



# **Royston Market Strategy**

## **3 Year Plan**

**1<sup>st</sup> April 2019**

## **Background**

A decision was made at the Markets Advisory Sub-Committee Meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2019 to work up a Market Strategy to establish how the council proposes to manage and develop the market over the next 3 years.

It has been historically difficult to recruit and retain market management in Royston but with this now in place following a recruitment drive toward the end of 2018 it was felt by the Sub-Committee that the future direction of the market should now be a priority.

Royston market has a long history, dating back to the reign of Richard I and like many towns throughout the country, provides a focal point for the community. It enables people to mingle and socially interact while also providing an opportunity for potential customers to have an alternative shopping experience.

The market is lucky to have retained a number of traders for a significant period of time (decades in some instances) and this longevity of trading has of course developed as a result of a loyal customer base. This is clearly in evidence if you are a regular to the market and the fruit and veg, fish and meat/poultry stalls have an established clientele.

However, the market along with the High Street in Royston has been adversely affected by the economic downturn and changes in the way people wish to shop.

The internet remains a significant obstacle to the development of Royston's retail offer along with the introduction of large scale shopping outlets providing customers with cheaper but certainly not better options than those on the market. The opening of Aldi and M&S in February 2019 is an example of this and there is of course the competition that the market faces from Tesco and Waitrose.

There is anecdotal evidence based on conversations between council officials and residents who shop in Royston that a thriving market is still something that people would like to see and this strategy will recommend that potential customers are surveyed regularly to determine empirically if that view is upheld.

However, the immediate challenge for the council is how to develop a coordinated strategy that enables the market to not only remain an integral part of the town but which also offers the best opportunities for sustained growth.

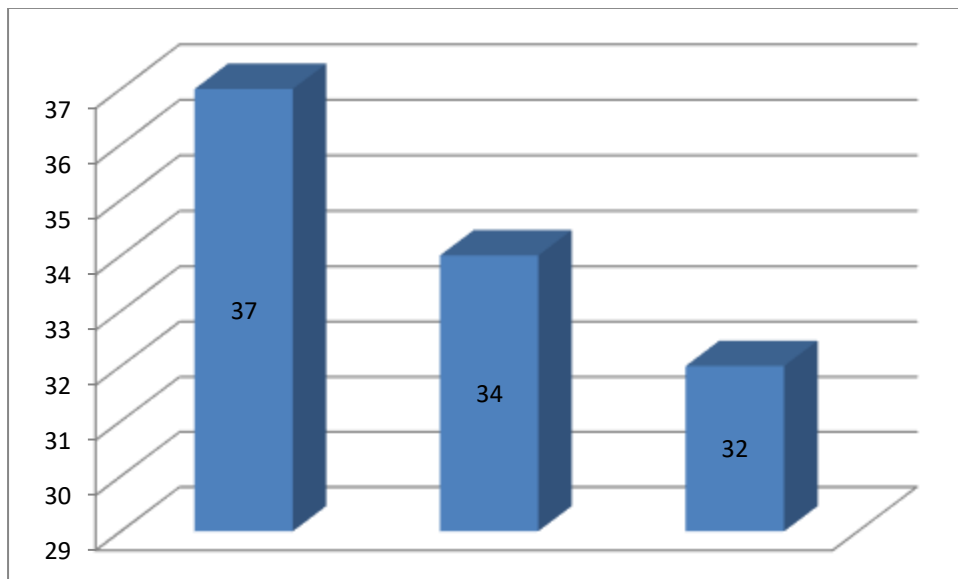
## Market performance

To determine realistic targets for growth in the future both past market performance in terms of pitch numbers and the current situation (examining statistics for the 2018/19 financial year) are illustrated below.

