

The Market Place in 2024

Following the work already carried out in the Market Place I would be grateful if members would consider the following:

The old stalls currently in the square make the area look untidy and unkempt and block the natural view of the church and auction shed, and they certainly do nothing to improve the area when there is a wedding or a funeral taking place. I personally feel quite embarrassed to think these important family occasions are marred by this eyesore. They are heavy and difficult to move and are also deteriorating further whilst stored out in the open. They also make it much more difficult to keep the area clean and tidy. I understand the need to reduce labour hours erecting/dismantling the stalls, but I think there is now a better solution.

Remarks made recently by the public include a wish to get rid of the old stalls and the stained covers. I agree totally, we have just spent a lot of money on new, stylish, branded gazebos which we should be using from now on.

Do we really need to have the old stalls scattered around the market place continually for weeks on end in-between Pop-up Markets ? (there are currently 11 stalls 'parked' around the auction shed) Or could we not just ask the additional traders to bring one? Many traders have their own nowadays. Due to the decision not to hold markets during the winter months our next scheduled 'Pop-up' market is not until 13th April - 3 months away.

Our current offer to traders for 3/6 months contracts includes the requirement that they provide their own tables, tents/gazebos.

Currently we have 4 traders signed up for the pre-payment schemes:

Ken Newson - expiry 18/1/24

Christine Scrivin – expiry 15/2/24

Freddie Foods – expiry 05/2/24

Claire Oxby – expiry 17/4/24

So, as you can see the last one of these will expire in 3 months, the other three will expire within weeks. We currently have no advance bookings after these dates.

In fact, just this week I have met with Marshall's Funeral Directors to discuss the problem and the costs incurred each time we close the square for a funeral and how these costs must now be met by those making the booking, and no longer met by the council.

We eventually came to an amicable solution whereby they will use their own casual staff to close the square 2 hrs before a funeral and to monitor it for the duration of the service. In this way there is no cost to the council. He also raised the issue of access via the gates at the rear and the lack of space to manoeuvre the hearse and accompanying vehicles

It remains unclear as to whether or not MRAG will agree to meeting the full cost of putting on the pop-up markets for the forthcoming year, or alternatively if they will use some of their members to close down the square etc. on those dates.

Although many improvements have been made, we now need to complete the project and provide the environment envisaged for everyone to use and also particularly for outdoor events.

Similarly, there are regular comments about the number of planters on the site. This issue is being addressed and we are currently re-locating some of these to other suitable locations. However, with this move comes the added problem of maintenance. Arrangements are in place for a local group to plant - up and maintain the remaining planters in the square for this year.

The Auction shed roof desperately needs painting.

The bench currently in situ between the pub and the gates at the rear needs re-siting under the shelter outside Luca Vets.

During the Christmas period, when we had various activities in the square, a number of people approached me suggesting that we should close the square permanently and that this would also help in keeping the area clean and weed free. To be fair I also received one or two comments supporting the continued use of the area for car parking, but not as many as those asking for it to close.

I also received quite a few questions / suggestions about the large gates at the rear of the square and the very large gate posts (again!) Mainly why the gates were so big and why were they considered necessary in the first place?

In response to my repeated requests to have the gate posts cut down to size the Community Manager's report of **October 2022** stated that "the over large gate posts would be reduced in size by **December 2022**". **It is now January 2024 and this has still not been done.**

Until this is done the gates at the rear of the market place will continue to dominate the area as they are overbearing and out of keeping. However, although we cannot do anything about the gates in situ reducing the gate posts and painting them the same colour as the gates and the rest of the street furniture in the area, will certainly reduce their visual impact significantly.

We continue to have problems with some car owners when trying to close down the market place and some owners who think that if they park inside the gated area in front of the auction shed that doesn't count, even though they have no right to be there.

We acknowledge that Andy's Charity shop has a right of access to the rear of their property, and to accommodate this they have been issued with a key to open the gate at the rear. However, this does not include permission to park in that area or anywhere else behind the gated area. We need to be more robust on this matter and to find a lasting solution.

Given the costs to the council (both in time and money) of closing down the area for events and employing security to prevent car owners from returning, it would make sense in the long term to consider erecting (suitably sized) gates at both entrances which could be easily closed once the area is cleared.

This would accommodate the closing for any planned events and also allow for a permanent closure of the area if / when we decided to do so. I am fully aware of the potential cost implications, but this is possibly the final step in our project to enhance the area for the long term.

We are now approximately 2/3rds of the way through our 3-year project for that area.

I personally would like to see the Market Place closed to cars. I know we have touched on and debated this point on a number of occasions to-date, but I would be interested to know how members currently feel on this issue as we move forward to the completion of our plans for the town centre.

I would be grateful for your constructive comments.

Cllr Jo Pilley

14th January 2024