



Organiser Cllr Sue Ferguson

Comments to make it better

Cllr Sue Ferguson who co-ordinated the market, said she had put hundreds of hours of work in to ensure the event ran smoothly.

She said: "We could have got together to run the market as a town but nobody came forward with offers of help.

"We need to develop our offering and have music on the Friday night but some aspects, such as the park and ride at the station were brilliant.

"If people would like to let me know their comments I can use them to make the market even better in the future."



Visitors explore the fair

Picture: Stuart Kirk



Tasty treats were on sale

Picture: Stuart Kirk

'IT RAISES THE TOWN'S PROFILE'

■ **Seren Welch**, of The Cowshed Workshop, which offers creative courses, said she was still responding to the numerous inquiries she had had from potential customers during the evening.

She said: "I would love to be at the market again and I've had so many advanced bookings.

"It's an important event because people from outside of the town visit and come back again. It raises Tenterden's profile as a shopping destination."

■ **Natasha Mahoney**, of children's gift supplier Betty & Peg, said this year's market was fantastic, adding: "In my

opinion the Christmas market was very successful. It had a very Christmasy feel and I chatted to lots of customers."

■ **Tara McCarragher**, from Rising Star, said: "The market was amazing and my takings were up from last year.

"It was so much better and very well organised and parking was easier.

"It's great to see Tenterden so busy and to welcome new people to our town.

"There was such a buzz in the High Street and it saddens me to think that people were not happy with the market. "It's no small thing to arrange it and the organisers have worked so hard."



Town clerk Phil Burgess

Town council happy to help

Town clerk Phil Burgess said: "The Christmas fair last year was organised by the Chamber of Commerce and this year by the Market Square Group.

"The town council is not involved in the organisation of the event but we were happy to allow use of the recreation ground and the event was endorsed by our tourism and business committee.

"I understand Sue Ferguson canvassed many shops in the town before the event.

"This is the first year in the three-day format."



This year saw the town's first commercially-organised Christmas market, organised on by The

Christmas market

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A small flurry of shop owners have given Tenterden's Christmas market a distinctly frosty reception.

However, other traders have leapt to the defence of the town's first commercially-organised Christmas market, put on by The Market Square Group which took place last weekend.

Kevin Bryant, owner of High Street business Truffles At Coco, said: "The High Street has sold out to a commercial operator who has no interest in the community and this is against what a small town should be about and the sense of Christmas spirit.

"The Christmas market lacked community spirit and that's the most important thing that was lost.

"I would like to have seen the Brownies selling cakes or the Scouts cooking burgers, but the cost of stalls would not have made it worth their while to set up."

The high-end confectioner said the market was too far a drift

from his shop at 128 High Street, which had no stalls outside.

"The market should encompass the length of the High Street but it was just concentrated in the centre of the town," he said.

Mr Bryant bemoaned the higgledy-piggledy look of the market, with different sizes, shapes and colours of the awnings and tents, which he said did not complement the smartness of Tenterden.

He added: "There was no consultation with shop owners as far as I can tell.

"I've spoken to around 15 business owners and none of them were asked if the market was what they wanted.

"I'm afraid the Market Square Group is the grinch that stole Tenterden's Christmas fair."

Paul Woodcock, owner of Woodcocks of Tenterden branded the market "financially a complete disaster", while Jamie Willson of Manor Row and Tenterden House Interiors said: "We much prefer the old format of a late-night shopping evening".

Last year's event organised by the Tenterden Chamber of Commerce was a victim of its own

'Market Square Group is the grinch that stole Tenterden's Christmas fair'

success as its popularity saw traffic queues tailing back from St Michael's into the town and side roads blocked with cars.

The Chamber said it no longer had the resources to organise the market so this year a commercial operator The Market Square Group was called in.

The Christmas market has previously been on a Friday and included a special late-night shopping event that evening.

This year saw the Christmas market run over three days, from last Friday until Sunday.

■ For picture special on the three-day Christmas market see pages 6 and 7.

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



Market Square Group

Picture: Stuart Kirk

'lacked community spirit'

'DIDN'T DO ANYTHING FOR THE TOWN AT ALL AND I HATED IT'

■ **Paul Woodcock**, from interiors shop Woodcocks of Tenterden, branded the market "financially a complete disaster".

"The Christmas market killed Friday night trade, ruined my Saturday trade, while Sunday was ok," he said.

"Traditionally we used to have the Christmas market on the first Friday in December and it was always great.

"The Christmas tree was up, the lights were on, carols were sung and kids came to look at the best dressed shop windows."

Mr Woodcock, who runs the shop with partner Adrian Gibbins, added: "As far as I could see there was an abundance of burger vans, takeaway and drinks stalls.

"The market didn't do anything for the town at all and I hated it."

■ **Alex Tang**, of the Honeymoon Chinese Restaurant at East Cross, estimated he had lost 50% of his takeaway trade as access to his premises was blocked off from Thursday to Sunday.

He was also reprimanded by a market inspector after his son sold bracelets and refreshments from the front of his premises.

Mr Tang said: "The old late-night shopping was much better, customers knew I gave out sake and mulled wine and they came into say happy Christmas."

"The whole thing has become too commercial and the experience was not nice."

■ **Carol Webb**, from High Street favourite Webbs of Tenterden, said: "We weren't consulted about the Christmas market and it just happened.

"There was no music and after my family and I got home from visiting the market we just felt flat.

"It used to be an old fashioned, magical occasion, but somehow the atmosphere was lost.

"Maybe people were put off from coming by all the parking problems last year but the atmosphere just didn't get going.

"I can't see how the Christmas market benefited the town or its shopkeepers."

Paul Woodcock from Woodcocks of Tenterden



Seren Welch of The Cowshed Workshop at the Tenterden Christmas market

Mixed messages from trader

Jamie Willson, owner of Manor Row Interiors and Tenterden House Interiors, saw a hugely contrasting picture in terms of trade.

While his Manor Row store at the centre of the market area was busy, his other shop at 108-110 High Street was quiet.

He said: "The market was better and calmer than last year, but it costs us more money when the market is on, than we make.

"People are not interested in buying bigger ticket items like dining tables during the market, which we need to sell for our business to do well."



Businessman Jamie Wilson

Mr Wilson, who has to pay for extra staff and security during the event, said: "We much prefer the old format of a late-night shopping evening."

Event is viewed as a success

Paul Kennedy, spokesman for the Market Square Group, said the market covered seven zones and as much as the High Street as possible.

He said free places were given away to seven charities including Tenterden Rotary, Lions and the Salvation Army.

Mr Kennedy added that Mr Tang's son of the Honeymoon Chinese restaurant was informed he did not have a

licence to sell refreshments but did not accept this.

He agreed that stalls were "different colours and sizes" but added: "They were all of a robust nature and safe to trade from."

Mr Kennedy added: "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."