

MAIDENHEAD TOWN FORUM

THURSDAY, 10 NOVEMBER 2022

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Donna Stimson, Councillor Simon Bond, Councillor Phil Haseler and Councillor David Cannon

Officers: Mark Beeley, Robyn Bunyan and Ian Brazier-Dubber

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Targowski.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Baldwin said that he was a former member and player of Maidenhead Rugby Club.

Councillor Taylor said that Braywick Park was in her ward, she had been public in her opposition against the application which would be made by Maidenhead United Football Club.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5th September 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record.

PRESENTATION FROM MAIDENHEAD RUGBY CLUB

Steve Bough gave a presentation on behalf of Maidenhead Rugby Club. He felt that the main reason why Maidenhead United wanted to relocate to Braywick was for financial benefit through the development of business based facilities at Braywick, rather than focusing on sporting facilities. The rugby club had a few discussions with the football club but there had been little detail. The rugby club had a number of concerns covering numerous issues with how the proposed stadium would work in practice, Maidenhead United said that these issues would be addressed in the planning application. It was not clear how many times the stadium would be used a year, although it was estimated that there would be the loss of around 8 to 10 rugby pitches. Maidenhead United had referred to the site as the new 'Braywick Park Sports Hub', Steve Bough felt that there already was a sports hub at the site and no additional sports facilities would be created at the park as a result.

Steve Bough outlined some of the benefits which had been communicated by Maidenhead United, however, this was at the detriment to the land used by Maidenhead Rugby Club. The new stadium would use around 9 acres of the park, this followed a pattern where land had been lost to Braywick School and the leisure centre in recent years. Between 8 and 10 protected rugby pitches would be lost as part of the development, where over 160 young children enjoyed playing rugby. The club was expanding and already had to carefully manage the space it had well. The football club had informed the rugby club that if it could pay to rent the stadium, this was an additional cost that the rugby club could not afford. Steve Bough concluded the presentation by outlining why the rugby club was against the proposed move and development by Maidenhead United.

Councillor Baldwin expressed concern about the further loss of space at Braywick Park, he understood the use of the pitches from Maidenhead Rugby Club and why they were also concerned about the lack of space at the site.

Steve Bough said that the park was vitally important to the rugby club but was also regularly used by local residents for a variety of purposes. The open space would disappear if developments on the park went ahead.

Councillor G Jones asked if it was correct that Maidenhead United needed a new stadium to comply with EFL regulations.

Steve Bough was not aware of this, they needed a minimum capacity and the current average attendance was around 1,200. Facilities were present at York Road and the current stadium could be upgraded. However, Steve Bough said that the football club lacked the space at York Road for the business elements of the plan.

Councillor G Jones asked how many rugby pitches were used and owned by the rugby club.

Steve Bough estimated that it was between 17 and 20 pitches, there were over 600 children that played at the rugby club.

Councillor Singh commented that it was concerning to hear that there had been a lack of dialogue with the rugby club, the plan was for the council to lease the land to the football club and Councillor Singh felt that there should be a full consultation. Councillor Singh asked if the rugby club felt that there would be a solution before the planning application was submitted.

Steve Bough said that there had been little communication since the football club had first announced the proposal. There had been a meeting last month which had been focused on use of the new stadium for the rugby club to replace the lost rugby pitches. However, there was no exact details on the amount of usage the rugby club would be allowed and there had been no consultation done.

PRESENTATION FROM MAIDENHEAD ATHLETICS CLUB

Derek Philip-Xu, Chairman of Maidenhead Athletics Club, gave a presentation on the development from the perspective of the athletics club. The athletics club had been in Maidenhead for over 120 years, with 60 of those being based at Braywick. There were currently around 400 active members, with the existing 400m track used a number of times a week for both junior and senior training. The track suffered from a lack of maintenance, was not floodlit and was often prone to flooding. The football club had outlined their proposal for the new stadium development along with a new running track and athletics facilities and since then the athletics club had met regularly to discuss progress with the development. The running and athletics facilities that were being proposed included a 300m 4 lane running track, 100m 6 lane sprint straight, long jump, high jump and shot put facilities.

Derek Philip-Xu explained why a 400m track was not part of the plans. Maidenhead was currently well served by existing competition standard 400m tracks in the surrounding area. Consequently, compact facilities, such as the proposed 300m track, were more sustainable and cost effective. These facilities would enable the athletics club to run more community based athletics and running projects which were currently difficult to do at present with the poorly maintained and unlit facilities. There were a number of elements that the athletics club were currently discussing with the football club, before the final application was submitted.

Councillor Baldwin commented on the availability of 400m running tracks within the radius of Maidenhead. He questioned therefore why Maidenhead Athletics Club felt that there was a need for a new 300m track.

