

# Private firm takes over running of festive fair

by Rachael Woods

rwoods@thekmgrou.co.uk  
@rachaelwoodskm

A Christmas fair regarded as the icing on the cake in Tenterden's annual calendar of events has been put in the hands of a private firm.

Tenterden Chamber of Commerce says it no longer has the manpower to run the popular fair that attracts an array of independent traders, food and drink stalls and entertainment acts.

Instead Peterborough-based Market Square Group has taken over the reins of the celebration, which sees thousands of visitors come to Tenterden.

The change-over means traders will pay significantly higher prices for their stalls, with a 3m-long grocery and craft stall charged at £300, and a hot food stall costing double the price at £600.

At last year's two-day Christmas fair some early bird stalls were advertised for as little as £60 net cost, although this year's fare is set to run over three days, from November 25-27.

Discounts of up to 50% are also being offered to businesses within a half a mile range of Tenterden.



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Town councillor Sue Ferguson said the use of a private company would inevitably mean higher prices but that it was better than having no fair at all.

She said: "It's brilliant the town still has an Christmas market and when the Chamber of Commerce said they couldn't do it, the choice was a commercial operator, or nothing at all."

A section of the recreation ground will be used for the fair this year, with boards laid down to protect the grass.

Cllr Ferguson was previously a key organiser along with Jonathan Medes but both have since resigned from the chamber, with Cllr Ferguson parting company with the organisation in April, after failing to win a

place on the executive committee.

Cllr Ferguson said that people wanted to see a professional event, which was expensive to run, requiring generators for electricity and a security presence. She said: "The old-fashioned idea of putting a couple of tables outside a shop is no longer enough as people expect a proper fair."

Cllr Mike Carter and Cllr Ferguson involved the commercial operator after the Chamber bowed out and Cllr Ferguson said that around 80% of the stalls available had already been booked.

Tenterden Chamber of Commerce issued a statement to clarify its position over the Christmas fair after town council minutes connected it to the event.

A spokesman said: "The Tenterden and District Chamber of Commerce wish to make it clear to all parties that the forthcoming Christmas event is in no way associated with the chamber as has been stated in town council minutes.

"It is being organised by an events company who are running the fair as a business project.

"This is unlike previous years when, under the stewardship of the chamber, it was run solely for the benefit of Tenterden town and its residents.

"Members can rest assured that no chamber funds will be invested in the event, nor have any been requested to date.

"We wish to see a successful weekend which benefits the town as a whole and rewards all our members involved."

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