

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS PANEL MINUTES

19 SEPTEMBER 2011

Chairman: * Councillor Bill Stephenson

Councillors: * Tony Ferrari * Barry Macleod-Cullinane
* Keith Ferry * Joyce Nickolay (1)
* Thaya Idaikkadar * Phillip O'Dell

* Denotes Member present
(1) Denotes category of Reserve Member

64. Attendance by Reserve Members

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

Ordinary Member

Reserve Member

Councillor Susan Hall

Councillor Joyce Nickolay

65. Declarations of Interest

RESOLVED: To note that there were no declarations of interests made by Members.

66. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2011, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

67. Public Questions, Petitions and Deputations

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put, or petitions or deputations received at this meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rules 17, 15 and 16 (Part 4B of the Constitution) respectively.

68. Heart of Harrow Area Action Plan - Spatial Vision

The Divisional Director for Planning gave an extensive presentation on the progress to date with regard to the emerging spatial vision for the Heart of Harrow Intensification Area, setting out a draft Spatial Vision for the entire Harrow and Wealdstone Intensification Area. He also referred to the appendix which had been circulated late as the information was still being compiled at the time of agenda dispatch. He briefly recapped on the issues that faced the borough:

- planned growth
- “Tired” looking town centres
- suburbs under threat
- uncertain infrastructure and service planning
- lack of confidence, including developer/investor interest
- lack of visibility in London
- unclear and uncertain spatial vision
- fear/resistance
- community ownership

He then spoke on the need to establish a more secure future for development, including the identification to date of seven sub-areas for the Harrow and Wealdstone Intensification Area, each with an individual role and emerging set of objectives to help guide future development. He advised that the draft Plan sought to address the issues of sub-standard infrastructure and that, to date, the consultation forums held had led to the drawing up of the emergent forms of development and green areas presented to the Panel. It was recognised that whilst there was anxiety concerning the proposals for new development, the consultation had started to identify resident desires and expectations around the need for higher quality development and a more diverse and stronger street / café culture.

The Divisional Director then briefly took the Panel through the emerging views for each as follows:

Harrow: Harrow Metropolitan Centre was divided into three separate areas. The Western Gateway and Town Centre East were essentially areas of transition between the town centre commercial core and surrounding residential area, with the mix of uses, densities and scale of development gradually reducing towards the sub area boundary. The Town Centre sub-area comprised the main retail and commercial core of the Intensification Area. It typified Harrow’s Metropolitan character, and development here would be required to be of a type and scale that reaffirmed Harrow’s Metropolitan Centre role, by extending the retail and commercial offer and through the creation of a network of quality public spaces. It was considered

the most appropriate part of the Intensification Area to locate a tall “landmark” building, marking the Town Centre’s borough-wide role and importance.

Station Road: The main objective for the sub-area was to improve the High Road character and enhance its role in linking the two main shopping areas, especially for pedestrians, cyclists and bus users, utilising development sites as “stepping stones” along the way. Public realm improvements, allied to improvements to key junctions to smooth traffic flow, would strengthen the High Road character. Higher densities would be limited to the road frontage reducing where they met the surrounding residential area. Street enhancements to Hindes and Elmgrove Roads would provide a green corridor linking two significant parcels of open space serving the sub-area. Greenhill Way car park, Tesco and the Civic Centre were identified as key development sites.

Wealdstone: Wealdstone could also be subdivided into three sub-areas, with a common objective being to create an east west link across the area, improving the connections between Headstone Manor, Kodak in the west, the District Centre, and the Leisure Centre to the east. Within the central sub-area, the aim would be to strengthen and diversify the current retail offer, creating a more specialist role, and refocusing activity around the Headstone Drive, High Street, Canning Road junction. The improvement of the public realm, particularly around the station and under the railway bridge adjacent to the Crown Court, would do much to improve Wealdstone’s image and function as a local centre. A number of small infill sites were scattered throughout the sub-area, especially at the junction of Palmerston Road and George Gange Way, where development could signal a gateway to Wealdstone and where taller buildings might be appropriate, reflecting the significant change in site levels near The Bridge.

