



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Name and date of Committee	<b>ENVIRONMENT O&amp;S COMMITTEE – 10 OCTOBER 2019</b>
Report Number	<b>AGENDA ITEM 11</b>
Subject	<b>MARKETS UPDATE</b>
Wards affected	Witney, Chipping Norton
Accountable member	Cllr Norman MacRae Cabinet Member for Environment
Accountable officer	Mr Matthew Kirby – Business Manager – Environment Services
Summary/Purpose	In 2012, the Council had established a small team of Members and Officers to conduct a review of the Council's Markets. The project team's report was considered by the Cabinet in September 2013 and various initiatives were put in place. At a recent Committee meeting Councillor Harvey noted that the Witney Market appeared to be somewhat less vibrant as of late and it was AGREED that the Committee should receive a report on the way in which the recommendations of the review had been carried forward. Councillor Coles suggested that this work should be extended to give consideration to the operation of the Witney Farmers Market which also appeared to be in decline.
Annexes	Annex A – Memo from Ron Spurs dated 8 <sup>th</sup> September 2014
Recommendation/s	<i>a) That the Committee notes the updates provided in the report. b) That the Committee considers the options provided in the report.</i>
Corporate priorities	1. Protect the environment whilst supporting the local economy 2. To provide efficient and value for money services, whilst delivering quality front line services.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	YES
Consultees/ Consultation	N/A

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1.** West Oxfordshire District Council has a responsibility for managing the Charter Markets at Witney and Chipping Norton. There is also an independently operated Farmers Market in Witney which operates on the last Friday of each month.
- 1.2.** The Council exercises no control over the Farmers Market as this is privately run.
- 1.3.** The management of the Charter Markets was transferred from Finance based at WODC to Public Protection in 2012, which subsequently became part of the shared ERS service in 2016.
- 1.4.** Prior to the transfer to ERS the markets were left very much to their own devices. Two part time market superintendents (one at Chipping Norton and one at Witney), supervised the collection of Fees from traders and supervised day to day operations. Since ERS took control the superintendents no longer operate, and fees are collected using invoiced subscription. One technical officer oversees the markets approximately 1 day per week. This includes fee collection, pitch management and gazebo maintenance/replacement.
- 1.5.** In 2013 the then Head of Community Services carried out a review of markets in Witney. The report highlighted a number of recommendations and set implementation dates. A summary of the current position is provided below;

Recommendation	Date	2019 Update
1. Continue to operate the Witney Charter Market weekly on a Thursday and Saturday	Aug 2013	Complete
2. Provide opportunities for specialist markets in Witney throughout the year	Dec 2013	Complete and Ongoing
3. Endorse the refurbishment of the Market Square in Witney	Aug 2013	Complete
4. Re-brand the Witney Market, calling it 'Witney Buttercross Market'	Aug 2013	Complete
5. Develop a marketing and communications plan for Markets in West Oxfordshire	Nov 2013	Not Completed
6. Explore the options for permanent signage to promote Witney Markets	Nov 2013	Not Completed
7. Launch the 'First Pitch' market trader scheme run by the National Market Traders Federation	Nov 2013	Not Completed
8. Support the Love your local market campaign	Ongoing	Ongoing
9. Support the Real Deal national charter scheme	TBD	Not Completed
10. Achieve National Charter Status run by the National Market Traders	TBD	Not Completed

Federation		
11. Review the implementation of the adopted review recommendations	June 2014	Completed – Memo from Ron Spurs to Kate Bishop on 8/9/14 – attached at Appendix 2.
12. Give consideration to the future management of markets in Witney and West Oxfordshire	Oct 2013	Limited review has taken place since Mr Spurs memo of 8/9/14
13. Review the Council street trading policy	Oct 2014	The policy was reviewed in 2015 and will be due for further review in 2020
14. Give consideration to operating Witney Farmers Market on a Saturday	Oct 2013	This was suggested but the operator wished to keep the markets separate

- 1.6.** A number of tasks were not completed by the Public Protection team at WODC – this was prior to the hand over to ERS so it is difficult for the author to comment. The final report of progress appears to be the memo written by Mr Spurs in 2014 attached in Appendix 1. His recommendations were made before the transfer to ERS and appear to centre around the disposal of the Markets.
- 1.7.** The Charter Markets were transferred to ERS in 2016. Since transfer the service has sought to deliver a basic administrative service which includes the collection of fees, and provision and maintenance of the gazebos.
- 1.8.** Commercial waste has historically been collected from the markets – however this is likely to be withdrawn subject to an impending cabinet decision. The existing market rules state that traders should dispose of their own waste.
- 1.9.** No resource provision has been made for the strategic assessment and review of the Charter Markets.

