

## REDEVELOPMENT OF HIGH STREETS FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

<b>Committee name</b>	Environment, Housing & Regeneration Select Committee
<b>Officers reporting</b>	Nigel Cramb - Place Directorate Stephanie Waterford - Place Directorate Helena Webster - Place Directorate
<b>Papers with report</b>	Appendix A: LB Hillingdon Hospitality Sector - Business Needs Consultation Format (March 2021) Appendix B: Examples of Town Centre/Shopping Parades promotional material Appendix C: Welcome Back Fund - Free Digital Training for Hillingdon Businesses Appendix D: Hillingdon Business Resilience Survey (Sept 2021) Appendix E Hillingdon Shoppers Survey (Sept 2021)
<b>Wards</b>	All

### HEADLINES

On 23 March 2020, in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, UK high streets, town and city centres effectively closed for business. Most retailers, offices, restaurants, coffee shops, cultural and leisure destinations shut their doors, as only essential stores were allowed to stay open.

As new ways of working have materialised for office-based businesses, the impact on retail and hospitality across larger chains and prominent 'brands' as well as small, independent businesses has been exceptional.

Covid-19 presents big challenges to businesses and local authorities seeking to rebuild the local economy after lockdown.

This report sets out the range of support services offered to high street businesses by the London Borough of Hillingdon both during the pandemic and as we move forward to help high streets, and town centres recover from the impact of Covid-19.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

**That the Committee:**

**Note the good practice and initiatives which have been offered to support high street businesses during the pandemic and post-recovery.**

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1. General Introduction

Local high streets, towns and city centres have faced significant challenges for many years, including competition with out-of-town shopping centres and the increase in online shopping. The recovery of our high streets from the pandemic will have a vital role to play in local and national economic recovery.

Generally, over the pandemic, people have been travelling less and living more locally. This means some local high streets may be benefiting from higher visitor numbers whereas Metropolitan centres such as Uxbridge that attracted more visitors, students, and workers from further afield appear to have been more heavily impacted as people tend to stay local.

During lockdown we have seen a huge increase in the number of people working from home and living locally and it seems likely that this practice will continue as lockdown eases.

Without the daily commute to a larger town or city, residents have been spending more time in their immediate local area. This could provide opportunities for some local high streets. In fact, some smaller retailers have reported increases in sales since the beginning of lockdown, as people have chosen them over large supermarkets.

Planning Policy officers have advised that the classification of International, Metropolitan and Major town centres is determined within the London Plan. Changes to District, Minor, Local town centres and small standalone shopping parades are reviewed as part of the Local Plan based on an assessment of how the town centre performs against a set criterion including town centre uses, a town centre health check and public transport accessibility (incl. walking and cycling)

The Hillingdon Local Plan Part 1 (adopted November 2012) shows a hierarchy of 16 town centres categorised as follows:

**Metropolitan Centre:** Uxbridge

**District Centres:** Eastcote, Hayes, Northwood, Ruislip, and Yiewsley & West Drayton

**Minor Centres:** Northwood Hills, Ruislip Manor & Uxbridge Road (Hayes)

**Local Centres:** Harefield, Harlington, Hillingdon Heath, Ickenham, North Hillingdon, Willow Tree Lane and South Ruislip

In addition, there are two local shopping parades which have recently benefitted from public realm and shop front grant initiatives, which are:

- Ryefield Avenue, Hillingdon
- Kingshill Avenue, Hillingdon

From this hierarchy, Uxbridge and all the District and Minor Centres were prioritised as the key town centres to support and where capacity allowed, some support offered to Harefield, Harlington, Ickenham, Kingshill Avenue, North Hillingdon (Hillingdon Circus) and Ryefield Avenue, 15 areas in total.

This report sets out the activity across the town centre improvements, regulatory services, and economic development teams to support town centres and shopping parades as listed above, in response to Covid-10 pandemic and post-recovery.

