

MAIDENHEAD TOWN FORUM

WEDNESDAY, 31 MARCH 2021

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Samantha Rayner, Councillor Donna Stimson, Councillor Simon Bond, Councillor John Bowden, Jeff Pick (Thames Valley Police), Ian Rose (Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum) and Andrew Ingram (Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum)

Officers: Mark Beeley, Steph James, Angela Huisman, Shilpa Manek and Barbara Richardson and Tamsin Traill

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received. Councillor Baldwin had informed Democratic Services that he would need to leave the meeting at 7.30pm.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st February 2021 were approved as an accurate record.

The Chairman updated the Forum on the progress of the Borough Local Plan (BLP). The council had recently received the planning inspector's advice, which advised of the modifications which were required. The BLP would then go out for public consultation again and once the inspector had considered the responses, the plan would go to Full Council for consideration. There were minor changes required to:

- St Marys Walk
- Maidenhead Station
- St Clouds Way
- Spencers Farm
- St Marks Hospital

All other sites had been agreed by the inspector.

MAIDENHEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Ian Rose, Chair of the Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum (MNF), gave a presentation on the progress of the Maidenhead Neighbourhood Plan (MNP). A neighbourhood plan put in place planning policy for a neighbourhood area to guide future development, focussing on the use and development of the land. The plan could deal with a wide range of issues (such as housing, employment, design, heritage and transport) or it might focus on one or two issues only. Most areas of RBWM already had a neighbourhood plan; either designated areas, with work on a plan ongoing, or adopted with the plan agreed and part of planning policy. Maidenhead was currently the only area of RBWM which was undesignated.

All neighbourhood plans had to be compliant with the overall National Planning Policy Framework. The Borough Local Plan, other neighbourhood plans and the potential Maidenhead Neighbourhood Plan all needed to fit inside the national policy, it was important that the plans complimented rather than conflicted with each other.

Ian Rose discussed the history of the Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum. Formally, the Forum was not an official body until it had received designation but it had over 60 members, 450 email subscribers and had its own written constitution. The neighbourhood area and the neighbourhood forum were two different things and were formally separate designations. Forum designation was only required for unparished areas, like Maidenhead. The Forum had originally been designated with Cox Green but due to a change in national policy in 2019, there needed to be a split due to Cox Green being its own parish area and the Forum had to reapply for designation. However, since then there had not been much useful dialogue with the council. Dialogue had been started for redesignation and Ian Rose said that it would be great if the Maidenhead Town Forum endorsed the direction of travel.

The Chairman said that he had started a neighbourhood plan for the borough when he was part of Bray Parish Council. He supported the concept of neighbourhood plans and wanted it to be a success. The previous Interim Head of Planning stated in the designation refusal letter that the MNF was “not considered to represent a relevant body.” The current Head of Planning had asked whether there should be a plan for the whole of the town or if it should be split into certain areas.

Councillor Singh said that he welcomed groups such as the Maidenhead Neighbourhood Forum. He picked up on the comments of Ian Rose who said that there had not been much dialogue with the council, he asked what engagement the group had attempted with RBWM.

Ian Rose said that the neighbourhood plan had been discussed with the previous Interim Head of Planning. The rejection letter was fairly detailed but since then the Head of Planning had changed and so also had the leadership of the MNF. There had been one discussion with the current Head of Planning but it had been difficult to arrange meetings. Ian Rose felt that both sides were willing but it had been slow.

The Chairman said that a meeting with himself, as Lead Member for Planning, the Head of Planning and the MNF had been arranged for 9th April 2021.

Councillor Baskerville asked if parish councils had been able to have their say and if everyone was on board with the plan for Maidenhead.

Ian Rose explained that Maidenhead was unparished but areas around the edge of Maidenhead, like Cox Green and Braywick were parished.

Councillor Taylor left the meeting.

Councillor McWilliams asked how the MNF attracted the widest demographic possible to ensure that Maidenhead was represented accurately.

Ian Rose said that the MNF had increased its social media presence, with a survey also being run about certain planning applications to gain an understanding of what residents' views were. The MNF had also written to every faith group in the area but had not received any replies.

