

COUNCILLOR MIRFIN MISUNDERSTANDS RESIDENTS

Recently there has been some correspondence between Residents' Associations and Cllr Philip Mirfin in his new role of regeneration czar. This unfortunately shows that Cllr Mirfin is re-cycling some old misunderstandings about public concern over the development of Elms Field. As Chair of the largest and nearest RA to the town I'd like to make the position of Great Langborough Residents Association (GLRA) clear to him in the run up to the extraordinary Council meeting on this subject at St Crispin's School on the 4th December.

- The GLRA supports the regeneration of Wokingham Town Centre and always has.
- We understand that the food retail projections indicate the need for additional capacity of the equivalent of another Waitrose by 2021.
- We are not convinced that this capacity requirement is most effectively met by a single store at the bottom of Denmark Street - there are other options like smaller units in the North and South Wokingham SDLs. These should be evaluated in the light of changing retail demands (convenience stores, internet shopping etc).
- Some portion of Elms Field can and should be put to better use as part of the regeneration plan, particularly the footprint of Wellington House and some disconnected grass areas. Therefore resistance to the loss of so much of Elms Field should NOT to be interpreted as lack of support for the regeneration, just to the scale of the development on Elms Field.
- The plan currently calls for the removal of ALL mature trees not just some - is this necessary?
- We challenge the necessity of building out-of-scale, 3 storey residences on the west side.
- The Save Elms Field petition had the support of over 1,700 signatories. For a petition this is VERY significant and should not be dismissed as trivial and unrepresentative - that's just insulting to residents.
- Senior councillors should no longer hide the business case for the financial investment and return that WBC has to make - it's our money. Publish the business plan now so we can see the justification for the loss of half Elms Field.
- Although we encourage progress on the Town Centre Regeneration, the Elms Field assumptions have moved considerably from the initial consultations and need challenging again. We were always told that the time to do that was during the planning phase i.e. now - hence the need to challenge the Council again.

Finally if senior councillors keep saying arrogantly "if you don't like it, vote us out" often enough, Wokingham BC residents might actually respond to that invitation in May.

Pat Smith
Chair GLRA