

## Policy & Resources Committee

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<b>Date:</b>	<b>2 August 2016</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Town Stocks</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Graham Hunt, Town Clerk</b>

### Purpose of this Report

1. To provide further background on the potential installation of a set of stocks in the town, to enable Councillors to decide relevant next steps.

### Background

2. At the Town Council meeting on 26 April 2016, Cllr David Bretherton asked a question about the whereabouts of the Town Stocks, which was minuted as follows:  
*“Referring to a Parliamentary Act of 1405, Cllr Bretherton raised the question “Where are the town’s stocks?” Cllr Bretherton continued to inform Members that other Town and Parish Councils had replaced or repaired their stocks in recent years. It was agreed that the Town Clerk would do further research into the matter.”*
3. Cllr Bretherton has provided various papers on the history of stocks and examples of their existence in other parishes.
4. There is a question over the legal requirement, but notwithstanding, the provision of stocks as a tourist attraction and to enable fun fund raising activities may be sufficient justification to proceed.
5. Most stocks disappeared in Victorian times, as people saw them as outmoded.
6. Stocks are sometimes mixed up with the pillories, or the whipping post. They are quite different. Stocks were more a case of naming and shaming than brutal punishment. The pillory could be brutal and its use was specifically abolished in the 1830s.
7. The Community Project Officer included an article in the Town Council newsletter of 19 May 2016 and published a news item on the website seeking opinion, but none was forthcoming:  
**“Should Thame Be Stocking Up?”**  
*Cllr Bretherton is a Trustee of Thame Museum and a keen historian. He has recently undertaken some research and discovered the Statute of Labours Act of 1405, an Act that required every town and village to maintain a set of stocks in which to punish vagabonds, layabouts and drunkards. Should a town not possess a set, it would be downgraded to a hamlet and would lose its right to hold a market or fair.*  
*Stocks should not be confused with a pillory; stocks hold the feet at a low level whereas a pillory was for the head and hands. The use of the pillory was abolished in England in 1837 but being placed in the stocks is still legal in this country and there is no evidence that the statute of 1405 has even been repealed.*  
*The Town Council is eager to gain your opinion as to whether a new set of stocks should be commissioned for Thame. Whilst it is unlikely that our town will be downgraded to a hamlet for not possessing a set, it has been proposed that stocks would be a welcome addition to the town to assist in community fundraising and tourism. Please get in touch if you've been desperate to hold a sponge throwing competition and lack the right equipment or if you think the idea of a set of*

*stocks deserves 'twelve strypes with a rodd'. Tell us your opinion via email, phone on 01844 212833 or Twitter."*

8. The Town Clerk, through the SLCC Larger Council's Forum, sought information from other towns that had been through any recent project to install stocks, but nothing was received. (Apart from various suggestions as to who should be put in them).

9. The Community Project Officer executed a survey via Twitter:



10. The Community Project Officer executed some further research to see if any evidence could be established of stocks ever existing in Thame:

- The Book of Thame: *"Thus grew up the apparatus of the Market Town – a market cross, a Market Hall, in which the courts took place; and gallows and stocks to complete the picture."*
- A history of Market House: *"Strong pillars of oak standing on large stones let into the ground supported the rooms forming the hall. Against one of the pillars there were manacles for public floggings."*
- History of the Market: *"The final result was the permanent layout of the Mediaeval 'Market Town, with its Middle Row, or Shop Row, Drapery, Butter Market, Corn Market. Butchers' Row, Shambles, Cock Row, and Sheep Row, with areas for Cattle and Pigs, complete .with Market House, Market Cross and Stocks - all in a most remarkable and imposing High Street."*

11. BBC Radio Oxford publicised the possibility on 28 June 2016, and some negative social media reaction was observed – *"What the ...?! So many things wrong with this. I hope it is some twisted PR stunt"*.

12. The BBC Radio Oxford coverage briefly became of national interest and a national article "A Ghoulish Tour of Medieval Punishments" was published on 3 July 2016, referring to the possibility of Thame installing stocks.

13. BBC South Today then picked up on it, with a humorous angle, based on Woodstock's stocks. The existence of stocks in Woodstock is perhaps more understandable. It is believed that the stocks were placed in their current location after being discovered in the 1950s languishing in a cellar. The Mayor of Woodstock said on 24 June 2016 that Woodstock is proud of its stocks.

14. A reader in USA provided a very supportive comment: *"I know the stocks would be very popular with tourists, especially Americans wanting to see "old England" and would undoubtedly increase tourism in your lovely town."*

15. A local historian also commented as follows: *"As an amateur historian (History of Thame Market House) I'd like to comment on the possibility of commissioning new stocks for Thame. I think that stocks would be an interesting addition to Thame both in terms of tourism and for charity fundraising. Their siting will be important: they would need to be in a historical context. Possibly*

*near the Birdcage or Shambles or in the old market place behind the Town Hall. There would need to be a notice explaining the historical reason for their installation.”*

16. The main other parish found to have been through the process was Broadstairs, although on further investigation it was a 2001 District Council project in a neighbouring village – St Peters (cf Moreton / Thame). Given a family history connection, the Town Clerk took the opportunity for a visit on 24 June 2016 - the stocks are presented in a village green setting. The local parish Council provided the following: *“I have been advised that the stocks were designed by one of our current town and district councillors, Jason Savage. Jason went through the process of obtaining planning consent for them in what is a conservation area. Brian Sleightholm, the President and Founder of St. Peter’s Village Tour, got part funding at the time, possibly from one of the local Councillors. Jason was not a councillor then as we are talking about 15 years ago. He arranged for a firm called Quinneys to make the Stocks from his drawings. There never has been any vandalism surprisingly, perhaps because they are located in such a prominent position by the road. Jason recalls that he has had one lady who complained that it was wrong to glorify the past with references to mediaeval type punishments, but none since. Most people see the Stocks as good fun. Some people even think they are original.”*
17. As yet, we have not established costs, but a local furniture maker has offered to build the stocks at cost.
18. If progressed another location to be considered may be Montesson Square. The separate Vibrancy & Vitality Study made suggestions on medium term extension of the square into a more formal and useful public open space, and implementation of stocks could be associated with that.

**Action Required:**

- i) To discuss the idea further, based on the further research and agree next steps.