

WINDSOR TOWN FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 5 JULY 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Jack Rankin (Chairman), Hashim Bhatti, Wisdom Da Costa and Eileen Quick

Officers: Paul Roach and Wendy Binmore

Also in attendance: Cllr Shamsul Shelim, Susy Shearer, Brian Rayner, Gary Williams and a number of other members of the public

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Malcolm Alexander, John Bowden and Samantha Rayner.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Part I minutes from the meeting held on 13 February 2017 be approved.

SECURITY MEASURES

David Scott, Head of Communities and Highways explained that following the Westminster attack in March 2017, security arrangements had been reviewed and temporary barriers had been installed. Although they were not particularly attractive, they were very functional. Thames Valley Police (TVP) and the Metropolitan Police reviewed previous security risk assessments for all involved in the well known times of Changing of the Guard to protect residents, visitors, security and military personnel. Any vehicle had to be considered as a weapon and he assured the Forum that the barriers were temporary measures and work was beginning on improving the street scene with integrated street scene measures to reduce risk of incidents of attack by vehicle. The Head of Communities and Highways added that there was also an uplift in numbers of police and security personnel deployed to manage the guard change.

TVP had led the process and appointed a specialist, following a procurement exercise and they had been on site and carried out a survey of the six current locations the temporary barriers had been installed plus an additional number of locations to be included in the permanent integrated security arrangements. The specialists are developing proposals which the council and TVP would review and then select the most appropriate measures at the different locations. The measures would seek to preserve the local heritage at sensitive sites and it would involve a number of different treatments.

The Head of Communities and Highways stated the proposals would go through the planning process and the expectation was that some proposals would be submitted in late summer 2017. The council was working closely with TVP and both the council and TVP together would make sure the final plans considered residents, visitors, businesses, the heritage and the conservation areas.

The Head of Communities and Highways explained that it had not been not possible to install just one barrier in Thames Street and two had been installed instead.. A consultation with local groups such as the Windsor and Eton Society would also take place.

The Head of Communities and Highways confirmed that as part of the planning process, when the planning application was submitted, residents and local community groups would be consulted and would be invited to make comments on the applications. A member of the West Windsor Residents Association (WWRA) requested confirmation that advice had been given to businesses and shops regarding what they needed to do in case of a major incident. Paul Roach, Windsor Town Manager confirmed that all commercial businesses along the Changing of the Guard route had been advised that with the barriers being installed, unloading and loading could not take place between the guards changed at 10.30am and 11.30am as a new security measure. He added that Project Griffin Workshops were scheduled where over 100 employees from local businesses attended and this training was focused on anti-terror measures and what to do in the event of a terrorist incident. A further workshop was scheduled for October with another 40 businesses signed up to attend.

2016 VISITOR SURVEY

This item was deferred to the following Windsor Town Forum meeting.

LOCAL ECONOMY

Paul Roach, Town Manager stated he did a health check on the Town Centre by assessing car park usage, foot fall and shop unit vacancy. He added there were footfall counter at both shopping centres and Peascod Street in Town. The shopping centre counters were being renewed so there was no picture on the movement figures from these currently, the counter in Peascod Street had been installed three years ago and the figures showed that from January 2016 to January 2017, footfall was up 1.3% in Town and that had increased a lot over the last two months; this was possibly due to the better weather.

The Town Centre Manager stated there had been approximately 8 million people in Peascod Street in 2016 and the footfall was on target to be increased by 2% for 2017. The average visitor numbers were 66k every week up to 175k in a week depending on what activities were taking place. The two shopping centres were expected to be slightly higher than that and most Councillors received the figures at least every quarter.

Car park monitoring and the coach park from April 2017 was up 75% in April 2017, possibly due to Easter being earlier; and 5% down in May 2017. The June figures were not expected to be available until the week commencing 10 Jul 2017 but, although he was expecting them to show an increase. It had been a positive start to the year.

Vacancy rates showed that Windsor always tended to punch above its weight and the last six months, the rate had steadily increased in vacant units. Equally, there had been a lot of new units that had opened up. The vacancy rate where there was no owner, no tenant and was closed was 5.3%. However, the national average for unit vacancy was 12% so Windsor was well below. However, since October 2016, the current rate of vacancies in Windsor had almost doubled.

There were approximately 370 units in the Town Centre which were monitored and retail was shrinking and becoming difficult for retailers. That was not just down to internet sales but, sales from mobile phones were up by 20%.

