Blyth Market Regeneration Programme (Trader Incentive Scheme)

Initial Brief

A joint project commenced with Northumberland County Council and elected members of Blyth Town Council, to increase the number of traders attending Friday and Saturday Markets in Blyth. There was a desire to improve the perceived image of the market on these days and attract a better calibre of market trader. It was hoped that this in turn would then attract people back into the town centre of Blyth again and improve footfall in the area in general.

The framework of the proposal was to offer free rent to all traders, offer financial and other incentives for new traders, and to intensify efforts to recruit those new traders.

A Communications Plan was developed by the Northumberland County Council Communications team. The PR and marketing activity highlighted reasons for people to come to Blyth on market days.

A small scale events programme was ran in tandem with the markets. Efforts were made to put on smaller scale events that would be likely to help the markets themselves rather than take away potential customers from them. The events budget for the entire project was only £2000 so focus was placed on attracting local entertainers, where there was likely to be some mutual benefit.

Budget:

The total project budget was agreed at £91,500. £22,500 is lost income from existing traders and that was written off by Northumberland County Council (NCC). Partners (Blyth Town Council) agreed to contribute £69,000. This was allocated to trader incentives (£37,000), staffing (£20,000) and events and marketing (£12,000).

Key Deliverables

The key deliverables of the project were

- To increase trader numbers
- To improve the image of the market to the wider public
- To improve footfall on the market via a targeted communications campaign

- To limit the number of second hand goods traders on the market and attract a better quality of trader
- To attract 'staple' traders to the market (fruit, vegetables, meat, fish, sweet treats etc) that would be likely to bring repeat business to the market
- To attract more bespoke and craft traders to the market
- To align stalls to create the appearance of a more orderly market
- To run cost effective events programmes that would be likely to attract people to the market and create atmosphere around the market (but not detract from the stalls themselves)
- To lessen anti-social behaviour on the market via a multi-agency approach and a direct staff presence on the market
- To tackle misuses of the market (traffic violations, political canvassing during elections, ASB etc)

Initial Issues

There were many misuses of the market encountered when the project first commenced. Bad habits had become deep-seated and many issues required addressing immediately. These issues included:

- The market being used for political canvassing during purdah.
- Homeless people selling goods without Public Liability Insurance.
- Numerous moving traffic offences and parking violations.
- The sale of second hand electrical goods by traders (this is against NCC's own policy).
- The marketplace being used as a meeting point for antisocial teens, even while the market was ongoing.
- Drug users meeting and conducting business there.
- Traders erratically spaced across the market, and goods being traded from the floor.
- Low trader morale and a hostile reception towards NCC and it's staff.

Strategy

A comprehensive canvassing strategy took place to encourage regional market traders to trade at Blyth, initially by distributing leaflets about the incentive scheme on other local markets. This was an effective strategy as it allowed for a full personalised pitch to be made at the time.

Efforts were made to canvass at local indoor markets (Grainger Market etc) and local shops as well. It was envisaged that some local shops may have excess stock at times they would like to sell, and the market project would represent an

attractive proposition to trade in a new area with few overheads. Local fruit and vegetable shops were extensively targeted as it was envisaged that a core of staple produce traders (fruit and veg, meat, fish, bread, confectionary etc) would be hugely beneficial in helping to attract new footfall to the market.

In an attempt to attract a new seafood trader to the market, extensive canvassing was done at other markets, local seafood shops and even at local fishing ports. Even though with an improved incentive package potentially on offer, the intensive search for a reliable seafood trader was not successful.

This strategy was repeated on a regular basis until almost all regional traders would have been made aware of the scheme. With hindsight, were we to repeat this process, I think there would be definite merit in giving the 'free rent' on the market equal billing with the incentive scheme itself. There were some traders who seemed distinctly reluctant to hand over their bank details to a local authority, and several new traders attended the market without even claiming the incentive on offer.

