

High Streets Task Force Case Study: Chiswick Flower Market London W4

February 2021

Chiswick Flower Market

Basic facts about the high street and local area

Description of the place

Chiswick High Road is in West London and - like many High Streets across the UK - has declined in recent years with falling footfall and a rising number of vacant shops. The area has arguably suffered from a lack of clear strategy or leadership for its management and improvement.

There is a population of over 600k within 3 miles of the High Road. There is a high level of local affluence, and it is one of the most beautiful parts of London with the River Thames, Chiswick House and Gardens and Gunnersbury Park all within a short distance. The High Road itself is attractive with Victorian architecture, wide streets and mature trees.

At the centre of the High Road is a car park for 50 vehicles where a market was held in the 1920s.

Key opportunities/challenges

Chiswick Flower Market was established in 2020 as a community-led project in order to help revitalise our town centre. It was set up as a Community Interest Company and run without public funding by a group of residents on an entirely voluntary basis.

We wanted to be the “Columbia Road of the West” and make Chiswick a top destination for Londoners and visitors to our city. Columbia Road Flower Market has transformed the local area around it, with a number of new businesses springing up, revitalising the immediate neighbourhood.

As well as creating a vibrant market, our objectives were:

- to bring a much-needed increase in footfall to Chiswick High Road, with the market acting as a catalyst for the renewal and regeneration of the High Road
- to complement and support other organisations, markets and businesses that are based in Chiswick
- to increase awareness of gardening, horticulture, the environment and more sustainable ways of living for all Londoners
- to bring local residents and businesses together in a collaborative way, working with other initiatives, to increase the sense of community and togetherness
- to create opportunities for the establishment of new independent businesses, for local businesses to grow, and to encourage other independent and national businesses to come to Chiswick High Road.

A public meeting was held in February 2020 to discuss the idea and - based on strong local support from businesses and residents - we decided to set up and operate the market.

A key challenge was doing this during the Coronavirus pandemic and particularly as we are a group who had never run a market before.

Description of the project/initiative

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We held three pilot markets in 2020 on the first Sundays of September, November and December.

Over the course of the three markets, we had:

- 18,500 visitors¹ and 32 different traders
- 75% of our traders were locally based businesses
- 40% of our traders had started their businesses in the last 2 years
- 82% of our visitors who responded to an Instagram survey² had come from more than 2 miles away
- 90 local volunteers helped us to marshal the markets and ensure safe social distancing.

In the run up to the inaugural market, we received strong press interest and were named as the number one thing to do in London in September by Time Out magazine. BBC Radio London promoted the market with two interviews, and it was widely reported in the run up to opening in local and London media. The Financial Times also had a two-page article about the market that weekend.

The first market had 7,500 visitors. Two short films about the market can be seen [here](#) and [here](#).

Due to the worsening Covid-19 situation, we cancelled our October market, but ran our November and December markets with the decision to do much less marketing to prevent too many people coming.

These markets attracted 5,000 and 6,500 visitors respectively. At the request of local businesses, we extended the market into the nearby Devonshire Road (which has a number of independent shops and cafes) and which enabled us to spread out our stalls and increase the number of stalls available. This both gave the market greater space for social distancing and brought our customers directly to the cafes and restaurants along the road.

¹ All visitor numbers were counted by marshals as part of our Covid secure plan

² Details in our [2020 review](#)

The team involved in the project/initiative

Project/initiative team

Ollie Saunders, a local resident and commercial surveyor, had the original idea for the market which he posted on a local website in a conversation about the lack of progress in regenerating the High Road.

This was read by Karen Liebreich, who is a director of Abundance London and who had already run several public realm projects locally. Together with Bridget Osborne, the editor of Chiswick Calendar and a former BBC journalist, they worked together to produce a business plan and organise a public meeting.

The team quickly grew to a total of 15 bringing in the range of skills we needed - including a finance director, a surveyor, administrative support, social media and marketing support, market and event management, a cargo bike team and others.



