

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee
Date: 25 November 2019
Reporting officer: Service Manager (Customer & Theatre Services)
Subject: Gravesend Borough Market Research Exercise

Purpose and summary of report:

To set out headline findings from the research exercise
To set out terms of reference for a proposed Member Working Group

Recommendation:

The headline findings are for information only, but Members are asked to consider the terms of reference and consider representation at a Member Working Group.

1. Background

1.1 The research exercise was designed to gather the views of traders, customers and visitors of Gravesend Borough Market in order to assist with setting the future direction of the market and identifying priorities going forward to build a sustainable, successful market.

The research objectives were to:

1. Identify consumer attitudes and behaviours towards markets and in particular Gravesend Borough Market.
2. Gain an understanding as to what consumers wanted from Gravesend Borough Market and how it could meet the needs of varying demographics.
3. Recognise the impact and appeal of pop-up markets and events.
4. Explore thoughts and behaviours surrounding the food court.
5. Understand effective and engaging methods of promoting and advertising the market and its offerings.
6. Develop an insight into trader experiences, including what unique opportunities the market offered businesses.

- 1.2 Consumer and trader research was carried out during June and July 2019 comprising of both quantitative and qualitative methods.
- Online survey: Quantitative data was collected and analysed from 414 survey respondents, covering the ages of 18-65+ years. Paper copies were also made available.
 - Consumer focus groups: Qualitative data was captured through focus groups with a representative from survey age brackets present and two separate discussions tailored specifically to 11-18 year olds.
 - Trader interviews: Individual face to face dialogues took place with five market traders.
 - Individual responses: Survey respondents, who registered an interest to take part in focus groups yet could not attend, were invited to send their general thoughts and opinions via email.

2. Summary of Findings

2.1 The headline findings are set out below:

Gravesend Borough Market offering:

- A unique, affordable, low risk opportunity for small and start-up businesses
- Variety is key
- Eliminate inconsistency and uncertainty to create a strong identity

Attitudes towards markets:

- The appeal to shop at markets still exists
- Food and drink play a key role in driving traffic to markets across all demographics
- Hard to reach young people will visit for good, affordable street food

Most popular product categories:

- Food and drink
- Fresh produce
- Locally produced products
- A strong desire for 'traditional markets' during week and weekend

Most preferred days to visit markets:

- Saturday
- Sunday
- Friday
- Tuesday, Thursday, Wednesday

Reasons for visiting:

- Supporting local businesses
- Location
- Events

Impact of events and pop-ups:

- A positive effect on footfall
- Brings new visitors to the market and raises its profile
- Importance of continuation and events budget

Promoting and advertising the market:

- A strong need to increase awareness of the market, its location and events
- Heavy investment in traditional advertising recommended, with specific attention to local outdoor media, signage and wayfinding.
- Social media should not be solely relied upon

The future:

- The market has potential and the community wants it to succeed
- A need for clear strategic direction
- Wants and needs must be acted upon
- Pre-development consultation targets should be reset during transition period

2.2. The research looked at 6 specific areas and drew out what is working well and potential areas for consideration. These are as follows:

2.2.1 Identifying consumer attitudes and behaviours towards markets and in particular Gravesend Borough Market

What is working well:

- The appeal to shop at markets still exists if the offering is right
- Food and drink proves popular and in particular the introduction of the Caribbean food is bringing young people to Gravesend Borough Market
- People want the market to succeed and realise its potential

Areas for consideration:

- Continue to break down the barriers of post-refurbishment negativity
- The atmosphere and character of Gravesend Borough Market requires an injection of personality
- Develop the food court offering further by filling empty units with good quality, affordable food
- Celebrate the success of local businesses to improve Gravesend Borough Market's reputation of low trader retention
- Capitalise on the new arrival of young people to Gravesend Borough Market by developing a youth focussed offering within the market's plan

2.2.2 Gain an understanding about what consumers want from Gravesend Borough Market and how to meet the needs of varying demographics

What is working well:

- There is a strong desire to support local businesses and a recognition that Gravesend Borough Market has potential to offer this opportunity
- Opening days and hours of the 'shopping zone' within the market is meeting and satisfying customer needs
- Fresh produce and locally produced products are the most required categories, which are partly present on a Tuesday

