

MAIDENHEAD TOWN FORUM

Thursday 12 January 2023

Present virtually: Councillors David Coppinger (Chairman), Helen Taylor (Vice-Chairman), Gurpreet Bhangra, Clive Baskerville, Greg Jones, Gerry Clark, Gurch Singh and Catherine Del Campo

Also in attendance virtually: Councillor Donna Stimson and Councillor Mandy Brar

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

Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor McWilliams.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

Minutes

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 10th November 2022 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Update on St Cloud Way

Ian Brazier-Dubber, Managing Director of RBWM Property Company, gave an update on progress at the St Cloud Way site. The sale of the site had been completed towards the end of September 2022, with Countryside Properties commencing the demolition of the old Magnet Leisure Centre. Phase 1 of the project would contain 351 residential units, 87 of which were affordable. Demolition of the main structure was planned to be completed by the end of the month and work would then commence on the ground in early February. This would continue until August 2023, when a new basement and groundworks would be completed. Affordable housing on the site would be managed by Abri, the organisation currently managed about 24,000 homes. Countryside had been providing RBWM with monthly updates through the project board. More people would be working on the site going into the summer as the project developed. Phase 1 at the site was planned to be completed in spring of 2025.

Councillor Del Campo noted that there would be affordable housing, she asked if the tenure mix had been confirmed.

She was informed that of the 87 affordable units, 33 were for affordable rent and 57 would be at a range of shared ownership.

Councillor Del Campo asked about the crossing which would be created to replace the footbridge, which had now been removed.

Ian Brazier-Dubber confirmed that a crossing would be part of the work, this had been funded from S106 contributions. This was planned to be completed in early spring.

Councillor G Jones asked about parking arrangements around the site.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the doctors surgery and pharmacy had parking permits to allow residents to park on the ten pin bowling site. There were 20 spaces that had been provided for patients just north of the doctors surgery. This was a distance of about 20 metres.

Councillor G Jones asked what would happen once the ten pin bowling site had been removed.

Ian Brazier-Dubber explained that this would be subject to future arrangements as Countryside brought forward plans for this area of the site.

Councillor G Jones commented that the parking situation was a concern, for both residents at the new St Cloud Way site and those who were using the doctors surgery.

Councillor Singh asked why the new surface level crossing had not been installed before the footbridge had been removed.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the crossing was being funded from money raised through S106 contributions, which was attached to the planning consent for the site. Now that the funding had come through, the council could start work on implementing the crossing at the site.

Councillor Singh asked if the council had received the S106 contribution for the site from the developer. He commented that for the majority of developments, S106 funding was received on commencement of the project. He said that there had been funding for the extension of the balcony on the library, again this was due to S106 money.

Ian Brazier-Dubber was unable to confirm or comment on either point at the meeting but he was happy to check with the planning team after the meeting.

ACTION – Ian Brazier-Dubber to confirm with the planning team whether S106 funding had been received from Countryside and on plans to extend the balcony at the library.

Councillor Singh asked about the development of the Ivy Leaf club site.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that Countryside had been focused on the St Cloud Way and ten pin bowling site at the moment, there were no detailed plans currently for the Ivy Leaf club.

Councillor Singh highlighted that there were a number of people on the housing waiting list and there were a number of sites in Maidenhead which had been allocated in the Borough Local Plan for housing.

Ian Brazier-Dubber explained that even though RBWM owned the land where the Ivy Leaf club was, it was up to Countryside to bring detailed plans forward.

Councillor Singh asked if there was any concern about an oversupply of flats over the next few years, taking into account some of the developments which were in progress.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the market was demand led, Maidenhead was regenerating and there was plenty of capacity.

Councillor Singh asked about a community asset review on Holmanleaze, he asked if there was any update.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that some work was done in 2021 which considered the assets in the area, the asset review was currently paused.

Councillor Taylor noted that the affordable housing at the York Road development was run by Housing Solutions, she asked why the affordable housing at St Cloud Way would be run by Abri, who were mainly focused on Windsor.

Ian Brazier-Dubber clarified that Countryside went out to the market to competitively tender bids from housing associations. Abri had provided Countryside with the best value bid.