Impact or outcomes

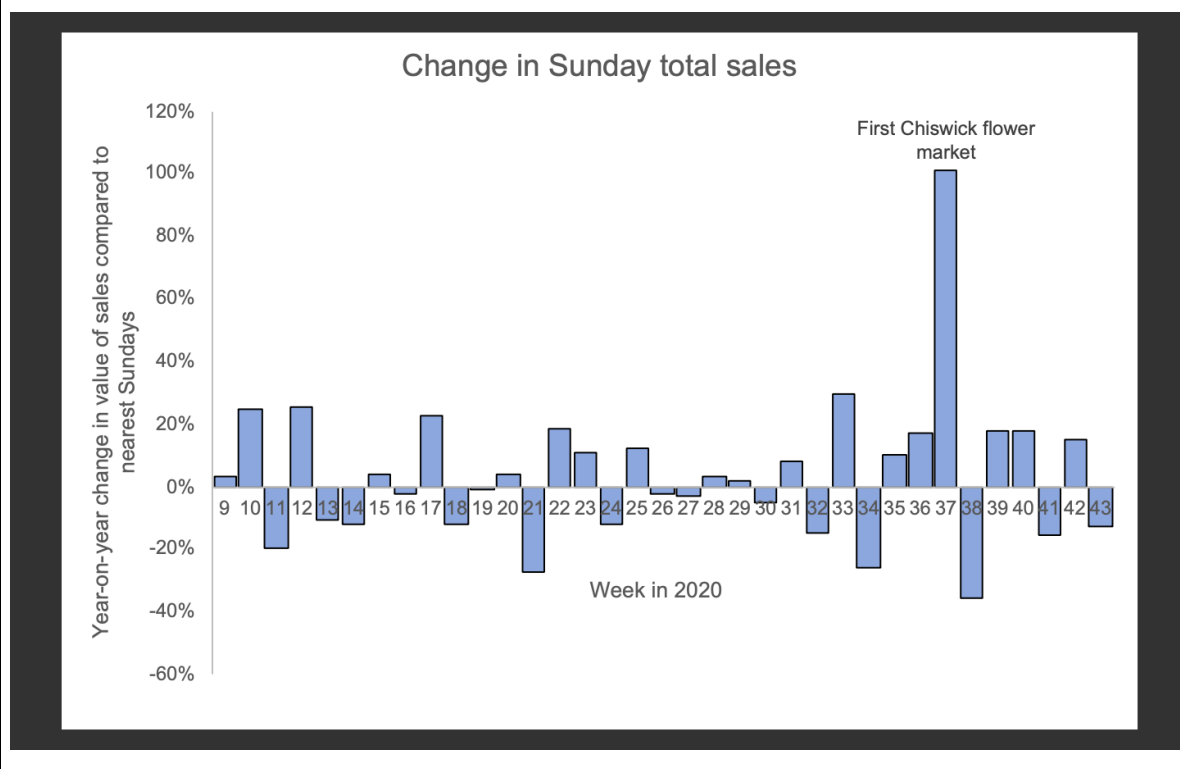
Short-term outputs/achievements

Impact on shops and restaurants

We had excellent feedback from local traders who reported to us that the September market boosted turnover by between 50% and 100% above their normal levels, and through the three markets attracting 18,500 visitors, this also provided an opportunity for retailers to promote and attract passing customers to their premises.

After the September market, we were approached by the traders of the adjacent shopping street, Devonshire Road, who requested that we expand into their road, and close it to traffic completely for 'Flower Market Sundays'. This brings significant footfall to the street - but we also had to bring in a stricter Covid-secured marshalled environment.

Data from retailers on nearby shopping street Turnham Green Terrace also showed a dramatic increase in turnover, as shown in the graph below, using data supplied by shops.



Impact on our community

Since we have started our market, the local authority has also granted licenses for a monthly antiques market with up to 80 stalls and a cheese market which will make Chiswick a London-wide attraction. Other market operators and event organisers have also been talking to us about events in Chiswick, as well as other areas asking us to bring our Flower Market to their High Streets.

We have provided reduced rents for local businesses at the market, and also invited Chiswick House, local social enterprise Cultivate London and Chiswick Horticultural Society to take stalls, which have been very successful for them.

Even established bricks and mortar businesses have found it has boosted their trade and increased their profile to have a stall, as demonstrated from the survey about Sunday sales referred to above.

A number of other local businesses have also had stalls at the market with more than 75% of traders being local. We have given priority to new start businesses. Several of these traders are startups with only an internet shop, and they have reported how important meeting new customers is and the benefits of a physical retail presence.

Several of the startups were started during the pandemic by local residents who lost their jobs or were furloughed - and so we are delighted that the market has provided an opportunity for our community to recover from the impact of the virus.

We are exploring whether to have a Chiswick Flower Market pop-up shop in the future and some online traders are now looking at having a bricks and mortar presence directly as a result of their experience at Chiswick.

To minimise our impact on the environment, we operated a cargo bike delivery service which made more than 80 deliveries, and we sold 250 branded jute bags as part of our plan to move to a total plastic bag ban in 2021. More than 70% of stock sold at the market was grown in the UK.

We have brought local residents and businesses together in a collaborative way, working with other initiatives, to increase the sense of community and togetherness. The Chiswick Flower Market team is a mix of 15 people from Chiswick who have volunteered to set up and operate the market. A total of 90 people also volunteered to be marshals at our markets. In addition, an appeal for assistance brought 10 local seamstresses who made us more than 500 metres of bunting. From the outset, we worked closely with the London Borough of Hounslow. Whilst there has been no funding available, they have been supportive with advice and practical assistance.