Derek Philip-Xu said that the club were often asked why the plan was not to build a 400m track. This was deemed too expensive and the cost to maintain and run a 300m track was more realistic. If there was no track in Maidenhead, the athletics club could not guarantee its own future.

Councillor Baldwin felt that this claim could also be made by Maidenhead Rugby Club, they would be losing some of their pitches as part of the proposed development.

Derek Philip-Xu said that from his understanding, the track was not being built on a rugby pitch. If the proposal did not go ahead, the athletics club would still have the 400m track but this would be unmaintained and was in a poor condition.

Steve Bough said that he had been told the athletics track would be built on some of the rugby pitches.

Councillor Singh asked who was responsible for the maintenance of the athletics track at the moment.

He was informed that this was the responsibility of RBWM, as the council owned the track.

Councillor Singh asked if the athletics club would have preferred for a 400m track to be included in the development proposal.

Derek Philip-Xu explained that during initial discussions with the football club, the aim had been for a 400m track. After considering the idea in more detail, it was decided that there was no need for a 400m track and a 300m track would still fulfil the needs of the athletics club.

Councillor Singh noted that a number of residents used the athletics track for free and were unable to travel to other areas which had a 400m track, they would be left without an athletics track to use for a number of years while the proposed development of the site took place.

Derek Philip-Xu said it was still unclear how long the overlap would be between there being no track and a new one being installed. The athletics club wanted the new track to be as accessible as possible for members of the public, however, there were issues like vandalism and it was important that the new track was protected.

UPDATE ON MAIDENHEAD REGENERATION

Ian Brazier-Dubber, Managing Director of RBWM Property Company, gave the Forum an update on various projects around the town. The car park in Vicus Way was now complete and would be opening shortly, it had been constructed within the anticipated time frame. On the Nicholsons Shopping Centre, the Property Company had received consent of the planning scheme to go ahead and there had been three days held for a public enquiry to confirm the Compulsory Purchase Orders. There was hope that a decision from the planning inspector would be communicated before Christmas but this could be received in early 2023. Should things progress as planned, the developers would be able to start on site in the autumn of 2023.

Over the summer, RBWM completed the sale of the Magnet Leisure Centre to the property partners for the site. The bridge over the A4, between the leisure centre and Sainsbury's car park, had been removed at the end of October. The site would become 351 residential units, of which 87 would be affordable units. Full demolition would be complete in January 2023, with a view for phase 1 of the site to be complete by summer 2025.

Councillor Baldwin asked what would happen to plans for the Nicholsons Shopping Centre, should RBWM not get the result they were hoping for from the planning inspector.

Ian Brazier-Dubber explained that the Compulsory Purchase Order was an independent decision, if the planning inspector decided that the order could not be granted, then the council would need to reconsider their plans for the centre and how to take the scheme forward. Planning consent for the scheme would remain in place.

Councillor Taylor mentioned the Vicus Way car park, concern had been raised by residents about how dark some areas of the road were. She asked if there was a condition in the planning permission which meant that the developers were required to add some additional lighting to the street.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the addition of two streetlights was part of the planning application, he would check this after the meeting.

ACTION – Ian Brazier-Dubber to check the condition on the Vicus Way car park planning permission and let Councillor Taylor know.

Councillor Taylor commented on the removal of the footbridge over the A4, from the road the covering over the opening where the bridge used to be looked temporary. She asked if there were any plans to improve this.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the second phase of the work would involve a permanent piece of the façade to cover the hole, this would fit in with the rest of the building.

Councillor G Jones felt that the side of the Sainsbury's building was outdated and could do with some maintenance.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that he had been involved in some initial discussions about this, Sainsbury's would need planning consent to do work on the cladding.

Councillor Singh added that the cladding needed to be replaced due to no longer meeting health and safety requirements. It was good to hear that Vicus Way car park was complete, he asked what the final cost of the project had been and how many EV charging points would be in place.

Ian Brazier-Dubber confirmed that the budget for the car park was £12 million, it had been completed at a cost of £11.9 million and therefore had been completed under budget. There would be 53 EV charging points, with a total of around 500 spaces.

Councillor Singh questioned whether this was too low, as the sale of new petrol and diesel cars would be banned from 2030.

Ian Brazier-Dubber explained that EV charging points were expensive to install and also the supply of electricity to the car park needed to be considered.

Councillor Singh asked how many affordable units would be part of the Landings development.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the Landings development was a 'build to rent' scheme, all properties would be rented on the open market at market rent.

Councillor Singh commented on the Compulsory Purchase Orders and he had heard that some of the objectors were considered a judicial review. He asked what the process would be.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that there was 42 days after planning consent was granted for someone to make a judicial review. However, these reviews were considering how decisions were made.

