

MAIDENHEAD TOWN FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 24 JULY 2019

PRESENT: Councillors Gurch Singh (Chair), Gurpreet Bhangra (Vice-Chairman), Ross McWilliams, Joshua Reynolds, Chris Targowski and Helen Taylor

Also in attendance: Councillors Clive Baskerville, Catherine Del Campo, Simon Dudley, Phil Haseler, Andrew Johnson and Donna Stimson

Officers: Andy Carswell, Steph James, Ben Smith and Gordon Oliver

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on June 17th 2019 be approved, subject to a small amendment to state that Cllr Baldwin arrived late for the meeting.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Forum noted the contents of the terms of reference.

MAINTAINING THE RETAIL OFFER IN MAIDENHEAD DURING REGENERATION AND KEEPING THE HIGH STREET

Steph James, Maidenhead Town Manager, gave a presentation regarding factors affecting the town centre and how these could be mitigated whilst major regeneration work was carried out. Members were told that the national picture showed a reduction in high street footfall, with one in every five pounds spent on shopping being spent online. This had led to major national retailers closing stores across the country, which had the knock-on effect of reducing footfall and therefore damaging other, smaller retailers. Steph James said that town centres had had to adapt to ensure continuation of footfall as a result. The Town Partnership had set up a large programme of free events to run throughout the year to encourage visitors and increase footfall. Events included the free outdoor cinema experience of Maidenhead at the Movies and the Christmas Lights Switch On. Events have been branded under 'Enjoy Maidenhead', however this would be changing to 'Make Maidenhead' to reflect the fact the town centre was subject to major regeneration. Many events were organised by the community, including the Maidenhead Festival and the Zombie Walk.

Steph James told the Forum that there was a focus on targeting office workers who may not live in the area but significantly add to the weekday footfall, by emphasising the growing food and drink offers in the town and sharing and promoting regeneration news. There was still a negative perception that there was little by way of choice in terms of eating out in Maidenhead. It was important to promote the accessibility and connectivity of the town, especially during periods of disruption from regeneration works.

In the presentation Steph James highlighted the concept of pop up businesses, where a business could hold a short-term lease of a vacant unit to test and then refine a particular venture. Usually these would be shops but could also be used for community events or art galleries. Steph James said these had been successful in the past as they gave people greater confidence to test new ideas if the lease was only done on a short-term basis. She informed the Forum that Craft Coop had been running as a permanent business venture for ten years after starting off as a pop up shop. She added that it was likely that long-term empty units would be taken up by smaller independent retailers rather than multinationals.

A database of landlords was being created with a view to offering pop up business ventures to them to improve the viability of the town centre. Early indications showed landlords were generally supportive of this. Steph James said there was a misconception that landlords did not want vacant units occupied; rates still had to be paid on an empty unit. There were also misconceptions that business rates were set by the Council when in fact it was done by central government, and that the Council owned any vacant units in the town centre and had control over who could lease them, when this was not the case.

Responding to a question regarding car parking, Cllr Dudley stated he accepted there were issues with the current machines and they could be used fraudulently by people inputting false details. A new system would be used in the redeveloped Nicholsons car park, and ways of making the Advantage cards more sophisticated and harder to use fraudulently were being looked into. Cllr Dudley said the new car park would have 1,050 spaces – up from the current 750 – and was three and a half years away from completion.

Cllr Baskerville asked if consideration had been given to marketing Maidenhead as a niche town for the arts. Cllr Dudley said a paper going to September's Cabinet, then Full Council, would recommend a budget for investment in the Desborough Suite, and that more information on creating an art hub would become available later in the year. Steph James said there was a large creative and cultural community in Maidenhead and it was important to embrace this. However Maidenhead was still looking into what its potential niche could be, and influence was being drawn from a number of towns rather than Maidenhead seeking to emulate any one town.

Responding to a point from Cllr Reynolds regarding the potential permanent loss of some retailers during regeneration works, Steph James stated that support was available in the form of business relief or short term business rates. However it was noted that businesses needed to be proactive in applying for support and marketing themselves. Steph James said the current thinking was that the redeveloped Nicholsons Centre would have 50 units, although discussions regarding the footprints of each individual unit still needed to take place and there was uncertainty around which retailers would remain in Maidenhead. There were currently 160 businesses on a database, who would receive marketing and share other information. Cllr Dudley informed Members that it was the responsibility of a shopping centre and the Town Centre Manager to help businesses relocate. He stated that a priority was to find a new location for the town centre post office.

Members were told that a Developers' Forum had been set up to facilitate meetings between the various developers involved in the regeneration projects and the Council, in order to coordinate the future vision for the various redevelopments taking place. A marketing suite would be installed in the York Road development early in the new year. It was also suggested that the Town Hall could be used as a marketing suite.

Cllr Dudley stated that the works would have no impact on the town centre Conservation Area.

