

***Farmers Markets  
Scrutiny Review***

***Report of Findings and  
Recommendations***



***Scrutiny Committee  
21<sup>st</sup> January 2003***

## **1. Background to the Review**

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Committee of Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council has undertaken a review of Farmers Markets operating in the Borough. The review was scoped at a meeting of Committee in November 2002 and was discussed in detail at its meeting in January 2003.
- 1.2 Scoping of the review highlighted the following issues that needed to be addressed:
  - the possibility of externalising market operations
  - the current operation of the two Markets in Tonbridge and West Malling and the need for any adjustments to be made to their organisation including their location and day of operation
  - the level of demand for further Markets elsewhere in the Borough
  - any adjustments required to the Conditions and Guidelines for Farmers Markets, the provision of stalls and the scope for additional marketing and publicity.
- 1.3 Prior to the review meeting, a group of Members attended a number of Farmers Markets at West Malling, Tonbridge, Sevenoaks and Bromley. A summary of the views obtained from these visits is set out at Annex A.
- 1.4 At the review meeting, a report and supplementary information from the Director of Health and Housing was presented. This included views on the Markets from consultees, traders and consumers. Also present was Mr Cyrus Schroff, Tonbridge and Malling Market Manager who contributed to the review debate.
- 1.5 Full details of the review are contained in the relevant Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet agenda papers. The purpose of this report is to set out the key issues, conclusions and recommendations resulting from the review process.

## **2. Review Conclusions**

- 2.1 The review considered a wide range of issues relating to Farmers Markets. The matters covered in this report are:

- The scope for externalisation/external funding
- Issues regarding West Malling Market
- Issues regarding Tonbridge Market
- Demand for additional Markets
- The 35 mile radius for producers and the types of goods sold
- Future provision of stalls
- Marketing and publicity and the scope for 'themed' special markets

**(a) The scope for externalisation/external funding**

- 2.2 In general terms, Members involved in the review confirmed their overall support for the continuation of Farmers' Markets in the Borough. They were found to be popular with both consumers and producers and contributed to economic, environmental and social objectives.
- 2.3 Concern was expressed, however, about the rising level of costs falling to the Council relating to the organisation of the markets. The estimate of costs for 2003/4 had risen to £13,700 net of income, an increase over the original 2002/3 of some 67%. It was agreed, therefore, that the identification of private operators to run future markets should be explored with a view to reducing such costs. The Director of Health and Housing had recently advertised for private sector interest in the running of farmers markets in the Borough and had received four initial expressions of interest. Although these required further evaluation and development, it was agreed that this approach should be further explored with a view to achieving full or part externalisation by January 2004.
- 2.4 It was agreed that the ideal objective would be to achieve a break even situation with regard to the funding for farmers' markets. The economics of running markets privately would need to be tested with potential operators as this would only be viable if such operators could generate a sufficient financial return. In general terms, however, it was agreed that the Council should be seeking to adopt of role of promoting the markets rather than directly subsidising them.
- 2.5 In order to reduce costs and enhance the viability of markets, it was agreed that the Council should explore the possibility of securing support funding from relevant agencies. Those to be consulted include SEEDA, the National Association of Farmers Markets, Kentish Fare and the National Farmers Union.

**(b) The West Malling Market**

- 2.6 It was reported that the Farmers Market at West Malling continued to be successful and popular. Members who visited the market reported that it was well located in the High Street and that Sunday appeared to be the most appropriate day for it to be held. In addition, support was

expressed for the inclusion of the Farmers Market with the West Malling Christmas fayre and Town Malling Day.

- 2.7 Members expressed some concern about the need for road closures to be better managed and, in particular, the provision of better signage from the A20. It was explained that highway safety considerations needed to be taken into account in the wording used for such signs but that further opportunities to improve signage would be explored. Additional concerns about noise from the delivery and setting up of stalls early in the morning on markets days causing disruption to local residents in the town centre had been addressed and it was confirmed that this would continue to be monitored.

### **(c) The Tonbridge Market**

- 2.8 Members expressed some concern about the continued viability of the Tonbridge Market which appeared to be less popular than West Malling. Figures presented to the review indicated a reduction of producers attending Tonbridge and it was suggested that this could have been due to the relocation of the market from the Castle Lawn to River Walk. This move was undertaken to ensure there was no conflict with other events held at the Castle. The review addressed two key concerns – whether the location at River Walk was the most appropriate and whether holding the market on a Sunday continued to be the most suitable day of the week for it.
- 2.9 With regard to the location of the market, there was no clear consensus emerging from the review. It was reported that some traders preferred the original Castle location although a majority preferred River Walk. In favour of the former, the location enabled consumers to circulate around the market more than once and the Castle itself provided an attractive setting with car parking close by. The River Walk location was regarded as more central to the Town and had more potential to attract additional passing trade. Car parking was not, however, as close. The provision of a power supply to River Walk also involved the hire of a generator at additional cost to the Council.
- 2.10 Members involved in the review suggested other potential locations including the Botany area and the riverside path below the curtain wall of the Castle. A location further to the south of the town was also suggested as this would link better with the normal Sunday market which generated its own activity.
- 2.11 With regard to the continuation of markets in Tonbridge on a Sunday, it was suggested that alternative days should be investigated to enable the market to benefit from the larger amount of passing trade. It was pointed out, however, that any change to the current arrangements would depend on prior consultation with the traders, including an assessment of their commitments to other markets in the area operated on other

days, and an overall need to avoid several changes in location which confuses consumers and provides little continuity for traders.

