

MAIDENHEAD TOWN FORUM

Monday 17 July 2023

Present: Councillors Gurch Singh (Chair), Helen Taylor (Vice-Chair), Clive Baskerville, Josh Reynolds, Kashmir Singh, George Shaw and Sian Martin

Also in attendance: Councillors Jack Douglass and Chris Moriarty; Andrew Ingram, Ian Rose, Harry Gilham, Jennifer Macro and Victoria Manston

Officers: Laurence Ellis

Officers (virtually): Simon Lymn

Apologies for Absence

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

No apologies for absence were received.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interests were received.

Minutes

Laurence Ellis, Democratic Services Officer, went through the actions the previous meeting:

ACTION: Maidenhead Town Forum to investigate the Forum's delegated powers.	Laurence Ellis informed that, while the Forum did have certain financial powers delegated by Cabinet to allocate money to the unparished areas in Maidenhead, this was based on whether there was any money leftover in the budget. When asked, the Head of Finance informed that there was no money leftover in the budget. Therefore, the Forum was unable to exercise these delegated powers at the moment.
ACTION: Laurence Ellis to investigate the use of YouTube comments during meeting livestreams.	Laurence Ellis reported that if the YouTube comments were turned on to allow residents to raise questions during the livestream, they would have to be constantly monitored and managed in line with social media policy and legal considerations.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st June 2023 were approved as a true and accurate record.

Maidenhead Station Parking

Ed Goose, Regional Growth Manager at Great Western Railway (GWR), gave a brief overview on the situation with parking at Maidenhead Train Station. A number of actions had taken place around the Station which had influenced how people access it, including the Forecourt Scheme led by RBWM and backed by GWR. He stated that he met up with Huw Jones, Traffic Safety Manager (RBWM), a couple of months ago to develop an action plan to mitigate the challenges with drop-offs and any other concerns. He mentioned that he was aware of concerns and challenges with the operation but hoped that the scheme would improve accessibility to the Station. He also added that as the drop-off was driven by RBWM as they led the scheme.

On parking, Ed Goose informed that Silco Drive had been reopened since around January and February 2023 for Station users. In addition, Shoppenhangers Road and the ground floor of Stafferton Way car parks was also being utilised.

Councillor Baskerville asked about a drop off point, namely what happened to the original idea of it. Ed Goose replied that this was being considered, and he welcomed feedback and the desire for a drop off point to be reinstated. He mentioned that he was going to meet with the Station Team to assess the possibility of a drop-off in a few weeks' time.

Councillor Reynolds commented that it was potentially a dangerous situation for residents to access the drop off points at the Station forecourts as the amount of parking could build back to the dual carriageway road and thus potentially causing residents to enter and exit their cars near the main road. He suggested that there could be some additional drop-off points near the Station. Ed Goose welcomed the feedback, adding that additional drop-off facilities were something worth considering and reiterating that this would be investigated by the Station Team. He also offered to return to the Forum at some point in the future.

Councillor Taylor, Vice-Chair, conveyed to Ed Goose that the current arrangement with drop-off parking was chaotic, with traffic building up on the A308, parking in residential areas and conflicts between taxi drivers. She also highlighted concerns of accessibility for disabled people with parking as well as potential for injury and accidents. She requested for the arrangement with drop-off parking to be re-investigated. Welcoming the feedback, Ed Goose responded that GWR and Network Rail were considering potential solutions to this. He also welcomed collaboration with RBWM.

Councillor Reynolds suggested that a report on the Station Team's assessment could be forwarded to the Forum, and that RBWM should get involved in the engagement exercise by linking with the relevant individuals within the Council. Ed Goose replied that he would be keen to work with whomever to find the right solution to make station access safe and accessible.

ACTION: Ed Goose to report back on the Maidenhead Station Team's assessment.

Councillor K. Singh raised some comments. Firstly, he stated that severely disabled residents were unable to walk from the disabled parking park to the station ticket office. He requested for extensive accessible parking for disabled residents to be reintroduced close to the station. Secondly, he conveyed that there needed to be more parking for commuters. Thirdly, he also suggested that there should be a cycle rack at the Station.

Ed Goose responded that there was a plan in place to ensure there was adequate accessible parking at the Station, but he stated that he would check with the responsible officer regarding the status of this plan. With general parking, Ed Goose believed that there was ample parking with the reopening of Silco Drive. On cycle parking, as part of the Forecourts Scheme, he stated that there was significant enhancement to cycle parking at the end of the Forecourts. In addition, one of the aims of the Scheme was to consolidate the cycle parking into a single 'easy-to-use' bay. He welcomed any feedback on cycle parking.