There had been eight units which had closed which included coffee shops, shoe shops, fabric shops and a pub. But, there were more shops that opened in the same period, of which, one was a nail bar. There had always been a lot of change in the shops so would have been a concern if a shop opened one month but closed again the next. There had been long term vacancies such as the Chicago's site but that was reopening as a soft play centre for children.

The Windsor, Eton & Ascot Town Partnership Board (WEATPB) looked at schemes and supported the council retail rates scheme, also.

Both shopping centres had two marketing agencies to develop events with the council and WEATPB and there was now a list of events and they were reviewing markets to improve or add to them. King Edward Court was looking to develop more temporary artisan stalls and meetings were already underway to plan the Christmas programme. The challenge was in the form of new shopping centres in nearby borough's such as the Lexicon in Bracknell.

Rob Large, Property Service Lead stated Fenwicks was leaving the Town Centre in the autumn and there had been rumours that it was to be turned into apartments; he reassured the Forum that the site would remain as a retail unit. The Royal Borough owned the freehold and received a percentage of the gross rates from site. For those concerned, he was unable to announce anything at the Forum but, a very experienced retail agent was working very hard to get the right retailer in situ. Investments were being made to make the unit more attractive and more easily seen from the main shopping area in King Edward Court.

Cllr Shelim stated that Windsor needed a cinema and the Fenwick site would be perfect. The Property Service Lead stated that although the Borough owned the freehold, agents owned the leasehold on a long term basis. For it to work, the site had to retain a shopping unit there. Others were also interested in a cinema and he was happy to discuss the position with them. He added a cinema would not come without a lot of restaurants and restaurants would not come without a cinema, it was a difficult situation.

Susy Shearer stated there were two empty units next to Fenwicks which had been empty for a number of months as it did not get a lot of passing footfall. The Property Service Lead explained that the overhang above Next would be knocked down to make the area more visible to increase footfall.

Susy Shearer stated there had been no mention of an independent shopping area in St Leonards Road on the sign post at the bottom of Peascod Street. Paul Road said there were plans to turn the sign post into a directory board.

Susy Shearer asked if it would be possible to install benches in King Edward Court as there had been some installed in the past and would give people places to stop and rest. She also made reference to a fund set aside some years ago for an art installation outside the Travelodge and wondered when the art installation was going to be installed and if not, what happened to the fund.

Paul Road, Town Centre Manager said he would look into what happened to the fund and find out if an art installation was going to be installed and the Property Service Lead agreed to look into if benches could be installed in King Edward Court.

- ❖ **Action:** Paul Roach, Town Centre Manager to investigate the art installation and whether or not money had been put aside for it.
- ❖ **Action:** Rob Large, Property Service Lead to look into benches being installed at King Edward Court.

Helen Price stated footfall could not be banked and therefore, wanted to know what the town was doing to increase spending. She added there was not a clear idea of what direction the Town Centre was heading in. there was so much going on in Maidenhead, so that was where all the energy was going and Windsor seemed forgotten about. David Scott, Head of Communities and Highways confirmed that Windsor had not been forgotten about but, the current focus was on Maidenhead. A lot of thought was going into how Windsor could develop. Legoland was a large attraction that increased visitors to Windsor, along with Windsor Castle and the Royal Collection which helped to attract visitors.

Residents said that a lot of retail units had flats above them and landlords should be persuaded to modify and redecorate them to keep Windsor a vibrant and well looked after town. They would also like to see all the clocks working, especially those on the High Street.

Cllr Bhatti queries the eight units that had closed in the last six months. The Town Centre Manager responded that although eight had closed, nine had opened up so it was a net gain of one.

The representative of Legoland said she was disappointed to hear that all resources were going into Maidenhead, and that she did not want Windsor to be forgotten. The Head of Communities and Highways confirmed that this was not what was said or was happening, and that Windsor would continue to be included in development plans and had not been forgotten.

Marjorie from Windsor 2030 said there was a very small but committed group of people in Windsor 2030 and the group met every other week and were contributing to the Local Plan. The focus was on maintaining the profile of Windsor, maintaining office space in Windsor and encouraging anyone in the area including businesses, visitors and residents to join the group. She added that she would like the council to support attendance. The Chairman invited Windsor 2030 to attend a future Forum and give a presentation on the work they were doing.

The Town Centre Manager said the bus stop on the high street had its power supply moved which also supplied the clock. The new power supply to the clock had been installed so it should be in good working order now.

The Property Service Lead stated there was a consultancy piece of work being put in place and that would consult with local groups on some regeneration projects. Once consultants had been appointed, they would be instructed to contact all local interest groups.