- 2.12 A specific issue raised related to the holding of the Tonbridge market on Remembrance Sunday. It was agreed that, should Sunday be retained as the most appropriate day for the market, Markets should be held but that traders attending on that day should be requested to observe the two minute silence.
- 2.13 In summary, it was agreed that a further review of the location of, and day for, the Tonbridge market should be undertaken with a view to improving its viability. With regard to electricity supply for the River Walk location, it was agreed that alternative forms of supply should be evaluated, potentially making use of a power outlet used for Christmas lighting. If such an alternative was not viable, then the review concluded that it might be more appropriate to purchase a generator, the costs of which could be offset by hiring the facility to local groups and event organisers for uses in addition to the Farmers' Market.

#### **(d) Demand for Additional Markets**

- 2.14 Whilst the Tonbridge and West Malling markets catered for a large proportion of Borough residents, it was felt that there would be additional benefit in exploring other locations around the Borough where Markets could be held on an occasional basis. It was pointed out that poor public transport services on Sundays often made travelling to either West Malling or Tonbridge difficult for many residents.
- 2.15 Potential additional locations identified for evaluation included villages on the east bank of the Medway, Aylesford (potentially at the Priory), Snodland and Borough Green. It was agreed that Parish Councils, traders and residents should be involved in the assessment of additional locations for Farmers Markets around the Borough.

#### **(e) The 35 Mile Radius for Producers and the Types of Goods Sold**

- 2.16 Current guidelines for operating Farmers Markets in the Borough required all producers to be located within a catchment area defined by a 25 mile distance from the A26/A228 junction near Mereworth. This was in place to ensure that producers could be genuinely regarded as 'local'. On occasions, however, it had led to difficulties in interpretation and it was suggested that a radius of 35 miles might be more appropriate.
- 2.17 Following discussion, a more generous interpretation of the area within which producers would be permitted to attend Farmers Markets was suggested. In order to embrace all of the County, particularly to include coastal areas to the east of importance for seafood products, it was agreed that the eligible area should be the whole of Kent to the east of

the Borough and an area to the west of Tonbridge and Malling which is equal in distance to that of the east but not including areas to the north of the Thames.

- 2.18 A number of concerns were raised about the range of goods available at markets and the relatively high cost of some products, particularly of an organic variety. Although some Members felt that these were generally comparable to prices paid in supermarkets for similar goods, it was felt that efforts could be made to widen the range of goods on sale in terms of both cost and quality and thus extend the appeal of markets to a wider range of income groups.

#### **(f) Future Provision of Market Stalls**

- 2.19 The current practice adopted by the Borough Council is to hire stalls for all markets for use by producers. This has the benefit of making arrangements easier for the producer and the markets are made more attractive by the quality and uniformity of the style of stalls. The costs, however, were high with an annual cost of £9,200 to the Council. It was suggested that producers should be encouraged to bring their own stalls to markets thus achieving a substantial saving in cost. To compensate, a reduction of £5 in pitch fee was proposed which would still equate to an overall annual saving of £6,900.
- 2.20 It was agreed that these changes should be explored. If support funding could be secured from other agencies, as noted above, it may prove appropriate to retain stall hire as this provides a more attractive appearance for markets. In the absence of this, however, it was agreed that stall hire be discontinued and the adjustments to pitch fees be made. In this instance, there would need to be some controls in place to ensure the quality of producers stalls did not adversely affect the visual quality of markets overall.

#### **(g) Marketing/Publicity and Themed Markets**

- 2.21 A number of suggestions arose from the review with regard to improving the viability of Farmers Markets. Additional publicity about the market programme could be explored, potentially in partnership with other organisations such as Kentish Fare and with other market operators. It was noted that more frequent and timely adverts were required immediately preceding a market taking place.
- 2.22 An additional means to enhance the appeal of markets is to extend the number of 'special' or 'themed' markets which might attract a wider public audience. A number of suggestions were made including markets based on themes such as cheese, seafood/fish, oysters and chocolate. It was agreed that these suggestions should be explored

further with a view to extending the number of such special markets in future programmes.

