

Minutes

Community Development Scrutiny Committee

19th October 2022



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
Mrs C Dervish	Yes	Mrs J Pell	Yes
Mrs D Garrod (Chairman)	Yes	Miss M Weeks	Apologies
A Hensman	Yes	Mrs S Wilson	Apologies
Mrs A Kilmartin	No	B Wright	Yes
W Korsinah	Yes		

14 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: There were no Interests declared.

15 **MINUTES**

DECISION: The Minutes of the meeting of the Community Development Scrutiny Committee held on 31st August 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no statements made, or questions asked.

17 **SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO MARKETS AND ASSOCIATED EVENTS WITHIN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT – THIRD EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION**

INFORMATION: The Chairman was pleased to welcome Councillor Tom Cunningham, Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, and Natalie Sadler, Marketing and Communications Officer, to the meeting. As part of the Committee's evidence gathering for the Scrutiny Review into 'Markets and Associated Events,' a presentation had been prepared for the Committee by Natalie. During the presentation, Natalie detailed the processes behind the promotion of both the Council's traditional and street markets via its social media channels, media releases and engagement with stakeholders. The presentation also touched upon the resources implications behind the promotion of the Street Markets on the team, in the lead up, during and following the event.

The full presentation may be viewed on the Council's YouTube Channel via the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tG5JdKFZl6g>

Following the end of the presentation, the Chairman expressed her grateful thanks and invited Members to ask their questions of Natalie and Councillor Cunningham. The following information was provided in response to the questions that were raised:

- In terms of the demographic at the street markets, there tended to be a mix of groups, with the various food stalls being a particular attraction for families.
- Although it was acknowledged that the Wednesday market did not see as much footfall as the Saturday market, it was highlighted that following the Covid-19 pandemic and the pedestrianisation scheme in Braintree, interest in the markets had increased across the board. The concept of the local Street Market first emerged as a result of the collective thought processes of both local retailers and the Council, who wanted to see Braintree celebrated once again for its unique commodities after years of the perceived decline of its town centre. The idea behind the Street Markets was not to undermine the current trade seen within the town centre, but rather to compliment by supporting existing retailers.
- In March 2020, the Street Markets were at the height of their success; however, the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic meant that the approach to markets had to be adapted; thus, the Council introduced the Braintree Virtual Street Market as an alternative platform for businesses to interact with customers online. Once the restrictions under the pandemic had lifted, the Street Markets, along with the town's traditional markets, were able to commence in person once again.
- Although it was acknowledged that the town in Braintree still faced challenges (e.g. due to a number of empty shops), there had been in recent years an overall 'switch' from the traditional retail outlets to the establishment of new social hubs (e.g. with Mosaic restaurant, Bar 92, etc). This change was in part due to the pedestrianisation of the town centre, but also the success of the Street Markets and the cross-departmental support and promotion this had received from the District Council.
- Due to the huge resource implications associated with the promotion and organisation of the Street Markets, it was possible that the District Council would take a step back from being the sole organiser in future, although it would still play an active role in enabling and supporting such events.
- There were some seating areas available along the High Street in Braintree; in terms of the Market Square, it was intended that this space be kept open and versatile in order to help facilitate future events. Other factors, such as the need for there to be provision for emergency vehicles and retail deliveries, had to be encompassed within the Council's event planning process. However, it was added that many of the food establishments within the town centre (e.g. Toast, Mosaic, etc) now included outdoor seating areas for its customers.
- It was acknowledged that the nighttime economy in Braintree was lacking, especially when compared with the choice of restaurants and other such establishments which were available in Halstead and Witham. As such, it was hoped that the public realm project in Braintree would help to encourage the growth of evening/nighttime businesses.
- In order to support new traders, the Council provided 'pop-up' markets that were unique to Braintree and could be hired for a minimal fee of £20 to help such businesses promote their products. Although the Council had not contacted specific

businesses about the use of the pop-up markets, the scheme and its benefits were promoted via social media channels (e.g. for the Christmas Market 2022).

- A potential recommendation as part of the feedback received at the meeting was to send written communication out to some of the more rural businesses in the District to see if they would be interested in trading at the Braintree markets, or perhaps as part of a one-off, 'special market' event.
- In respect of promoting markets within the more rural areas of the District, Members were advised that there had been a recent feature in the Braintree Contact Magazine. As a rule, the Council tended to avoid circulating leaflets due to the potential impacts of this on each area; however, the post it sign at the train station had been used previously to try and attract commuters to the town, and the free, Community Ad magazines were also utilised. It was added that there was a newsletter distributed to Parish and Town Councils every few weeks, which could also be used to help promote information relating to the markets.
- The primary focus of the Marketing and Communications team was around the promotion of the Street Markets in Braintree; however, the team did undertake some promotion of the Saturday markets in Witham as well.
- Members were advised that it was difficult to promote the markets through the District's schools as, quite often, they were busy promoting their own events to students and parents. It was mentioned that George Yard Shopping Centre in Braintree promoted a number of events for families during the holiday seasons, which the Council could also look at utilising as a means of promoting markets to wider groups of people.
- Since the conversion of Freeport to Braintree Village in 2019, the relationship between the centre and the District Council had improved and there was perhaps some scope for collaborative working in future around the promotion of markets.
- Braintree Museum was a key stakeholder in terms of the support they provided during markets and events within the town centre.
- The Council did not currently use Tik Tok as one of its social media platforms as it was not felt to be an appropriate platform for the wider audience it wanted to attract. Instead, the Council tended to use reels on Instagram which were similar to those seen in Tik Tok.
- There was a historic Section 106 agreement for a transport service between Braintree town centre and Braintree Village (previously Freeport Designer Village). Although this service had long since ended, Members were advised that discussions were underway between the District Council and Landsec (owner of Braintree Village) on how a similar scheme could be implemented in the future.

The following actions were agreed in response to the discussion by Members:

- Councillor Cunningham agreed to report back to the Chairman with information in relation to safe cycle storage within the Braintree town centre on market and event days.

- The Chairman raised a question for the Economic Growth team which related to the cost of gas supplied to some market stall holders by the Council, whether there was an extra fee paid to the Council for this, and if such a charge would be increasing as part of the impacts of the Cost of Living Crisis. It was agreed that Economic Development should be asked to respond to this.

Further to the end of the discussion, the Chairman once again wished to express her grateful thanks to Natalie and Councillor Cunningham on behalf of the Committee for their attendance and contributions towards the Scrutiny Review.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.11pm.

Councillor Mrs D Garrod
(Chairman)