

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 MARCH 2020
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

TOWN CENTRE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2019-20

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 A thriving town centre is seen by many to embody the spirit and prosperity of a place. While the state of a town centre is mainly a product of the broader economy and the individual decisions of a multitude of businesses and customers, the local council is invariably identified with the state of its towns.
- 1.2 The Engagement and Events Officers in the council works through the Hatfield Town Centre Forum and the Welwyn Garden City BID to enhance and promote the vitality of the two town centres, each of which faces different challenges. Since 2012, the council's involvement in town centres has been managed within the Community and Housing Strategy team, which brings stability and synergy with other partnership activities that are relevant to the town centres.
- 1.3 This report gives a brief insight into the action taken by officers within each town centre over the past year, and indicates the direction of future developments, including how the team successfully worked in conjunction with Welwyn Garden City BID Partnership Board to help meet its aims and objectives. Also working with the Hatfield Town Centre businesses to establish the Hatfield Town Centre Forum.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the content of this annual report.

3 Explanation

Hatfield Town Centre

- 3.1 The council's investment in the redevelopment process throughout the town has given opportunities for businesses and residents to fill the vacant business and resident properties. This has meant that there are now less vacant properties compared to previous years and the vacant properties have been occupied by national companies which has helped with the growth of the town centre. There are a range of national and independent shops, with the two weekly markets as the unique selling point of the town. In 2019 there was a lively event and campaign calendar which helped increase the footfall to the

town, helping contribute to the council's goal to regenerate and revitalise the town.

Hatfield Town Centre Website

- 3.2 The new Hatfield Town Centre website has gone live. This website is a sub-site of the Council's main page which has huge advantages. The website includes: store directory, event calendar, Hatfield Community Hub booking information, how to get to the town centre, car parking information, Hatfield 2030+ redevelopment updates and information about the markets.

'Shop Watch' radio scheme

- 3.3 The 'Shop Watch' Radio scheme was launched in autumn 2018 and is working well in reducing shoplifting in the stores. The users involved are: various retailers, Resolve, Street Wardens, Police, ASB Team, Hatfield Housing Office (White Lion House) all reporting into the CCTV control room. The scheme is part of a drive to tackle shoplifting and to reduce crime in the retailers.
- 3.3.1 The Radio Link provides instant communication between retailers, CCTV control room and the Police about shoplifters or anyone acting in an anti-social manner. This creates an inclusive environment, where retailers feel less isolated (especially if lone working) and can rely on the support from the rest of the members during a 'real time' crime problem with retailers requesting help or offering help in an emergency situation.
- 3.3.2 From the radio scheme the Business Security Group was established; this is a sub group from the Hatfield Town Centre Forum. This group meets twice a year with retailers, CCTV Control and the Police. In between these meetings a security newsletter is sent to the retailers who has a radio providing key messages on how to keep their stock safe, current safety campaigns and current scams.

Hatfield Town Centre Forum

- 3.4 This group has been well represented with businesses, officers and external organisations throughout 2019. The group continues to update the environmental action plan which outlines environmental issues in the town that needs addressing. This has been shared between the Forum members to increase cross partnership with the common goal of improving the look and feel of the town for visitors.
- 3.4.1 From this the group felt that there should be a meeting solely for the businesses (Business Forum). This meeting has created an action plan which is updated at each meeting with actions for officers and businesses. At these meetings discussions that take place are: how the Council can help increase their footfall i.e. through events and activities they would like to have in the town centre. Other items discussed are: training they would to attend and grants that are available.

- 3.4.2 Business newsletters are sent quarterly to these members keeping them up to date with items such as: business grants information, business meeting details, upcoming events and training they can get involved with, information regarding the 2030+ redevelopment and retailer news.

The Market (managed by WHBC Corporate Property Team)

- 3.5 The number of stall holders has increased significantly and the footfall shopping at the market is also growing. New market stalls have been ordered and will further improve the look of the market. Currently creating new marketing to increase the footfall further.

PlaceDashboard

- 3.6 The council funds a system called PlaceDashboard who monitor the behaviour of visitors in the town centre. This has been in place for a year. The trackers give a useful insight into how successful events have been, understanding shopper behaviours how they access the town and understanding the busier months as well as the busier locations.

