

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 MARCH 2019
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

TOWN CENTRE ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT 2018-19

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 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 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 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 wide range of national and independent shops, with the two weekly markets as the unique selling point of the town. In 2018 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 A new Hatfield Town Centre website is currently being designed and is due to be live by the end of the financial year. The website will be 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, parking, Hatfield 2030+ redevelopment updates and information about the market.

'Shop Watch' radio scheme

- 3.3 The 'Shop Watch' Radio scheme was launched in autumn 2018 and now has 28 businesses signed up. The users involved are: various businesses, Resolve, Street Wardens, Police, ASB Team, Queensway House caretaker and the CCTV control room. Users have radios which link into each other. The scheme is part of a drive to tackle shoplifting and anti-social behaviour and reduce crime in the main shopping areas. It provides instant communication between shops, CCTV control room and the Police about shoplifters or anyone acting in an anti-social manner. The radios report into the CCTV control room.
- 3.3.1 The Radio Link enables partners to communicate with each other and with the control room. 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 partnership during a 'real time' crime problem and/or businesses and partners can request or offer help in an emergency situation.

Hatfield Town Centre Forum

- 3.4 This group has been well represented with businesses throughout 2018 and continues to grow with new businesses attending. In summer 2018 the group created an 'environmental action plan' which outlines issues in the town that needs addressing. This has been shared between the Forum members to increase cross partnership working the common goal of improving the look and feel of the town for local communities.

Hatfield Community Hub

- 3.5 Since the Hub changed its usage in spring 2018 it has become very popular with bookings by various different organisations. It is used regularly 'throughout the week by external organisations and internal WHBC teams. Examples are: CVS use it every Monday, WHBC tenant training every Tuesday, Shaw Trust every Thursday. Other users have been NHS, Oaklands College, Carers in Herts, Refugee Council and Royal Mencap Society.

The Market (managed by WHBC Corporate Property Team)

- 3.6 The number of stall holders has increased significantly and the amount of public shopping at the market is also growing. There has been a new market

manager joined and he is trying to increase this further with new stalls. New market stalls are planned which will further improve the look of the market.

Animal Crackers

- 3.7 We delivered the Animal Crackers event again this year, which is one of the most popular events. This is an educational animal event designed to teach attendees about the animals that are present at the event with a chance of meeting the animals. There were talks throughout the day on various animals on the educational stage. The council organises this and on the day external organisations run the talks and activities, with the events team overseeing the whole event. In 2018 we expanded the event into Market Place by inviting the fun fair to have small rides and this worked very well. This meant that businesses in both areas were busy as the crowds were spread between both areas. Feedback from the businesses was very positive – they reported being very busy and that they made a good profit on this day. It was estimated that around 1500 people attended throughout the day.

SkateFest

- 3.8 This is the second year we have run this event and it was well attended. There was skating and scooter tuition in Market Place, followed by skating in the skate bowl in Link Drive. We also provided an outdoor roller rink which all ages could use. For 2019 this event will be much bigger with the possibility of including a skate ramp and having more activities at the skate park in Link Drive; making this one of the key events throughout the year.
- 3.9 2018 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:
- 3.10 *Pancake Race*- this continues to grow each year, with this year holding both adults and children's races as the event took place during half term. There was a new competition for businesses, which encouraged them to take part.
- 3.11 *Easter Egg Hunt* in the different retail shops within the town. 2018 was the most successful with over 25 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. Feedback from 2017 was that the hunt was too long therefore we used this feedback and outlined in the rules participants could visit 15 shops and still be in with a chance of winning a prize; instead of having to visit every shop. This worked well with positive feedback from participants.
- 3.12 *BIG Summer activities* – the town centre was a hive of activity during the council's wider Big Summer campaign. Activities included: Play Rangers twice a week for four weeks; each week was a different activity theme; working in partnership with various businesses we put on: dog show with Pedigrees 'n' Pooches, table tennis competition with Open Heavens Christian Centre and Animal Antics with Hatfield Library. We also organised mobile crazy golf

which, was well attended; we are looking at extending these activities in the coming year.

- 3.13 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 our events calendar. These events were: *Freshers Fair* and International Information Fair. The *Student Lock In* at The Galleria. A booklet was created with over 25 different town centre businesses/ shops providing offers just for students. Most successful year with handing out over 400 voucher booklets to the students.
- 3.14 The team's Apprentice leads on *HalloweenFest* every year and its aim is to raise money for local charities by providing 'Halloween' themed activities. Always a popular event with different competitions and activities throughout the day.
- 3.15 An exciting new event was put on in 2018 called *Love Hatfield at Christmas*; this saw various stage performances, Christmas activities (snow globe, reindeer, huskies, meet Santa), go karts, Christmas market and fun fair. This was well received for the variety of activities attendees could take part in.
- 3.16 *Christmas Window Display Competition* was the most successful so far with 28 shops taking part and over 450 votes. The businesses really got involved with a healthy competition! A lot of new businesses took part which is really encouraging. A great article in the WH Times. This year a shield was created with all winning shops names and the winning shop wins a trophy they can keep.
- 3.17 *Christmas Carols* was partnered with Simmons and Kings Community Church who are both based in Hatfield Town Centre. Simmons provided the refreshments and Kings Community Church hosted the carols. Comments from public that this is a 'feel good community event'.
- 3.18 *Business breakfasts* and *business newsletters* - the newsletter template has been upgraded to a new more professional looking template and this is sent out on a quarterly basis.
- 3.19 *Litter/Waste Campaigns* in the town centre and around Hatfield - Clean up Hatfield Campaign happens twice a year (April and October). In 2018 businesses got involved and so did the local community. Along with the environment team we delivered a waste awareness month.
- 3.20 Additionally in 2018 there were various activities organised with different organisations such as:
 - Macmillan information bus,
 - Young Carers awareness stand in Asda foyer for Young Carers awareness week,

