

Item 10
tabled

HARROW ARCHITECTS FORUM

NOTES FOR PRESENTATION TO MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS PANEL 8 NOVEMBER 2010.

1. Current Situation

A careful definition of key attributes to the whole area is required to maintain, improve and integrate these elements properly with any new proposals.

- **Harrow Town Centre** has poor architecture and intimidating spaces. It is over scaled with ugly buildings and drab landscaping and townscape.
- There are few public use buildings. There is no theatre, arts centre, library, youth club etc.
- There is lack of decent public spaces and squares of the right human scale. In essence it is a dull and poor destination or place to live.
- There is poor permeability and poor links to green spaces.
- There is little to promote in Harrow. It is not a lovely leafy suburb anymore and it has no heart.
- All housing stock from Metro land era is nearing the end of its life (cheap double glazing, front garden parking, inappropriate extensions and infills). Many of the major shopping parades in Harrow Town Centre have the same problem. The negatives outweigh the positives. With nothing to promote there is little to trade on. No hotels of note, no shops of note and no companies of note.
- Identify demand. Harrow is neither Central London nor a green field environment. There is not a mix of retail units. They are mostly poor quality offering products to visitors on low disposable incomes. These key drivers are unlikely to change.
- Roads and transport routes are poor and congested.
- **The Civic Centre** site is poor because of its bleak car parks and temporary buildings. It will be a key site in the link between Harrow and Wealdstone.
- The **Kodak** site is peripheral to the intensification area and can be a stand alone residential village.
- **Wealdstone** is very poor quality and dying as a centre. It needs a complete makeover.

2.0 Land Use

- **The Town Centre** needs a cultural and civic hub. It needs a mixed use of retail, offices, residential, civic facilities, bars, cafes, restaurants, libraries, arts centre. Residential could be a mix of well designed apartments with some houses integrated.

The college could stay to bring life and vibrancy.

We need to create an attractive environment to draw people retailers and companies.

We need public spaces and squares to the right scale.

The Town Centre needs a public transport hub integrated with shops, offices, restaurants and bars. It needs a vibrant link over the railway line, wide enough to build on and covered to carry pedestrian routes over to the land surrounding the Hill. Whatever is built should be within a framework of proper townscape and spatial integration not isolated inward looking schemes.

- The **Civic Centre** site could be retained as a civic centre but with a good civic space in front with landscaped piazza. Car parking could be in multi storey parks at the rear or preferably below ground. Otherwise it should function as the Station Road intensification corridor.
- The **Kodak** site should have a mixed use of residential, modern workshops, small town communal facilities, shops, bars and restaurants. It could also act as another mode to help give some connectivity with Harrow Town Centre.
- The **Station Road corridor** needs a pavement society and public realm buildings up to 4 storeys. It needs trees, water features shops, bars, apartments, balconies and squares. It could have dedicated public transport zones.
- **Wealdstone** needs to be a vibrant local centre with all that Harrow Town Centre but has on a smaller scale. There is a major development opportunity for all uses including medical, nurseries, crèches and schools

3.0 Heights

- The **Town Centre** should be limited to the current maximum height and only then in the very centre. Harrow on the Hill and St Mary's should be respected as a focal point. The height restriction is vital. At its edges it should be transitional with its surroundings, using diminishing heights or wide buffer zones.
- The **Civic Centre and Station Road Intensification** corridor could be 4 or 5 storeys if stepped back at upper levels and the width of the corridor increased and landscaped as appropriate. This would not necessarily then dominate residential buildings behind.
- The **Kodak** site does not deserve any feature buildings. It is surrounded by residential area and therefore should be a 2,3 and 4 storey mix.
- **Wealdstone** could have 1 identifying landmark tall building close to the station. The rest could be say 6 storeys in the core area.
- **Generally** the heights in the whole zone should be controlled and limited in height. Isolated and stand alone height buildings in open space should be avoided. Tall buildings have no place in Central Harrow. Low height but dense ribbon development should be the appropriate model.

These can then integrate terraces, squares, trees, piazzas, cafes etc in a human useable scale. It needs to create a street level, friendly culture with set backs at higher level.

