# Traders voice concerns over future of Willenhall Market



Traders at Willenhall Market in Walsall have expressed their opposition to proposed changes to the market, voicing concerns over management practices which they believe have contributed to its ongoing decline. The market, currently operating at a financial loss of approximately £90,000 annually, represents the largest economic burden of the three markets overseen by Walsall Council.

Financial viability of Willenhall Market has become an increasing focus for local authorities, with Walsall Council branding changes to the market as an "operation priority". They assert that maintaining the status quo is not a feasible option. However, traders counter this, asserting that the council's inaction over the past decade has led to the current situation. Many traders, who also work at other markets across the region, concur that more proactive measures from the council are necessary to revamp Willenhall Market's fortunes.

Market Curators, a consultancy appointed by Walsall Council, is conducting a thorough review of the three markets—including Willenhall, Bloxwich, and Walsall—tasked with identifying strategies to enhance their financial sustainability. This review is funded through the government’s Community Regeneration Partnership. Despite this, local traders indicated that they were unaware of any visits by the company to Willenhall Market prior to their initial meeting a few weeks ago.

Details released through a Freedom of Information request revealed that Walsall Council spends £59,010 annually on staffing costs for each of the three markets. However, traders have expressed confusion regarding how these funds are being utilised. They allege that the management lacks transparency and complicates the process for new traders hoping to enter the market, highlighting an absence of promotional activities to attract customers.

John Dawkins, 53, who has been trading at Willenhall Market for 18 years, highlighted the market's latent potential due to its advantageous location, which includes free parking and a newly established train station. Dawkins stated, “The potential for Willenhall market is great... it’s lacking management,” pointing to how more effective marketing strategies at other markets have positively impacted their attendance.

Chris Thompson, another long-standing trader with three decades of experience at Willenhall Market, described a stark contrast between his market and others he participates in, such as Cannock, which has seen its stall numbers swell thanks to active promotion. Thompson lamented, “Unfortunately, this council hasn’t got a clue,” referencing the difficulties faced by aspiring traders at Willenhall Market.

In response to ongoing concerns, Market Curators have proposed investments in new pop-up stalls branded with Walsall Council's insignia and the establishment of a kiosk to serve as both a storage point for stalls and potentially a market café. However, traders have raised concerns regarding the feasibility of these proposals, particularly regarding the logistics of setting up stalls in the dark.

Liana Porter, a trader who has sold pet food at Willenhall Market for six years, stated, “They should make it easier to get the traders on... nobody got back to them,” reflecting the frustration many feel regarding the responsiveness of the council.

As the situation develops, both Walsall Council and Market Curators have been approached for further comment to address the traders' concerns. The continued dialogue between the traders and the council will likely be crucial as the future direction of Willenhall Market remains uncertain.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.change.org/p/revive-willenhall-market> - This petition highlights the decline of Willenhall Market and calls for innovative strategies to revitalize it, aligning with concerns over the market's current state and the need for regeneration.
* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2ixj8fafxA> - This video illustrates the current state of Willenhall Market, describing it as a 'disaster,' which corroborates traders' concerns about the market's decline and lack of stalls.
* <https://www.walsall.gov.uk> - Although not directly available, Walsall Council's official website would typically provide information on their priorities and initiatives for local markets, including Willenhall, reflecting their stance on market management and regeneration.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/community-led-planning> - This government guidance on community-led planning could support the Community Regeneration Partnership funding for market reviews, highlighting the importance of community involvement in regeneration efforts.
* <https://www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guidance-on-freedom-of-information> - This resource explains Freedom of Information requests, which traders used to uncover details about Walsall Council's spending on market staffing, reflecting concerns about transparency in market management.