Councillor Taylor raised that there had been a high level of bike thefts from the Station bike racks. She wondered whether the bike racks could be moved closer to the station and the space where the bike racks were currently located could be used for disabled parking bays. Ed Goose replied that he could look into this, but this would require some consultation and collaboration with RBWM officers as cycle parking was outside of GMR's remit.

Councillor K. Singh asked whether the Forecourts Scheme was legally compliant with disability access, and if not when it would be. He believed that it was not legally compliant as the disabled bays were too far away from the ticketing offices, asserting that it needed to be fixed by having the disabled bays closer the ticketing office. Ed Goose stated that he would investigate with relevant colleagues on whether the disability access was compliant. He also reiterated that the intention of the Forecourts Scheme was to improve parking at the Station.

The Chair asked for a brief update on the lifts at the Station. Ed Goose informed that Network Rail were conducting a scheme to improve safety and accessibility at the Station platform. Aware of the challenges around the lifts as well as them being out-of-order on a number of occasions, he added that the lifts were being looked into. In spite of financial difficulties, he stated that Network Rail and GWR were seeking to push this forward.

The Chair asked Laurence Ellis, Democratic Services Officer, asked whether a report could be sent to Cabinet to hand over the assets of the Forecourts Scheme so Network Rail and GWR could work in conjunction with it. Laurence Ellis replied that he would investigate this.

ACTION: A report to be sent to Cabinet to hand over the assets of the Forecourts Scheme.

Neighbourhood Plan Update

Andrew Ingram, Co-Chair of the Neighbourhood Forum, gave a presentation on the Maidenhead Neighbourhood Plan. He started off explaining that the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) put in place planning policies to guide future development. NPs set policies to guide developments, decide whether planning applications were approved and propose areas for development. He added that NPs affect development plans as developers looked at NP policy before making planning applications. Andrew Ingram added that an NP was not a talking shop, a complaints procedure, a way of challenging higher-level policy, a way to implement specific projects, or a way to stop development.

Andrew Ingram then explained how NP policies worked. He stated that if someone wanted to build something and it was not permitted development, there was the option of a pre-application discussion with RBWM Planning, then the individual would submit a planning application, and RBWM planning would review whether the application met national, RBWM and NP policies.

Andrew Ingram showed a map which illustrated that Maidenhead was the only area in the Borough which was neither a designated area or an area which had an adopted plan, and therefore it was the focus of development. Because of this, an NP was needed. An application for Maidenhead to be a designated area in 2019 was rejected.

With the refusal of the application, Andrew Ingram then informed that the Neighbourhood Forum had two main objectives: further dialogue with RBWM Planning to formulate an application; and engage with Maidenhead residents. He stated that RBWM Planning were concerned that Maidenhead was not a "logical or appropriate" area for a Neighbourhood Plan. He stated that he asked the Neighbourhood Forum's 500+ social media followers whether a plan was appropriate for Maidenhead, to which an overwhelming majority said 'yes'. After some time, Maidenhead was given designated status.

The Neighbourhood Forum then sought to obtain feedback from residents. One approach was through a public workshop in March 2023 to allow residents to convey ideas. From this, Climate Change and Biodiversity had become a primary area of concern, followed by housing and 'getting about' being strong areas of interest. Following the workshop, the Neighbourhood Forum collated the ideas and filtered them based on whether they were compatible with the National Policy Framework (NPF) and Borough Local Plan (BLP), and whether they were planning issues.

The topics from the public workshop were also categorised into 6 Topic groups: Biodiversity, Climate, Housing, Built Heritage, Design and Getting Around. Each of these Topic groups had group leaders and a small number of people working on them.

On the status of the Plan, Andrew Ingram informed that the Neighbourhood Plan was currently developing proposals by making policy proposals and reviewing them. The next steps were to review a draft by publishing the draft policies, consult on them and review the feedback. This would be followed by the submission of a plan with a formal RBWM consultation process, an independent examination and any modifications. After this, a public referendum would take place; and if approved, it would become the Neighbourhood Plan and would affect future planning applications. It was hoped that this would be completed in the next couple of years.

