

GLA Regeneration Committee

How has the Outer London Fund been used in the London Borough of Harrow?

Harrow secured OLF Round 1 funding for North Harrow District Centre (£360,400) and Harrow Town Centre (£496,000), and Round 2 funding for Harrow Town Centre (£1,758,785). The Round 1 funding for both areas shared some common themes; marketing and promotion, involvement of young people, events, the development of town centre management and partnerships. The Round 2 funding has provided “opportunity” funding for the design and delivery of town centre public realm/open space projects in Harrow Town centre which have enabled the Council to move quickly from “plan” to delivery of the Heart of Harrow Area Action Plan.

OLF has played a central role in enabling the Council to accelerate delivery of its vision for sustainable growth, set out in the Boroughs adopted Local Plan Documents. Harrow and the GLA began collaborating on the “Heart of Harrow Project through the London Plan/Harrow Core Strategy in 2009. The adopted Core Strategy, also set out an ambition to deliver the Mayor of London’s ambition to create sustainable neighbourhoods based around local and district centres. The OLF funding has played an important part in providing the resource to quickly move from “plan” to delivery – which is critical in building confidence (and media profile) to engage the community in the story around London’s growth and evolution.

The marketing and promotion elements in round 1 included Visual Merchandising training for independent traders, Christmas (Festive) Lights, events (Food and Dance Festival, markets) and the creation of websites. The revenue funded “events” provided opportunities for the Council to build retailer and developer confidence and enabled the Council to negotiate further public realm enhancement as part of new developments in the town centre.

The involvement of young people was inspiring. It generated the greatest positive publicity and got those involved to consider their local shopping areas. Projects included school students designing banners hung from lamp posts, college students producing a film celebrating romance, which was projected onto the rear of the town centre prior to and on Valentines Day, arts from a local school exhibited at a pop up gallery, and groups performing in dance and music events.

North Harrow benefited from a Local Development Order, improvements to its car park, and installation of on-street parking bays. Harrow town centre also benefited from a “Testing the Public Realm” project which helped shape the development of the Round 2 OLF Programme. Without OLF the Council would not have had the resources to “pioneer” regulatory reform (such as the LDO).

In Round 1 it was apparent that events, (dance, music and markets) draw shoppers to the Town centre. Harrow's OLF Round 2 programme with its emphasis on capital programmes, has focused on projects which will, a) improve the infrastructure of the town centre to host events and b) provide a revenue stream to fund events.

As of early December 2013, St Ann's Road the main shopping street has been transformed. The redundant planters and police kiosk have been removed, the number of phone boxes rationalized and relocated, and the uneven pavements relaid, to create a central area for markets and events.

In Lowlands Recreation Ground, (behind Harrow on the Hill station) work is ongoing to create a town park, and Performance Space and Café to provide a venue for dance, music and theatre. As well as providing a place for rest and entertainment the park and performance space will provide opportunities for residents to gain skills and work experience.

The revenue element of the Round 2 programme has focused on the creation of a business led group to establish a Business Improvement District. The results of the ballot will be announced 13th December.

Round 1 funding also supported the development of Harrow College's Harrow into Work programme. This offers a brokerage service between learners, (particularly apprentices) and employers. That brokerage service is no longer funded, by OLF, but is still being operated by the College.

Which aspects of the project have been successful?

OLF has helped to demonstrate to politicians the capability of the Council, working with others, to make a difference in its town centres. It has helped to demonstrate how strategic planning and vision, when tied to dedicated funding can make things happen and has restored confidence in traders, investors, members and the community about the "opportunity" that still exists in "traditional" town centres to host exciting, engaging and fun events which people will come to!

In terms of measurable outcomes, our OLF programme has been a success

- North Harrow District Centre Vacancy rates have fallen from 25% to 6% (June 2013).

The Harrow Town centre bid aimed to reduce vacancy rates in the High Street and adjacent offices. It was our ambition that that greater vibrancy in the town centre would encourage occupation of vacant retail space and of office space. The former occupied by businesses that wanted to sell to a greater number of visitors. The latter occupied by businesses that wanted to locate their company in a lively attractive environment.

In Harrow Town Centre between June 2010 – June 2013,

- the proportion of vacant floor space in harrow town centre fell from 5.88% to 4.10% (1,842m²), a fall of 30%.
- based on a rate of 1 job per 21m², this equates to 88 new jobs created in the High Street
- Despite a decreasing amount of total office space, the amount of occupied office space has increased by 9,933m² from 2011-2013 (83,699 to 93,632).
- based on a rate of 1 job per 10m², this equates to 993 new office based jobs

Private sector investment in the town centre since OLF 1 has included

- £3m refurbishment of Debenhams
- £3m St Georges Shopping Centre upgrade and new store refits
- £2m St Ann's Shopping Centre store fit outs.

