

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Annual Review of Huntingdonshire Markets – 2018/19

**Meeting/Date:** Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economy & Growth) –  
5 March 2019

**Executive Portfolio:** Councillor Marge Beuttell – Executive Councillor for  
Operations and Regulation

**Report by:** Business Development Manager – Chris Jablonski

**Ward(s) affected:** Huntingdon and St Ives Wards

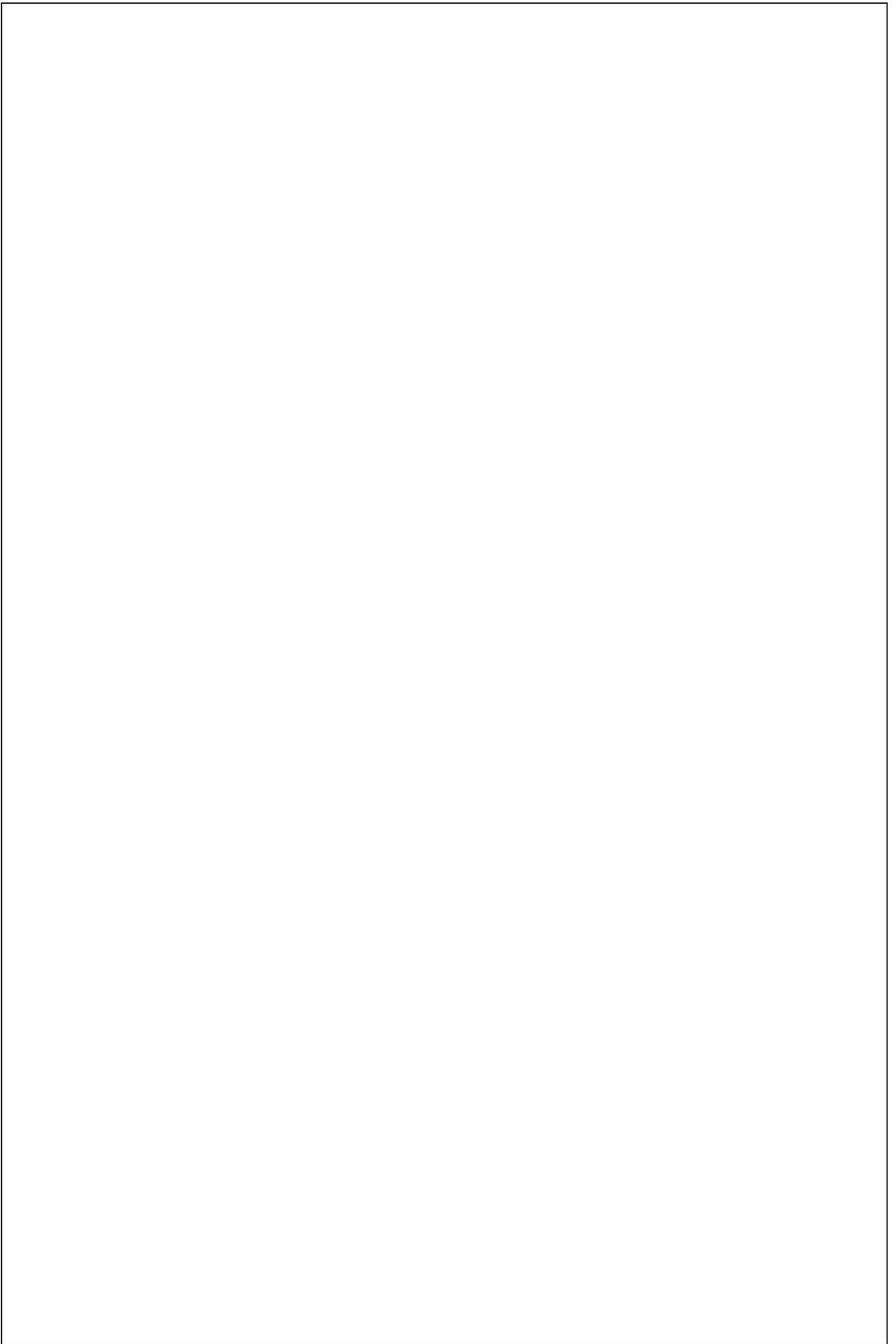
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**Executive Summary:**

1. The Council operates traditional street markets in Huntingdon on Wednesdays and Saturdays and in St Ives on Mondays and Fridays. In line with the stated aim of the Council's Corporate Plan, these markets fulfil an important role in **ensuring that our market towns remain vibrant and prosperous places where communities and businesses can thrive.**
2. This report accompanies a verbal presentation by Keith Salmon the Council's Markets Officer, to update Members on the performance of the Council's Market Service over the past 12 months and the measures in place to ensure the viability of our markets going forward.
3. The report and presentation highlight the continued success of Huntingdon Market in its new High Street location and outline the approach to addressing operational issues associated with St Ives weekly and Bank Holiday markets.
4. Trading conditions continue to be extremely challenging for market traders and retailers alike. The report and presentation outlines the measures taken to ensure that our markets remain viable, operate safely and provide an attractive retail offering supporting the image of our market towns as attractive retail destinations.

