

Key Points from discussion with Officers

Notes from the Panel's meetings with officers involved in the running of the Covered Market

Meeting with Officers 27 August 2013

Attendees

John Bellinger, Building design and facilities Manager
Sheralynn Cross, Streetscene Assistant Operations Manager
Jane Winfield, Regeneration and Major Projects Team
Ruth Whelan, Senior property Manager/
Chris Wood, Property Manager

Panel

Cllr Jim Campbell
Cllr Mary Clarkson
Cllr Jean Fooks
Sarah Claridge, Democratic Services Officer

Sheralynn explained the role of the porter in the market, they are responsible for:

- Opening market
- Waste collection
- Traffic control
- Cleaning toilets
- Monitoring the cellar space – 15 cellars leased separately for storage.

The Current Leasing structure

- There are 57 separate leases which set out the responsibilities for both the landlord and the tenant.
- Leases are 15 years in length, they began in 2002 and end in 2017 – every 5 years the rent is reviewed.
- All but 2 leases begin and end on the same day; this makes the landlord/tenant relationship difficult as the rent is reviewed for all the leases at the same time. Normally leases are staggered so a landlord would only deal with reviewing rent for a few leases at a time. However Council has to review 55 leases at the same time, which means that dissatisfaction amongst traders is widespread.

When the leases expire in 2017, the tenants are legally entitled to a new lease and the council can only oppose a request on specific grounds.

The Council could propose a change in the terms of the lease at renewal but this is largely a matter for negotiation between landlord and tenant. It may therefore be possible to agree different lease patterns at renewal ie stagger the leases so they don't all start and end (and require rent review) at the same time.

Council could have a more flexible approach in 2017. It doesn't need to be constrained by tenure as any empty units could be changed to licenses. As long as we are fair to all tenants.

Q What sort of market would you like to see developed?

Change of Use requests – currently Corporate Property is responsible for determining Change of Use applications, we consult with the CMTA, look at the leasing strategy and then officers decide whether the proposed Change of Use is good for the Covered Market or not which can create conflict with the CMTA.

Would like to see a more tightly managed user clause similar to Borough market, which would regulate the quality of the food being sold. ie Borough Market has a tightly controlled approach to permitted uses. In Borough, traders are interviewed and their products taste tested before they are given a licence/lease to sell it. Change of Use are rarely given, traders have to re-apply to sell alternative goods.

The Covered Market could be a niche, high quality shopping destination so that it can distinguish itself from the new Westgate and Oxford Castle. It should sell goods/services that are not available on the High St.

Council needs to consider users and where they are placed in the market.

There needs to be a clear theme in the market to draw people in. ie high quality, unique gifts and food

Need to re-create the Christmas shopping atmosphere year round.

Lighting is an issue – Christmas lights are left to collect dust, some traders have set up their own lighting.

Shop fronts have no identity or cohesion and there is a big difference in quality between vendors.

Focus should be on traditional, local and independent vendors with a strong food focus. Revert back to what the market sold 30-40 years ago.

Improving access to the Market

Signage

- It is difficult to get people from the High St into the market.
- Installing signage on the High St is problematic as it's a listed building and the frontage is owned by Lincoln College so permission is needed.
- If Market Street became the front of the Covered Market – installing signage is easier as the Council owns the entire frontage so we have more control and opportunity in the signs we install.
- Is there a main entrance?

Maintenance

Fixing the Leaky Roof – part of the backlog maintenance programme to be completed in 2014/15

The roof is a construction of a series of small slopes and narrow drainpipes. When there is a large amount of rainfall the drainpipes overflow and water can leak into the building. The Council looked into replacing the drainpipes, but this was too expensive. Huge gutters have been installed to contain the water on the roof until it can drain away. This work will be completed by the end of 2014/15. Blocked drainpipes are an on-going problem and Porters clean the gutters every week. Since the new gutter has been installed, leaking roof complaints have reduced.

Fixtures and fittings

The Panel mentioned how in other markets the stalls were a lot more open and accessible.

In 2017 it is possible to change the fixtures and fittings in the market, however there is a cost to changing the structure. The tenants will need to agree to the change, as a lot of tenants have spent a lot of money on upgrading their shop fronts.

Other

Extending opening hours

Changing the opening hours can only succeed if the majority of tenants decided to remain open. They have tried Sunday opening before, but only 50% of tenants were open, which created uncertainty for shoppers – as some avenues appeared closed.

Because of the mix of stores, quite often the food shops want to stay open later midweek and the gift shops want to be open on Sunday so reaching an agreement can be difficult.

Covered Market Manager

The Panel explained how the other markets had a manager responsible for running everything ie leases, change of use, promotions and events. Officers were asked what they thought of having a manager for the CM.

Sounds like a good idea, - Is the Covered Market big enough for 1 FTE? Currently the CMTA is responsible for promotions.

Relationship with the CMTA

The Council has quarterly meetings with the CMTA, and consults with them on change of use applications. Perhaps we rely on them too much to act as the 'voice of the market' and should consult with non CMTA traders more.

Some traders are very quick to blame the Council for everything ie footfall drops and its Council's fault.

Panel's Findings

Future vision for Market

The Covered Market could be a niche, high quality shopping destination so that it can distinguish itself from the new Westgate and Oxford Castle. It should sell goods

and services that are not available on the High St.