- Fraud information workshop in Hatfield Library with Trading Standards as part of National Fraud Awareness week,
- Poppy appeal, Hatfield Town Council put the tins in various retail shops.

Welwyn Garden City

Welwyn Garden Awards

- 3.21 2018 business awards saw the highest amount of participants since the start of this campaign, with 70 businesses taking part, and almost a third of them scored 90% or over in customer satisfaction in the mystery shopping judging. The award ceremony was successfully held in Trinity Church. A new approach will be taken in 2019 to further develop the awards.

Healthfest

- 3.22 Healthfest took place in Welwyn Garden City in June and was a success. The event had up to 40 organisations taking part, giving out information and advice to the community. As in previous years stall holders are encouraged to provide interactive stalls and for the first time the event had taster session in a separate marquee. The taster sessions were successful and provided insight for 2019 and how we can improve and grow the event.

Christmas in Welwyn Garden

- 3.23 The Welwyn Garden City Christmas light switch on was held on a Saturday as opposed to its usual Thursday evening. This was to give families more time to enjoy the attractions. The attractions were popular among the crowds as well as the stage line up, which saw a number of local community groups sing and dance. The roads were closed when the 'Switch On' got closer, which allowed for the children's lantern parade to take place.

Christmas Messages

- 3.24 We delivered an event in the Howard Centre in the weeks leading up to Christmas in partnership with Herts Fire & Rescue and Herts Action on Disability to provide the community with useful information on how to stay safe during the Christmas period. This included information on how to look out for elderly neighbours, how to reduce the risk of fires and theft. This received positive feedback from the community.

Service Yard

- 3.25 The service yard on church road over the last year has been causing various issues relating to fly tipping, refuse and cars blocking the entrance to the yard. Over the past 12 months we have managed to ascertain that the land is owned by the Crown and therefore has proved difficult to resolve the ongoing issues. The BID have worked with the council and local businesses to find a solution to the ongoing issues. There have been various meetings to discuss the different options that could provide a solution. Currently solicitors are looking into how the businesses can purchase the land from the crown.

Welwyn Garden City Watch

- 3.26 The Welwyn Garden City Watch scheme was given a re-launch last year in partnership with the BID, the Council and Shop Safe. We delivered a successful re launch event in the town centre. In attendance was the local PSCO's and shop safe as well as businesses who picked up their new radios and received information from local police and shop safe.
- 3.27 There is now over 40 businesses signed up to the scheme and the interest is growing. We now provide businesses with regular newsletters to keep them up-to-date. Training is being provided in March 2019 which will give businesses the tools they need to both use the radios, spot crime, report it correctly and tips on how to protect their businesses. The radios have already proved how important communication in the town centre is by helping prevent crime and track individuals who commit crime in the town.

BIG Summer Presents

- 3.28 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 launch event which was used to promote the project. The event had a skate ramp for children and young people to either use on their own or get help from the professionals as well as professional shows. The event also had arts and crafts and bouncy castles for the younger children. The event was successful in promoting the BIG Summer project as well as giving young people of all ages an activity to engage in.

Plans for 2019

- 3.29 We will be delivering a number of town centre events and initiatives over the next 12 months. These will include to reintroduction of the Pancake Day race which we will work with the BID to grow the event into the 'business games'. This will encourage businesses to engage with the BID, the Council and each other. New to 2019 and WGC we will deliver an environmental day to highlight the ongoing environmental issues and work with businesses on how they can cut their carbon foot print. Additionally plans for 2020 are in preparation for the two book end events in the town centre which will see an increase of football and interest in the town centre.

BID update

- 3.30 The BID team successfully recruited an Events and Marketing Manager and a town centre ambassador all of whom assist the BID team to deliver their agreed action plan.
- 3.31 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.

- 3.32 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.
- 3.33 World Food Fair, Mid-Week Munch, Cinema on the Green and a new garden fair where just a few of the events that were delivered in 2018.

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 For nearly all of the work undertaken a separate communications plan is put together. Examples of successes is new Hatfield Town Centre newsletter and the new website which will be launched later this year. In addition to this we

work closely with the BID team to produce their business and community magazine as well as promotions on social media. The team also utilises the Council's media outlets including LIFE, Heads Up, website and Social Media. This year as well 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 Environmental Health Colleagues to promote better health and wellbeing within the businesses 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, Play Rangers, Community Safety Week and Macmillan Bus.

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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