

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 17 OCTOBER 2013

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 17 SEPTEMBER 2013

REGENERATION IN NORTH HARROW, REPLICATING LESSONS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE BOROUGH

Members received a report of the Corporate Director of Environment and Enterprise which outlined the work to reduce vacancy rates in North Harrow and how the lessons learnt could be transferred to other district centres in the borough. The report detailed the activities in North Harrow in the context of emerging national, regional and local strategies to stimulate economic growth.

The Committee agreed that the former Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration be allowed to address the Committee. The Chair welcomed the former Portfolio Holder and officers to the meeting.

Members welcomed the report stating that the lessons learnt section was helpful and that it could be a valuable blueprint as to what could be done elsewhere. Having considered the report, Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Clarification was sought in relation to the North Harrow Business Association and Members were advised that the North Harrow Partnership had been established. The Council was able to guide business/traders' associations in terms of constitutional issues.
- A Member questioned whether the Council was able to coordinate different traders associations and whether there was any particular mix of retail and non retail that the Council could secure. The officer advised that such associations were sometimes dependent on only one or two individuals who were enthusiastic, active and community orientated. Many in the borough functioned without direct Council support and that others needed some Council direction. In terms of retail/non retail use, a local development order provided more flexibility in changing the use of premises, but the Council was unable to prevent the same type of business trading if that use was permitted. The Council could not, for example, limit the number of fried chicken shops in area if that class of use was allowed.
- A Member stated that traders and residents' groups were vital to a successful district centre but may become demotivated by lack of action by the Council. An officer advised that a toolkit had been prepared that provided traders with advice on how to set up a group, best practice and development of a constitution. The officer also attended meetings of the traders' associations and partnerships to provide advice and guidance.
- Referring to the gym, the effect on the area and the controversy linked with the lack of supermarket in North Harrow, a Member questioned how the Council could get residents on board. The officer stated that, in his view,

residents had been on board and that the items that residents could buy from a supermarket were readily available from the independent traders in North Harrow. The opening hours of the gym had been an issue but the gym had also brought visitors into the area who may then spend money locally. The former Portfolio Holder added that at the time the Council agreed to the gym, the Council had been keen to find a business to use the premises.

- A Member congratulated officers for the work done, stating that North Harrow had been a success largely due to the mix of business models.
- With reference to the petition presented to Cabinet the previous week which had contained over 3,000 signatures, a Member stated that it appeared that parking was a priority for residents. Residents wished to make their purchases quickly and easily by parking outside the relevant shop, rather than parking round the corner in the car park. The officer responded that traders wanted on street parking and the car park was under used. A survey of 400 shoppers and 200 business had identified that the importance of parking was dependent on the particular shopping area (district centre). For shoppers, the biggest draw was the offer in the shops but he acknowledged that there were considerable complexities around parking.
- A Member questioned whether any resources were available from the Greater London Authority for similar work to that done in North Harrow and, if so would bids for vulnerable areas be likely to succeed. The officer advised that such funding was not available, but if they became available would hope a bid would be successful.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder and officers for their attendance and responses. It was then proposed and unanimously agreed that it be

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be requested to consider this report and how viable it was and to consider those areas with over 10% frontage vacancy detailed on page 10 of the report.

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 17 September 2013

Contact Officer:

Alison Atherton, Senior Professional Democratic Services

Tel: 020 8424 1266

Email: alison.atherton@harrow.gov.uk