



## NABMA Retail Market Health Check

On

LEDBURY

The National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) is the country's leading representative markets organisation with over 200 members.

The following report refers to Ledbury Charter Market and was visited by Alan Ottey (NABMA) on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2018 at the request of Ledbury Town Council.

### Location

Ledbury is a small town in Herefordshire with a population of just under 10,000. It is surrounded by a rural hinterland but is within 30/40 drive of Gloucester, Hereford or Worcester which are major competition for the retail offer. It is one of the country's finest black and white market towns and as such, is a tourist attraction.

Although there are 2 supermarkets with a further one opening shortly, this being more off the town centre, the main retail offer consists of small independents. The offer is mixed but was not aware of a greengrocers and clothing, especially men's, was restricted. It is also a fair trade town.

The population is mainly English with Polish being second. The age group of the town is fairly spread but the majority would be towards the older generation. The wealth of the town is split fairly evenly between categories A, B and C1 and the groups C2, D and E which shows there are residents with disposable income as well as those not so well off. Unemployment in the area is low.

### Market

The market area is historic and part of it is underneath the Market House. This area has 8 pitches. There are outside spaces which allow for a further 10 pitches. This gives a total of 18 pitches.

The market operates on a Tuesday and a Saturday. The Tuesday market has currently only 5 pitches occupied on a permanent basis by 4 traders. The Saturday market has 11 pitches occupied by 7 traders and 1 being the charity stall.

This is not a healthy position and the Tuesday market is bordering on not actually being a market but street trading.

### Management

The market is allowed by Ledbury Town Council who own the market rights but there is no actual market manager. The day to day issues are administered by a member of staff of the Town Council. Ledbury Town Councillors indirectly manage the market and deal with any issues through their Charter Market Working Party.

Traders erect their own stalls and tables as none are provided. The current rent is £17 for a pitch under the market house and £14 for an outside pitch which are paid monthly. There are market terms and conditions in place covering the market and its goods etc. which is adequate for type of market and there is nothing contentious with them.

In relation to cost of market and income/expenditure it would appear as there is no management or stalls to erect, there is little expenditure. What there is minimal i.e. administrative cost etc. is minimal so the market does not really cost the council anything and brings them a small income of approximately £230 as shown with their tolls. It would appear none of this has been reinvested in the market.

### Visit and Main Issues identified

The visit was made on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2018. The weather was initially dry, cold but with snow showers later in the day.

I met with 5 of the Town's councillors where there was general discussion as to its present position, their aspirations for the market and giving them various ideas, promotions etc. This was a very constructive meeting with a good exchange of ideas.

The 'footfall' on the town was low and was apparently an older generation, but that was just on an impression on the day as I was not able to compare. I was informed Saturday is far busier with more families.

My first impression was:

#### Good Impression.

- Good central position.
- Historic buildings surrounding square and gives good appearance.
- In a good visible position, junction of main roads through town.
- Friendly traders.
- Plenty of space for expansion.
- Keen to succeed.

#### Bad Impression:

- Lack of stalls



- Lack of choice of quality goods and hot/take-a-way food,
- Lack of footfall and potential customers.
- Merchandising and signage could be better and more colourful.
- Appears lack of support from the town centre retailers. They could be complementary to each other.
- Needs something to attract customers.
- Lack of colour or inviting layout including inviting smells etc.
- Lack of signage and advertising.

From the first impression, the main issues identified are:

- Lack of traders.
- Lack of customers.
- Lack of promotion.
- Lack of cohesion with other businesses in the town.
- Poor appearance in a 'heritage' town.
- Poor merchandising (on day of visit).
- Lack of investment.
- Lack of performance indicators i.e. footfall, occupancy, weather etc. which enables early recognition of potential issues.
- Lack of a strategy and action plan to take the market forward.
- The councillors had enthusiasm to take the market forward but were seeking ideas and initiatives that could achieve this.
- Lack of identity and good visibility of the market. Nothing to attract the visitor.

