

Workplace operators Qualitative Survey

Interviewee: Ken Hussey

Workspace: Bridport Market (manager)

Location: Bridport town centre

Type of workspace: Market

How long have you been providing workspace: 11 year

Key questions:

- 1. Do you think Bridport's workspace offer matches business needs now? And do you think it can respond to future trends (ie, Shifts to smaller or bigger workspaces, serviced workspace, or in and out of town spaces?)*

It really depends on what the vision is on where the town should be. And I don't think there's a coherent vision at the moment. Nor are there any individual drivers pushing this cohesive vision forward... not the council, not the chamber of commerce, not any large-scale employer with significant enough employment or planning needs, and not any educational institution that would drive it.

Bridport's reputation is that it is a town of retirement and tourism. If there was a coherent vision around tourism, for example, I don't think there's coherent investment in developing tourism within the local structure or built environment within Bridport and surrounding areas.

There is a need to invest to improve and maintain the built environment to make it a desirable destination – both for people to come and visit and also for business owners to come here to run their businesses. But this is not currently happening.

Why? The town council doesn't have the authority to look at the built environment, and Dorset Council – as the 'new kid on the block' – lacks the strategic vision for how it should develop – if indeed 'tourism' is the predominant industry.

Within the market we have a working group that has input from the tourism and leisure sector, but again there is no real coherence within the local leisure industry to support a 'destination' offering.

Some decisions need to be made: What do we want Bridport to be for people? Who are we attracting? Who do we want to come to Bridport to visit and or stay and run their business?

- 2. How have occupancy rates/level of vacancy changed at your workspace over the last few years? (ie are they stable, or significantly up or down)*

There have been dramatic changes recently: a shift away from traditional market stalls with regular schedules, turning up every week in the same pitch, and a shift toward occasional and seasonal traders. This is part of a national trend. Where 10 years ago, maybe 5-10% were seasonal traders, now it's about 45-50%.

3. *What types of businesses exist in your workspace (i.e. parks, estates, high streets)?*

Many of the traders now are multi-channel sellers - makers, providers of produce - so we have changed the way we charge and curate the market to enable those seasonal traders to be able to use the market occasionally, or to provide a place for traders to use the market as a shop window.

Many of these businesses now need small, affordable, accessible spaces for manufacturing their produce/wares. Most don't need specific provision (ie industrial electric points) but simply affordable, usable, warm places with parking. And these sorts of workspaces are still at a premium in this town. But we need to make these affordable to sustain these businesses.

~~4. What changes have there been in the type of businesses operating in these trading spaces? (ie, more food, less manufacturing, more storage, etc)~~

5. *Do you see a trend of businesses starting small and scaling up? For example, have your tenants moved in because of a change in their business needs? Or is trading on the market a pipeline to other trading spaces? (i.e. retail/industrial)*

Steptoos, mercato, bridgets, 25 local businesses started on the market - having the space to go to is important. Starting at home. Bayside brownies: industrial kitchen at home. Vegan Munchies - finding it hard to scale up without an appropriate physical space.

Hard for people to envision where they go to 'next'. Look at growth as 'more of', and what this means I need 'more of'. Not always 'more products' but more people to

Not sure what growth can mean for them. Effective small business advisory would help people overcome this. Growth means different things for different people/businesses.

6. *Do you have an overall 'identity' or priorities for your workspace tenants, or are you agnostic on what types of businesses can operate from your workspace?*

Bridport Market is curated and deliberate - and it needs to be in order to be a destination.

7. *Do you have a marketing strategy to find new tenants? Do you find it costly to invest in marketing to attract new tenants?*

~~8. Do you have any information/understanding on why businesses don't follow through with tenancy after their initial enquiries?~~

~~9. Do you work in partnership with a local estate agent? How do you set your lease terms or rents?~~

10. *Have you made any changes to your lease terms based on business demand (ie, shorter lease terms, adjustments to rent, etc)*

There is no longer so much demand from "regular" traders. So we have changed the way we charge for the market to make it more affordable and offer flexibility needed to trade as occasional/seasonal traders. Bridport Market is unusual in this, as compared with other areas – markets are in decline around the country. Flexibility is key to maintaining the steady churn of traders that keeps the market going.

The question is, how to turn this into an operating procedure that can be sustained after he's not doing it. The role of managing this type of market is a different job description – a different way of doing things. There needs to be flexibility and agility built in to maintain it.

