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Cherwell District Council

Executive

Minutes of a meeting of the Executive held in at Bodicote House, Bodicote, Banbury, OX15 4AA, on 16 March 2009 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Barry Wood (Chairman)

Councillor G A Reynolds
Councillor James Macnamara
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Nigel Morris
Councillor D M Pickford
Councillor Nicholas Turner

Also present: Councillor Maurice Billington
Councillor Colin Clarke
Councillor John Donaldson
Councillor George Parish

Apologies for absence: Councillor Norman Bolster
Councillor Michael Gibbard

Officers: Mary Harpley, Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service
Ian Davies, Strategic Director - Environment and Community
Julie Evans, Strategic Director - Customer Service & Resources
John Hoad, Strategic Director - Planning, Housing and Economy
Mike Carroll, Head of Improvement
Catherine Phythian, Senior Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
James Doble, Democratic, Scrutiny and Elections Manager
Jo Smith, Communications Manager
Natasha Clark, Trainee Democratic and Scrutiny Officer
Pat Simpson, Head of Customer Service & ICT
Richard Hawtin, Team Leader Property & Contracts

Resolutions

189 **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

190 **Petitions and Requests to Address the Meeting**

There were none.

191 **Urgent Business**

The Chairman outlined that he had agreed to admit one item of exempt urgent business with regard to the Town Centre Offices to the agenda on the grounds that it was in the financial interests of the authority to consider the issue as quickly as possible and therefore could not reasonably be left to the next meeting.

192 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2009 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

193 **Access Strategy**

The Strategic Director Customer Service and Resources, submitted a report to update the Executive on the development of the Access Strategy and ask for comment on the direction it takes and the action plan it proposes, prior to finalising the draft.

Resolved

- 1) That the vision, aim and objectives of the strategy be agreed.
- 2) That the main pillars of the action plan be agreed as set out below:
 1. deliver the services most face to face customers want (not just our local office customers), at locations near them.
 2. deliver more services through the telephone contact centre so that more customers have their enquiry or request satisfied at first contact.
 3. deliver the services our online customers want to access themselves, and persuade those customers to change from phone to online.
 4. Use information from customers to improve service delivery, ultimately reducing the amount of contact we handle that is classified as “avoidable” in the definition of NI14.
 5. use NI14 data, customers’ own feedback, complaints and compliments, mystery shopping and customer consultation, to improve our service processes so that the customer need be less proactive and the Council can make best use of its resources – principally staff time.
 6. identify potential efficiencies and improvements to service processes and the investment to achieve those efficiencies, and put in place a means of getting decisions about whether to realise those efficiencies and improvements.
- 3) That the access strategy development group to complete work on the strategy and action plan and bring it back to the Executive for adoption

Reasons

The Council has an agreed strategic priority of being an accessible, value for money organisation. This strategy is about achieving that ambition, focusing on removing barriers to access and providing choices to customers, by preventing unnecessary contact and making sure the most cost effective access channels are available and known about.

194 **Management Information Strategy**

The Head of Improvement submitted a report presents a Management Information Strategy and action plan for Cherwell District Council which will deliver continuous improvement in its information management arrangements, helping to improve service delivery and respond effectively to the new CAA assessment regime.

Resolved

- 1) That appropriate member training be included in the member training programme with regard to using and analysing management information.
- 2) That the management information strategy and action plan be agreed
- 3) That Officers report back on progress with the implementation of the strategy and action plan in March 2010

Reasons

This strategy sets out a broad framework of how the council intends to develop its management arrangements for the production, sharing, analysis and interpretation of management information. It will be used as the basis for a medium term action plan to guide improvement activity during the period 2009/10 to 2011/12.

195

Working in Partnership Annual Report

The Chief Executive, submitted a report to review the achievements of the Council's significant partnerships in 2008/09, the progress made improving the governance and performance management of the Council's significant partnerships and the key activities for significant partnerships in 2009/10.