## **2. Town Centre Improvements Team activity**

### **2a Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) Funding**

In June 2020 a dedicated Reopening High Streets Safely Fund was announced. The intention of the funding was to support temporary measures enacted up to 31 March 2021 to encourage the safe reopening of high streets across the UK. The LB Hillingdon received a £272,855 grant fund.

The grant funding had been sourced from unallocated European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) so use of funding needed to comply with ERDF regulations especially in terms of European compliant procurement and use of the EEC and ERDF logos in all publicity

The grant conditions included three main categories where activities could not be supported, which were:

- *Activity that provides no additionality*  
The funding is intended to be additional, on top of existing activity; it should not be replacing the source for already committed expenditure.
- *Capital expenditure*  
The funding is to help local authorities address the short-term issue of re-opening their local economies. It can support some temporary changes to the physical environment, but those changes should not be anticipated to last beyond 12 months, or until no longer required for social distancing.
- *Grants to businesses*  
Funding cannot provide direct financial support to businesses to make adaptations to premises, purchase PPE, purchase goods or equipment or offset wages or other operating costs.

The Government announced on 20 March 2021 that the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund (RHSSF) has been expanded and will begin a new phase of delivery up to the end of March 2022 as the Welcome Back Fund (WBF). The original RHSSF allocation was doubled for each local authority and the scope of eligible activities was increased significantly to better support the reopening of local economies i.e., running publicity campaigns and hold events like street markets and festivals to support local businesses.

With agreement from the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Environment, Housing & Regeneration and the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Public Safety and Transport, a European Regional Development Fund compliant tender was published 5 May 2021 for returns by 4 June 2021. The tender comprised three lots as summarised below:

#### **‘Welcome Back’ themed branding for town centres and local parades**

designer/ design team to create ‘Welcome Back’ concept branding for use within town centres and parades across the borough

**Temporary street furniture hire & maintenance to facilitate the safe reopening of High Streets** i.e., parklets, planters and hand sanitisers to support the safe reopening of the High

Street. Locations based on extensive consultation with business themselves undertaken by Regulatory Services

**Specialist Retail/Town Centre expertise to support small independent businesses within town centres and local parades.** Scope of services to include:

- Organising a promotional event for each of the nine minor and local town centres between August 2021 up to February 2022;
- Organising up to two promotional events within Uxbridge and the five district centres between August 2021 up to February 2022;
- Digital marketing training to help small independent businesses across the town centres and parades adapt to on-line retail and encouraging the increased use of film and social media to help businesses with more effective marketing.

Utilising the combined Reopening High Streets Safely Fund and the Welcome Back Fund grants of £545,710 a formal funding agreement was entered into with the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government in June 2021, based on tendered costs as follows

Table summarising grant funding activity apportionment

<b>Ministry of Housing Communities &amp; Local Government Grant</b>		
<b>Scope of Activity</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>Grant</b>
Communications and public information activity	ERDF compliant promotional materials	<b>£ 65,000</b> (£25k design and £40k resources)
Business-facing awareness raising activities including events	21 Town Centre/Parade events, borough-wide digital on-line marketing training for small businesses	<b>£142,720</b> (£50k specialist support and £92.72k resources based on average £4.4k per event)
Temporary public realm changes	Rental and maintenance of planters, parklets, hand sanitisers etc	<b>£303,490</b>
Support & promote a safe public environment, visitor economy	Specific Uxbridge BID support July-August 2021 Summer programme	<b>£ 34,500</b> (£22.4k Uxbridge BID £12.1k temporary gazebo hire)
<b>Total grant</b>		<b>£545,710</b>

To expand on the activity funded through the Welcome Back grant:

**a) Communications and public information activity**

Whistlejacket [www.whistlejacketlondon.com](http://www.whistlejacketlondon.com) were appointed to design Welcome Back branding to be fully compliant with the European ERDF and Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government requirements.

