

Flintshire Markets

Developing the Future

Executive Summary

August 2010



Section 1 - Introduction

1.1 In March 2010 Flintshire County Council commissioned New Markets Solutions -in partnership with PM Regeneration -to assess and guide the future of the county's existing and potential markets.

1.2 The consultancy team has carried out extensive research locally through shopper, market trader and local retailer consultation. The research has been supported through consultant meetings with stakeholder groups (farmers' market representatives, town centre managers, town partnership representatives and key Council officers, including markets management). Visits of inspection to each market have been carried out and access has been given to Council financial and management documentation.

1.3 Markets are seen from different perspectives by different stakeholders, therefore an overall expert view is taken in addition to individual and group negative and positive factors. The consultants have significant specialist personal experience and knowledge about the markets industry and this is brought to bear upon the local Flintshire markets situation, which is also seen contextually against the national markets perspective.

1.4 The full report extends to over 120 pages and is in three parts. Part 1 contains the main contextual information, the analysis carried out at each market/town and the recommendations arising from the research. A key part of this study has been to consider how other local authority markets players and their stakeholders are dealing with similar issues as face Flintshire. A number of case studies are, therefore, included in Part 2 of the full report in order to generate a wider appreciation of the national markets industry and a better understanding of Flintshire's markets situation. Part 3 of the full report contains in-depth detail of the extensive consultation carried out with the public, retailers and market traders – together with further information on what is meant by actioning particular recommendations.

1.5 The report highlights the major growth across Britain of out-of-town and edge-of-town big business retailing over the last twenty years, with the result of this often being highly negative upon town centres, with the major supermarkets in particular drawing shoppers away from previously busy town centre cores. Small traders, be they shopkeepers or market traders, find it extremely difficult to compete when there is less passing trade from which to draw interest for their products and goods. Shoppers are naturally drawn away to the new, to the bright and shiny, to the mass of professionally-presented goods on offer, to the convenient free adjacent parking facilities and to the dry, warm conditions of supermarkets and shopping centres. Big business is very professional in pursuing its aim of retail domination at the expense of small business.

1.6 The shopping cores of most of Flintshire's market towns have suffered like most town centres across Wales and England. They have lost vitality, they have empty shops and their traditional markets have vastly diminished -and some infrastructure of the town centres has degenerated as new shopping attractions have taken the business that was their lifeblood.

1.7 This is particularly true of Connah's Quay, Flint and Holywell markets and town centres. Traditional retailing in all three towns has suffered from a proliferation of supermarkets and retail parks that have set up in locations that are away from traditional shopping streets. All three towns had very good open markets before their customers were attracted away from them. Connah's Quay used to have a major-sized market (well over 100 traders) that is now reduced to four traders who continue to provide a small but useful service to some of those local people who don't use vehicles to go shopping. Flint too was known as an attractive market venue, but now is reduced to one market trader and, like Holywell's Saturday market, no longer really exists as a market. Holywell Thursday market continues to trade, but at a very much-reduced level that is not an attraction of any interest beyond local pedestrians, with consequent little interest from market traders.

1.8 Mold is the exception. It has retained its vibrancy and life. Mainly because of the supportive locational circumstances and town centre environment that has favoured the open market and indoor market, Mold markets are relatively healthy and have a vitality that continues to attract not just locals, but shoppers from the county area and leisure visitors from well beyond. Mold still has significant vitality as a real market town; it is a huge asset for the County. But supportive measures will be required to ensure that it stays that way. Even Mold retailing is weaker than it looks. There are ever increasing competitive factors in the retail environment that continue to threaten even successful towns – and successful markets. Research shows that there is fundamental recognition and support for markets from all stakeholder groups in Flintshire, but that there is a need for improvement in the quality and quantity of its markets.

