

BATH CHRISTMAS MARKET – ALLISON HERBERT CEO OF BATH BID
STATEMENT TO B&NES CABINET 23 JUNE 2021

Bath Christmas market is a longstanding and significant feature on Bath's calendar. It attracts large numbers of visitors, particularly at weekends.

This year, when businesses have taken out huge loans just to survive and although it has changed hands with the closure of Visit Bath, we have never needed it more and it is a brand of rare quality, which the city cannot afford to lose.

I have a few stats from mobile phone use in 2018 and 2019 which show that the month of December is when we welcome most visitors to the city from beyond a 15 mile radius.

In December 2019, we saw a 60/40 split between local visitors and people coming from further away whereas in October it was 70/30 showing how the balance shifts. At the same time, the footfall in December is about twice November's.

Which means that Christmas is the shop window opportunity for the city. People come to the market which is professionally and widely promoted and then come back later in the year.

Why do we have a Christmas market and who benefits?

Aside from the stallholders, hosting the market in the heart of the city means that there are multiple beneficiaries evidenced by the Visa spending information.

In the last quarter of 2019, people spent almost four times as much on food and drink as during the rest of the year, 3 times more on leisure and attractions (the Roman Baths), about twice as much in shops and restaurants. Hotels saw a 33% increase over the winter period. The benefits are felt across all sectors and it doesn't take a mathematician to understand that the impact of a four-fold increase will be felt throughout the rest of year. Many businesses have shared with me how they are only able to continue to trade because of the November and December boost that their businesses enjoy thanks to the Christmas market.

So, what is the problem with the Christmas market?

If you look at the issues which people complain about, it's mainly access, parking and transport.

The Bath BID is keen to help with these issues and will work with partners to get the practical details right and make this year's market a wonderful experience for residents as well as visitors for us all to be proud of.

It is our job together to make sure that Bath maintains its competitive edge, maximising the local and specialist companies represented in the market and showcasing the city. Clearly having a Xmas market is beneficial to the local economy – so considering the data, this year could be the moment to consider having a smaller market and keeping it for longer, perhaps a full month and spreading the stalls more evenly across the entire city.

With those modifications the city could hold on to the positive aspects of the brand, reduce the burden on transport (400,000 visitors into 18 days) and deliver a more customer friendly experience, allowing visitors and locals to coexist.

The Christmas message is all about sharing, at that moment of the year, the business community appreciates the willingness of all of us to share the city with our guests.

This year is an opportunity not to be missed, for change, rebrand, making it a far better experience, with a clear marketing message to enjoy Bath at Christmas.