

HARROW TOWN CENTRE FORUM

THURSDAY 26 APRIL 2012

PRESENT:

Jeff Jackson Chairman

BUSINESS MEMBERS

Howard Bluston North West London Chamber of
Commerce

Gary Stevenson Debenhams Ltd

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The Reverend Bob Gardiner Churches Together in Harrow
Steve Porter Harrow College

SERVICE MEMBERS

Anthony Wood Harrow Public Transport Users

OFFICERS

Mark Billington Head of Economic Development and
Research

Andy Stubbs Harrow Town Centre Manager

Wil Tonkiss Temporary Research Assistant

61. Apologies for Absence:

Apologies were received from Councillor Simon Williams, Bernard Segal, Pat Carvalho and Darren Harman.

62. Minutes of Meetings:

AGREED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2012 be taken as read and signed as a correct record, subject to minute 60, paragraph 10 reading: 'In response to a question as to the status of the Harrow Town Centre Bid Company Ltd, it was noted that it was non-trading, had no assets or liabilities and was separate to the Forum.'

63. Matter Arising:

AGREED: That it be noted that the Harrow Town Centre Board accounts to end March 2012 had been finalised. These would be sent to Companies House shortly.

64. Outer London Fund Round 1 Update and Evaluation:

An officer provided a verbal update on the various projects and events which had taken place since November 2011 and supported by funding from Round 1 of the Outer London Fund. He stated that a total of £472k had been spent in the last six months on projects aimed at boosting the profile of the Town Centre. There would be further funding available for similar projects over the next two years. Evaluation of the recent projects would inform the planning of future events.

The officer briefed the Forum on the projects and events' initial evaluation:

- Banners of Faith and the Light Garden – both of these had been well received;
- Festive lights – Harrow's Christmas lights had been switched on at an official ceremony by a local celebrity which had been well attended. However, the crowds began to disperse as soon as the celebrity left. Bad weather had also contributed to this. Although traders had noticed improved footfall during this event, sales had not increased proportionately. Sales tended to increase when shops held their own promotional events within their premises. However, promotional events within the Town Centre may encourage shoppers to return;
- Animation – Media students from Harrow College had produced a short animated film to promote shopping and eating in Harrow during Valentine's Day;
- Events infrastructure – the Council had been let down by the contractors who were coming to the end of their 5 year term. Although the in-ground supply units had been procured they had not been installed.
- DVD – it was suggested that the promotional video about the Town Centre be distributed to local Colleges. The longer version of the film would be put on YouTube and the shorter version would be available on the Council's website. In future, Media students from local Colleges or the University of Westminster could be invited to undertake this work, which would help keep costs down. The video might not need to have high production values, as these days, the public were used to seeing Youtube clips and images;
- Community Radio – Harrow Community Radio station had broadcast for 28 days on FM. This initiative had been arranged within a relatively short time frame and they hoped to be able to make further FM broadcasts in the future.

- Town Centre Website – it was noted that this was smart phone compatible, had an ‘open’ architecture which allowed individuals and businesses to add their own news items, offers and events and was simple and easy to use. Increased use of online publicity would reach a wider audience in the future;
- Pop-up Art Gallery – this event had been visited by 11 thousand people during a four-week period. It had been an innovative use of an empty retail unit and had helped to raise the profile of St. George’s Centre. The artwork, which had received very positive feedback, including requests to purchase some of the artwork, had been produced by pupils from Nower Hill School. Forum Members agreed that a similar event should be repeated in the future;
- Food and Dance Festival – this had been well attended, received positive feedback and had a dedicated Facebook page to help publicise it. However, bad weather had been an issue and there were plans to repeat this event, with better provision for bad weather;

Forum members made the following comments:

- banners publicising projects and events could be erected sooner to provide advanced publicity;
- the Community Radio initiative could have been launched sooner and include greater participation by the voluntary sector;
- site locations for events such as the Food and Dance Festival should be more widely spread throughout the town centre, with both College and Station Roads being used in the future;
- all projects and events should be publicised in the Harrow People Magazine in good time. Some of the installations, such as the giant tulips and the banners could be re-cycled;
- overall, the programme of events and projects had been excellent, delivered to a professional standard with a low incidence of errors. The events had also received positive local and national media coverage. In future, retailers would be encouraged to take better advantage of such events around the Town Centre.

The officer circulated an evaluation document requesting Forum members’ feedback with regard to the programme of events and projects held. Responses would form part of the overall officer evaluation, which would be submitted to the Greater London Authority (GLA).

AGREED: That the report be noted, including the comments made by the members of the Forum.

65. Outer London Fund Round 2 - Public Realm Improvements, Events and Business Improvement Development:

An officer provided the Forum with an update on Round 2 of the Outer London Fund Programme for the achievement of Harrow's Business Improvement District (BID). The officer advised that:

- staffing was in place and funding and business plan activity had been agreed with sponsors;
- there had been some slippage with regard to capital provision and adjustments had been necessary;
- Public Realm would be carrying out re-paving of the area between of St Ann's Road near Harrow on the Hill Station up to Havelock Place. Phase Two of these repairs would begin in August 2012. These works would not affect the highway;
- consultants had been appointed to provide advice relating to the final Public Realm improvements in the Town Centre. Traders and residents would be consulted about the proposals over the following weeks;
- one of the two annual food markets in Harrow may take place in July 2012;
- the Olympic torch would pass through Harrow streets on 25 July 2012. The torch bearer would start off from Headstone Manor and pass by the Town Centre using Station Road. Harrow had submitted a bid for the Cultural Olympiad festival programme and had been awarded one of the "Showtime" street theatre shows on Thursday 2nd. This would take place in St Ann's Road and be coupled with Harrow's own music/dance festival as scheduled in the round 2 programme;
- the Harrow Company would be re-activated and its members would have a key role in maintaining an overview of projects. This was an unpaid responsibility and job descriptions would be available shortly. Officers requested Forum members to forward any suitable nominations;
- in addition to the annual food markets, Forum members suggestion of looking at the possibility of offering markets specialising in other areas such as antiques and vintage clothing, would be explored;
- following requests from the Government for longer opening hours during the Olympics, it was noted that traders in Harrow Town Centre had indicated their willingness to do this.

AGREED: That the report be noted.

66. Date of Next Meeting:

4.00 pm on 26 July 2012.

67. Reverend Bob Gardiner - Churches Together in Harrow:

The Reverend Bob Gardiner announced that he would be retiring and would be stepping down from his position on the Forum after fourteen years service. The Chairman and Forum members wished Rev. Gardiner a happy retirement and thanked him for his hard work on behalf of the Forum.

The Meeting having started at 4.12 pm, finished at 5.47 pm.