### Proposals for Consideration

After posing the question to them 'Do you want a market and do you wish to support it?' and the positive answer they gave I would suggest the following ideas be looked considered and explored.

- Develop a vision forward.
- Develop a strategy and action plan.
- Maximise marketing and promotion and establish a communications plan. Need active website and use of social media to create a presence and broaden the presence of the market.
- Promote the Market directly to groups and individuals who are available, including toddler and community groups, as well as those shopping elsewhere in the town; we would see campaigns of fliers, offers, and a focus on the community element once it has been established.
- Introduce a number of performance indicators to enable an overview is gained and any patterns identified.

- Establish traders group and have regular open meetings with them. Also look at establishing a 'Friends of the Market group' from the local community as they are the customer and can help with promotion.
- New trader initiatives, reduced rent or special offers i.e. pay for 2 weeks get 1 week free.
- Link with all local community groups and even arrange a community awareness market alongside the regular market.
- Advice on merchandising and sales to ensure a quality display and service. Encourage the trader to make a good visual display as the customer is more attracted by a good display. The trader also needs to be aware of quality of service, that is they sell their goods rather than waiting for someone to buy their goods.
- Good liaison with all types of educational establishments with a view of encouraging entrepreneurship.
- Look at attracting new businesses with the use of a business support initiative, giving periods of reduced rent and business advice.
- Have an annual programme to target customers i.e. targeting local customers with leaflets and offers or targeting the visitor through the visitor economy contacts.
- Encourage the use of the social media by traders and the importance of linking all together.
- Integrate the Market fully with Love Your Local Market fortnight in May, promoting it throughout that period.
- Develop more local products and produce and market the same especially through healthy living.
- Invite retailers in the town to take a stall; existing market traders may handle sales of other businesses in the town if this means increasing the market's offer, e.g. hardware and homewares, pet supplies and food items.
- Have a regular events programme, especially with the use of music as this creates a pleasant atmosphere across the market.
- Set up monthly craft workshops e.g. knitting, flower arranging and gift wrapping, which are linked to the current traders at the market. These could be held in during spring and summer.
- Set up a children's play area, or story telling sessions on a monthly basis to attract young families to the market.
- Create an attractive outdoors area in summer months where people could practice crafts, relax or read.
- Create occasions – local farms could be invited to bring small animals and 'petting zoos' to the market.
- Annual review of policies, conditions of trading etc. to ensure they are fit for purpose and have the flexibility to adapt to changes in customers habits, economy, habits etc.



- Explore the possibility of providing a uniform stall to improve the general appearance of the market and make it more visible to the passing pedestrian and other traffic.
- Explore the potential for more involved and positive management to ensure the market raises its standards.
- As the market is actually in a positive position in relation to creating surplus rent, explore potential for re-investment on improvement.
- With reference to market rights, explore the advantages of adopting the Food Act 1984, as that would enable the town to hold a market on other days etc. and explore the potential of specialist markets on other days.
- The market should be integrated with all the towns businesses. I appreciate this will take time but it is essential as the town is marketed as a 'market town'.
- Attend the NAMBA annual conference in September to gain ideas from others best practice.

## Conclusion

I have done the report mainly as bullet points to identify the headings as obviously there is a lot more consideration involved in the various suggestions. There are other suggestions and during the meeting with councillors they took note of suggestions.

I found the councillors I met enthusiastic to improve and upon my view of the market and what was explained to me there is grounds for a lot of improvement. Taking into account the weather on the day of my visit, the Tuesday market will not survive much longer. It is also worth asking is Tuesday the right day?

With what was explained, Saturday sounds a better day so is a little more healthy, but again, with investment in time and the market, establish an identity and a 'want to be there' attitude, not only with the market but with the retail businesses in town.

I am happy to give any advice in the future and consider further ideas and I would like to thank the councillors for giving their time to an interesting and informative morning.

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