Andrew Ingram, also from MNF, explained that it was hard to engage residents when it was not clear what the MNF would be involved in and what the key issues would be.

Councillor McWilliams said that Maidenhead had several different architectural styles, layouts and communities. He questioned how well a neighbourhood plan would work in Maidenhead and how the MNF could see it working.

Ian Rose said that there was a strong relationship with the Borough Local Plan and that the framework allowed space for a neighbourhood plan to influence things like the designation of green spaces, the historic built environment and sustainable transport routes.

Councillor McWilliams suggested that a potential MNP could also benefit community projects through things like CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) payments. The plan could also have an influence over things like architectural style.

Jeffery Pick said that he had a newsletter which he distributed to a significant number of residents. He was happy to include things that were of community interest and suggested the MNF get in touch if they were interested.

Councillor Singh asked if there was anything RBWM could do to help improve the demographics on the MNF, potentially by approaching the RBWM Communications Team.

The Chairman explained that the MNP needed to be approved for it to go ahead with the decision all down to planning policy.

UPDATE ON REGENERATION

Barbara Richardson, Managing Director of RBWM Property Company, gave the Forum a presentation on the latest regeneration and development around Maidenhead.

York Road:

- Site area: 1.53 hectares (3.77 acres)
- 229 units
- 38% affordable
- 20,000 sq. flexible commercial space
- New civic square
- Relocation of Heritage Centre
- Relocation of Community Centre
- Start on Site – March 2019
- Phase I, II and III
- Practical Completion of final phase 2025

St Clouds Way (Subject to Planning):

- Site area: 2.5 hectares (6.18 acres)
- 424 units Subject to Planning Permission
- Phase I – 333 homes
- Phase II – 91 homes
- 30% affordable
- Estimated Start on Site Autumn 2021
- Estimated Practical Completion final phase 2026

Reform Road (Subject to Planning):

- Site area: 1.71 hectares (4.23 acres)
- 30,000 sq. ft health hub
- Potential for >30,000 sq. ft office
- Potential for some residential
- Combination of Clyde House and Waldeck House
- Estimated Start on Site 2023
- Estimated Practical Completion 2026

West Street (Subject to Planning):

- Site area: 0.21 hectares (0.53 acres)
- Up to 141 units Subject to Planning Permission
- Residential/commercial mixed use
- Non-residential up to 25,000 sq. ft
- 30% affordable housing
- Land assembly opportunities would enhance the scheme
- Estimated Start on Site 2024
- Estimated Practical Completion 2026

Maidenhead Golf Course (Subject to Planning):

- Site area: 53 hectares (133 acres)
- Establish contractual joint venture to deliver 2,000 dwellings, including associated infrastructure and education provision.
- 30% affordable housing requirement across the site.
- Joint Venture partner to secure planning permission.
- Deliver a scheme that brings forward placemaking with sustainable development.
- Estimated start on site April 2023
- 12-15 year build out programme

Ray Mill Road East (Subject to Planning):

- Site area: 1.3 hectares (3.4 acres)
- Up to 78 units Subject to Planning Permission
- 47% affordable
- Open space provision
- Planning submitted April 2019
- Planning resubmitted December 2020
- Start on site September 2021
- Practical Completion February 2022
- Biodiversity to take into consideration

School House, West Dean (Subject to Planning):

- Up to 4 units
- 100% affordable
- Priority for Key workers
- External to Riverside School
- Use as temporary accommodation during planning process
- Access issues to overcome
- Permission from Secretary of State
- Permission from Department of Education
- Start on Site Q3 2022
- Practical Completion Q1 2023

St Edmunds House (Subject to Planning):

- Up to 14 units
- 100% affordable housing
- Existing vacant lodge house
- Adjacent to St Luke's School
- Land assembly to take into consideration
- Site restrictions to take into account
- Permission from Secretary of State
- Start on site Q2 2021
- Practical Completion Q4 2022

Nicolson's Shopping Centre:

- Site area: >2 hectares (5 acres)

