

GODALMING TOWN COUNCIL

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20 September 2022

Sent via Email to: burysdevelopment@waverley.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Central Godalming Regeneration Project

The Central Godalming Regeneration Project is one of the most significant projects to have come before Godalming Town Council's Environment & Planning Committee. Following consideration by the Committee I am instructed to make the following response on behalf of Godalming Town Council (GTC) to the Waverley Borough Council (WBC) public engagement process.

GTC recognises the significant financial strain on local authorities throughout the United Kingdom and that the financial strain has existed since at least 2017. This situation has been acknowledged by multiple different administrations of WBC of all political affiliations. The financial impact upon local authorities continues to widen as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. The situation must be resolved either through Central Government intervention or local mitigation such as is being proposed here.

The majority consensus of GTC is broadly supportive of the proposed plan. The Town Council welcomes efforts to have the Borough Council remain within Godalming, on a redesigned site that will be both more economical and more environmentally friendly in the long run; the Town Council believes this represents a strong commitment to financial prudence and sustainability. The Town Council also strongly approves that The Burys Field, which is crucial as both green space and as a space for key community events, is categorically excluded from the overall scheme.

The Town Council welcomes WBC's efforts to build low density affordable and social housing in the town, rather than simply selling the land to private developers. However, in doing so, the Town Council seeks reassurance and clarification from WBC on the following matters:

1. That the majority of the proposed housing is genuinely affordable, and a significant proportion will be for social rent, and that social rent houses will not be able to be sold on at a later date.
2. That WBC will endeavour to ensure that they are ambitious with regards to ensuring the new houses are built to the highest possible standards of insulation and energy efficiency.
3. That current residents of Great George Street impacted by the development will have their views properly taken into account.
4. That the view through the proposed development of the river front and Lammas Lands is not unduly impacted by the housing.

Regarding the issue of parking. It is the consensus view of the majority of the Town Council that as a community priority must be given to the people and the planet before parking, and therefore, accepts that a small, decked car park, that does not exceed the height profile of the current Council

offices represents the most efficient way to replace the parking currently offered at The Wharf and Crown Court sites.

The declaration of a climate emergency by WBC means that the private car cannot continue to dominate, as it has for decades, the town; GTC believes that thinking must move beyond the 20th century.

In relation to Crown Court Car Park, the Council noted that even in the pre-pandemic period, it never operated at more than 90% capacity, and that there is ample public car parking elsewhere around town. That being said, it is important that the High Street remains accessible to older residents, parents and the disabled, and in supporting the proposals put forward GTC insists that blue badge, family and EV spaces be maintained within the Crown Court site near to the Wilfrid Noyce Centre and also within the new decked car park. GTC also suggests that WBC look at all other parking sites within the town centre to ensure these designated spaces are more equitably distributed around the town.

Whilst the majority opinion of GTC is supportive of WBC's proposed plan, there is within the Council a dissenting minority viewpoint that is opposed to the plans, which for the purposes of democratic accountability, the Town Council wishes to record. The minority viewpoint, which is the view of the Conservative group on the Council, is that the loss of the Crown Court Car Park is not ameliorated by the proposed decked car park at the council office site, and that this will have a detrimental impact on both businesses and older members of the community. The minority view was also of the opinion that a multi-storey car park located near to the conservation area should be opposed on the basis of aesthetics and inappropriate location.

GTC considered that, to date, the public communication of this public engagement could have been better. With this in mind, it is suggested that any future public consultation on further proposals will need to take into account criticisms levelled at this engagement exercise, and seek to present plans in an improved, accessible and clear way.

Yours faithfully

Andy Jeffery

Andy Jeffery
Town Clerk