

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
SOCIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 14 MARCH 2017
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

TOWN CENTRES PROGRESS REPORT

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 Town Centres Team in the council works through the Hatfield Town Team and the Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Partnership to enhance and promote the vitality of the two centres, each of which faces different challenges. Since 2012, the council's involvement in town centres has been managed within the Housing and Community 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 over the past year, and indicates the direction of future developments, including how the team successfully worked in conjunction with Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Partnership Board to achieve a YES vote from local businesses in the ballot to make Welwyn Garden City a Business Improvement District from the 1 April 2017.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee notes the role of the Town Centres team during 2016 in building local partnerships that can sustain and develop each Centre to thrive and serve local people.
- 2.2 That the committee note that the financial support received from Hatfield Town Council to assist in the delivery of events and programmes in Hatfield has been reduced.

3 Financial Implication(s)

- 3.1 None arising from this report.

4 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The content of this report is linked to the council's corporate priority 'Help build a strong local economy' whilst also contributing towards both 'Maintain a safe and healthy community' and 'engage with communities and provide value for money'.

5 Legal Implication(s)

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

6 Climate Change Implication(s)

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

7 Risk Management Implications

7.1 In any non-contractual partnership arrangement there is a risk that a partner might disengage from joint work. Based on current indications from several partners, and the stability of the structures in place, this is judged to be of low likelihood and medium impact in the case of the Hatfield Town Team.

7.2 The Interim Welwyn Garden City BID Board have a risk register around the development of a Company which will manage the BID and launch of the BID is proposed from 1 April 2017.

7.3 There is currently some risk with regards to resilience in the Town Centre team about the delivery of the Hatfield Town Centre projects and events due to current officer vacancies. It is hoped that these issues will be resolved at the start of the new financial year if not before.

8 Explanation

Hatfield Town Centre

8.1 The council's investment in the redevelopment process throughout the town has given opportunities for businesses and residents, and there is a very high occupancy rate of units in the town centre. The Town Centres team continue not only to deliver high quality events and projects in the town, but work alongside other council departments who are responsible for the development of the Hatfield regeneration. Events over the year included: -

8.2 Animal Cracker

This was one of the most popular events for the community as always. With the popularity of the mobile farm coming back to Hatfield, members of the public were waiting for the event to start with excitement! The event was extended by an extra hour due to feedback from 2015, and it was well attended throughout the whole period. In addition, we added donkey rides and a kids' fun fair ride; along with the usual face painting, sand art, ice cream van, balloon modelling, etc. Our challenge is how to increase it even further for 2017.

8.3 Have a Go Day – Experience the World in Hatfield

A successful joint project delivered by the council and Oaklands' College.; The day saw a number of stage acts and stall holders, a mix of different foods from across the world, and different activities to try; with carpentry workshops, Asian drumming and belly dancing coming out favourites of the day. With over 500 attending, it was a great day for the community.

Unfortunately, intake for Oakland's' college has spread further afield; with a large number now coming from Luton. Oaklands has therefore decided to move their have a go experience to Luton in 2017 instead of keeping it in Hatfield. The team will agree a replacement initiative.

8.4 The Market (managed by WHBC Corporate Property Team)

With the successful relocation of the market from Market Place to the main shopping thoroughfare (St Albans Road East), the market is going from strength to strength. The number of stall holders has increased and the amount of public shopping at the market is also growing. There have been positive responses from both the market management, stall holders and the community about the success. On very windy days when the market has not been able to go ahead, it's been great that comments have come flooding in about how the market was missed!

8.5 HealthFest

Hatfield HealthFest had many interactive stalls helping to raise awareness of health and wellbeing, with information available of events taking place in the local area. There was also live music and demos, fun and games and an active zone with sports tasters for all ages run by Welwyn Hatfield Sport and Physical Activity Alliance (WHSPAA). The event was organised in partnership with the Health and Wellbeing Partnership, WHSPAA, the Housing Trust and the Public Health team.

8.6 Christmas In Hatfield

Hatfield saw its biggest Christmas lights event so far. Feedback from businesses informed that activities needed to focus across the town rather than just White Lion Square. This impacted on the planning and delivery of our set up for Christmas in 2016, and a decision was made to have a funfair based in the Market Place; reindeers under the Arcade as the connection from Market Place to White Lion Square; and the stage/stall holders in White Lion Square. The set up was successful, with the funfair provider wishing to return in 2017. Feedback from stall holders such as Domino's and Kings Community church was that a larger amount of food/drinks was sold (higher than usual). And our footfall statistics informed us that over 3,000 people were at the event.

