

TO: BRACKNELL TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION COMMITTEE
10 February 2014

FUTURE OF BRACKNELL MARKET AND WINCHESTER HOUSE
Assistant Chief Executive

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To decide the future of Bracknell Market and Winchester House following public consultation.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the Committee endorses Option 2, and that Bracknell Market be relocated to an outdoor location and that Winchester House be redeveloped.**
- 2.2 **That authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to vary the management agreement with Grenchurch to facilitate an outdoor market.**
- 2.3 **That the Council secures vacant possession of the market on a date to be determined by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Executive member for Regeneration and Economic Development**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To progress the Council's key priority of a Town Centre Fit for the 21st Century
- 3.2 To bring forward the comprehensive regeneration of Bracknell Town Centre as soon as possible in the current economic climate.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The options for the future of the Market and Winchester House were the basis for public consultation and are contained in the body of this report.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 5.1 Winchester House is one of the most prominent buildings in Bracknell town centre. The building has frequently been cited as a symbol of the urgent need for regeneration. Bracknell market is accommodated in the ground floor of the building and operates for two days per week. Occupancy has declined over many years, reflecting the difficult trading conditions in the town centre generally but also changes in shopping habits. The Bracknell Town Centre Masterplan developed in 2002 envisaged the redevelopment of the building for residential use, and the relocation of

the existing indoor market to a new, purpose-built market hall, on the southern side of a new public space to be created.

- 5.2 Members will recall that, following the credit crunch and subsequent recession in 2008 onwards, the plans for the town centre were reviewed. This was at a time when retail-led regeneration schemes across the country were being shelved; they were simply uneconomic to deliver. Although essentially the same scheme, areas of development were reduced by around 40% and other changes made to provide a phased development more appropriate to economic conditions, and to make delivery of a viable scheme more likely. This remains a key issue for regeneration in Bracknell and led to the outline planning permission for the town centre not incorporating a proposal for a new indoor market. This was not the only 'casualty' of the recession's impact on the town centre plans. Commercial development was also shelved for the medium term on the southern gateway; proposals remain to be developed for the Northern Retail Quarter East, pending the delivery of the NRQW; and the council's own plans for new accommodation were halted .

Re-development of Winchester House:

- 5.3 Winchester House belongs to Comer Homes, although the Council has a lease for an indoor market. Officers have been working for many years to find a way to encourage the redevelopment of the building. On 20 December 2013, a conditional Development Agreement was exchanged with Comer Homes which provides for the demolition of Winchester House in 2014 subject to the Council providing vacant possession of the Market Square and Market Hall. Members should note that this agreement is dependent on the decision on the future of the market and the Council is free to decide that the Market is not relocated. If vacant possession is not provided, the deal will fall and Winchester House will not be redeveloped. Therefore there is the need for the council to take a decision with regard to the opportunity presented by this conditional agreement.
- 5.4 On 17 December 2013, Comer Homes submitted reserved matters applications for the proposed new development and for the new Market Square.
- 5.5 In order to inform the decisions which Members must make on the future of the Market, the Council commissioned a public consultation, done by an independent market research organisation (QA Research). The consultation ran for eight weeks between 18 November 2013 and 13 January 2014. The consultation set out three, realistic options, highlighting the fact that the future of the market and Winchester House are linked:
- **Option 1:** Keep Bracknell Market and Winchester House as they currently stand and do not redevelop the site.
 - **Option 2:** Move Bracknell Market to an outside location and redevelop Winchester House.
 - **Option 3:** Close Bracknell Market and redevelop Winchester House.
- 5.6 The three options do not, of course, contain the original aspiration of a new covered market included in the 2002 master plan. In recent years the possibility of relocating the market to an alternative existing indoor location has been considered. However, no suitable alternative existing premises are available in or around Bracknell town centre, particularly given that the site of the Northern Retail Quarter is now cleared ready for development, thus restricting the total retail space in the town. In the future redeveloped town centre, the focus remains to maximise economic viability.

