

Southern Market Towns - Redhill

Roger Mills popped into this Surrey gaff on one of our few sunny Saturdays this summer

Redhill is a pendulum market - swinging from Hughmark to Town and Country and back to Hughmark in the least few tendering rounds.

Well, if Reigate and Banstead Council want to give two of our biggest operators a chance to show what they can do, they are no less generous to the traders, giving them a site smack-bang in the centre of town - a few steps from both rail and bus with plenty of punters on hand.

MT last visited at 'Tender Decision Time' two years ago, to find an anxious looking Andy Morris, then of Town and Country, awaiting the official announcement. As we soon heard, it was Hughmark's Graham and Lew who were cheering, but with plenty to do.

The contract's five years term, longer than envisaged, was a recognition of Hughmark's £50,000 investment of Vitabri pop-ups in corporate colours to be provided in replacement for the own rigs format.

Lew was clear about getting it right, even though time was tight: "We'll consult traders about the style and format of stalls, showing examples of the types available. But it is our intention to get colours and designs agreed early so that we can be ready to stall Redhill out completely for the first day in November."

And two years on, traders told us that they were absolutely true to their word. One said: "You couldn't fault how they went about it. Yes, they knew some of us worked

from box iron joints framed up for our stock but they said 'look, we've got to have these stalls so let's see how we can make sure you can still work as you want to.' Hughmark are a good operator for us here, they've gone to a lot of trouble to make things work."

The solutions are ingenious and use Vitabri's flexibility to the full, but result in a very smart corporate image that's still usable by, say a bag worker or clothing specialist. And yes, it does look well turned-out, the layout making efficient use of the space with steady punter weight throughout.

Yet even under the sun, trader sentiment was pessimistic. Nothing to do with Hughmark though, it was merely another slow day's



This gorgeous floral display sets the tone for the gaff



Hughmark's corporate look still allows flashing up flexibility

work in an increasingly difficult retail environment. From his sock stall, long standing trader Mr Singh, who spoke for many, rued the tightness of money: "The market game isn't what it was. They are all slow but you simply have to keep trying to see what you can do."

Down at the front of the gaff, Ideal Gold's Mike Parker agreed money was tight, but also reckoned punter's tastes - or maybe the 'post Elizabeth Duke' jewellery trade - had

changed, and there is less interest in their high end flash of quality gold rings: "We have had to change what we carry and put a table of cheap stuff at the front to try to get people to simply stop and browse, giving us an opportunity to at least show them what we've got in the cases back here."

"When they see what we carry they are impressed and will spend money but you have to get them interested with the cheap stuff first these days."

Mind you it all looks different to the newcomer and Michelle Johnstone, who's been working Saturdays with her Kraft Box lines for a few months and was delighted: "We are doing well and it is really beginning to build now people are getting to know we are here."

"Markets are a good outlet for us, we simply couldn't look at a shop but a stall gives an economic way to set up without needing to invest a lot

of money in stock. I'd certainly suggest small start-ups look at the idea."

And within the established one of each commodity rule, there is space here. Casuals can turn up, by 07:00 please,

and the gaff trades through to 5:30 when the gate is opened. The Tobies are Stewart Cross on Thursdays and newcomer Adam Baxter on Saturday, and they'll be pleased to hear from you via the usual Hughmark

numbers. A word of caution though. General opinion is that you have to give it a few weeks at Redhill, so the one day hit casual worker is probably wasting their time. Take note...



Ideal Gold's Mike Parker