Christmas Lights Switch On

- 3.7 This was the biggest event to date with the highest number of attendees. As a result of feedback from 2018 event there was a larger fun fair in Market Place with bigger rides to attract older children and increased activity stall holders in the large marquee increasing the dwell time of the attendees. The event made the town have a real buzz throughout the day. Feedback from the businesses who was surveyed; 100% of them had an increased footfall and some noted a increase in profit in their store.

HealthFest

- 3.8 HealthFest took place in June, this was successful with the amount of stall holders and attendees. Lots of these stall holders were interactive and provided information on the 5 ways to wellbeing. After feedback from 2018 event there was a lot more activity providers invited to attract families with their children. Departments who attended from the Council was: Community Partnerships Team (promoting BIG Summer activities, WelHat Sports and Hatfield Town Centre), Public Health & Protection and Housing (Community Engagement).

Live & Creative Event

- 3.9 A funding bid was written to the Arts Council with the idea of arranging an outdoor live arts event that brought a different audience into the town centre. This funding bid was successful and the Council was awarded £14,000 worth of funding. With this funding a creative art event was organised that had a mix of street theatre, circus and dance performances in a rolling programme. Also there was a large marquee of various art activities that families could get involved with. The event was busy even with the nonstop raining.

- 3.10 2019 saw the delivery of some new projects and initiatives as well as the development and improvement of some of our annual events. A few examples are:
- 3.11 *Easter Egg Hunt* in the different retail shops within the town. 2019 was the most successful with over 26 shops participating. This was a huge success from the business engagement point of view, as it meant they wanted to take part and engage with the community. This worked well with positive feedback from participants and businesses who enjoy speaking to the families entering their stores.
- 3.12 *Litter/Waste Campaigns* in the town centre and around Hatfield - Clean up Hatfield Campaign happens twice a year (April and October). In 2019 town centre businesses got involved, local community and local schools. There was a competition in the schools to design a new poster which is being used for 2020's marketing.
- 3.13 *BIG Summer activities* – the town centre was a hive of activity during the council's wider Big Summer campaign taking place during August. Activities included: weekly Xplorer's (orienteering challenge), SkateFest event and weekly mobile crazy golf course.
- 3.14 The team attended various events held by the University of Hertfordshire in order to promote Hatfield as a destination to shop and to raise awareness of the events calendar. These events were: *Freshers Fair*, International Information Fair and Re-Fresher Fair. Also the *Student Lock In* at The Galleria. A booklet was created with over 30 different town centre retailers providing offers just for students. This booklet has also been sent to the international students who when they start have a tour of the town centre.
- 3.15 *Christmas Window Display Competition* was successful with the public casting over 450 votes in total. The businesses really got involved with a healthy competition! A lot of new businesses took part which is encouraging. There was great article in the WH Times with the picture of the winning window. The winner receives a shield with all winning shops names and a trophy they can keep.
- 3.16 *Christmas Carols and late night shopping* during this Christmas period was partnered with Kings Community Church who are based in Hatfield Town Centre. Kings Community Church hosted the carols. There was around 40 retailers who took part in the late night shopping.
- 3.17 *A Santa Grotto* was organised as a result of feedback from the Hatfield Town Centre Forum asking if one could be organised. This was new for this year and was open in the lead up to Christmas. Overall there was extremely positive feedback on social media and from the public who attended.
- 3.18 Additionally in 2019 there were various activities organised with different organisations such as:
- Macmillan information bus.

- Police information stand in Asda foyer.
- Poppy appeal, Hatfield Town Council provide the tins in the various retail shops.

Welwyn Garden City

Skate Jam

- 3.19 Following feedback from events and talking with local young people a Skate Jam was delivered to give young people an opportunity to skate and learn some new skills. Unfortunately the August rain delayed the event by a week, eventually relocating it to Campus West. It was held on a Friday evening and had around 50 skaters participating. The feedback from the young people was positive. Campus West proved as a good location for skaters during the winter months and there is now a satellite club for young people to learn to skate at Campus West.

Healthfest

- 3.20 Healthfest took place in Welwyn Garden City in September and was a success. Due to the time of year, less organisations were able to commit to the event which saw a smaller event than usual. However, stall holders are always encouraged to provide interactive stalls which received positive feedback from the community. After evaluating the Healthfest event it was found that organisations struggle to commit to both Hatfield and Welwyn events and it would be better use of budget, resources and time do one Healthfest a year alternating between to the two town centres. With more resources available to deliver one event it will give the opportunity to build and grow it. As it will be the centenary year in Welwyn Garden City it was decided that the Healthfest 2020 will take place in Welwyn Garden City town centre.

