

HARROW TOWN CENTRE FORUM

TUESDAY 29 JANUARY 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Sue Anderson (Vice-Chairman)	Harrow Council
Councillor Bill Phillips	Harrow Council
Councillor Simon Williams (Vice-Chairman)	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
Gary Stevenson	Debenhams Ltd

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The Reverend Barry Hingston	Churches Together in Central Harrow
Bernard Segal	Roxborough Residents' Association

SERVICE MEMBERS

Chief Superintendent Dal Babu	Borough Commander
Inspector Aidan Whelan	Metropolitan Police
Sergeant Mark Pullen	Metropolitan Police, Greenhill Safer Neighbourhood Team

OFFICERS

Mark Billington	Head of Economic Development and Research
Andy Stubbs	Town Centre Manager
Louise Baxter	Town Centre Officer
	Marketing Communications Officer

ALSO PRESENT

GJR Consulting

1. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Anthony Wood, Harrow Public Transport Users Association, the Head of Major Development Projects and the Head of Communications.

2. Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest at the meeting.

3. Minutes of Meeting:

AGREED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2012 be taken as a correct record.

4. Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising.

5. Police Update:

The Borough Commander, Chief Superintendent Babu, Inspector Whelan and Sergeant Pullen updated the Forum on the plan for future policing of Harrow Town Centre and the current issues which were being addressed. The police officers made comments including the following:

- there had been an increase in the number of officers in the Safer Neighbourhood Team (SNT). There was now one police sergeant, three police constables and six community support officers;
- action had been taken to address the issue of drinking in the town centre, especially in the vicinity of St John's Church. A strategy which encouraged positive action, such as involvement from Compass Outreach, had been developed;
- the details of the drug and alcohol team would be shared with the Forum Members. The police worked with street pastors and their contact details would be shared;
- a single unit for anti-social behaviour issues was being formed which would include drug and alcohol problems and mental health issues. A briefing on this team could be presented to a future meeting of the Forum;
- an increase in the police presence in the Town Centre had seen a reduction in the level of crime;
- a 'Pub Watch' had been set up and it was anticipated that its remit would be widened to include some other premises, such as betting shops;
- bike thefts were becoming an issue and action was being taken to address this;

- the Town Centre police team would be reformed with effect from 1 February 2013 which would result in additional officers being available. The geographical footprint of the town would be enlarged and there would be a total of nine extra officers. The team would comprise of experienced officers and measurable targets would be set;
- there had been an increase in the number of pick pocketing offences. The crime data had been analysed to ascertain the most likely victims and the most likely time and date for offences of this nature to be committed;
- crime stalls were held on average twice a month and the two shopping centres were thanked for their support. Information and equipment, such as handbag bells, were given out at the stalls;
- Harrow was the second safest London Borough;
- it was hoped that use could be made of signage, public address systems and electronic message boards to help disseminate crime prevention information.

Members of the Forum raised a number of issues to which the police officers responded as follows:

- to help support action against business crime (in particular retail) the Police proposed to follow a similar methodology to 'Pub Watch'. A meeting with the shopping centre managers, a representative of Debenhams Ltd and the Police would be arranged;
- the kiosk was being removed from the front of St George's Shopping Centre. It was hoped that investment in materials and equipment for the crime stalls would help improve the displays;
- the SNT were aware of the issues in locations such as Station Road and this was why the police operating model was being altered. There would be more patrols and involvement with school officers. Consideration was also being given to the working arrangements and times for officers to help develop a flexible team;
- the SNT would be based at Kirkland House;
- the level of anti social behaviour was low in Harrow when compared to other Town Centres and it was accepted that due to the nature of a Town Centre that there would be thefts;
- consideration was being given to how crimes were reported and how minor offences were addressed;
- the SNT was working with an expert police team in central London to help address the pick pocketing problems;
- the dispersal zone in the town centre had lapsed as there was no evidence to support its renewal at present and members of the Forum were asked to let the police know if there were any issues associated with this.

A Member of the Forum thanked the Borough Commander for attending the meeting and wished him well in his retirement.

AGREED: That the update be noted.

6. Business Improvement District (BID) Development:

An officer introduced Mr Gary Reeves of GJR Consulting who had been appointed to work on the Business Improvement District (BID) development following a competitive tender process. The consultants had been appointed for an initial three month period from January to March 2013 and there was the potential to extend this.

Mr Reeves of GJR Consulting introduced himself to the Members of the Forum and made the following comments;

- the main objective was to have a BID ballot in November 2013 and then an operative BID in 2014;
- between now and November 2013 there would need to be engagement with all the businesses within the area of the potential BID;
- the work programme for the next three months included establishing a group to act as champions for the BID who would engage on a business to business level and meet stakeholders. In addition, there was a need to engage with the wider business community and to hold group meetings from early to mid March;
- there would be formal consultation with store managers and head offices between April 2013 and July 2013. Dependent upon the outcome of the formal consultation, a formal proposal would be developed during the summer of 2013 followed by a campaign for the BID between September 2013 and November 2013;
- there were two criteria for a successful BID ballot, one was that 51% of those business voting supported the BID and the second was that business comprising 51% of the total rateable value supported the BID;
- materials and information about the BID would be available shortly and it was anticipated that an online portal would be established.

