

Building a Better Harrow Residents Panel: Meeting 7, 10 January 2017

Attendance

Officers: Paul Nichols, Tobias Goevert, Daniel Lester, Leanne Cooper, Sandra Perez, Cheryl Bannerman

Councillors: Cllr Keith Ferry, Cllr Sachin Shah

Panel members: Raj Kumar (facilitator / chair); Kiran Chotalia; Joanna Bowyer, Mihir Benodekar, Meera Chotalia, Louise Baxter, Danielle Witter

External: Jay Gort, Gort Scott Architects, Daisy Froud, Participation, Politics, Process, Oliver Marlow, Studio Tilt

Apologies: Mehdi Juma, Daniel Thurlow, Manjul Shah, Peter Jackson

Presentations

Welcome & Introductions - Raj Kumar

The year ahead – Raj Kumar

This is our seventh meeting so it is a good time to think about the year ahead. At the end of 2017 how will we know we have done a good job? What does success look like for us?

Panel Responses

- Seeing some of our ideas materialise whether it is on a building site or meanwhile uses onsite.
- It would be good to reflect back on what the Panel has said and for the Panel to let officers know what the Panel needs.

Latest News and Key Sites Update – Paul Nichols

- Regeneration Programme Finance – new set of capital budgets going through Cabinet in January 2017.
- We are in a deep phase of engagement on our major projects. The Poets' Corner drop-in events were held in November 2016. On The Wealdstone Project a lot of engagement is now taking place. Byron Quarter will begin engagement in February.
- Haslam House – now onsite.
- 2017 is a really exciting year for the programme as many schemes progress to planning.
- In the first half of this year we need to create a forward plan for meanwhile uses.

Panel Questions/Comments

- What happened with the Wealdstone twin towers scheme (Origin Housing)? *Paul - It went to committee at the end of 2016 with a recommendation for approval. The members weren't convinced and it was rejected on the night. The GLA have an option to call it in and they have decided to do that. This is because they feel it has got an impact on the delivery of the London Plan, particularly because of the high affordable housing content which is part of the Mayor of London's agenda.*
- What is the reason it wasn't passed? *Paul - A number of reasons. Concerns were raised about design, height and massing. There was also concern about refuse, servicing and parking arrangements.*
- I am surprised the scheme was recommended for approval as being a gateway to Wealdstone it doesn't come across as a high quality scheme and it seems completely out of character and out of place. It is a challenging site but the scheme needs to be reconsidered.
- People have a fear of losing the Harrow skyline – they like being able to view St Mary's on the Hill and the Kodak towers.

The Wealdstone Project (relocation of the civic centre) - Sandra Perez/Gort Scott Architects

Sandra Perez

- One of the things we are keen to get your input on is that this building will be more than just the civic office so we need to think what the building could be and what role it could play in Wealdstone.
- We want the building to support activities in Wealdstone and inject something that might be missing.
- We have appointed Gort Scott Architects, Allies & Morrison, We Made That and Daisy Froud to design and consult on the new building.

Jay Gort

- Gort Scott has a good background in High Street regeneration. Allies & Morrison are very inventive thinkers on good architecture. We Made That are keenly involved in the public realm and meanwhile uses.
- The red boundary includes the temple, discussions are being held with them at the moment, Peel House car park and the ground floor of Premier House.
- The brief is for: office use; potential NHS and wellbeing facility; housing; supporting commercial space; public parking and other public uses.

- The High Street works pretty well but it has probably seen better days. It has hit a number of obstacles along the way but it has great potential and some great buildings and independent businesses.
- The Wealdstone Square project which is looking at the space outside Holy Trinity Church is being led by We Made That. The aspiration is to look at how to link the two projects with the High Street.
- There is also the opportunity to think about some of the hinterland spaces to change the nature of them including Gladstone Way which at the moment has a bypass feel to it with defensive planting and crossings.
- The first public event will take place on 21 January at Holy Trinity Church, Wealdstone. We want to ask questions about the types of uses, materials, type of feeling and atmosphere. We conceive of this new space as a living room for Harrow, where people can go and sit and spend some time.
- We are at the fact finding stage so we thought it would be good to have a walkaround of the current civic centre building to get your views.

Panel Comments

- How you are going to push people to Wealdstone? How you are going to get rid of drug dealing and other anti-social behaviour to pull people into the new building/Wealdstone? People are looking at the inside of the building but they also need to look at the outside. You need to address these issues first and build the confidence in Wealdstone.
- Please don't build anything like Brent Town Hall because you see the receptionists sat there in their coats as it is freezing.

Jay

- What do you think people know about the project?

Panel Comments

- There was a difference of opinion with one panel member saying people will be shocked, with another saying people are talking about the project but that they want to find out more.
- Parking will be a big issue.

Daisy

- We want to talk to you today to ask you about the kind of impression the public spaces in the current civic centre make on you as individuals? How often do you use them, if at all, you might only come here for the Residents' Panel? But also what do we definitely not want to carry forward in designing new spaces? Also what do we think is rather lovely and we might want to have something similar in the new building?

- How often do any of you come to the civic centre now and for what reasons do you come here?

