

Leatherhead Residents' Association – Forward Planning Group (FPG)

Report to Open Executive Committee Meeting 3rd November 2014

There have been no formal meetings of the FPG since the last Executive Meeting. However there have been a number of informal meetings between some members and also with John Howarth, Chairman of the Local Area Partnership (LAP) and also with officers of MVDC.

There have been two significant changes in the forward planning climate since the last Executive Committee Meeting. These changes have emanated from the MVDC meeting of 14th October 2014. I attended the Council Meeting in spirit as I watched all the proceeding on my computer. I report on these here:

Coast to Capital (C2C) and Plan L.

C2C, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) covering the area of E & W Sussex and East Surrey, had, in conjunction with MVDC, decided that one of its early projects to regenerate the economy was the revitalizing of the centre of Leatherhead. This gained government approval for initial expenditure in this next year to investigate and make recommendations to this end. MVDC had agreed to match this initial fund making a total of circa £120,000.

At the Council meeting on 14th October, under the leadership of Councillor Townsend, the Council debated whether to extend its financial commitment up to circa £500,000 on the preparation stages of the redevelopment of the town centre of Leatherhead. This money would be expended over a number of years and was largely to fund investigations and reporting by experts in town planning. What was clear was that the Council was looking to produce a Master Plan to which they would direct developments over a period, which could be up to ten years or more. It must also be remembered that they are anticipating that in spending public money C2C hopes to attract private investment of 7 times the public expenditure. (i.e. every £1million of public money would attract £7million of private investment).

There was strong support for this proposal, which was passed unanimously. The project will be managed by Nick Gray, Executive director of MVDC. (See proposed timetable in the LAP section on page 2.)

Housing & Traveller Sites Plan (HTSP)

Also at the Council Meeting on 14th October there was a debate on deferred motions put by two Councillors, that the Green Belt should be protected.

Two significant developments had taken place since MVDC started work on the HTSP. One was a change in guidance on the National Planning Policy Framework given by Secretary of

State, Eric Pickles. This directed that councils should avoid developments in the Green Belt and only under exceptional circumstances should such development be considered. Also, it was reported that the Planning Inspectorate had strongly argued against Green Belt development.

The Councillors, having received these two pieces of guidance and having recalculated the forecast of housing needs and at the same time having received vociferous opposition to most of the Green Belt development proposals, decided that the Planning Policy team would have to start again. It was acknowledged that some of the previous investigative work would still be useful.

The two motions were therefore withdrawn and a new motion would be drawn up which would include the statement that development on the Green Belt would only be considered if it had local support. We need to examine such a motion carefully.

Leatherhead Area Partnership (LAP)

An open meeting was organized at short notice by Chairman, John Howarth (JH), to substitute one of Leatherhead & District Forum. LRA had a reasonable representation at the meeting.

LAP & the Forum - JH suggested that consideration should be given to a merger of the Forum and LAP. However, although the constitutions and aims are similar, the legal structures are different – Forum, an unincorporated association; LAP, a company limited by guarantee. This will be considered further by the two bodies.

C2C – JH gave an outline of the C2C territory and the five zones, which it covered. The drivers for these Local Enterprise Partnerships were threefold:

- Job Creation;
- Provision of Employment Space;
- Homes

The Master Plan for Leatherhead (Plan L) was intended to be an all embracing review and plan for the centre of the town and would include the retail provision, business premises, public sector amenities, leisure facilities, the road network, parking and consequent housing needs.

The timeline for the Plan L project:

- By December 2014 - Procurement of Master Plan Partner
- February 2015 - Appoint Partner
- October 2015 - Draft Master Plan submitted to MVDC
- Early 2016 - MVDC to approve Master Plan subject to public response
- Spring 2016 - Public consultation
- July 2016 - Final Master plan submitted to MVDC
- September 2016 - Master Plan approved

It is important that the LRA through the LAP assembles its ideas for this regeneration by February 2015 in order that LAP/LRA can work with the Partner to present our considered views.

John W Wilson