### Saturday Pitch Utilization (2005-2008)

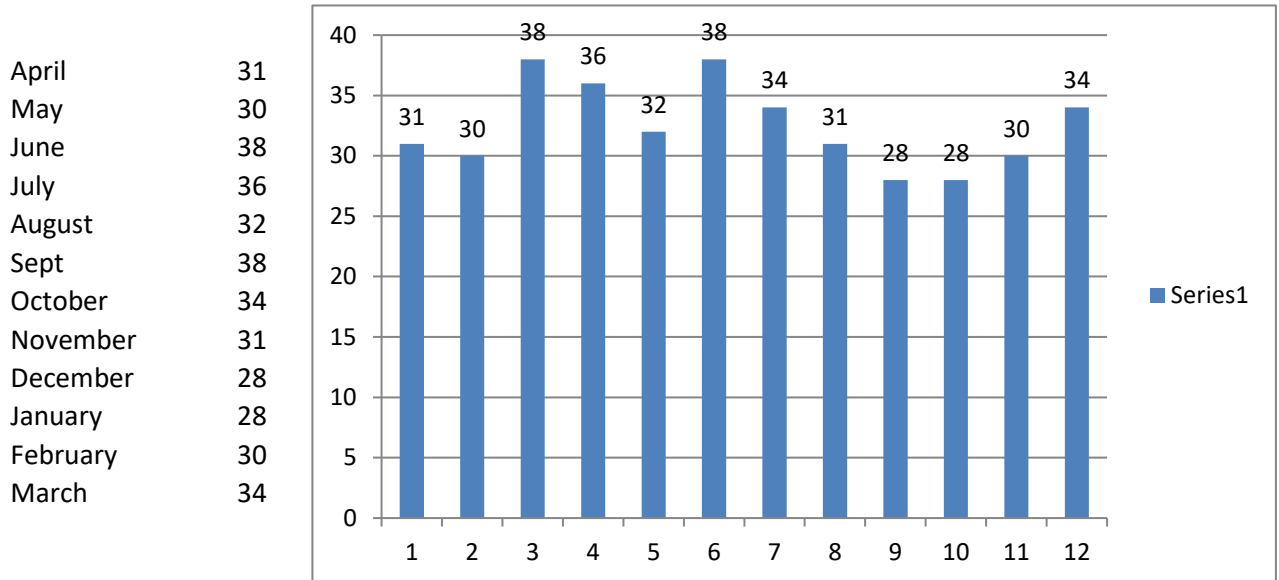
The raw data detailed here has been obtained from archived NHDC statistics and indicates pitch utilization across three financial years.

	<b>2005/6</b>	<b>2006/7</b>	<b>2007/8</b>
April	39	37	34
May	38	35	31
June	37	36	29
July	37	33	32
August	37	33	33
September	37	34	33
October	37	33	34
November	37	34	34
December	36	33	34
January	36	34	32
February	38	34	29
March	36	34	27
<b>Average</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>32</b>



## Pitch Utilization 2018/19

The figures outlined below are taken from current RTC statistics.



Average number of pitches monthly: **32**

### Interpretation of data

The graphs used in this particular section of the strategy point to a reduction in the number of pitches since 2005/6. However, the figures for 2007/8 and the current financial year are the same, possibly indicating that the downward trend has plateaued somewhat.

While the reduction does not appear to be too significant in statistical terms it does represent a considerable financial loss to the council. Just one standard casual trader pitch utilised on a Saturday provides an income of £1040 each year.

## **Strategic Objectives**

- **To consolidate the existing offer on the market**
- **Develop the market by increasing the number of pitches and diversifying the type of commodities available to shoppers**
- **Create conditions that will enable growth to be sustained**

In order to meet these objectives the council will need to consider the following key areas:

- **Marketing and promotion**
- **Maintenance**
- **Engagement and consultation**
- **Food and health**

<b>Key Area</b>	<b>RTC's Aims</b>	<b>Action to be taken</b>
Marketing and promotion	Maximize marketing and promotion of the market with a view to increasing the number of traders and therefore customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and maintain the council's website for the market and ensure that content is relevant and current</li> <li>• Introduce a social media platform for the market to give it a more modern feel and highlight forthcoming events and offers</li> <li>• Develop a strong working relationship with the Listing's Magazine and ensure that the market is featured regularly through monthly advertising</li> <li>• Negotiate free advertising in exchange for a commitment to more extensive advertising relating to events</li> <li>• Use alternative social media platforms such as the Listings and the Royston Chamber of Commerce to maximize</li> </ul>

		<p>exposure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore alternative networking opportunities</li> </ul>
Maintenance	To maintain equipment to an appropriate standard and ensure that cleanliness is paramount	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market Manager to clean storage area monthly and report on any concerns that may compromise the cleanliness of this facility (pigeon infestation)</li> <li>• Introduce a cleaning regime (frequency to be determined) to ensure that gazebo's and side sheets are not dirty and therefore considered unsuitable to be used in close proximity to the sale of items of food.</li> <li>• Carry out regular checks of equipment to satisfy the council that it is safe and complies with risk assessment requirements.</li> <li>• Actively ensure that traders keep their stalls and immediate environment clean and presentable</li> </ul>
Customer and trader consultation/engagement	Maximize opportunities for market development by determining what customers would like to see on the market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market Manager to devise a customer survey form seeking feedback about the market generally. Questions to include if residents use the market regularly, if not why and what commodities they would like to see in the future.</li> <li>• Ensure that the survey is carried out at least twice a year. This proactive approach can hopefully capture any themes/issues that may be arising and provide the council with an opportunity to consider solutions.</li> <li>• Regular engagement to take place between the Market Manager and traders. While the council is</li> </ul>

