

HARROW TOWN CENTRE FORUM

THURSDAY 17 OCTOBER 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Sue Anderson
Councillor Bill Phillips

Harrow Council
Harrow Council

BUSINESS MEMBERS

Howard Bluston

North West London Chamber of
Commerce

Jeff Jackson
Gary Stevenson

St Ann's Shopping Centre
Debenhams Ltd

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The Reverend Barry Hingston
Bernard Segal

Churches Together in Central Harrow
Roxborough Residents' Association

SERVICE MEMBERS

Sergeant Gail Reinhart
Inspector Aidan Whelan

Metropolitan Police
Metropolitan Police

OFFICERS

Andy Stubbs
Louise Baxter

Harrow Town Centre Manager
Harrow Town Centre Project Officer

ALSO PRESENT

Gary Reeves
Lobna Benllahssen

BID Consultant
Harrow Council – Communications

26. Appointment of Chair:

AGREED: That in the absence of the Chairman, Councillor Sue Anderson to chair the meeting.

27. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were received from Darren Harman, Simon Williams, Anthony Wood and Mark Billington.

28. Minutes of Meetings:

AGREED: That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18 July 2013 be taken as a correct record.

29. Matters Arising:

None.

30. Police Update:

A Member of the Forum reported that the dispersal zone, which would be in place until 16 March 2014, had been effective so far. Since the last meeting there had been forty-nine arrests, with theft from persons the most prevalent crime. Police resources had been improved and there were five additional officers, which would make a total of nine officers up until Christmas. There had been 204 Stop and Searches, 59 Sanctioned Detections, and 34 Crime Prevention Days since the last Forum. There would be an increased uniformed police presence in the Town Centre until Christmas, and an increased plain-clothes police presence after Christmas. An officer added that since the introduction of the new policing model, there had been a change to the professional standards in dealing with businesses affected by crime. If the business was the victim or the venue of the crime, then the business would be responsible for conducting the initial investigation and it would be responsible for providing the relevant CCTV evidence to the police.

A Member of the Forum asked whether this applied to voluntary organisations that had premises in the Town Centre, and whether civil action could be taken against businesses that did not co-operate. An officer confirmed it applied to voluntary organisations. The aim of this initiative was to get a more accurate record of crime in the area (to help distinguish between something stolen on a business premises and something that was lost or left behind).

A Member of the Forum commented that local crime statistics would be reported to the Police Commissioner and resources would be allocated accordingly. An officer added that the Police aimed to achieve a 20% reduction in crime despite a 20% reduction in resources. The officer stressed that the Police did not want to give a false impression about crime rates, and wanted to identify time periods when crime was more likely to take place, for example, when gangs visited the area.

Following questions from Members, a police officer advised that:

- CCTV was affordable for businesses and was widely available, and that businesses had been made aware of the new changes and that awareness would improve when further training in the use of CCTV was undertaken;
- during the Christmas period, the police will periodically deploy and staff a temporary information point (gazebo structure) around the Town

Centre offering information about crime prevention to members of the public. However, these will not be used to report crime;

- officers would patrol in the Town Centre from 10:00 – 20:00 around the Christmas Shopping period, and that officers would be trained in “street awareness” and particularly mobile phone thefts. The officer stated that it was likely that more crimes would be detected, therefore crime rates would appear to rise, but the rate of crimes being solved would also rise;
- the additional Police presence around the Town Centre at Christmas would be reported in the local press. The incident of violence that had taken place recently in Station Road had happened before the dispersal zone was put in place.

31. Business Improvement District (BID) development:

A report from the Harrow Town Centre Management Team, regarding the projects that the team were currently focusing on, and a brochure detailing the Business Improvement District (BID) Proposal were tabled. The BID Consultant to the Town Centre Management Team made the following points regarding the BID in Harrow Town Centre.

- over the last six months, three surveys had been carried out to gauge the attitude of businesses to the Town Centre, the quality of their experience and that of their visitors, and the appetite for a BID in Harrow;
- meetings would be set up with the 204 businesses in Harrow to engage and consult with them, and increase the understanding of what the BID would mean for their business;
- the ballot papers would be sent to the businesses on 14 November 2013, the votes would then need to be returned by the 12 December 2013 and the results would be announced on the 13 December 2013.
- the BID document explained the aims of the BID, that it would be business-led by members from different aspects of the business community in Harrow, and that it would generate £2 million in investment over a 5-year period.

