

MAIDENHEAD TOWN FORUM

MONDAY, 5 SEPTEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Councillors David Coppinger (Chairman), Helen Taylor (Vice-Chairman), Gurpreet Bhangra, Clive Baskerville, John Baldwin, Greg Jones, Donna Stimson, Ross McWilliams (virtual), Gerry Clark (virtual) and Gurch Singh

Also in attendance: Councillors Samantha Rayner, John Bowden and Karen Davies

Officers: Mark Beeley and Robyn Bunyan

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Targowski, Councillor Hill and Councillor Clark, who was attending the meeting in a virtual capacity. Councillor Stimson was attending the meeting as a substitute for Councillor Clark.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Baldwin said that he would be mentioning Food Share Maidenhead during the Cost of Living Crisis agenda item, he was a volunteer for the organisation.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11th July 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record.

UPDATE ON MAIDENHEAD UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

Jon Adams, CEO of Maidenhead United Football Club, gave a presentation updating the Forum on the football club and its plans to move from York Road. The ground was held in a trust by the football club and the company was a not for profit organisation. They therefore made the final decision with regard to any relocation and the future of the ground after relocation had taken place. Capital assets were held separately from the club for the benefit of the town, this would be maintained should the move away from York Road take place. Maidenhead United FC Limited was a company formed when the club was in a poor financial situation around 15 years ago, they stepped in and ensured that the commercial arm of the club was able to still function. The Maidenhead United men's first team was the only part of the club that fell under the Maidenhead United FC Limited organisation. The other part of the club was operated by Maidenhead United FC Community Trust.

Maidenhead United was founded in 1870 and currently played in the National League, which was the fifth tier of English football. The club was one of the highest ranked part-time clubs in the country, while the women's team played in the FA Women's Premier League South West League. Considering the club in the community, the club was one of the largest community sports clubs in the Thames Valley. The juniors section currently had 51 teams and over 600 members. A National League accredited programme was run in partnership with the Berkshire College of Agriculture, while over 2,500 children per week participated in community football activities across RBWM.

Magpies in the Community was a partnership run by the club that was focused on the health and wellbeing of the local community. Opportunities were provided for local people of all ages and abilities. Examples of activities included: football coaching, development centres, walking football, seated exercise, autism friendly soccer, lunch time and after school clubs. The

Premier League trophy would be coming to the ground on 12th September. Activities were being delivered in a number of locations across the borough. Magpies Community Care was a programme set up during the pandemic which consisted of a hotline that residents could call if they needed food supplies, a prescription picking up or any other help which could be provided by volunteers, the programme was still ongoing. Wellbeing circles had been formed and the club had its own dedicated wellbeing team which could provide support for individuals. The football club was an important community resource, the community was placed at the heart of what the football club did.

Maidenhead United faced a number of challenges, as the existing facilities were not fit for purpose and required significant capital investment:

- Ageing facilities close the end of their economic life.
- Locational challenges in terms of site access.
- National League and EFL (English Football League) ground grading requirements (capacity, lights etc).
- Improved spectator facilities and increasing the supporter base of the football club.
- Limited opportunity for wider usage of the York Road pitch for community use.
- Limited opportunity for facility development at York Road.

It was estimated that improvement to York Road to allow the ground to meet the requirements on EFL capacity and the number of seats would cost around £10 million. This impacted the long term sustainability of the football club, it was important to establish financial independence. The football club needed to address the long term challenges and it was felt that the correct time to move was now, which would tie in with the wider redevelopment of Maidenhead. The main requirements for the football club were that any new ground was still in close proximity to the town centre and transport links. An extensive number of options had been considered over a number of years, the site identified at Braywick was the most suitable option.

The site at Braywick was at the northern end of Braywick Park and was already an established location for outdoor and indoor sport. There was an opportunity at the site to upgrade the existing athletic facilities, while the site was still close to Maidenhead town centre and transport links. The new stadium would have a proposed capacity of 5,200 and new clubhouse facilities would be incorporated into the site. The proposal was for an Astro turf pitch to be installed which would help increase the usage of the stadium and allow it to be used for community use. The football club were working closely with Maidenhead Athletic Club and they were a partner in the project, there would be a four lane 300m track on the site. It was important that the open environment currently at Braywick was preserved, a number of trees would be maintained at the site.

The main benefits of the move to Braywick would allow a high quality community sports facility to be developed for the benefit of the town. The proposal would secure the long term future of the football club and the community programmes. Growth of participation in community sport, health and wellbeing activities would be supported and it would establish Braywick Park as the sport, health and wellbeing hub of Maidenhead. The development would also provide facility improvements for other users, such as Maidenhead Athletic Club, Maidenhead Rugby Club and local schools and community groups.

Jon Adams concluded the presentation by outlining the timescales involved. A consultation would take place between May and November 2022 with supporters, stakeholders and the public. It was anticipated that a planning application would be submitted by the end of 2022.

