

HATHERLEIGH MARKET – THE PRESENT & THE FUTURE

The present

An aerial view of Hatherleigh Market on a Tuesday morning in the summer would reveal all the car parks heaving with cars and vans and up to fifty market stalls doing brisk business. A closer look under the roofs would reveal people from the area shopping and meeting friends, maybe in the market cafe, holiday makers getting a glimpse of life in the country, the poultry auction with buyers and sellers of rare breeds from all over the South West, the furniture cum bric-a-brac auction with over 1000 lots in full swing and the recently formed ‘In the Pen’ arts and antiques section causing a real buzz. All in all, the look of a happy and thriving marketplace, and a rare one with its quick and easy access to the main road and its long interface with the market town of Hatherleigh – in fact, Hatherleigh’s *raison d’etre* and the day on which numbers of people doing business in the town itself probably trebles.

So why the need to change all this and to redevelop the site?

Apparently it is because the falling livestock numbers since the Foot-and-Mouth epidemic of 2001 have made it uneconomic to continue running it as a livestock market.

By how much have stock numbers dropped?

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and turnover
dropped?.....

Why is this?

Have the farms that lost their stock in the f & m epidemic not replaced them?

Are they following a different pattern of (stock) farming?

Are they marketing their stock in different ways?

Are they marketing their stock at different markets? And what are the figures for the whole of Devon/the South West?

Is the new market near Bridgwater in Somerset causing numbers of stock being sold in Devon to fall?

What effect is the increasing presence of bovine TB on farms in Devon having on the number of cattle becoming fit to market, and what effect is it having on the spending power of those farmers and their families in the local economy?

What percentage of farms are affected at any one time in the Hatherleigh Market catchment area, and is this greater or less than other Devon markets?

Is there a solution to the problem which would avoid closing the current market?

(bearing in mind that the vast majority of those who went to the Consultation day at the HCC do not want it to close):

For instance: Could other firms of specialist auctioneers turn around the situation by bringing in different specialities or options?

Is there potential for installing solar panels on the roofs of the market sheds?

Could just part of the market find an alternative use or be redeveloped without impinging on the car parks or the areas used for the Tuesday market day stalls and poultry market?

What rights do the people of Hatherleigh and the customers and stallholders of the market have to prevent its closure and ensure its continuation?

The Market Charter has given the people of Hatherleigh the right to hold markets on Tuesdays for hundreds of years (William & Mary 1692/3) (1st Charter was in 12th C)

Do these rights exist regardless of who holds the Market Charter?

Do they automatically revert to the Town if/when the existing Market operators

decide to give up their operations?

Can the Town/local authority prevent planning permissions being given for alternative uses if there is proved to be an overwhelming need for the continuance of the market?

Could the local authority carry out or direct a proper survey at the market and in the town ? to find out who uses the market, how far they come, why they come, how far they would have to go if they couldn't come to Hatherleigh, and to see how much local businesses in the town and tourism businesses in the area depend on it and then work out the real value of it to the whole economic and social community of West Devon. *(The consultation day in the community centre was in no way the whole picture as a very high percentage of users don't live in town and wouldn't have been able to get to it & many more are tourists staying throughout West Devon in B&Bs, Guest Houses & hotels)*

And if sufficient value is proven then could the local authority (West Devon) be persuaded to buy the site (most markets are owned by local authorities) at a realistic price with a Trust to run it and a users committee to see to the day to day running and employment of staff and/or to lease parts of it to related rural businesses or attractions and to be able to promote it so that it continues to grow?

What would happen to the Town if the current livestock market does close and the proposed plans go ahead?

Swamping the area with new houses and the proposed street market would be the beginning of the end for the town as we know it and love it.

Why?

Hatherleigh market is a trading centre for the whole of the area and a major tourist attraction. It is vital to the continuation of the rural economy, it is a FREE trading area, a place where real market values can be determined and a local market where people can buy REALLY fresh and locally produced fruit and vegetables, fish, meats and cheeses, without having to drive for miles. Without *critical mass*, many stalls would not continue to come and without adequate (free) parking many current customers would not bother to come.

The car parking problems of the Town which arose when parking charges were introduced, irritating and debilitating as they are to both residents and businesses, fade into nothingness compared with the possible closure of the livestock market. Without the market, Hatherleigh would cease to be a centre that people regularly visit for nearly all their requirements both economic and social; business and pleasure, it would cease to be a place where in the holiday season *Town* meets *Country* and where tourists and visitors can learn to appreciate something of each other's lives. Many if not most of the present shops and other businesses would close and residents would have to travel out of town for many necessities of life.

Lessons from the past

Okehampton lost its market because of the procrastination of councillors.

Hatherleigh market, owned by J Gordon Vick (*who had first come here in 1936 while working for Ward and Chowen*) grew instead and in the 1960s became one of the largest markets in the South West, serving one of the best livestock rearing areas in the country and it was run with the help of a users' committee who could plan the best dates for sales, shows etc.

Buyers came from great distances, especially from East Anglia, where suckled calves went to be fattened on the corn grown there. Older sheep came from off the

moors to be fattened on lower ground. Fatstock (now called primestock) were purchased by local butchers as well as by many supermarkets with national chains. Finished cattle and sheep could be slaughtered and butchered by the new service abattoir at Hatherleigh (thus avoiding further stressful journeys) and the meat so produced could then be exported to the EEC if required.

Then due to the world financial crisis and credit squeeze of the late 1960s, the Bank demanded its loans back at short notice and the Vick family had to sell the abattoir (as well as Strawbridge). A receiver ran the market on behalf of the bank and the Vicks had to find someone quickly to purchase the market and to lease it back to the family business in order for it to continue. The *knight in shining armour* was a hardworking and successful livestock farmer from Wiltshire, Lionel Turner, who had family farming in Australia, and who bought and sold a number of farms in this area, and who literally *saved the market* for the Vick family and the Town.

Comments and thoughts

Martin Hesp (WMN 23/7/11) says it all & gleans many gems of wisdom from his visit to the market:

‘I was unable to find a single person [at the market] who supported the possible plans for the market site.

‘Closing this [market] and replacing it with houses would be a total tragedy because it is the hub of the whole community.

‘I went to the exhibition which showed the proposed plans and I was overwhelmed by the response down there; it was unanimous – it’s just not welcome – this is an ill-conceived development (said Dan the Fishman) ‘It would be a great loss to the whole of North Devon – it would be a nail in the whole area’s coffin.

‘There is anger in the streets; we all understand things change economically and we are all under pressure but what we need is help with how to build this amazing market, not to close it.

Other points

With the coming of the bypass (which incidentally was taken across the river to avoid taking any land from the Market car park as well as preserving the Bridge Inn) the market acquired unbeatable access on to the bypass main road (access through the town had always caused major traffic jams) and easy access into the centre of Hatherleigh.

What more could a market want? Many markets have become landlocked and strangled by the often carelessly planned growth of unrelated housing and business parks around them with the result that the markets then have to move out of the centre of town; the town centre businesses lose many of their customers who primarily came for the market; and the out of town shopping centres become the only winners.

Further point

Change is something that seems to be happening at a faster and faster rate nowadays. Sanity seems to be disappearing at the same rate and particularly in the rural areas where there are less social services close by, people cannot take it. Gradual change where things evolve is a much better option and

allows society to readjust and reform itself as it goes along rather than having to pick up the pieces.