Councillor Taylor asked if the crossing which would be installed would be the same type as the crossing which was a little further west along the A4, connecting to Kidwells Park. She had been made aware of children running across the crossing without using the traffic lights correctly to stop traffic.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said the plan was for the traffic lights to be pedestrian controlled, with links to the cycle route which would form part of the development. He was happy to confirm the exact details with Councillor Taylor after the meeting.

ACTION – Ian Brazier-Dubber to confirm the details of the crossing over the A4 at the St Cloud Way site.

Councillor Taylor asked about access off the site, would the site traffic be entering and leaving the site through Cookham Road or would other entrance points be added to the site.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that once the first phase of the site had been developed, there would be access roads on to Kennet Road and Holmanleaze.

Councillor G Jones asked if there had been any update following the result on the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) from the planning inspector.

Ian Brazier-Dubber said that the planning inspector had decided not to grant the CPO at the current point in time, the Property Company were currently considering what the result meant before they decided what the next step was.

Councillor Singh had noted that one of the concerns the planning inspector had raised was the lack of engagement with Smokey Joes. He asked if RBWM had made contact with any of the objectors to the CPO since the hearing result.

Ian Brazier-Dubber confirmed that there had not been any contact, the result had recently been received and the Property Company needed to consider the situation.

Maidenhead Town Manager Update

Robyn Bunyan, Maidenhead Town Manager, said that she had circulated her report as part of the agenda which covered October and November 2022. The Christmas free bus travel offer had been positively received by residents and there had been a promising increase in bus usage as a result. This included the busiest day of November, which was Saturday 26th, as this was also the Christmas light switch on event. Considering data from across the whole of 2022, over 6 million people had visited the town centre which was up 22% on 2021. The week in the lead up to Christmas saw over 116,000 visitors to the high street, this was up 17% compared to the same period the previous year. On vacancy rates, there were 297 units available and 248 were being used. This left 49 units which was 16% of all units, this was 2% higher than the national average but this did not take into account units which were unused but were coming into let. There was interest in the town centre from office occupiers, if these were taken up there would be a positive increase in footfall.

Robyn Bunyan considered car parking usage across Maidenhead in December. There were 75,000 spaces used and Stafferton Way car park had a 215% increase compared to December last year. Work was still on track to launch the Maidenhead Town Team, with the first meeting anticipated for mid-March. The Lunar new year celebrations, celebrating the year of the rabbit, would be returning at the end of the month. The parade would be held on 28th

January while there would be some free craft activities on 21st January. The pancake race would also be returning on Shrove Tuesday.

The Chairman asked about the closure of the Nicholsons Shopping Centre car park.

Robyn Bunyan explained that the car park had been closed on new years eve due to health and safety concerns. The car park was fully closed and would remain so until contractors had made a further assessment of the work required. This would continue for several weeks until next steps had been planned.

Councillor Taylor raised concerns about elderly residents and those with health issues that faced being forced to park further outside the town centre and would be a significant inconvenience. She suggested that contingency plans should be considered, for example a shuttle bus service from other car parks.

Robyn Bunyan agreed with the comments made by Councillor Taylor, vulnerable residents needed to be considered. There was suitable capacity at other car parks in the town centre, she would be doing a walk round of car parks to gain a better understanding of the situation.

Councillor Taylor commented on the look of the high street and that improvements had been proposed. One idea was for businesses to sponsor flower boxes, she asked if this suggestion was still being explored.

Robyn Bunyan said that visual improvements were something that she always considered, work was being done with Good Gym over the next few weeks to clear and tidy up certain areas. A piece of work was ongoing currently which looked at shop front policies to encourage a similar look and appeal on all shop fronts.

The Chairman asked about businesses at the Nicholsons car park which had been affected by the closure.

Robyn Bunyan confirmed that Food Share had maintained access and had not been impacted by the closure. Shopmobility would be moving their services into the shopping centre, opposite the old Argos store. There was no onsite parking provision at the site, however, an entrance to the centre could be used as a drop off point and there were disabled bays on the street.

Councillor Del Campo highlighted concerns that Shopmobility was now more difficult to access than previously, she asked if residents were largely dependent on being dropped off if they were unable to use the car parks.

Robyn Bunyan said that she was eager to speak to Peter Haley at People to Places to understand the situation and how it was working for clients.

