

Harrow and Wealdstone Intensification Area (HWIA) Action Plan: Business Forum Meeting Notes

Date: 13th October 2010

Time of Meeting: 8.30 am -10.30 am

Location: Members Lounge, Civic Centre, LB of Harrow

Attendees:

Patricia Bench (PB) - Chair Business Forum

Phil Greenwood (PG) – LBH

Peter Barron (PB) – LBH

Mark Billington (MB) - LBH

Yogita Walunj (YW) – LBH

Julian Lewis (JL) - East

Richard Hall (RH) – East

Representatives from

GEM Appointments

Wealdstone Active Community

St Georges Shopping Centre

Comfort Hotel Harrow

Harrow College

Kodak

1. Introduction

PG introduced the scope of the masterplan and the purpose of the meeting and the masterplanning/Area Action Plan (AAP) process followed by Patricia's introduction to her role.

JL presented the consultant team's thoughts and approach to date. It included understanding of the place, objectives and opportunities in the Intensification Area (IA).

JL introduced three questions for discussion in groups: What are the strongest aspects of the current trade offers? What are the main issues affecting trade in Harrow? What do you think should be done to improve trading opportunities?

2. Discussion

2.1. Group 1 (coordinator PG, PB, MB)

Representatives from Kodak, Wealdstone Active Community and Harrow College

What do you think is the strongest aspect of the current trade offer?

- Kodak benefits from proximity to London, Good commuter links to Euston for multi-national business, but also close to better value housing/quality of life for those who live to the north of the borough.
- Acceptable road infrastructure, operate 24 hrs.
- Multi-lingual staffs, live in inner London but higher turnover.
- Large number of start-up businesses.
- Wealdstone is seen as edgy and attracts young people (students); could be developed as a brand.
- Visitors to college bring money and expenditure.

- College attracting international students.
- Many types of business and industrial estates located in the IA and there is a need to promote these.
- Harrow College is strong in creative arts/vocational areas, there is potential for creative industries

What do you think are the main issues affecting trade in Harrow?

- Perception of Wealdstone as not a safe place to be - Dispersal orders, crime, no physical link to Kodak site, poor roundabout, bridges, heavy traffic and poor public realm.
- No town maps and legible signs
- Wealdstone has poor mix of under maintained shops and needs genuine small businesses/outlets. Successful places like Kensington and Camden have varied/diversified their retail offer.
- Wealdstone very busy at school leaving time – off putting
- Centres like Westfield and Harlequin Centre (Watford) very successful, but don't want the same in Harrow, Needs more local offer; places to eat and browse
- Empty sites and offices and trading estates.
- Businesses to sustain the current retail need.
- Need to attract people from outside.
- Large manufacturing companies (Kodak, Colart) and businesses moving away; knock-on effect for small businesses
- No relationship between major employers and town centre
- Kodak no longer has apprentice scheme, so limited links with local colleges

What do you think should be done to improve trading opportunities?

- A cultural hub with library and gallery to attract people to Harrow, Arts and craft centre
- A museum for Wealdstone.
- Promote café culture to create feeling of safety in evenings
- Safety in the public realm can be created with strategy rather than reaction (signs etc) to promote a better image.
- Suggest a craft centre/artistic bent. Herga music & Herriot's catering good examples – need more of these.
- Balance of corporate and social responsibility

2.2. Group 2 (coordinator JL, RH and YW)

Chair Business Forum, representatives from GEM, Kodak, St Georges Shopping Centre and Comfort Hotel Harrow

What do you think is the strongest aspect of the current trade offer?

- Good transport links, potential to attract more business and more quality business.
- Business mix and 'perception' of Harrow as 'Hill'.
- Large number of professionals.
- Proximity to Wembley, schools and hospital bring hotel trade.
- Many branch offices in the area.

What do you think are the main issues affecting trade in Harrow?

- Contrasting images of Harrow on the Hill and Harrow town centre 'Where is the Hill?'
- Even big shops are not reaching their potential.
- Car parking spaces in St Ann's being sold to Wembley visitors.
- Visibility – lack of appropriate signage.
- Street clutter.
- Many young people do not want to spend to time in Harrow.

What do you think should be done to improve trading opportunities?

- Promote perception of Harrow (as a 'Hill'), revive town centre management, and change image.
- Marketing to promote the Harrow as a place.
- Bring the town 'together' currently very bitty. Business Improvement District; bring together local businesses
- Would benefit from a key core brand to attract new business.
- More parking, reduce crime and improve selection of shops.
- Safety, cleanliness and events are the three golden rules.
- Attractive public realm.
- Legible signage, tourist office, directions with details of places of interest.
- A school in the centre of Harrow with mix of facilities cultural and community facilities.
- Improved market on St Ann's Road, remove street clutter.
- Evening economy, better quality restaurants.

2.3. Improvement opportunities

- Dandara site has potential to promote a new image for and bring stronger mix to Harrow.
- Station road needs to be more attractive to walk (by providing trees, benches, artwork, improvements and shop frontages).
- Using planning and landscaping to design out crime.
- North end of Station Road used to be called Greenhill Village; the name could be reintroduced
- Colart – manufacturing closing but intellectual element of business could stay.
- Harrow town centre not commercial to business occupiers – need to strengthen offer
- Local people would rather shop in Harrow than travel to other centres if quality and mix of shops is improved with better linkage between shops.
- 'You can eat your way around the world in Harrow' – good variety, but poor quality. Opportunity to improve this exists.
- A balance of large and high-tech industries could sustain in Harrow.
- Larger businesses are now looking for more contact with communities.
- Two proposed Travel Lodges in Harrow town centre; more variety needed in hotel offer.
- There is good architecture in Harrow; should be stop on the conversion of housing stock into flats.
- Provide more family housing and business to attract especially intellectual and footloose business. High quality community and leisure facilities, parks/open spaces and good quality local environment are desirable.

3. Date of next meeting

Provisional date: Wednesday 24th November (08.30am Harrow Civic Centre).