

TRAFFORD COUNCIL
STRETFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM – 16th SEPTEMBER 2013
SUMMARY NOTE OF DISCUSSION

PRESENT: Councillors Walsh (In the Chair), Acton, Adshead, Duffield, Cordingley, Jarman, Mrs Lloyd, O'Sullivan and Taylor

Also Present: Kate Green MP and Councillor Hyman (Executive Member, Economic Growth and Prosperity)

TRAFFORD COUNCIL OFFICERS: Stephen James (Economic Growth Manager), Sonia Cubrilo (Strategic Manager – Neighbourhoods and Communities), Martin Ledson (Growth and Business Development Manager) and Julie Reilly (Stronger Communities Officer – North)

PUBLIC: 175 residents

Apologies: Councillors Malik, Ross and Stennett

1. **Welcome**

Councillor Walsh welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the speakers.

2. **Stretford Town Centre Masterplan**

Stephen James explained that delivering the successful regeneration of Stretford Town Centre is a key priority for Trafford Council.

To make this happen, a Masterplan for the area is being developed to establish a framework for the next 10-15 years.

The Masterplan sets out to achieve:

- The creation of more active street frontages at key locations;
- Delivery of a wider mix of uses within the Masterplan area;
- Improved pedestrian links;
- Maximised positive impact from the historic buildings; and
- Improved access to recreational assets and green spaces.

The following key assets were highlighted to the meeting:

- Key environmental assets including Victoria Park and the Bridgewater Canal.
- Proximity to major cultural and leisure destinations, including MUFC, Lancashire County Cricket Club, Imperial War Museum North and Media CityUK.
- A large catchment area and proximity to high density residential communities.
- Heritage assets include three Grade II listed buildings:
 - Stretford Public Hall
 - St Matthews Church
 - Essoldo Cinema building
- Excellent accessibility by road via the M60 / A56 and public transport via Metrolink and regular bus routes.

Priority Development Sites:

Site 1 – Stretford Mall

Site 2 – Arndale House

Site 3 – Stretford Public hall

Site 4 – Essoldo Cinema

Site 5 – Lacy Street Car Park

Site 6 – Former Boatyard Site

Site 7 – Royal Canal Works

Site 8 – Stretford Station

Site 9 – Stretford Library and Clinic/Surgery

Site 10 – The Drum

The meeting was also informed that as part of the Masterplan consultation process consideration would be given to pedestrian movement and Highways and how improvements could be brought about.

The Consultation Process was outlined with people were being encouraged to provide their views in one of the following ways:

- Visit the Council website at www.trafford.gov.uk and complete the online questionnaire.
- Return a hard copy of the questionnaire.
- E mail suggestions to stretfordmasterplan@trafford.gov.uk

Some key highlights from the public consultation so far were outlined to the meeting and it was explained that following the formal close of the consultation all consultation responses will be analysed and used to inform necessary changes to the plan with the following steps then being taken:

- Further engagement with local schools will take place now the 2013/14 academic year has begun.
- Revised version of the Masterplan will be prepared for the end of 2013.
- As specific projects are developed in more detail there will be further opportunities to give feedback and work in partnership to deliver.

A summary of questions and comments from members of the public included:-

The Masterplan:

- *Q: At a previous meeting I saw some sort of presentation – is the budget still zero? I've heard that Altrincham is getting another £70 million. We've been neglected for decades and sacrificed. Where do the Councillors live? Who do we complain to? Is there an Ombudsman?*

A: The council will be looking at Section 106 etc. I can't comment on the history but the Masterplan is the first step to a cohesive approach to give the private sector some confidence. Only the private sector can do some of this and it has to be an opportunity for the private sector. The Altair project in Altrincham has been around for some time and is private sector investment. We want to create confidence here for private sector investment. We want the Public Hall to remain a key feature in Stretford.

- *Q: Key points of interest have been mentioned but it's brochure speak and is missing the key/main gateway. You see dreary dross. It needs a bit of money spending to make it look nice. I want to spend my money here.*

A: We're looking at pedestrian flow – money put aside for public realm improvement. There is an outward facing emphasis and it needs to be re-configured, need to soften the look. No one is saying the problem can be solved in five minutes. Too much or not enough residential has been mentioned. When the Mall closes at 6pm things seem to come to an end – we want people to stay on.