1.9 The report suggests ways in which markets vitality can be sustained – and not just for Mold town centre but with considerations for Connah's Quay, Flint and Holywell town centres – through direct and indirect Council actions and through the encouragement and support of community participation that can create an attractive marketing mix for the local and county populations and for tourists and leisure visitors. The suggestions made include operations and training methods, marketing systems, planning and design requirements and market event implementation. Sustaining and developing the markets service in support of the vitality of Flintshire's town centres is what this report is about -as is the realistic assessment of which markets presently contribute, those markets that may be able to contribute (with support) and those that cannot contribute to that vitality.

Section 2 – Summary of the Analysis

Flintshire Markets – County Overview

2.1 Flintshire County Council has market towns at Connah's Quay, Holywell, Flint and Mold. The other principal town centres of Buckley, Queensferry and Shotton have no real market history, though markets have been trialled in the past at Buckley. Unlike many market towns elsewhere, there is no known history in Flintshire of towns having a permanent infrastructure of open market stalls or of provision of demountable stalls by the markets authority. This is significant in terms of future potential and also in terms of the presentation of Flintshire's open markets.

Mold

2.2 Mold still fulfils many of the criteria of a model market town. Mold's markets are small, varied and effective. They comprise a small indoor market that trades throughout the week, a Wednesday and Saturday outdoor market, farmers markets held once a month and car boot sales held every Sunday.

2.3 There is considerable trader business strength and experience; it is estimated that there are over 90 market businesses in Mold's indoor and outdoor markets. However -in an extremely competitive trading environment -a number of improvements can be made to create sustainability, to increase vitality and viability. Layouts of – and connections between – markets can be improved. Marketing is necessary to maintain quality and quantity of trader numbers and to ensure the increased customer interest that is required to ensure sustainability. Quality of design, presentation and access can be improved and measures are proposed for this to be achieved by both the traders and the Council.

Holywell

2.4 Holywell has a real issue with the lack of a strong retail offer on High Street but investor confidence in town centre retailing is likely to be boosted if there is investment in an effective Thursday Market as well as a broader portfolio of specialist events and promotions.

2.5 Holywell Market is now only held on a Thursday; the small number of market traders and their presentations match the lack of current passing trade in the core of this architecturally attractive town centre. To increase the size and quality of the market it will be necessary to implement a range of measures but there is need to particularly consider a specific improvement plan approach for this market which would include a relaunch supported by promotional marketing activity.

Flint

2.6 Flint's retail offer is somewhat lacking in coherence, with the traditional heart of Church Street being the first point of reference in retail terms for a first time visitor approaching from the east, whilst the Sainsburys and adjoining retail park appears to be Flint's centre if the town is approached from the west.

2.7 Flint's Friday Market is, effectively, no longer in existence as it only has one trader in the poorly located traditional market area. It is considered, however, that the town would benefit from a revived market in a location that should attract customers and traders. Church Street would offer the best potential location for success, but other sites are considered within this report and -given adequate resourcing -it is suggested that a relaunch of the market should be attempted in the future.

Connah's Quay

2.8 In reality, neighbouring Shotton acts as the traditional High Street for Connah's Quay, which itself has a more basic collection of retailers and though it does host a few large-scale enterprises, the town has some challenges to address in terms of its infrastructure and appearance.

2.9 Connah's Quay Thursday Market has reduced in size significantly over the years and now presents a poor yet still worthwhile attraction to the town. There may be an opportunity to resite it in the short term, but it will be crucial for the longer-term future of the market that it is supported by a development plan. One concept for the future masterplan may be to develop a new activity hub with greater retail footfall in a more natural market location that could encompass a larger and more qualitative market that is more likely to succeed than the present very limited market.

Buckley, Shotton and Queensferry

2.10 The three other principal town centres of Flintshire – Buckley, Shotton and Queensferry, have also been assessed with regard to their suitability for hosting a market. As noted above Shotton effectively operates as one retail hub with Connah's Quay and it is clearly not a realistic proposition to introduce another market in such close proximity when efforts need to be concentrated on rejuvenating and expanding the existing market. In a similar vein, operating a market in Queensferry is impractical, as it would compete with Connah's Quay. In retail terms the three centres need to co-operate to a degree to promote a combined Deeside offer -and one market that represents all of Deeside is sufficient at the present time.

