

Open letter to all Cambridge City Councillors, plus County Councillors tbc, plus MPs and press / radio

20 March 2021

From:
Cambridge Market Traders Association
Federation of Cambridge Residents' Associations
Friends of Cambridge Market
Living Streets Cambridge

Dear Councillor

Cambridge City Council is taking its draft Market Square Vision and Concept Design to its Environment Scrutiny Committee on 25th March, to be approved for Public Consultation from 17 May -25 June. The Vision and Concept Design was deferred from February, following legal challenge against the omission of the Quarterbridge report.

We are pleased to see that the Committee report now recognises that our Market Square and civic space is a matter for all Cambridge people, and for all the Councillors of all Wards who represent them. The proposed major repurposing of this whole space is also of great importance to people living beyond the city boundaries.

We are now able to see the Council's vision "to secure multi-million pound capital investment to transform the market square into a multi-functional outdoor space". Along with the draft Concept design, we are also now able to see the Quarterbridge report covering the operation of the market and the potential business case. It's not surprising that the Council didn't want to publish the Quarterbridge report, because it says that the project will not provide the returns needed to attract commercial investors. The Council is clearly going to have to think again about the financing of this project on which it has already spent £158,000, and has recently allocated a further £320,000 to carry forward the detailed design stages.

What the papers still don't include is any business plan for, or detail on, the feasibility and viability of the potential large scale events which are the Council's

claimed justification for demountable stalls. There are direct contradictions between Cllr Rosy Moore's statements (at Strategy and Resources Committee, and more recently on radio) that such events will be very rare, and the number of events outlined in the draft Concept design. This suggests regular live evening events from the start of May through to September, plus further events, including 3 weeks of Christmas night markets, in November and December.

The information on how such events will impact on market activities, individual existing traders and nearby businesses and residents is wholly inadequate. Worrying detail can be found in the Council's Stakeholder Feedback published in February <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/media/9121/market-square-project-concept-design-stakeholder-engagement-sessions-6-and-9-november-output.pdf>. The Council's answer to question 33 shows that any major staged event could involve taking setting up from mid-day on the day before the event, and that staging could be taken down overnight after it. This would mean both major disturbance to nearby residents overnight, as well as loss of 2 days' trading for the stalls affected each time such an event is held. "Christmas Night Markets" are also proposed, but these would have severe impacts on the existing traders at their busiest and most profitable time of the year.

The proposals also amount to the privatising of public space: any charging model for events would exclude the public from free access to our Market Square.

For very sound practical reasons, the traders are strongly opposed to demountable stalls (see the appended extracts "Key functional issues / stallholder needs" from <https://www.lifeoncambridgemarket.com/market-customs-and-practice>). The stalls the council are proposing are brand new and have not been trialled anywhere in the country, nor has any date been given for when prototypes of such stalls will be ready. Until these have been produced, trialled by the traders and proved to be viable for all kinds of trade and in all weathers, it is plainly wrong to spend any more public money on the "flexible space" which is at the heart of the Council's vision.

The Council proposes a 6-week online public consultation, with no mention of putting any information on or near the Market Square where the thousands of people who use the market might actually see it. Any such consultation will be premature before prototype stalls have been tried and tested in situ.

There is a solution which seems so obvious the moment you think about it: how about starting the 6-week public consultation when, and only when, a prototype stall has been set up on the Market Square? Traders would be able to directly assess its viability. The stall could display exhibition boards and take-away consultation material which would make the whole concept immediately available for consultation and comment to the whole market community of Cambridge and its hinterland.

Councillors, the Committee papers reveal stark contradictions and inadequacies. These proposals are not fit, in their current form, for purpose or for public consultation. The demountable stalls which are central to the Council's vision for a flexible space have to be subject to trials by traders, the public, and the weather.

(signed)

Bill Proud and Paul Neeve for Cambridge Market Traders Association
cmta2020@gmail.com

Wendy Blythe, on behalf of the Committee of the Federation of Cambridge Residents Associations (FeCRA) wendy.blythe.fecra@gmail.com

Glenys Self, Annabel Keeler, Valerie Neal, Kati Preston and John Preston for Friends of Cambridge Market Friendsofcambridgemarket@gmail.com

David Stoughton for Living Streets Cambridge
cambridgegroup@livingstreets.org.uk

Extracts from “Key functional issues / stallholder needs”

Adapted from <https://www.lifeoncambridgemarket.com/market-customs-and-practice>

1. WEATHER

Weather Issue 1: Wind

Cambridge Market Square must be understood in terms of the 'wind rose' (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wind_rose) arising from ambient weather, complicated by the interacting tunnelling effects due the surrounding buildings. These can amplify the effects of gusty winds. Failure to account for such considerations has meant that markets at e.g., Ely and St Ives must be closed down when winds above a certain speed are anticipated. This should be avoided in Cambridge. For traders, gusts and shifting winds are more problematic than steady winds. Stall design must be stable and protective against all of these, in both the horizontal and vertical planes. Having stalls that are fixed to the ground offers the most reliable stability against wind damage to stock (or to customers and staff). This need for stability will become ever greater with increasing numbers of increasingly intense weather events due to climate change.

2. DISPLAY

Display Issue 1: Strength and Security

A robust frame is essential to allow effective display of stock in both horizontal and vertical planes. These items may have substantial weight, which must be effectively supported in order to avoid dangerous and costly collapses of displayed goods. A wide range of items for display must be considered, including but not limited to:

- robust and heavy items (e.g., tools and accessories at a cycle-repair stall);
- delicate and perhaps costly jewellery, silver, ceramics or paper goods;
- heavy display shelves with rows of cannisters of dried beans, fruits, seeds;
- table-top displays of heavy fluid-filled containers of olives etc.
- tiered racks of clothing items on display for customers to browse
- tilted displays of fabrics, leather goods, or products from pelts/sheepskin;
- table-top displays of books to be browsed by customers;
- crates of fruit or vegetables;
- ice-filled trays for fish, meat or poultry.

3. OPERATION

Operational Issue 1: Set Up/Take Down

Stall holders need to be able to

- deliver stock for sale
- set up display
- take down display
- remove unsold stock

swiftly, and at the times that suit the running of their own particular business. The timing needs of e.g., a fish stall will differ from those of many other stalls.

Stallholders should be able to operate independently of each other, according to the demands of their individual businesses.