This included flyers and social media to promote local events as well as tote bags distributed by the businesses themselves and at high street events as further encouragement to shopping locally. Examples of promotional material are shown in Appendix B

## b) Business-facing awareness raising activities including events

Following the appointment of Retail Revival Ltd. [www.retailrevival.org.uk](http://www.retailrevival.org.uk) Business and shoppers' surveys were created for completion during August and September 2021 to inform the business support and events programme.

In addition to an online survey, a minimum of 150 responses were collected from face-to-face engagement with businesses across the borough and 200 face to face responses from shoppers. Retail revival made personal visits to a minimum of 30 businesses in each of the six main town centres as well as contact with local business representative groups to identify the specific business needs and to secure participation within the programme.

Connections were also formed by Retail Revival with resident associations to forge relationships between them and the businesses. A summary of the programme of 21 High Street events in the six months from October 2021 to March 2022 is shown below:

Date	Location	Theme	Business participating	Footfall estimate (based on High Street trail)
1-2 Oct 2021	Uxbridge	Heritage Trail	12	600
26 Oct 2021	Ryefield Avenue	Halloween	12	200
27 Oct 2021	Ickenham	Pumpkin Festival	22	650
28 Oct 2021	Eastcote	Pumpkin Festival	30	1200
29 Oct 2021	Yiewsley & West Drayton	Pumpkin Festival	20	350
30 Oct 2021	Hayes	Music Festival	25	400
20 Nov 2021	Ruislip Manor	Christmas	25	6000
27 Nov 2021	Kingshill Avenue	Christmas	12	200
2 Dec 2021	Harefield Village	Christmas	20	1500
4 Dec 2021	Yiewsley & West Drayton	Christmas	15	1000
18 Dec 2021	Northwood	Christmas	20	450
19 Dec 2021	Ruislip	Lantern Festival	25	300
12 Feb 2022	Uxbridge	Love Your Independents	15	800
14 Feb 2022	Northwood Hills	Children's Literature	15	600
15 Feb 2022	Uxbridge Road, Hayes	Children's Literature	10	350
16 Feb 2022	North Hillingdon	Children's Literature	15	600
19 Feb 2022	Harlington	Children's Literature	10	100
26 Feb 2022	Ruislip	Art & Crafts	15	600
5 Mar 2022	Eastcote	Family Food Fun	tbc	tbc
12 Mar 2022	Northwood	Family Food Fun	tbc	tbc
*29 May 2022	Hayes	Canal Festival	tbc	tbc
<b>Totals to date</b>			<b>318</b>	<b>15,900</b>

\* Hayes Canal Festival postponed from 26 September 2021

From 2 -14 March 2022, businesses across Hillingdon had the opportunity to participate in a short programme of free training to help them improve their digital marketing practices. This included two workshops at the Civic Centre in Uxbridge to support businesses that would like to improve their Instagram efficiency and four live webinars on topics including:

- Online Reviews: are these affecting your business?
- Search Engine Optimisation

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Classification: Public

Environment, Housing & Regeneration Select Committee [16 March 2022]

- Business Websites: How strong is yours? and
- Google My Business

The promotional leaflet is shown in Appendix C. The programme was advertised through contacts within Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce, Hayes Town Business Forum, Uxbridge Business Improvement District, Ruislip Manor Chamber of Commerce and Ruislip Chamber of Commerce as well as the Council's own website and social media channels

A full evaluation report scheduled for April 2022 will be presented by Retail Revival when all activity has been concluded which can be shared with the Environment, Housing & Regeneration Select Committee. The report will include the feedback from all business and shoppers' surveys,

The findings from the evaluation report will inform recommendations for further provision during 2022-23 to further support high streets and town centres.

### **c) Temporary public realm changes**

The Welcome Back Fund initiative allowed for trialling temporary public realm changes originally to facilitate the safe return to the high street and from spring/summer 2021 specifically to support the hospitality sector and in particular small independent businesses and how they could best reopen offering residents a safe and enjoyable restaurant/cafe experience and contributing positively to the local economy.