A typical market during the project in reasonable weather



We did however through a variety of methods manage to get a large selection of local traders to give Blyth Market a try. Some we felt did not give it long enough to become established on the market, but a comprehensive list of the products we have attracted over the course of the project are as follows:

Bargain groceries
Cups, placards and music merchandise
Confectionary
Quizzes and birthday gifts
Photographic prints
Gadgets
Soaps and bath bombs
Workwear and t-shirts
Comics, collectibles and toys
Punjabi kebabs
Sausages
Crystals, antique coins and jewellery
Upcycled furniture
Crafts and homemade gifts
Greek confectionery
Olives, cheeses and sweet treats
Vapes and smoking paraphernalia
Stone ornaments
Second hand books
Bespoke wooden furniture
Fruit and veg
Handmade chocolates
Flowers and gifts
Craft beer
T-shirts and t-shirt printing
Cakes and sweet treats
Jewellery making equipment
Rotisserie chicken
Chilli sauces
Perfume
Shoes
Pies
Pease Pudding
Coffee

Advertising

Here are some examples of the various types of advertising that we used in an attempt to bring more footfall to the market. Feedback that we had, was mainly that the artwork used was very effective.

Flyer advertising the scheme to market traders



Permanent advertising affixed to the toilet block on the market square



Bus advertising



Targeted bus stop advertising in Blyth (outskirts and main roads into Blyth)



Other advertising methods used have included -

Banners for Artisans market
Business Cards
Friday/Saturday market banners
Radio Advertising
Bin lorry advertising (no advertising cost)
Bus shelter advertising
Posters for local pubs and tourist hotspots

For all it is acknowledged that the advertising campaign for the new Blyth Market has been very effective, it is currently thought that advertising for the project may have reached saturation point for conventional advertising, with a limited new audience able to be reached at this stage. We feel it may be prudent to ring fence some of the advertising budget to promote forthcoming events on the market, that will be designed to improve footfall.

General Management of the Market

Efforts were made to be on the market by 7:30 am each market day. This way we could attempt to influence and shape the market as traders arrived. With many traders not making much money, and many local markets directly competing for a finite number of local traders, we decided to allow some established traders to remain in the spots where they thought they could make the most money. When new traders came to the market, we then attempted to align them with the other traders and 'fill in the gaps'. This strategy has helped us to retain our core of traders (about 10 or so) who were regular traders on the market and align new traders who were selling similar products.

A row of aligned new traders on the market attracted by the incentive scheme



Having a presence on the market has allowed us to manage trader disputes as they happen. Efforts have also been made to attempt to coach traders in how best to set up a stall, to maximise the customer experience.

Efforts have also been made on a daily basis on the market to chat to shoppers and explain what we were trying to achieve with the incentive scheme. This effectively acted as personalised PR campaign and helped to gain public support for what we are trying to do. While all the comments have not been positive, it has certainly helped us to assess current public perception and help us determine what we might be able to do better.

Providing the Loan Use of Gazebos and Weights

There are four serviceable gazebos that are stored in the pump house on the market place in Blyth. We decided to make use of these and offer the loan use of them to new traders (and some existing traders on exceptionally wet weather days as well). This proved to be an attractive proposition to new traders, as many, still not yet knowing the viability of becoming a full time market trader, are reluctant to commit to buying a gazebo of their own.

With the weather being windy even for Blyth this year, we have also loaned out weights to some of our other traders. This allows them to weight down their stall, and helps them to be able to trade more safely in windy conditions.

For all we only have one member of staff on the market, we have discussed the possibility of using other gazebos normally reserved for teenage markets on Blyth. This could help to improve the aesthetic look of the market and help to attract even more new traders. Traders are now in the habit of helping the Market Officer to erect the gazebos, so with just a little more effort, it is expected that many more gazebos in a much better condition, could easily be erected and taken down.