- *Q: Who are the private companies who will invest? Night time economy – Didsbury, Stockport, Stalybridge all have problems at night.*

A: The Masterplan mentions residential schemes and potential. The Mall, the Administrators and the council Chief Executive are having high level discussions and this process is being used for potential redevelopment of the Mall. Then an approach can be made to the market.

- *Q: Private space to public – how likely?*

A: Can't currently answer.

- *Q: Not everyone has Internet and local newspaper delivered.*

A: I will take your comments back. I understand that consultation has been done with tenants and residents groups etc.

- *Q: There are quite a few things you can't answer. Tonight is window dressing. You've decided what you want to do.*
A: Decisions are not made.

Comments made:

- Nigel Woodcock from the Green Party presented Trafford Green Party's formal response to the Stretford Masterplan stating that the Stretford Masterplan is a "missed opportunity because it fails to grasp the nettle regarding the long-term decline of Stretford town centre. He stated they feel there is a lack of coherence and sustainability has been ignored. His party believe that the A56 should be put underground and that the £50 million needed would be a fraction of the HS2 budget. He stated there is no town centre in Stretford and that greenery is needed. Too much residential is proposed and better use could be made of the canal side. Businesses currently on site should be asked if they want to move and not shoved. Public owned sites should not be sold. Longford Park etc is not mentioned and no cost benefit analysis has been done.
- I'm a resident and Editor of the Community News and chose this area. I had to change the name to Trafford Community News as advertisers etc wanted the name change – there was no support in Stretford. I'm proud to live here. Proud of the big sports venues. The A56 does cut Stretford in half.
- I've been a resident for 63 years so before the Mall was built. You can change the retail environment and make wind tunnels for rain etc. Altrincham is a mess and certain times such as the evening it's dead. Sale is dead except for Waterside. The worse thing is 8 million vehicles a month travel along Chester Road. Houses along there are a mess. Trafford Road greenery is a mess with dilapidated houses that are not mentioned in the plan. You can't make businesses come in. Towns around have the same problem. At least the Mall is warm and dry. Lacy Street estate needs investment.
- Bars and restaurants discussed but what about families.
- Extra houses but if shops not better then no use.
- Deadline 18th – why haven't you contacted residents at the back of Royal Canal? No notification at all.
- Lacy Street not contacted. What if that car park is used?
- You've talked about residential but no talk of extra school places?
- Green Party Representative: Some private investors – Peel and the canal – have reaped lots of profit. We wrote to Peel a while ago asking them to invest. No interest from papers etc. Why can't they be forced to invest?
- I would say the consultation is short and rushed. I heard about it on Facebook. It was stuck in the library corner. Suggest you extend the consultation. Over 100 here tonight.
- Obvious people want to see improvement. No money and commercial ventures. We've not seen anything about how it's going to be done
- Concerns were expressed around the standard of housing being provided and that new developments would probably only focus on increasing the affordable housing offer.
- It was stated that a local FM Radio Station would help to encourage local engagement.

Stretford Mall:

- *Q: Has there been any negotiation with the Mall owners?*
A: The council has been negotiating with Aviva on lots of topics.
- *Q: How long has the Mall been in Administration?*

A: Approximately five years. (It was stated this figure would have to be checked).

- Q: *There seems to be no choice as to who is in the Mall. T.J. Hughes, gas, electric have all left – no services remain and no suitable bus stops. Millions has been spent on Altrincham. You're talking about fifteen years. People need social housing not offices.*

A: There are a whole variety of reasons the retail offer has changed and we're trying to create a climate for businesses. We want to attract a wide variety of small independents. In Altrincham the Interchange and hospital are funding from other sources. As here we are trying to attract private money.

- Q: *Fifteen empty units near T.J. Hughes – Business Rates are destroying it. How can you regenerate when people are moving out? Also, have heard that a team of Architects are drawing up plans.*

A: This is not the case. We want to try and encourage shops of all sorts and have introduced a Town Centre Loan Scheme with a number of enquiries going through. There are various uses to encourage businesses in all our town centres. This is council money intended as a rolling amount.

