

MJ Awards 2020 – Innovation in Property and Asset Management (Markets Team)

The decline of the traditional town centre has been a cause for considerable concern since 2008. Slower consumer spending, the rise in online shopping and cuts to local authority budgets means the number of empty shops and amenities has grown. Tameside, and in particular our primary town of Ashton-under-Lyne, also faces a number of specific economic and social challenges. Pay and skill levels are below the Greater Manchester and national average, and Ashton as an economic centre is less productive than other towns of similar size in the region. Healthy life expectancy, childhood obesity and smoking rates in Tameside are also significantly worse than the national average, with an accompanying impact on healthcare costs and service demand.

In order to address these issues we have chosen, despite continuing financial uncertainty, to develop an ambitious strategic vision to underpin our approach to transforming our town centres, public buildings and communal spaces into engines of economic and social improvement. Known as “Vision Tameside”, it brings together a number of strands of investment and development including; rationalising the council estate, enhancing our public service offer, raising the skill levels and health outcomes of our residents, and improving our digital infrastructure. It is also the catalyst for an enriched gateway into Ashton town centre, creating a new public realm and pedestrian routes to link the historic Market Square and an under-construction transport interchange.

Tameside’s primary indoor market hall, based in Ashton-under-Lyne, has won a number of awards including “Britain’s Greenest Market” from the National Market Traders Federation (NMTF), and “Britain’s Favourite Market” and “Market Team of the Year” from the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA). As well as encouraging young entrepreneurs into business and increasing footfall to more traditional retail outlets, it is understood that markets can also play a key role in the regeneration of the local area. Over the past few years, Tameside Council’s Markets Team has led the way in Greater Manchester in shaping our offer. As well as working closely with the existing 80 stall holders and other partners to continue the successful operation of Ashton Market, the work of the Markets Team feeds into a number of the council’s wider objectives, including improving the mental health and life expectancy of our residents, protecting our shared environment, and strengthening links with local partners in the private, public and voluntary sector.



Tameside's healthy life expectancy continues to lag behind its neighbours in Greater Manchester, and delivering a significant improvement in this is a key goal of the council's corporate objectives. This cannot be achieved without giving our residents the opportunities to make healthier choices around their life and well-being. Working with other council services and external partners, the Markets Team has opened the Tameside Wellbeing Corner. Located in a vacant unit within the market hall, the Wellbeing Corner provides space for a variety of services from organisations such as Be Well Tameside, Active Tameside, Healthy Tameside and the NHS to build service visibility and engage with the public around health and social issues and consultations within a community setting.

Services offered to date have included free blood pressure checks, signing people up for support to stop smoking or drinking, mental health drop-ins and consultations on the Council and Clinical Commissioning Group budget for the next financial year. The Wellbeing Corner also has a private room if visitors wish to speak to an advisor about something confidential. Placing the Wellbeing Corner in the market means that it is located in the centre of the community; and services based in the Wellness Corner estimate that they have received 10 times more footfall and interest than if they had been based somewhere like the Hospital, GP surgery or council offices.

Another scheme that has met with success is our Kids Cookery Club, a series of monthly events which teach six children per session, up to the age of 12, how to make healthy dishes such as pizzas, vegetarian burgers and fish cakes using only fresh, natural ingredients. The cookery lessons are delivered by prominent local demonstration chef Joan Borage, and 94% of the ingredients used during the sessions are sourced from our own market traders. Since the Cookery Club began in June 2019, a number of local children have been educated about nutrition and cooking, encouraging them to try new things and equipping them with valuable life skills.

A second key objective in our Corporate Plan is making sure that we are meeting our obligations to protect the environment, both locally within Tameside and feeding into the wider Greater Manchester Environment Plan. In co-operation with the council's Environmental Services, the Markets Team have played a supporting role in driving forward Tameside's green agenda by encouraging behaviour change within the market and in the wider community. A particular focus has been the elimination, wherever possible and reasonable, of single-use plastics in the market. With the agreement of the market traders, Ashton Market has been the first in the country to introduce compostable bags as standard. This pioneering initiative has also been supported by the Markets Team, working closely with the council's Communications service, producing letters and FAQs on the change and what it means for both market traders and members of the public. In addition, all of the market traders with tap water on their stalls have signed up to the Refill scheme, allowing residents to use their facilities to refill their water bottles for free. This has reduced the amount of plastic bottles being purchased as well as promoting healthier options around lifestyle and hydration.