Wealdstone West comprised land on either side of the west coast mainline railway and included some of the borough’s longest established employment uses, most notably Kodak and Col Art. Development would be required to create better connections with the existing suburban street pattern and integrate sites with the surrounding Metroland, through a wider mix of employment, housing and community uses and new green links. The size of available sites created the opportunity for a more distinctive built form and contemporary character. Kodak/Zoom Leisure, Col Art, the Teachers Centre and Headstone Manor had been identified as sites which, together were anticipated to make a significant contribution to meeting employment and housing targets and the provision of new community and green infrastructure. Byron Park and the Leisure Centre were the main landmark features of Wealdstone East. The main role was to improve and diversify the existing leisure offer, and to use development as a transition with the existing suburban fabric and Green Grid proposals.

The Divisional Director Planning then spoke on the issue of infrastructure requirements and addressed the subject of tall buildings indicating that officers were continuing to collect evidence and undertake analysis with regard to these issues. It was noted that the protection of iconic views remained a matter of importance and that consultants were being commissioned to identify specific views in the borough which required

safeguarding in terms of development proposals. He referred to a contour map noting that this was intended to suggest the height contours within the borough to inform the appropriateness of tall building placement, although officers believed the number of such buildings would be very few in number.

Members then questioned officers and made comments which were then responded to as follows:

- With regard to the issue of traffic flow, there was the additional consideration of capacity and potential vehicle reassignment. Resolving the perceived traffic problems of Harrow could result in additional traffic utilising the through route and thereby creating greater congestion. There were important judgements to be made in balancing congestion, air quality and the safety of all users of the network. Officers considered a more balanced approach in terms of the acceptance of a element of congestion should be considered which sought to improve air quality and safety and prevented undesirable reassignment of traffic through the intensification area. However, it was recognised that this was an area for consideration and decision with regard to the solution being sought.
- A Member, in referencing the growth of businesses proposed, noted this was a multiplication of use levels and commented that this would exacerbate current congestion issues. He further emphasised that it was his belief that the levels of car parking in the Town Centre were insufficient to cope with the level of use envisaged. Officers noted the need to place Harrow within the context of west London. It was advised that the surrounding local boroughs were also currently experiencing growth and that there was a balance to be considered between creating a fast route which could be used as a thoroughfare and promoting traffic to remain in Harrow. The Divisional Director advised that businesses and developers had raised concerns with officers around the lack of amenity and cogent strategy for Harrow and consistent decision-making concerning proposals, but the issue of increased car parking had rarely been raised.
- The Chair noted the Member's point with regard to the development of the town centre and corresponding growth of residential development, and questioned whether the current road system in Station Road would be sufficient to cope with the additional pressures. Officers advised that work was being undertaken with TfL to "model" traffic flows and use within the borough to test all emergent scenario's. Officers recognised that if these resulted in the conclusion that the road capacity would exceed current or deliverable infrastructure, the land uses would need to be revisited as part of the Strategy.
- The Corporate Director also responded advising that the issue of traffic flow and management had been recognised as a major driver in the preparation of the Area Action Plan, which was being undertaken jointly with the Greater London Authority, with the key issue being the need to provide the evidence to demonstrate what could be achieved.

- In response to a Member's comments with regard to driveway parking and the potential for improvement to numerous junctions, officers advised that TfL provided a general policy with respect to car parking constraints, although decisions remained with local boroughs. There was a need to manage traffic differently and promote alternatives such as public transport.
- A Member referred to the issues faced by the Honey Pot Lane development and several other wards of the borough where there was a belief that current car parking levels were insufficient. He suggested that there should be a realistic recognition that people would seek to own cars as part of day-to-day use and that the Council should consider a more car friendly stance and provide appropriate levels of parking. The Chair responded that the pressure from central government was to reduce parking levels in town centres and that legislatively the authority was unable to turn down planning applications that met the minimum criteria for car parking as a local choice issue. He noted that the current standards were, with regard to flats developments, approximately less than one space per flat. Moreover, developers seemed to be confident of selling flats even if there was limited car parking. It was further advised that the London Plan also promoted "mode-shift" away from ownership of vehicles and parking provision.
- A Member noted that the Plan submitted differed slightly from those previously considered and was advised that the Plan was still at the point of consultation but was intended to reflect the views emerging from comments rather than being a definitive conclusion. Officers would reconsider how this was to be presented to ensure that this was captured in the future.
- The Chair spoke on the south sub-area (Town Centre East) asking that greater consideration be given to the provision of community facilities, particularly at the Gayton Road site as the current proposal was for a predominantly residential development and could result in a perception of marginalisation with respect to other sub-areas.
- In relation to tall buildings a Member questioned the suggested height levels in previous reports. Officers responded that it was not anticipated that buildings in excess of ten storeys would be suitable outside the Harrow Town Centre location and that the maximum height envisaged for Wealdstone was nine storeys. Discussions had been held with the developers of the Kodak site and whilst there was a variety of feedback from the public that the site should reflect a tall structure or retain the current chimney, there was no appetite on the part of the developer to construct a building of this height in the current market. The contour map and proposals presented to the meeting aimed to identify a broad envelope of generic heights appropriate for the various sub-areas to ensure that tall buildings were only permitted where they served to deliver specific (or exceptional) planning

