

St John's Road Epping

Outline report of public consultation, June 2012

This document sets out a digest of the responses to the consultation on the St John's Road Area Design and Development Brief which was staged during March and April 2012. It is intended to give Members an early view of the key issues whilst the Brief is being drafted.

The consultation process which was undertaken was extensive and was also extended in response to the strength of local response. A total of 826 responses have been received, of which 462 were submitted as paper questionnaires or letters and a further 354 were submitted on-line through the council website.

Question 1

The first question asked respondents whether they agreed with the core project principles which had been set out in the consultation material as follows:

- The development needs to be strongly integrated with the High Street and the rest of the town centre;
- The area should include a sustainable mix of uses and create high quality public streets and spaces;
- Any development should respect and complement the historic character and scale of the town centre with buildings of the highest quality; and
- The ideas for development should make the most of this once-in-a-generation opportunity for the town but should be practical, deliverable and affordable.

The responses provide a very strong positive feedback on this question, with 477 people either supporting or strongly supporting the principles whilst 178 people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the principles. 91 people indicated a neutral response and a further 80 people did not complete the question.

It is instructive to read the written comments which accompany the scores. These indicate that people have tended to rate the illustrative schemes in the exhibition rather than the core principles as the questionnaire asked. Many of the comments mention issues which do not relate to the principles given and so people may not have answered the question accurately.

Question 2

Question two asked people to tick five things from a long list to identify which issues they felt would be most important for Epping town centre. Space was also provided for further suggestions.

- Provision of improved sport and leisure facilities in the town centre is the stand-out issue with 535 of all respondents ticking this option;
- Protection of historic buildings and respect for historic scale were the next two most selected issues with 401 and 382 votes respectively;
- Provision of space for adult education received a surprisingly high response of 315 votes;
- Following this the issues were scored as follows:
 - Protecting historic trees - 256
 - New high quality public space - 225
 - Smaller shops / boutiques - 203
 - New or improved library - 185
 - New premises for the CAB - 148
 - Community buildings for hire - 142
 - New affordable houses - 140
 - New premises for the church - 138
 - More town centre parking - 119
 - New houses - 114
 - Start-up space for businesses - 112
 - Larger non-food shops - 103
 - Town centre supermarket - 95
- Below this list there are a further 57 identified issues either from the original list or from those suggested by respondents. Most of these only score a small handful of votes.

These responses provide a clear indication that provision of improved sports and leisure facilities in the town is very important, whilst the comments about the protection of historic scale and character correlate well with the responses to question one. The most surprising response is the high level of support given to the provision of space for adult education and further thought is being given to how this can be reflected in the brief.

Question 3

Question three provided people with space to make their own comments about the scheme. These are currently being analysed by identifying and coding key issues.

At the moment, the key issues emerging reflect the desire to see improvements to the sports and leisure provision in Epping and a concern that a new larger store will have a negative impact on the High Street. Alongside this a number of people express a desire for a new food store to provide more competition, with some specifically suggesting Waitrose. Others have expressed concerns about traffic and about the need for infrastructure commensurate with new growth.

Question 4

Question four requested basic demographic data but did not require people to respond – some people have left this question blank. The data received can be summarised as follows based on the analysis completed so far:

- Slightly more than half of the respondents are female;
- Those under 35 account for 80 responses, the majority of which were posted on-line;
- The 36-50 age group is the largest responding group, with 186 comments – again the majority of this was received on-line;
- The 51-65 age group provided 125 responses and a high proportion was received on-line;
- The over 65 age group provided 61 responses, of which just over half were made on paper; and
- Postcode area CM16 5 was best represented, followed by CM16 4 and CM16 6.

Key issues for the brief:

On the basis of the work undertaken so far to analyse the consultation responses our project team has identified the following as key issues which need to be considered in the drafting of the brief:

- There is strong support for improved sport and leisure provision in the town centre. It is being considered how the potential for this can be included in the brief whilst leaving flexibility around the issue for further consideration of options both on and off site and funding strategies;
- There is strong support for an approach which protects the historic character and scale of the area and the brief will provide guidance to establish this;
- There are significant concerns about the provision of a new food store on the site, including concerns about scale and bulk, parking, traffic impact and impact on the High Street. This needs to be weighed against the need to provide for additional retail capacity in the town centre over the coming years as demonstrated in the Roger Tym study. It is also noted that many of the other issues which people supported strongly would only be viable or justifiable if a food store were to be included as part of the project mix. Consideration is being given to how best the brief can respond to these comments; and
- Consideration is being given to the future of the Centrepoint building in view of the comments regarding the provision of space for adult education and potential community uses.

The project team has been in consultation with the Parish Church, the Town Council and Essex County Council to review the emerging significant issues and is now

preparing the draft brief which will be submitted to members for adoption. These conversations have highlighted the need for the various bodies to work together to establish a clear position on land ownership and disposal strategy outside the scope of the brief and this work is ongoing.