Councillor Del Campo asked what the plan was for retailers who were currently located in the Nicholsons Shopping Centre and would like to remain in Maidenhead in the long term.

Robyn Bunyan said that she wanted to continue the good mix of national retailers and independent traders. She urged all businesses to get involved with 'My Royal Borough' which was run by the economic growth team, this would allow opportunities to be promoted along with training and networking events to be run. Relationships could then be maintained between the council and retailers.

Councillor Del Campo continued by asking if all retailers in the shopping centre could be relocated into external vacant units once the redevelopment process had started.

Robyn Bunyan explained that a lot of units were run by private landlords, the team at the council and at the Nicholsons Shopping Centre would be involved in helping retailers to find new units if required.

Councillor G Jones asked if there were any plans for St Marys walk, he felt the area was looking tired.

Robyn Bunyan said that the properties had been cleaned up a couple of months ago. One of the units on the walk was to let. Sierra House was a redevelopment site but she was not aware of anything being proposed at the current time.

Councillor Stimson said that the 'secret kitchen' sign needed to be removed from the vacant unit in St Marys walk.

Robyn Bunyan said that she was happy to explore this if Councillor Stimson was able to send her the details.

Councillor G Jones commented that the vacancy rate figure was distorted due to the ongoing development of the town centre.

Robyn Bunyan explained that the figure increased and decreased over the course of the year, changing as lets were agreed and units were created.

Councillor Singh highlighted the good initiative of providing residents the opportunity to use the bus for free. When the Braywick Leisure Centre had been through the planning process, it had been mentioned that there would be a free shuttle bus service for residents from the town centre. He asked if this plan was still going to happen.

Robyn Bunyan had not heard about the initiative, she would be happy to report back on this.

ACTION – Robyn Bunyan to report back to Councillor Singh on the proposed free shuttle bus service to Braywick Leisure Centre.

Councillor Singh said that businesses and residents he had spoken to about the closure of the Nicholsons car park were frustrated.

Robyn Bunyan reiterated that the car park was currently closed to the public and was being assessed. There was suitable capacity at other car parks and on street parking, this was a change for residents usage but it was an unprecedented situation. There was appropriate fencing around the car park and the site was secure.

Councillor Singh had noted that not many residents were using the new car park on Vicus Way, he asked why the usage had been low.

Robyn Bunyan explained that the car park would be more popular with office workers and those using the train station. It was anticipated that usage would increase later in the year.

The Chairman said that long term contracts would be moved from the Sainsbury's car park to Vicus Way in due course.

Councillor Singh said that this could be over 30 minutes walk for commuters to walk from Vicus Way to the other side of the town centre. He asked why commuters would choose to park at Vicus Way over the Stafferton Way car park.

Robyn Bunyan advised that Neil Walter and the parking would be able to provide further information on the points raised by Councillor Singh.

The Chairman suggested that Neil Walter could be invited to attend the next Maidenhead Town Forum meeting.

Councillor Singh asked if RBWM owned the units which were located on King Street.

Robyn Bunyan did not know the answer to this question.

Item Suggestions for Future Forums

Councillor Taylor asked if it would be possible to have an update on the Maidenhead Town Team.

Robyn Bunyan gave a brief update, the project was on track with the next step being to relaunch the Maidenhead town charter. Town team representatives would then be recruited before the inaugural meeting.

Councillor Del Campo asked if there were any plans to mark the coronation of the King in Maidenhead, if there were then this could be a future agenda item.

Robyn Bunyan said that plans were currently being discussed and how the coronation would affect RBWM.

Councillor G Jones highlighted an event which had previously taken place in the Riverside ward, a classical music concert on the River Thames. He asked if this event could be brought back.

Robyn Bunyan said that she was happy to look into this to see what the event was.

ACTION – Robyn Bunyan to explore the suggestion made by Councillor G Jones.

Councillor Singh added that there had been a fireworks show as part of the event, he would also like to see it return. He asked if the library service team could be invited to a Forum meeting to outline the activities which they provided to residents.

Dates of Future Meetings

The next meeting would take place on Thursday 16th March 2023 at 6.30pm.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 7.50 pm

Chair.....

Date.....