## **2. CURRENT POSITION**

- 2.1.** The twice weekly Charter Market at Witney sells a variety of food, produce, sweets, flowers, stationary and gifts. The market square has a capacity for 30 stalls 3mx3m. Currently there are 20 pitches let on a Thursday and 21 on a Saturday. The number of pitches does not reflect the number of stall holders, as some take more than one pitch.
- 2.2.** The Charter Market at Chipping Norton sells similar goods to Witney and takes place on a Wednesday and there are 16 pitches on this site.
- 2.3.** Although there remain vacant pitches at Witney, new traders have recently been attracted; these include a meat stall, basketware and a tea stall. Chipping Norton has remained more stable, although it has been noted that the closure of banks on the bottom side of town and the opening of out of town shops such as Aldi, M&S and Mountain Warehouse has reduced town centre footfall.
- 2.4.** In January 2019 the business manager visited Witney market and spoke to traders about how we could better support the market. The two points that most traders made was;
- I. a request to improvement to their gazebos through an updating regime

2. a request that the Council did not outsource the market to a private company – many traders were concerned this would push up fees with little added commercial benefit. Some traders gave examples of where this had happened locally.

### 3. FINANCIAL POSITION

- 3.1. The overall financial position for the Charter Markets in 2018 is shown below;

	Employment Costs (+20% oncost)	Direct Expenditure	Income
2018 Witney and Chipping Norton Charter Markets	£6170	£20,651*	£68,294

\*Direct Expenditure is likely to reduce if the waste provision is removed as this currently costs £12,492 per annum

### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1. The Charter Markets provide a useful source of revenue for the Council. Members may wish to consider the following options;
  1. To maintain the current level of service provision provided by ERS.
  2. To recommend the allocation of resource to strategically review and assess the future strategic direction of the markets. This is likely to require specialist consultancy support as such commercial development skills do not exist within ERS.

### 5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. None Identified

### 6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. No major risks identified

### 7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1. No further alternative option considered at this stage

### 8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

# Memorandum

To: Kate Bishop, Shared Head of Public Protection and Regulation

Tel: 1633

From: Ron Spurs, Principal Community Safety and Licensing Officer  
2014

8<sup>th</sup> September

## Witney and Chipping Norton Charter Market – Future Management

The purpose of this report is to examine the operation of the Charter Markets at Chipping Norton and Witney which are managed within Public Protection with a view to transferring responsibility to an external operation or to another area within the authority.

### Background

West Oxfordshire District Council has a responsibility for managing the Charter Markets at Witney and Chipping Norton, having obtained the market rights from the Duke of Marlborough through its predecessor authority in 1925.

There is also an independently operated Farmers Market in Witney which operates on the last Friday of each month on the Market Square.

In 2012 management of the markets was transferred from Finance based at WODC (prior to the introduction of “Go Shared Services”, to Neighbourhood Services which is now Public Protection in the Environment Services directorate.

Prior to this transfer from Finance to Neighbourhood Services it is fair to say that the markets were left very much to their own devices, two part time market superintendents (one at Chipping Norton and one at Witney), supervised the collection of fees from traders and supervised day to day operations.

Elsewhere in West Oxfordshire. Carterton Town Council operates a market on a Thursday in the town centre, this currently has 7 stalls.

The twice weekly Charter Market at Witney sells a variety of food produce, sweets, flowers, bric a brac, stationary and gifts. The market square has a capacity for 30 stalls 3m x 3m. Currently there are 24 pitches let on a Thursday and 25 on a Saturday. The number of pitches does not reflect the number of stall holders, as some take more than one pitch.