Resolved

- 1) That the key achievements of the Council's significant partnerships in 2008/09 and the contribution they make to delivery of the Council's strategic priorities be noted
- 2) That the progress made during the year in strengthening the governance of the Council's significant partnerships be noted
- 3) That the actions proposed by the significant partnerships for 2009/10 be agreed
- 4) That the proposals to improve partnership working detailed at paragraph below:
 - a) Improve the service delivery and value for money from Cherwell's significant partnerships
 - b) Seek out opportunities for new partnership arrangements to improve service delivery and value for money
 - c) Continue to strengthen governance and accountability arrangements, especially around information and data sharing arrangements
 - d) With West Oxfordshire District Council, continue to jointly lead the countywide review of the structure and governance arrangements of countywide partnerships
 - e) As part of this countywide review, achieve agreement on the significant partnerships common to all the local authorities across Oxfordshire and focus resources accordingly
 - f) Strengthen the support for elected Members involved in partnerships on the Council's behalf through the Member Training and Development Programme

- g) Strengthen the links between the Council's partnerships and Executive Members, to be considered as part of the Council's current review of its Constitution
 - h) Consider hosting a Cherwell Partnerships Conference to celebrate achievements, consider future partnership opportunities, share knowledge and best practice
 - i) Include significant partnerships in the Council's performance management framework and include in the quarterly performance report to the Executive.
- 5) That the Annual Partnerships Report be referred to Overview and Scrutiny as part of their future programme of work on the evaluation of partnerships.
- 6) That the Executive receive a report setting out how the Council will effectively support member representatives on partnerships and all outside bodies, including providing appropriate training, strengthening staff support for members, advice on council policy with regard to issues within the remit of partnerships and outside bodies and providing feedback mechanisms from issues raised on partnerships on outside bodies.

Reasons

In March 2008, the Council agreed a Partnership Protocol and Working Framework. The Framework requires the production of an annual report of the year's achievements focusing on the significant partnerships. The Council's significant partnerships are those key in helping deliver the Council's strategic priorities and the new Local Area Agreement.

196

Land Charges Value for Money Review

The Strategic Director Customer Service and Resources submitted a report to consider the findings of the Land Charges Value for Money (VFM) Review report and the recommendations arising from the report

Resolved

- 1) That the overall conclusion of the review that the service is high cost and has low performance in terms of its productivity, but is high quality in terms of its search turnaround times, be endorsed;
- 2) That further improvements in value for money be sought and the following recommendations to achieve this be endorsed;
 - a) That staffing levels be reduced by 37hrs per week to eliminate surplus capacity and generate savings of £22,650. This will bring employee hours per thousand population more into line with the average authority. These savings have already been identified and accommodated in the 2009/10 budget.
 - b) That capacity be further reduced within the service by 15hrs per week in recognition of the continuing fall in demand due to the economic slowdown, but re-invest these hours in improving the council's digital records to improve future productivity by allocating them to the council's GIS team. Monitor work volumes and review this arrangement after 6 months in order to maximise possible savings (should search volumes continue to fall) end ensure continuity of the service (should search volumes increase).

- c) That the contributions paid to other services through internal recharges be recalculated so that these are based on a cost per search rather than a fixed overhead. This would produce savings of £24,865 for the service in 2009/10, although these costs would be transferred elsewhere in the council.
- d) That the true costs of the service (in anticipation of likely legislative changes allowing cost recovery charging) be ascertained by carry out a zero based budget analysis of support costs to remove any overhead cost loading on the service. This is to take place in autumn 2009 as part of the routine budget revision process.
- e) That the standard search fee cost be raised from £80 to £120 (around the average for other Oxfordshire authorities) to raise additional income of £55,000 per annum. This may carry a risk of further reducing demand for searches, although reduced fees have not been shown to have any demonstrable influence on demand.
- f) If legislation is introduced to allow it, that the fee for personal searches be raised to at least £25. This would raise additional income of around £30,000 per annum.
- g) That the TLC ICT system be implemented to improve the automation of electronically held information for searches
- h) That appointments bookings and advance payments for searches be moved to the Customer Contact centre to provide a common standard of customer service to callers and to remove unproductive administrative work from the land charges team
- i) That an online booking and payments system be developed and introduced for appointments to complement the telephone service and further reduce administrative work
- j) That using Land Charges staff team to deal with personal search appointments in the mornings be discontinued, transferring this work to reception staff (this has already been agreed and is being undertaken as an early outcome of this review).

Reasons

This review forms part of the Value for Money programme of reviews, which aims to cover all services within the council and improve the value of services offered to residents of Cherwell.

The Future of Markets in Cherwell

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report of the Task and Finish Group scrutiny review into the future of markets in Cherwell and the supporting recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Resolved

- 1) That the work of the Task and Finish Group scrutiny review into the future of markets in Cherwell be noted;
- 2) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommendations regarding the markets in Cherwell as detailed in the report from the Task and Finish Group as set out in the appendix to these minutes be agreed.

Reasons

To consider the report of the Task and Finish Group scrutiny review into the future of markets in Cherwell.

198 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

Resolved

That, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that they could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 1, 3 and 4 of Schedule 12A of that Act.

