

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
SOCIAL OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 11 APRIL 2018
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 Centre Forum and the Welwyn Garden City Business Improvement District to enhance and promote the vitality of the two town centres, each of which face different challenges.
- 1.3 This report gives a brief insight into the activity carried out by the team and partners 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 BID Partnership Board to help meet its first year's aims and objectives. Also working with the Hatfield Town Centre businesses to establish the Hatfield Town Centre Forum.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the committee notes the role of the Town Centres team during 2017 in building local partnerships that can sustain and develop each Centre to thrive and serve local people.

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 The council is a key stakeholder in both town centres and the prosperity of the town centres is a key objective of the council. The work of the town centre team helps to achieve vibrant and welcoming town centres and manages any potential reputational or economic risks.

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 to fill the vacant business and resident properties. This has meant that there is now less vacant properties compared to previous years and some vacant properties have now been occupied by national companies which has helped with the growth of the town centre. The Town Centres team continue not only to deliver high quality events in the town and improve business relationships through business engagement, but work alongside other council departments who are responsible for the development of the Hatfield regeneration. Events over the year included: -

8.2 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 significantly 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.

8.3 World Culture Day

This was a new event this year and was very successful on the day. The event included a number of stage acts and stall holders, a mix of different foods from across the world, and different activities to try. Activities included steel drumming, arts and crafts, competitions, face painting and a peace tent. There was also a variety of different stage performers such as a local choir, Irish dancing, Indian dancing and local dancing schools. With over 1000 attending, it was a great day for the community to try something new and to embrace different cultures. It had a positive impact on community spirit. Our challenge for 2018 is to attract even more visitors by delivering more activities and encouraging people to stay at the event for longer.

8.4 Animal Cracker

This was one of the most popular events during the year, particularly the mobile farm and donkey rides coming back to Hatfield. The event was extremely busy throughout and even had people wanting to stay after the event had finished. This year was the first year we had an 'educational stage' which held talks from different animal providers such as a birds of prey, exotic animals and a local Vet's. In addition we had face painting, ice cream van, balloons, animal charities, live animals on display, birds of prey and activities. Our challenge is how to increase it even further for 2018 by having some more activity stalls for the children and having more educational animal talks.

8.5 HealthFest

This year's Hatfield HealthFest was the biggest event so far. With a huge number of interactive stalls helping to raise awareness of health and wellbeing and information about events taking place in the local area. There was also a stage which had live music and demos, local dancing schools performing, choir, fun and games. The event was organised in partnership with the Health and Wellbeing Partnership, Welwyn Hatfield Sport and Physical Activity Alliance, and the Public Health team.

8.6 Christmas Lights Switch On

Following engagement with businesses during the year, activities were again located across White Lion Square, The Arcade and Market Place. This worked well because it incorporated the whole of the town centre. This year a larger scale funfair was based in 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 2018. Feedback from stall holders such as Domino's and Kings Community church was that a larger amount of food/drinks were sold (higher than usual). All extremely positive comments from the public and businesses such as on social media. A challenge for 2018 will be planning where to relocate the event because White Lion Square will be closed for the public realm work.

8.7 Other Events and Initiatives

- 8.7.1 Pancake Race - the second year this has been run and was successful with a number of children, adults and businesses taking part. This was a positive community feel event. For 2019 could think of ways to expand the race by having additional activities, a challenge is that the time of year this is held as the weather can be unpredictable.
- 8.7.2 Easter Egg Hunt around different businesses within the town- 2017 was the most successful 'Hunt' so far, with over 25 shops participating. This was a huge success from the business engagement point of view, however members of the public commented that the Hunt took a long time. Therefore a challenge for 2018 is to still get the same amount of businesses involved, but find a balance which meets the public's expectations.
- 8.7.3 Summer 2017 – play rangers took place twice a week based on four different themes. This was also the first year we ran the BIG Summer campaign, which brought different activities to the town centre such as mobile crazy golf, roller skating, blow up golf net, karate tuition and Hatfield Library's story time event. The aim was to have an activity on every day for the two weeks and this was almost met with either the market being on or an activity/ event taking place. For 2018 the idea is to work with more partners to put activities on in the town centre.
- 8.7.4 'Student Lock In' at The Galleria - promoting Hatfield Town Centre. A booklet was created with details of over 20 Hatfield town centre businesses/ shops providing offers just for students. This was the most successful year to date, with the team handing out over 200 voucher booklets to the students. Since this there has been a noticeable increase in the amount of students who are in the town centre.

