

St Helens Council

Environment, Regeneration, Housing, Culture and Leisure Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Earlestown Market

11th March 2015

1. Background

- 1.1 Members of the Panel were requested to undertake a site visit to Earlestown Market. On 6th February Councillor(s) K Roberts, J De'Asha, C Preston, L Preston, S Dyer, J Jackson, K Deakin and D Banks together with Kevin Gavin the Markets Manager and Steve Littler Estates and Asset Manager walked around the market and met and spoke to a number of market traders.

2. Findings

- 2.1 Earlestown Friday market is a traditional market. The physical structure of the market consists of approximately 150 defined positions of which 64 are stalls supplied and maintained by the Council, the remaining positions being let as pitches. The 64 supplied stalls are permanently sited on the market and the Council's Cleansing Section adjusts non fixed stalls into position once per week. The Council has recently replaced some of these non- fixed stalls with fixed 10ft stalls. The initial replacement programme provided 27 new stalls at a total cost of £58,833 with £48K funding from Service Modernisation and remainder from revenue budgets. These new units are bolted to the ground thus removing the need for weekly adjustments. New traders are given a choice of all available stalls for the day. Restrictions do however apply where commodities clash on adjoining stalls.
- 2.2 The market operates throughout the year and is traditionally a busy market with 80%-90% occupancy during the peak trading months of April to December. The quietest months being January to March. Traders are currently allowed 4 weeks rent free holiday per annum, however some traders have requested a reduced rent policy for the quieter periods in Jan, Feb and March.
- 2.3 In terms of rental holiday period, average pitch and stall price is £27.20 per week therefore holiday entitlement would be equivalent to £108.80. At half rent this would provide 8 weeks in exchange for holidays or 12 weeks at 33% discount. This may be favoured by some of traders but other may prefer to take holidays and would probably need discussion with traders committee.
- 2.4 New traders are not discouraged, however, a policy limiting the number of pitches stocking similar ranges exists. There is a commodity limit placed on various items i.e there are 9 traders who sell ladies fashion. Therefore further ladies fashion would be prohibited to ensure that the market does not become over saturated with the same commodity. Attached is a commodity checklist which is constantly under review.
- 2.5 There is a diverse range of products at the market however, advertising for specific commodities may help support its growth and attract new businesses.

- 2.6 The rental amount for the pitches is dependent on size. These range from £11.20 to £35.80 per day, the average being £17.00.
- 2.7 The ancillary functions carried out by alternative providers are:
- Stall Straightening; provided by the Cleansing Section at a cost of £1,630. New stalls would result in a saving against this item of expenditure.
 - Cleansing also provides refuse collection and cleansing of the market at a cost of £56,337 per annum. (also includes Saturday market).
- 2.8 Earlestown Market has a heritage which dates back as far as 1258. The market in its present form dates back to 1870 when the current market square was established.
- 2.9 Earlestown market's heritage therefore needs to be celebrated as it provides both a social and business development function whilst also providing a tourism attraction linked to its past. The Earlestown Market is well established at a local level with well over 100,000 visitors a year however, recent market research has shown that most of these visitors are from within the borough. We need to therefore attract visitors from other areas whilst maintaining the local interest also.
- 2.10 Panel members discussed how we might improve the facilities by possibly reinvesting some of the monies collected back into the market.
- 2.11 Below is income and expenditure figures for Earlestown last year and projections for this year.

Earlestown Market	2014/15 Forecast	2013/14 Outturn
Cleaning Costs	56,337	55,232
Total Costs	164,779	158,718
Total Income	-248,985	-260,314
Surplus	-84,206	-101,600

- 2.12 Over the years, Earlestown has seen the benefit of reduced overheads. However, Earlestown has a very small planned maintenance budget (less than £1,500). We believe that should this be increased, it could be used to fund a replacement programme for stalls on an annual basis rather than an injection of capital to replace stalls all in one go. As it stands, the current planned maintenance budget wouldn't cover one new stall.
- 2.13 Members raised their concerns in respect the shoppers' car park in Fairclough Street which was being taken over by commuters who park and ride on the adjacent railway. We heard that on numerous occasions, those trying to park on the shoppers' car park had found it completely full and as a result had to park in nearby streets. If we are to address the regeneration of Earlestown Town Centre and Earlestown market, then we have to look at ways to solve this problem.

3 Recommendations

3.1 The Panel would like Cabinet to consider the following suggestions:

1. A possible increase to the planned maintenance budget for Earlestown market to allow for the management of annual stall replacement programme.
2. Provision of 4 interpretation boards to be sited around the square.
3. Provision of advertising banners to be sited on high level lampposts on square.
4. Refurbishment/improvements to existing public convenience on square.
5. Possibility of bringing the old market offices back into use for traders and or visitors.
6. Discussions with market traders as to possibility of reducing rents in Jan Feb and March instead of the 4 weeks rent free holiday period.
7. Identification of parking areas for visiting coaches.
8. Promotion of market as a tourist attraction for visitors to St Helens Council.
9. A possible trial for the recycling of cardboard to identify how much is generated from the Friday Market.
10. The use of the Shoppers' car park in Fairclough Street be monitored, particularly in the morning, to assess what percentage of usage is by rail passengers.

No	The Panel would like Cabinet to consider the following suggestions	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action and Date of Implementation
1	A possible increase to the planned maintenance budget for Earlestown market to allow for the management of annual stall replacement programme.		
2	Provision of 4 interpretation boards to be sited around the square.		
3	Provision of advertising banners to be sited on high level lampposts on square.		
4	Refurbishment/improvements to existing public convenience on square.		
5	Possibility of bringing the old market offices back into use for traders and or visitors.		
6	Discussions with market traders as to possibility of reducing rents in Jan Feb and March instead of the 4 weeks rent free holiday period.		
7	Identification of parking areas for visiting coaches.		
8	Promotion of market as a tourist attraction for visitors to St Helens Council.		
9	A possible trial for the recycling of cardboard to identify how much is generated from the Friday Market.		
10	The use of the Shoppers' car park in Fairclough Street be monitored, particularly in the morning, to assess what percentage of usage is by rail passengers.		