199 **Urgent Business - Town Centre Offices**

The Strategic Director Customer Service and Resources submitted a report regarding the future proposals for the Town Centre Offices.

Resolved

That the resolutions as set out in the exempt minute be agreed.

200 **2009/10 Environment and Community Budget Reductions & Service Implications**

The Strategic Director Environment and Community submitted a report regarding the 2009/10 Environment and Community Budget Reductions and Service Implications.

Resolved

That the service changes outlined in the exempt appendix to the minutes as a means of delivering a balanced budget be agreed.

Reasons

To consider the specific 2009/10 budget and service reductions required to produce a balanced budget.

201 **Revenues and Benefits Service Delivery Options Appraisal**

The Strategic Director Customer Service and Resources submitted a report regarding the findings of the Revenues and Benefits Service Delivery Options Appraisal.

Resolved

That the resolutions as set out in the exempt minute be agreed.

Reasons

The value for money review of the Council's Revenues and Benefit Service reported to the Executive in June 2008, identified two separate strands for potential improvement. This report considers the outcome of the research into the service delivery options for securing improved Value for Money in service delivery.

Banbury Market

The Head of Urban and Rural Services submitted a report on the current position with Banbury Market, to consider the options for long-term management and operation of Banbury Market and to identify preferred options for further investigation.

Resolved

- 1) That the current position and arrangements for the continued siting, management, control and regulation of Banbury Market (the Market) be noted.
- 2) That options 3, 5 and 6 for the future management and operation of the Market be agreed as worthy of a more detailed assessment, with options 5 and 6 being preferred at this stage and option 4 held in reserve.
- 3) Authorise the Head of Urban and Rural Services to investigate further the risks/benefits to the Council in pursuing the options set out above, and report back to the Executive in April/May 2009 with a recommendation as to the option he considers would, if implemented, represent the Council's best interests.

Reasons

The council has been required to take action to ensure the continuation of Banbury Market, due to the previous operator ceasing to trade.

The meeting ended at 8.42 pm

Chairman:

Date:



DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE



The Future of Markets in Cherwell

**A Task & Finish Group Report
for the**

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

February 2009

Membership of the Task and Finish Group

Cllr Colin Clarke

Cllr Maurice Billington

Cllr Diana Edwards

Cllr Tony Ilott

Cllr Les Sibley

Cllr Carol Steward

Cllr Patricia Tompson

Acknowledgements

The Task and Finish Group would like to thank the following for providing information and evidence to the Group either in person or by written response.

- Mr Quinn, Mr Dindol, Mr Finch and other traders at Banbury market
- Mr Gould and other traders at Bicester market
- Traders at Kidlington market
- Mr Hughes, Hughmark International
- Cllr Mallon and Cllr Wrenn, Banbury Town Council
- Cllrs Pickford and Steward, Mrs Mackrell, Parish Clerk and Mr Johnston, Outdoor and Activities Manager, Bicester Town Council
- Cllr Pack, Cllr Rae and Mrs Redpath, Parish Clerk, Kidlington Parish Council
- Mr Rothwell, Head of Urban and Rural Services, Cherwell District Council
- Mr Almond, Street Scene and Landscape Services Manager, Cherwell District Council
- Mr Cooper, Street Scene Officer, Cherwell District Council
- Mrs Barnes, Licencing and Vehicle Parks Manager, Cherwell District Council

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1 Executive Summary

"Street and covered markets (including farmers' markets) can make a valuable contribution to local choice and diversity in shopping as well as the vitality of town centres and to the rural economy. As an integral part of the vision of their town centres, local authorities should seek to retain and enhance existing markets and, where appropriate re-introduce or create new ones. Local authorities should ensure that their markets remain attractive and competitive by investing in their improvement."¹

1.1 The Task and Finish Group took this statement as the starting point for their review. Their objective was to understand what factors were influencing the current state and prosperity of the district's traditional markets and consider what steps were needed to "retain and enhance" them.

1.2 In the course of the review it became clear that the market in Banbury faced more acute difficulties than the markets in Bicester and Kidlington. The Group acknowledged that one option would be to let market forces take their course and allow the struggling market in Banbury to fade away. However, despite the difficulties facing that market they do not believe that its loss would be in the best interests of the local community or the district as a whole.

1.3 At the end of this year long review the Group are agreed that the three traditional markets in Cherwell have a number of strengths:

- An established history and tradition of market trading.
- A strong desire by those involved in each of the markets (shoppers, traders and elected representatives) to retain a traditional market and bring prosperity to the market towns.
- Town centre locations linked to other retail outlets, with potential for future improvements to layout and facilities.
- Generally good public transport access from a large catchment area.
- Generally good, inexpensive car parking available close to the markets.