5.7 The potential to relocate the market to a brand new, purpose-built hall has also been examined. Unfortunately, this is not a realistic option. Officers have tried to find the cheapest possible indoor solution. Setting aside the difficulty in finding a site for a new hall, estimates of the cost of a suitable new building are in the order of £0.5m (excluding professional fees, site and fit out costs). This would be for the most basic accommodation, which would not be consistent with the step change in the quality of the built environment being sought through the regeneration (and which has been a frequent issue raised by residents over many years). Realistically, therefore, the cost of a new hall would be considerably more and this is unfortunately unaffordable in the present financial climate. In summary, the provision of a new market hall is not a realistic option. As a result it was thus discounted as being a misleading alternative to include in the consultation. Once again, the council's focus has been on realistic, economically viable solutions. This was explained in the preface to the consultation document.

Consultation response:

5.8 The research agency's report is attached at Appendix 1. 1050 responses were received either online or on paper copies of the questionnaire. Members should note that face to face surveys were also included in the process. The key survey question related to the three possible options for Winchester House and the market. These are set out in the table below:

Base	1042	100%
Option 1: Leave the market in its current location and retain Winchester House	45	4%
Option 2: Move the market to an outdoor space elsewhere in the town and redevelop the Winchester House site.	746	72%
Option 3: Close the market completely and redevelop the Winchester House site.	236	23%
No preference	7	1%
Don't know	8	1%

Key findings from the consultation by QA research:

5.9 The conclusions reached by QA Research are set out in section five, p27 of their report:

- 1 The consultation offered the opportunity for a wide range of groups to give their views. The survey was distributed to a wide range of local stakeholders including residents, market users, traders and businesses and more than 1000 completed surveys were returned.

- 2 There is clear support for the principle of redeveloping Winchester House. Almost nine out of ten residents support replacing Winchester House and this proposal was also supported by the majority of other respondent groups.
- 3 The majority (89%) of residents did not support the option to keep Bracknell Market and Winchester House in its current location. In fact 81% gave this option the lowest score of zero out of ten. The option was considered unpalatable because it would mean that Winchester House would remain in place, reflecting the negative views about this building that currently exist.
- 4 There is clear support for relocating the market outdoors, supported by almost three quarters of residents. There was a belief from some that this would reinvigorate the market. It is notable that residents (45%) were more likely to say that they would visit the market more than they do at the moment.
- 5 There were mixed opinions about the option to close the market and provide no alternative. Whilst half of all residents did not support this option, a third said that they would. Generally, those that supported it liked the fact that it would mean that Winchester House would be demolished, but those that did not support the option expressed concern about the loss of the market.
- 6 When asked to choose between the three options for Winchester House, there was a clear preference for relocating Bracknell Market to an outdoor location. Overall 71% of residents, and 72% of all respondents, chose this option. Of the remainder, most supported option 3 (to close the market and provide no alternative). Few preferred to keep Bracknell Market and Winchester House in its current location.

Other responses received:

- 5.10 In addition to the questionnaire, eight emails and one letter have been received making representations (although one email related to technical problems with the online survey). The issues raised are addressed in Appendix 2.
- 5.11 Separately from the formal public consultation, the market traders organised a petition containing 1213 signatures (927 collated by the stallholders and 286 on-line). This was considered at Council on 22 January 2014 which referred the issue to the Regeneration Committee for consideration. The petition is attached at Appendix 3 and echoes the view raised by a small number of respondents to the formal consultation viz that the consultation questions were wrongly drafted or that the Council should have offered an additional option of relocating the market to a new indoor location. Members may recall that in response to questions at Council, the issue of storage was highlighted. The permanent outdoor market solution will explore ways to provide necessary storage.