Street Food

Efforts have also been made to attract suitable food traders to the market. Street food traders are a popular draw to most modern markets, with many markets having their own designated food area. We would have very much liked to have had a mini food area within Blyth market, with the potential to expand it further. Extensive canvassing was done primarily at both Tyneside and the Quayside Market in Newcastle to see if we could attract traders. Other traders had reported that food traders at these markets had reached saturation point, so there was possible scope to persuade some of these traders to come to Blyth. We successfully managed to attract a range of food traders including kebabs, pies and hot rotisserie chicken. Regrettably though, on the whole they did not make the money required to make the operation viable for them. We even increased the incentive for the kebab trader as an incentive to retain him, as the feedback received about his products had been excellent. The eventual result though was that he felt he was priced out of the local picture by the cheaper chain-based options in the immediate vicinity. The proximity of eateries such as Greggs, Subway and Dominos Pizza is always going to provide competition for street food traders on Blyth Market, who may not be able to compete with the prices that they can offer due to economies of scale. Street food traders at other markets can be helped by a captive audience with little competition. There is also the economic reality currently of a town like Blyth, where some people may feel that a higher price for a better quality of product is simply not affordable to them. On a positive note, a cake trader, Once upon a Tier, has managed to build up a loyal customer base and continues to attract people to the market for her wares specifically. She has ran a weekly Facebook competition to win cake that has attracted new customers to the market. She has also helped to raise awareness of her presence on the market by donating cakes to the Briardale Centre for the Homeless in Blyth and a local food bank. This is all very good PR for the market in general.

Monthly Trader Statistics

Here are the detailed trader monthly visit statistics for the entire reporting period to date (to the end of February). Please note that the total trader statistics also include the new trader visits as well.

Month	Total Trader Visits	New Trader Visits	Trading Days In Month	Average Trader Visits Per Market	Average New Trader Visits Per Market
April	82	10	5	16.4	2
May	102	13	8	12.75	1.6
June	119	17	9	13.2	1.9
July	144	35	9	16	3.8
August	144	30	8	18	3.6
September	196	52	10	19.6	5.2
October	148	45	8	18.5	5.6
November	164	41	8	20.5	5.1
December	152	42	10	15.2	4.2
January	112	29	8	14	3.6
February	136	40	8	17	5
Totals	1499	354		16.5	3.8

Compared to data from 2016 we have seen a **30.13%** increase in trader visits to the market for the same period.

Entertainment on the Market

The entertainment budget for the market was not large but we still managed to provide some regular entertainment that people on the market were able to enjoy. The traders themselves are generally negative about entertainment on the market however as they tend to see it as something that distracts people from their stalls.

We worked closely with local musician Dave Cowan to bring a variety of local buskers to the market. We called this 'In The Market For Live Music' and it proved to be quite popular with locals who came down especially to watch some

turns. It also helped to bring people to the market from other areas such as Wallsend and North Shields. This was also not as unpopular with the traders as some of the other entertainment we brought to the market, as Dave was briefed to keep the music acoustic and low key. We asked Dave for something that would add to the market and not take people away. When Northumberland Pipe band played, even though they were asked to do three 20 minute slots (one per hour), we still received a lot of complaints from traders, many claiming that in the time they were on, they took no money at all.

We managed to bring the Pearl of Africa Children's Choir to the market who went down extremely well. They also managed to bring large crowds into the market. The advised afterwards that the public in Blyth had donated generously to their cause and said that they would be very keen to attend again this summer.

We also worked with local dance troupe Bad Apples to provide some street dance performances and provide some activities for children in the school holidays. This was moderately successful but was probably not as good as value for money as some of our other performances.

