

MAIDENHEAD TOWN FORUM

Thursday 1 June 2023

Present: Councillors Gurch Singh (Chair), Helen Taylor (Vice-Chair), George Shaw, Clive Baskerville, Kashmir Singh, Adam Bermange and Siân Martin

Also in attendance: Councillor Jack Douglas

Also In Attendance (Virtually): Councillor Maureen Hunt

Officers: Laurence Ellis and Robyn Bunyan

Officers (Virtually): Ian Brazier-Dubber

Apologies for Absence

The Chair, Councillor Gurch Singh, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Forum members then introduced themselves.

Apologies were received from Councillor Reynolds, who was substituted by Councillor Bermange.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interests were received.

Minutes

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Maidenhead Town Update

Robyn Bunyan, Maidenhead Town Manager, briefly explained to the new Councillors that her role as Town Manager was to support Maidenhead's business community as well as its residents to improve Maidenhead as a place to live, work and visit. She then gave the Town Manager update which covered April 2023.

Starting with the High Street footfall, the monthly footfall report showed that the total number of visitors to Maidenhead was 464,000, with Saturday 22 April which coincided with the Maidenhead Waterways Fun Day. She stated this was an example of a community event taking place in the Town Centre and ultimately boosting footfall and the local economy. In comparison to 2019 (pre-Covid), High Street footfall had declined by 2.4% in 2023, which was a good position compared to South East England which experienced a decline in footfall of 11.9% between 2019 and 2023.

The best footfall, Robyn Bunyan explained, was Thursday to Saturday weekly, which coincided with high activity on the High Street, such as the Produce Market, weekend trade, specialist markets (e.g., Vegan Market) and community events.

On car parking usage, the total car parking visits for April 2023 was 49,855, which was a decline compared to 2019. In spite of Broadway car park being closed, there was capacity for parking within the Town Centre, such as Hines Meadow car park, which saw a 25.6% increase

in usage in 2023 compared to 2022. In total, parking had declined by only 4.4% across Maidenhead's car parks, including the Braywick Leisure Centre, Grove Road, Hines Meadow, Stafferton Way, West Street and Vicus Way. A lot of parking had been transferred from the Broadway car park to other car parks. While there was demand for surface-level car parks like Grove Road and West Street, there was active encouragement to use Hines Meadow car park.

Robyn Bunyan informed that resident's discount through the RingGo parking app was used 1,533 times in April 2023, which had recently been extended to Hines Meadow car park. Resident's discount had been gradually increasing. Hines Meadow had made up 48% of parking usage in April 2023.

Robyn Bunyan notified that the parking figures did not include permit holders using the car parks as these were not recorded through the parking machines; therefore, she was working to get a clearer picture of this data.

Regarding social media, Robyn Bunyan informed that the Facebook page for the Make Maidenhead social brand, where residents could find news on events in Maidenhead, had 6,686 followers as of April 2023; meanwhile, the Instagram page had 1,700 followers in the same period. In April 2023, the Make Maidenhead Facebook page reach was 5,925 (an organic reach without paid advertising) a 10.6% increase from March 2023.

Robyn Bunyan explained that she continued to host the 'Where Can I Park?' Campaign, which sought to highlight car parks across Maidenhead. She stated that the campaign had been well engaged with the community and continued to be engaged with.

The highlights of April 2023 were the Rotary Easter Fun Day and The Waterways Fun Day, which provided the highest footfall of April 2023.

Robyn Bunyan then explained some of her activities. She was undertaking an audit, review and update of wayfinding around the Town Centre, the riverside and the Green Way; and was engaging with wayfinding specialists to enhance and improve wayfinders. This had received funding from the UK SPF (Shared Prosperity Fund).

The Maidenhead Town Team Initiative was launched in the previous week, whereby around 40 people gathered to discuss about making Maidenhead a better place to live, work and visit. There was a lot of pf positivity from the meeting and a lot of ideas were suggested on how to enhance the look and feel as well as how to reinstate some Town pride. She informed that anyone was welcomed to be involved in the Town Team.

A large-scale project occurring in Maidenhead was working with a company called Access Able on creating access-ability guides which informs visitors on the accessibility across the town before visiting an area so that they could be prepared. 25 venues across the town had signed up and were taking part in this scheme. The plan was to launch Access Able in Maidenhead by the end of 2023. The scheme was also taking place in Ascot as well.

Councillor Baskerville asked when the Maidenhead Library 50th Anniversary celebrations would start and whether she was aware of any celebrations on offer. Robyn Bunyan replied that the celebrations would be from 21st July 2023 and would include event, such as author talks and a silent disco, using the Library Square and amphitheatre to host the events. She also informed that the anniversary celebration would also incorporate the 50th anniversary of the Wombles. More information on the celebrations would be released in the coming weeks.

Councillor Bermange asked if the Town Team was focussing on long-term or short-term issues. Robyn Bunyan answered that the Town Team were doing short-term 'quick win' schemes, like planting and some events, and long-term projects. She explained that the Town Team was focused on community engagement to ensure Maidenhead's community came

together and do various projects for the town, both short-term smaller projects and long-term larger projects. She also explained that there was also the Maidenhead Town Partnership which received support from local developers and key partners who place funds to help deliver larger projects.