objectives and were consistent with the broad urban design strategy to be set out as part of the spatial vision.

- In considering the issues raised about tall buildings, the Chair emphasised the need to have clear guidance on this area for the purposes of consultation and future development.
- Responding to a Member's comments on the draft infrastructure schedule included in Appendix 4 of the report, the Divisional Director Planning offered to meet with the Member concerned to review the funding assumptions made, arising from the GVA Grimley report on likely infrastructure provision but stated that these were at an early stage of development. It was noted that issues which had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be picked up as part of this consideration.
- A Member queried the current situation with regard to community projects noting the examples quoted of ice rink etc. The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Development and Enterprise advised that the Council was not required to realise the highest commercial return from its land use and that this enabled consideration of utilising sites for community related purposes. He emphasised that the ideal was to find a developer who was in tune with the Council's ambitions with respect to an increase in community facilities but accepted that the business cases would need to be drawn up to inform future decisions.

In conclusion, the Divisional Director Planning advised that further reports would be presented to the next meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Local Development Framework Panel with a view to the Preferred Option being considered at Cabinet and Council on 18 October and 3 November respectively. Subject to Cabinet and Council approval, a six week public consultation on the Preferred Option would be undertaken in November/December, in accordance with the Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

RESOLVED: That the Panel's comments on the draft Spatial Vision for the Heart of Harrow and the role and objectives for sub areas and key development sites, as outlined in the Appendices to the report, be considered by the Local Development Framework Panel at its meeting on 10 October 2011.

69. Update on Various Projects

Members noted the updates with respect to the various projects listed.

The Chair referred to the need to identify an alternative solution for a potential re-siting of the Civic Centre library with a state of the art facility for the future but noted that there were various potential possibilities available to the Council for the future consideration of its land use.

A Member requested an update with regard to Bradstowe House expressing his concern at the issues of graffiti and trespass which affected the site. The Leader of the Council expressed his own disappointment with regard to progress on the site but advised that the Council were charging a rent for the ongoing encroachment on the pavement area which prevented thoroughfare use. The Divisional Director Planning advised that the most recent negotiations with the developer had resulted in their stating that the project was unlikely to restart unless the current residential Market improved to make the commerciality of the development more viable. He further stated that several proposed change requests to the planning application had been informally received and that, to date, a number of the proposals tabled were unlikely to meet appropriate planning application standards. He was hopeful that the proposed intensification programme works would assist in a change to the external investment profile of Harrow which would then promote greater confidence and provide an opportunity to move the development forward emphasising that there was currently no simple solution to the issues faced by the developer.

RESOLVED: That the update be noted.

70. Future Topics and Presentations

Members considered which items they would like to receive at their next meeting. Officers advised they were working with the Youth parliament for a future submission to the Panel on youth aspirations for the Borough.

Members agreed that Transport for London (TfL) be invited to the next meeting to speak on its broad approach to managing traffic flows in the future as part of its “managing place” strategy.

It was noted that the AAP would also return to a future meeting for further discussion and that Land Securities had indicated an interest in presenting to the next meeting with respect to aspirations for the Kodak site.

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.30 pm, closed at 9.18 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR BILL STEPHENSON
Chairman