### **3. Recommendations**

3.1 It is recommended to Cabinet that Farmers' Markets in the Borough continue to be supported in principle subject to the following:

1. a detailed review of the potential for externalising the running of markets be carried out with a view to the partial or full externalisation of the markets with either public or private sector partners by January 2004.
2. the West Malling Farmers' Market continues to operate on Sundays in the High Street, subject to the granting of a road closure order and the provision of further improved road signage.
3. the day and location of the Tonbridge Farmers' Market be reviewed with consideration given to holding the market on alternative days and at alternative venues within the Town Centre. Any changes made to current arrangements should be capable of being sustained to ensure consistency for both traders and consumers.
4. that, in the event of future markets being held on Remembrance Sunday, all stall holders be requested to observe the two minute silence.
5. that, in consultation with Parish Councils, market operators and Borough residents, additional locations for future occasional markets be explored to cover villages and communities not well served by existing markets.
6. consideration be given to encouraging a broader range of products at Farmers Markets that can be sold at a range of prices thus enabling Farmers Markets to be more accessible to a wider range of income groups.
7. external financial support for future markets be sought from relevant bodies such as SEEDA, the NFU and the National Association of Farmers Markets.
8. the purchase of an electricity generator for use at Farmers Markets be investigated along with other options for power supply; should a generator be purchased or new supply provided, the costs of this investment be offset by offering the facility for use by other community groups and organisations and for other events.
9. the Tonbridge & Malling Farmers' Market Conditions and Guidelines be amended to include producers within Kent, and within an area to the west of the Borough of equal distance to that to the east, but not including areas to the north of the Thames.

10. consideration be given to discontinuing the hire of stalls and producers being asked to bring their own stalls to future markets unless external support funding can be obtained for this purpose. Subject to the possible future externalisation of the markets, the fee be reduced to £20 (for advance payment) and £25 (for payment on the day) if stalls are not provided.
11. a review of marketing and publicity be undertaken with consideration given to partnership arrangements and joint marketing initiatives with Kentish Fare and neighbouring market operators (both Local Authority and private) to improve the frequency of local adverts.
12. the 2003/4 revenue estimate for Farmers' Markets be reduced in light of any potential cost savings with a view to achieving a break even situation in the future, subject to the retention of support for the Markets overall.
13. consideration be given to the organisation of additional special/themed markets to be held on an occasional basis subject to consideration of costs and practicalities.

## **ANNEX A**

### **Scrutiny Review of Farmers' Markets**

#### **Site Visits**

##### **West Malling Farmers' Market**

Date: Sunday 24 November 2002  
Times: 10am – 2pm  
Fees: £25 per pitch, stalls provided  
Organised by: Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council  
Location: High Street (closed to traffic)  
Number of Stalls: 22  
Variety of Produce: Vegetables, soap, organic poultry & eggs, free range turkeys, game, apples, plants, juices, honey, wine, fresh and prepared meats, cider, cakes, cheeses, yoghurts, breads, pies, quiches, preserves  
Other Comments: West Malling Christmas Lights switch on. Also in the High Street were several local craft stalls and an ice rink.

##### **Sevenoaks Farmers' Market**

Date: Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2002  
Times: 9am – 1pm, although producers may stay until 2pm to catch lunchtime workers  
Fees: Variable, up to £25 depending upon trading conditions on the day  
Organised by: Local producer, little assistance from District Council  
Location: Adjacent to Blighs car park in Sevenoaks town centre  
Number of Stalls: 8  
Variety of Produce: eggs, honey, wines and juice, cakes, smoked fish, plants, pies and prepared meats, vegetables, woodcrafts.  
Other Comments: Number of producers vary throughout the year, 8 is about average for the season

##### **Bromley Farmers' Market**

Date: Friday 13<sup>th</sup> December 2002  
Times: 9am – 6pm  
Fees: £30 - £100 depending on pitch size  
Organised by: Bromley Council, via Town Centre Manager  
Location: Pedestrianised central town location  
Number of stalls: Farmers market type stalls – 11  
General or craft stalls – 15  
Bavarian market stalls – 14

Variety of Produce: Farmers' market produce included plants, vegetables, fresh and prepared meats, apples, fresh fish (not local), game, eggs, bread/cakes  
General or craft stalls included knitwear, clothing, bags, jewelry, dried flowers, picture frames and gifts  
Bavarian stalls included crafts, hot food and gluwein, sausages, sweets

Other Comments: The Bavarian market is held in semi-permanent huts for the month preceding Christmas. The general/craft market and farmers' market were not separated.

## **Members' Comments**

### **West Malling**

Good mix of stalls  
Successful market with a community feel  
Special Christmas market – not necessarily representative  
Signage needs to be improved

### **Tonbridge**

8 producers and a lack of customers  
Disappointing but not necessarily representative of whole year  
Stall holders support the provision of stalls  
Prefer Castle site

### **Sevenoaks**

Only 3 stalls had covered accommodation  
Craft and charity stalls selling products which are not necessarily local but added variety/appeal  
Producers bring their own stalls leading to a less uniform and attractive look  
T&MBC markets are better in comparison

### **Bromley**

No separation between general, Farmers' Market and German market  
Farmers' Markets do not necessarily mix well with other events