

THAME MARKET TRADERS CO-OPERATIVE



This report was originally sent to all Thame Town Council Councillors in December 2022 and has since been updated, due to the recent election in May. It is the Co-Operatives understanding that a majority of Thame Town Councillors are unaware of the how Thame Charter Market is run and hopes this report will help the Town Councillors get a better understanding and the fragility of the market.

Thame Market and its traders along with many independent retailers are only just starting to recover from the pandemic. Although entitled to SEIS grants and Local Authority grants many traders needed to take out government bounce back loans to carry on trading. Thame Market lost a number of long-standing traders with large stalls trading commodities such as Ladies Clothing, Chinese Food, Moroccan Crockery, Bags and Purses, Vacuum Cleaner Spares, Hats. Carpets and Textiles, South African Food, and Sustainable Products amongst others.

Since the pandemic shopping and trading trends have changed significantly. Trading hours have been shortened as shoppers no longer seem to spend afternoons on the market. Traders are no longer willing to trade on a monthly basis (regular trader) and are more comfortable trading on a daily (casual) basis. Post pandemic new traders are mostly applying to work on 3 x 3 m gazebo with

food commodities. Following the national trend, it is increasingly difficult to attract new traders as nationally there has been a significant reduction in the trader pool.

The Co-Operative has been successful in bucking this national trend by continuing to attract new traders by advertising and using social media. A number of traders have transferred from markets close to Thame after enduring a downturn in trade or the failure of their market.

Pre-pandemic the traders were scheduled to meet with the Town Clerk to negotiate a new contract and a reappraisal of market tolls and trading conditions. This meeting was put on hold until trading, post pandemic allowed. The contract and tolls are no longer fit for purpose and changes in both trading conditions and market tolls were at the top of the Cooperative's agenda. It was the Cooperative's understanding that a number of Town Councillors in the past have a singular approach to market tolls without acknowledging the benefits of a full and vibrant market and how the market works.

The Town Council holds the right to run the Market under licence from SODC, which in turn runs the Market in partnership with the Thame Market Traders Co-Operative. The current contract with The Town Council was set up over 35 years ago making Thame Market Traders Co-Operative the first and the longest Trader operated market in the country. The Thame Market Traders Cooperative run the market on a not-for-profit basis, its officers work on a volunteer basis unpaid for the benefit of the Town Council, the community and the traders. Its officers combined donate between 20 to 40 hours per week towards the running of the market. Hours include dealing with casual traders, processing applications, collecting market tolls, clearing the market of litter and dealing with enquiries from members of the public and public bodies. This list is not exhaustive and the cost savings to the traders and the Town Council has not been recognised.

A not-for-profit organisation, the cooperative is not profit motivated unlike a Private Operator and returns any funds generated after the renumeration to the Town Council into the promotion of the market. In partnership with the Town Council this has proved successful and makes Thame the longest working Trader operated market in the country. The Co-Operative believes that this partnership will serve the public, the Town Council and the market traders for the foreseeable future.

The Thame Market Traders Co-Operative is no longer in a position to pay for all stalls on the market whether they are let or not. This practice was set up when market trading and market traders were oversubscribed. According to the National Market Traders Federation there are now less than 45% of traders in the UK that there were at its peak in 1990's.

The weekly market toll is divided between the regular traders and we currently require 3 casual traders per week to meet the current obligations. The Co-Operative is no longer in a position to offer regular traders rent free periods for either holidays and or sickness. Regular traders no longer have any benefit from being a signed-on trader, as casual traders now make up revenues for the weekly toll.

The Co-Operative believes that the current tolls are sustainable in the short term and originally asked for a meeting with the Town Council in the Spring 2023 to reappraise. This was put on hold until after the May elections and traders would value a meeting at the end of the summer 2023. The raising of market tolls from its current level will have a cyclical affect and a significant impact on the cooperative's ability to attract traders, which in turn will lead to a loss of revenue. We presently pay

the Town Council £1,100 weekly with an exemption for the Co-Operative to fund the annual community day and between Christmas & New Year dependant on how it falls.

The Co-Operative continues to assert that it is in the best position to run the market in partnership with the Town Council and will continue to attract traders. It believes that a vibrant and diverse well-run market is an asset to the town and its community. As shareholders and members of the Co-Operative individual traders value their place on the market and with that in mind have an interest in attracting traders from other markets to Thame. The Co-Operative post covid, has successfully carried out unprecedented responsibility for both retention and attraction of traders.

COMMUNITY STALLS AND COMMUNITY DAY



The annual Community Day is a firm addition in the Town diary for 15 years and continues to be a great success, attracting both local and national charities. The day along with the offering of a free weekly community stall has enabled a large number of local groups to raise funds and the profile of their organisations. The Royal British Legion amongst others consider the market integral to their fundraising activities. The traders continue to add value to the market with ad-hoc events throughout the year such as on Valentine Day and Halloween.