Councillor Singh highlighted that the lights on Marlow Road by the community centre had been switched off, it would be useful to turn these lights back on to improve safety in the area.

ACTION – Ian Brazier-Dubber to enquire about the streetlights in this area and report back to Councillor Singh.

Councillor Bond asked about the proposed pedestrian crossing on St Cloud Way, which would be replacing the footbridge which had now been removed. He asked if this was planned to be for pedestrians only, or pedestrians and cyclists. Councillor Bond queried whether the footpath would link to the entrance of Sainsbury's, as this was currently not possible unless residents walked along the verge of the road.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that through section 106 funding received from the development, the crossing could be funded. He understood that the crossing would be for use by both pedestrians and cyclists.

HOUSING SOLUTIONS INITIATIVES

Jackie Fearon, Director of Resident Services and Community at Housing Solutions, gave the Forum some information on the initiatives Housing Solutions had in place to support residents over the winter period. There was a resident support fund and events were planned, for example focus on the health and wellbeing of older men in partnership with 'Men's Matters'. Work was also being done with RBWM and the NHS on the world cafes which were currently running across the borough. Housing Solutions had increased the number of organisations which it worked with. A social prescribing trial was currently underway, which looked to provide person centred support to explore with residents what is important to them to improve health and wellbeing. This was designed to help reduce pressure on GP services. A number of cost of living pilots were also being run, in relation to things like increased bill costs and providing support to those that were struggling.

Councillor Baldwin asked how much interaction Housing Solutions had with the RBWM 'here to help' programme.

Jackie Fearon confirmed that Housing Solutions was working closely with the council so that there was no duplication and that funding was distributed as widely as possible.

Councillor Taylor mentioned the social prescribing pilot and asked if the scheme was successful, would Housing Solutions look to make it permanent. She asked if Housing Solutions had the potential to catch families 'which fell through the gap'.

Jackie Fearon said that there had been some successful examples from the scheme and she was keen to expand the scheme beyond the initial pilot. GPs were not necessarily best placed to deal with calls related to social prescribing, repeat callers to Housing Solutions were able to share a good amount of information with the team.

Councillor Stimson said that she felt Housing Solutions were being more attentive in their responses which was promising. She outlined a project that was running with the NHS on green and blue social prescribing, this could be something that Housing Solutions would be interested in getting involved with. Councillor Stimson said that she was worried about people not turning their heating on which would increase the likelihood of dampness and illness which could occur as a result.

Jackie Fearon said that an estate services panel would be set up which combined staff from Housing Solutions and residents, to consider the environment and to consider how things could be improved. On damp and mould, Housing Solutions were doing a lot of work in reaching out to residents who had experienced issues with mould. An assessment could be completed and the resident support fund was there to support residents that needed additional support.

Councillor Bhangra asked how many residents had contacted Housing Solutions and how many residents had the organisation helped as a result.

Jackie Fearon said that Housing Solutions had helped around 284 residents, through various routes and methods.

THAMES VALLEY POLICE UPDATE

Jon Groenen introduced himself as the new local area police commander at Thames Valley Police. He had been in position for two months already and we would remain for another two months before a new commander would take over in January 2023. Dan Bennet was the new inspector for the geographical neighbourhood teams, he was tasked with improving the way the police communicated with the local community. The Thames Valley alert system was not running to the standard that was seen under Jeff Pick, work was being done with an analyst to try and provide the same detail on crime stats. A priority for Jon Groenen was for the police to improve the way it engaged, he had recently met with the Cabinet Member for Public Protection and the Leader of the Council. Dan Bennet was reviewing the situation to ensure that the right officers were attending the right meetings.

Councillor Baldwin commented on the use of nitrous oxide, he felt that the police needed to target those who were oversupplying the market and supplying repeat customers.

Jon Groenen said that there were no police powers on possession of nitrous oxide, the police were working in partnership with the council to collate any evidence which could be needed and reviewing the possibility of a PSPO being required.

Councillor Baldwin said that the sales records of the two main suppliers needed to be reviewed by the police, it was the organisations who were profiting which needed to be prosecuted.

Jon Groenen said that it needed to be considered along with other priorities for the police, the police did not have the resources at a national level to look into it.

Councillor G Jones made reference to the Thames Valley neighbourhood newsletter, residential burglary had increased by 11%, business burglary by 3%, personal robbery by 33%, violence and injury up 10%, sexual offences up 31%, drug trafficking down 41%, theft of vehicle up 49% and theft from vehicle up 10%. He was surprised and concerned about the significant increase in all types of crime.

Jon Groenen said it was a national issue and it was a concern that crime had increased. However, there had been an increase in positive outcomes from offences that had been committed.