Analysis:

- 5.12 The responses received through the consultation have been carefully considered. In addition the points raised by the market traders' petition have also been taken into account. Appendix 2 sets out a detailed response to the points raised by email and letter. The most prominent issues raised are analysed below:

The Council's consultation was flawed and a different set of questions should have been asked, de-coupling the market from Winchester House, and offering the option of an indoor market:

- 5.13 This issue is at the heart of the Market Traders' petition, as well as being reflected in some of the individual correspondence. In response, it is clear that the future of Winchester House is wholly related to that of the market. It is impossible for Winchester House to be redeveloped without the relocation of the market. In addition, the Council has been clear about offering options that are realistically capable of being delivered. Paragraph 5.7 sets out the reasons why there is no realistic prospect of providing a brand new purpose-built market hall. This was also highlighted in the preface to the consultation document.
- 5.14 The petition seeks to ask a set of new questions. It is unclear what the outcome of a new consultation would be, notwithstanding the fact that such an exercise would involve an option that is not realistically capable of being delivered.
- 5.15 The consultation itself was carried out by an independent consultation agency, ensuring that the process of securing and recording responses has been objective. Therefore, the outcome of the consultation can be relied on to inform the council's decision on the future of the market. The full report by QA is appended to this report.

The market should either be moved or closed, and Winchester House should be redeveloped (options 1 or 2)

- 5.16 95% of respondents have chosen one of the options seeking change to the current market. This comprises 72% of respondents who want the market to be moved to an outdoor space elsewhere in the town and Winchester House to be redeveloped, and 23% who would simply prefer to close the market completely and see Winchester House redeveloped.

Conclusion

- 5.17 The impact of relocation or closure on the market traders is not to be underestimated. Bracknell market provides a valuable addition to the range of food and retail available in the town centre, especially during a time of significant transition and reduced choice for residents. A new indoor market would be an attractive solution for the market traders. However, the unfortunate reality is that this is not a realistic option.
- 5.18 QA Research's conclusions are clear and summarised at paragraph 5.9 above. In short, 72% of respondents (and some of the individual emails) are supporting a market in the town. Option 2 would provide for a new market, with the potential to offer a range of goods and broaden the retail and food/drink offer in the town centre.
- 5.19 In the light of the consultation response, the committee is recommended to follow option 2, ie to move the market to an outdoor space elsewhere in the town centre and to redevelop Winchester House. All of the current market traders will be offered the opportunity to take space in the new temporary outdoor market and in the eventual permanent location.

Next steps:

- 5.20 Should the committee choose to proceed with Option 2, then officers will start work to secure vacant possession of the Market Hall. A planning application would be submitted to provide a temporary outdoor Market in the High Street for the period until the Winchester House redevelopment and new market square is complete. Depending on the design proposed in this planning application, it may be necessary for consent to be secured from adjoining retail tenants. Subject to being granted

planning permission and any other necessary approvals, the market would then move to a permanent location in the new Market Square. In preparation for this move, the traders would be given three months' notice (exceeding the legal requirement for a four-week period).

- 5.21 The agreement with the existing market management company (Grenchurch) would need to be amended to manage a new outdoor market. Authority is sought for such a variation.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Nothing to add to the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The net cost of Bracknell Market is £14,000 p.a. Closure of the Market will, therefore, realise a modest saving. Costs associated with the relocation of the Market to an outdoor location (and their proposed funding) will be reported to a future meeting of the Committee.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Retention of the existing market and the provision of a new market all add to the variety and choice of shopping for residents. The option to close the market altogether would reduce such choice.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The redevelopment of Winchester House is a key element in the delivery of the comprehensive regeneration of Bracknell town centre, one of the council's overarching priorities.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 Set out in the report

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Online survey, printed questionnaire and face to face surveys.

Representations Received

- 7.3 Set out in the report.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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Appendix 1:

Report from QA Research into consultation results.

