

**Councillor Robert Taylor – Cabinet Member for
Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy**

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22nd August 2024

Cllr Michael Bennett-Sylvester
Elected Member

Via email: Michael.sylvester@rotherham.gov.uk

Dear Cllr Bennett-Sylvester

Council Meeting – Wednesday 17th July 2024

I am writing in response to your supplementary question at Council regarding the outdoor markets and the possibility of continuing to operate the markets on the street. It is encouraging that the on-street markets have been popular, and it evidences that there is demand for a type of retailing offer that the Council is seeking to enhance through its significant capital investment in the market redevelopment. The redevelopment will provide a high quality, all-weather, purpose-built space for outdoor markets in the future, with better connection to the rest of the town centre, which we feel will best serve customers and traders alike.

As a development of this nature progresses, questions and considerations do arise that require an assessment of whether adaptations and amendment to the plan are required. We have carefully considered various factors relating to moving the outdoor market on street:

- There have been some positive benefits from the move onto the street and the number of traders attending has been good, although this is at least partially due to the financial support for traders during the redevelopment the Council has put in place in the form of reduced rents. Subsidising rents over the long term is challenging for the financial sustainability of the market operation. The support was provided only as an interim measure until the new market development is complete. Whether numbers would hold up at higher rentals is far from certain.
- The move on street has not been universally popular, particularly with our indoor market traders who have told us that the loss of footfall and trade they have experienced, as a result of closure of entrances and loss of connectivity with the outdoor covered market, has in their view been exacerbated by the expansion of on street trading.

- The logistical demands of setting up and dismantling the market on the street each day places a significant strain on our staff. The daily set up requires considerable manual labour and would prove increasingly burdensome and unsustainable over time. This will not only affect our operations but will impact the well-being of our employees who are currently heavily stretched and working hard to maintain the current arrangements on street. Fixing permanent stalls on street would restrict the use of the town centre for other purposes.
- Street markets are very weather dependent. Footfall is lower when weather conditions are poor but the impact on street markets is particularly acute and many of the casual traders, who make up a large part the street market, choose not to attend during heavy rain for example. In addition to this there are a number of days, (at least 3 in recent months), where markets have had to be cancelled due to high winds which pose a health and safety risk over the stability of on-street gazebos.
- Alongside the physical redevelopment of the market, we are reviewing the business operations of the service, including the offer and potential to bring in additional attractions and generate more revenue. This includes the scope to provide additional ad-hoc markets on street (food markets, continental markets, etc) that would complement and add to the core offer within the new market building – we do see street markets as an important part of the mix.

The completion of the market redevelopment presents an opportunity to offer a more stable and sustainable environment for both traders and customers. The scheme is being developed to accommodate the needs of our market community, providing improved infrastructure, better amenities and a more comfortable shopping experience that will help the market flourish and benefit the town centre as a whole. In the long-term I believe this will be welcomed by customers and traders. It therefore remains our preference that the move of the outdoor market remains a temporary measure although we are exploring the opportunity to add street markets where possible.

We have commissioned some external consultancy to advise us over the next few months on the best operating models for the market, utilising best practice from markets elsewhere in the country, and this will also look at the role of street markets.

I hope my response is helpful and I'd like to thank you for your interest and engagement over the future of the market which I understand is driven by a desire to see a successful and thriving town. Your co-operation and challenge is greatly welcomed as we move forward in this next chapter for Rotherham market.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Robert Taylor
Cabinet Member for Transport, Jobs and the Local Economy /Ward Councillor for Aughton & Swallownest