Saturday Market Proposal

This proposal seeks the council's approval for a plan to develop our Saturday Market.

Objective

To take the next steps towards developing a weekly Saturday Market for Newent. Specifically at this point in time to purchase 10 additional gazebos, additional signage and market management software and approve staff overtime expenditure.

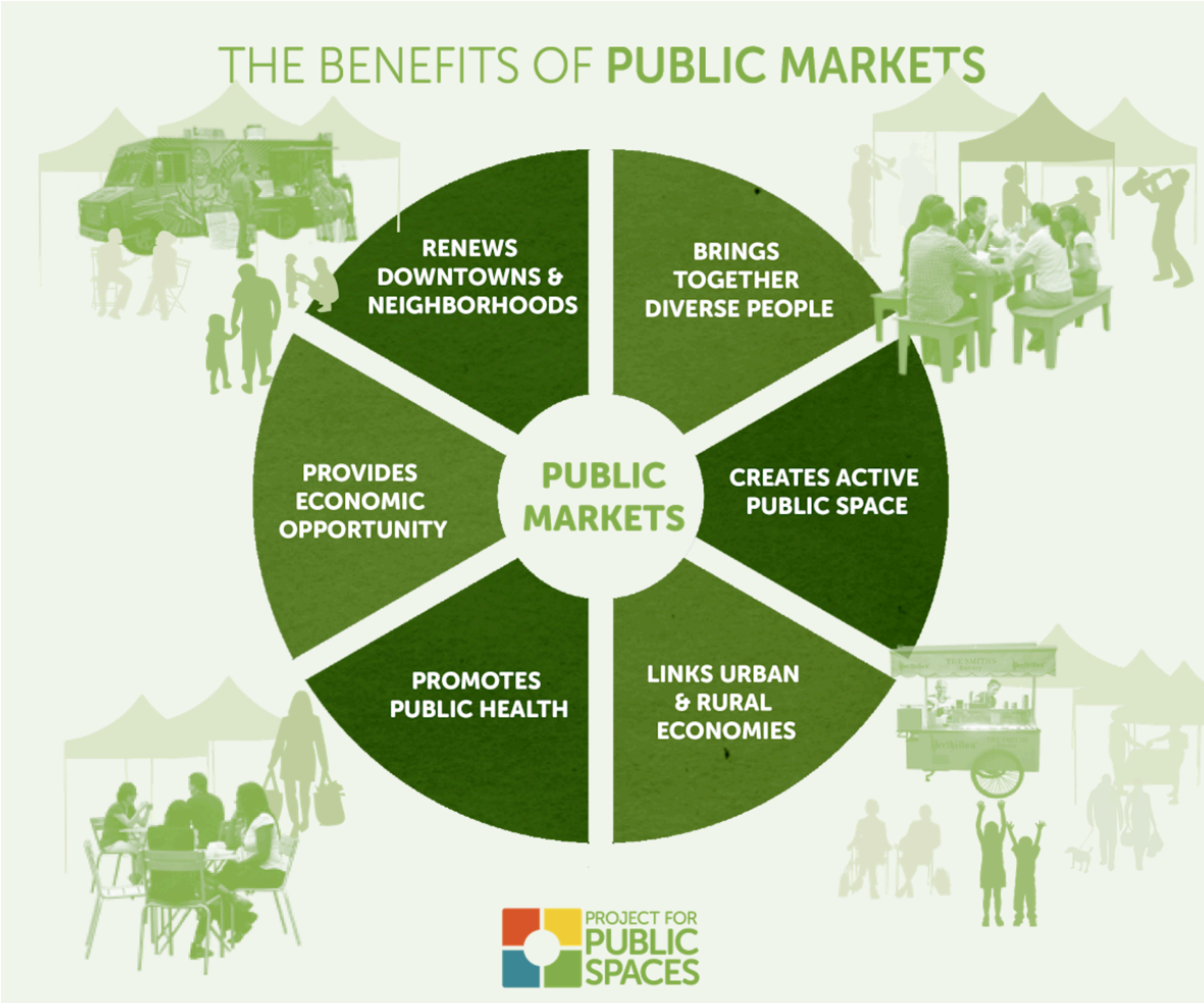
Rationale - Why Do this?

Both the Flying Geese Consultancy and Aecom (working for the NDP) recommended establishment of a regular street or farmers market as a priority or "catalyst" action for Newent.

By activating public realm space a regular market can:

- Revitalise the town centre by broadening the retail offering.
- Build community cohesion by providing a forum for social interaction.
- Strengthen links between town and country.
- Spark economic growth by:
    - Giving new seedling businesses a low cost, flexible route to to market.
    - Giving expansion space for existing town centre businesses.
    - Giving businesses a way to "test the market " in Newent.
    - Enabling farm/rural business diversification
- Enhance public health by providing access to local fresh produce.
- Reduce emissions and enhance food security by shortening the supply chain.
- Attract visitors to the town.
- Unlock funding to upgrade public space.

This is a well tried and tested mechanism for kick-starting community regeneration and economic growth.. Research and case studies from around the world have shown how a very small capital outlay, and some underused public space can be used to quickly breathe life into a community or town centre.



In a world where we have relatively little control over how our town develops, this is something we can do to build a strong community and a vibrant economy at its core.

We can see the start of these benefits in our embryonic market, and it's now time to build on that success.

Why The Town Council?