1.4 There is, however a downside:

- The recognised national decline of traditional markets in recent years.

¹ Excerpt from Planning Policy Statement Six: Planning for Town Centres

- Some localised enforcement issues which have gone unchecked and now need to be addressed.
- The absence of a clear vision and strategic direction for the markets.
- The absence of established communication channels between the various market stakeholders (councils, operators, traders, retailers, customers).

1.5 And even threats:

- The impact of the recession is already apparent as shoppers and traders stay away.
- The closure of high street shops could lead to a reduced footfall of customers to the markets.
- The financial difficulties facing the operator of the Banbury market operator identified in January 2009.

1.6 But there are some opportunities:

- The recession might lead to an increase in market trade as people look for a bargain and go in search of cheaper products.
- In Banbury the Parsons Street pedestrianisation project provides an opportunity to introduce improvements to the layout of the market and the facilities available to the traders and shoppers.
- In Bicester, the town centre redevelopment sets the context for the development and enhancement of the market.
- The completion of the work in and around Watts Way in Kidlington may allow for the expansion of the market.
- Economic regeneration, on whatever scale, will be an important issue as we come out of recession and traditional markets can play a part in that.

1.7 The challenge now is for Cherwell District Council to develop a vision and to assume a more proactive role in steering and managing the three markets. This does not need to be an elaborate strategy document full of promises and action plans. But it does need to ensure that the markets in the urban centres are recognised as an important element in all of Council's work ~ whether recycling initiatives; tourism and other promotional activities; or large urban regeneration projects involving external partners.

- 1.8 This commitment by councillors and officers to the district's markets will need to be supported by appropriate investment in recognition of the fact that markets are an underutilised resource.

2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That the future commercial success of the markets in Cherwell is dependent on the development and execution of a clear vision of the role they can play in a district of opportunity. To achieve this Cherwell District Council must assume a pro-active role and demonstrate a renewed commitment to the management of its markets.

Recommendation 2

That Cherwell District Council officers should introduce arrangements for regular, structured dialogue and communication with the local town and parish councils, and trader and retail groups, where possible through existing partnership arrangements, regarding each individual market.

Recommendation 3

That all three markets would benefit from greater publicity and improved promotional activities and new initiatives. A marketing strategy for the markets should be developed and co-ordinated by Cherwell District Council officers, in consultation with the local town and parish councils, and trader and retail groups.

In 2008/09 the Council allocated £15,000 to “promote and attempt to rejuvenate the District's street trading and open air markets to increase stallholders and public awareness”. Expenditure against this allocation has been on hold pending the outcome of this scrutiny review. It is proposed that this sum should now be carried forward to 2009/10 and be released to fund activities which support Recommendations 1 – 3 above and that the funds should be distributed evenly between the three markets.

Recommendation 4

Banbury market: that Cherwell District Council officers, in consultation with the Town Council, the public and trader and retail groups, develop a strategy and longer-term proposals for the provision of a market which is appropriate to the needs of the town and its residents.

Recommendation 5

Bicester market: that Cherwell District Council officers and the Town Council in consultation with the trader and retail groups, work together to develop plans to safeguard and enhance the market during the redevelopment of the town centre.

Recommendation 6

Kidlington market: that Cherwell District Council officers and the Parish Council explore options for the operational management of the market including the possibility of replicating the Bicester Traders Association arrangements at Kidlington.

Recommendation 7

That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should monitor progress against each of the above recommendations and review the situation, initially in September 2009.

3 Introduction: markets in Cherwell

Traditional markets

- 3.1 There are three traditional weekly markets operating in the Cherwell district, at Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington:

Banbury

Banbury's market charter dates back to 1608. The market takes place on Thursdays and Saturdays. The market is centred on the Market Place and Cornhill although some stalls extend into Bridge Street and the High Street.

Bicester

Friday is market day in Bicester. The market is located along the pedestrianised length of Sheep Street in the heart of the shopping area.

Kidlington

A market is held on both Fridays and Saturdays in Kidlington. The market is located at the intersection of the High Street and Watts Way adjacent to the main shopping centre.

Specialist markets

- 3.2 There are regular farmers' markets in Banbury (first Friday of the month) and Bicester (second Thursday of the month). In addition there are occasional specialist (e.g. continental/Christmas/craft) markets organised by the District Council in conjunction with the town and parish councils.

