

## Harrow Town Centre Forum

**Notes of the informal meeting of the Harrow Town Centre Forum held at the Training Room, Debenhams, Harrow on 26 February 2009.**

### Present:

Councillor Marilyn Ashton	PC Neale Hutchings	Bernard Segal
Howard Bluston	Steve Kent (Chairman)	Councillor Rekha Shah
Reverend Bob Gardiner	Councillor Narinder Singh	
John Hurst	Mudhar	

### Officers

Claire Codling, Phil Greenwood and David Sklair

#### **1. Quorum/Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence had been received from Jeannie Cohen-Brand, Michael Windeatt, Anthony Wood and Suzy Wood. It was noted that the quorum for the meeting was six, to include two Core Funding Organisations, and that the meeting was therefore inquorate.

It was agreed to hold an informal discussion of the business on the agenda.

#### **2. Minutes**

It was noted that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2008 would be considered at the next meeting.

#### **3. Harrow Business Improvement District**

The meeting received a report from the Corporate Director of Place Shaping which set out the proposals put forward by the Harrow Town Centre BID Company for the establishment of a Business Improvement District in Harrow Town Centre. The report included proposed action plans that focused on reducing costs, increasing footfall, and working together.

The Chairman introduced the document and, in response to a question, informed the meeting that the BID Company was Limited by guarantee with papers being submitted to Company House. The Company would run itself with assistance from a Bid Manager, a salaried post which would replace the post of Town Centre Manager. He highlighted the process for the ballot on whether to accept the BID and the basis on which businesses qualified for a vote. Funds would be collected annually in advance, beginning half way through the rating year.

Clarification was sought as to the position of smaller companies such as kiosks. The BID business plan indicated that businesses with a rateable value below £3000 would be exempt from the BID levy but would not be entitled to vote. It was suggested that if smaller traders were aware that the main participants were in favour it could influence their decision.

The Chairman informed the meeting that due to the deferral of the vote by six months to July, due to the original tight timescale, the economic climate was not ideal. Once the result of a poll currently taking place amongst the top 100 businesses was known, the BID Board would decide whether to proceed with the vote in July. Should the July vote be negative, it would be very difficult to hold a re-ballot in the future.

The report put forward two options: a Town Centre Consultation Group or a Town Centre Partnership.

When asked how the representatives in attendance at the meeting could be of assistance in encouraging a yes vote, the Chairman suggested that they raise awareness as there were still a lot of people who did not know what it was about. It was recognised that due to the current financial situation, businesses currently had a lot of pressure on their finances and having to pay more even for something of benefit to them may not be met with enthusiasm.

The seventeen bids for BIDs in London to date had been successful and there would be a vote in Ilford in March.

It was noted that:

- The business plan was based on the findings of a poll of town businesses
- The installation of a police kiosk should make a visible impact
- Shopkeepers were now able to report crime on radios and the CCTV coverage was good.
- HIB (Harrow In Business) was receiving increased demand for business support
- Should a business cease to trade, the landlord would remain liable for business rates

An initial approach had been made to local managers to seek their agreement to the BID prior to contacting the business headquarters as not all local managers had the authority to make the decision as to the vote. The officer drew attention to a business workshop with Business Link for London on 19 March 2009 to which all offices in the Harrow Town Centre would be invited. Any further comments from members of the Town Centre Forum should be conveyed to the Regeneration Project Manager during the next week.

#### **4. Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy**

The Forum was informed that the last time this item was discussed it had been the middle of the consultation phase of the preferred strategy. The consultation had finished in August and the final preferred option would be available for consultation later in 2009. The Town Centre remained the focus for development.

It was noted that a design guide Supplementary Planning Document, which was not site specific but the basis of what the Council would want to see, was being finalised. The Core Strategy would direct a significant amount of growth to the town centre. Consultation was expected in October and key stakeholders were already engaged.

#### **5. Police/Harrow Against Crime**

John Hurst, representing Harrow Business Against Crime (HBAC), reported that the scheme had now been in existence for three years.

Harrow was currently the borough with the lowest recorded crime. An opinion survey had resulted in complaints about fairly minor issues such as chuggers.

Business people joining the scheme would get the opportunity to influence priorities. Should the BID be successful, crime prevention schemes would be available throughout the area. The statistics could not include all action taken, such as the initiative of speaking to known criminals when seen in the vicinity of the town centre and ensuring that they moved on.

The Forum was informed of:

- an Early Intervention Project whereby anyone under 18 causing trouble was referred to a programme that provided an opportunity for them to correct their behaviour. Unless the person was arrested, there was not an official record of action taken.
- a project to divert young people into the cadet forces which was steered by business people
- research indicated that the public noted how safe an area was, for example, litter, chewing gum, graffiti
- business people had the opportunity to share information through HBAC

An officer of Harrow Council reported that the Anti Social Behaviour Panel for London had profiled the work that Harrow was undertaking including:

- a steering body with Ealing and Brent to work on a cross border basis on issues such as the Wembley Stadium footprint, which included consideration of banning orders and Controlled Parking Zones in a co-ordinated manner
- piloting Responsible Retail Agreements
- intelligence sharing

## 6. Date of next meeting

It was suggested that the next meeting be held in approximately three months time. Members requested that a reasonable notice period be given of the date chosen.

(Note: The discussion having commenced at 4.15pm, closed at 5.30pm)