

HARROW TOWN CENTRE FORUM

THURSDAY 1 NOVEMBER 2012

PRESENT:

Councillor Bill Phillips

Harrow Council

BUSINESS MEMBERS

Howard Bluston

North West London Chamber of
Commerce

Darren Harman

St George's Shopping Centre

Jeff Jackson

St Ann's Shopping Centre

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Bernard Segal

Roxborough Residents' Association

OFFICERS

Mark Billington

Head of Economic Development
and Research

Louise Baxter

Town Centre Officer

Lindsay Coulson

Head of Communications

Andy Stubbs

Harrow Town Centre Manager

1. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were received from Councillor Sue Anderson, Councillor Simon Williams, Pat Carvalho, Mark Pullen, Gary Stevenson, Kunjal Sutaria, and Anthony Wood.

2. Minutes of Meetings:

AGREED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2012 be taken as read and signed as a correct record and that the notes of the informal meeting held on 26 July 2012 be agreed.

3. Matters Arising:

A member of the Forum stated that he had met with Rev Bob Gardiner's replacement, Rev Barry Hingston at Churches Together in Harrow. Rev Hingston had indicated that he would be the new representative of Churches Together in Harrow and the Forum member undertook to liaise with Rev Hingston.

AGREED: That Rev Barry Hingston be appointed as the Churches Together in Harrow representative to the Harrow Town Centre Forum.

4. Police Update:

A member of the Forum requested that if the police representative from the Greenhill Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT) was unable to attend future meetings, then he should be requested to submit a written update report to the Forum. He also requested that the police representative provide a report about plans for policing Harrow Town Centre (HTC). He added that the Borough Commander had indicated his willingness to attend a future meeting of the Forum and should be invited to attend the next meeting. The Chairman stated that he would forward these requests to the police representative.

AGREED: That

- (1) the Borough Commander be invited to a future meeting of the Forum;
- (2) the Police representative be requested to provide a written report to future meetings of the Forum if unable to attend in person.

5. Invest in Harrow DVD viewing:

The Forum viewed the 4 minute version of the promotional DVD, Invest in Harrow. Copies of the 15 minute version of the DVD were distributed to all those present. Following questions from members of the Forum, an officer advised that:

- the main intention of the DVD had been to promote Harrow as a brand and encourage investment in the area;
- the shorter version of the DVD had been aired on Star TV on several occasions at no cost and the DVD had been made using OLF1 funding. The DVD had been distributed to organisations such as the University of Westminster and via Harrow in Business to local businesses;
- Land Securities, who would be undertaking £300m redevelopment in Wealdstone were keen that the commercial spaces in Wealdstone be utilised;
- the lack of step-free access at stations such as Harrow on the Hill and Stanmore continued to be an issue and that the Council, the GLA Member and residents had been lobbying Transport for London and the Mayor of London about this issue for a number of years and would continue to do so.

The Chairman stated that Harrow did not promote itself enough, for instance it had the 9th largest shopping mall in London and that there should be greater marketing and promotion of Harrow.

AGREED: That the DVD, Invest in Harrow, be noted.

6. **Outer London Fund Round 2 Project Update:**

Officers provided verbal updates on the various projects and forthcoming events which were supported by Round 2 of the Outer London Fund.

St Ann's Road/Havelock Place

A detailed design comprising the following elements was recently presented to the Council's Public Realms Project Board:

- granite paving adjacent to Katie's statue would continue along St Ann's Road;
- a central strip, also paved in granite, where performance areas, trading activities, trees and street furniture would be located;
- a cantenary lighting system in which lanterns would be suspended from cables across the street and fixed to adjacent buildings;
- raised planters, steps and canopy to the entrance to the mall would be replaced by a continuous ramp;
- measures to restrict vehicle access to the western end of St Ann's Road would be implemented;
- the number of BT telephone boxes had been reduced from 12 to 8 but it would not be possible to eliminate these altogether as BT used these as advertising space;
- a cost appraisal was being undertaken and adjustments may be made to ensure the scheme remained in budget with works expected to begin in February 2013;
- the plans for the cantenary lighting system had caused some delays. Any building owner that agreed to the installation of cables for the suspension of this lighting would have this written into a contract and this would be apply in case of change of ownership of the building.

Kymberley Road/College Road

A feasibility study had been carried out by consultants and three options for the one way gyratory system at Kymberly Road/College Road/Headstone Road were likely to be proposed:

- minimal change with a focus on public realm and pedestrian access improvements in Kymberley Road/Headstone Road and additional bus standing capacity;
- as above, with entry/exit to St Ann's car park reversed;
- two-way working on College Road;
- reversing the entry/exit points to St Ann's car park would lead to confusion amongst motorists and may lead to accidents and delays

along Kymberley Road. It was important that delivery vehicles on Kymberley Road not be delayed as a consequence and that most landlords at St Ann's centre would agree with this view;

- signage in the car parks needed to be improved and the ramps needed to be widened. Other local authorities such as Manchester, which were in a similar process of improving their town centres may be willing to share ideas and successes and should be invited to future discussions.