The Round 1 "Testing the Public Realm" project and Food and Dance Showcase demonstrated the potential of Harrow Town Centre to act as a destination. Those projects also highlighted the physical limitations of the centre. This led to the development of the town centre regeneration programme, and the work in St Ann's Road and Lowlands Rec (described above).

In the town centre the creation of a town centre management team and development of a BID Group has energized businesses and helped them think about their role in developing and promoting the Place they trade from. (The results of the BID ballot are not known at the time of writing this note).

The feedback from the BID Group is that public investment in the town centre has increased the confidence of the private sector. It is easier for landlords and multiples to decide to invest in their shopping centres and stores, if the physical infrastructure around them is being improved, and there is a series of ongoing events that bringing consumers to the marketplace.

The use of events to increase footfall and spend has been noted as good case studies by London Councils "Streets Ahead" and Local Government Association "Driving growth through local government investment in the arts"

The scale of OLF funding The match funding requirements of the programme have caused the council to become more pro-active in the use of its capital programme and by engaging with members at Cabinet and Ward level, has ensured that politicians have shared in the project delivery.

The scale of the OLF has acted as a catalyst to change – it is too good an opportunity to miss, it attracted commitment to participate despite scarce resources.

What has gone less well?

There is some learning about process and programme timetables. The application process had short deadlines and long evaluation times. This made resource planning for officers in the council difficult. Delays in contracting meant the council either commenced delivery at some financial risk, or programmes had to be delayed whilst contracts were developed and exchanged – losing precious time of delivery and compressing programme implementation timelines.

The project to create a Town Park and Performance Space and Café is behind schedule and will not be completed in this financial year. Capital programmes are often complex, requiring consultation, planning applications and procurement. Harrow's experience is that OLF funding can add further complications to an already complex process.

Ownership: When GLA money is funding a capital project, which is initiated and managed by the council, there is a strong need to ensure Design Consultants are aware who the client is. It has been difficult in some cases for the Council to steer the projects successfully through local political sensitivities because of confusion and split loyalty between the contractor, the GLA and the Council. Clearer lines of authority and delegation are required – whilst understanding the needs for outcomes for both the GLA and the Local Authority.

There is a weakness into a programmes which aims to deliver a long term economic impact but is evaluated shortly after its completion. The 2 year OLF programme is seeking to mitigate the impact on the High Street of

- 5 years of economic uncertainty (since Q2 of 2008/9),
- competition from destination shopping centres
- a decade long migration to internet shopping

Harrow is fortunate in being able to already demonstrate a positive economic impact, but it is not able to demonstrate the impact of the Town Park and performance space and will not be able to do so until well into 2014/15.

How would you describe the application process?

The process in Round 1 was short and sharp and required applicants to be able to demonstrate they had projects that could be quickly developed and implemented. The speed of the process helped the creative process, but equally led to little time to consult with residents / shoppers. This was important, because one lesson from Round 1, is that the views of business are not necessarily consistent with the views of shoppers.

The process for Round 2 was more considered, given its emphasis on capital programmes, however in some cases its demands were less realistic. Applicants were required to deliver Economic Impact Assessment for their applications, but the GLA had not undertaken an Assessment for the impact of its programme across London.

The application process assumed applicants have a team of people with programme management, bid writing, regeneration and design skills. However, many Outer London boroughs which have not been the recipients of grant funding have a limited capacity to develop bids. That capacity is further eroded by public austerity and a focus on cutting non statutory services. There is then a potential bias in favour of boroughs that have a track record of securing funds, and in receipt of greater grants.

How did the GLA support you during throughout the project's life?

The GLA have supported the council in procurement processes and through the design stages of capital programmes. GLA officers have helped to produce Project specifications for tenders, have worked with engineers and architects to develop out capital programmes, and provided a steer to the council's Programme Board.

The engagement with design and regeneration professionals (and focus on OLF by GLA resources) has been a helpful tool in enabling a dialogue about delivery of future aspirations that might not otherwise have been possible.

What will happen next to your Outer London Fund-supported projects?

The Heart of Harrow Area Action Plan provides a context for continued development of town centre initiatives. Harrow (and London's) planned future growth requirements are also tied closely to the delivery of greater quantum's of growth in the town centres of Harrow and Wealdstone. The OLF projects (and future GLA/Growth projects) have a key role to play in ensuring that the whole community buys into the important, pan London objective for diversified, accessible and sustainable town centres.

Our intention is to create sustainable projects that will never need council funding. The intention to create a BID was driven by the need to create a self financing vehicle that could continue to provide town centre management and deliver events.

The work in St Ann's Road is nearly completed and will provide a legacy for the continued delivery of markets and street entertainment.

The council has secured a tenant to manage the Performance space and café and an extensive programme is being developed to attract visitors to Lowlands and the town centre. The performance space and café will also provide the perfect business environment for young people and workless residents to gain skills and experience in

- Catering
- Marketing
- Events management
- Financial management
- Drama
- Dance
- Music