Councillor Moriarty commented that it was not clear on what the scope of the Neighbourhood Plan in Maidenhead was, elaborating that the NP did not encompass certain areas which many would label as being in the Maidenhead area, such as Cox Green. He suggested that the project's scope should be made clearer. Ian Rose, Co-Chair of the Neighbourhood Forum, informed that Cox Green was a civil parish while the other wards in Maidenhead were unparished, and it was prohibited to place these areas under the same Neighbourhood Plan. He also informed that Cox Green was developing its own Neighbourhood Plan.

Councillor Moriarty wondered if there was a further way to ensure residents were aware of the Plan's remit and therefore whether it affected them or not. Andrew Ingram replied that one method was to continuously show the NP map to residents.

Councillor Baskerville speculated that Maidenhead may have missed out in having a true identity and being part of the process to deal with such matters. He contrasted this with civil parishes which he stated had their own identities and parish councils to speak up for them and deal with local matters; meanwhile, Maidenhead's local matters were handled directly by the Borough authority. Councillor Baskerville commented that the Neighbourhood Plan would fill this gap and wondered if the Neighbourhood Forum Co-Chairs agreed with that the Plan was a good step forward. Ian Rose agreed with this.

Councillor Reynolds asked for advice on how he should explain the Neighbourhood Plan to residents as a Councillor, particularly as some residents may have critical views of the planning process. Andrew Ingram advised that that Councillors could focus on informing that there would be a third localised layer of policy to planning permission rather than focus on the Planning Department. Ian Rose stated that residents could have their say during the consultations and engagements on the formulation of the Plan.

Councillor Shaw asked whether there were any ideas which the Neighbourhood Forum were excited or passionate about. Ian Rose stated that he would be keen for a good, integrated cycling network and better disability access for wheelchair users. Andrew Ingram conveyed that he had an interest with Built Heritage: the preservation of historic buildings and areas. He hoped to compile a Local Heritage List to identify and further protect certain historic buildings and areas from being demolished.

Hub Residential - The Landing

Harry Gilham, Instinctive Partners, Victoria Manston, Development Director at HUB Residential, and Jennifer Macro, Development Manager at HUB Residential, introduced the item.

Victoria Manston gave a presentation on Building C, part of the One Maidenhead project (formerly The Landing) since 2018, forming part of Phase 2 of the development. The building was located on the corner of King Street and Queen Street in Maidenhead.

Victoria Manston introduced HUB as a developer focused on creating high quality living spaces for communities, working with the world's leading architectural practices.

Victoria Manston gave some background to Building C. The site was granted consent in 2019 for a 7-storey office building with floor flexible floorspace for cafes, restaurant or shops at ground floor. HUB sought to redesign Building C with the objectives being:

- Deliver a local landmark building that acted as a gateway to the wider town centre;
- Create a sustainable office building that would be net zero carbon and utilised innovative construction methods, including a timber structure (the first of its kind in Maidenhead and the wider Thames Valley);
- Respect the local context which included providing active ground floor uses and new public realm areas;
- Use a refined material palette and ensure the building was future-proofed.

Jennifer Macro explained the key considerations of the project:

- Aligning with RBWM's new Local Plan and Sustainability Statement:
 - Seeking to meet BREEAM Outstanding (the top sustainability certification) and WELL Platinum (health and wellbeing of the tenants);
 - Utilising a timber frame and façade system that was easily demountable and suitable for re-use.
- Tying in with the urban fabric of the surrounding area:
 - Taking into consideration of the mix of historic and modern architecture;
 - Looking at proposals for a stone/ brick building utilising a simple material palette that will increase natural daylight and heating.
- Completing the masterplan and developing a vacant site in the town centre:
 - Proposals were lower than the consented office scheme by circa 4 metres;
 - Drops down in height considerably from Phase 1 by circa 10 storeys.
- Addressing the need for high-quality Grade A office space in Maidenhead and providing ground floor active uses and public realm.

Victoria Manston then illustrated some conceptual images for the building, both internal and external viewpoints. She also illustrated the comparison between the consented and proposed schemes, namely the reduction in height. She informed that HUB were exploring on how to bring the timber on the outside of the building while complying with the building regulations.

Victoria Manston then displayed the bird's eye view design proposals to the building floors.

- The ground floor would have cafes, restaurants and nurseries;
- The upper floors would have maximum efficiency and flexibility;
- The fifth floor would have an external podium garden where tenants could enjoy the views of Maidenhead.
- The public realms (which was mostly delivered under Phase 1) would have tables and chairs as well as a mix of trees and plants (a mix of hard and soft landscaping spaces).