Lowlands Recreation Ground

The consultant team had been engaging with a wide range of interest groups across the borough and a concept design and a design workshop with the local community was expected to be completed by December/January. A package of initial 'quick wins' was being developed to raise the profile of the project and build relationships with interested groups and test design ideas for the site.

Signage

- the new programme of works and designs agreed as part of the Legible London Signage Scheme was on track;
- there were plans for bespoke signs and artwork created by Design for London Consultants to be installed on the flank walls of large buildings and four possible buildings were being approached;
- preliminary designs for car park indicator signs in the town centre, which would give motorists real-time information about parking spaces available in the town centre car parks, were being completed.

Events

- a two day antique market held in August, where the stall holders attending had done well despite the number of stalls being lower than expected;
- 9 November – festive Diwali lights would be installed in Station and College Roads and a Light Garden around Katie's statue;
- a European Christmas market would be running from 23-25 November;
- 24 November – Harrow Song Festival would take place on a stage in St John's Road;
- 1 December – Christmas tree installed and Christmas lights to be switched on by the Mayor accompanied by singing by community groups and choirs.

AGREED: That the Outer London Fund Round 2 Project Update be noted.

7. Business Improvement District development programme update:

Officers made the following presentations to members of the Forum. The first of these set out the findings of the Business consultation questionnaire

formulated by the Harrow BID team. 67 retailers had responded. Officers anticipated that the results would help to identify the key areas for future improvements through a BID. The findings of the questionnaire were summarised as follows:

- the most prevalent perceived strength of the town was its clean environment; the good variety of people that visited, secure environment and good variety of shops;
- the most prevalent weakness of the town, was the level of anti social behaviour; the second was both needing a better variety of shops, parking facilities and improvement in the evening and weekend cleaning;
- the areas that needed the most priority within the Town Centre were more events and activities to draw people in; action against crime affecting businesses and marketing and promotion of the town centre;
- averages for the following features in Harrow Town Centre (where 1 was poor and 5 was good):
 - shopping facilities = 3.5
 - retail mix / offer = 3.3
 - parking provision = 2.7
 - destination stores = 3.2
 - customer experience = 3.2
 - ease of use = 3.7
 - promotional activity = 2.5
- 45% of the retailers, stated that there were no factors that prevented customers from choosing Harrow Town centre as a place to shop or visit;
- 55% of the retailers thought that there were factors preventing customers from choosing Harrow Town Centre as a place to shop or visit;
- 15% indicated that they knew about the work of Business Improvement Districts in other Town or City Centres;
- the most popular reasons for people choosing Harrow Town Centre were convenience, good car parks, to meet friends, shopper facilities.

Following questions and comments from Forum members, an officer advised that further surveys of other business sectors would be undertaken. A follow-up programme of action was planned and a business plan would be developed to deal with key concerns highlighted in the survey, such as security, better signage, parking and marketing.

The second presentation was the Retail Group's Retail Operator report, the findings of which were as follows:

- an overwhelmingly high number of respondents did not know what BID's were achieving/doing in other town centres;
- over two thirds of respondents had stated that three following core areas should be focussed on the reduction in the number of 'chuggers', better security/ safety, improved hygiene standards;

- almost three quarters of all respondents considered there to be some factors that prevent shoppers from choosing Harrow;
- 35% had said the choice of shops was an issue; 31% stated parking needed to be improved; 21% felt the town had not undergone enough regeneration;
- 14% said security issues needed addressing;
- a regular/local shopper base (95%) dominated and that they were also successfully attracting families. Local workers were only mentioned by two thirds of respondents which was a level lower than expected;
- shoppers were overwhelmingly considered to be 'value seekers' and 'on a budget'. Harrow's retailers recognised that the town was attracting a proportion of family focussed, comfortable consumers and brand conscious shoppers. Respondents did not think that Harrow was attracting the aspirational and affluent shopper;
- 45% of respondents were trading in line with or better than last year which was a positive factor given the current difficult trading conditions. Almost a quarter of retailers were more than 10% down on last year. No one sector was trading better than any other;
- 37% of retailers stated that they were currently trading in line with regional trends (20% are above regional averages). 22% said turnover was currently matching their company's national averages with a further 22% trading above average.
- of those retailers who reported that turnover was down, most were well known clothing and footwear high street brands. 55% of retailers had the same staffing levels as 2011, with 36% trading with fewer staff than last year;
- typical Average Transaction Values (ATVs) were focussed around £5-£10 and just under a third said ATV was between £16 and £30. 27% of retailers indicated that typical ATVs were in line with those achieved in 2011, with 39% stating they had fallen year on year;
- the town was successfully appealing to local shoppers and workers and the town centre was considered to be 'convenient' and with specific stores that attract shoppers on a regular basis;
- only 4 reasons to visit were rated by over 50% of retailers: the market, car parking, environment and evening facilities were all underperforming as reasons to visit the town, the key aspects which would need to be addressed in order to maintain the existing shopper base and attract new shoppers;
- the wide variety of shops and leisure facilities in the town were seen as core strengths;

