

MAIDENHEAD TOWN FORUM

THURSDAY, 12 MAY 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Donna Stimson, Helen Taylor (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Gurpreet Bhangra, Ross McWilliams, Clive Baskerville, Maureen Hunt, John Baldwin, Neil Knowles, Greg Jones, Gerry Clark and Gurch Singh

Also in attendance: Edward Goose (Great Western Railway), Louise Gurney (Network Rail), Peter Haley (People to Places) and Jeff Pick (Thames Valley Police)

Officers: David Cook and Robyn Bunyan

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Coppinger, Councillor Hill and Councillor Targowski. Councillor Stimson, Councillor Knowles and Councillor Hunt were attending the meeting as substitutes.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hunt declared a personal interest as she owned a flat in Maidenhead.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17th March 2022 be approved as a true and accurate record.

MAIDENHEAD STATION

Ed Goose, Great Western Railway (GWR) and Louise Gurney, Network Rail, attended the meeting to discuss the pick up and drop off point at Maidenhead Station and the potential for the railway bridge to be decorated.

Ed Goose informed Members that following the pandemic, passenger levels were about 80% of pre-pandemic levels while journeys into London were at about 46% of pre-pandemic levels. There had been an increase in weekend travel and due to the pandemic the government had provided £16 billion of funding. Cross Rail was expected to bring many benefits to Maidenhead once it had fully opened.

Louise Gurney explained that she was the Network Rail sponsor for the Cross Rail project. They were currently working with partners to look at the best options for Maidenhead Station, a site visit was planned with partners to consider what the best outcome could be for passengers with the funding which had been made available.

Councillor G Jones said that it was great to see the station forecourt being revamped but there was no drop off for passengers, only parking for staff. He was informed that this was an RBWM lead scheme and they wanted to make services accessible to the public, he was advised to discuss any concerns with officers.

Councillor G Jones also mentioned that he was concerned about cycle storage and the number of thefts which had been reported, he suggested that the storage was brought closer to the main ticket office. He was informed this could be looked at and considered.

Councillor G Jones continued that the bridge was in a poor condition and needed to be redecorated. He was informed that this could also be looked at but additional funding could be required, GWR and Network Rail needed to be mindful of how best to spend tax payers money.

Councillor Singh said the station was 'the bike theft capital of Europe' and that residents no longer reported thefts as they happened so frequently. He also said that the area underneath the bridge was filthy and covered in bird excrement. With regards to parking he understood that staff needed parking close to the station entrance due to anti-social behaviour, he also requested that arrangements for taxi drivers could be looked at. Councillor Singh felt that there needed to be a multi-agency approach, the council wanted to encourage as many people as possible to cycle to the station. He appreciated that staff safety was a priority but suggested that next steps could be to work with RBWM and other agencies to look at the station holistically in the short, medium and long term.

Councillor McWilliams mentioned that the train station was built in the 19th Century, which meant that a lot of the architecture was stricture and felt that the southern side of the station was looking tired. He was informed that GWR and Network Rail were looking at the northern entrance where the ticket machines were placed and it was planned to also look at widening the southern entrance in the future.

The Forum noted the update.

SHOPMOBILITY

Peter Haley, CEO People to Places, provided the Forum with an update on the work of Shopmobility.

Peter Haley informed the Forum that Shopmobility had operated since February 1996 and was operated by People to Places since June 2010. People to Places was a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.

They provided the following services based in two offices, Shopmobility Maidenhead and Shopmobility Windsor. Membership allowed the day hire of mobility equipment from either centre, up to 6 days a week, with free parking.

Equipment owned by People to Places included:

- 53 mobility scooters
- 6 powered wheelchairs
- 6 powered strollers
- 24 manual wheelchairs
- 4 walking frames

They were open 6 days a week, 9.30 am to 5.00 pm with 2.4 FTE staff, plus two volunteers for mobility equipment maintenance and one volunteer for admin support.

The Membership fee was £16 or £9 on Income Support equivalent. Day and extended hires were also available. Revenue income was via a grant from RBWM for £50K, plus up to £3.5K from memberships. Donations and grants were also received from time to time. People to Places had recently supported by a substantial legacy from a previous supporter, plus a grant from Lions Club of Maidenhead for five scooters.

They also provided facilities for extended hires and car transportable hires, in the summer months they provided guided rambles suitable for scooter users.

With regards to the future, Maidenhead was tracking at around two thirds of the pre-pandemic long term trend, this was around 6,000 hires per year or 19 hires per day.

The return after pandemic had plateaued with their projection for this year at only 3,500 hires for 2022/23 or around 11 hires per day, but this was dependent on the response to a temporary accommodation move.

The organisation had been informed by the RBWM Property Company that Shopmobility Maidenhead was to be moved as soon as the Vicus Way car park was completed, possibly in November/December 2022. Shopmobility would be moved to West Street car park, along with Blue Badge parking too. On the plus side, there would be a direct link to Sainsbury's for food shopping and the opportunity for substantial signs off the A4 Bath Road. The new Shopmobility facility included a bespoke office and storage space on the Ground Floor. After a meeting had been held with Tim Golabek in March 2022 regarding dropped curbs for the new temporary accommodation, he was unable to confirm the current situation regarding timescales, planning permissions, utilities, services and permissions.