An assessment of the six main centres within the borough (Uxbridge, Hayes, Eastcote, Northwood, Ruislip and Yiewsley & West Drayton) showed very varied provision in terms of private pavement provision facilitating outdoor seating and the mix of dining and take-a-way provision. For example, Coldharbour Lane, Hayes where many restaurants are concentrated has very generous privately owned forecourts whereas within Ruislip High Street the pavement space available for outdoor seating is much more limited.

With support from colleagues in Regulatory services, during March 2021 a specific hospitality business survey (as shown in appendix A) was circulated to all non-takeaway food outlets within the main town centres where outdoor dining space was limited. This invited business to feedback on their requirements including:

- Support to potentially maximise the extent of outdoor seating if possible
- Support to help segregate/screen a seated outdoor eating area, and
- Provision of outdoor hand sanitisers for use within the high street

In total 35 responses were received and based on these responses the contract for the rental of temporary street furniture such as parklets, hand sanitisers and planters was tendered and let to Meristem [www.meristemdesign.co.uk](http://www.meristemdesign.co.uk)

For information, a parklet is a small public pavement extension, usually extending two parking space lengths combining elements such as seating, trees, flowers, shrubs, providing an additional safe, secure outdoor seating area for hospitality businesses, subject to licencing, to trade from. The specification was for the parklet to be enclosed on all three sides and with a roof to provide all-weather protection to the customers.

Whilst parklets are now commonplace in central London locations such as Westminster, Camden, Kensington & Chelsea, Islington, and Hammersmith & Fulham they had not been tried or tested within the London Borough of Hillingdon.

The parklets trialled in Ruislip and Eastcote Town Centres are designed to fit a standard parking bay (5m x 2m) and the Uxbridge is two parking space lengths (10m x 2m). Photos of a parklet in Eastcote are shown in appendix B. The tender stipulated the weekly maintenance of all temporary street furniture including planting for the parklets and planters.

All four parklets are being trialled under an 'experimental' order which is the opportunity for comments and feedback to be provided by residents. In addition, a licence is required to serve food and drinks from the parklet, and any business can apply for a licence

The experimental order for the Ruislip and Eastcote parklets was advertised on 22 October 2021 and came into effect from 8 November 2021, with comments invited before 8 May 2022. The experimental order for Uxbridge was advertised on 14 January 2022 and came into effect from 31 January 2022 with comments invited before 1 August 2022.

A summary of all temporary street furniture being trialled under the Welcome Back initiative is summarised below:

<b>Location</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Qty</b>
Uxbridge	Parklet (10m x 2m)	1
Uxbridge	Planters	2
Uxbridge	Folding dining table	8
Uxbridge	Folding dining chairs	16
Uxbridge	Hand sanitisers	12
<b>Eastcote</b>		
Eastcote	Parklet (5m x 2m)	2
Eastcote	Planters	24
Eastcote	Folding dining table	16
Eastcote	Folding dining chairs	32
Eastcote	Hand sanitisers	10
<b>Ruislip</b>		
Ruislip	Parklet (5m x 2m)	1
Ruislip	Folding dining table	4
Ruislip	Folding dining chairs	8
Ruislip	Hand sanitisers	8
<b>Northwood</b>		
Northwood	Planters	7
Northwood	Folding dining table	7
Northwood	Folding dining chairs	18
Northwood	Hand sanitisers	8
<b>Kingshill Avenue</b>		
Kingshill Avenue	Screening at Adelphi Way	1
<b>All Areas</b>		
All Areas	Gazebo's for High Street events	25

All Areas	Stage, PA lighting	3
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#### d) Support & promote a safe public environment, visitor economy

Section 3 Economic Development summarises the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic specifically in relation to Uxbridge Town Centre particularly in relation to loss of footfall from in-commuting to the many company headquarters based within and/or on the periphery of the town centre in addition to students from Brunel University and Uxbridge College.