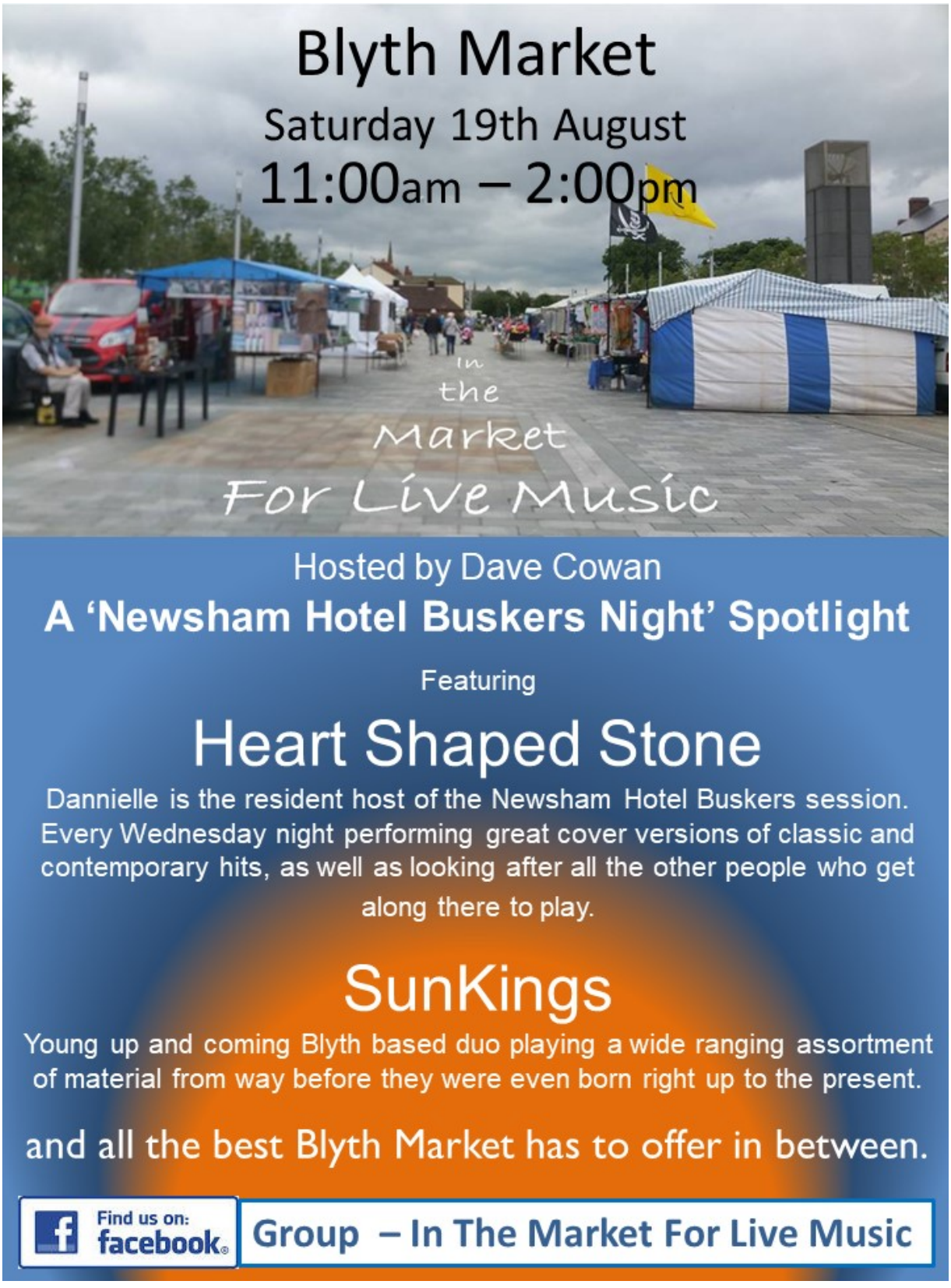
We have had interactive educational features on the market with busses from government organisations coming on to deliver information campaigns. These have included the NHS, Northumbrian Water, The DVLA and children's dentists. The RSPB have also visited the market to deliver promotional campaigns about wildlife.

We have worked with Blyth Town Council to help with the carnival event and also to facilitate entertainment in the run up to Christmas as well as the Christmas lights switch on.

We also have worked closely with other community groups to provide entertainment on the market. We worked with Jack Antonio's Ice Cream parlour to help them with their local fun day. We got the go ahead a little later in the day than ideal that they definitely wanted to go ahead with the event (a lesson learned for the future), but it was worth the effort. They provided a range of additional stalls that supplemented the market very well, and despite some very windy weather we still received some positive feedback about the day. We would be very keen to work with them on similar events in the future.

We worked too with the Blyth Development Trust to deliver their Christmas Market event. Although paperwork regarding planning and risk assessments was received later than we would have liked, we worked hard with The Development Trust to make sure that the event was a success. Some issues had to be proactively managed on the day, but altogether the feedback received about the event was extremely positive.