Councillor Singh said that he was pleased to hear that the alerts system would be improved, he had been disappointed to see Jeff Pick leave. Councillor Singh was concerned about anti-social behaviour in the town centre, there had been a number of bike thefts at the train station and the two top levels of the Broadway car park had been closed due to recent incidents. He asked what the level of policing was at weekends and what was being done to tackle some of the anti-social behaviour issues.

Jon Groenen said that the police were aware of a number of new night time economy venues which had opened in the town centre, there would be a review of whether policing needed to return to the town centre. If it was decided that there needed to be a night time resource in Maidenhead, this would be found from other areas which did not have a night time economy.

ACTION – Jon Groenen to provide an update on the Broadway car park and plans to tackle bike theft at the train station after the meeting.

Robyn Bunyan, Maidenhead Town Manager, said that she attended the night time economy briefing, which meet on a weekly basis. Any issues in Maidenhead were being picked up effectively and there was also a strong Pub Watch presence.

Councillor Singh asked if there was a community warden presence in the town centre at weekends.

Robyn Bunyan said that she was unaware of whether there was a community warden presence, there were Street Angels in Windsor and there was a plan for this to be rolled out in Maidenhead too.

Councillor Baldwin confirmed that the street angels were active in Maidenhead.

MAIDENHEAD TOWN MANAGER UPDATE

Robyn Bunyan discussed the issue of theft in the town centre, there was a significant issue. There was a plan to reintroduce the Shops in Maidenhead Against Retail Theft (SMART) scheme, this originally existed before the pandemic and opened up a communication network between retailers. It would also help to ensure that crimes were reported effectively. SMART was planned to meet quarterly with representatives from the business community along with an ongoing forum online. There would also be an audit of the town link radios. Looking ahead to winter, Robyn Bunyan was keen to ensure that retailers and the local community were aware of what was in place to support them. The Royal Borough Christmas guide had now been completed and launched. On footfall, Robyn Bunyan shared the data from October, Maidenhead was down 1.1% compared to 2019 which was pleasing and residents were using the town in a positive way as a result. Car parking usage was at 90% for Grove Road, 40% for Hines Meadow, 60% for Nicholsons, 20% for Stafferton Way and 90% for West Street. Robyn Bunyan concluded her update by encouraging residents to shop local over the festive period.

Councillor Baldwin asked for a progress update on the Maidenhead town team.

Robyn Bunyan explained that the town team was pushing forward, there had been some delays as officers determined the best approach to take. There would be a period for the vision and charter relaunch and work would be done to recruit town team representatives. The aim was for the first meeting of the town team to take place in March 2023.

Councillor Baldwin highlighted that the paper had been agreed by Cabinet in June 2022, he asked why the town team had not yet launched.

Robyn Bunyan clarified that the initial timeline was that the town team was planned to be launched in September. However, the whole of September had been focused on Operation London Bridge but there had also been a number of issues to work through, to ensure the town team was launched at the right time. Town team representatives would be recruited before the inaugural meeting in March. While the town team had not yet formally been launched, a significant amount of work had been undertaken behind the scenes.

Councillor Bhangra said it was good to see footfall improving in the town centre, he asked if there were any new businesses due to be opening in the near future.

Robyn Bunyan highlighted that Knead Pizza would be launching before Christmas, there were a few things happening on the high street. There was some interest in the empty units on the high street, details of which were confidential at the moment. Tesco and Superdrug would be opening on the high street, the latter of which had moved from the Nicholsons Shopping Centre.

Councillor Singh felt that it was good to see the SMART scheme returning along with the retail radio system. Cost of living was having an effect on residents and work needed to be done to

understand why some people were shoplifting and why there had been such a big increase in recent months. Councillor Singh asked how the footfall data was collected.

Robyn Bunyan explained that footfall was recorded using a static camera on the high street, there were plans for a new system to be put in place with a new provider. This would allow officers to analyse things like dwell time which would allow for a more sophisticated picture on footfall.

Councillor Singh asked if retailers were doing well overall.

Robyn Bunyan said that it was a mixed view, the town partnership was there to support retailers. Things were looking positive.

Councillor Singh commented on the upcoming Christmas light switch on outside the Town Hall. He informed Robyn Bunyan that there was a lack of bins around the site.

Robyn Bunyan confirmed that she was aware of the issue, she would bring it up with different officers at the council to see what could be done.

Councillor Taylor said that there was a bin on the high street which had recently had a fire in the cigarette section and needed to be repaired.

Robyn Bunyan said that she would report this, she encouraged residents and Members to let her know of any other problems and she would report them to the relevant team to deal with.

ITEM SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

Suggestions for future meetings could be sent by email to mark.beeley@rbwm.gov.uk.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 12th January 2023, starting at 6.30pm.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.50 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....