Would like to see a more tightly managed user clause which would regulate the quality of the food being sold. ie Borough Market has a tightly controlled approach to permitted uses. In Borough, traders are interviewed and their products taste tested before they are given a licence/lease to sell it. Change of Use are rarely given, traders have to re-apply to sell alternative goods.

More promotion and marketing of the market needs to occur, shop fronts need more identity and cohesion, work needs to be done to improve the lighting, signage and visibility of the market.

Improving the relationship between Council and Traders

Traders are too quick to blame the Council for everything - ie footfall drops and its Council's fault. The Council has quarterly meetings with the Covered Market Traders Association (CMTA) and consults with them on change of use applications. We rely on the CMTA being the voice of the market and it should communicate with all traders more.

Changing the leasing structure would improve the relationship between Council and traders. The current leases all start and finish on the same day which has meant that 50 rent reviews all take place at the same time. The tension between traders and the Council occurs because the rent review affects the whole market at the same time. When the leases expire in 2017, the tenants are legally entitled to a new lease however it may be possible to agree different lease patterns at renewal ie stagger the leases so they don't all start and end (and require rent review) at the same time.

When the leases end in 2017 the Council could adopt a more flexible approach. It doesn't need to be constrained by tenure - any empty units could be changed to licenses as long as we are fair to all tenants.

It would be possible to change the fixtures and fittings in the market, however there is a cost to changing the structure. The tenants will need to agree to the change, as a lot of tenants have spent a lot of money on upgrading their shop fronts.

**Meeting with Gordon Reid, City Centre Manager
3 September 2013**

What is your personal vision for the covered market?

Would like to see the historic building retained but remodelled and filled with high quality independent retailers. A highly visible and successful retail venue unique from the chain stores found in shopping centres and providing high quality and varied food and catering establishments.

With the proposed Westgate shopping centre being built in the next 4 years would like to see the Covered Market and wider Broad Street/High St develop into an area for high quality specialist stores, that complement the emerging offer in the new Westgate and adds to the overall attraction of the city centre as a regional shopping destination.

Signage and making the market visible

At present, approx. 10% of the city centre footfall finds its way into the market; approx. 5% of city centre workers; and 4% of visitors/tourists per year.

The Covered Market is not sufficiently visible to potential shoppers and The Retail Group will bring forward proposals to address this. Most visitors to Oxford arrive on the High Street yet the signage to the market from the High St end is poor. The listed building status restricts the type of signage allowed.

The Panel suggested that vertical banners could be used on the High Street to promote the market.

The Market St end of the market has the largest footfall and has been proposed as the front of the market, yet visibility is currently restricted by delivery vans and toilets and there is limited signage.

The Retail Group have been asked to offer solutions to making the market more visible. These could include transforming Market St so that it is pedestrianised, limiting delivery vans to certain hours (as in Cornmarket) and allowing outside traders.

The Council could pay for such renovations by renting out the 1st floor of the market, currently it is not being used but it could be rented as office space or student accommodation.

Relationship with Traders

Initially got involved with the Covered Market through the quarterly traders' meetings, where the idea for a long term Covered Market strategy came from.

There appears to be a lot of mistrust between traders and Council that has built up over many years. This needs to be constructively addressed in order that accepted outputs from The Retail Group's work can be successfully implemented in due course.

When asked for his view on the implications for his own job if a market manager was appointed, Gordon stated that he would welcome improved management arrangements for the good of the market itself and the additional capacity it would provide for marketing the city centre. Having a manager at the market would also 'free up' Gordon to pursue other work.

The Covered Market Strategy

Focus is on the strategic outlook rather than the day to day. Gordon realised the Council didn't have the expertise to draft a strategy inhouse so commissioned The Retail Group to draft it.

Commissioning consultants to conduct evidence based research was the correct approach for the Council to take to best understand the challenges and opportunities facing the market. The best means of facilitating commercial success is to align the retail offer with the expectations of the catchment population.

Officers are expecting the draft strategy from The Retail Group on 2 October 2013

Future Plans

Council needs a cohesive approach to developing, promoting and managing markets and events in the city centre. This is a body of work that Gordon plans to pursue.

**Discussion with David Edwards, Director of Housing, City Development and
Regeneration
21 August 2013**

Relationship needs to improve between traders and Council

Council needs to decide the purpose of the Covered Market

- Financial/ Social
- Commercial operators
- Good management
- Tenant mix

We have a landlord/ tenant relationship with the leases

Other markets have more flexibility through the licences

Covered Market leases

Licenses require a more intensive relationship between management and leaseholders.

Leases offer more security and set out responsibilities for both tenant and landlord.

The CM leases allow tenants to sub-let and several tenants sub-let their leases for significantly more than the lease. As the Covered Market is prime real estate in Oxford.

The leases expire in 2017 and tenants are legally entitled to a new lease with broadly the same conditions as their current lease. Exceptions to this would be a complete re-organisation of the market.

The rent review system causes animosity – as a 5 year lease works well for a High St shop but not for the Covered Market.

Quality and mix of stores in the market

Food offer is important

Use of the first floor – there are always winners and losers with any change,

Signage and management is important

It's important that any changes to the Covered Market needs are value for money.

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