Gathering the evidence

- 3.3 In the course of this review members of the Task & Finish Group (the Group) made a number of site visits to each of the markets and spoke informally to market traders and customers. This gave them a valuable insight into how the markets change as a result of seasonal and economic influences. They also held discussions with the trader representatives and the market operators to establish their views on the future of the district's markets. Finally the Group met with council officers and representatives from the town and parish councils to find out what they valued about the district's markets and what they would like to see improve.
- 3.4 Appendix 1 contains details of the interviews, site visits and background documents.
- 3.5 In any review of markets it should be noted that many of the items, including fresh produce, available at a weekly market can also be found at the car boot sales that take place at weekends across the district. These "informal markets" are not included in the remit of this review but they do have a bearing on many of the issues identified.

4 Context and Research

"The conclusion is that traditional markets are generally in decline as places to shop for price choosing consumers but they have a developing role as venues for the sale of local produce and as part of market town tourism." ²

- 4.1 Relatively recent changes in retailing and shopping behaviour have impacted on the viability of traditional markets nationwide. There is now a greater range of shops and services that provide similar quality and prices as that of goods purchased on a market stall. More and more shops are open seven days a week, often at out of town locations. There has also been a reduction in employment in town centres and a growth in internet shopping and grocery delivery services.
- 4.2 This means that less people are visiting our markets and as a consequence it is harder to attract and keep traders who sell good quality merchandise.
- 4.3 A 2004 report for the Countryside Agency, based on case studies of six market towns in the north west of England divided market customers into three main categories:
 - *Price choosers* who shop at markets on the basis of price, value and quality
 - *Quality searchers* who shop at certain markets for local produce
 - *Leisure shoppers* who visit markets as part of a leisure/tourist experience
- 4.4 The report argues that traditional markets need to evolve in order to survive and that they cannot depend on their historic "price chooser" customer base. By adapting to meet the needs of the "quality searchers" and the "leisure shoppers" markets can thrive and make a contribution to the vitality of the market town and to the wider economy.
- 4.5 A 2006 study by The Open University³ looked at the importance of markets as social spaces in towns and cities in England. From fieldwork in eight markets across the country the research team found that:
 - Markets were important sites of social interaction for all groups of the community, but most significantly for older people, especially women. Markets were also important for families with young children, particularly at weekends.

² The Role of Traditional Markets in Revitalising Market Towns, ER Consulting, July 2004

³ Markets as social spaces, Open University Study, 2006

- For markets to work socially, they needed to attract people but also encourage them to linger.

4.6 The research concluded that a number of attributes contributed to a market's success:

- a diverse range of products reflecting local needs; cafes and seating on site or nearby; good access, especially by public transport and parking; and an engaged community of traders.
- A well-designed site, with a connection to other retail outlets.
- Effective management and a leadership role by the council to provide a strategic direction for the market.

"With good management and a strong vision as to their unique offer, combined with good accessibility, well thought through design and layout, and use of linchpin stalls and cafes on site, markets are well placed to succeed as economic and social spaces."

4.7 How the markets in Cherwell compare with the academic research is explored in more detail later in the report but the success of the farmers' markets in Banbury and Bicester is evidence that good quality, local produce, even at a premium price, does attract the "quality shoppers" of Cherwell. The popularity of the monthly farmers' market at Deddington would suggest that they are succeeding in attracting both the "quality shoppers" and the "leisure shoppers" in the region.

4.8 But of course the academic research predates the current recession. It is quite possible that as the economic situation worsens the prosperity and popularity of the specialist markets will decline and the focus will return to the needs of the "price chooser".

4.9 Nevertheless the Group believes that the principles identified in these reports remain true and that they should be fundamental to our efforts to retain and enhance the markets in Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington.

5 Evidence and Observations

Banbury

- 5.1 Banbury market, held on Thursdays and Saturdays, is centred on the Market Place and Cornhill with some stalls extending down into Bridge Street and along the pavement to the High Street. Hughmark International, a private contractor specialising in market operations across the UK, has operated the market under licence from Cherwell District Council since 2001. Hughmark International are responsible for attracting traders, collecting the rents and general market enforcement matters. Hughmark International staff erect and dismantle the stalls and are responsible for the removal of all rubbish.
- 5.2 Although the actual stall occupancy rate has remained fairly constant since 2001, many Banbury residents recall the hustle and bustle of market day when there were a 100 plus stalls selling a wide range of produce and goods in the Market Place and spilling over into adjacent streets. As a result the market today, reduced in size with a narrower range of merchandise and frequently empty stalls, appears to be lacklustre and in decline.
- 5.3 There are a number of factors contributing to this sense of decline but the Group felt that the most significant problem was that the market had become physically fragmented. On every site visit made by the Group there were empty stalls located in the central area of the market (on the car park in Market Place). These bare tables, scaffolding poles and flapping canopies do not attract the public or encourage them to linger.



