

# High and low marks for market

Opinion divided over changes to Christmas fair

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Love it or hate it, the Tenterden Christmas market has got the town talking.

This year for the first time it was staged by a commercial operator, The Market Square Group, and held over three days, from November 25-27.

The 2015 market, organised by Tenterden Chamber of Commerce, was beset by parking problems as thousands descended on the town for the day-long event and was a victim of its own success.

A commercial firm was called in to bring order to the chaos and the market was extended to avoid bottlenecks.

But some residents and retailers felt that the new-style market lacked atmosphere, or was damaging to business, and called for a return to the tradition of late-night Friday shopping in the first week of December, where shop-



Cllr Sue Ferguson

Picture: Lewis J. Brockway

keepers offered mulled wine and minced pies to customers.

Cllr Sue Ferguson took a lead role in organising this year's market, liaising with a commercial operator, and she appealed for people to share their views on social media in a bid to understand what the people of Tenterden wanted.

She said: "I wanted to understand people's views so that we can make the market even better next year."

"Many of the shopkeepers I spoke to said 'fantastic', 'brilliant', 'wonderful', and wanted more, but although takings were up for some others were less enthusiastic. It was a mixture of views."

Cllr Ferguson said she felt the market was compromised as organisers could not use the parking bays at the lower end of the High Street (by Tenterden House Interiors) and also outside the former Viyella shop, due to Ashford Borough Council's restrictions.

"The heavy footfall was certainly at both ends of the town rather than in the middle section - the market was in effect cut in two and some shops suffered as a result," she said.

Critics complained that Sayers Lane did not have Christmas trees or lights, but Cllr Ferguson explained that the area was privately owned and the decision was out of organisers' hands.

People also thought that the Rotary Club's mulled wine stall had disappeared when it had just moved from Sayers Lane to the town hall.

Cllr Ferguson added: "I'm certain that we can't go back to the old days when banks opened late and handed out mince pies. It doesn't happen like that nowadays and there just isn't a budget for it."

➔ What do you think? Write to Kentish Express, 34-36 North Street, Ashford, TN24 8JR or email kentishexpress@thekmgrou.co.uk



Time for a treat at Cakey McCakeface, stocking fillers and, top, visitors explore the funfair



Pictures: Stuart Kirk/Gary Browne

## 'GOOD BUSINESS'

Paul Kennedy, spokesman for the Market Square Group, which organised the event, said: "Traders did good business and the event was very well attended."

"We would view this event as a success. I am sure that majority of the public would agree."

'We view it as a success. I am sure the majority would agree'

## 'NO COMPLAINTS'

An Ashford Borough Council spokesman said it had received no complaints about the market organisation and added: "The only limitations placed on the market operator were due to other planned events that we were notified about beforehand, such as the weekly street market, the installation of the Christmas tree and the town council's light switch on."

## LOVE IT



**Smartie Party Events:** "Tenterden Christmas Market was lovely. Lots of happy kids' faces painted. Thanks to the Secret Pantry for filling me up with mulled wine and cake."

**Charley and Nick's Real Food:** "Another excellent day at Tenterden Christmas market!"

**Think Quirky:** "We have had a lovely weekend at Tenterden Christmas Market, the weather has been great and lots of lovely people came to see us. Another thank you to the organisers for doing a brilliant job."

**Nicola Collado:** "Lovely evening last night with the family down at Tenterden Christmas market. Rosie and Joey loved seeing Santa and going on some rides. Feeling all Christmassy now."

**Emma Eustace, with Tim Eustace and June Crawford, at Number 1, the Seaside:** "Tenterden Christmas market was lovely. Came back with rosemary focaccia, olives, garlic, sundried tomatoes, wild rice, cous-cous, bean stew and scoffed the lot!"

**Peter Williams:** "Really good and much better than trying to get everything into one evening, when the town becomes inaccessible and overcrowded. This was a great start and I'm sure it will get better, perhaps with more stalls in the middle of town. Please stick to this format, some people don't like change and others will complain about anything. A resounding well done from me."