Marjorie asked if there was any incentive for independent retailers to be more centralised to help stop the high street looking like just another generic high street. The Town Centre Manager confirmed that St Leonards Road was a niche and cluster of shops together that were independent. In terms of the centre of town, landlords wanted the most for their money. The council have had new independent shops rates waived to help which some had taken advantage of. The Property Service Lead confirmed that it was market forces. The units were owned by investors and if the demand was there, property values rose unless the units stayed empty long term.

ARTS CENTRE, ST LEONARDS ROAD

Mark Taylor, Deputy Head of Library & Resident Services, Communities Directorate explained that the current provider at the arts centre had been there for eight years and the council was looking at an opportunity for ensuring residents were getting best value for the investment for the building and the venue for the delivery of arts and also in terms of the annual sum paid to the provider.

A tender process had been agreed and a number of interested parties had come forward to submit a bid. Two potential providers were shortlisted and face to face meetings were held with them to find out what they proposed for the building and the arts programme. A contract was offered to Martin Denny Management Ltd who would be taking over the arts Centre in October 2017.

Martin Denny addressed the Forum and stated his company were in a position to need to rename the arts centre when they took over on 1 October 2017. Martin Denny Management had been operating for approximately 17 years and had operated Windsor Festival since 2001 in conjunction with many other partners. His company had worked on the bandstand opening and organised the first concert to play there. He added it was very exciting for Martin Denny Management Ltd to be taking on the arts centre in St Leonards Road.

The tender was for two and a half years which gave him a chance to see what they could do in that time; after which time the tender process would begin again. The current leaseholder was moving on in September 2017 and would be taking the name Firestation with them. Martin Denny Management Ltd would then move in and begin talks with those who wanted to continue to work and operate at the arts centre, in view of making it a smooth transition.

There was some maintenance of the building which needed to be carried out which the Borough was looking into and that work would be scheduled in with the least disruption possible. The intention was to honour the commitment to those currently using the building but it could mean that a full programme might not run straight away until things were settled.

The aim was to emphasise the importance of having an arts centre in Windsor to serve residents that would be used as much as possible and to offer a range of activities and groups moving forward. Things took time in scheduling and organising but the bar and café was seen as part of the aim of delivering activities. Martin Denny Management Ltd would be asking people for ideas of what they would like to see and it was a chance to develop the venue and what went on inside it. Martin Denny was not looking to translate Windsor Festival into the venue as they were a completely separate entity.

Martin Denny confirmed that it was unlikely he would be remodelling the inside of the venue but, with the Borough responsible for the maintenance of the building, that would be deferred to the Borough. Contact with existing users was being carried out by the current leaseholder who was requesting they contact Martin Denny and if a group wanted to make enquiries about starting to use the facilities, they should also contact Martin Denny. That helped with anyone wanting to move on with the current leaseholder. He added that the arts programme would be funded by ticket sales and he was hoping the arts centre would be busier and more engaging.

One resident said it was a great sorrow for the community to lose the building at the Ex-Serviceman's Club site as it saw no interest. He added that it would take a lot of hard work to get the new arts centre up and running and successful. Martin Denny responded that he would be encouraging people to use the facilities, although they would need to pay their way. Schools could use it for rehearsal space or as an event space. The arts centre would respond to enquiries with times they could hire the venue as well as prices. He had taken into consideration that there were organisations that used the venue every week for years at a time and he encouraged them to continue. Others used the space for an occasional meeting for an hour and that would also continue.

Susy Shearer asked if another there would be another press release detailing what had been expressed at the Forum as there had been rumours that the centre would be turned into flats. Martin responded that there would be a press release and he was working towards being able to embellish what had been said at the Forum.

In response to being asked why the Firestation name that was so well known for that building could not remain, the Chairman confirmed that the current user of the building owned the name and they were taking it with them. Martin Denny stated the venue at one point had also been known as the old court building. Residents requested that Martin Denny engaged with Windsor 2030 group; Marjorie wanted to know what Martin Denny could learn from the current user of the arts centre. Martin Denny responded that it was a balance which would help professional events being booked which provided more income to provide further events which often required a subsidy. He added that what he could learn from Dan was the difficulty of running arts programmes. He always had to think about how he was going to pay for events and it was a difficult conundrum. This had led the previous leaseholder to do things in a certain way to keep the centre going. The bar was vibrant with a DJ and that was probably the sort of thing Martin Denny wanted to continue to do. In his view, the more he engaged with groups, residents and potential acts, the more people were likely to visit. The way the Firestation ran the bar was very appealing and a strength of the venue.

