

Presentation and Discussion: Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration

Philip Mirfin, Executive Councillor for Regeneration and current Wokingham Town Mayor, presented the key items of the current plan at the GLRA AGM 22nd June 2015

He gave a well received and informative review of the council's plans for the three sites around the town centre.

Residents were given time for a question and answer session following Philip Mirfin's presentation.

Traffic Projections

A major concern for the expansion of Wokingham was the increased traffic volume. However, Philip Mirfin pointed out that the number of households in Wokingham Town was to be expanded by over 4,000 by 2026. Wokingham also had one of the highest car ownership per household averages in the UK at 2.4. However, he reported that traffic modelling is indicating no real change to the current flow in the Town. There was still some concern about the impact on Langborough Road. The chicane system was regarded by residents as vital to retain. Even with this management feature, peak traffic times often resulted in temporary gridlock.

Financing the plan

Questions focused on the costs and who will pay for the scheme. Philip Mirfin stated that the overall project would be self-funding. There would be no impact on Community Charge. Planned revenue from the retail premises and hotel would cover the costs of servicing the capital loan. Answering a question on the increased cost of the regeneration, Philip Mirfin said that the latest increase was caused by the addition of Carnival Pool to the overall plan.

Impact on the character of Wokingham

On the impact on the character of Wokingham, Philip said that English Heritage was against the concept of new buildings attempting to copy the oldest buildings. The aim was to build structures acceptable today that would still be regarded as such in the future. The impression of large areas of red brick in the exhibition drawings was misleading as to the finish of the final buildings. WBC was looking for variation in brick colour, texture and rendering in the final designs.

Major Car Park – Carnival Pool

There were concerns expressed about the height of the car park (five storeys) planned for the Carnival Pool site. Philip Mirfin was clear that this capacity is required and that the site by the railway is the least obtrusive location for such a building.

Carnival Pool residences

We were also concerned about the residential accommodation to be built on the Carnival Pool site. Its location opposite the multi-event space and next to a busy car park could cause high noise levels. Philip Mirfin was happy that incorporated modern sound proofing would be adequate to mitigate against this. He stressed that the Regeneration Company was forced to adopt the highest standards in such aspects because of the "in house" relationship with the WBC Planning Department.

Elms Field – Supermarket & Hotel

We expressed on-going concerns about the need to occupy part of the Elms Field site with a supermarket. Philip Mirfin stated that reviews of retail studies support the capacity need. There were two supermarket groups very interested in becoming tenants. Also Premier Inns were committed to the hotel site and were planning a ground floor restaurant.

Elms Field – Green Space & Pedestrian Route

The size of the remaining green space continued to be an issue. Philip stressed that the acquisition of 'brown' land behind Denmark Street had allowed for an increase in the green space compared with previous plans. We were also told that the council are planning to open up Broad Street Walk and using the derelict garages and ground to create pedestrian access up to Broad Street and retail

starter units. This was welcomed and a very positive step forward. The concern was expressed, however, that this route could draw footfall away from Denmark Street shops.

Plans for further dialogue

Philip mentioned that GLRA committee members have a meeting with Councillors and Officers on 3rd July to further understand the finances of the plans.

The Mayor was thanked for his presentation and he in return thanked us for our on-going interest and input to the council's plans.