**Lisa Lockwood:** "We had a lovely day yesterday, so many stalls with lovely stuff to buy. Had a lovely welcome in the church while

the kids made some Christmas decorations and all the shops very welcoming to us all."

## ENJOY IT!

**Miguel Fenton:** "Was great! How lucky are we to live in a town with this and all the other events and live entertainment on our doorstep. Why do some people moan so much? Enjoy it!"

**Zoe Rushforth:** "Thanks to all the stallholders and organisers of the market. I really loved the original Friday late night shopping but it has become really hard to manage over recent years so it had to change. Having it over a weekend meant we got to spread out the experience over a couple of visits. I'm sure the market will grow and

evolve over the coming years and become even better."

**Patricia Keys:** "Tenterden never disappoints, especially at Christmas. The lovely little independent shops were full of sparkly things, including in some cases a free glass of fizz and a mince pie. Carol singers were excellent and the stalls were full of tasteful artisan fare. Had a lovely afternoon."

**Sophie Hernandez:** "I went with my husband and my nine-week-old baby. We absolutely loved it and we felt all Christmassy. The range of stalls was wonderful and a lovely selection. We loved it all so much we went round twice."

**Heather Fray:** "Thought it was just perfect. Best Christmas market I've been to."



Fairground fun was popular with children, but some felt there were too many food stalls

# HATE IT



**Tracey Baldry-Batchelor:** "I was really disappointed. Majority of the stalls were selling alcohol, no atmosphere, too spread out. Totally didn't enjoy it."

**Kieron Tang:** "The market is not about selling, it's about having fun, Christmas is about having fun."

**Naomi Elizabeth:** "Because you spaced it out over a long weekend the numbers would have been more spread out over those days. I do think the middle of the street was rather empty."

**Tracy-Anne Jennings:** "In previous years it has been so busy I had stopped attending. I use a mobility buggy and found navigating the crowd impossible. This year yes. It was easy to get around. But no atmosphere so it was just like going shopping."

**Julia Burr:** "After finding out the extortionate fees the traders were charged to have a stall no wonder their prices were high. Someone's

done well out of it – sadly not the traders or Christmas shoppers."

**Louis Bentley Bryant:** "The market square really is the grinch of Christmas! Next year I think we should go back to the old late night shopping where it was local markets and not the community trying to get whoever they can get in."

## BAD SANTA?

**Karen Philbey:** "I felt it was too early. I think it should have been in December, it would have been more festive. Oh, and Father Christmas was not friendly at all."

**Chantelle Lee:** "My family had a stand on my behalf and it was not in a good position. While there was a big group of stands at the lower end of town mine was with a group of three at the other end (by WHSmith), with no lighting supplied for an outside night-time

market the organisers should be a little ashamed."

**Amber Marie Pearson:** "Was very excited for this and came down on the Sunday. Was so disappointed, most of the stalls were food/drink stands! Think in total I counted at least three crepes stands ... do we really need that many? Hardly any craft stalls or bits to buy. Would limit food and drink stalls or at least have more variety in them."

**Christina Smith:** "I was so very disappointed with the Christmas market. I have always lived in Tenterden and remember about 20 years of late night shopping experiences. The consensus from people I've spoken to, both the public and shop owners, is that they would like it to return to the old way. Having beautiful Christmas lights down Sayers Lane, mulled wine and carol singers outside Waitrose, with kids' funfair rides outside the town hall. Shops open late with mince pies and mulled wine etc. I popped down

with friends on the Friday and was so disappointed at the lack of Christmas feel, the ridiculous amount of food and drink stalls and the town resembling something of the 'jungle' that has just been taken down in Calais. The fact that the whole thing was organised by an outside company not local to Tenterden is also so disappointing."

**Candy Pearce:** "I didn't find it financially viable and I paid more than £150 for my stand. The food stalls next to me paid a hell of a lot more and they struggled. Certainly up the end I was at, a lot of people said it was too disjointed, too spread out, not a lot of atmosphere. I don't think I would consider doing it again unless I could negotiate where our stand would be."

**Amanda Jane Marsh:** "I was extremely disappointed with this year's event. Moving the fairground rides to the field just took away the lively atmosphere. It just didn't have the same amazing village atmosphere of other years."