

Chairman's Report of the activities of the Harrow Town Centre Forum

AGM 2010

1 Overview

This report covers the period from 30th July 2007 to 30th March 2010. The Forum has met 3 times during this period (2nd July 2008, 26th February 2009, 9th December 2009) to receive updates on BID progress, consider the relationship of the Town Centre Forum to the BID and consider the Local Development Framework document.

The main focus of activity since the last AGM has been on developing the BID. This has seen mixed fortunes from a number of quick wins such as bringing new businesses onto the shadow Board through to the effect of the credit crunch and recession on a number of key town centre projects, the loss of key players on the Board and general continued uncertainty over the economy.

2 Activities

2.1 BID Development

A number of activities have been undertaken to develop the BID proposals. In summary these were:

- a questionnaire survey of businesses in the town centre to identify key issues
- a BID launch event at the VUE Cinema to introduce the BID concept to businesses
- a BID event linked to offices to promote the idea to business occupiers in the proposed BID area
- A draft Business Plan was produced following consultation with retail and office businesses.
- A comprehensive database of businesses in the BID area has been put together
- The software to bill businesses has been installed and is currently being tested by Revenues team in Finance Department
- Harrow Council's relationship to the BID was agreed at CSB in 2008/9 .
- Harrow Town Centre BID Company has been formally set up with two board members from town centre based businesses.

In autumn 2008, the BID Board was ready to recommend going forward for a vote for Spring 2009. Harrow Council formally backed the BID process at their Cabinet meeting in November 2008.

However, the "credit crunch" began to bite the retail sector around that time.

A number of key town centre projects such as the public realm improvement works in St Ann's Road, and the Harrow College development were hit by lack of funding and some of the businesses, who were initially supportive of the BID, had to withdraw because of financial issues or changes in personnel.

A survey of major retailers in early 2009 suggested that there was reluctance at head offices to support BIDs given the economic climate at the time. Reluctantly, the shadow BID Board decided to postpone the vote.

2.2 Events

The French market has continued to come to St Ann's Road in March and October of each year and made an additional visit in summer 2009. A new method of engaging stall holders has been introduced by the Market organiser and this saw an increase in number of stalls for the Spring 2010 visit.

A themed Christmas Market was held in December 2009. Due to a combination of factors including poor weather, the effects of the recession, the late withdrawal of a couple of stalls, the Market was not particularly successful in terms of attracting additional footfall to the town centre. However, it should be noted that none of the other markets run by the Market organiser (in Bournemouth, Southend and Oxford Street) were particularly successful last year.

2.3 Reducing crime and the fear of crime

Unfortunately, after a number of years of slow development, Harrow Business Against Crime partnership (HBAC) has had to cease trading.

HBAC's original business plan sought to make the organisation self financing after a 3 year period and coincide with the withdrawal of financial support from the Town Centre Forum/Harrow Council.

It soon became apparent that income derived from the sale/rental of radios would not be sufficient to provide a sufficient income so it was decided that HBAC would become part of the Business Improvement District and would be supported by the BID's income.

Following the decision to postpone the BID vote, HBAC's financial position became increasingly uncertain and despite attempts to improve cash flow and identify other sources of funding, the decision close was reluctantly taken by the HBAC Board.

It should be noted that a radio scheme still exists in the town centre which links businesses with the Police and CCTV control room. This is being run by a private company.

3 Budget

A more detailed budget report appears elsewhere in the AGM.

4. Thanks

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your assistance and support over the previous years as Chair of the Town Centre Forum.

Stephen Kent

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Stephen Kent

Former Chair – Harrow Town Centre Forum