MAIDENHEAD STATION PROJECT UPDATE

Ben Smith, Head of Commissioning – Communities, gave a presentation and outlined to Members the latest state of the Maidenhead Station upgrade project. Members were reminded that there was a strong business case to support the project, with the delivery of Crossrail

providing a significant positive impact on footfall in the town centre. Since the last Forum, the Council's cycling strategy had been formally adopted by the Cabinet, which aimed to increase the number of cycle journeys in Maidenhead by 20 per cent in the next five years and reduce the accident rate. This also fitted in with the aim to become carbon zero, as discussed in the climate change emergency debate at June's meeting of Full Council.

Members were reminded of the proposed changes to the roads as part of the improvement scheme. These included making Broadway two-way and introducing right-hand turns from the Nicholsons car park and Frascati Way, and removing the right turn onto the A308 at the Queen Street junction. The new Broadway junction had gone live on July 1st and trialling the closure of the right hand turn at the Queen Street junction had begun on July 8th. It was anticipated that the junction alterations would lead to fewer vehicles using Queen Street and lead to an overall reduction in congestion.

Ben Smith told Members that an online survey had taken place to engage the public about the amendments. Of the 532 responders, 123 thought the closure of the Queen Street right-hand turn would increase road user safety and 155 thought the new two-way system on Broadway would reduce the potential impact of the closure on Queen Street. Ben Smith stated that Thames Valley Police and the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service felt the changes would have little effect on their ability to respond to emergencies and the closure of the Queen Street turn would aid traffic flow. It had not been possible to get a response from the ambulance service despite numerous repeated attempts. Courtney Buses had indicated they believed the changes would increase time, mileage and costs and that this could impact on the reliability of their services. Feedback from residents suggested that a footbridge or underpass at the station would be a better solution. Ben Smith stated that these options had been looked into but were not considered viable due to costs and the constraints of the surrounding land.

Cllr Haseler said he worked as a quick response driver and stated his belief that the right turn closure had made traffic flow simpler, although he felt the final scheme did need some fine tuning. Cllr Taylor stated her belief that the new junction arrangements at Broadway and Frascati Way needed to be better signposted. Ben Smith stated that consideration had been given to a right-hand turn for emergency vehicles at Queen Street but this had been abandoned as it was considered too dangerous.

Responding to a question from Cllr Del Campo, Ben Smith stated that the scheme would not have a huge impact on air quality and emissions; a detailed analysis on this was included in the business case, which also outlined the benefits to the project. Ben Smith also confirmed that consideration had been given in the forecasts to increased traffic going to the new Braywick Leisure Centre.

Members were informed that the consultation on the changes to the road layout had been launched in advance of the trials going live. Cllr Dudley stated that any consultation needed to include data that would allow the public to give a more informed view and to take into account user experience. He stated he was concerned that no consideration could be given to any response from the ambulance service and whether the proposals represented any risks to the emergency services. Cllr Dudley said he was concerned at the number of negative responses to the consultation and said he was not happy to proceed with the scheme on this basis. He said that the Forum was no longer the appropriate place for the scheme to be discussed and requested a paper be produced, which included responses to a re-run consultation led by an external company, a response from all of the emergency services, and input from the Lead Member. It was agreed at Cllr Reynolds' suggestion that the paper should be considered by Full Council on September 24th.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That a paper from the Lead Member be presented to Full Council on September 24th containing responses to a new consultation led by an external company, and from all of the emergency services.

ITEM SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

The Chairman informed everyone present that future meetings would be a forum where ideas could be put forward and discussed as decided as to whether they were believed to be feasible.

Members suggested the following items for consideration at future meetings:

- Updates on the progress of town centre regeneration
- Update on the climate change working group
- Update on youth services and to hear from younger residents

It was requested that item suggestions be emailed to nabihah.hassan-farooq@rbwm.gov.uk

DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Cllr Dudley proposed that both the Maidenhead and Windsor Town Forums should meet every other month, in order to encourage greater resident interaction and improve transparency. Members were reminded that the terms of reference for the Forums stated that each should meet three times a year and any amendment to the terms of reference, which were part of the Council's Constitution, would need to be agreed by Full Council. Cllr McWilliams also proposed that the Forum meetings should be streamed on social media channels such as Facebook Live, in order to further encourage greater resident participation and suggested that residents would be able to submit questions during the course of meetings. Cllr Dudley stated that the Communications department would need to report back on this.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That a paper proposing the terms of reference be amended to state the Maidenhead and Windsor Town Forums meet six times a year be presented to Full Council on September 24th.

Members asked for an additional meeting to be scheduled as soon as possible after the next Full Council meeting. It was also noted that the next meeting was scheduled for November 5th; it was requested that a different date be sought due to a likely clash with a number of other community events that it was anticipated would take place on the same day.

The date of a Forum meeting taking place on March 25th 2020 at 6.30pm in the Town Hall Council Chamber was noted by Members.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.25 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....