

## Market Sub Committee

Date: 5 August 2021

Title: Review of Market Opening Hours

Purpose of the Report: To consider the market opening times.

Contact Officer: Adrian Harrison, Markets Manager

<b>Corporate Objective/s</b>	No 23. To continue to manage, promote and develop the street market.	
<b>Implications:</b>		
<b>Financial</b>		
<b>Human Resources</b>		
<b>Operational/Service delivery</b>	Yes	Review the opening hours of the market
<b>Procedural/Legal</b>		
<b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>	Yes	Continue to manage the time market equipment is left in the High Street
<b>Environmental Aims</b>		

### 1 RECOMMENDATION

Should members be minded, the proposal is:

1.1 To change the market opening hours to 8.30am–3.30pm and that this change commences from 30 September 2021.

### 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Leighton Buzzard Market for many years has published its opening hours as 9am-4pm. These hours have not necessarily reflected the actual hours attended by traders and to date, the hours have not been enforced by the Town Council having taken a flexible approach with managing trader attendance for some time.

2.2 To reduce trader's early departures, traders can collect their vans from 3.00pm onwards yet their front of stall should not be packed away. This is not often adhered to meaning that many products are being packed up or gone before 4.00pm.

2.3 Reputationally, there is a conflict between the publicised opening hours and the lived experience of visitors to the market and the town. There is also a need for understanding of trader needs and preferences. As every trader is an individual and

with different product related issues, a 'one size fits all' approach will always have tension.

### **3 INFORMATION**

3.1 The 2020 annual market review asked for trader and customer views on opening times. A follow-up survey was undertaken in May 2021.

3.2 When based in Hockliffe Street car park, opening hours were 8-12noon. This helped to focus the public to spread their shopping times over a four-hour period. This suited traders with less customers attending and the reduction in stock being provided. It became apparent that trade started to tail off as noon approached yet many shoppers turned up prior to the 8am start.

3.3 When returning to the High Street in June 2020 with all traders present, the opening times changed to 9-2pm. Officers initiated that all vehicles must be off the market by 8.30am. Anecdotally, traders reported that trade was busier in the mornings than the afternoons.

3.4 Footfall data on market days corroborate this view with the average footfall count being at its highest between 10.00 and 12.00 hours.

3.5 By July 2020, the market had adjusted to the new way of trading and the opening times changed again to 9–3pm with the increase of customers within the town. Again, all vehicles were off site by 8.30am. Whilst many traders remained content with this arrangement, some traders said they wished to stay longer. Often, these traders were those who benefit from customers browsing the market as opposed to attending to buy their weekly shopping.

3.6 The above timings were influenced by Covid circumstances and whilst it is recognised that shopping habits changed because of Covid, this period coupled with previous monitoring of market opening hours, suggest it is an opportune time to establish more realistic opening hours. Hours that recognise trader needs and wishes whilst managing expectations of existing and future customers. In doing so it would better reflect upon the reputation of the market and the Council.

3.7 A survey of the public in 2019 showed that 54% of people shopped on the market between 9am-11am, with a further 27% shopping 11am – 1.00pm.

### **4 OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

4.1 When gazebos were again provided for traders upon their return to the High Street, the Council's stall erector team continued their same work hours regardless of the change in opening hours. These being 4-7am and 4.30-7.30pm.

4.2 Although the market finished earlier, no difficulties have been experienced with the management of equipment remaining in the High Street. The Market Porter and Manager are in attendance.

4.3 Likewise, access to Council vehicles for use on the market at the end of the day remains the same, i.e., from 4.30pm onwards when the Grounds and Environmental Service staff finish work.

## **5 TRADER AND CUSTOMER SURVEY FEEDBACK**

5.1 Trader and customer survey feedback can be reviewed in Appendix A (**attached**).

5.2 In October 2020 customers were surveyed via social media and the Market's own customer newsletter database about their shopping times on the market. The social media survey received 54 responses (4 people skipped the question) while the newsletter received 23 responses (3 people skipped the question). Both surveys show a similar pattern with the main shopping times being between 9am–1pm. With the peak times between 9am–11am.

5.3 Traders were also surveyed in October 2020 and were asked about their views on opening times (see Appendix A). 28 traders were contacted with 9 traders responding and 4 skipping the question. The majority of traders (33.33%) voted for opening from 8am-3pm, all year round.

5.4 Traders were again surveyed in May 2021 regarding opening times. 12 traders out of 28 who were sent the survey responded (see Appendix A). There was a split majority between opening between 8am-3pm, and 9pm–3pm, all year round of 41.67%.

## **6 PROPOSAL**

6.1 Officers propose that the advertised opening times are changed to reflect survey results from 9am–4pm, to 8.30am–3.30pm, all year round starting from 30 September 2021. Traders' vehicles to be allowed on the market from 3.30pm.

6.2 Traders have reflected that they would like to start at either 8am or 9am. Officers feel that an opening time of 8.30am is a good compromise.

6.3 Traders showed a preference to closing at 3pm with over 83% confirming this. With advertised closing times at 4pm, a compromise of 3.30pm would allow customers enjoying a general town centre visit to be able to access the market.

6.4 The proposed new opening times do not have any impact on market operations. and should therefore commence from 30 September 2021.

6.5 The current market Rules and Regulations identify that:

*5. Trading hours are from 9:00am to 4:00pm with the exception of the Farmers Market where trading hours are from 9:00am to 1:00pm. No trader is to leave the market before 4:00pm without prior consent of the Market Manager, with exception of the Farmers Market.*

## **7 CONCLUSION**

7.1 There is a correlation between the customer and trader survey results with a bias showing that some customers are shopping earlier for their weekly supplies and perhaps, before they go to their workplace. Officers feel that a shift forward in opening times by 30 minutes at the start and finish of the day is a good compromise for customer and trader alike.

7.2 With Leighton Buzzard expanding there are many new potential customers with no pre-conceived ideas on opening times, yet they can be easily disappointed and put off if the opening hours do not reflect the reality of their experience. Currently we advertise closing at 4pm yet vehicles come on at 3pm making the market look closed. This may cause confusion for customers, and they may not bother returning another time. The new opening times should negate the confusion, be clear and serve all.

7.3 It is proposed to commence the new opening hours after 30<sup>th</sup> September. This period of notice easily achieves an adequate notice period for change. It also coincides with the build-up to the autumn/winter seasonal shopping period. It also provides ample time to prepare for the change for traders and with the creation of promotional information.

## **8 TRADER COMMENTS ON FINAL PROPOSAL**

8.1 The proposal as set out at 1.1 was shared with traders on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> July directly to their email addresses with an invitation to comment by Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> July. Comments received are listed below.