Following on from these initiatives, the Markets Team has been working closely with the Council's Growth Service to investigate and develop further opportunities for cutting costs, waste and carbon footprint. As part of this, the Markets Team are in the early stages of talks with Bio-Evolution, a biotech manufacturing company based in the South of England. Bio-Evolution are developing Be Block, an innovative small scale, anaerobic digester unit which, when coupled with a fuel cell, is capable of converting food waste into ethanol and then into electricity. It is believed that Ashton Market Hall would be an ideal host for a prototype of the technology, using the existing food waste generated by the market traders to test the capacity of the units to generate sufficient energy to economically power the facility. As a formal member of the research consortium, it is understood that the Be Block unit would be provided at no cost. The proposed subscription fee in the companies' business model would be waived, ensuring that participation in the project carries a minimum financial risk to the Council. It is hoped that the Markets Team will be able to engage with Bio-Evolution and their partners in the near future to support the prototype Be Block and their bids for further development funding.

As well as supporting these objectives in the council's Corporate Plan, the Markets Team works to ensure the economic viability of our markets in the long-term. An emphasis has been put on attracting younger residents as customers and traders, which in many cases has involved going beyond the traditional retail-driven market model and into other areas such as food, culture and wellbeing. This is supported by a series of learning sessions provided by the Markets Team to traders, covering subjects such as business development and social media marketing.

A number of projects have been launched to introduce young people to markets, achieving a balance between the market's heritage and the needs of a new generation of customers and traders. This has involved developing a close relationship with our local education providers, in particular Tameside College, in order to plan a series of joined-up events. From December 16-17, business students in the College hosted a Christmas Market in the outdoor market ground, selling a variety of hand-crafted Christmas themed products such as cupcakes, baubles, keyrings, mince pies and sweet cones to the public. The money raised was donated to two charities; Cancer Research UK and local charity Finding Rainbows, which

offers support to anyone in Tameside who has suffered the loss of a baby, child or pregnancy.



As part of a national scheme driven forward by the NMTF, Tameside also introduced its first Youth Market in June 2019. The event was a great success with three of the young traders being selected to appear on the BBC and represent Tameside at the National Youth Market Final in Stratford-upon-Avon. Further partnership working with the Tameside College business department and the NMTF is currently being undertaken with a view to hosting an expanded version of Youth Market this year. This will see around 50 young traders selling various commodities and providing entertainment. Tameside College will also be working closely with the council's Communications and Design services to create unique branding for the event. Other plans in development include the College's Tourism students operating a pop-up travel agent within the Market Hall, and the introduction of a work experience programme across some of the businesses and traders.

The expansion of the cultural offer has been driven by the transforming of vacant stalls at the rear of the market hall into an art space. Created in cooperation with the Market Team and the Council's cultural and museums services, following its opening in November 2019 the space has showcased the work of the local art community as well as artworks and exhibits from Tameside's Museums and Galleries. In operational terms, the two aims of the art space are to attract footfall to the back of the market hall, and to bring in customers with a cultural interest who may not normally visit. Students, local artists and creative businesses are also given the opportunity to showcase their creative talents and sell their work. Less than four months after its opening, enough bookings have been made to cover the next two years. Traders have given positive feedback on the impact for their businesses, and the Markets Team are currently speaking with our Cultural Services to further discuss the art spaces' potential.



The work of the Tameside Markets Team has been recognised both within the borough and among professional bodies as an example of good practice. Graham Wilson, NAMBA Chief Executive, says *“Tameside have always been one of the country’s leading market providers demonstrating innovation and passion in the way the service is provided”* while Joe Harrison, NMTF Chief Executive, stated, *“We at the NMTF and myself in particular, feel the Tameside Markets Team have done such an excellent job, not only in engaging with the initiatives that we as a National Body for market traders have developed but also many, many other issues that deal with the community in which the Tameside markets operate We as an organisation feel that the local markets should be at the very heart of their communities and engage with every aspect of that community in their everyday lives. The team at Tameside have definitely endeavoured in pursuing and developing many environmental, community and health initiatives that make them stand out as an ideal team to fulfil all the above”*.

Over the past 12-18 months the Tameside Council Markets Team has been able to redesign the structure of the services; establishing strong relationships with other services in the Council and working in a joined up manner with partners such as Tameside College, national Market Trader bodies and private sector organisations. This important work is reinforcing Tameside Council’s commitment to the successful delivery of its market offer, and is a significant contributing factor in the wider work the Council is undertaking around the rejuvenation of the borough’s town centres, improving the health and wellbeing of our residents, protecting and improving our shared environment (both built and natural) and giving our young people the skills and experience they need to have the best start in life. Our Markets Team will continue to deliver a world class market service that is responsive to both the needs of our residents and the wider objectives of Tameside Council.