- 5.4 The Group felt that the problem had been exacerbated by the closure of the “middle” entrance to the Castle Quay shopping centre which forced the main pedestrian footfall via the Cornhill exit onto Parsons Street or via the Bridge Street exit and along the High Street.

Consequently these are highly desirable market pitches, and a number of traders have migrated away to these peripheral locations leaving gaps on the traditional Market Place.

- 5.5 The Group talked informally with many of the stallholders and followed this with a meeting with three representatives of the Banbury market traders. They raised a number of concerns, which included:
- the apparent lack of commitment by the operator and the District Council resulting in a lack of investment
 - inadequate facilities available to traders (no electric/toilets and remote parking/stock storage)
 - the absence of structured communication between the traders, operator and District Council
 - no point of contact / a lack of visible presence by the operator on market days
 - competition from Castle Quay
 - competition from licenced street traders on High Street and Bridge Street
- 5.6 The traders also put forward a number of ideas for market Improvements, including the possibility of relocating it to the lower end of the High Street under street licencing arrangements. They identified the arrangements at Bicester as a good model to replicate in Banbury, as it had a visible on site management presence, control over the range of stalls and type of commodity, with traders responsible for stall erection and refuse removal. They felt that a smaller, busy market could still make a vital contribution to the economy of the town.
- 5.7 The Group also reviewed the Council's proposals for a revised market layout which was developed as part of the Parsons Street pedestrianisation scheme.
- 5.8 They were pleased to note that these proposals addressed many of their own concerns and the issues raised by the traders and market customers, in particular the need to consolidate the market stalls in one designated area.
- 5.9 They noted that although there were a number of positive aspects in moving a smaller market to the bottom of the High Street (for example the capture of the Castle Quay/High Street/Bus Station footfall and increased revenue through the release of the market place car park) there were also some practical difficulties (for example safety implications from the traffic on the High Street and emergency access). Moreover, relocating the market could have a detrimental impact on the Parsons Street scheme.
- 5.10 The Group felt that on balance the proposals for consolidation on the market place met the "best practice" principles of creating a safe,

pleasant environment which encourages people to linger and promotes social interaction: good entrance/exit routes; wide pathways between stalls; public seating; trees and flowers/shrub displays; catering outlets with seating; stall locations determined by availability of service “pop-ups”. Still to consider were other operational issues such as stall canopies and arrangements for the recycling and removal of rubbish. The Group were concerned that the arrangements for waste disposal (a waste compactor or refuse vehicle parked in the market area) were unsightly and did little to enhance the overall market ambience.

5.11 The Group’s assessment of Banbury market is summarised below:

Banbury market SWOT analysis	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 400 year tradition of a successful market • Public desire for a thriving market • Central location with good public transport access • Large potential customer base from Banbury hinterland 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empty stalls in centre of market area • Dispersed stall locations • Lack of facilities for traders • No co-ordinated communication between councils, operator, traders and local retailers/business groups • Limited range of merchandise
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parsons Street pedestrianisation scheme and improvements to Market Place • Lack of food retail outlet in town centre • Planned and co-ordinated events and new initiatives local produce/fair-trade/recycling • Build stronger links with specialist markets • Build links with leisure/tourism 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market continues to decline • Traders transfer to other markets • Recession

Bicester

5.12 Unlike Banbury and Kidlington there is only one market day (Friday) In Bicester. The market, consisting of some 20 stalls, is located along the pedestrianised length of Sheep Street in the heart of the shopping area and close to the main car parks. It appears to be busy, successful and popular with local shoppers and traders. Attractive flower displays, public seating and street side cafes all contribute to the overall shopping experience and reflect the success factors identified in the Open University report.

5.13 The market is operated independently by the Bicester Market Traders Association who allocate the pitches and collect the individual licence fees. The District Council receives an annual income for the operation of this market from licence fees in line with usage. The

stallholders are responsible for the erection and dismantling of their stalls and the removal of their rubbish.

