ashford Town Centre

5. An **Ashford Farmers Market** had taken place in the Town Centre Lower High Street, one Sunday every month 10am-2.30pm, starting in 2014 and ending in 2018. This market was managed by a Farmers' Market Manager funded by Ashford Borough Council, with the initial set up costs supported by Portas Pilot funding. Stalls included locally grown game, artisan breads, fudge, jams, honey etc. For the first two years the market grew steadily incorporating 20 stall holders, however this declined from 2016 to 2018 where the market was assessed to be no longer viable with stallholders numbers reducing and increasing costs for ABC due to reduced revenue.
6. **Kent Food Hubs** ran markets in Coachworks and Elwick Place during 2021 and 2022, but discontinued these due to lack of business for the traders. They are still running markets in Folkestone, Dover and Hythe.
7. **Ashford Street Market** has offered free stalls set up for entry level traders in the past, but take up has been poor, and the number of traders have reduced with no new traders coming forward and no real interest for a number of years.
8. **Made in Ashford** was set up alongside the Craftship unit to support entry level craft businesses to sell through a shop in the town centre. Craft businesses can take shelf space within the unit to sell their products. This collective also organise the Makers Market in Park Mall.
9. **Coachworks** has also provided entry level space for traders through the containers and units within this complex, with businesses able to try out new concepts with less initial capital outlay.
10. The Council are also aware of a number of organisations that support markets both locally and nationally, these include: NABMA – National Association of British Market Authorities; NMTF – National Market Traders Federation; ATCM – Association of Town Centre Management; Kent Farmers Market Association; Visit Kent; Produced in Kent; and Kent Food Hubs. These organisations provide support and market analysis that would be helpful in shaping activity in Ashford moving forward.
11. Both Canterbury Market and Ramsgate Market in Kent have recently gone through a review, with Canterbury proposals out to consultation with the public, and Ramsgate Market being reintroduced. Although these are different towns and cities, engagement with these Council's to understand the work that they have done in reviewing their activity will help support Ashford proposals moving forward.

Proposal

12. The Motion by Cllr Spain to develop a 'Best of Kent' Market in Ashford Town Centre, supports the move to buy local, encouraging consumers to support and enjoy products and services from local businesses, and is intended to drive increased town centre footfall. In discussions with a number of members, and the portfolio holder, there is an opportunity to review the existing activity around markets within the area and how this can be supported, and consolidated to improve existing provision. This work can learn from what has been tried before, but also investigate new opportunities to develop markets that can attract visitor numbers, create a platform for local traders and celebrate diversity and culture within the area.
13. It is therefore proposed that a Members Task Group be set up and supported by officers to look into opportunities to improve the Market provision within Ashford Town Centre.
14. It is proposed that the Task Group have the following Terms of Reference:
 - a. Review the activity of the current Ashford Market with the support of the Environmental Protection and Licensing Team Leader
 - b. Consider the requirements for successful markets through a review of best practice examples in similar towns and similar work in other parts of Kent.
 - c. Review the Christmas Market activity and consider what existing market operators could deliver in Ashford Town Centre, and any associated costs.
 - d. Work with the existing Ashford Market and Makers Markets to consider whether consolidation of these existing offerings can support and coordinate the expansion of the overall offer.
 - e. Consider emerging proposals from Produced in Kent for local produce markets across Kent.
 - f. Consider other themed markets and suggestions that could be brought into Ashford on a regular basis.
 - g. Consider consultation with consumers and local traders to understand demand.
 - h. Consider how any new proposals fit within the Town Centre Reset Strategy.
 - i. Develop a business case for proposals to bring back to Cabinet, including the financial (start-up costs and ongoing operational costs), regulatory, staffing, promotional, location, and infrastructure requirements, and the potential impact or risk to other existing operations.
15. It is proposed that the Task Group be chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Direction, Cllr Heather Hayward, and that Cllr Hayward invite cross party representation to investigate and consider opportunities, including Shadow Portfolio Holders. The Task Group will be supported by the Corporate Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Head of Economic Development, Economic Development Manager, Town Centre Regeneration Manager and Environmental Protection and Licensing Team Leader, with support and expertise from other teams being brought in as required.

16. The Task Group will look to report back to Cabinet with proposals in spring / summer 2024, once sufficient work and consultation has been undertaken and considered proposals can be brought forward.

Consultation Planned or Undertaken

17. As part of the work of the group, consideration will need to be undertaken about how to understand the demand for local markets that residents will frequent and spend money at. This could include use of the Citizen's Panel once proposals have been developed to test these out in advance of being brought back to Cabinet.
18. Consultation with existing businesses within the town centre will also need to be undertaken to understand the impact of any proposals on existing businesses or where there could be collaboration and opportunity to enable benefits for existing businesses.

Other Options Considered

19. The other options considered were to accept the motion proposed for a 'Best in Kent' Market. The motion would have required a business case as well as financial and logistical planning to be undertaken. This report's proposed option of setting up a Task Group allows for Cllr Spain's proposal alongside other options to be considered by the Members Task Group and for these to be investigated by officers before being brought back to the cabinet with fully considered proposals.
20. The option to do nothing was also considered, especially within the current financial and resource position, and with the Town Centre Reset Action Plan that already provides activity to be delivered through to March 2025. Markets do however provide a potential opportunity to drive footfall and activity within Ashford Town Centre, and there is further work that can be done to investigate these opportunities and consider the financial and resource requirements to enable proposals to be brought back to Cabinet for consideration.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

21. Further investigation is required to enable a full business case to be brought forward to be considered by Cabinet. A Member task group as proposed would ensure that the business case and any proposals could be informed by, and have the consensus of, Members across the Council.

Next Steps in Process

22. The next step if approved will be to set up a member task group to agree the activity in line with the proposed Terms of Reference (section 13).

Conclusion

23. There is cross member support to look at how markets can provide vitality and activity within Ashford Town Centre to provide a destination and attract customers into the High Street, whilst supporting local producers and businesses.
24. The setting up of a Members Task Group will provide member and officer resource to investigate these opportunities, and the resources and environment required to make them successful. This work will therefore be able to inform proposals moving forward.

Portfolio Holder's Views

25. "I was pleased to see Cllr Spain's motion as market provision was an area I had already been discussing with council officers. I know from the large amount of work already being undertaken as part of the "Town Centre Reset" project that both officers and this cabinet share his passion for a revitalised town centre.
26. If the proposed task group is agreed by Cabinet I look forward to working with Cllr Spain and other members to bring back a carefully considered and costed proposal to cabinet colleagues."
27. Cllr Heather Hayward, Portfolio Holder for Performance and Direction

Contact and Email

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