Q: *Deterioration of quality of the Mall services has been over 20 years. Rates too high. I didn't used to have to go too far but do now. We need reduced Business Rates.*

A: We want the same thing. Council tax is local but Business Rates are sent to central government and not set locally. We are making representation to Government as this is a nationwide problem. We have created a Landlords Forum in Altrincham and want to do the same in Stretford – Agents and Landlords working together. An independent company has approached the Valuation Office and has been successful in some cases.

- Q: *Empty units – what can be done?*

A: This isn't easy but discussions are taking place and we need to push the Mall for new occupiers. The Loan Scheme has been mentioned and the Retailers Forum for specialist advice. It might be that the Mall is too big as shopping trends have changed. It might need to be smaller, more outward facing. I reiterate that this is a draft Masterplan.

- Q: *The Council need to buy out the owners and reduce rates.*

A: Unfortunately the council haven't got the money to buy out the owners.

- Q: *What are Aviva's plans for the site?*

A: We don't know.

Comment: They have a lot of power. We're stuck.

Comments made:

- Some attendees supported an improved night time economy but others pointed to the risks of resultant anti-social behaviour.
- It was felt that a better retail offer on its own is not enough there must be food and drink. Concerns were expressed that the food and drink offer might only be aimed at adults and therefore not provide somewhere for parents to take their children during the daytime.
- It was felt that free parking is essential. A market (outdoors or indoors) was also felt to be essential.
- Some Mall shops need to be outward facing so that people driving past would realise there is a shopping centre. Some attractive, complementary public realm on the main road would further announce that Stretford was 'open for business.'

- Retailers will only come if people want to buy their goods and there are several reasons I don't shop there. The building is physically separated by two main roads. Didsbury, Chorlton and Sale are different. A viable evening proposition is needed. It is in a prime position. More residential is needed.
- The Mall needs to be reconfigured to be more outward looking. Kingsway needs to be closed and traffic re-routed. Get cyclists off the road – more cars and more parking for Manchester United are needed.
- It's been said it needs to look attractive – that's false pretences. There's nothing there. I wouldn't go out after 6 or 7 at night. You need to clear the anti-social side.

The Public Hall – comments made:

- The Public Hall should be turned into a theatre.

The Essoldo:

- *Q: The Essoldo – can't it be flats or something? An extra lane is needed to turn.*
A: The Essoldo is a Grade 2 listed building with potential future leisure uses identified.

Comments made:

- Essoldo – Planners refused my interest in putting something on the site. Told by the owner it would have generated grants.

The Chair stated he would speak later to the resident regarding discussions with the Essoldo owner.

- Queries were raised regarding listed building restrictions and private ownership of the site.
- Queries were raised regarding parking provision/set down and pick up should the site be developed.
- It was stated the access road for the Essoldo is not included within the Masterplan boundary.
- It was felt that double yellow lines on the access road to the Essoldo must be retained at all times to ensure that emergency vehicles can get to the Essoldo and adjacent properties.
- Suggestion made that the owner wants to turn the Essoldo into a roller rink.

The Drum:

- *Q: Drum – housing not feasible. Only a business can go there.*
A: Identified earlier that times have changed.
- *Q: Mcdonalds? Is it the right tone? If we objected would it be turned down?*
A: Discussions taking place.
- *Q: Rubbish is dumped.*
A: This is a busy junction but we can't predict what Planning will do.
- *Comment: They (McDonalds) had an outlet in the Mall.*

Comments made:

- Most development opportunities are things you can't influence. Those you can you want to sell. What about a McDonalds on the Drum site? A theatre would be a good opportunity. It's short sighted of you. The road is a big problem. Think about me!
- Some attendees supported the suggestion of a McDonalds because it would be popular and offer job opportunities whilst others felt it would cause a serious road hazard. (A McDonalds in the Mall also received support).
- It was suggested that the Drum owners had already looked at residential and there were planning objections to such a development.

The A56 - comments made:

- What traffic calming?
- Reduce speed limit to 20mph.
- It was acknowledged that reducing the speed limit could have serious knock on congestion implications.
- It was pointed out that the A56 separates the Mall from the rest of Stretford and concern was expressed that significant work needs to be done to reduce the impact of the road on pedestrian access.

The Library - comments made:

- Library – I feel strongly the building should survive. People who can't have computers in their homes use the library. If the Mall fails we lose the library.

3. **Date of the Next Meeting**

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending. The date of the next Stretford Neighbourhood Forum is to be confirmed.