- 1.5 acres of public realm
- 250,000 sq. Ft NIA of office space
- 60 new retail units
- >600+ residential properties
- New MSCP
- Planning submitted May 2020
- Resolution to grant 3rd March 2021

Alexandra Coach and Car Park, Windsor (Subject to Planning):

- Site area: Coach & Car Park 1.85 hectares (4.58 acres).
- Site area: Baths Island 0.93 hectares (2.3 acres).
- Replacement public parking
- Replacement Coach Park
- Coach drop off/pick up in town centre
- Mixed use development.
- Joint Venture Partner Selection to start 2021
- Public Consultation on Vision for Windsor 2022

Councillor Baldwin left the meeting.

Barbara Richardson gave an update on the Landings site in Maidenhead. It was being developed by a company called Hub but they had recently encountered land assembly issues. There would be a Compulsory Purchase Order enquiry on the week beginning 28th June 2021 which would last 3 to 4 days.

The Chairman commented that he was delighted at the amount of affordable housing being provided in Maidenhead.

Councillor Singh asked about the site in York Road, with residents due to be moving in shortly. He asked how many of the units had been sold and also if Sienna Court, in the Nicolson's Shopping Centre development, had been purchased by the council.

Barbara Richardson said that 38% of the units had been sold to Housing Solutions. Initially, there was not a huge amount of interest in the marketing suite but the interest quickly increased when prospective buyers were shown an actual flat in one of the buildings. On average, around 4 units a month were being sold and there were also several reservations. Sales had been going well with around 40% sold but the final two phases of the project had not yet started. Sienna Court was now owned by the council, with the leaseholder surrendering their lease due to the pandemic.

Councillor McWilliams hoped that the issues with the Landings site could be resolved or the enquiry would be needed. He asked how quickly a decision could be made.

Barbara Richardson explained that it was made at the end of the enquiry period, which was planned to last between three to four days.

Councillor Singh asked if there were any funding issues with the Landing site. He asked if an agreement had been reached with the nightclub.

Barbara Richardson explained that Hub had the funding ready to go, they were just waiting for the outcome of the enquiry in the summer. The nightclub had been offered space on the ground floor of the Broadway car park, with the developer agreeing to cover the capital cost of fitting out the new location. Two elements were still outstanding, the ability to have a smoking area at the nightclub and also the amount of space it required.

TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

Steph James, Service Lead for Economic Growth, explained that from the first lockdown being announced the role of the town partnership was to help disseminate information to businesses. There had been assistance provided to the RBWM Business Rates team in administering grants and relief to eligible businesses while signposting was promoted to businesses to make them aware of support available.

Support had been provided to the local community to ensure that information was received during lockdown. There had been a number of different social media campaigns via Enjoy Maidenhead, Make Maidenhead, Visit Windsor, RBWM and Windsor and Royal Borough Museum.

The Covid-19 response involved:

- Continued support to businesses via visitor management, town management and museums and arts teams.
- Coordinated communications strategy via RBWM corporate account, Visit Windsor, Make Maidenhead and Windsor & Royal Borough Museum accounts.
- Content moved online during lockdown to continue profile of services and provide residents with information and entertainment.
- Online campaigns including 'Shop Local, Support Local', 'Independents Day' and 'Rediscover Your Royal Borough'.
- My Royal Borough established to support borough wide communications and help support businesses.
- To date a total of 2812 grants have been allocated totalling £13,286,290.62.

It had been clear during the past year that residents wanted to shop local where possible. While footfall in the town centre was still down, it was slowly increasing as lockdown restrictions were relaxed. The current vacancy rate was 17% which equated to 48 units. A comprehensive reopening strategy had been launched based on "don't let your guard down", which utilised the boroughs unique royal status. The Covid-19 recovery strategy involved three main strands:

- Empowering communities to thrive
- Creating great places to live and work
- Building lasting partnerships with businesses

The challenges that were still ahead included:

- Re-opening the town centre safely
- Supporting existing businesses
- Maintaining vitality and vibrancy during Covid-19 recovery and extensive regeneration
- Keeping the community engaged and providing them with the opportunity to support the recovery of their town

Councillor Singh thanked Steph James for all her work. He commented on the street art and mural in Maidenhead as it had recently been vandalised. It could be a good idea to implement things like graffiti boards.

