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The Wokingham Society

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Dear Bernie and colleagues

CARNIVAL LEISURE HUB

I am writing on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Wokingham Society to offer our response to the consultation about Carnival Phase 2. A number of the issues we raised in 2015 in our submission about the earlier plans still apply, so we will reiterate them where appropriate.

We are grateful to the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration Team for meeting us to discuss the plans and our views have to an extent been informed by the answers we were given at that time.

1. Name

We do not think that naming the site 'Carnival' will work. It needs a suffix such as 'Place' to be intelligible. People saying 'I'm off to Carnival [or the Carnival]' only works for those who already know it. Otherwise it could just as well be the Winter Carnival – or the Rio one come to that.

We would urge you to do what is planned for Peach Place, and ask for opinions from the local community, since there is plenty of time to do so.

2. Library relocation

We will reply separately to the forthcoming community engagement about the Library relocation and facilities.

3. Pool

Last time we noted that the pool itself was not to be enlarged and deepened in order to provide a full-sized facility for residents, but understood that such provision was to be built at the Arborfield Strategic Development Location. We wondered if Wokingham town residents would find this solution acceptable, and asked if the Carnival Pool renovation might allow for this decision to be revisited should a strong feeling emerge in future that a full-sized pool was an important need for the town.

Now that the pool is to be rebuilt, we wish to ask that question more strongly. The opportunity presents itself to increase the number of lanes to eight (particularly since the pool planned for Arborfield will have only four lanes) and thus ensure that there is sufficient space for what might otherwise suffer from over-crowding due to competing demands between classes and leisure uses.

4. Design and over-development

As last time, it is unfortunate that the design of these buildings is so vestigial, although we understand the desire to leave greater detailing until later. We reiterate our view that the drawings look very square and featureless, yet it is very important that they offer attractive and interesting facades, which are not overbearing and thus add to a sense of overcrowding on the site, and that they have clearly indicated entrances. We do hope – and understand – that the the local community will have the opportunity of commenting on specific designs before they go to the Planning Committee as Reserved Matters.

With the addition of the Library, if that comes about, the plans indicate a very congested development and we urge that thought be given to increasing the amount of public space at the expense of some parts of the development, eg less residential provision, less commercial space or, of course, no Library.

5. Sports, leisure and community centre

We are told that entrance to the centre will be immediately visible from Wellington Road (it also need to be easily located from the multi-story car park).It is not clear from the plans how this will be achieved and would welcome an early indication of what is intended. Indeed we have general concerns about ensuring sympathetic signage on the site, given the rather poor recent example of the Premier Inn signage.

We are worried that sports use of the centre will be compromised by the other uses for productions and community facilities. This would most easily be addressed by allowing the equivalent of two more courts, or similar, in the area now indicted for the Library.

We take the view that those facilities which can be booked by the community should be fully serviced, with chairs and tables laid out according to need, complete AVC facilities and a pricing structure that encourages use.

We remain very supportive of part of the entrance area being devoted to a display about Wokingham's past, in lieu of a museum pro tem, and would be glad to participate in such a venture.

6. Residential

As we said last time, some members of our Society have queried the need for further residential provision in this vicinity, given that it was not included in the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan. We understand the argument for some measure of surveillance of the site that local residents offer, but we have still not seen the justification otherwise for the amount of housing proposed.

While detailed design is to follow, we have some concern that the mass of the sports/leisure centre and the size of the residential area will make this section of the site look crowded, and that the promenade will be overshadowed by the flanking buildings. We hope that careful design might dispel these concerns.

7. Lighting

As said before, is important that, for safety reasons, the illumination across the development is strong enough to make this a welcoming night-time destination but, at the same time, it needs to be

soft enough not to appear harsh and industrial in appearance nor to be objectionable to the occupants of the residences.

8. Landscaping

Again, to reiterate our earlier response, the plans envisage the loss of the footpath running from Wellington Road to the crossing over the railway (where Network Rail has installed a temporary bridge), by re-routing it through the Carnival site. Much effort has been devoted to landscaping the first part of that path, especially for Wokingham in Bloom, and there are plantings and insect habitats that have been created in the last couple of years. It is understood that local residents regard the path as a hazard to personal safety and we would not wish retain it against their concerns. We would ask, however, that an attempt be made, in consultation with the Town Council, to see how this landscaping effort can be reinstated, in whatever form, elsewhere in the development.

We would support the suggestion that the area of land at the edge of the site at the top of Finchampstead Road be landscaped to provide a seating area with shrubs around it, to mirror the 'Carnival Corner' location across the road that we have helped to plant.

7. Road, traffic and pedestrians

We strongly support the installation of a signalised pedestrian crossing from the promenade to the other side of Wellington Road, but we would also ask that careful thought be given to providing safe crossings for people around the Carnival Pool roundabout, which we understand is to be enhanced, so that pedestrians can get from Finchampstead Road to Denmark Street and vice versa without having to go all the way to the promenade crossing.

We do have concerns, however, that the combination of the MSCP, the development of Elms Field, the additional vehicles coming from the South Wokingham Distributor Road, both as a relief road and as an exit for new residents on the SDL, will create more congestion and possibly more threat of accidents than allowed for in the current traffic modelling. We would urge that, from the early stage of the Elms Field development, traffic and pedestrian rates be monitored for comparison with modelling predictions, and if they are in excess of expectations, further thought be given as to how the situation might be ameliorated.

There is no statement about Blue Badge parking and we would like assurance that sufficient provision will be made on site to cater for users with disabilities.

We welcome the prospect of enhancements to Wellington Road to assist both vehicular and pedestrian movement and understand there will be an opportunity to contribute our thoughts on this. Could you also see what can be done about the lack of a controlled crossing around the Pavilions/McCarthy and Stone area since Section 106 money was reserved for this purpose?

Yours sincerely



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