- the town was considered to be accessible, with public transport being specifically named as a strength;
- whilst the variety of shops was seen as a strength, over a quarter of respondents stated that there was a lack of choice to the retail offer within each product category – with too much of the ‘same’ across the town;
- parking provision and security/safety issues were also considered key weaknesses
- retailers felt that Harrow needed better quality clothing offers to broaden the overall choice (width and depth) and more entertainment shops;
- catering provision was another area where retailers felt improvements were needed. Parking provision was the main area that respondents felt needed to be addressed. Maintenance was an issue with many operators;
- retailers felt that the retail offer needed broader improvements to the marketing/events within the town and would help to attract more shoppers;
- overall Harrow was rated as ‘ok’ across all seven statements All the statements were rated by retailers as above average (2.5). The parking provision and promotional activity rated lowest by comparison, shopper facilities rated best comparing the statements with each other, the parking provision, promotional activity and destination stores were considered to be a poor relative to the ‘scores’ for ease of use and shopper facilities;
- 46% of respondents had indicated that they were serving fewer customers compared to 2011. 53% of retailers said that they intended to remain trading from their existing premises, with 26% stating they were unaware of company plans for the future. In addition, 85% of retailers stated that they felt the existing trading hours suited shoppers – those that disagreed felt that the town centre should trade later most days and in particular at peak trading periods.

An officer added that areas for further investigation or potential improvement initiatives included:

- Identifying opportunities to grow and expand the customer base, including local workers;
- Identifying opportunities to reward customers for their loyalty;
- further improvements to the catering provision – especially for both shoppers and workers which would help extend the shopping trip and increase reasons to visit the town centre.

- promoting the town centre as a viable retail opportunity for more specialist traders/independents to help broaden the perceived offer available in Harrow;
- identify how to further improve the appeal of the town centre to the student population;
- create leisure visit reasons, such as events/promotions which would attract more people to the town centre;
- focus on events that were both shopper and worker focused;
- additional marketing activity;
- improved maintenance regimes and response times;
- investigate car park pricing/promotional initiatives.

AGREED: That the presentations be noted.

8. Other Updates:

An officer advised that the Communications team at the Council would support the BID by promoting and explaining it to the wider community, promote forthcoming events related to the BID and flag up improvements and changes that had already been carried out to the Town Centre. She added that her team had supported the consultation on the St Ann's Road design proposals and the proposed development of Lowlands Recreation Ground. She would aim to share the results of a recent survey of residents views' regarding the Town Centre, which had revealed that the level of resident satisfaction with the Council and the Town Centre was at 60%.

The representative from Harrow College stated that:

- student enrolment figures for September had been good and similar to those in January;
- the college was focussing on apprenticeships and vocational training and was in discussions with local businesses about these;
- the college would be holding an Industry week at the end of November and a Winter Fair, where arts and crafts students would have stalls at either an indoor/outdoor venue where they could promote and showcase their work. These events would be publicised shortly.

The representative from North West London Chamber of Commerce stated that:

- the NWLC would be moving offices shortly and Harrow in Business would be moving to offices at Harrow College.

The representative from St George's shopping mall stated that:

- phase 1 of refreshing St George's mall had been completed with phase 2 underway;
- there were four new tenants and a comparatively low void rate;
- footfall was down on last year and down during the last quarter;
- he would be happy to provide a more detailed overview of this to Council officers at a future date, along with information about which retailers and leisure operators are looking for new premises in Harrow.

The Chairman stated that St Ann's Shopping mall:

- had a very low void rate;
- new doors and mats and new car parking equipment had been installed recently, which should reduce the incidence of breakdowns and complaints;
- although footfall was lower than usual, traders reported that they were generally doing well;
- he had concerns about competition from the new Wembley Park retail unit due to open shortly and felt that the shopping facilities in Harrow Town Centre should be promoted to the residents of Wembley.

AGREED: That the updates be noted.

9. Any Other Business:

An officer reported that a feasibility study into the use of a Smart card/loyalty card specific to Harrow which would provide discounts for parking meters and could be used for shopping, was being carried out. A member of the Forum suggested that the use of apps on smartphones would be an alternative way of providing this service.

10. Date of Next Meeting:

4.00 pm on Thursday 29 January 2013.

The Meeting having started at 10.10 am, finished at 12.37 pm.