Areas for consideration:

- Although opening hours of the shopping zone meets expectations, there is potential for extended opening hours for the food court
- That the Tuesday market receives a heavily invested revamp and relaunch, with an additional 'traditional market' suggested to run on a Saturday

2.2.3 Recognise the impact and appeal of pop-up markets and events

What is working well:

- Pop-up markets and events are proving popular and have a positive impact on footfall
- Events are the third highest reason why respondents visit Gravesend Borough Market, proving their importance to the market's programming
- Well established pop-up markets such as Christmas Fairs and Vintage Fairs are the most popular and heavily attended events

Areas for consideration:

- With 30% of respondents stating they would like to see a new event at the market, there is scope to continue extending and developing pop-up market concepts
- There is very little desire currently from young people to visit a market event. Consideration should be made to tailor and trial an event to their specific needs
- Twilight markets are still an uncertainty in terms of popularity and potential for success. Continuation of a testing period is recommended to fully investigate their worth and to identify categories that are more suited to evening events

2.2.4 Explore thoughts and behaviours surrounding the food court

What is working well:

- Awareness of the food court is high and visitors moderate
- The food court offers a unique environment for vendors to create a food theatre experience in an open, casual and more visual space to that of a restaurant
- The combination of a well-established vendor and an up and coming food stall with strong followers is having a positive impact on the food court's reputation and footfall

- The introduction of the Caribbean food offering is bringing the new arrival of young people to the food court and market

Areas for consideration:

- Increase the variety of food vendors to strengthen the offering further
- Extend the standard opening hours of the food court and advertise substantially
- Clarify and communicate the product positioning of Gravesend Borough Market's food court to improve perception
- Capitalise on the introduction of young people to the market by creating a unique offering for them within the market

2.2.5 Establish the most effective and engaging methods of promoting and advertising the market and its offerings

What is working well:

- Social media and more specifically Facebook, is proving a popular and cost-effective means of advertising and promoting Gravesend Borough Market and its events

Areas for consideration:

- Although the market should continue to utilise social media, it is important that this is not the only predominant means of communicating with the public. Posts can be seen too late or missed entirely by many
- A need to invest in a marketing and advertising budget for Gravesend Borough Market, with a clear strategy to support the development of the business
- A demand for traditional forms of advertising has been identified, with additional attention to out-of-home, digital outdoor and directional media. Raising awareness of the market and its location, is essential, and there is a definite opportunity to reach, interact and entice existing High Street shoppers to visit the market as part of their current shopping experience

2.2.6 Summarising the unique offering for Gravesend Borough Market traders

- An affordable, low risk opportunity for new and small businesses
- Free flowing environment requiring less customer commitment
- Allows customer interaction and camaraderie with fellow traders
- A hub for supporters of local businesses
- No set up and pack up required, with permanent storage space
- Huge potential identified for Gravesend Borough Market

3. Member Working Group

- 3.1 At the Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee in June, it was requested that a Member Working Group was set up to review the research information.
- 3.2 On consultation with the Chair of the Cabinet Committee, the attached Terms of Reference have been developed and are attached as Appendix II.
- 3.3 Members are asked to review the attached Terms of Reference and consider representation for a Member Working Group with responsibility for reviewing the research information in full, along with a draft strategy document and sharing the recommendations from that working group back to the Committee in February.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 The headline findings are for information only, but Members are asked to consider the terms of reference and consider representation at a Member Working Group.

IMPLICATIONS		APPENDIX 1	
Legal	There are no legal implications		
Finance and Value for Money	The Borough Market is currently experiencing a period of challenge. In order to set the direction of travel, a research exercise was undertaken to gauge the views of customers, visitors and traders. This information will be used by Members and Management to consider appropriate actions required to turn the market into a thriving town centre space.		
Risk Assessment	The council faces a reputational risk in that the Borough Market is a significantly historic building which has undergone major funded refurbishment works, yet is currently not delivering a sound offer. The additional work recommended in this report aims to address this and relaunch the market as a town centre destination and business offer.		
Equality Impact Assessment	Screening for Equality Impacts		
	Question	Answer	Explanation
	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	N/A	
	c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?	N/A	
<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>			
Corporate Business Plan	03 – Sustainable Gravesham		