

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
SOCIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 APRIL 2016
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (FINANCE AND OPERATIONS)

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 The 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 has and is currently working towards a Business Improvement District (BID, please see Appendix One) for central WGC.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee note the report on the role of the Town Centres team during 2015 to build local partnerships that can sustain and develop each centre to thrive and serve local people.
- 2.2 That the committee note the ongoing financial support received from a variety of businesses in Welwyn Garden City to help and assist in the development of the WGC Partnership and BID development and from Hatfield Town Council to assist in the delivery of events and programmes in Hatfield.

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 for '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 There is a risk related to the work in WGC, currently the town is working towards becoming a BID and should the businesses of the town vote No there is uncertainty around the future of the Welwyn Garden City Town Centre Partnership. However due to the strong commitment of the current Board members and the BID development project plan, this is judged to be low likelihood Medium impact.

7.3 There is a risk associated to the reliance that the current Hatfield Town Team relies on the support of the Town Council. Over recent years Hatfield Town Council has worked in partnership with the Town Team and has also provided a grant of £15,000 to assist in the staffing and delivery of events in Hatfield Town Centre. Whilst the Town Council continues to work in partnership with the Town Team and the council the financial contribution has been cut for 2016/17.

8 Explanation

Hatfield Town Centre

8.1 Hatfield Town's Centre's fabric has needed renewal and many of its units are smaller than many retailers demand. In addition to the pressures that have affected so many traditional high streets, Hatfield's town centre has had to find a role that complements that of the nearby Galleria, which inevitably takes many national names. 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 Hatfield Town Team was galvanised by the input of government funding a few years back and the Town Team has continued to grow since that investment.

8.2 Animal Cracker

With the start of summer holidays, the community were treated to a great family fun day on 7th August, with Ark farm being a hit with both young and old. From ice cream vans, face painting, balloon modelling to meeting all kinds of farm animals, the summer holidays was kick started off with lots of fun.

8.3 Give it a Go – Experience the World in Hatfield

For the second year, working in partnership with Oaklands College, we invited local people to 'experience the world in Hatfield' with a host of free 'have a go' activities for all the family, visitors had a chance to build a brick arch, try their hand at plumbing and electrical work, and learn some wonderful print making techniques. Those with equestrian aspirations also had an opportunity to learn

how to groom and bandage a horse – and yes, there was a live one in the square.

Live music on stage included gospel choirs, salsa, plus African and Indian drumming. There was also be a delicious array of food and drink from around the world thanks to the variety of shops in the town centre who took a stall at the event alongside the live music, dance and entertainment to celebrate the diversity of the Hatfield community. The event was a fantastic success, and one that we hope to replicate in 2016.

8.4 Here we are! – a showcase for schools and young people in Hatfield

For the second year, children and young people from around Hatfield had a chance to showcase their performing arts talents on the main stage in White Lion Square on Saturday 4 July. Live music, singing, dancing and much more will be performed on the amazing Hatfield stage by local schools, choirs, dance troupes and stage schools, including some of the finalists from this year's 3 Music Competition.

The square also featured other entertainment, activities and family fun, including face painting, glitter tattoos, arts and crafts, Mathmagicians, and lots more. The event had enormous public support.

8.5 The Market

With the successful relocation of the market from Market Place to the main high street, the market is going from strength to strength. The number of stall holders have increased and the amount of public shopping at the market is also growing. We have had positive responses from both the market owners 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!

8.6 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.

8.7 Christmas Lights Switch-on

Christmas lights switch on was a great success, well attended despite chilling temperatures, and received well by the community, with Paddington Bear and Cinderella flicking the switch on Saturday 21st November. There was a fantastic programme with stage performances, Christmas photo booth, Santa's grotto, children's entertainment and fun fair rides.

8.8 Town Centre Team

There are now two permanent members of the team (1.5 posts) which enables them to focus all their efforts on the development and improvement of Hatfield Town Centre. The biggest improvement to be made over 2016/17 will be to

increase the engagement of businesses in both the Hatfield Town Team Steering Group meetings but also within the three sub groups of the town team.

2016/17 will see the introduction of 'Business Breakfasts', business specific newsletters, a re-launch of Hawkeye (security sharing scheme for businesses using radio's and Police intelligence, especially around known shoplifters) and an exciting Events Programme.

8.9 Hub Update

Significant changes are taking place within the Town Centre including demand for good retail space. As part of these changes the Hatfield Housing Office will be relocating to White Lion House along with the Hub. This will provide an opportunity for greater joint working, improved resilience and more flexibility to engage with local businesses and build upon the successes achieved so far.

Welwyn Garden City

8.10 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.

8.11 Welwyn Garden Awards

The ceremony was held at Campus West on 22 October and was well attended. Nearly 8500 people voted for the favourite business, a 105% increase on last year's traffic to the WGC town centre website and helped raised the profile of the Partnership and create a sense of business community in the town centre.

8.12 Food Festival

Working together with Oaklands College the World Food Festival took place on 16 May in the town centre, the event was bigger and better than previous years with an estimated 10,000 visitors coming to the town centre from far and wide to enjoy the more than 25 food stalls and sampling a variety of food and drink from around the globe.

Visitors also had the chance to watch live cooking demonstrations from local restaurants and food providers, including Mill Green Museum, as well as Hospitality & Catering staff from Oaklands College.

Live entertainment took place on the main stage throughout the day, including belly dancing, African drumming and performances from the College's Music and Performing Arts students.

8.13 Tour of Hertfordshire

Following on the success of the Women's Tour and the Tour de France event in WGC last year, the Town hosted the last leg of the Tour of Hertfordshire Series, a cycling event in WGC town centre. Despite the bad weather, hundreds of people came to the town centre to take part in the cycling races and to watch the

final stage of the Tour de France on a big screen and running plenty of activities in the town centre on July 26th.

8.14 Christmas Lights

Was a great success, very well attended and received by the public, with Eurovision star and WGC resident, Alex Larke, flicking the switch on Thursday 19 November. There was a fantastic programme with stage performances, a Christmas photo-booth, Santa's Grotto, children's entertainment, a food and crafts market and fun fair rides.

8.15 Christmas Market

As a first time event there was an excellent response to the event which took place, on Thursday 3rd December from 4pm at the Anniversary Gardens, with lots of delicious Street Food, mulled wine, cocktails and music. The event tied in with the late night Christmas shopping evening across the town centre.

8.16 BID update

The project to develop WGC into a Business Improvement District (BID) is underway and being led by the WGC Town Centre Partnership's Board. The project was launched on February 24th to town centre businesses.

In the next few weeks, the Town Centre Partnership will be holding a consultation exercise to identify the improvements and initiatives that local businesses want to see and which can be addressed through the BID. The consultation with businesses includes surveys of the town's businesses and employees. The Town Centre Partnership is also working closely with Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to baseline the services provided through the rates. This information will then be used to draw up the BID Business plan, which businesses in the town will vote on later this year.

Subject to a successful vote a BID Company will be formed by the businesses who will then be responsible for ensuring that the improvements are implemented fairly in order to benefit every business in the Welwyn Garden City BID area.

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.

Name of author	Matthew Rayner x2184
Title	Community Partnerships Manager
Date	March 2016

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.