Other future plans included:

- Promote the organisation to maintain and increase usage and support the 'purple pound'.
- Continue to promote the day and extended hire options which were available.
- Encourage local business support through the BNI Maidenhead Chapter.
- Contact local hotels and other accommodation businesses to see if they would promote a "mobility" service.
- Support other local events through the Shopmobility service.

Councillor Singh commented that he was concerned that there were still doubts over the temporary accommodation which had been provided, he asked if Shopmobility provided equipment for event organisers. He was informed that equipment was provided for events such as the Royal Windsor Horse Show but there was always a need to consider parking.

Councillor Baskerville asked if there was secure storage for the equipment. He was informed that they were stored between the two offices and that they were looking to buy new equipment.

The Forum noted the update.

UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENTS AROUND MAIDENHEAD

Item deferred due to late apologies from the reporting officer.

THAMES VALLEY POLICE UPDATE

The Forum considered the latest Thames Valley Police update.

Jeff Pick, Thames Valley Police, had produced and circulated the latest crime stats for Maidenhead for the last 31 days. Since the stats had been provided there had been three further car incidents. There continued to be an issue with unlocked cars as handles were being tested on the chance that residents had left their cars unlocked. Keyless black Land rovers were being targeted specially, while there had been 8 bicycles stolen in the last month.

There had been a number of changes to the local police force, with a number of personnel moving on or being deployed to different parts of the borough. The summer bicycle campaign was being launched with leaflets and postcards produced. The community speed watch

scheme would now have to be arranged by community groups, there were only a couple active currently.

Councillor Stimson asked what was being done by the police and what could be done by cyclists to help prevent bike crime. In response, Jeff Pick said that the police were working with bike clubs, promoting the tracker system, leaflets were being produced and work being done to promote using three locks on a bike. It was noted that the most valuable bikes were being stolen from sheds.

Councillor Baskerville asked why bikes stolen from sheds were not included on the stats provided and was informed that they were included as dwelling burglaries.

Councillor Singh commented on an action from the last Forum meeting on trading standards leaflets, he asked if these had arrived. Jeff Pick said that they had not but Councillor Singh would be in contact with Honour Ryan from the Trading Standards team. Councillor Price had also asked for them in Windsor, £200 of funding would get the team around 15,000 signs which could be used by residents.

Councillor Singh suggested that this item should be discussed at the next Town Forum meeting so that the funding could be found for the signs. He suggested that he would need to use funding from the Liberal Democrat Group if funding could not be found from RBWM.

ACTION – Councillor Singh requested that this was brought back to the next Maidenhead Town Forum meeting for discussion.

The Forum noted the update.

MAIDENHEAD TOWN MANAGER UPDATE

Robyn Bunyan, Maidenhead Town Manager, provided an update that included information on footfall, vacancy rates, shop openings and closings, national data, regeneration news and all the local events taking place in Maidenhead.

The Forum were informed that halfway through the year the high street was busy for this time of the year given the pandemic and that there were plans to expand the market. With regards to footfall, the town centre continued to recover as the UK unlocked however footfall was still down compared to pre-pandemic levels. Maidenhead's weekday footfall was heavily reliant on lunchtime office workers which would account for some of the decline. During April, the monthly footfall report showed that the total number of visitors to Maidenhead was 481,660. Comparative figures were provided with her update report.

Retail vacancy rates in Maidenhead were currently at 18% which was 51 empty units. This was the same as previously reported. The new traders that had moved into Maidenhead had reported that they were doing well.

With regards to events planned, they included the Jubilee Beacon Lighting and Fireworks, Picnic in the Park on the Long Walk and Windsor's Big Lunch.

Many of the large scale 'flagship' events were taking place in and around Windsor across the Jubilee weekend but the following were planned for Maidenhead:

- Borough wide Jubilee bunting
- Themed hanging baskets
- Jubilee trail
- Craft activities for children and young people
- Business shop window competition
- Residents were encouraged to apply for street parties

Councillor Baldwin asked about car park usage in Maidenhead, a lot of the update relied upon the revenue from car parking income. He said that the report talked about the calendar year but he wished to ask about the fiscal year. Councillor Baldwin mentioned that current parking was substantially below previous years but the budget assumptions for parking was forecasting over £2 million bump in covid recovery. He estimated that the shortfall would be below the pre-2019 figures. Footfall might be recovering but he did not see this in car parking. He was concerned about in year cuts if projections were not met. He asked that the relevant Executive Director be engaged with on this issue.

In response, Councillor Baldwin was informed that the targets were put together on assumptions which were made on the bounce back from the pandemic, it was great that footfall was increasing but it would take time for office workers to return. Robyn Bunyan said that concerns would be taken back to the team.

ACTION – Robyn Bunyan to report concerns raised by Councillor Baldwin back to the parking team.

Councillor Baskerville asked if there was an event planned for the 60th anniversary of the Town Hall, he was informed that this was being worked on.

The Forum noted the update.

ITEM SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

The Forum considered future discussion items and it was noted that:

- Councillor Singh requested a discussion on Kidwells Park and the tennis courts.
- At an appropriate time, an update could be considered on Maidenhead United Football Club.
- Update on the Town Centre.
- Councillor Stimson suggested an update on the ‘wall of kindness’.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Future meeting dates were noted:

- Monday 11th July 2022
- Monday 5th September 2022
- Thursday 10th November 2022
- Thursday 12th January 2023
- Thursday 16th March 2023

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.30 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....