

So I would like to start by looking at the facts.

I thought it might be helpful to look at some number comparisons starting with a takeaway food restaurant and a street food stall in Bath.

A full time city centre street trading pitch on Southgate Street will pay a total rent to the council of £9,318 regardless of the type of product.

A restaurant and takeaway in the same part of the city will pay approximately £200,000 per year in rental.

A stall in Southgate street pays no business rates. A food business in Southgate Street pays an average of £84,000 in business rates and an additional £2,000 to the BID to cover the costs of our operations to keep the city attractive and welcoming.

And the hidden costs of the stall include:

The risk of the obstruction, the loss of amenity to neighbouring businesses (I am reliably informed by landlords in the city that tenants are reluctant to take on properties with a stall outside), and in the case of street food leaves an enormous greasy patch for which the cleaning bill is picked up by the council and the BID.

And just to put that cleaning job into perspective, last year the BID paid £12,000 to clean Southgate Street (you have probably noticed that this is more than the revenue from the stall) and in addition the council's cleaners come by 3 times a week and the BID rangers clean about once a week. Even at minimum wage with no oncosts, we are looking at an additional £3,000 per year to keep that street food stall in the city.

I am not at all surprised to read that the stallholders would like to keep the status quo. This fundamentally unfair system has created a subsidy for some businesses whilst others are expected to manage with their expensive windows blocked from view.

And the grease is not going away.

It is my understanding that national legislation dictates that the Council is not allowed to make money from the stalls. However, I also understand that the council has an income target for the stalls. This is a bit difficult to reconcile. The stalls create an income but not a profit so they will never achieve a meaningful revenue stream only a never ending cycle of officers who don't generate quite enough income to have the capacity to enforce the rules.

There must be a better way. At the BID we are already working with 700 businesses and partnership is the beginning and end of what we do.

Let's work together therefore, not just to adjust the current rules, let us have a complete rethink of the system for street trading, one which is equitable, entrepreneurial and which respects the fabric of our unique historic city.

Let us work together to make markets in the city, real markets, a genuine destination which attracts customers when the city is relatively quiet and creates a buzz for all the businesses to benefit from.

Based on the Artisan market model in Queens Square, I have done some calculations as an illustration.

Maximum revenue from the street stalls.
31 stalls @ £9,000 per year
£279,000 in total

Queens Square Artisan Market raises £1,300 once a month for the council simply for the land hire.

In addition, it generates enough revenue from the 40 stalls to pay its staff (who are there to set up, provide equipment and a safe environment etc), promotional work, insurances and bespoke shelters.

£15,600 would be income to the council and the remaining operational costs (officer time etc) would be covered by the stall fees.

If the market was held twice a week, the income would double.

If the market was then circulated around the district, the Council could look at additional revenue and regeneration in the market towns across the area.

Creating a destination for the market in a car park or Queens Square, rather than spreading it out around the city would remove the risk to public safety in an emergency or terrorist incident, would remove the unfair situation where one business is promoted to the detriment of another, would support the stallholders businesses and would enhance the visitor experience.

This is just one option, I am sure there are more, so my closing point is, please let us make this the beginning of an imaginative conversation about how to improve the street trading not the end of the review and the retention of the status quo.