

Roman Road Square Market Action Plan

London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Markets Improvement Plan



Overview

The market

Roman Road Square is located towards the Bethnal Green end of Roman Road and has a small collection of stalls. With only four traders, the market is the smallest in the borough, but these stalls are very well established in the community and described as 'small but mighty'. Many of the businesses operating have been passed down through generations and the community supports them well. It appears that the market is operating with the best local synergy of all the borough's markets.

The goods on offer are of a high-quality e.g., high-quality fish and bakery. The market is also attracting more traders by itself with a new flower trader recently joining.

The market square has a "destination" appeal and is inviting; it doesn't feel too crowded. When it is busy it does draw more customers in, however it currently operates on a hyper-local basis, with 88% of shoppers walking there.

It is not well known by those outside of its immediate small community (it has only 10 Google reviews).

There is a diverse mix of residents with both wealthier roads and social housing on the market's doorstep, which presents lots of opportunities to draw in different customers.

All respondents buy fresh food at the market, this category covering most of the traders' goods.

Roman Road Square is second only to Columbia Road in attracting shoppers based on quality (58%). 45% of shoppers also visit due to a favourite stall which is not the case at other markets.

The Friends of Meath Gardens (FofMG) (working with the Roman Road Trust) focus on "Globe Town and Roman Road", including Meath Gardens, with residents, businesses, a market trader and residents groups taking part. FofMG led a petition with over 15K signatures to open-up a railway arch and link Queen Mary University campus and the town centre via Meath Gardens and funding connected to this has been secured by the council's town centres team. This will improve the square and the work is a key element of local regeneration plans to improve footfall on the high street, revitalise the market in the square and support local business.

The project includes public realm improvements (wayfinding, planters, artwork), relaunching the market square (lighting, planting, seating and power points), replacing shutters on shops and creating new workspace. The market plans include waste management solutions with a bin store, community events, power for traders and seating. It is hoped that these changes will also attract new traders. Work is expected to start in summer 2021.

Snapshot

Trading days: Monday to Saturday, 8am to 2pm/6pm

Commodities: fruit and vegetables, fish, bakery and plants

Customers: Local customers from diverse neighbourhoods

Reasons for shopping here: Quality of goods (58%), a favourite stall (45%)

Pitches: 28 | 14% full (4 traders)

Household income (Bethnal Green ward)

15% less than £15,000 | 56% less than £30,000 | 10% higher than £60,000



Challenges

The Tower Hamlets High Streets & Town Centres Strategy 2017 – 2022 identified the market as having limited customer facilities and issues with antisocial behaviour and graffiti, waste management, cleanliness of the area, a poorly maintained public realm and high traffic volumes in the surrounding area. These problems remain but the forthcoming works will address some of them. Additional challenges include:

Environment: The market square is not successfully appealing to this customer base. The square is open to the elements making trading challenging in bad weather. The surface of the square is also in bad condition.

Trader numbers: The market needs more traders for it to be economically successful
Commodity mix: There is not enough variety of stalls to attract a larger audience at present. As the borough aims to increase trader numbers, it is crucial to develop a well balanced and exciting variety of quality stalls to attract customers. At present this is only a fresh food market, with the recent addition of a plant and flower seller.

Profile: There is a lack of consistency in the branding of this market, it being referred to as Roman Road Square, Roman Road West and Globe Town Market in different places locally and online.

Consultation feedback

In the consultation, traders, shoppers and businesses were offered the opportunity to comment on one or more markets that they shopped at, traded at or had a business nearby. Responses were received from:

- 2 traders (from 4 licensed to trade here)
- 33 shoppers (7% of the total shopper response)
- No local businesses responded. This is likely due to the small size of this market and it having little impact on local businesses.
- Responses: 35

Traders would like:

- **More special events** which they think would increase their income
- **Eco initiatives and adding bike racks** may have a positive effect on trader income in attracting more customers
- **Longer trading days / opening hours** which could generate a little more income
- **Quality food and higher end products** would be welcomed by traders to bring more people to the square

Residents and businesses would like:

- 48% would like to see **more food available** in form of street food, deli-style items and bread with 12% requesting flowers/plants

Appendix III provides an overview of survey feedback for Roman Road Square Market.

Action plan

Actions have been identified and prioritised within the context of the five-year Markets Improvement Plan.

Phase 1	
Place	<p>Add signage from Bethnal Green / Roman Road junction and Roman Road market to link the three markets in this area.</p> <p>Consider how the seating will interface with the market stalls as works start on the square.</p>
Sustainability	<p>This market has the potential to lead the way in the borough for green shopping. As the smallest market with successful traders, there is an opportunity to trial new ways of trading to roll out across the borough later.</p> <p>Traders indicate they would welcome eco-friendly initiatives and the market is small enough to be able to consider supporting the traders financially to switch to sustainable systems.</p> <p>These could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plastic free shopping • refill stall for dry goods and household products • bike stall for repairs • repair your own tech stall • handmade, sustainably sourced household and personal items • events and workshops showcasing green living techniques, grow your own etc • reduce waste initiative • separated recycling points for market waste • community stalls, run by local people/charities offering local support or services to build social capital <p>Reach out to local sustainability groups such as the Women's Environmental Network, Rice Marketing and the Sunny Jar Echo Hub to advise and partner.</p>

Theme	Action
Trading hours and days	Victoria Park Market on a Sunday is very successful; currently Roman Road Square only operates Monday to Saturday. There is an opportunity for Sunday trade to spill over from Victoria Park, however this should be explored with residents. It is vital that this market maintains its hyper local appeal with any changes that evolve.
Marketing	<p>As part of the Moving Markets Online funding create social media channels and a website for the market.</p> <p>Consider the branding of the market alongside the plans for new works locally. Signage, online presence and council comms should be positioning this market with a clear identity and vision in preparation for new shoppers. Crucially, this brand should cement the market as a local place, at heart of the community, to ensure continued support from local people. The ambition is to attract customers from neighbouring spaces, not across London.</p>
Phase 2	
Partnerships	Continue to work alongside local groups to embed the market in the evolving local landscape. Ensure the market is keeping up with the works from 2021-22, making the most of opportunities to capture new shoppers - staying ahead of the build timeline with the market's curation and programmes.
Phase 3	
General	Continue to monitor the market as it and the local area evolve. Measure economic success by number of traders, footfall and reviews.



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