		<p>happy to formalise such an arrangement through a series of documented meetings the reality is that traders do not want the inconvenience of travelling into Royston other than on a market day. However, there is now a regular liaison taking place providing a significant opportunity for traders to voice their opinions and future aspirations for the market.</p>
<p>Food and health</p>	<p>Promote a healthy lifestyle through good food knowledge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endeavour to have fresh fruit and vegetables on the market twice a week</li> <li>• Endeavour to have fresh fish and meat/poultry on the market twice a week</li> <li>• Have healthy options on stalls where possible and ensure the provision of specialist foods e.g. gluten free offers.</li> <li>• <b>Use our outstanding fresh produce to be innovative and promote 'Healthy Living'. The Child Obesity issue is high on the Government agenda and we can perhaps liaise with schools (e.g. under 9's) to promote fresh produce as an alternative to supermarket options with all the associated benefits. This can include visits to the market on a Wednesday associated with students project work. This not only has educational benefits but reflects the council in a good light – trying to think outside of the box for the well-being of its residents.</b></li> </ul>

<p>Community Initiatives</p>	<p>Diversifying use of the market and improving the customer experience</p>	<p>In the absence of significant funding, the council needs to be creative in bringing about changes on the market. The council therefore proposes introducing a 'Royston Market Community Initiative'.</p> <p>In short, this will provide one local business and one local 'not for profit' organization such as a club or society with a 'free' pitch on the market. This can be utilised on any market day.</p> <p>The business, under no obligation, gets the opportunity to sell and promote itself and just as importantly sign-post people to its shop premises which by definition will be located in relatively close proximity to the market.</p> <p>Similarly, clubs or societies may wish to promote an event or just be looking to acquire new members.</p> <p>The return for RTC is a couple of additional pitches improving the aesthetic of the market. It also ensures that there are, every week, new offers for customers to enjoy. No market day will be exactly the same as the one that went before it which will be a welcome change.</p> <p>It will also serve to freshen up the market and introduce some higher quality commodities with the aim being to improve the customer experience.</p>
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## **Targets for The Next 3 Years**

The purpose of this strategy is to put in place a structured approach to the development and promotion of the market over the next 3 years.

It is the council's expectation that by implementing the actions highlighted above, the market will be provided with an opportunity for sustainable growth.

This strategy has already alluded to the difficult economic conditions which are affecting high streets and markets the length and breadth of the country and reversing the downward trend in pitch uptake discussed above will be challenging.

However, the council has shown through some of the initiatives cited in this strategy that it is committed to supporting the market through consistent and favourable promotion.

While it is a long term goal to increase the number of pitches rented on the market, it is not just this quantifiable measure that is important to the council.

There is a strong qualitative thread running through the council's future objectives which is equally important if the market is to be seen as credible and professionally managed.

In the next 3 years the council hopes to reverse the downward trend in pitch numbers and has therefore set the following targets:

Financial Year	Average Monthly Pitch Target	Increase on 2018/19 Figure
2019/20	34	2 Pitches
2020/21	36	4 Pitches
2021/22	37	5 Pitches

## **Threats and Risks to This Strategy's Objectives**

While there is a genuine optimism within RTC that the objectives and targets in this strategy are realistic, it should nonetheless be understood that there are certain variables outside of the control of the council which could have an adverse effect on delivering our aims.

These include:

- Changes in the economic climate
- Further changes in the 'shopping habits' of customers
- Lack of investment damaging the ability to advertise and promote the market
- Stalls not fit for purpose
- Retention of long term traders adversely affected by diminished footfall
- Failure to attract new traders due to perceived/actual low footfall leading to a lack of variation in commodities.
- Retirement of older traders who are not replaced

It is important that the council reviews its progress throughout the 3 year period of this strategy and this will be done formally with the Markets Advisory Sub-Committee at the end of each financial year.

However, it will of course be prudent to regularly assess if goals and milestones are being achieved. This should ensure that momentum is maintained and that any problematic issues that may inhibit the successful implementation of this strategy can be addressed.