WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 19 May 2020

Recommendation from the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 March 2020:-

RETAIL STRATEGY

The report of the Corporate Director (Public Protection, Planning and Governance) set out the Council's current retail strategy, which currently was a wide-ranging number of policies for Members to consider.

The report set out the numerous policies, frameworks and initiatives such as the development at Highview, the Welwyn BID (Business Improvement district), Welwyn Renewal Partnership and the redevelopment of Hatfield Town Centre. It also set out the limitations of the Council when it came to business units, but they could be supported through the planning system.

A Member felt that the Committee had waited too long for the report, having requested it mid-2019 and that an overarching strategy contained in one document was required. Shop closures, such as Debenhams and Halfords in Welwyn Garden City, highlighted the challenges faced by town centres. They felt that much more that could be done over and above what was currently being done to improve retail and bring visitors into the town.

Then Councillor M.Cowan moved and Councillor J.Broach seconded that:

"Members believe a dynamic strategy is needed to help arrest the decline in our town centres; this will build on town centres being not only commercial but also the social meeting places that online can never be. This strategy should aim to include:

- Working with landowners to provider smaller units to help starter and innovative businesses,
- Learning from and adoption of approaches used elsewhere,
- Working with the local Chamber of Commerce and similar local business support organisations,
- The presence of an active town centre manager to bring in the necessary dynamism,
- Closer join working of the teams whose work affects the town centres,
- In accordance with the Government's own review into High Streets in 2012, this Council maintain free parking in town centres where it currently exists and review the position where there is not".

A discussion followed and the following points were raised by Members:

- Some Members agreed with the motion and that by "aiming" to include the various points it could be agreed to in principle. By highlighting the need for retaining free parking it would ensure that this would be considered in view of the development of the new MSCP (Multi Storey Car Park) in Hatfield.
- Other areas outside of the main town centres ought to be considered such as the small parades of shops at Oaklands, Woolmer Green and Hollybush.
- Other Members felt that the report was a significant piece of work, providing good background and that the recommendations put forward were too specific. Some were also of the view that Welwyn Hatfield was doing very well comparatively and there lacked evidence as to the successes of having a town centre manager.

Officers advised that there was the Corporate Town Centre Group, Chaired by the Chief Executive, which could be an appropriate forum to take the motion to and come back with a proposed way forward.

It was then put to the vote and

RESOLVED:
(6 voting for and 5 against)

(1) That the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members agree that a dynamic strategy is needed to help arrest the decline in our town centres; this will build on town centres being not only commercial but also the social meeting places that online can never be. This strategy should aim to include:

- Working with landowners to provider smaller units to help starter and innovative businesses,
- Learning from and adoption of approaches used elsewhere,
- Working with the local Chamber of Commerce and similar local business support organisations,
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