A typical 'In the Market for Live Music' poster



The Pearl of Africa Children's Choir performing in Blyth



Perceived Measures of Success

It was envisaged that a definitive measure of success would be 30 traders regularly turning up to trade at Blyth Market by the end of the project. Although we have managed to steadily increase the number of traders (and just as importantly, halt the trend of losing them), we have fallen short of the target we set ourselves at project commencement.

That said, we have managed to retain a core of traders who appear now to have committed to the market long-term. If the project were to continue it is anticipated that we could again attract and retain this number in the coming year. If we are able to do this it is thought that we would be able to get very close to our perceived measure of success.

Another measure of success was to improve footfall on the market. Footfall figures provided by the Keel Row Shopping Centre have shown that footfall is still not as high as we would have liked, but encouragingly it does not appear to have fallen further either. It is felt that steady progress is being made and that public perceptions of the market are slowly starting to change as well.

Factors That Have Prevented Us From Reaching Our Target

Speaking to many people who shop on the market, disposable income levels in the town appear to have diminished in recent years. Given that the percentage level of public sector employees in the north east is the highest in England (according to a 2014 parliament research briefing on the parliament UK website), poorer towns like Blyth in the area are likely to feel the effects of government austerity programmes the most. The diminished spending power of locals is a hugely important factor in why many traders have reported poor business on the market. Some traders selling non-essential items or luxury items on the market (crafts and pictures for example) have reported that they made no sales at all. This meant that even with the initial £25 a day offered by the trader incentive scheme, trading on the market was still not a viable financial option for them.

Trader numbers in general are also diminishing. According to the National Association of British Market Authorities, from 2009 to 2016 the number of market traders in the UK dropped from approximately 55,000 to 32,000. The Office for National Statistics however indicated that level of self-employment in the UK increased from 3.8 million in 2008 to 4.6 million in 2015. With this in mind, a targeted effort was made to attract the newly self employed in the region by pitching to both the local Job Centre and the New Enterprise Allowance Scheme in Ashington. Leaflets about the scheme were left in both offices and both organisations agreed to promote the scheme to potentially interested clients. No new traders however were derived from these sources.

Many local market traders nowadays tend to be 'hobbyist' by nature. This means that market trading is not their sole source of income. Blyth Market is not as viable a proposition to these types of trader as many do not have their own gazebos and stalls. If a resource could be found to both provide and erect suitable stalls then these types of trader would be easier to attract. Discussions are ongoing within NCC to see if some more can be sourced.

According to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics Local Government employment is at the lowest since records began in 1999. As with a lot of other services likely to be deemed non-essential, it cannot be denied that austerity programmes are likely to having continued impacts on local markets.

A Year of Extremely Wet and Windy Weather

Inclement weather can massively affect Blyth Market. The wind is predominantly westerly or north-westerly at Blyth, meaning that it tends to blow forcefully down the market, offering very little shelter for both the traders and the customers. Very wet and windy weather can often see a hugely diminished market.

We have made a point in recording what the weather has been like for each market since the project began, and it is clear from this that we have had very bad luck where the weather has been concerned. Even the fine weather days have often been accompanied by very strong winds, and it is the wind that impacts upon our market traders the most.

This also has impacted on our advertising of the time that the Market is on. We advertise the market until 3:30pm but sometimes it is unreasonable to expect traders to stay to that time in inclement weather, especially when they have made little money previously. In fact if we were to insist on making traders stay to this time, it is likely to impact on their willingness to trade at the market at all. A common sense approach has been taken in allowing traders to leave the market early, on a case by case basis.

Communication Strategies Via Social Media

Social media is an extremely useful and cost effective promotion tool that is utilised by a variety of organisations nowadays. Promotion of Blyth Market by methods such as Twitter and Facebook however can be difficult in an official capacity in real time as communications teams aren't always instantly accessible. In order to be able to promote the market in real time, we are exploring the possibility of setting up some unofficial accounts as a promotional tool. Studies have shown that the timing of tweets and Facebook statuses is crucial when using these mediums, and setting up unofficial accounts may provide us with timely opportunities to raise awareness about good things happening on our markets in real time.