11. *Have you adapted your units/made any renovations to accommodate incoming tenants or respond to perceived business demands?*

There is scope to make the market space more attractive to traders and customers. For a long time now people have been having to 'make do' with a space which is no longer fully supportive of running a street market. How can it be changed to interact with a busy market and pedestrian demands? Things like more accessible parking for traders and customers, one way systems, wider pavements, more on-street parking close to businesses will keep high streets alive. This churn enables businesses to survive.

Of course, there is also conflict between parking for the market and residents. For traders, the ideal is to be able to park where you trade - which some can do now. But to stimulate growth we need to be able to offer good parking for traders as well as customers who are visiting because of the products available or because of the built environment being somewhere they want to be.

Managing the relationship between highways authority and the market is our biggest overhead. The constrictions of highways authority are often in conflict with the needs of running and certainly growing a street market.

The town council needs to pick up and make some decisions on the Access and Movement study, which was commissioned a few years ago to look at the built environment, streetscape, and movement through it. There is support from Dorset

Council to get on with some of the work, there just needs to be a local champion to usher it through.

12. Bridport Town Council wants to know about the needs of young people. How many of your tenants are under the age of 30? Do you have much demand for your workspace from the younger demographic? And what kind of space are they looking for/renting?

Not many are under the age of 30. There are 15/200 on the list. And about 30 aged 30-45. There is a fairly constant churn. I think this is driven by the economic and employment climate. When you have restricted employment options, the market option to start something on your own grows, and I don't think there's this restriction at the moment.

It seems there's actually a shortage of people to fill employment spaces locally. So there's not the perceived need to take the 'risk' involved in starting up on your own. I think if this could be relabeled as an opportunity – as in, a viable option with a support structure to help you develop your idea and turn it into a trading business – I think more people would do it.

Having people start up a business idea because they want to is a more sustainable pathway for the market, as compared with a pipeline of people trading as a necessity as there are no other options.

I think the general perception is that there is a lack of opportunity for young people to do something for themselves. The enabling organisations that used to promote this entrepreneurship in young people, like the training and enterprise councils, have not been replaced in any coherent way. At the local level this is a problem.

There are no structures or frameworks that make people look at self-employment as a viable option. And when there is very little structure to enable people to do it, they don't even consider it as an option.

Not just financial support but cultural support that is needed for developing small businesses. Bridport needs to offer space to work, support for business development, support or mentoring for training needs, and opportunities for taking a new product to market. I'd like to see the chamber of commerce or local businesses sponsoring market spaces for young people, or offering mentorships for retailers. We need to have a way to join up all the pieces.

Bridport should look to places like Kingston Maurward and other enterprise schemes that encourage new start ups by young people. We need to support young people financially, with mentorship, and developmentally from idea to market to retail to growth. We have all the capabilities within local organisations, and it's not hard - just needs a champion to take it forward.

~~13. As a workspace operator, do you feel your business is affected by any government policies (ie rates system)?~~

14. Bridport Town Council supports the Bridport economy and is keen to see businesses thrive and make steps toward more sustainable practices. As a workspace operator, how do you see your role and responsibilities within local economic development?

The authority sits with the county council, but the responsibility for making it happen sits locally. And this requires having a coherent vision for growth and development. It needs a vision statement.

In town, a level of physical neglect leads to a perception of decline, which leads to an attitude of 'nobody's bothered about it'. Often this happens when the space in question falls between town and county remit. And what happens is it stops people having the concern about the built environment around them.

~~15. Have you taken any measures to decarbonise your workspaces and/or make them more sustainable? Examples; energy saving, energy generation, electric vehicle charging etc~~

~~16. From your perspective, who should foot the bill/take responsibility for making energy efficiency upgrades to units in your workspace?~~

17. Any other information you'd like to share about workspace availability and provision in the area?

In terms of what I'd like to see in the next 5 years, I would love to see the Wednesday market full with small producers who build their business on sustainable local resources. Going back to the roots of street markets: a market for the community where people do their weekly shopping for provisions they need from sustainable producers using the resources available to them locally. In terms of consumption – people are looking for this, and if it's here, people will come and buy it.

This requires a coherent interface between town and surrounding rural environment. This requires access to land, coherent support structures, and affordable local workspace. And this should be supported by the chamber, supported by a programme of business development of ideas and mentoring, with both Dorset and Bridport councils providing infrastructure for them to be able to do that.

All of this is possible within the next 5 years.