Councillor Martin asked if Access Able could be tied to shop mobility. Robyn Bunyan replied that Access Able would be working with shop mobility. As part of the launch of Access Able, accessible guides would be promoted to shop mobility to inform visitors.

Councillor Taylor, Vice-Chair, asked if residents parking at Hines Meadow had affected people's journeys and footfall. Robyn Bunyan replied that there had been a change in people's journeys around the Town Centre which was likely driven by the car park usage and the way the town was changing, namely new areas to visit. There was also a lot of footfall moving towards Waterside Quarter. With the High Street, there had been some dips in footfall, but footfall nevertheless was moving around. In spite of no footfall into the Broadway car park, there continued to be a movement of people nearby.

Councillor Taylor then asked if there were any discussions on shuttle buses to help residents who could not walk from available car parks on the outskirts of Maidenhead to the Town Centre. Robyn Bunyan replied that she had not had those discussion and that conversations surrounding this would be for the Transport and Parking Teams. She was aware and concerned about residents with mobility issues who were unable to cope with use of Hines Meadow. At the moment, a solution had not been found yet, but Robyn Bunyan added that it was worth having a discussion to find one.

Councillor Douglass asked what the timescale regarding the update to the wayfinders and signage. He also asked if the funding for the updating of the wayfinders would cover the repairing of signages and monoliths, adding that there was one on Moorbridge Road had been damaged. Robyn Bunyan answered that all finger posts, signposts and monoliths were part of the wayfinding strategy whereby every sign across Maidenhead was being audited and updated. Regarding the monoliths, she explained that the plan for the monoliths were to make them more simplified; showcase, for example, green spaces and leisure areas; and add notice information to inform residents on what was happening in Maidenhead. On the timescale, Roby Bunyan explained that the funding needed to be spent by 20th March 2024, but she was seeking to get it done earlier.

The Chair asked if the bins would be changed as well, stating that many bins were in a terrible state. Robyn Bunyan replied that bins did not fall under her remit and instead fell under the Waste Team. Nevertheless, the issues were being identified amongst the Waste Team.

The Chair then asked if Robyn Bunyan would be doing some decluttering of the street signs. She replied that there would be decluttering if they were wayfinders. If they were highway, parking or enforcement signage, she was uncertain as there was potential legality for those signs being placed there. She suggested that if she was sent an image of the sign, she would be able to tell if she and her team could refurbish it or not.

Councillor Shaw asked if demographic information could be collected with the new sources of data for footfall, elaborating that he had received concerns from elderly residents that vertical car parking would disproportionately affect them. Robyn Bunyan replied that deep dive demographic data required additional and expensive to which her team were not committed to at the moment. The collected data, she explained, was superior to what was received before, but it did not reveal the deep dive demographic. In spite of this, her team had an Economic Growth Development Officer who was investigating the demographic data of Maidenhead. She offered to arrange for contact between Councillor Shaw and Economic Growth Development Officer.

(Robyn Bunyan had left the meeting at 7:13pm)

RBWM Property Company Update

Ian Brazier-Dubber, Managing Director of RBWM Property Company, started off explaining to the new Councillors that the RBWM Property Company was a wholly-owned company of the Borough which provided property services, asset management for all corporate assets and commercial assets of the Borough, and manage the development partnerships with companies like Cala Homes and Countryside Homes. The Company was also involved in regeneration projects which were mainly focused around Maidenhead.

On the Broadway car park, Ian Brazier-Dubber informed that the Broadway car park would remain close in the foreseeable. In the meantime, further inspections with a technical working team had been established to look at the project management of the car park process. The technical work, the costs around the car park and the appropriate outcome for Broadway would be brought forward in a Cabinet paper around the end of July 2023 to discuss the strategy and then establish a decision for the car park.

Ian Brazier-Dubber explained that the key recommendation at the moment was that Broadway car park was at the end of its economic life for a number of years and the balance of cost in terms of repair were outweighed by the lesser cost of demolition and the replacement of a surface car park or a temporary small level car park. Acknowledging some frustration regarding this, he explained that the site was difficult to deal with as it was surrounded by the Broadway, which had the ongoing Hub construction, to the south; King's Street to the west; Brock Lane and Queen Street to the east; and the Nixon Centre in the north. Based on this, Ian Brazier-Dubber explained that the plan was to forward a report to Cabinet and then Full Council in July 2023 with the recommendation for demolition.

On shop mobility, Ian Brazier-Dubber explained that the Property Company the Asset Management Team were working on behalf of the Borough and other teams, such as the Parking Management Team and the Highways Team, to relocate shop availability. The identified location was to West Street to re-provide shop mobility. This was because it was the flattest and safest protected zone in which people with a range of disabilities would be able to access the High Street. A short study was taking place regarding any changes which were required for access on the highway and pavement on West Street. Ian Brazier-Dubber expected to have this approved in August to September 2023 and then subsequently implemented.