FACEBOOK

< Thame Tuesday Charter Ma... 9+ ▾ 🔎

Posts **About** **Photos** ▾ **Mentions**

Boost this post to reach up to 400 more people if you spend £10. **Boost post**

11 Sally Elizabeth Crowther and 7 others

Like **Comment** **Share**

THAME CHARTER MARKET **Thame Tuesday Charter Market** ...
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Lyd's Bakes and Cakes new addition Peanut butter cookie 😊 And some of their spooky Halloween range will be on offer tomorrow! Don't miss out! 🎃👻



The Thame Market Traders Facebook page continues to attract followers by engaging the group with close to 2500 active users. Individual traders have autonomy on the page and post regularly showcasing their commodities. This has proved to be successful for traders that do not attend on a regular basis.

TOILETS & RUBBISH



The Market House toilets are often a subject of conversation between the traders and traders and the public. The separate units are often closed for repair for months, open units are not at all hygienic and are not cleaned to an adequate standard. When open they are left with insufficient amounts of toilet tissue and liquid soap in the dispenser plus the automatic system gives insufficient time to wash and dry hands. This is problematic for all traders but particularly resonates with food traders. The lack of soap in the dispenser has been blamed on “human error” when corresponding with SODC. The toilets are often opened late and are not cleaned or replenished during the day and are a sad indictment of the town.

Rubbish is cleared from the market by individual traders and the market area is cleaned and checked by officers. It has been noted that the surface area at the commencement of trading already has a significant amount of rubbish and leaf detritus. There is currently no schedule for the Autumn leaf fall by the contracted street cleaners.

PARKING & SURFACE AREA



Parking is still an issue on and around market and the decriminalisation has not solved the problem. Unlike the previous Town Council controlled officers, the new traffic officers are not in the town long enough to ticket overstays or overnight parking on the Upper High Street carpark. Vehicles park overnight, some regularly with impunity. This causes friction between traders when stalls are moved out of position and with members of the public when wanting to retrieve their vehicle. There is currently no provision to allow traders a return of tolls should they not be able to trade because of

vehicles in their pitch. The Town Councils Maintenance Team place a No Overnight Parking sign and cones on the market and send letters to residents with parking permits who have caused traders not to trade.

The Parking Order for Tuesdays needs to be amended and consider the changes in the market and the regulation of the new officers. This position and the anomaly of parking on Tuesdays has been clearly relayed to both Oxfordshire Highways and SODC.

Many traders now park their vehicles on the market, this position is endorsed by the Co-Operative for a number of reasons including security, protection and the ability to load and unload vehicles unhindered. Casual traders tend not trade in inclement weather and regular trader are not inclined to trade in inclement weather without the security and protection of their vehicle in close proximity of their stall. The position for sole traders leaving their stalls and stock and carrying cash to and from their vehicles has massive security implications and is no longer acceptable. Past agreements have allowed traders to park their vehicles in trading gaps and in inclement weather conditions.

There is adequate parking for Blue Badge holders alongside the Upper High Street Island and in Montesson Square (when the Local Produce Market is not taking place).

The provision for larger vehicles and a number of vans in the Cattle Market carpark needs to be maintained. There are currently four vehicles over 7.5 tonnes and four 3.5 tonne vehicles that regularly use this facility.

The surface area is on ongoing conversation between traders the public and the Co-Operative. Traders relay that as they are ostensibly provided with a trading space and this should be free from encumbrance, including potholes and standing water. There are a number of trading spaces that have become unlettable as the trading area is uneven or has standing water and or potholes. There have been 3 pot hole incidents where traders and members of the public have tripped on the uneven surface.

ELECTRICITY

Any trader needing electricity has to use either petrol or diesel-powered generators with both its air and noise pollution issues, we regularly turn away potential traders who need an electrical power source. The lack of provision of electricity is a major source of consternation between the Cooperative and the Town Council. Under the then Town Clerk Helen Stewart, market tolls were then raised on a yearly basis in line with movements of the RPI/CPI and the Town Council precept. This was accepted by the Co-Operative as a percentage of the market tolls was to make separate fund for the delivery of electricity on the market. The Co-Operative were assured by Graham Hunt Town Clerk, that an infrastructure fund was being built up with the purpose to aid with an electricity provision for the Market.

The Co-operative would like to be appraised of the status this fund also elucidation on a timescale for electricity to be provided?

CONCLUSION

There have been a small number of issues affecting the market these are generally issues that the Town Council has no control over and can only be remedied with protracted negotiations with Oxfordshire CC, Oxfordshire Highways and SODC. We appreciate the swift action from Town Council Officers this working relationship is integral in the smooth running of the market and the Co-Operative thanks the Town Council and its Officers for their continued support.

The Co-Operative would like to take this opportunity to remind the Town Council of the fragility of its Royal Charter Market. Many large markets have failed locally and nationally because of the lack of understanding of the idiosyncrasies of markets and the cyclical nature to changes in trading conditions and market tolls. Many of the Co-Operative members trade on various size markets and are acutely aware of the peculiarities of each and the Thame Market Traders Co-Operative will continue to work with the Town Council for the success of its and the community's market.

The Co-Operative encourages all Town Councillors to read [the Communities and Local Government Committees Report Market Failure?; Can the Traditional Market Survive?](#) and its recommendations and conclusions. This will give a useful insight into best practice and how the Thame Royal Charter Market will endure, move forward and succeed in the future.

