

Great Langborough Residents' Association

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Great Langborough Residents Association

Report from AGM 23rd June 2014

We were delighted to welcome Councillors Prue Bray and Phillip Mirfin to our AGM held at the Salvation Hall in Sturges road.

The councillors gave a short presentation on their proposals for the town centre regeneration. They then answered questions from residents.

It was good to hear that the council is reviewing its plans for the town centre and that this will take a wider view of the needs of the whole area. It seemed, however, that the discussion will remain within closed council meetings. It was not clear if this would include those outside the Conservative majority group, including the Liberal Democrats. Neither was it clear whether the council will seek further views from the residents or from the experts who are essential to ensure the best qualities of building, style, traffic management and safety.

As J Sainsbury has withdrawn its interest in being an occupant of the proposed supermarket with its underground car park, the councillors were asked their views about the implications of this change. Phillip Mirfin suggested that this was a positive change. The option of a smaller supermarket with surface car parking might be a possibility. It was not clear whether this car park would encroach further on Elms Field or on the Carnival Pool site. The council had not come to a firm conclusion on alternative plans.

We hope this will prompt consideration of the Liberal Democrat's suggested alternative plan and a general opening of discussion with local residents.

It was not clear from the discussions why the council feels it has to risk £95m on the regeneration plan; especially so when it includes building on Elm's Field. This aspect of the plan has raised considerable objections recently and in the past. The extent of this plan may be excess to the needs and ethos of the town centre. A smaller budget could create a more appropriate Wokingham style centre, without the major increase and burden of the traffic that a supermarket and residential accommodation will accrue.

Looking at the wider picture as suggested by Cllr Mirfin and putting oneself in the place of a new resident in the South or North SDL, it seems highly unlikely that residents would drive into the town centre to do the weekly food shop and then go shopping for other things? The usual pattern is to do that shop and take it home. Nor is the reverse likely. Residents will not choose to sit in a queue to go to the centre if they can drive round the distributor roads to the big stores already on the outskirts of town or order on line.

It would be far better to make the town centre the aim of an enjoyable shopping and social trip. There are of course existing town centre supermarkets and general food stores which demand

much better if not excellent pedestrian and cycle access from the SDLs as well as the central areas so as to promote other forms of transport.

The Great Langborough Residents' Association would like the council to grasp this opportunity to reconsider fundamentally its plans given that they had to withdraw their original application and have no firm commitment from a potential occupant of the supermarket on Elm's field.

We hope that the councillors will be more willing not only to seek the views of residents, but to give them serious consideration. I am sure we would all be more than willing to support the council in such a project.

Pat Smith. Chair : Great Langborough Residents association