Susy Shearer stated that Windsor was a very diverse community and she felt what Martin Denny was offering was doing well to reflect that. Martin Denny stated he was aware that because trading would continue, some of the work they had done such as comedy, they were looking to take with them, he did not want to replicate that as he did not want to get in the current leaseholders way. The Deputy Head of Library & Resident Services, Communities Directorate confirmed he had met with the current leaseholder and he had indicated that he was likely to keep the Firestation brand in Windsor and possibly tour with the brand. Cllr Quick wished Martin Denny Management well in their future endeavours.

YORK HOUSE UPDATE

Rob Large, Property Service Lead gave a brief update on what had been happening at York House since the planning permission had been granted. He explained that York House was now empty and all staff had been relocated. Contractors were carrying out intrusive investigations and construction was expected to start in approximately two to four weeks time. The works would take around 12 – 14 months to complete. York House would be a three storey building with no increase in parking provision and would be a grade A office building. The ground floor would host the new and improved customer services offering.

Mark Taylor, Deputy Head of Library & Resident Services, Communities Directorate stated the Council had merged the customer services centre and Windsor Library into one building which was one of three service hubs in the Borough. The Windsor Hub delivered the same services previously obtained at York House and the merge took place on 1 June 2017.

There was an extensive range of services at Windsor Library and was not only housing back office functions but, customer facing services. Revenue and Benefits were now operating out of the library and there was a partnership in place between the council and the Citizens Advice Bureau which was available at the Hub once per week. The hubs had extended opening hours during the week till 7pm and were also open at weekends. The Deputy Head of Library & Resident Services, Communities Directorate added the Customer Services Centre telephone service had also extended their hours of operation to match those of the Hub,

The Property Service Lead confirmed that Thames Valley Police (TVP) had decided against signing contracts which would have meant they shared the site at York House. It was a mutual decision which was jointly announced due to the possible difficulties in obtaining planning permission for the TVP building. The police had advised they would be looking for an alternative site in Windsor.

Richard Thomas, Regent Court Residents Association said the residents association had attended various meetings and there had been two different planning applications for the site, he wanted to know which application would be going ahead. The Property Service Lead confirmed that the later application submitted in March 2017 had been withdrawn as the deal with TVP was no longer going ahead. The council would not be submitting any further planning applications for additional buildings on that site.

Gary Williams, local resident stated that he had been having difficulties reaching the duty officer out of hours and that he had found the telephone service very frustrating. He added there was a time limit for calls which meant that before you get through to the right person, the phone cut out and dropped the calls. The Deputy Head of Library & Resident Services, Communities Directorate requested the specifics on the case had said he would look into the issue personally. He added that the out of hours number was the same and had not changed. There was a duty officer on call at the control room and there was also duty emergency planning officers which were on a rota system and consisted of senior officers where one of them was always on call on a rotational basis. He added that he was not aware of calls cutting out but he would talk to the IT officers and investigate. The Deputy Head of Library & Resident Services, Communities Directorate stated that the council had not been rated as a good performer in the past with regards to the telephone service; but the council had made significant improvements recently. There was a large volume of calls received in the run up to

the General Election in June 2017, which caused a spike and the service had to hire and train new members of staff so that the new seven day service could be covered. Currently the telephone service was operating at 80-90% good service. David Scott, Head of Communities and Highways stated he was on the rota as a senior duty officer and the system in place was working well. The number to contact the out of hours service was 01753 853 157 and whenever the main service was not available, a duty officer was on call. There was also an arrangement in place to ensure that someone with the right experience to deal with incidents could be contacted.

- ❖ **Action:** Mark Taylor, Deputy Head of Library & Resident Services, Communities Directorate to investigate with IT why calls to customer services were timing out with.

Robert Muir stated York House would be a major construction site in a sensitive area opposite Victoria Barracks. There would be dangerous equipment being used on site a short distance from public crowds and soldiers, he wanted to know if construction personnel were going to be security checked and if the Ministry of Defence had been consulted. The Property Service Lead explained that within a few days of planning permission being granted, he had met with senior officers in the Army who confirmed they were happy with the arrangements in place. Senior officers within Thames Valley Police had also been consulted and were also happy with the arrangements. On the run up to the closure of York House, there were plain clothed security on site but, the police felt that did not feel it was necessary to have those plain clothed security officers on site during the construction.