Appendix 2

Issues raised in emails/letter in response to the consultation:

	Respondent	Issues raised	Response
1	Mrs J Tidy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest strongly at the wording of the consultation. • Option should be given for an indoor market. • Traders have said many times that they are unable to function without storage for their goods. Therefore offering only an outdoor market will effectively close the market. • The market is the only place that sells haberdashery, wool of decent quality, fabric, ribbons, buttons, knitting needles, patchwork tools, sewing machines etc, the vast majority of which could not be sold in an area open to the elements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultation options were realistically capable of being delivered. • Haberdashery is available for a range of alternative retail sources.
2	Jennifer Bagshaw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough options given • Cannot accept that it is impossible to have a new indoor market. • If the council had the enthusiasm for an indoor market, the space would be found. • A market in decent accommodation rather than the current crumbling, damp, cold, draughty space, it would attract good quality stalls that would be a bonus for their neighbours. • A market a lift ride away would help to sell the new flats. • The council should persuade Comer homes to provide space for a market. • The market could be accommodated in the old Bentalls store. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultation options were realistically capable of being delivered. • Alternative indoor space is not available (see paragraph 5.z of the main report) • Comer Homes's development proposals do not contain a new indoor market hall; it would be inconsistent with the plans for new residential development. • The old Bentalls store is still in operation by Bentalls. In

			the future, this building will be at the retail heart of the town centre and will be prime retail space.
3	Jan Guiver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite strong local comment, the survey has not been changed to take notice of the stall holders. • The council should make provision for the relocation of the market to a covered area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultation options were realistically capable of being delivered.
4	Tim Hodgson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since you have demolished half of Bracknell town centre, local people now have nowhere to obtain goods and food other than from corporate chain stores. No doubt this is part of your plan to outlaw and make obsolete people in the poorer demographic. • People in charge of environment design have an obligation to provide for other people than middle and upper class. Removing the only affordable food source for the less well off will most likely further add to the feeling of anxiety and oppression that has become more apparent since the removal of all the smaller and lower end traders from the town centre. • How will the poor going to be able to find affordable food in your plans for Bracknell town centre once you have got rid of the market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option 2 proposes a new outdoor market which would meet the needs of everybody listed in this response.
5	PA and CR Klesel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This has not been offered openly. Why bind the future for the market in with that of a derelict building? Surely it is not beyond the wit of the Council to include arrangements for a covered market on an alternative site, but within the redevelopment, which is what traders and residents want. • A local authority with a developed policy on waste reduction should be welcoming opportunities for local produce and reduced packaging that is offered and encouraging the market to thrive rather than allowing the "big four" to dominate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The future of the market and Winchester House are bound together. No redevelopment of the derelict building is possible unless the market is relocated. • Alternative indoor space is not available (see paragraph 5.z of the main report).

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We wonder whether our town-twinning partners would value their markets in the same way. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local produce and reduced packaging would still be possible through a new outdoor market. The Borough Council is not twinned with any other towns.
6	James Beeston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prefer Option 2 or Option 3. In a lot of respects I don't care much about what they do as long as that awful eyesore of the 3M building is removed. It is a terrible blot on the landscape of Bracknell and will look awful next to the regenerated town centre. 	Noted
7	Bracknell Regeneration Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully support Option2. This is in line with current thinking backed by the Government, the Mary Portas initiatives, and work done by the Association of Town Centre Management to support markets and town centres. BRP considers it extremely important to have the vibrant market in the town to drive footfall and provide a service to the local catchment. As the lead developer of the regeneration of Bracknell town centre, we consider it essential that Winchester House is demolished and redeveloped as quickly as possible. The building in its current state will have an adverse impact on leasing the regeneration. 	Noted
8	Mrs KE Bates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bracknell needs a market. Where else can you buy haberdashery, sewing machine materials, reasonably priced vegetables, meat products and pet food, café etc and raise money for charity. Build a purpose-built indoor market on the site at the back of the Point especially now that the opposite side is being updated. 	

Appendix 3

Market Traders' Petition:

Appendix 4

Consultation Document