Steph James said that it was shame that the mural had been tagged but she was in contact with artist James Maddison to see if he could restore it. She would be happy to support more opportunities for artwork in the town centre.

LIBRARY TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

Angela Huisman, Library and Resident Contact Lead, gave the Forum a presentation on the Library Transformation Strategy. The library service vision was underpinned by six key strategic priorities:

- Facilitating opportunities for young people to make a positive contribution to society
- Empowering people to be healthy, skilled and independent
- Helping to shape vibrant, strong and resilient communities

- Assisting with economic recovery and aspiration, fulfil potential
- Ensuring well-managed resources were delivering value for the community by the community
- Giving access to trusted information without a commercial or partisan bias

The proposed LTS (Library Transformation Strategy) outlined how the library service would continue to adapt in an agile way to changing circumstances, opportunities, challenges and demands. There was an aim to be clear about the priorities and outcomes for the service, with an understanding of the changing environment in which libraries operated. The strategy also aimed to be creative and realistic around new possibilities and ways of working.

Before lockdown, Maidenhead Library frequently had over 1,000 visits a day for a variety of reasons, including study, community group activities and exercise. The largest demographic was the under 24s, while during lockdown this had changed slightly to those aged between 18-35.

The community library model required one single part-time staff member on site for a limited number of hours per week. This was to facilitate and coordinate the range of activities and support services delivered by volunteers, charities and other organisations while helping residents navigate access to digital and physical information sources and books. It was worth noting that there were significantly more library volunteers than library advisors.

In terms of value for money and contribution to public services, for every £1 efficiently invested in library services, £6.95 was returned to the local economy. The accessibility hour was not proposed to be withdrawn, instead it could be changed from 9-10am to 10-11am. The proposal sought to retain professional staff on duty for all published opening hours. These staff underwent enhanced DBS checking and also rigorous training in areas such as Safeguarding, Sensory Disability Support, Dash and Domestic Abuse Support and Autism awareness. Volunteers would continue to work alongside staff but would be supervised and managed by a library professional. The main aim was to provide digital and physical support to ensure access for all.

The consultation process would be as follows:

1. Consultation closes 30 April
2. Public sessions to hear more about proposals
3. Review consultation results and any alternative proposals that are suggested
4. Present preferred options to Cabinet for final approval
5. Implement

The Council had a statutory duty to provide a comprehensive and efficient library service that met the needs of residents. It was important that residents were involved in defining what that was. This was an opportunity for residents, partners and stakeholders to make their views known.

Councillor Bhangra passed on his thanks to Angela Huisman, it was important to have libraries in the borough. Work was being done to save Boyn Grove library which was important for the local community.

Councillor Rayner also thanked Angela Huisman and her team for their work on the strategy. So far, the team had engaged with a significant number of people with the take up and feedback being positive. Some groups had been coming up with ideas to make the library offering stronger which was pleasing to see.

Councillor Bond asked if the leaflets promoting the strategy would be ready to distribute shortly. He asked if the autism reading group that had been mentioned in the strategy was for adults or children and where the groups had been taking place.

Angela Huisman said that if the leaflets were ready she would ensure that they had been distributed before the Easter weekend. The autism reading group had been taking place at Maidenhead Library while reading groups for people with disabilities had been taking place at Boyn Grove library. A charity had donated a number of devices which could be used to help people with disabilities read and access books.

ITEM SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

Councillor Singh said that a number of residents had complained about litter in parks and there were also concerns about fly tipping. He suggested that it would be good to invite the district enforcement team to the next meeting to explain what action they were taking in the town centre.

The Chairman said that if immediate action needed to be taken then Councillor Singh should discuss this with the relevant Lead Member.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members of the Forum noted the dates of future meetings.

The next meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 18th May 2021, starting at 6.15pm.

The meeting, which began at 6.15 pm, finished at 8.00 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....