

PRESENTATION BY Cllr. PHILIP MIRFIN
ON
WOKINGHAM TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION

1.0 **INTRODUCTION**

A public meeting was held in Wokingham Town Hall on the 20th March, during which a presentation on the Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration was delivered by Cllr. Philip Mirfin, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) Executive Member for Regeneration, supported by Melanie Allen, WBC Communications and Engagement Manager, Commercial Property.

As the Society's Chairman, Peter Must, was unavailable, the meeting was opened and chaired by Society member Paddy Haycocks.

Over 70 people came to the talk; they were not only extremely interested in what was said but were grateful that they were able to ask questions in the formal session and also to speak to Cllr. Mirfin and Ms Allen whilst having their refreshments.

2.0 **POINTS OF INTEREST**

2.1 **General**

2.1.1 **Aims and Objectives of WBC For The Wokingham Town Centre**

Cllr. Mirfin stated these were to provide:

- An 18-hour economy
- A unique shopping experience with both national shopping names and those with bespoke offerings
- A safe shopping and entertainment experience
- The means of making Wokingham distinctive from Reading and Bracknell by being able to provide a shopping experience coupled with the ability to hold cultural events close to the Town.

2.1.2 **Security**

Security cameras are to be installed around the Town including the Market Place and Peach Place.

2.1.3 **The Road System and Traffic around the Town**

Cllr. Mirfin was asked a number of questions on this topic to which he gave the following answers:

- Shop keepers were not in favour of pedestrianisation as the passing through of traffic gave opportunities for the occupiers of the vehicles to see what the Town had to offer.
- The Northern and Southern Distributor Roads would reduce the volume of traffic going through the Town. These roads would have parking restrictions.
- It is WBC policy to discourage the use of cars within the Borough and in particular around the Town, which is why Park and Ride systems are going to be established to enable easy access to the Town.

2.1.4 Car Parking

Cllr. Mirfin was asked a number of questions on this topic to which he gave the following answers:

- WBC opposed Euro Parks' proposed application for planning permission for housing on the car park in Denmark Street and he noted the concern expressed about the location of the current car parks and the lack of availability.
NB: This car park was once owned by WBC but was sold off and is now privately owned. It could prove difficult for WBC not to approve the change of use from a car park to housing.
- Additional car parking could be provided by adding another level to the new Carnival Field multi-storey car park.
- Ms Allen said that WBC are developing a car park strategy.

2.1.5 Housing

Cllr. Mirfin stated that it was WBC policy to ensure that there was a mix of housing, which would include accommodation for key workers and affordable housing.

Each house sold attracted a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which is based upon the size of the new property or extension and is typically £350 per square metre. This could amount to a charge of some £40,000 per new property.

The money raised from CIL could be used to support and manage the impact of development by funding an infrastructure wanted by the Council and local communities, for example new road schemes, open space improvements or new schools.

2.1.6 Current Library And The Associated Car Park

No decision had been reached about the use of the current library and associated car park once the new library had been opened on the Carnival Pool site.

2.1.7 Cultural Events

Cllr. Mirfin stressed during his presentation that the design of the Town Centre would enable cultural events to be held that were close to the Town. This was due to the facilities and opportunities that would be on offer via the Carnival Pool complex and on Elms Field with its open-air spaces and the Everyman cinema.

3.0 PEACH PLACE

Dawnus

It had been widely reported that Dawnus, the developer of Peach Place, had gone into administration. Cllr. Mirfin explained that WBC had known for a while that the Company was in financial difficulties and hence they had developed plans to address this problem should it arise. As soon as it became known Dawnus had gone into administration, WBC cancelled the contract

and seized control of the site. This had enabled new contractors to begin work the following day.

3.2 **Peach Place - General**

- All units, apart from one, now had options taken up for occupancy by the end of June this year.
- *Cook* and *Download* were currently being fitted out and would open in the next few weeks.

4.0 **CARNIVAL POOL SITE**

4.1 **General**

4.1.1 **Swimming Pool**

After careful consideration it had been decided that, instead of modernising the existing pool, it would be more cost effective to completely replace it, which would enable it to be better integrated into the whole complex.

4.1.2 **Library**

The new library would be both larger and have better facilities than the existing one.

4.1.3 **Sports Hall**

The design of this facility would enable it to be for multi-purpose use and thus not just for sporting activities but easily convertible to stage various cultural events.

4.1.4 **Existing occupied Office Space**

Before the development of this site began the existing office and staff would be re-located close to the Town.

4.1.5 **Housing**

It was the aim of WBC to enable much of the housing on this site to be made available for key workers.

5.0 **ELMS FIELD**

5.1 **General**

- Aldi had begun recruiting staff.
- The road system was nearing completion.
- The work on building the Premier Inn, Everyman cinema and shops was progressing to plan.
- Work would start soon on building the houses and shaping the new park.

Trevor Sleet

March 2019