- 8.7.5 Halloween Fest- The apprentice leads on this every year. The aim is to bring some fun to the town centre and also to raise money for local charities by providing 'Halloween' themed activities. Always a popular event with different competitions and activities throughout the day. A challenge for 2018 is to think of different activities that could take place on the day.
- 8.7.6 Poppy appeal- over 15 businesses got involved and over £350.00 was raised. Christmas Window Display Competition- most successful with 20 shops taking part and over 400 votes. A great article in the WH Times. The team will build this momentum with the business engagement for 2018.
- 8.7.7 Christmas Carols - 2017 was the first year this ran and this was extremely successful with over 200 people attending. This was partnered with Simmons who provided the refreshments. This event will run again in 2018.
- 8.7.8 Business Breakfasts and Community/Business Newsletters- editions of the newsletters are sent out on a quarterly basis. For 2018 we will be upgrading the business newsletter template to send to the businesses, making it look more professional.
- 8.7.9 Arcade Lights promoting charity campaigns- change the lights pink for breast cancer awareness and will be carrying on with this in 2018. The next campaign where we will be changing the lights will be for Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month and will be changing them to green and blue.
- 8.7.10 Litter/Waste Campaigns in the town centre and around Hatfield- Clean up Hatfield Campaign happens twice a year and is becoming more successful with each campaign.

8.8 Hub Update

From February 2018 Hatfield Hub has changed its usage and name to become Hatfield Community Hub. Its purpose now is a community space to be hired by local organisations, businesses and charities. A challenge for 2018 is to maximise the use of this space.

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 City Business Improvement District (WGCBID)

Following the successful YES vote, the BID Company was set up from April 2017. It has been a busy year, forming the company and associated governance structures and policies. The BID have successfully recruited permanent BID Managers (job share) Nicola Wolff and Mariana Bitonte and Clare Day, Marketing and Event Manager. They have recently recruited two Town Centre Ambassadors who will be working with local businesses and the community. The BID continue to create an identity and brand for themselves. The council's

Events and Engagement Officer (WGC) works closely with the BID team to maximise the offer for the community in the town centre.

8.11 The BID are currently designing a Welwyn Garden City Town Centre magazine which will showcase the businesses and events in the town centre, being delivered to 50,000 houses in Welwyn Garden, Harpenden and St Albans. They are planning a range of events for the town centre in the coming year including a Garden Fair, Animal Antics, outdoor cinema and lunch time food market.

8.12 Welwyn Garden Awards 2017

Approximately 80 businesses turned out in force for the Awards Ceremony, hosted at the Garden City Cinema. Over 100 people attended the event, which was a great way to celebrate and learn about the service that businesses in the town centre offer to customers. The 10 categories, which form the Awards, were judged by Mystery Shopping and all businesses received feedback which is a very valuable tool to improve their customer service skills. The awards encourage businesses to delight their customers with fantastic service and this is fundamental to the success of WGC town centre.

8.13 Food Festival

It was a dry day for the most part with a heavy shower in the middle of the event, however it was estimated that 10,000 people attended the Festival. Families loved the atmosphere, live music, and the wide range of foods on offer. There was also a successful cooking demonstration area with a special guest, the winner of series 4 Great British bake off, Frances Quinn. The arts and crafts and retail stalls were all well received. This event continues to grow and has become a popular event among traders and the community.

8.14 Christmas in Welwyn Garden

The Christmas light switch on event continues to grow year on year. Father Christmas constantly had a queue and the snow globe was a real crowd pleaser. The donkey rides and stilt walkers were also very popular and drew big crowds. There were lots of families and young children who could enjoy a range of foods and live performances. In spite of the public's negative reaction to a proposed celebrity turning the lights on, the event was very well attended. Next year there will be more focus on how to manage crowds safely. One of the challenges faced was anti-social behaviour towards the end of the event which will also be looked at for 2018.

8.15 Other BID Projects

8.16 The BID Board are currently considering proposals for public WiFi access in the town centre and have recently approved proposals for some additional flower baskets and columns, which will be on show from later in the Spring.

9 **Equality and Diversity**

9.1 An EqIA was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies

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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.