



Brighton Open Market

Type of asset:	Market hall
Legal model:	Community interest company
Type of community enterprise:	Business saver
Year of transfer:	March 2011
Type of transfer:	999-Year lease
Full-time staff:	4

Overview:

Established in the 1880s, Brighton Open Market has played a pivotal role in Brighton’s history. After a period of decline starting in the 1970s, traders decided to form the Open Market Traders Association and create a renovation plan for the market. This was approved by Brighton and Hove in 2006. A 250-year leasehold on a peppercorn rent was given to a Community Interest Company, ‘Brighton Open Market’, formed in 2011. The market re-opened in 2014.

Background

Established in the 1880s, Brighton Open market plays a pivotal role in Brighton history. After a period of decline started in the 1970s, the Open Market Traders Association asked Brighton & Hove City Council as owner of the market for its support to bring forward a redevelopment plan for the market, which the council agreed in 2006. Although Brighton & Hove City Council did not have a CAT policy at this time, nor has it developed one since, the redevelopment plan of the market was achieved through a CAT of a 250-years leasehold on a peppercorn rent. According to councillors, the community asset transfer was seen as the most desirable way to renovate the market given the key role it plays in the area and inability of the council to invest in the site. Hence, in 2011, a Community Interest Company (CIC) was established with the aim of taking on full ownership and responsibility for the market after redevelopment. This redevelopment would be delivered through a partnership between the council, Open Market Traders Association, Hyde Housing Association and the Ethical Property Company. The market re-opened in 2014, and has been operating since.

which had been struggling with the loss of retail and the effects of severe and multiple deprivation for some time. At the beginning, the traders motivation to take on the asset was from a desire to keep the market alive as it desperately needed investment which the council could not put into it. The notion of full redevelopment of the site was instigated after Hyde Housing came on board. The idea was for the market to be a community social venue with space for activities in the central square, which also provided cheap products and services for the community. However, in the push for regeneration of the area there was also a desire to attract new and different kinds of buyer and trader to the market. More recently, there has been a call not only for cheap products but also for quality food reflecting health and environmental concerns. For a period, this change in vision created turbulence within the CIC, with ramifications for their delivery of a clear public service offer. However, within recent months these challenges have been overcome, with some market traders investing their own money to ensure that the public service aspect of the central space is delivered and community groups are brought into the space.

People

The redevelopment of Brighton Open Market was key to the wider regeneration of the London Road area,

The CAT proposal was brought about by long-standing traders who were personally attached to the market. Yet, as they admitted, passion itself is not enough to determine the success of a transfer. Traders were working full time, trying to renovate the market on the

side on a voluntary basis. This meant they had to work with the skills available, relying on third parties for advice wherever possible. A supportive development officer at the council, and the involvement of councillors with previous experience in regeneration and community involvement proved crucial to make the project a reality. However, skills in marketing tailored to market's were missing in the early stages of the project. This made overcoming the market's reputational legacy and attracting new business challenging, with subsequent financial implications. However, management of the market changed in 2016 to secure more relevant expertise and oversight. This has included stronger skills in building management and health & safety regulations to improve risk resilience.

Rules

As mentioned earlier, the redevelopment of the site was delivered by Hyde Housing. Their interest in this was the creation of 87 flats adjacent to and above the market. Unfortunately, the close proximity of residential development has led to regulatory challenges for the CIC. For instance, traders are not allowed to load on Sundays, or to open in the evenings. This limits their ability to attract new trade. At the moment, they have 12 late night licences a year, which cannot be used on consecutive weekends. These rules in turn limit the potential for the market to act as a social venue.

Internally, there have also been rule related challenges. Before choosing the CIC model for the market, the charity model was considered and then disregarded as the project partners believed it to be too restrictive for a market. The disparate and ultimately, individually commercial interests of the traders led cooperative models to be dismissed. Therefore, the CIC model was chosen.

However, which 'community' interest was being represented by the board was contested, resulting from a lack of consensus around a common vision. As not all traders can be on the board and the minutes of board meetings are kept private, some traders felt resentment and exclusion from processes of decision making. However, these challenges are being addressed with the

CIC appointing new independent directors and working towards a single market traders' representation body, to unite traders around a common vision for the project.

Resources

Partnership

The main challenge to partnerships in this project was imbalances in information. This revealed itself relating to secrecy and the board as discussed above, but also played out in other relationships. To make the CAT possible, the CIC relied heavily on the council and Hyde for information. While all parties trusted that the council shared their interests, some traders remain sceptical about the motivations of Hyde, as a commercial operator. While some councillors felt that their participation on the board was crucial in the beginning to get the project approval, Hyde's superior experience in processes of development led the market traders to take a backseat in design and planning stages, potentially leading to the regulatory challenges they face.

Assets/money/funds

As soon as the redevelopment was complete, the CIC inherited a £1m debt which needed to be repaid. This situation was exacerbated by the absence of any seed funding; the CIC had to immediately generate income, to pay off the loan which they secured from Triodos Bank in 2014. The absence of finance contributed to the inability of the CIC to buy in relevant expertise, leading to financial difficulties in 2015. In early in 2016, the council granted the CIC a loan of £0.061m under the condition of a change in the management structure. It is now improving and is aiming to secure its successful future.