Following questions from Members, a Member stated that:

- the refurbishment as shown in the brochure was an example of the kind of work that would result from the investment, to instil confidence in potential members and encourage them to invest;
- the BID would enable closer working, improve marketing and improve environmental standards but all businesses would be required to pay a proportionate amount to the rateable value of their premises;
- both St. Ann’s and St. George’s centres were undergoing renovation and updating of their tenant portfolios;

- although a decision to create a BID would be clearly beneficial to the businesses in Harrow Town Centre, the Town Centre Management Team would be lost along with the marketing and promotional activity if the vote was lost;
- businesses were in the process of making their decision, but overall a “Yes” result was expected on the ballot;
- The ballot will be conducted by Electoral Reform Services, and 51% of the votes cast (by number) would need to be in favour, along with a majority by rateable value, in order to proceed with the BID;

32. Outer London Fund Round 2 Projects:

A Member of the Forum advised that there would be twelve oak trees planted in an arc at Lowlands Recreation Ground. Planning permission had been granted for the building works to begin, and a contractor has been appointed.

Following questions from Members of the Forum, a Member advised that:

- the public could not walk among the trees at Lowlands Recreation Ground as it was still a building site that must remain closed to the public. However, there would be a press release during the week beginning 21 October 2013 regarding Harrow College’s successful bid for the space nearby to be used as a performance space;
- at the request of local businesses, the improvement works on St. Ann’s Road would be halted for the Christmas shopping period. There would be new trees planted in St Ann’s Road on 4 November 2013. The project board had rejected the proposal of having catenary lighting across the width of the high street, as the board members had expressed a number of concerns and some property owners had declined. There was also a cost issue, as the cost of the lights would be £400,000 which was double what was expected, for a saving of £100,000.
- The Valuation Office had confirmed that they would make a 5% reduction in business rates for businesses affected by the works;
- rising bollards would be introduced at Clarendon Road linked to CCTV to keep vehicles to a minimum in the most crowded public space in Harrow between St. George’s Centre and Havelock Place;
- the contractor would be ceasing the work on 15 November 2013;
- A Member advised that the name “St. Ann’s Road” is confusing as it describes an area that is entirely pedestrianised. In the short term the new “Legible London” signage should help to alleviate confusion experienced by pedestrians;
- For drivers trying to navigate the area, Variable Message Signs would be added around the town centre which would display the number of

available spaces in the car parks so drivers would be able to see this before entering the car park. These signs would be operated via a SIM card connected to a computer.

Upcoming events included a four-day food festival, which would include a number of culturally diverse food stalls. It would be located from outside St. George's to Katie's statue, with two rows of stalls back-to-back along St. Ann's Road.

The event to switch on the Christmas lights would feature appearances from Bob the Builder, Peppa Pig and some rapping Santas. The focus would be on children and families. There would be a marquee outside Debenhams, and a huge firework display lasting five minutes that would be widely visible.

A Member of the Forum reported it had been agreed that no more than four charity fundraisers would be permitted to operate, no more than three days per week. There had been one complaint from a member of the public regarding a Big Issue vendor outside Marks and Spencer followed by an email from the Operations Manager of Marks and Spencer.

A Member of the Forum reported that some Marks and Spencer customers had reported feeling pressured by the vendor's behaviour, and her non-adherence to the Big Issue Sellers' Code of Conduct. The Big Issue had investigated the vendor's behaviour and taken the pitch away from her.

A Member of the Forum reported that a meeting had taken place with Councillors regarding pigeons in the town centre. Signs had been produced to attach to street lamps and stickers would be distributed to shops to put in their windows urging members of the public not to feed the pigeons.

A local company had been commissioned to erect a large illuminated dove in the town centre to mark the start of the festive season and Diwali. The dove would remain there over the Christmas period.

33. Other Updates:

Marketing/Communications: A Member of the Forum reported that:

- the next issue of Harrow People would contain information about Harrow Means Business from Councillor Chana and Councillor Hall. The issue would also include promotion of the Diwali and Christmas party events;
- banners and flyers would also be produced for the forthcoming Harrow Food Festival and the turning on of the Christmas lights, and there would be a press release to promote a recently-opened "music gym" for young people that offered free instrumental lessons;
- there would also be a press release aimed at dog owners emphasising the importance of microchipping dogs. The next issue of Harrow People would also contain a double-page spread on the Business Improvement District, and new and up-and-coming businesses would be reported on.

Following questions from Members, a Member advised that:

- rather than a section devoted to business in the Harrow People, there would be a business newsletter sent to local businesses and hopefully promoted on Harrow Council's website;
- the music gym would offer young people music lessons, as well as access to studio equipment and advice, and would offer free instrumental lessons as an introductory offer.

34. Any Other Business:

RESOLVED: That there was no other business to be discussed.

35. Date of Next Meeting:

RESOLVED: That the date of the next meeting was to be decided pending the availability of the chair.

The Meeting having started at 4.05 pm, finished at 5.40 pm.