In May 2021 as part of the Welcome Back funding, market and event specialists were invited to quote for delivering a summer entertainment programme within Uxbridge Town Centre over weekends from 24 July to 31 August, including August Bank Holiday.

From the responses received, Uxbridge Business Improvement District were engaged, and events fully funded from the Welcome Back Fund initiative. Funding earmarked included the hire of gazebos for the Uxbridge Market which could also be utilised for other town centre and high street events.

#### 2b Festive Lighting

Christmas for many is about family time and celebration and 2021, more than ever, was a crucial time for town centres and especially the smaller independent businesses within them. The Hillingdon 2021 Christmas Lights programme provided a well needed cheer for residents and businesses and for the first time included displays within all 22 wards in the Borough.

As a further boost for residents and high street businesses and to achieve greater value for money from the lighting displays, a pilot trial of removing the lighting displays from timers was undertaken. This meant that residents were able to enjoy the lighting effects throughout the day (rather than just from late afternoon) as well as achieving cost and vehicle emission savings by eliminating the need for night-time scouting and timer repair costs.

Full details of all the lighting schemes supported across the Borough are provided in the table below:

<b>Christmas Lighting Programme 2021</b>			
<b>Council Managed</b>			<b>Community Schemes</b>
Belmore Parade	Harmondsworth Village	Ruislip Town Centre	Ickenham
Blenheim Parade	Hayes Bridge Parade	Ryefield Avenue	Northwood
Byron Parade	Hayes End Parade	Sipson Village	Northwood Hills
Civic Centre, Uxbridge	Hayes Town Centre	South Ruislip	Ruislip Manor
Crescent Parade	Hillingdon Circus	Sutton Court Road	
Eastcote Town Centre	Kingshill Avenue	Uxbridge Town Centre	
Glebe Estate	Kingsway Parade	Yeading Lane Parade	
Harefield Village	Marlborough Parade	Yiewsley & West Drayton	
Harlington High Street	New Broadway Parade		
Harmondsworth Road	North Hyde Road		

From consultation with the businesses themselves and local chambers of commerce, Christmas themed events were organised through the Welcome Back Fund to support Christmas lights “switch-ons” at Ruislip Manor, Harefield Village, Yiewsley & West Drayton, Kingshill Avenue and Northwood as well as a Lantern Festival within Ruislip.

## **2. Economic Development – Uxbridge Business Improvement District**

Uxbridge benefits from having a Business Improvement District, which since its inception in October 2017 has been at the forefront of promotional activity. The BID’s stated objective is to ‘make Uxbridge an even better place to live, work and socialise’ and the BID were particularly active in supporting and promoting Uxbridge during the Covid crisis.

Initially as the town came out of the first lockdown in 2020 the BID provided resilience business packs, which included floor signage, shop local posters, hand sanitisers, face masks to all businesses when re-opening occurred. Additionally, the BID instigated Covid19 Hygiene cleans in the town centres on a twice weekly basis from March 2020 until September 2021.

The BID Funded Police Officer continued to carry out regular visits to essential retail who remained open and non-essential retail as it began to re-open, providing reassurance, support and advice throughout the crisis.

Via the Love Uxbridge app and the Love Uxbridge social media platforms Uxbridge BID provided regular advice and information to town centre users and the BID mounted a Shop Local Campaign in May 2020, promoting and highlighting businesses that had reopened and the steps being taken to ensure public safety. Information was distributed to 64,000 homes.

The shop local campaign was supported by the ‘We’re Open’ Campaign, which ran from October/November 2020 and the ‘Independent Campaign’, which as the title suggests highlighted independent retailers and service providers. This campaign ran between July - September 2020.

The BID also staged a number of town centre events including the Christmas lights switch on in November 2021 to bring people back into the Town Centre.

The BID via its Love Uxbridge platform actively promoted the Government’s Eat Out to Help Out Campaign, which had a significant impact in terms of increasing footfall in the town and has also been active in supporting Council activity, promoting information and offering advice to businesses on the range of financial support available via the various Government Grant Funding schemes put in place to support businesses directly affected by closures (March 2019 – January 2022).