Panel responses

- I used to when there was a library to study in while doing my A Levels but not anymore. Maybe there is the opportunity for business incubator space in the new building?
- I have used the building for 25 years for training and consultation events.
- I attend partnership meetings regularly.
- I visited the building to declare my intention to marry at the registry office which is some random office out on the corner. The experience felt very clinical and administrative. It didn't feel special.
- A challenge at the Civic Centre sometimes is how to get to the right meeting point.

Daisy

- What do people in Harrow generally think of the Civic Centre? Is it a building that means something to people? What part does it play in people's lives? Does it mean anything to people?

Panel responses

- It probably means less as people do more and more online and council's encourage people not to visit council buildings or to ring them. For a majority of people there is no reason to come to the building unless there is some other use that will encourage them to visit.
- There is confusion in Harrow about what is the centre of Harrow. Is it the station, the town centre, the civic centre?
- The Civic Centre used to have an aura when the library was here but it is an afterthought when you think about Harrow. Harrow town centre is the centre of the borough. As there is no use at the Civic Centre for me anymore all I see is cars.

Jay

- Should a town hall be something like a supermarket or should it have something that has confidence and a presence?

Panel responses

- It should be a building you can use and be proud of as then you will have confidence in the council.
- We could do with a few more buildings in Harrow to be proud of which demonstrates the investment of the council.

- Brent Town Hall has a number of good uses and the outside is lovely but it is a cold building and that is my everlasting memory of the town hall. It should be warm and inviting.

Daisy

- We are going to look at three spaces and how each one is used, thinking about: the impressions they make on you and what impressions might they make on someone coming here for the first time? Are there things about this space that is great and that the new civic centre should keep? Are there things that we think no way should we take to a new building?

Location: Entrance of the Civic Centre, Ground Floor

Daisy

- Walking into the building what impression does this normally give you? What strikes you about this space? What do you feel about the entrance space?

Panel Responses

- It is confusing you get the lifts straight away with people walking in all directions and sitting in different places and queuing to the right. It isn't a great welcome. The signage is confusing.
- It feels like I have entered a Travelodge reception because of the low floor to ceiling height, there is a reception desk but very little other signage. Where is the registry office?

Daisy

- What else strikes you about this space, not just what you can see but think about the quality of the space?

Panel Responses

- It feels corporate. It is faceless. It isn't welcoming.
- It feels like you are not meant to stray beyond the area in front of the lifts.

Daisy

- Is there anything looking around that makes this feel like a good entrance?

Panel Responses

- Don't lose the list of the Mayors and the awards.
- The staircase gives the impression that we are not allowed up there. There is no visual link. Is there public access? *Paul - Yes, when I have guests I ask them to sit upstairs on the Middlesex Floor by the security desk as it is a more pleasant place to sit and wait. It comes back to the fact that the current entrance was never planned as*

the main entrance for the building and is really the basement level which has been adapted.

- There is a lack of space to take someone to one side for private conversations.

Location: Middlesex Floor lobby area

Daisy

- We know that this was originally meant to be the entrance area. Do any of the Panel spend any time here apart from walking through?

Panel Responses

- Most responded no but a couple of members indicated they wait on the Middlesex Floor for meetings.
- You can see the Kodak Mural when you sit and wait. Harrow cannot lose that as it is history. There is always a display or two to look at. A few Panel members hadn't noticed the Mural before but thought it was colourful and looked interesting.

Daisy

- What strikes you about this space? Not just what you can see but what how it makes you feel?

Panel Responses

- The ceiling is high. You can look out at a view and it feels more spacious.
- The greenery is good but it could be better integrated and more of a feature made of it.
- The wood is quite interesting. It gives you a period type of look and reminds me of civic uses.
- You can have new materials but respect the old and history by integrating things like the Kodak Mural.
- In a new building the materials will need to be chosen carefully so they withstand heavy use.
- The wood adds a bit of texture.
- The trophies and exhibition space could be made more public.
- The new building needs to allow for better access for all users.

Location: Council Chamber

Jay

- One of the quite big questions as we look at the new building is that there will be a room similar to the council chamber. Should that be such a set piece or something different and not have stepped seating? There are pros and cons to both.

Panel Responses

- I like the Chamber. It feels grand.
- It feels very formal like you have to be invited in.
- It isn't used as much as it could be. Not very flexible.
- The access to the viewing gallery is quite poor up what feels like a fire escape which makes you feel secondary to what is going on in the space.
- The building is very non DDA compliant.
- It would be a shame if we lost the talking point of the council chamber with it being used for filming.

Website

The regeneration website will be available at the end of the month.

www.buildingabetterharrow.co.uk

Future Engagement Events

- The Wealdstone Project – 21 January, 10am-5pm, Holy Trinity Church
- Wealdstone Partnership – 1 February, 5-7pm, Holy Trinity Church, network meeting for invited Wealdstone businesses and stakeholders
- Byron Quarter – 9 February, 3pm-8pm, 11 February, 10am-5pm, Harrow Leisure Centre
- Vaughan Road – 18 February, Noon-4pm, Arc House

Date of the next meeting: Tuesday 14 March 2017