- 5.14 Through their site visits and discussions with Bicester Town Council representatives the Group identified some specific operational concerns and enforcement issues, mainly relating to emergency vehicle access and refuse collection. District Council officers have been informed.
- 5.15 In common with the other two markets the Group noted that there was a need to introduce more regular and structured communication between the two councils, the traders and the local retailers/business community.
- 5.16 The Group agreed that this was particularly important given the potential risks and opportunities that the Bicester Town Centre redevelopment posed to the future of the market. In principle the market could be a key contributor to the longer term vitality and regeneration of the town. The longer term tourism potential of capturing the “leisure shoppers” who would visit the market as part of a leisure/tourist experience to Bicester Village should be recognised and exploited. But at the same time the immediate dangers of losing the existing customer base due to frustrations with traffic congestion and lack of parking should not be underestimated.
- 5.17 The Group’s assessment of Bicester market is summarised below:

Bicester	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity to high street shops and cafes • Pedestrian area • Attractive environment (seats, flower beds) 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local infringement issues that have not been actively addressed. • No co-ordinated communication between councils, traders and local retailers/business groups
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bicester Town Centre redevelopment • Build links with leisure/tourism • Planned and co-ordinated events and new initiatives local produce/fair-trade/recycling • Build stronger links with specialist markets • Build links with leisure/tourism 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bicester Town Centre redevelopment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Traffic congestion ○ Car parking • Recession

Kidlington

- 5.18 Kidlington market is held on Fridays and Saturdays. The market is located at the intersection of the High Street and Watts Way adjacent to the main shopping centre. It is a relatively small affair with about a dozen stalls but it has a very strong and loyal local customer base. This coupled with its central location results in a thriving, bustling market, particularly on Saturdays.
- 5.19 Under a longstanding arrangement Cherwell District Council collects the licence fees from the individual stallholders but pays Kidlington Parish Council to supervise the actual operation of the market. The stallholders are responsible for the erection and dismantling of their stalls and the removal of their rubbish.
- 5.20 This arrangement is quite resource intensive for both Cherwell and Kidlington councils as they have to deal with individuals rather than a single spokesperson or group. This lack of “ownership” has given rise to some local infringements of the licence conditions which will need to be enforced.
- 5.21 As a result of discussions with the Task and Finish Group Cherwell District Council officers and the Parish Council have agreed to explore the possibility of replicating the Bicester Traders Association model in Kidlington. They are also keen to introduce arrangements for more frequent structured communications between the two councils, the traders and local retailers to oversee the direction and operation of the market on behalf of the local residents.
- 5.22 The Group’s assessment of Kidlington market is summarised below:

Kidlington market SWOT analysis	
<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small but consistent trader base • Waiting list for pitches • Good client base (especially Saturday market) • Proximity to high street shops and cafes • Free parking 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vulnerable due to size and dependence on key traders • No single point of contact/voice to represent stallholder views • No co-ordinated communication between councils, traders and local retailers/business groups
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replicate Market Trader Association model • Planned and co-ordinated events and new initiatives local produce/fair-trade/recycling • Build stronger links with specialist markets • Build links with leisure/tourism 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term disruption due to Watts Way redevelopment • Recession

Promotion and publicity

- 5.23 At the start of the review the Group looked at the District Council's website and publications to find out what information was readily available about the markets in the district. They found no hard copy literature and very little information on the website, other than the basic facts and a link to the Hughmark International website which provides basic details about Banbury market. Perhaps not surprisingly given that markets are a District Council responsibility the information available on the town and parish council websites was equally sparse.
- 5.24 By contrast there is a lot of publicity for the farmers' markets. The Thames Valley Farmers' Market Co-operative runs the Banbury and Bicester farmers' markets and their website lists and gives details of the individual traders for each market. These markets are also widely advertised in the local area with temporary street signs appearing shortly before the market day. Another example of good practice was at Banbury Farmer's market where there was a white board detailing which stalls were "on holiday"; a simple way to ensure that they did not lose potential trade. Yet when the Task & Finish Group visited the traditional market in Bicester in the summer the only signs they saw were advertising the farmers market the following week.
- 5.25 Similarly the residents of Abingdon who checked the town council website in November 2008 were able to note the dates of the French and Italian markets scheduled for May and June 2009.
- 5.26 The Group consider that this is a missed opportunity and one that could be a "quick win". All three markets would benefit from an effective marketing strategy, encompassing better communications and greater publicity. This needs to be developed and co-ordinated by Cherwell District Council, in consultation with the local town and parish councils and market operators and trader associations.
- 5.27 The District Council could also do more to use the markets as platforms for some of its promotional activities. For example last year the Council held its "recycling roadshow" in the car park of a local supermarket. This was a good idea but could have been even better if it had been repeated at one or all of the markets. The same approach could apply to a wider range of Council promotional activities for the arts, sports and health education. We should even consider the possibility of using the markets as a venue for different types of public consultation.