As highlighted elsewhere in this report, due to residents shopping locally and using local town centres and parades, these centres appear to have withstood the worst of the downturn in the economy. The experience for Hillingdon’s smaller town centres and parades appears to be replicated in other boroughs. Uxbridge however has been impacted by the Covid crisis. Despite the activities of the BID, footfall in Uxbridge has not returned to pre Covid levels.

Uxbridge has, like a number of larger town centres, suffered from the closure of some of the high street’s high profile chain stores and restaurants, including Debenhams, Topshop and Thornton’s.

A recent report from PwC highlighted that more than 17,000 chain store outlets closed across Britain last year, according to new research by the Local Data Company, a specialist retail analytics company. The figures reflect the rise of online shopping and the impact of the pandemic. However, on a more positive note the data suggests the rate of closures is slowing as more independent firms take on space in high streets.

**High Streets for all fund** – in March 2021 the GLA launched the High Streets for all initiative. The initiative provided funding for one project per local authority area. The GLA's objective was to invite bids for projects that contributed to creating thriving, inclusive and resilient high streets and town centres, within easy reach of all Londoners. Each London borough area would be awarded £20,000 to explore ways of meeting the GLA's objective. Hillingdon Council received one bid for an Uxbridge research project. Partners included Uxbridge BID, Hillingdon Chamber of Commerce and Brunel University.

The Uxbridge bid was subsequently awarded the £20,000. These funds were used to commission research on local residents and visitors' perceptions, views and aspirations for Uxbridge and the High Street area. The research has recently been published under the title 'Reimagining Uxbridge High Street'. It is currently being assessed and evaluated but undoubtedly be of benefit in planning for future developments in Uxbridge town centre.

**Financial support** – It is important to acknowledge the impact that the funding the government made available via the various business rate relief and grant support schemes over the period of the pandemic. Whilst breakdowns for individual high streets are currently not available, the High Street retail businesses benefitted from 100% retail discounts for 2020/21, 66% for 2021/22 and 50% for 2022/23, with small businesses with Rateable Values under £15k receiving up to 100% Small Business Relief throughout the period. High Street businesses also received grants from the overall grant spend of more than £81m to date. It should be noted that the Council is continuing to support borough businesses via a range of grant schemes, which are currently due to end on 31 March 2022.

#### **4. Regulatory Services team activity**

Throughout the pandemic period, the Council's Licensing, Food Health & Safety and ASBET officers were tasked with supporting businesses to meet a range of Covid restrictions and to provide advice and guidance on Covid-secure and recovery measures.

Officers ensured they were up to speed with the ever-changing restrictions and requirements affecting businesses and information, posters and templates were made available to businesses to assist them with operating in a safe way.

##### **4.a Visits and inspections**

Between 1 February 2021 and 31 January 2022, the team carried out over 6000 visits to businesses in Hillingdon.

In early 2021, the roadmap out of restrictions began introducing **Step 1**, **Step 2** and **Step 3**. Visits around this time were mainly aimed at maintaining compliance with the restrictions still in force, but also assisting residents and businesses with adjusting to the changes – this took the form of advising on risk assessments, best practice, ventilation, spacing/social distancing and hygiene/infection control strategies in the workplace to protect staff. During the '**Step 1**' period,

the 'Rule of 6' was in force from 29 March 2021 allowing for outdoor gatherings of 6 people or two households.

In April, **Step 2** came into force, which allowed non-essential retail to open. This also included personal care businesses such as nail salons and hairdressers. Hillingdon has around 300-400 businesses in this sector and the team ensured that they were provided with advice and guidance to ensure a high standard of protection for customers.