**Recommendation(s):**

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to:
  - Comment on the progress of the Markets Service during 2018/19.
  - Note the challenging trading conditions facing the Council's Markets, in particular the St Ives Bank Holiday Market and the proposed Fees and Charges for the Markets Service in 2019/20.
  - Endorse the measures proposed to ensure the continued viability of Huntingdonshire's markets during 2019/20 and beyond.



## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This is a covering report accompanying a presentation by Keith Salmon, the Council's Markets Officer, updating Members on the performance of the Council's Market Service over the past 12 months and outlining plans for the development of the service during 2019/20.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 At the end of 2015/16 the Council's Markets Service made an operating loss. The service had not been given much focus and as a consequence our markets had gone into decline with a diminishing number of traders, a lack of clear direction and significant overdue debt.
- 2.2 To address this situation a new post of Markets Officer was created in 2016 with a retail specialist employed to review and improve the Markets Service.
- 2.3 Since 2016 Members have received an annual review of the progress of the Markets Service, outlining structural changes implemented to improve viability.
- 2.4 A prime example of such an improvement was the relocation of Huntingdon Market in September 2017 from the Market Square to the High Street. The purpose of which was to capture the main footfall of the town and re-invigorate both the market and the High Street.

## **3. HUNTINGDON MARKET**

### **3.1 Benefits of relocation:**

The presentation outlines significant benefits from the relocation of Huntingdon Market:

- a) The number of pitches available and the number of traders has increased, with the market now almost four times its size compared to 2016.
- b) The trial of a differential pricing structure providing pitches ranging in price from £10 to £22 has proved highly successful and pivotal to the expansion of the market.
- c) Pitch utilisation to Christmas 2018 averaged 95% for both Wednesday and Saturday Markets for prime pitches.
- d) Overall pitch utilisation to Christmas 2018 averaged 82% on Saturday and 68% on Wednesday.
- e) Traders vans are no longer parked on the Market Square and to minimise loss of car parking revenue, Pathfinder House is used for trader parking on Saturday's.
- f) The relocation of the Market has fostered a much closer working relationship with partners, including Huntingdon BID and the Town

Council. The Market Square is increasingly used for promotional events, including an extremely successful Family Fun Day in July 2018, Speciality Markets and the Christmas Market.

- g) The relocation of the market has created space for children's fairground rides to be integrated into the Saturday Market on a regular basis. This has added to the sense of the Market as an 'event', drawing residents into the town centre who may otherwise shop and spend their leisure time elsewhere.
- h) The market now has a Facebook page and promotion is increasingly undertaken using press articles and partner publications.

### 3.2 **Ongoing Issues/Actions:**

- a) Cycling in the High Street remains a very real safety concern – Traffic calming measures are now routinely in place in the early morning on market days and discussions are ongoing with HBAC, BID and the Police regarding the issue. Periodically Police enforcement has been undertaken and a proposal to joint fund improved signage is supported by the Markets Service.
- b) Vehicles attempting to drive down the High Street on market days – particularly taxis, regularly encroach first thing in the morning and last thing at night leading to safety concerns and conflict. Where taxis are involved they are reported to Council's licencing section and the Police are informed where other vehicles are involved, although we are not aware of any enforcement action being taken as a result.
- c) Trading has been consistently difficult on the Wednesday Market and since Christmas has become even more so with several traders leaving the market. Incentives are being considered to maintain the viability of this market. Ultimately it may be necessary to consider the whether it is viable to operate two markets in Huntingdon each week.
- d) Severe weather – Incidences of prolonged high winds in particular, cause problems for the Market in the High Street which can become a wind tunnel. This issue is mitigated by the use of weights for all structures and where winds of dangerous speeds are forecast the Market Rules allow for the operation of a 'no structures' market.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Support a proposal to joint fund improved signage to alleviate issues with illegal cycling in the High Street
- Support continued liaison with Police and HDC Licencing to address issues of illegal use of the High Street by taxis and other vehicles.
- Support the use of incentives to maintain the viability of Huntingdon Wednesday Market

## **4. ST IVES MARKET**

### **4.1 Relocation Feasibility Study**

In 2017 a feasibility study was undertaken to consider the possible extension of the St Ives Monday Market into Bridge Street to remove the need to operate a partial Road Closure to manage traffic flows on the Monday Market. A series of concerns from stakeholders regarding the proposal led to a recommendation not to extend the market but to maintain and develop its current location in Market Hill.

