

Cambridge Market Closure – comments of Cambridge University ventilation expert, Dr Shaun Fitzgerald who sits on the government’s environmental working group for Covid-19

It is disappointing that all the market stalls have been closed by the Council. I understand the concerns about too many people in close proximity, but if this could be managed then shopping for basic provisions (such as fruit, veg, fish, meat, cheese) is safer in an open air environment than in enclosed shops. I would have expected the city council to just close stalls selling cooked food which is often eaten at tables nearby, and any market stalls selling non-essential retail items.

If closing non-essential retail stalls did not solve the problem of overcrowding in the essential food item stalls, then other measures could be chosen. For example, a queuing system for the market as a whole not dissimilar to those used by supermarkets.

Finally, if this didn’t work then it would seem a last resort of closing the whole market would be needed. However, it is disappointing that this last resort was used before other attempts.

I should add that face coverings should be recommended in the market itself as it might be difficult to guarantee a distance of at least 2m in all instances.

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I am happy for my email to be shared. Fundamentally it is about a balance of risks and managing these so that they are minimised if possible.

Closing the market entirely means that there are more people frequenting indoor environments to purchase essential food. It is up to policy makers, but if CCC felt that the takeaway stalls were the source of lingering and overcrowding then it might be worth them considering how to manage that. Closing the whole market is one option, but I don’t understand why that is the only option. Closing just the takeaway stalls is another. And as I said, crowd management with queuing for the market would be another.

I am not a policy maker and I understand that this is difficult. However, from a scientific point of view it does seem disappointing that we are effectively asking people to frequent environments where the ventilation rate will be lower – i.e. indoors rather than outdoors.