We also paid special attention to the look and feel of the market - such as attractive posters based on paintings by Liz Pinn, a member of the RWS who lives locally, the erection of bunting and flags together with a friendly greeting at the entrance to the market as we undertook Covid protocols (as seen in the images below). This ensured a clear identity for the market as well as providing an aesthetically pleasing and welcoming community element to our market.

Our social media channels now have more than 6,000 followers from across London and further afield. Our Chiswick Flower Market website regularly receives 1,000 unique visitors before market day. As well as featuring on BBC London News, the front page of the business section of the Daily Telegraph, and a two-page article in the FT Weekend, we have gained much positive press about Chiswick since the market was launched, including commentary in British Airways High Life magazine, Visit London, Japanese press and several garden magazines.

Long-term outputs/achievements

We plan to continue to operate the market during 2021 (subject to Covid restrictions).

We will continue to market Chiswick and the Flower Market to a London-wide audience of visitors and residents, with the aim of bringing regular much needed footfall to our High Road. The mix of traders at the market is carefully curated so that we always have a range of interesting traders with a strong sustainability ethos - in line with what we and our visitors want.

Our marketing will focus on Chiswick as a destination - both the market as a place to come to, but also the wider retail offer of Chiswick High Road and visitor attractions such as Chiswick House and other local markets. Once the effect of Covid has subsided we anticipate that the Chiswick Flower Market will become a significant tourist attraction, bringing much-needed footfall to the local area and local attractions such as Chiswick House.

We will grow our social media channels as well as TripAdvisor and other ways to enable us to increase our visibility to tourists as London emerges from the pandemic.

We hope also that the higher footfalls, and the emergence of other ideas such as the Antique Market and the Cheese Market, will encourage more bricks and mortar retailers to come to our High Road. Local property agents report a recognition of the flower market from a number of enquiring retailers, and a major fashion retailer is considering a pop-up store to coincide with our market. One of our flower market traders is seeking a permanent retail premises in Chiswick.

As we generate surpluses, we will look to use them to invest in improving the market's appearance and marketing, as well as other projects beneficial to the High Road area.

We intend to bring local buskers and other arts and music, as well as workshops and themed events to the market and to offer some form of street entertainment and other attractions, such as the Fullers Brewery Horses, when social distancing rules permit.

The accessibility of the location is important and we will continue to undertake surveys so that we have accurate data about our visitors. Our Instagram survey found that few people drove to the market (and indeed an overflow car park we arranged for the first market had zero customers).

We have a robust business model, which means that the market will bring in money from stall fees and some merchandising in order to ensure its long-term viability.

Advice for High Streets Task Force users

Advice/key learning

Our key learning is that making a High Street a destination with a unique or specialist offering is an important part of revitalising our town centres. The increased footfall has had a positive impact on Chiswick retail but also in marketing it as a destination for Londoners. The increased profile of the area had a knock-on appeal, and our initiative and work in creating a new retail space generated further initiatives and proposals from other businesses.

We also were empowered by the response of the community and local businesses that wanted to get involved in a positive project.

This is an area where retailers have never been able to agree on setting up a BID or similar organisation, so we aim to provide some of the benefits other areas have seen by providing a different model.

A key learning was also to embrace the internet retailers - many of whom have many thousands of customers and followers and who promote our town centre. They also saw the benefit of a physical High Street presence to their business in addition to their online presence.

Our social media following also is a huge marketing tool for Chiswick as a destination and gives access to potentially tens of thousands of people for us to promote and encourage people to visit at very little cost to us.

We were careful to fully consult local businesses and residents, with a public meeting and upfront consultation survey to which 400 people responded. We also gained the support of the leader of the Council which enabled us to have access to key officers at the Council. Close coordination with the varying departments (from transport to health and waste disposal) proved essential to our success.

The team that set up and operated the market all have different strengths and skills - and worked collaboratively with a real sense of purpose. We also made it fun!

A key learning is also that High Street regeneration does not necessarily need significant public funding - we were fortunate enough to receive two small grants from The Wakeham Trust and Waitrose, some small sponsorships and assistance in kind from local businesses such as printing posters.

In conclusion, our Flower Market is an example of how the community was brought together to proactively bring life to our High Street. Strong citizen participation created a distinct place with a unique offer for locals and brought new visitors to Chiswick from outside our immediate catchment area. We were able to bring together the diverse skills of our local residents – and used the Market to publicise our High Road to a wider new audience through digital marketing.