Councillor Baldwin commented on biodiversity at the proposed site at Braywick Park and how this would be managed.

Jon Adams said that the football club would need to demonstrate how it would meet the requirements for biodiversity net gain, this would be submitted as part of the planning application.

Councillor G Jones thanked Jon Adams for the presentation, he was a representative on the Older People's Advisory Forum and knew the impact that the Magpies in the Community project had, it would be useful to invite Jon Adams to a meeting of the working group. Councillor G Jones asked if the fans of the football club wanted to move from York Road.

Jon Adams said that there would be a number of supporters who would be disappointed to leave York Road. However, he believed that the supporters also recognised the challenges the football club faced and to allow the club to continue to play at a high level and be a major community asset, the move needed to happen.

Councillor G Jones asked what the current attendances were for Maidenhead United men's first team games.

Jon Adams said the average was around 1,500 with the biggest attendance during his time at the club being around 3,000. It was realised that York Road was an old ground with outdated facilities, it was hoped a new stadium with modern facilities would be able to attract more fans.

Councillor Baskerville commented on how communication had been with Maidenhead Rugby Club, who would be impacted by the proposed move to Braywick Park.

Jon Adams said that Maidenhead Rugby Club were generally supportive of Maidenhead United's proposals. The football club was looking to engage with the rugby club during the consultation process, they wanted to work together to find a solution to the issues that had been raised. Jon Adams added that there was a desire for Maidenhead United to become full time, which would allow the team to increase the amount they could train and become more competitive in the National League. There were a number of ex-EFL clubs like Wrexham, Notts County and Chesterfield who were currently competing in the National League.

Councillor Baskerville noted that in the past, York Road had been used for things like local cup finals. He asked if there were plans for other events to use the facilities at the new stadium.

Jon Adams confirmed that the installation of an Astro turf pitch at the proposed new stadium would allow the football club to host more games and events. It was hoped that the stadium would also attract more people to use the sport and leisure facilities at Braywick Leisure Centre.

Councillor Stimson said that the work the football club had done throughout the pandemic was hugely beneficial to the local community.

Jon Adams said that the football club supported residents in contributing to their community and it was about giving back to the community.

Councillor Singh asked about the athletics track at the proposed site and how this would be funded and maintained.

Jon Adams said that the athletics track would be paid for by the football club and they would be the trustees of the track, it was important that it was maintained as a good facility for the athletics club and the wider public. There would be opportunities for the public to use the facilities. Construction of the site was planned to take around a year.

The Chairman thanked Jon Adams for attending the Forum and said that he looked forward to seeing plans progress.

WILD MAIDENHEAD - BECOMING A PESTICIDE-FREE TOWN

Angela Alexander from Wild Maidenhead presented a report on Maidenhead becoming a pesticide-free town. Pesticides were used in the borough to control a range of problems including weeds and vermin. Pesticide use could have serious human health impacts, harm biodiversity and contaminate water supplies. There was growing evidence that glyphosate, the most commonly used weedkiller, had a high health risk. Pesticide use had a negative effect on urban wildlife and had been identified as a contributory factor in the decline of hedgehogs. Pesticides sprayed onto the hard surfaces could run off into drains and sewers and could find their way into water supplies, incurring additional cost. Many local authorities had already gone pesticide-free, with a total of 46 town or boroughs having pesticides or glyphosate bans or phase-out commitments around the UK.

Wild Maidenhead requested that RBWM considered going pesticide-free for almost all uses, but to retain very limited use of an injectable systemic pesticide for Japanese Knotweed. This was a highly invasive plant which the council was bound to control effectively by law on any sites where it occurred.

The Chairman said that Environmental Services fell within his Cabinet remit, he received a significant number of complaints from residents about 'pavement plants'.

Councillor Taylor said it was important to educate the public on the issues of using pesticide.

Councillor Singh underlined that there were some serious health risks caused by using pesticides. He was supportive of the proposals made by Wild Maidenhead in the paper and said this was something that the council needed to look at.

Councillor Davies said that she was currently working on bringing a motion to Full Council on the subject of pesticides. It was great to see the item being discussed at the Maidenhead Town Forum, she had asked the Chairman of the Windsor Town Forum if it could also be discussed there too. Councillor Davies asked if the Town Forum was able to refer the paper to Cabinet for consideration.

Robyn Bunyan, Maidenhead Town Manager, said that she would be happy to speak with Wild Maidenhead about where improvements could be made in the town centre in relation to an increase in planting.

ACTION – Robyn Bunyan to contact Wild Maidenhead to discuss where changes could be made.

The Chairman suggested that he would take the issue up with officers, there was a need to find the right solution which suited all residents.

ACTION – Councillor Coppinger to speak to officers about what could be done to reduce the use of pesticides in the borough.