Regarding development changes in the Borough, there was Countryside joint venture development in which a range of sites owned by the Borough were being developed. These included landscaping works on Library Square and the former Magnet Leisure Centre sites which would include 351 residential units (20 of which would be affordable homes). The building of the affordable homes was expected to be completed by September 2024.

Ian Brazier-Dubber also reported that there were planning applications submitted or being submitted for the Barclays Scheme, Taylor Wimpy and Cala Homes.

Angela Clark, Chair of the Disability and Inclusion Forum, asked what the timeframe would be for when shop mobility would be functioning in West Street once it was approved in September 2023. Ian Brazier-Dubber answered that the objective was deliver on this by November 2023 at the latest, after the expenditure was approved and then a 12-to-16-week implementation process.

Regarding the Magnet Centre site, Councillor Hunt asked if there was another method to do the developments, such as digging footings, rather than the current piling method which would create a lot of noise and therefore affect nearby homes.

Ian Brazier-Dubber replied that as part of the planning application process, to enable to meet the Borough's parking requirements, the developers decided to dig a basement to provide both parking storage waste management and building facilities. Due to the range and

distribution of massing, heights and densities some of the units, he explained that piling was a very traditional way to build both substantial protection for a basement as well as enough bearing load to support the height of the buildings going above them. Ian Brazier-Dubber added that as part of the planning process, the developers would have had to submit a construction management plan which would have included noise management and time limits on piling. He also informed that it was expected that all the heavy piling work would be completed by Christmas 2023, in which building would subsequently take place.

Councillor Bermange asked for clarification regarding the Countryside partnership developments along York Road. Ian Brazier-Dubber explained that relationship with developers involved an overarching agreement regarding the use of Borough's corporate assets; and when sites which were deemed to be vacant and/or the developer had a proposal for those sites, they would have to develop an initial design scheme. In the York Road area, the three sites encompassed the buildings immediately south of the Town Hall (including Library Square), the small site at the corner of York Road, adjacent to the former Desborough bowl site and the Grove Street car park.

Regarding West Street car park, Councillor Taylor asked if the expenditure would cover, for example, improving pavement accessibility and signage. Ian Brazier-Dubber replied that the expenditure would have to cover all costs to deliver shop mobility and changes to the car park, including widening, flattening and reprofiling some pavement and curb lines, electrical power for charging mobility scooters, and fresh water for washing and changing facilities.

(Ian Brazier-Dubber had left the meeting at 7:35pm)

Item Suggestions for Future Forums

The Chair informed that he would like to open up the Forum to increase resident engagement, namely officers attending and answering any questions and concerns from residents.

Citing the Constitution, Councillor Taylor would like to explore expanding the Forum's responsibilities, namely decision-making and spending money as delegated by Cabinet resolution in unparished areas. She mentioned that the Lead Member for Finance confirmed that the Forum would be able to have a budget providing there was money available. She also suggested to start with a small budget on a specific area. The Chair liked the idea.

ACTION: Maidenhead Town Forum to investigate the Forum's delegated powers.

Citing the minutes from the previous meeting, Councillor Baskerville suggested an item on the drop-off at Maidenhead Railway Station. He also highlighted that 1st April 2024 would be the 50th Anniversary for the establishment of RBWM and suggested some sort of celebration to mark the occasion.

Councillor Bermange suggested to invite the Neighbourhood Forum to a meeting where they could present a progress report as they had recently brought forward a Neighbourhood Plan. He also suggested an item on biodiversity in urban areas, such as tree management in urban areas.

With the 50th Anniversary of Maidenhead Library approaching, Councillor Shaw suggested an item on the future plans for Maidenhead Library or even other libraries. The Chair suggested to bring officers from the Libraries Team or the Cabinet Member for the libraries.

On inadequate parking at Maidenhead Train Station, Councillor Kashmir Singh suggested an item on disabled parking at the train station. The Chair replied that this could be discussed alongside the Train Station drop-off.

Citing the minutes from the last meeting, Councillor Martin suggested an item on the parking and A4 crossing at Holmanleaze.

Councillor Bermange raised that many residents were frustrated with roadworks, namely the coordination and the way they were carried out. He suggested a discussion on the permit scheme used by Highways, particularly how this worked and leveraging this scheme in the best way possible.

The items suggested for future Forum meetings:

- Drop-off at Maidenhead Railway Station
- Neighbourhood Forum
- 50th Anniversary on the establishment of RBWM
- Biodiversity in urban areas
- Future plans of Maidenhead Library
- Disabled parking at Maidenhead Railway Station
- A4 crossing
- Highways permit scheme

Dates of Future Meetings

The Forum noted that the next meeting would be held on 17 July 2023 (6:30pm). The meeting will be in-person in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Taylor asked if the YouTube comments section, which were conventionally turned off, could be turned on to allow residents who were watching the livestream to engage and ask questions. Laurence Ellis, Democratic Services Officer, replied that the likely main reason the YouTube comments were disabled was to prevent “unflattering comments” against Councillors from being posted. He stated he would investigate but it was unlikely.

ACTION: Laurence Ellis to investigate the use of YouTube comments during meeting livestreams.

The meeting, which began at 6.31 pm, finished at 7.56 pm

Chair.....

Date.....