Efforts have been made as well to encourage existing traders to use social media as a promotional tool. Some of our new traders have very good social media strategies and it most certainly helps their trade and the market as a result. Social media savvy stall holders will often see people making a special visit to their stall to buy their products, and it is likely that will buy something else from the market when they are there. If more of our traders were to utilise this free service, then it could massively help the market in both in terms of promotion and attracting new customers. Traders that currently use social media report it to be a cost-effective marketing tool that certainly appears to reap dividends.

One of our incentive scheme traders, Once Upon a Tier, clearly advertising their social media presence.



Antisocial Behaviour and Perceptions of Blyth Market

It was envisaged at the outset of the project that a key deliverable was to actively manage incidents of antisocial behaviour on a day to day basis, and to develop multi-agency strategies that would help to reduce antisocial behaviour overall. Many people have indicated that they view the marketplace as a place that they are fearful to shop because of the type of characters that usually hang around there.

There are a group of youths who hang around the market place regularly who are most likely responsible for a large portion of the antisocial behaviour that

goes on. They can regularly be seen on bicycles and hang around together in the same group. David has politely asked them to leave a number of times as they have been making traders fearful about having stock stolen and do at times attempt to shoplift. Their presence and overall behaviour helps to put many people off from shopping at the market. These youths are even present on the market place sometimes at 7am in the morning in the summer months.

If the police were able to take action against these individuals (or their parents) it could be hugely beneficial in helping to attract people to the market again. It would also save the Council staff time and resources in clearing up their seemingly constant stream of offences. Working CCTV cameras around the market may also help to get the evidence to help bring some convictions about. Here is some photographic evidence of the typical types of ASB we have encountered:

Planter damage



Damage to concrete seats



Fireworks found on 27 October (it is illegal to set off fireworks in public places)



Broken Glass first thing in the morning



Repeated damage to the toilet block roof



It is felt that an increased police presence on the market would help in reducing ASB (if they have means at their disposal with which to stop it). It is also felt that turning off the NCC WIFI on a night time might help to stop the issues as youths convene on a night time to make use of it. Having a presence on the

market has helped, but as powers of the market officer are limited and in reality they can do little to stop the recurrence of these events.

A functioning CCTV set up around the marketplace would potentially help to significantly reduce ASB. It is not known what resource the local police force have to reduce ASB in the town centre, or indeed how high up in their current list of priorities this is, but definitive evidence would certainly be helpful in bringing about any prosecutions.

Having regular community group meetings, to which the Market Officer is invited would be beneficial also. A joined-up approach between Community Police, Highways staff, Town Council members and NCC maintenance staff would help to build up an accurate picture of events, and potentially lead to workable solutions. While this ASB is ongoing however, building a market that is likely to attract customers from more affluent areas will certainly be a more difficult task.

Improper Use of the Toilet Block and Impact on Perception of the Market

I have witnessed Northumberland County Council employees attempt to maintain the toilet block in good serviceable condition on a daily basis, but in truth, they appear to be constantly fighting a losing battle. While certainly the majority of people use the toilet block for its intended use, there are are a few members of the public who use it only to take illegal drugs, consume alcohol and commit petty acts of vandalism. There is also a current trend of stealing toilet rolls with the toilet roll holders themselves being regularly smashed in order to get them. People also often use it for a shelter from the rain to smoke inside the building.

Example of typical drug paraphernalia found in toilets



While efforts are made to manage antisocial behaviour within these facilities (when they are seen), the level of offences are certainly make it a challenge to be able to effectively manage.

Discussions take place regularly within NCC to see how we are better able to tackle these issues. Having a member of staff in the area who has been regularly trained in conflict management and de-escalation tactics has certainly helped to prevent issues on market days before they take place. Admittedly though, there is still a way to go. There is a definite risk that council staff face in managing antisocial behaviour around the Blyth market, that needs to be collectively managed.

Trader Morale and Trader Conduct

Trader morale on the market has been at a low ebb for some time with many traders having had a low perception of the market, the council and the area in general. However we appear now to have turned a corner, with morale improving. Traders have appreciated the efforts of us trying to turn the market around although footfall and sales seem static rather than improving. Trader morale may continue to have an impact though on the shopping experience at Blyth Market unless sales improve.

