

Report on :-

Meeting with Councillor David Lee: 3rd October 5.30pm: Shute End

Present: Gerald De Pasqua, GdP; Les Roland, LR; Peter Humphreys, PH ; Pat Smith, PS;

Councillor David Lee, DL: Leader of the Council and Conservative party

The above residents have been party to an email network of residents, which includes Wokingham society and the Residents Associations around Wokingham. Gerald and Peter are individuals who are concerned residents though Peter was involved with the Plough Lane association before moving closer to the centre of town. Les Roland is chair of Froghall Drive Residents Association and Pat Smith, the chair of Great Langborough Residents Association.

In the course of email exchanges Peter Humphreys had been writing to David Lee querying the financial loss incurred by setting up a new park area by Plough lane when the council must have aware that it would be impacted by the planned north distribution road.

Councillor David Lee suggested meeting Peter Humphreys. Other members were then invited to join the discussion which expanded to include the Elm's field development.

Agreed outcomes.

1. DL agreed to review the amount of housing along the proposed new road through Elm's Field and whether these houses could be deleted from the plans so that the road was sited where the houses are currently on the plans.

2. He also agreed to look at more open space and equipment aimed at young people and possibly adult exercise at the Wellington Road end of the remaining field.

Re: Northern Distributor road and Planted park area

DL noted that there had been little choice in the matter and agreed that this would be the case.

Current consultation maps for the northern distributor road clearly show that this will happen.

[nb: The park for the Carillons site was set up as the developer was legally required to provide a SANG (Suitable Alternate Green Space) to mitigate the effects on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area [SPAs are strictly protected sites classified in accordance with Article 4 of the EC Birds Directive, which came into force in April 1979. They are classified for rare and vulnerable birds (as listed on Annex I of the Directive), and for regularly occurring migratory species].

Concerns regarding Elm's field were identified and discussed.

1. Loss of significant green space:

DL commented that proposals for Elms Field have been subject to debate and consultation, were approved and clearly shown in the Wokingham Town Centre Master plan in June 2010.

A recent Liberal Democrat petition and demonstration on Elm's field suggest that a good number of residents challenge at least the amount of development planned.

DL responded that residents had supported the town centre regeneration not least in voting back in the council which was supporting it.

It was pointed out that this did not necessarily reflect residents' views regarding Elm's field itself and that while the regeneration overall was welcomed and supported the number of houses around Elm's field seemed excess to need generating also considerable more traffic. This has actually been the view expressed at many workshops.

DL considered that the council has to make considered decisions which may not be popular.

2. **Reduction in Play space:** GdP expressed grave concern about the amount that will be left.

DL was adamant that the play area will be larger than that which the equipment currently occupies. We have to agree to differ on this point.

DL felt that there would be consultation about this which would be the time to air these views. However if the current plans go ahead it will be too late to impact on the amount of play area as opposed to space for other usage.

DL commented on the increased and improved provision of and in the parks around Wokingham Borough all of which is very welcome but these are clearly not accessible to those living in the centre of town nor can it replace the space lost.

3. **The proposed housing and shops** around the residual Elms field was felt by these residents to not only Frame the area as has been described as 'desirable' but will actually result in it feeling overwhelmed by tall buildings, leaving little in the way of mature trees or views out of the area.

Further housing would impact even further. There was some discussion about the possibility of instead building houses elsewhere but we would challenge the need to build so many houses in the centre of town

4. **Financial issues:** these were high on the agenda as it was not clear why the council needed to make so much money to cover the town centre regeneration

DL explained that the housing and shops would result in revenue (profit) for the council which would not only provide for the regeneration of the town BUT ALSO for other areas of the borough. Subsequently he confirmed this and that it could also potentially be used to fund new roads and bridges for residents of Wokingham just as other areas of the Borough fund neighbouring areas

We pointed out that we did not feel this justified losing so much of Wokingham centre green space.

DL reported that the whole scheme would cost in the region of £67M but have a sale value of £60M which was somewhat confusing as previous figures seen were 95M against a total final valuation of 110M. [The £67m referred to above is for retail units only the £95m and £110m is for the whole scheme.] By this measure, and assuming a 100,000 profit per house, they could remove all the housing to the west of elms road.

DL commented that to build enough only to fund the purchase, knock down and redevelop other parts of the Town would not provide infrastructure demanded by residents in other parts of the Town.

DL was adamant the *whole* scheme including the hotel and supermarket was needed to generate a profit. He added that the leader of the Lib Dems was fully aware of the figures and not a single councillor has challenged them.

[Prue Bray has responded to this assertion saying that she does not agree with it and has challenged the figures in council.]

5. **Transport:** this was raised as a significant concern with all the new housing already and then adding that on Elm's field.

DL agreed and responded that the road across Elm's field was part of the transport strategy along with the new station link road, and arrangements around station road and changes to the bridges to try to address this. It is not therefore possible to avoid it being built.