In response to questions from Members of the Forum, Mr Reeves made the following comments;

- the legislation allowed for the BID levy to be between 1% and 5% of the business rate. For the purposes of initial modelling, it was recommended that the levy should be 1% with the exception of charities;
- arguably smaller businesses received more value for money than larger businesses from a BID;

- if some businesses found that the levy was unaffordable it was possible to apply for a reduction in business rates by following the normal process;
- BIDs tended to work against 'cloned' high streets as they provided a loose form of single ownership. The 'Portas' work has shown that a variety of uses in the high street, including municipal ones, helped to promote vibrancy;
- BIDs were occupier led but property owners should be encouraged to make voluntary contributions.

AGREED: That the update be noted.

7. 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.

Lowlands Recreation Ground

- The design was evolving around the soft and hard landscaping. The landscape contract was being scoped at present;
- a meeting was scheduled with London Underground to discuss Station Approach and there had been provisional agreement regarding a one way system. A meeting was also planned with National Car Parks to consider the layout of the car parking spaces in Station Approach;
- a consultant had been commissioned to look at operating models and the future sustainability of the performance space. The test would be what the space could be used for which was cost neutral to the Council;
- local consultation had taken place;
- the key aim of the project was to encourage people to into the area and the town centre;
- improvements to the recreation ground would potentially encourage an increase in nearby office occupation levels;
- it was understood that the consultant architects were engaging with the crime prevention design coordinator but this would be checked.

St Ann's Road Public Realm Improvements

- At the Cabinet meeting in December 2012, an extra £500,000 had been allocated for the improvements which would be used to pay for items such as the pavements, drainage and lighting;
- businesses had been informed of what was happening and there would be continued liaison with businesses throughout the improvements. Any works directly outside of premises would be carried out at the close of business;

- some works had commenced, for example soil and services were being tested. In February work would begin on cutting and removing the trees. The substantial works would begin on 4 March 2013;
- pigeons were an issue and the Forum would be updated on any actions taken following consultation with other council services.

Car Park Indicator Signs

- the design of the signs was underway and there had been stakeholder consultation.

Legible London and Bespoke Signage

- the locations for the signs had been confirmed and the legal agreement with Transport for London (TfL) was in place. A cost estimate had been completed and a meeting with the consultants was scheduled to identify what bespoke options were feasible;
- there were ongoing discussions regarding improvements to the Kymberley Road/College Road area including ingress and egress.

Events Held Since the Last Meeting and Forthcoming Events

- there had been positive feedback from the three day European market but some retailers had reported that there had not been an increase in footfall sales in their premises;
- the Song Festival was held on 24 November 2012;
- the Christmas Lights switch on had been a success;
- an extra continental market was planned for 15 to 17 February 2013

A Member of the Forum commented that the markets helped to raise awareness of the Town Centre.

In response to questions from Members of the Forum the officers made comments including the following;

- clarification would be sought on the extent of the signage and whether it would include signposting to Harrow on the Hill from the station;
- the information included on the signs was taken from the asset database of TfL but consideration would be given to gradient signs for Harrow on the Hill and the inclusion of meeting points for walks on the signage;
- many of the signs and street furniture would be removed and the number of telephone kiosks would decrease from 13 to 8. The 8 remaining would be in 2 blocks of 4.

AGREED: That the update be noted.

8. Other Updates:

Marketing/Communications

An officer updated the Forum on recent marketing and communication activities. The following comments were made:

- local press coverage had been given to the Christmas Lights switch on, the public realm improvements and the increase in new businesses;
- the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration had been interviewed on BBC London Radio about the commercial premises vacancy rate in Harrow;
- there had been an article in the Evening Standard regarding Harrow, the Portas review and new businesses;
- a 'How to Start a Business Guide' had been printed and an electronic, web based version was being developed;
- online promotion of the public realm improvements was taking place;
- there were targets for press coverage and this was monitored;
- the Communications department was liaising with the shopping centres.

AGREED: That the update be noted.

9. Any Other Business:

New Member of the Forum

The Reverend Barry Hingston, the new representative of Churches Together in Harrow, introduced himself to the Forum.

Other Updates

The representative from St George's Shopping Centre stated that:

- the footfall for quarter 4 was up 3.9% and that the footfall, at present, was up 6% year on year. The week prior to Christmas had been the highest ever footfall;
- the Centre was investing £2 million in six projects, including a new east entrance. The projects would be commencing on 4 February 2013;
- the Centre had two voids at present.

The representative from North West London Chamber of Commerce stated that a joint event with Diageo Plc would be held in Brent on 4 February 2013 and that the regular business breakfast would be held on 21 February 2013.

An officer advised that a meeting was scheduled to discuss how investment in Harrow linked with investment in London and that joint work was being undertaken with Land Securities to promote the area. The officer stated that ambassadors were sought to facilitate 'place promotion'.

The representative from St Ann's Shopping Centre commented that there were two void units in the Centre and that the footfall at Christmas was up 1.7%. Works were being undertaken to install new facilities in the Centre.

AGREED: That the updates be noted.

10. Date of Next Meeting:

AGREED: That the next meeting of the Forum be held on Tuesday 30 April 2013 at 4.00pm in the Management Suite, St Ann's Shopping Centre.

The Meeting having started at 4.24 pm, finished at 6.00 pm.