Victoria Manston then listed the benefits to Building C:

- Up to 335 new jobs created during the construction phase and up to 620 new jobs created once completed.
- Increase in grade A office space in the town centre, helping to attract quality businesses to Maidenhead.
- Projected business rates of £700,000 each year.

- Support economic growth in Maidenhead as the new office space will lead to more customers visiting and spending money in town centre shops, restaurants, and other businesses helping them recover from the recent slowdown in the economy.
- The establishment of a high-quality design and landmark building in a currently vacant space would improve the street scene and positively contribute to the town centre's ongoing regeneration.
- A wider pedestrianised area with new tree and shrub planting which would provide a more attractive access way into the wider site and the town centre.

Harry Gilham gave an overview of the planning and consultation programme. As part of the consultation, HUB met with local politicians – namely the Chair (Councillor G. Singh), Councillors Douglas, Werner, Reynolds, Buckley and Bermange – to discuss the proposals. Future meetings were set up with Theresa May (MP for Maidenhead) and Councillor Moriarty.

Harry Gilham informed that newsletters were sent out to residents in late-June 2023 to inform them of the proposals and inviting them to a public exhibition consultation event on Wednesday 5th July at High Street Methodist Church on King Street. The key feedback was:

- Supportive of the design approach, notably the reduction in height against the original scheme,
- Supportive of the sustainability approach,
- Keen to see improvements to the town centre,
- Some discussions on car parking in Maidenhead, particularly as Nicholson's car park had shut down.

Harry Gilham stated that HUB were seeking to submit the planning application in late Summer 2023 and start the project in early 2024.

Andrew Ingram asked about the reduction in height of the building. Victoria Manston answered that HUB did not want to deliver a scheme that was greater in terms of the quantum, which was already approved, and that feedback from residents stated they would prefer a reduction in height when feasible. In addition, buildings with timber had to be built at a certain height.

Andrew Ingram asked about the different visual illustrations of the outside view of the buildings. Victoria Manston replied that some feedback from the original consultation stated that residents wanted the building to feel like an intimate space. By changing the building shape, namely cutting the corners of the building, a space within the centre of the public realm would be created that which would then be more sheltered and welcoming for people to enjoy it.

Councillor Martin asked how much of the footprint had increased by percentage compared to the previous plan. Victoria Manston replied that the size of the building was the same and had not affected the green space.

Councillor Martin then asked if the existing consultation was still online. Victoria Manston confirmed this, with all the exhibition boards being uploaded as well. She offered to share the website link.

ACTION: HUB to share the website link to the existing consultation on Building C.

Councillor Reynolds asked a couple of questions. He firstly asked if the project would lead to any changes to King Street, such as any upgrades to the public realm. Victoria Manston replied that the Council was planning to put forward their own plans for King Street, Broadway and Queen Street, led by the RBWM Transport Officer. Because of this, HUB were not going to make any changes as these were being delivered already. However, HUB would make some improvements within the red line around the building, such as new pavement areas and soft and hard landscaping.

Councillor Reynolds then asked what the retailers would be. Victoria Manston replied that there had been a lot of interest from retailers, but they usually would like to see the premises first before signing off anything.

Councillor Moriarty asked to what extent did the change in work patterns caused by the Covid pandemic affected planning, namely if it affected demand for office space. He also asked how much of the current state of the local town centre provision would impact demand and how occupying this would drive demand. Victoria Manston replied that the quality and attractiveness of the space was a method to attract employees back to the office, particularly as it stood out from the rest of the town centre. In addition, employees in general were returning to the office.

Harry Gilham added that the new residential buildings being built nearby would attract a new population to the town centre which would then be a catalyst for new shops and restaurants. He also cited research from Wimbledon Town Centre that town centre restaurant and shops were viable and sustainable due office workers going for their lunch or to do some shopping.

A4 Crossing

Simon Lymn, Interim Infrastructure Delivery Manager, gave a presentation on the A4 Crossing at Holmanleaze. Giving an overview, he explained that the Borough was providing a new Toucan crossing along the A4 road, near Holmanleaze and the Sainsbury's roundabout, which would allow cyclists and pedestrians to cross the road. This was part of the development of the old Magnet Leisure Centre site, secured through local enterprise funding and Section 106 Developer Contribution funding.

The purpose of the project was to improve travel routes into Maidenhead Town Centre and the surrounding communities, as well as provide vital new connection into the new development on the northern side of the A4.