The attitudes of market traders to equality and diversity may also have been a factor that might put off new shoppers from coming back to the market. It may have also been a factor in dissuading some traders off from wanting to trade on the market. Having a staff presence on the market to point this out to individual traders is helping to improve behaviours. Politically incorrect views are always challenged in line with council policy and the use of bad language has been confronted as well. It is very important to have an inclusive atmosphere on the market and to provide an atmosphere in which people would want to bring their families down to shop in.

Traders too can from time to time overstep the mark with council staff in terms of tolerable language and in disputes with each other. Having a staff presence permanently on the Friday and Saturday market though has certainly helped in managing minor disputes. In fact almost all of the more prominent altercations this year have related to the Wednesday flea market.

Trader Views on the scheme



Stuart Wardle, Plants and Wreaths, 20 years trading on market, 45 years as a family
“We’ve not seen this number of traders for a long time.”



Peter McGaw, Sportswear, 30 years on market
“You’ve done a good job attracting more traders. Free rent is good.”



Matthew Mcilhoney, Pet and Bird Foods, 22 years on market
“I have served a lot of new faces since the project began.”



Yvonne and Andrew Martin, Haberdashery, Over 60 years trading as a family on the market
“It’s positive to have staff on the market. The worst thing has been the weather.”



Stephen Laidlaw, Crystals and Jewellery, New Trader
“Trading has improved since I started trading. I am now getting some very good customers.”

A Democratic Forum for Decisions to be Made on the Market

A more preferable way of keeping stall holders abreast of things on the market, would be to have a bi-monthly meeting at a local cafe nearby. This is something we will look to introduce in this coming year. This may also help in communication local authority decisions such as events etc, giving traders ample and undisputable warning if they have to be moved. Where it may also be useful is in helping to give the traders a voice in decisions that are made about the market. Some of the traders have vast experience of the markets and there may be significant benefit in asking for their opinions and taking their advice into account.

In Conclusion

While it is accepted that progress with the market has not been as speedy as we would have liked, it has to be acknowledged that new traders have been retained and it appears that public perceptions of the market are starting to change. Having a member of staff at the market has helped to manage issues as they arise and some of the low level ASB during the market has been able to be tackled at source. While we are seeing forward momentum it makes sense to continue the good work. We believe there is definitely further potential for the market to grow and we are currently experiencing a lot of queries about wanting

to trade on the market. Altogether, the landscape certainly does appear to be changing.

We would also very much like to see the marketplace reclaimed as a spot for the local community to cherish and utilise. The marketplace should ideally be the focal point of the town centre and ensuring that the place can be used by local community groups would go some way to achieving this. We would like to welcome even more local community groups to the market over the coming year.

Some events have been more successful than others. Events that have had the biggest positive impacts on the market have been trade based and it would be prudent to focus on these types of events in the months ahead. Preliminary discussions are already underway with regards to a record festival and food festival.

Proposed Action for the Continued Growth and Development of Blyth Market

To continue with canvassing and marketing campaigns to continue to persuade new market traders to come to Blyth.

To continue to focus on a high calibre of market trader, with an emphasis on food traders who are likely to encourage regular visits to the market for a specific purpose.

To use, where possible, existing council gazebos that would help to attract more new traders to the market, and improve the image of the market.

To re-inspect and repair, if possible, the power points on Blyth Market, allowing greater flexibility of where to locate traders that need power and a greater advertising of the power options available to traders at Blyth.

To continue with efforts to manage antisocial behaviour on the market by continuing to build good public relations, and nipping instances in the bud where we can before they escalate.

Re-draft and redistribute of the market codes of conduct, to emphasise behavioural expectations.

Explore possibilities to install functioning CCTV that covers the entirety of the marketplace, that may help to bring about successful cautions/prosecutions in relation to ASB and act as a viable deterrent.

Recommend that the wifi at the market place on a night time in an attempt to further reduce the amount of ASB.

Continue with discussions and strategies within NCC that may be likely to reduce improper use of the toilet block.

Continue with attempts to persuade market traders to advertise effectively using social media. A huge potential audience both locally and in other towns could be reached if they were to effectively utilise these tools.