

**How has the Outer London Fund been used in the London Borough of Harrow?**

Harrow secured OLF Round 1 funding for North Harrow District Centre (£360,400) and Harrow Town Centre (£496,000), and Round 2 funding for Harrow Town Centre (£1,758,785). The Round 1 funding for both areas shared some common themes; marketing and promotion, involvement of young people, events, the development of town centre management and partnerships. The Round 2 funding provided “opportunity” funding for the design and delivery of town centre public realm/open space projects in Harrow Town centre which have enabled the Council to move quickly from “plan” to delivery of the Heart of Harrow Area Action Plan.

OLF has played a central role in enabling the Council to accelerate delivery of its vision for sustainable growth, set out in the Local Plan Documents. Harrow and the GLA began collaborating on the “Heart of Harrow Project through the London Plan/Harrow Core Strategy in 2009. The adopted Core Strategy, also set out an ambition to deliver the Mayor of London’s objective to create sustainable neighbourhoods based around local and district centres.

Young people were heavily involved in designing banners for lamp posts, producing a film projected in the town centre, providing art for a pop up gallery, and performing in dance and music events. Round 1 funding also supported the development of Harrow College’s Harrow into Work programme. This offers a brokerage service between learners, (particularly apprentices) and employers. That brokerage service is no longer funded, by OLF, but is still being operated by the College.

North Harrow benefited from a Local Development Order, improvements to its car park, and installation of on-street parking bays. Harrow town centre also benefited from a “Testing the Public Realm” project which helped shape the development of the Round 2 OLF Programme.

In Round 1 it was apparent that events, (dance, music and markets) draw shoppers to the Town centre. Harrow’s OLF Round 2 programme focused on projects which will, a) improve the infrastructure of the town centre to host events and b) provide a revenue stream to fund events.

St Ann’s Road, the main shopping street has been transformed. The redundant planters and police kiosk have been removed, the number of phone boxes rationalized and relocated, and the uneven pavements relayed, to create a central area for markets and events.

In Lowlands Recreation Ground, (behind Harrow on the Hill station) work is ongoing to create a town park, and Performance Space and Café to provide a venue for dance, music and theatre. As well as providing a place for rest and entertainment the park and performance space will provide opportunities for residents to gain skills and work experience.

The revenue element of the Round 2 programme has focused on the creation of a business led group to establish a Business Improvement District. The results of the ballot will be announced 13<sup>th</sup> December.

**Which aspects of the project have been successful?**

OLF has helped to demonstrate to politicians the capability of the Council, working with others, to make a difference in its town centres. It has helped to demonstrate how strategic planning and vision, when tied to dedicated funding can make things happen.

In terms of measurable outcomes, our OLF programme has been a success

- North Harrow District Centre Vacancy rates have fallen from 25% to 6% (June 2013).

The Harrow Town centre bid aimed to reduce vacancy rates in the High Street and adjacent offices. It was our ambition that greater vibrancy in the town centre would encourage occupation of vacant retail space and of office space. The former occupied by businesses that wanted to sell to a greater number of visitors. The latter occupied by businesses that wanted to locate their company in a lively attractive environment.

In Harrow Town Centre between June 2010 – June 2013,

- the proportion of vacant floor space in Harrow town centre fell from 5.88% to 4.10% (1,842m<sup>2</sup>), a fall of 30%.
- based on a rate of 1 job per 21m<sup>2</sup>, this equates to 88 new jobs created in the High Street
- Despite a decreasing amount of total office space, the amount of occupied office space has increased by 9,933m<sup>2</sup> from 2011-2013 (83,699 to 93,632).
- based on a rate of 1 job per 10m<sup>2</sup>, this equates to 993 new office based jobs

Private sector investment in the town centre since OLF 1 has included

- £3m refurbishment of Debenhams
- £3m St Georges Shopping Centre upgrade and new store refits
- £2m St Ann's Shopping Centre store fit outs.

The Round 1 "Testing the Public Realm" project and Food and Dance Showcase demonstrated the potential of Harrow Town Centre to act as a destination. Those projects also highlighted the physical limitations of the centre. This led to the development of the town centre regeneration programme, and the work in St Ann's Road and Lowlands Rec (described above).

In the town centre the creation of a town centre management team and development of a BID Group has energized businesses and helped them think about their role in developing and promoting the place they trade from. The feedback from the BID Group is that public investment in the town centre has increased the confidence of the private sector.

### **What has gone less well?**

Delays in contracting meant the council either commenced delivery at some financial risk, or programmes had to be delayed whilst contracts were developed and exchanged.

The project to create a Town Park and Performance Space and Café is behind schedule and will not be completed in this financial year. Capital programmes are often complex, requiring consultation, planning applications and procurement. Harrow's experience is that OLF funding can add further complications to an already complex process.

Ownership: When GLA money is funding a capital project, which is initiated and managed by the council, there is a strong need to ensure Design Consultants are aware who the client is. Clear lines of authority and delegation are required, that recognize the agreed outcomes for the GLA and Local Authority, & define management roles..

There is a contradiction in a programme which aims to deliver a long term economic impact but is evaluated shortly after its completion. The 2 year OLF programme is seeking to mitigate the impact on the High Street of

- 5 years of economic uncertainty (since Q2 of 2008/9),
- competition from destination shopping centres
- a decade long migration to internet shopping

Harrow is fortunate in that it can already demonstrate positive impacts for part of its programme, but this is not going to be the case for all capital programmes which can have a long time lag between implementation and payback.

**How would you describe the application process?**

The process in Round 1 was short and sharp and required applicants to be able to demonstrate they had projects that could be quickly developed and implemented. The speed of the process helped the creative process, but equally led to little time to consult with residents / shoppers. This was important, because one lesson from Round 1, is that the views of business are not necessarily consistent with the views of shoppers.

The process for Round 2 was more considered, given its emphasis on capital programmes, but also highlighted the impacts of reduced capacity within councils resulting from financial savings programmes, Harrow lacked a dedicated team with programme management, bid writing, and design skills. Many Outer London boroughs which have not been the recipients of grant funding have a limited capacity to develop bids. There is then a potential bias in favour of boroughs that have a track record of securing funds, and in receipt of greater grants.

**How did the GLA support you during throughout the project's life?**

The GLA supported the council in procurement processes and through the design stages of capital programmes. GLA officers have helped to produce project specifications for tenders, have worked with engineers and architects to develop capital programmes, and provided a steer to the council's Programme Board.

The engagement with design and regeneration professionals (and focus on OLF by GLA resources) has been a helpful tool in enabling a dialogue about delivery of future aspirations that might not otherwise have been possible.

**What will happen next to your Outer London Fund-supported projects?**

The Heart of Harrow Area Action Plan provides a context for continued development of town centre initiatives. Harrow's (and London's) planned future growth requirements are also tied closely to the delivery of greater quantum of growth in the town centres of Harrow and Wealdstone. The OLF projects (and future GLA/Growth projects) have a key role to play in ensuring that the whole community buys into the important, pan London objective for diversified, accessible and sustainable town centres.

The work in St Ann's Road is nearly completed and will provide a legacy for the continued delivery of markets and street entertainment. The creation of a BID will provide a self-financing vehicle to provide town centre management and deliver events.

The council has secured a tenant to manage the performance space and café and an extensive programme is being developed to attract visitors to Lowlands and the town centre. The performance space and café will also provide the perfect business environment for young people and workless residents to gain skills and experience in Catering, Marketing, Events management, Financial management, Drama and Dance.