Hospitality venues were permitted to serve guests outside, and the requirements for table service was still required. Mixing of groups was still not permitted indoors. The visits to these premises were again focussed on providing advice to the business owners and staff about practical steps they could take to protect their staff and customers, addressing any questions they may have had about the law, its implementation or enforcement. Advice was given about testing and where to get tested.

May 2021 saw the arrival of **Step 3**, which opened-up indoor entertainment venues. Hospitality venues could serve alcohol indoors, without substantial meals, but table service was still required. Capacity limits were in place for certain venues and events. Advice for these visits was in the same vein as before, with a focus on helping the businesses develop strategies to maximise their options whilst maintaining a Covid-secure environment.

Hillingdon has approximately 3,000 registered food businesses which are in a rolling programme of food hygiene inspections. Environmental Health Officers resumed the inspection programme and began food hygiene checks to ensure that premises were of a safe and hygienic standard following long periods of closure and having to operate under different conditions.

In June and July 2021, the focus of the visits was on the lifting of all remaining major restrictions. The aim was to provide businesses with as much support as possible, whilst ensuring that they were confident to operate without the legislative framework and restrictions that had been required for so long. The move was designed to reflect the increase in responsibility individuals and businesses were expected to take for themselves.

Throughout the Summer, the teams worked with event organisers, sports grounds and entertainment venues to ensure that appropriate risk assessments were in place as visitors and spectators were allowed to enjoy these events and attractions once more.

The team also facilitated licences and permissions for street markets and Christmas events to take place across the borough.

From August 2021 onwards visits have been advisory and fact-finding in nature. Businesses were regularly visited to check how they were getting on, to offer advice on the latest guidance issued regarding their businesses, offering information about the various grants available, and how to apply for them. The aim was to facilitate a shift in perception for our businesses from enforcement-led interventions that had been the norm for a long period during the restrictions to a perception of regulators as assistance and support for the community. Advice on getting back to normal, advising on applying for lapsed licences etc also formed a part of the discussions during these visits. In general, businesses have been signposted to the Council website for updates.

Due to the onset of the Omicron variant around November 2021-January 2022, visits were ramped up and focused on trying to limit the spread of covid inside venues, but without legal force. This was in order to try and prevent a spike in infections over the festive period when many businesses would be busier.

#### **4.b Licences and permissions**

In 2020, the Government introduced a temporary light-touch licensing system for Councils to award 'Pavement Licences' to place tables and chairs outside hospitality premises. This enabled businesses to make use of pavement and high street spaces to accommodate customers whilst their indoor spaces were restricted.

In April 2021, the Council resolved to offer these licences for free to hospitality businesses across Hillingdon to support their recovery and to build back confidence for diners to socialise in the open air. Since February 2021, the Council has awarded 95 pavement licences to businesses.

In recognition of the economic impact on businesses, the Licensing Service introduced flexible systems to alleviate the pressures of licensing fees falling due. These included instalment payments, flexible licence extensions and additional time to pay fees where needed.

#### **Implications on related Council policies**

A role of the Select Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

#### **How this report benefits Hillingdon residents**

The focus of the activity outlined within this report is to work in particular with small, independent business, shoppers, and local residents to find the best way to preserve and enhance high streets and local shopping parades as more retail, hospitality and other services reopened in line with Covid-19 Government regulations and guidance and to create a safe and enjoyable return to High Streets contributing positively to the local economy.

All delivery partners appointed under the Welcome Back Initiative took a key role in identifying the positive attributes and local features that each town centre location can build on to create and sustain a competitive advantage whilst also encouraging residents and visitors to be spending locally.

In terms of Christmas lighting, displays are highly valued and appreciated by residents and businesses, playing an important part of how Christmas is celebrated in town and neighbourhood centres.

Traditionally, the Christmas light switch on has acted as a significant event in terms of encouraging greater footfall and local spending at a time when many small independent retailers are struggling with the competition from online shopping

#### **Financial Implications**

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report and its recommendation to the Committee.

## **Legal Implications**

The Borough Solicitor confirms that there are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

NIL.