It is possible to outsource the running of a market to a market operator, and some towns do this very successfully. Outsourcing would certainly involve less day to day work for the council, so might be less hassle. However we think there are good reasons to keep the market in house.

- More control - keeping stall holder prices reasonable to encourage growth.
- More control over what is sold.
- Surplus income can be used for projects which benefit the community.
- Give the council visibility and relevance - should help with recruitment of both councillors and staff.

Add to this the unfortunate experience we had with Green Tops, which set progress back a full year, and keeping the market in house seems to be the right way to go.

Growing the Market

Current Position

In spring 2024 NTC engaged with residents via Facebook to get a steer on views on having a regular market in the town, before renewing our Market Licence.

There was a huge positive response from residents to the idea. Consequently the licence was renewed and we've been running a monthly Saturday market for 9 months now.

Food stalls, especially a butcher and a grengrocer, were most in demand from residents. After much work trying to persuade food suppliers to join our new market we were lucky to secure Market To Your Door as a cornerstone trader for our first six months, providing fresh local fruit, veg and meat, and attracting their own followers to our early markets. Though Market to your door have now ceased trading we are steadily filling the gaps left by their provision and footfall continues to increase.

The market is free of charge for stall holders to encourage take up, whilst we build footfall. Traders are aware that a fee will be charged from April and £10 is anticipated.

We have achieved a good level of repeat bookings from traders, with new traders coming on each month. The level of repeat bookings is the best testament to the growing success of the market.
At our first market in May 2024 we had 7 stall holders, this month 15 and turning stall holders away.

The market is now at the point where it cannot grow as it needs to to achieve financial sustainability and deliver its full benefits without a clear strategy and investment.

Specifically, we cannot bring on the additional food stalls which are top of residents wish lists, without investing in more gazebos.

Factors Limiting Growth

Undercover Space

In our climate few traders are prepared to operate entirely exposed to the elements. Some cover is needed. The Market House has proved popular and we accommodate 8-10 traders under it at each market.

Some traders have their own gazebos, but in most cases market operators provide these. The council purchased 4 in Autumn 2024. These have been fully utilised at each market since.

Acquiring more gazebos is a priority and will allow us to get more traders onboard on a "free trial" basis, before charges are introduced in April. This is an essential next step for the market to grow to the point of financial sustainability.

Duplication of Stalls Selling the Same Stock

We aim to avoid too much direct competition between stalls selling the same or similar products. More than one producer selling the same or very similar products would probably not sit comfortably together at our current stage of development. This at least is the perception amongst traders.

This means we are turning away people who would like to trade in Newent (eh. A local farmer this month)

This can be addressed by increasing the frequency of the market so that different traders can visit Newent on different days/weeks. This offers more opportunity to trade and more variety for shoppers.

We would like to aim for a fortnightly Saturday Market by Autumn 2025 and a weekly market by Spring 2027.

Lack of Physical Space

Though attractive and centrally placed the Market Square is small and oddly shaped. It can only accommodate a maximum of 25 stalls.

Many larger traders, especially food traders, trade from rucks or trailers. The historic paving in the Market Square means we can accommodate a maximum of 2 of these.

To achieve its full potential the market will need more space.

Though this could be achieved through road closures, this will be unpopular with our bricks and mortar businesses and also create more work for council staff.

The preferred option is to operate a separate site in the library car park. This offers ample space for more stalls, without restriction of weight.

It will also ease the pressure on duplication - a butcher - for example in the market square and another by the library would probably not be too close for comfort.

If approved by council, we would aim to bring the car park into use as demand grows - probably looking for a “cornerstone trader” to kick things off and act as a draw to that location.

It is also possible that using the library car park once a week as a “New Market Square” might help us to unlock grant funding to improve the space which would not be available its only use is as a car park.

Staff Time

Though growing and running a market doesn’t require much capital investment., it does require time:

- Time on site on market days.
- Time to promote the market and attract new traders
- Time to manage registrations, payments and bookings.

This is all being handled through existing staff time and volunteer councillor time currently. In order to expand we will need:

- To streamline admin process
- To plan for staff overtime.

Custom software, designed for councils, exists to manage markets. This should ease the burden on the office considerably, automating compliance, bookings and payments. The annual licence fee for the system under consideration operates on a sliding scale , based on the number of stall bookings, and will start at under £200 per year for us.

We would recommend immediate purchase of this system.

With our current set up we utilise 2 hours per month of estates staff overtime at a total cost of £87.64 per month. Estates staff are happy to work these additional hours.

As the market grows, setting up and breaking down will take longer. We will need to budget for up to 4 hours per market, at a cost of up to £160.

This cost will be covered by Market charges from April.

Market Charges

The aim of the market is to deliver social and economic goods for the town, rather than making a significant profit in itself, so it's important to keep changes reasonable.

Our neighbours in Ledbury and Ross charge £15 per stall, larger, better promoted markets (what we are aiming for) charge more - Tewkesbury £30 and Stroud £45.

We would propose to introduce a charge of £10 per stall in April,rising to £15 in April 2026. This should allow the market to continue to grow whilst covering its costs and making a small surplus.

Resolutions:

To support the plan to establish a large, weekly Saturday market by spring 2027.
To purchase 10 x additional gazebos at a cost of £1500.
To purchase 50 x corex advertising signs at a cost of £150
To purchase an Advantege Market Management software licence at an annual cost of £150
To authorise overtime to a maximum of £160 per market, cost to be covered by stall fees from April.