Christmas in Welwyn Garden

- 3.21 As a result on the positive feedback the Welwyn Garden City light switch on took place on Saturday again. The event was a success and saw a large increase in footfall. New to this year's event was the BID's teddy bear and bauble light instalment which was revealed as part of the event. As a result of feedback from last year event there was also a big wheel and in addition to the usual funfair, Fretherne road was closed to allow for a smaller funfair for younger children. The footfall trackers showed there was around 16,000 people in the town centre throughout the day compared to the weekend before that is a 6,000 person increase.

Welwyn Garden City Watch

- 3.22 The Welwyn Garden City Watch scheme has continued to grow throughout the year. To encourage more businesses to sign up there was a free month trial which saw 10 new business signing up. Businesses receive regular newsletters to provide important information and updates on crime trends. There has been several meetings with businesses, the police, the council and

the BID to discuss how to improve the scheme. Most recently the launch of the Shop Watch app which will allow users to share information and keep up to date with crime trends.

BIG Summer Presents

- 3.23 The BIG Summer project runs during the school holidays in which it uses marketing tools to showcase all the activities in the borough for families using an online calendar. Welwyn Garden City delivered a town centre event as part of the project with a rock climbing wall, arts and crafts, soft play and a surf simulator. The event was very popular among families and young children. It also provided the BIG Summer team an opportunity to give out information about the project.

Plans for 2020

- 3.24 We will be delivering a number of town centre events and initiatives over the next 12 months. As it is the centenary year, there will be several town centre events delivered by the WGC Centenary Foundation, which the BID and the Council are involved in such as the Carnival and Petite Tour. This will encourage businesses to engage with the BID, the Council and each other.

WGC Business Improvement District (BID) update

- 3.25 The BID team has had a couple of changes in their team. The Events and Marketing Manager and Senior Ambassador have moved on from the business and both vacancies are open and in discussion in regards to a team restructure.
- 3.26 The Events and Engagement Officer, who is employed by the council, works with the BID to establish a good link to between the two organisations and continue to improve relationships and communications as the two organisations must work in partnership. Over the past 12months this officers have been fundamental in enabling the BID in implementing various projects, events and campaigns.
- 3.27 These include additional flower displays and planter throughout the town centre, free public Wi-Fi which includes footfall counters and issuing a bespoke magazine, which was delivered to 50000 households, promoting Welwyn Garden City as a shopping destination. In addition to the future planning of town centre events and projects including the potential delivery of different events throughout 2020.
- 3.28 Food Festival, Cinema on the Green and an Ocktoberfest where just a few of the events that were delivered in 2019.
- 3.29 The Geo Sense trackers have now been in place for over a year and therefore able to provide more accurate data. The trackers have given a useful insight into how successful events have been and understanding the busier periods in the Town Centre as well as the busier areas. On average there are around

7,000 people visiting/passing through the town centre. With Stonehills being the busiest area.

Implications

4 Legal Implications

4.1 There are no legal implications directly relating to the content of this report.

5 Financial Implications

5.1 There are no financial implications directly related to the content of this report. The Service has its own budget which is agreed annually as part of the Council's overall budget process.

6 Risk Management Implications

6.1 There are no risk management implications directly relating to the content of this report.

7 Security and Terrorism Implications

7.1 There are no implications for security and terrorism arising from this report.

8 Procurement Implications

8.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this report

9 Climate Change Implications

9.1 There are no climate change implications directly relating to the content of this report.

10 Link to Corporate Priorities

10.1 The content of this report is linked to the council's corporate priority for 'Our Community,' 'Our Environment' and 'Our Economy.'

11 Communication Plan

11.1 The team also utilises the Council's media outlets including LIFE, Heads Up, website and social media. This year we have had good publicity in WH Times and online.

12 Health and Wellbeing

12.1 Over the next 12 months the team will also be working with other teams especially our Public Health colleagues to promote better health and wellbeing within the town centre themselves. This is done through individual campaigns and promotions which are delivered directly by the Council or by assisting partner agencies to those deliver key messages.

12.2 Our work over the past 12months has involved events and promotions such as HealthFest, Mental Health Awareness, Community Information Days, Macmillan Information Bus and national awareness days online.

13 Equality and Diversity

13.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out in relation to this report, as it is for information only.

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