8.7 Other Events and Initiatives

Student lock-in at the Galleria promoting Hatfield Town Centre

Festive Market at Christmas in the Market Place

Summer 2016 – play rangers, strongman, Mad Hatters Tea Party and much more.

Halloween Fest

Easter Egg Hunt around different businesses within the town

Business Breakfasts and Community/Business Newsletters

Arcade Lights promoting charity campaigns

Litter/Waste Campaigns in the town centre and around Hatfield

8.8 Hub Update

Significant changes have taken place over 2016 which include the Hub moving twice from its original place in White Lion Square. The hub is now located in White Lion House above Simmons. The team continue to work closely with

partners across Hatfield and further afield to encourage better usage of the Hub. The hub is a community space, for the community which needs to be maximised.

Welwyn Garden City

8.9 Although not immune from the effects of the current economic conditions, Welwyn Garden City (WGC) retains an enviable array of national names and a good variety of independent traders in its town centre. It is important for the prosperity and well-being of the borough to ensure that the town centre retains its appeal both to local people (including everyone working or studying in the locality) and to a wider catchment, so maintaining its regional significance as a shopping and leisure destination.

8.10 Welwyn Garden Awards

Approximately 80 businesses turned out in force for the Awards, hosted at John Lewis, Welwyn Garden City. It was a lively event with businesses taking the opportunity to network and learn more about the BID. There is an appetite for a larger event, possibly more formal, so businesses can celebrate success with their teams. The BID will lead on this initiative next year with an additional investment plan to re-introduce Mystery Shopping and several new awards. The awards encourage businesses to delight their customers with fantastic service and this is fundamental to the success of WGC town centre.

8.11 Food Festival

It was a cold, dry day and it was estimated that 10,000 people attended the Festival. Families loved the carnival atmosphere, live music, and the wide range of foods on offer. The donkeys, land train and play area were all well received. This event continues to grow and we are looking at ways of extending the event into the evening.

8.12 Christmas in Welwyn Garden

The Christmas light switch on event continues to grow year on year. Father Christmas constantly had a queue and the roaming life sized polar bear was a real crowd pleaser. There were lots of families and young children creating a festive spirit and sense of community. With DIY SOS's Billy Byrne switching the lights on, it was another successful event and now the BID company is in place we will look to enhance it further.

8.13 BID update

The Council's Town Centre Managers (job share role) were seconded across to support the BID in the development process, as the town worked towards the ballot. During this time the officers met with nearly all businesses to explain about what the BID would do for them and the town, they also worked tirelessly on a 'vote yes' campaign to ensure that at ballot time those businesses understood how important their vote was. The officers were also working closely with the Council to get service level agreements in place with regards base line delivery of services within the town centre should a yes vote be successful. During all this time the officers also continued to deliver and grow the events and projects that took place in the town centre.

Since the 'yes vote' last year the officers have been working closely with the interim board to help set up the new BID company. The BID company will be set up to begin work from 1 April. At the time of writing this report the company is in the process of recruiting officers to fulfil key roles which will enable the successful delivery of a BID in the town.

9 Equality and Diversity

- 9.1 I confirm that an Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out in connection with this progress report, but that the equalities implications of town centres projects are assessed as they are developed. The content, accessibility and promotion of all events aim to maximise appeal and availability to all people with protected characteristics under the legislation. As such, the work of the Town Centres team has a positive effect on persons with protected characteristics under the relevant equality duties.

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Appendix One

Notes associated to Business Improvement Districts:

- BIDs are an investment in the local trading environment through the provision of added value services
- BIDs are funded by local businesses through a levy, therefore all beneficiaries pay.
- They see improvements to business profitability and turnover which would not have happened without a BID.
- Businesses will identify the area and the issues and put together a proposal which should include delivery guarantees, performance indicators and management structure.
- The plan voted for has a lifespan of 5 years and further proposals will have to be reaffirmed through a further vote.
- There are now over 220 BID's across the UK,
- There are two criteria which have to be achieved for the vote to be successful: more than 50% of the number of businesses who vote have to say yes and more than 50% of the rateable value of the businesses who vote have to say yes.