4.0 Architecture and Quality

- Harrow is probably not going to attract iconic buildings. It is a poor quality borough. Currently there is a very uncommercial environment so early developers will design to current or expected low rents. This will promote a continuation of low quality buildings. Punitive Section 106 costs will further drive down good design, detailing and quality. The Council should encourage lower rates and no Section 106 costs in certain areas.

The design framework should be robust in so far as it will provide quality not by individual designs but by the underlying concept planning.

Big developers should not be allowed to dictate the sites. The area needs to be linked together not further isolated.

Low rise high density is possible and can be incorporated into all mixed use developments. Tight urban spaces with clear delineation of public, semi public and private spaces should be encouraged.

Good urban planning and a framework to work within is key.

5.0 Conclusion and Priority

Harrow Town Centre must be the key focus for a cultural and civic Harrow. It has all the problems that need to be addressed. The intensification area/Kodak/Civic Centre and other sites are all relatively isolated, small scale or stand alone. They are therefore much less important if Harrow is to survive and thrive.

There is a big problem in Harrow Town Centre. What do you do with all the 2/3 storey isolated freehold units in centre Harrow. It will be too difficult to assemble meaningful sites. A Town Centre Guide must be formulated to enable piecemeal pockets to be designed and built within Town Centre guidelines and height restrictions in place. This needs to be compatible with early development opportunities.

The heart of the Town Centre is in danger of being ignored and left alone. The other sites must not become a distraction. We must not end up with a doughnut where the peripheral easy sites are developed around a void in the centre with no attractions, no heart, no culture and no future.

A concentrated effort must be made to generate the Centre.

Once the Town Centre has been assessed and good plan produce, then this can be the focus and hub of all linking sites.

The infrastructure and traffic will also be a key driver of the Centre. If this can be developed with a human, urban scale with good design and a good infrastructure the Town Centre can act as a focal point for the borough.

However, this is the most difficult and most challenging area that needs to be addressed. Even if the delivery of the main objections can be provided outside Harrow Town Centre, or by using one or two sites in the Town Centre Harrow will fail in so many respects.

6.0 **Some Ideas for the Harrow Town Centre**

- A new transport hub. Reactivate previous objectives set out in Harrow on the Hill Station Planning Brief.
- Transport hub link to first floor level of St Anne's.
- Introduction of cultural centre with theatre, performing arts venue, library, exhibition space, tourist office.
- Pedestrian squares with cafes, shops and trees.
- New pedestrian route through centre in north/south orientation to give more permeability.
- Remove traffic other than public transport and deliveries from Centre.
- Prepare Town Centre Design Guide limiting heights and providing blue print for future developments.
- Think about future of Station Road, St Anne's Road, College Road and Havelock Place as priority.
- Identify what is good and preserve it. Existing buildings could be sustainable by good transformation and restoration.
- Create a cutting edge sustainable town centre which encourage a green buildings and low carbon culture.
- Retain lowlands recreation ground to provide attractive semi rural approach to the Green Historic Hill.

7.0 Some Ideas for Wealdstone Town Centre

- Existing key elements such as Civic Centre, reference library, Wealdstone Mosque, public library, Harrow and Wealdstone railway station, main shopping area, Leisure Centre and Byron Park to be improved and properly integrated with each other and any future proposals.
- Unattractive Civic Centre car park and barren paved open spaces could be landscaped as an attractive open parkland visually linking with the mosque opposite, the Civic Centre and approach to Harrow and Wealdstone Railway Station. Parking could be relocated to possible underground car park constructed under existing car park or new multi storey elsewhere.
- Improve pedestrian and transport links with Harrow Town Centre by upgrading Station Road with attractive and intensive tree planting (currently a wide and characterless thoroughfare) and by incorporating a designated pollution free electric tram or bus link relating both centres and their main line and underground rail stations. The terminus at the Wealdstone end being in the proposed planted open space near the Civic Centre, mosque and Harrow and Wealdstone Railway Station.
- Restore the Safari Cinema to its original splendid art deco faced by simply removing the 1970's aluminium cladding making good and redecorating – a low cost way of reintroducing a key local building on the Wealdstone/Harrow link route.
- Upgrade leisure centre by re-establishing existing outdoor pool (possibly all weather with sliding roof structure?) and properly relating the Centre with Byron Park with its play areas, tennis courts and skate board facility.