2.11 Buckley is sizeable in retail terms and benefits from good strategic accessibility, with a town centre that has benefited from highly visible investment in its public realm and paving. A market has been trialled in the past, but other non-Mold market days may offer potential for one-off specialist market events.

Specialist Market Events

2.12 The full report contains a section with regard to the potential for coordinated specialist market events -possibly both commercial and community-based events – as part of a marketing strategy to sustain and increase the vitality and viability of Flintshire's town centres. Examples are given of such events held elsewhere in the country and it is suggested that if markets management has a stock of attractive stalls then this would encourage community engagement in addition to supporting other markets presentations.

The Comprehensive Approach to Development of Flintshire's Markets

2.13 There are fifteen recommendations in the report with a mixture of strategic, tactical and operational factors. Some apply across the County, some are particular to certain markets, but the last recommendation aims for the Council to develop a markets strategy that will bring all other recommendations together for implementation in order to create a more sustainable future for the County's markets.

Section 3 – Summary of Recommendations

3.1. Layouts of – and access to – all open markets need to be regularly reviewed by markets management, particularly due to the flexibility and potential of trader attendances.

Operational

3.2. To increase trading viability for all Mold stakeholders the farmers market should be relocated as near as possible to the open and indoor markets.

Strategic/Tactical

3.3. A “Marketing the Markets” Strategy and annual marketing plans are necessary to sustain and build trader numbers in all of the markets, with funding through grant aid and/or reinvestment of markets profits. **Strategic/ Tactical**

3.4. A county-wide Markets and Town Centres Stakeholder Marketing Group should be established, linking market traders from all of the markets, shopkeepers, town centre managers and other key stakeholders so that there is a partnership approach in place to pursue continuous improvement in marketing and operational strategy in all market towns.

Strategic/Tactical

3.5. Training of existing and “new start up” market traders will assist in their retention and acquisition in order to support the viability of all markets.

Tactical/Operational

3.6. Incentives should be devised so that traders at all of the markets are more encouraged to present their stalls and goods more professionally in the market towns.

Tactical/Operational

3.7. A stock of pop-up stalls procured via grant aid/capital and held by Flintshire’s markets unit should be used for markets and community events development purposes in all towns, including encouraging existing and new traders at all of the markets to present well and support trading viability.

Strategic/Tactical/Operational

3.8. A professional shopfit/designer should be engaged to plan and cost a retail “makeover” for the Mold indoor market in consultation with markets management and a trader user group. **Strategic**

3.9. When appropriate staffing, marketing and infrastructure resources are in place, a Holywell Market improvement plan approach be considered so that a relaunch of the Thursday Market can then be organised.

Tactical/Operational

3.10. When appropriate staffing, marketing and infrastructure resources are in place, consideration should be given to the revival of Flint Friday Market in a location that will enable successful trading conditions for all stakeholders. **Strategic/Tactical**

3.11. The Council should ensure that Connah's Quay's status as a market town is protected and enhanced in the short term (prior to the Masterplan), exploring all interim measures available to stimulate trader interest.

Tactical/Operational

3.12. The Masterplan for Connah's Quay & Shotton should, amongst other things, consider how appropriate structural changes can be made to facilitate and incorporate a qualitative relaunch of markets activities.

Strategic

3.13 The Markets staffing establishment and office facilities need to be reconfigured so that staff can efficiently and effectively deal with markets operations and developments.

Tactical/Operational

3.14. The development of a series of specialist markets as a key part of a County-wide programme of events -incorporating all Flintshire towns where possible and where appropriate – should be investigated as a potential regeneration tool.

Strategic/Tactical/Operational

3.15 A Flintshire Markets Strategy be developed that will acknowledge the markets' existing and potential community benefits and will set out and plan the comprehensive actions required to ensure that the markets are sustained and developed in the future.

Strategic

Note: For the purposes of this report, Recommendations are classified **Strategic** (one to five years ahead/policy level), **Tactical** (up to one year ahead/senior management level) and **Operational** (week to week/markets management level). It will be noted that certain Recommendations cover more than one classification.