Gary Williams stated trees next to the barracks had been removed, he suggested planting trees on the opposite side of the street to balance out the greenery. The Chairman said he had asked officers various questions on tree planting and that the loss of trees had been noted. The Head of Communities and Highways said because of the barriers now in place, there would be a review on where replanting could take place following the final security measures being implemented. Two trees were removed as they obstructed CCTV views and alternative locations for trees were being looked into.

Gary Williams said two parking spaces had been lost on Park Street due to the temporary barriers being installed. The Chairman responded the barriers were put in front of the barracks which took up three or four spaces and due to residents complaints, the barriers were moved. He added he would look into the issue with the loss of parking due to the barriers at Park Street and see if anything could be done.

Brian Rayner asked if residents could use the parking facilities at the Windsor Library while they were not allowed to park outside York House during construction. The Chairman said the library was not big enough for residents to use for parking as there were very limited spaces.

- ❖ **Action:** the Deputy Head of Library & Resident Services, Communities Directorate and the Chairman to write to officers responsible for parking to request residents be allowed to use the library car park for parking while York House is under construction.

The Property Service Lead confirmed that the owners of the old Morrison's site had been approached by the council to see if they would allow residents to use their car park as the site was not in use but, Morrison's declined. Residents wanted to know where Willmott Dixon were going to park during the construction of York house. The Property Service Lead confirmed that a construction management plan would be agreed between the construction firm and the planning team. They were to use to surface car park for large truck deliveries. They would have to agree to the plan prior to construction taking place. He added larger lorries had to go onto site and not park on the road. Occasionally, just for loading and unloading, the lorries might need to park on the road but generally, there would be no parking on the street. The Property Service Lead also confirmed that any gates and barriers to be installed at York House would not be installed till after staff had moved back in, unpacked and taken delivery of all furniture.

- ❖ **Action:** The Property Service Lead to ensure the Construction Management Plan is published once agreed.

Susy Shearer wanted to know if the bus stop outside York House would be moved. The Property Service Lead said talks were taking place with the Highways team as the contractors wanted the bus stop moved temporarily while the works were carried out at York House.

A local resident wanted reassurance that the cladding used on the outside of York House was fire resistant following the tragic events that took place at Grenfell Tower in London. She also wanted to know what the hours of construction would be; requested a telephone number of the contractor so that there was a point of contact to resolve any issues, reassurance that the council would make sure the condition of the over ground car park would be put right following construction and finally, what the business case was for spending £9m on the refurbishment. The Property Service Lead confirmed that the cladding would be entirely non-combustible. A work plan would be circulated to residents that covered the hours of work for the construction. Wilmot Dixon was writing to all residents regarding contact details and as soon as the plans were signed off, an exact date for the start of the works would be included in the letter circulated to residents. The Chairman stated that the arrangements for the external car park at York House before it closed would remain in place and not be used out of hours to protect residents. The business case for the £9m refurbishment would be made available in a few weeks time. The Property Service Lead said that with regards to the cladding, there would be no air gap between the cladding and the front of the building. He added that there had been a lot of misleading information out there regarding how fire retardant cladding was and a lot of the tests carried out had been put into some doubt. The council's previous choice might have been fine but, to be certain, the council had chosen a more expensive and completely non-combustible type of cladding.

Local residents wanted to know if the finance for the project had been arranged and if the rates were fixed in order to pay for the refurbishment. The Property Service lead said that the finances for the refurbishment were not being released but that the council was not borrowing specifically against that project and if the council did, it would be at a very low fixed rate.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

the Chairman requested Windsor 2030 contribute to the following meeting and add something to the next agenda on what they did and their contribution to the Local Plan.

- ❖ **Action:** The Chairman to write to Windsor 2030 to request their attendance at the next meeting of the Windsor Town Forum and for them to submit a presentation to be included on the agenda giving a brief summary of who they were, what they did and their contribution to the Neighbourhood Plan.

Brian Rayner said he was having difficulty in using the Slough tip as a Royal Borough resident. The Chairman said that his colleagues in Waste would write to him to outline and confirm the official policy.

- ❖ **Action:** The waste team to write to Mr Rayner detailing the official policy of using the Chalvey Tip in Slough as a Royal Borough resident.

The Royal Windsor Summer Show was a community event and would be taking place on 15 July 2017 at St George's School.

Windsor 2030 would confirm the date of their next meeting at the end of July 2017.

An emailing detailing the changes to the traffic lights at the Crosses Corner junction in the Town Centre was handed out and the Head of Communities and Highways confirmed there was money in the Capital Budget to amend the sequencing of the lights. It was a phasing issue and it would be rectified this year.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 9.10 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....