Simon Lymn then displayed an illustrated plan of the works around the A4. The project was in three phases:

- Phase 1: Toucan Crossing across the A4 road near Holmanleaze for pedestrians and cyclists,
- Phase 2: At-grade crossing onto Holmanleaze to ensure it was accessible,
- Phase 3: Cycle-pedestrian link to Forlease Road roundabout.

Simon Lymn then used Google Maps to show a street view of the road and help further explain the project. As part of Phase 2, a ramp next to some pedestrian steps would be built from the A4 road and Holmanleaze as there was a height difference between them.

With the timeframes:

- Begin on-site work for Phase 1 in late Summer 2023 and complete the works by November 2023.
- Begin on-site work for Phase 2 in the Winter 2023 or Spring 2024, subject to agreement with the nearby Ivy Leaf Club, and complete the works by Spring 2024.
- Start time for Phase 3 was yet to be confirmed and was subject to funding, although the aim was to begin the works in Spring 2024.

The Chair asked for some elaboration about the funding for the phases. Simon Lymn stated that he was confident that there was plenty of funding at the moment and that the Borough was still planning to implement the three phases. It was the case of ensuring that the funding would still be available in spite of inflation in the construction industry. There would be confirmation once there was certainty of the costs for Phase 3.

Councillor Reynolds requested for the presentation slides to be shared amongst the Forum.

ACTION: Simon Lymn to share his presentation slides on the A4 Crossing with the Maidenhead Town Forum.

Councillor Reynolds asked for the reasons to install the crossing near Holmanleaze rather than York Stream. Simon Lymn replied that it would provide a direct route from Holmanleaze and that the project was linked the Magnet Leisure Centre development. He stated he could investigate why York Stream was not the chosen location for the crossing.

Councillor Reynolds then asked if the crossing would be the same design as another nearby staggered crossing. Simon Lymn confirmed this as it was in line with the highway design standards, the road speed limit and the road being a dual carriageway.

Councillor Reynolds then asked if the crossing lights at the staggered crossings were phased together. If not, he asked whether the lights could be phased together. Simon Lymn replied that he would take this back and confirm with the RBWM Signals Engineer if this was possible, and then forward a formulated response. He added that the new technology was more responsive than the old systems.

ACTION: Simon Lymn to ask about the crossing light system and reasons for the crossing's location near Holmanleaze, and then forward a response to Councillor Reynolds.

Ian Rose commented that a cycle-pedestrian link at Forlease Road would be welcomed. He then asked whether the impact of vehicle traffic was assessed when crossings were installed. Simon Lymn replied that modelling had been conducted on vehicle and pedestrian flows to highlight any potential issues.

Ian Rose then asked how cyclists were taken into account with the crossing's design. Simon Lymn replied that crossings in general try to cater for the needs of both pedestrians and cyclists. The crossing was a Toucan crossing which was to ensure safety and provide space for pedestrians, disabled people and cyclists to cross at the same time.

Councillor Martin asked whether the project would include a crossing near the Magnet Leisure Centre which directly accessed Hines Meadow car park. Simon Lymn responded that there would still be access along the footway as well as some drop curbs in place to cross over the service yard, in which residents could walk to, for example, Sainsbury's.

Councillor Martin elaborated that she was reflecting some resident concerns, particularly from the nearby mosque, whereby, for example, young children may be crossing the service area after dark. Simon Lymn replied that there was no plan in the current project and advised the alternative route would be through Sainsbury which was well lighted.

Councillor Shaw asked for confirmation on whether all 4 curbs near the entrance to Hines Meadow car park and Sainsbury's were being dropped. Simon Lymn confirmed this.

Councillor Shaw then asked whether there would be a zebra crossing. Simon Lymn stated that this was not the case. Nevertheless, he conveyed that the crossing would be accessible and there would be a natural break in the crossing.

Councillor Reynolds asked whether the modelling was conducted before or after the closure of Broadway car park, elaborating that the modelling would be out-of-date if it was done before the closure. Simon Lymn stated that he would check this.

ACTION: Simon Lymn to check whether the traffic flow modelling was done before or after the closure of Broadway car park.

Item Suggestions for Future Forums

Councillor Reynolds suggested an item from the Maidenhead Town Team on any new retailers coming to Maidenhead in the next few months.

The items suggested for future Forum meetings:

- New retailers in Maidenhead

The Chair stated that agenda item suggestions could be emailed to him.

Dates of Future Meetings

The Forum noted that the next meeting would be held on 12th September 2023.

The meeting, which began at 6.32 pm, finished at 8.07 pm

Chair.....

Date.....