The Charter Market at Chipping Norton sells similar goods to Witney and takes place on a Wednesday and there are 10 pitches on this site.

A table outlining the income from both markets is shown below:

Chipping Norton - 10 stalls x 50 weeks x £20.40 =	£10,200
Witney	£52,185

In 2013 the then head of Community Services carried out a Review of markets in Witney. The report included public and trader consultation.

The key results of this consultation are shown below:

The Market Traders Key Points:

- 65 % of traders are from the Oxfordshire area
- 52% have traded in Witney for over 10 years and 35% between 6 months and 3 years
- The majority of market traders would like to see a twice weekly market remain
- 70 % of market traders would like to see the scope of the market broadened
- Comments from traders generally focused on the need for more support for the markets eg. “Witney market needs to be improved “The Council needs to invest in advertising in order to give more scope and more choice rather than supermarkets. “Markets are fantastic to grow and should be supported so they keep going and are an important part of life.”

Local Business Survey Key Points

- The majority of businesses felt Saturday was their busiest day for trading with Monday being the quietest
- Comments about the Charter and Farmers Market were largely positive eg “I believe the market traders are an asset to Witney generating additional footfall in a well controlled area” and “Positive effect for town”

General Public Survey Key Points

- 52% of those surveyed came from the OX28 postcode (Witney), 19% from the OX29 (Area North / West of Witney), 11% from OX18 (Carterton) and 18% from other locations
- Nearly half (47%) use the market occasionally, 22% never uses it and 28% use it once or twice a week
- Over half (52%) never use the street traders, 36% occasionally use them and 8% use then once or twice a week
- Of those people who use the markets/street traders frequently 37% use them because they are good value and 36% because of good quality
- 66% of people would like to see the Charter and Farmers’ markets combined
- 78% of people would like to see specialist markets in Witney

Generally the comments from the public are supportive of the markets “a market town has its heart ripped out when there is no active market”. There were some negative comments about the street traders in terms of positioning and food smells.

The survey highlighted strong local support for the Charter Market and a desire for it to develop.

Subsequently, on the 21<sup>st</sup> August 2013 the then Head of Community Services submitted a report to Cabinet.

**Report Key Points:**

“This work (the Review), has identified a number of improvements that need to be made before consideration can be given to how the market is managed. Officers have identified the following tasks that need to be completed:

- All market trader’s agreements need to be reviewed
- A new streamlined market traders payment process needs to be introduced
- A market traders selection process needs to be introduced
- The visual appearance of the market stalls needs to be reviewed
- The number of market stalls needs to be increased
- A review of the support and operating costs

These measures will ensure the market is managed in the most effective manner and provide a ‘stable platform’ on which to determine how the market should be managed in the future.”

**Current Operation of Chipping Norton and Witney Charter Markets**

**Chipping Norton**

The Review mentioned above and the Report were focussed on the operation of markets in Witney. Since the operation of Chipping Norton Charter Market was transferred to Public Protection the appearance of the market has remained the same and is untidy. The introduction of the Go Shared Service Agresso payment system has meant that the traders are invoiced via “Go Shared Services”. The market superintendent, who works two hours per week is still in post and deals with day to day queries from traders. There has been no investment in new gazebos for the traders who operate Chipping Norton Charter Market although two of the traders who operate at both markets use the gazebos supplied by WODC. The market is located in the town centre on a steep slope which seriously restricts development.

**Witney**

Shortly after the management of the Charter Market was transferred to Public Protection the market superintendent resigned and has not been replaced. The Charter Market is managed by the licensing team. (This involves approximately .1 FTE for both markets). New gazebos have been purchased for the traders (who are repaying the cost with their weekly fee), a number of events have taken place to attract customers, new market regulations are in force and a much more hands on approach to management of the Charter Market is in place.

Also, the county council has refurbished the Market Square paved area where the market is held.

The refurbishment of the market has been extremely well received by local politicians and the public. The appearance of the market is much more professional and attractive to visitors and residents.