COST OF LIVING CRISIS - IMPACTS IN THE BOROUGH

Jeff Pick, Thames Valley Police, outlined the crime stats which had been circulated as part of the agenda pack. He introduced Roger Aisladie, who was the Lead Manager for the Community Safety Team. The original concept was volunteers were used to make the community a safer place, while using social media to inform residents about events and operations. It was important that residents did not leave valuables in their car, as thieves could easily break the window. A number of occurrences had happened where residents had reported their car as stolen, however it was actually due to them parking in a multi-story car park and being unable to locate their car again. There had been a number of bike thefts around the train station, however, a number of residents did not know the model, make or even colour of their bike which had it harder for the police to locate. Jeff Pick advised bike

owners to use a UV pen to mark their bike with details which could be used should it be stolen.

Jeff Pick said that Councillor Baldwin had requested to know if there had been an increase in the number of crimes due to the cost of living crisis. There had been a few shoplifting incidents recorded, for skincare products and clothing. A number of incidents were not formally reported to the police, therefore this figure would be much higher.

Robyn Bunyan said that she was aware of an increase in the number of shoplifting incidents across the town centre.

The Chairman asked if shoplifting had always been an issue or if there had been a recent increase.

Robyn Bunyan said that there had always been a level of shoplifting in Maidenhead but this had got significantly worse. Some shops had to now employ security to try and deter thieves, while others like supermarkets were now using things like meat monitors for expensive goods. For big companies, they could afford to take a financial hit but the effect was particularly damaging for smaller and independent traders.

Jeff Pick said that there was a similar situation with petrol, garages only reported incidents to the police which were over a certain value. He concluded his presentation by outlining the various alarms and other products which could be used to improve home security and for protecting things like tools in vans.

Councillor Singh commented on the closure of the upper levels of the Broadway car park due to anti-social behaviour, it would be good to have more patrols in this area to deter any further activity.

Councillor G Jones questioned whether there needed to be more prosecution for those who were involved in shoplifting.

Jeff Pick explained that prosecution was a long drawn-out process and often shops would rather ban the individual from their store. It was not the responsibility of shop assistants to stop shoplifting, it was down to security but a lot of stores could not afford this extra cost.

Councillor Baldwin said that he had received a huge amount of correspondence from residents and community groups about the cost of living crisis and what the council was doing to help those in need. The council had a responsibility to do what it could and Councillor Baldwin requested that his comments were put forward as a motion for Cabinet Members to consider and respond to. The council tax relief scheme allowed residents to claim back money but a significant amount of this was due to go unclaimed. There was concern that a number of residents would qualify but were unaware that the scheme existed or how they could claim the amount back. Councillor Baldwin suggested that the scheme was promoted through the council's communications channels.

The Chairman said that he did not see how the item was something that could be discussed by the Town Forum Members. He suggested that any requests should be raised directly with officers or with the relevant Cabinet Members. The Chairman said that he wanted to see the proposals from Councillor Baldwin carried out in a different way and felt that they were not relevant to the Maidenhead Town Forum.

MAIDENHEAD TOWN MANAGER UPDATE

Robyn Bunyan said that there had been over 582,000 visitors to the town centre in July, with the busiest day being Saturday 16th July. This was positive compared to the pre-pandemic figures and the figure was now relatively similar. The vacancy rate would be reported as part of the August update while three new businesses had opened in Maidenhead; Chai Cocoa,

Pianoz and Coopers Estate Agents. The Countryside York Road development was continuing and Library square was being well used by residents. However, car parking was still significantly below pre-pandemic levels which was mainly attributed to the lack of office workers. A number of festivals had also successfully taken place, including Braywick Nature Festival, Maidenhead Festival and the Summer Vegan Festival. Upcoming events taking place in the town centre included the Norden Farm Kite Festival, Waterways Fun Day and the Gravity Grand Prix. There was a lot happening and Robyn Bunyan felt that there was a real community spirit in Maidenhead.

Councillor Singh asked if the Gravity Grand Prix was definitely going ahead.

He was informed that it was taking place in Cookham rather than Maidenhead, the Maidenhead edition would not be taking place this year.

Councillor Singh asked what the timeline was for the opening of Vicus Way car park.

Robyn Bunyan said that she was not sure, she would check and let Councillor Singh know.

ACTION – Robyn Bunyan to see what the timeline and potential opening date of the Vicus Way car park was and inform Councillor Singh.

A resident, Adam Bermange, noted that footfall was near pre-pandemic levels but parking was still significantly down. He asked if it was fair to make the assumption that residents were using greener forms of transport when visiting Maidenhead town centre.

Robyn Bunyan said that the parking was mainly due to office workers who had not returned to offices in the town centre.

ITEM SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

The Chairman said that suggestions for future meetings could be sent via email to mark.beeley@rbwm.gov.uk.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting was due to take place on Thursday 10th November 2022, starting at 6.30pm.

The meeting, which began at 6.40 pm, finished at 9.00 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....