Since 2017 the trading position for St Ives Market has been positive. Pitch utilisation prior to Christmas 2018 averaged 86% for the Monday Market and 83% on Friday.

### **4.2 Ongoing Issues/Actions**

- a) The ensuring the safety of the public and traders from vehicles moving within the market (predominantly on Fridays when no Road Closure is in operation) remains an issue. Although it is impossible to completely alleviate this risk the Markets team are working with the Council's Health and Safety Co-ordinator and explore all options to minimise this risk. This includes the consideration of new market layouts and the use of cones to slow and guide traffic away from market stalls.
- b) Motorists regularly challenge the requirement for the Road Closure which operates on the Monday Market and the authority of the Road Closure Marshal in performing his job. The situation is being closely monitored and there is a need for Body Cams to be used in the coming year.
- c) Vehicles parking in traders pitches on Sunday night – This is a constant cause of friction between market traders and motorists, with the Markets Team regularly caught in the middle of such disputes. Close liaison with the Golden Lion Hotel is limiting the extent of the problem.
- d) Maintaining the market at its present occupancy levels. - Traders takings are mostly in decline and they are looking for further lines to augment their present range. Unfortunately this is usually lines sold by existing traders which can cause considerable friction between traders.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue to trial the use of new market layouts to slow and guide traffic away from market stalls and improve customer experience .
- To use Body Cams as a matter of course at the earliest opportunity
- To actively engage with stakeholders to alleviate parking issues concerning overnight parking on Sundays affect the Monday Market.

## **5. FEES AND CHARGES 2019/20**

- 5.1 In 2015/16 the Markets Service made a loss of £5,745 but since this time the service has consistently delivered a trading surplus and is on course to do the same in 2018/19.

- 5.2 This represents a considerable success in the current trading climate and although the Markets Service is non-statutory it plays a vital role in maintaining life in our Market Towns and bringing people into the town centre.
- 5.3 In deciding the level of pitch fees a balance must be struck between increasing pitch fees and ensuring that our markets remain as close to full occupancy as possible. The price sensitivity of pitch fees differs from market to market and town to town and it is significantly easier to fill pitches at some markets than others.
- 5.4 To assist with this issue a differential pricing structure was trialled at Huntingdon Market in 2018/19 and this has proved extremely successful. The structure divides pitches into bands based on their position in the High Street, with prime pitches costing £22 and peripheral pitches costing as little as £10.
- 5.5 In 2019/20 pitch fees at all HDC markets will rise in line with inflation. The exception to this is St Ives Bank Holiday market which is particularly price sensitive and for which pitch fees will be held at their current level. The timings of the Bank Holidays in 2019 will make it extremely difficult to fill pitches, but to counteract this, as in previous years, discounts will be offered, to attract traders to sign up early for all four Bank Holiday markets.
- 5.6 Looking to 2020/21 the likelihood is that to maintain occupancy levels of Huntingdonshire markets it may be necessary to reduce fees and charges across the board. This will be assessed in the coming year with recommendations made as part of the process of setting Fees and Charges for 2020/21.

**Recommendations:**

- To note the changes to fees and charges and the continued operation of discounts to attract traders to the St Ives Bank Holiday Market
- Support work to be undertaken by the Markets Team to consider the need for a permanent reduction in pitch fees across our Markets

**6. PUBLICITY**

- 6.1 A considerable amount of work has been undertaken in the current year to upgrade the online presence of Huntingdonshire's markets and both Huntingdon and St Ives Markets now have their own dedicated Facebook pages. During the current year attention has turned to the development of a stand-alone website linked to the Council's website.
- 6.2 This is seen as a clear 'next step' in the branding and publicising of the Council's Markets. Whilst they are amongst the very best in our region, publicity is currently behind that of some competitors and for our markets to thrive, it will become increasingly important to promote them as fully as possible.
- 6.3 By improving our online presence it is hoped that it will be possible not only to attract new customers to our markets but also to attract new traders and to provide support and information to individual's considering a market stall as a first step in starting a business.

### **Recommendations:**

- To support the development of standalone websites linked to the Council's website

## **7. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS**

- 7.1 Huntingdonshire's Markets play an important role in maintaining the vibrancy of our town centres. Many markets across the UK are in decline and the average age of market traders is rising. HDC is proud of our market towns and they need vibrant markets to remain.
- 7.2 The Council's Corporate strategic plan is committed to **supporting economic growth in our towns.**
- 7.3 The Council is committed to enabling vibrant markets
- **to regenerate and drive redevelopment of retail in our market towns**
  - **supporting the success of our markets is a valuable part of the retail mix in our market towns**
- 7.4 Against a backdrop of an increasingly difficult trading environment the HDC Markets Team is doing everything in its power to ensure that our markets remain financially viable, attractive for traders and appealing to customers going forward.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

## **CONTACT OFFICER**

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