**Potential for increased profitability**

## Witney

There is an opportunity to increase the number of stalls on the opposite side of the road to the main market square and the area near the Woolgate in the area which is still designated as Market Square by 7 /8 units per day.

## Chipping Norton

There is an opportunity to increase the number of stalls by a small proportion by better management of the existing space on the current site. To substantially increase the number of stalls operating the market consideration would need to be given to changing the location of the market. (Some alternative sites have been identified).

### Options for the future

The management of the Charter Markets does not sit in the normal activity of Public Protection. The forthcoming changes to the way in which Public Protection is delivered throughout West Oxfordshire and the other council's involved necessitates either the transfer of the management of charter markets to another unit within the council or totally outsourcing the market operation.

There are five principal avenues open to the authority to dispose of the charter market:

- Commercial market companies
- Local authority operated – transfer to another directorate within WODC
- Community management (including town and Parish councils)
- Co-operative of stall holders
- Local business is set up to operate the markets

The strengths and weaknesses of each option are shown below:

### Commercial market companies

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Operated in a commercial manner	The council has direct control over the type of traders working on the markets. This would cease with a commercial operator.
Operator has to make the market profitable	The commercial operator could drastically change the market trader conditions and fees
Local authority manage the operators performance through a contract	The relationship between the council and agencies such as Oxfordshire highways and the town councils in managing issues arising from the operation of the markets could be jeopardised
Operator has greater knowledge and experience than the Council	Loss of income from trader fees
Operator can make capital investments to improve the market	Market traders may leave the market if they do not like how the new operator works
Operator has incentive to improve the market to increase income	When the previous head of community services spoke informally to commercial operators it seemed unlikely that the council would be able to generate any income from the contract
Officer involvement is greatly reduced	Lack of local control and direction unless part of contract
Management of the contract would sit outside Public Protection	The character of the market could change contrary to local wishes
	Lack of personal service
	It is unlikely that a commercial company would be

	based in West Oxfordshire
	Lack of political control

### **Retain local authority management-outside of Public Protection**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
Control of strategic direction	Need to identify service to manage charter markets
Maintenance of standards	Increased officer time and training required from new service
Income from stalls	Difficulty in finding service area where charter markets will "fit"
Maintain good relationship with stallholders	

### **Community management – Parish or Town Council**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
No input from WODC	At this time no formal approach has been made to either council. It is not known whether they would wish to undertake management of the charter markets
Local interest and commitment is maintained	Both councils would need to employ additional staff to manage the markets
Each Charter Market would be able to develop independently of the other	Lack of experience - Neither council has experience of running charter markets
Opportunity to develop profitability at both locations	A lack of WODC political control
Likely to have good relationship with market traders	Loss of income to WODC
WODC has excellent working relationship with town councils	Possible political indecision and lack of oversight

### **Co-operative of stall holders**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
No input from WODC	The number and type of stalls changes regularly. This would impact on the professionalism of the market managers
Local interest and commitment is maintained	No or limited influence by WODC
Each Charter Market would be able to develop independently of the other	Standard of stalls could suffer
Opportunity to develop profitability at both locations	No input ref types of traders
Likely to have good relationship with market traders	Would still require input from officers to a certain extent

### **Local business invited to operate the charter markets**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
No input from WODC	Success dependent upon procurement process to find good company
Local interest and commitment is maintained	Issues such as refuse need to be sort out prior to contract being signed (Currently £8k per year, mostly incurred by one trader)
Each Charter Market would be able to develop independently of the other	No income to WODC – unless negotiated with new provider
Opportunity to develop profitability at both locations	No strategic control outside of terms of contract
Likely to have good relationship with market traders	No local political control
Contract between WODC and company will need to have terms that allow development and progress	
Saving in officer time	

Next step

- Conduct informal discussions with Town councils to establish if they are interested in operating the charter markets.
- Conduct informal discussions with commercial market operators – expressions of interest
- Identify local firm or individual willing to take on the operation of the markets
- Check the above processes with Procurement to ensure fairness of process
- Seek political guidance as to a preferred option

Ron Spurs

Principal Community Safety and Licensing Officer

WODC