New initiatives

- 5.28 The Group believes that currently there is very little to encourage the “quality chooser” or “leisure shopper” to visit any of the traditional markets in Cherwell. Even in the context of the current recession they believe that all three markets could develop new initiatives to increase business by appealing to each of these customer groups.
- 5.29 Anecdotal evidence presented to another Task & Finish Group reviewing concessionary fares, in particular the implications of the national bus pass scheme, suggests that there has been an increase in passenger traffic between Daventry and Banbury. The reason given is that the passengers see Banbury as a desirable shopping location. This should be good news for Banbury and its market. The downside is that those “leisure shoppers” could just as easily take a bus to a different and more attractive market town.
- 5.30 The Group suggests that the District Council in consultation with the local town and parish councils and market operators and trader associations should develop ideas for the promotion of themed markets such as “buy local”, fair-trade and consider developing stronger links with organic/farmers’ markets.
- 5.31 In considering new ideas we should not lose sight of the needs of the “price choosers” who want competitive prices, good quality and value for money. These regular customers are the mainstay for most traders. As the recession bites it is possible that their numbers will increase as they look for the traditional “bargain” and we need to ensure that the range of stalls on the markets meet their needs.

6 Conclusions

Banbury

- 6.1 This market is at a critical juncture. In early January 2009 the Task & Finish Group learnt that the market operator, Hughmark International, had ceased trading. The Group met with the Portfolio Holder for Urban and Rural Services and Cherwell District Council officers to discuss the situation and were reassured to learn that contingency arrangements were in place to provide the regular weekly market.
- 6.2 Although regrettable, the Group believe that the operational management changes forced on Banbury market present an opportunity for the District Council to reappraise its plans and ambitions for the future of the market. They would encourage the Council to take a long-term and flexible approach to this and when possible involve the traders, the local business community and the public in the process. The task should be to determine what Banbury needs from its market (in terms of size, frequency, location, content) rather than just identify options to continue the current twice weekly market.

Bicester

- 6.3 Overall the Group considered that this was an example of a successful market which works well in its current format. There are some local enforcement issues to address, and this may need to be supported by a more visible presence from Cherwell District Council officers from time to time. The main area of concern was the need for a more structured dialogue between Cherwell District Council, the traders and the Town Council and local business groups to develop ideas and address operational issues. This will become increasingly important as the redevelopment of Bicester town centre progresses. The Group believe that this is an opportunity for Cherwell District Council to be proactive and explore the potential to establish the market as a key contributor to the vitality and economic success of the town.

Kidlington

- 6.4 Although small, the market in Kidlington is thriving with a waiting list for pitches. The main problems that the Group identified were similar to those at Bicester in that there are communication difficulties and some local enforcement issues to address which may need a more regular visible presence from Cherwell District Council officers. The introduction of regular structured communication between the District and Parish councils and the traders and local retailers was seen as a priority. One of the first issues to address would be the possibility of replicating the Bicester Trader Association arrangements.

- 6.5 Throughout this review the Group has been aware that many individuals, including district, town and parish officers, traders and councillors, have been working hard to make their particular market succeed. But they all share a sense of frustration that they are operating in a vacuum and that they lack direction and guidance.
- 6.6 To a degree this did not matter given the “spend” culture of the last two decades but the current recession has changed that. If the Council is to resurrect Banbury market, and ensure that Bicester and Kidlington markets continue to flourish, then it will need to adopt a more proactive management style and commit to a clear vision and strategy for the future of the markets.

Appendix 1

Interviews, site visits and background reading

Interviews

Mr Quinn, Secretary Banbury National Market Traders Federation, Mr Dindol, Mr Finch (Banbury Traders)	23 October 2008
Mr Hughes, Hughmark International	4 November 2008
Banbury Town Council & Chamber of Commerce	7 November 2008
Kidlington Parish Council	25 November 2008
Bicester Town Council	9 December 2008

Site visits

(dates when 3 or more members of the T&FG visited the markets. In addition individual members visited specific markets on a regular basis)

Banbury market	21 February, 10 and 31 July 2008
Banbury farmers market	4 July 2008
Bicester market	14 March and 29 August 2008
Kidlington market	8 August 2008

Background reading

- The Role of Traditional Markets in Revitalising Market Towns, ER Consulting for the Countryside Agency, July 2004
- Markets as social spaces, Open University Study
- City Living Commission Report : The Value of City Markets, City of Stoke on Trent, May 2005
- Markets Service Review, South Lakeland District Council, October 2006
- National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA), www.nabma.com

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