

MARKET PLACE MARKETS – THE HEART OF MELKSHAM RETAIL

January 2021

1. Melksham's beautiful Market Place is a key focal point and natural gathering place in the town, and never more so than when it is used for events of varying types including markets. However, our markets activity needs strengthening. New and developing businesses as well as charities wish to participate but do not necessarily have gazebo-type infrastructure available to them to encourage them to test their ambitions and business plans.
2. We anticipate noticeably increased entrepreneurial activity as we emerge from COVID-19 lockdown as people look to develop new opportunities due to redundancy or simply due to changes to personal priorities. We also see developing our markets as a way to bring our residents and visitors from the wider community area and beyond back to our high street as well as providing low-risk business nursery-type retail facilities to support new and developing businesses. To achieve this, we seek capital funding support for some heavy-duty gazebo infrastructure.
3. Yes, it is true that Melksham Town Council may approve some budgetary provision for this work at their forthcoming budget meeting and the author is grateful for the consideration and support of members. But our development discussions on this matter have raised some highly valid, but potentially conflicting issues:
4. The markets operation needs to generate sufficient surpluses to be able to cover its operating costs and renew the gazebo infrastructure as it wears out. Members also, quite rightly, have raised the issue of needing to supporting businesses back on their feet as COVID-19 restrictions recede. The problem is that supporting new and developing businesses with marketing effort, and discounted market rates erodes our ability to generate sufficient surpluses to fund operations and renewals.
5. Like many Town and Parish Councils this year, setting budgets and precepts is a challenging task. In this instance though, we are in the position of seeking to deliver a COVID-19 recovery project for the benefit of residents and businesses in Melksham and the wider Melksham Community Area, without the benefit of COVID recovery funds to do so.
6. For the above reason, and because some of the beneficiaries will be from outside the Melksham Town area, we consider it appropriate to ask the Melksham Area Board to consider a modest capital grant to support the project. A modest grant will allow us to purchase the necessary gazebo infrastructure we require and, at the same time, enable us to fulfill the desirable and necessary COVID-19 recovery element of our work.
7. In addition, the applicant is pleased to make available to the project, the skills of their highly experienced Community Development Officer and Economic Development Manager. The combined skills and experience of this team encompasses product development and marketing, community development and support, business management, training, business support and coaching. Some of this experience directly relates to running charter as well specialist artisan markets.
8. Given the COVID recovery challenges we face, and that the benefits of tis project encompass a greater geographical area that Melksham Town itself, i.e. the wider community area, we respectfully seek the support of the Area Board for 50% of the capital cost, to match the contribution of the applicant – i.e. £2079.57 grant contribution.

David McKnight

Economic Development Manager
Melksham Town Council
January 2021.