

BIRCHERLEY GREEN: CALL FOR NEW PROPOSALS

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY MEMBERS

Context – the town overall and the town centre as a whole.

“The Bircherley Green footprint is large enough and in such an important location – potentially **the heart of Hertford** – that it is appropriate to consider this development in the context of what the centre of Hertford may require as a whole.”

“The future of the Bircherley Green site must be planned in conjunction with the rest of the town, not planned in isolation.”

“Bircherley Green was sold off and last ‘developed’ some fifty years ago. Our planning horizon must look forward for, at least, a similar period.”

“The chosen development will probably stand for the remainder of the Century; please let’s take time to get it right.”

“Bircherley Green is a large site in the heart of Hertford; it is crucial to the daytime economy of the whole of Hertford. If we get it right, it will transform daily local life. If we don’t, the centre of Hertford will merely continue to grow as a rowdy night spot, where locals fear to tread.”

“The overwhelming feedback was that Bircherley Green needs to be the centre of the town - the **town has lost its anchor** and it needs this to be restored.”

“It seems to me that we should be asking the question “**What is Hertford for?**”

“Can we assess where the town is successful and in what way can any success be encouraged in order to assess the land use for the town centre?”

“We are obviously very successful in attracting new residents. Commuting includes not only London but a wide ring of nearby towns. Much of the new housing is in small flats generally near the centre and this must support both the flourishing restaurant and personal

maintenance businesses such as barbers, manicurists and gymnasia, whether the residents are young couples or downsizing elderly.”

“Residential development seems a constant demand. It is generally agreed that shopping is in decline, largely due to the internet and also the ability of larger towns with a larger footfall to attract leisure and luxury shopping. It has been said that Hertford suffers from high rents and rates, based upon an over assessment of the importance of the current shopping streets. I think we are too easily put off on this point by government statements on the difficulties of re-assessing values – if we go on, there will be no shopkeepers left to pay the rates.”

“Hertford seems to be fairly successful as an administrative office-centre – I confess I am not sure about this as parts of Christs Hospital are converting from offices to luxury flats and the offices at the bottom of London Road are always seeking tenants. Probably a health centre and residential use would be sufficient.”

“The Council should consider the attraction of Hertford as a tourist target. We have one of the most interesting town centres in the region. It is half way to Cambridge and would provide an excellent coffee break centre for tours to that city. Could tour operators be encouraged to come here for this purpose? It would need coach stop facilities (London Road) and public lavatories but a positive policy could bring a major increase in shopping demand, without which no town centre can prosper.”

“We have a thriving art community and the Council have done quite a lot to encourage this with the gallery in the Hertford Theatre. There are also galleries at the old McMullens Yard and on Bull Plain. Again, these are difficult letting propositions and can only be used as examples of a changing shopping scene.”

“Part of Hertford’s charm is its heritage - Old buildings should remain as far as possible, obviously adapted for modern purposes.”

“We are the **County Town of Hertfordshire**. Therefore the town deserves some kind thoughtful detailed planning attention.”

“Cafes/ restaurants and art galleries would be good, to enhance the town, not nail bars, shoe menders, hair-dressers or charity shops, but a more a peaceful place of recreation and pleasure.” “Please no more barbers and nail bars.”

“With so many new houses/flats being built these are being brought by people moving out from the London area. We want them to shop in our town, not just go out into the night economy.”

“The current retail environment, rather than attracting new players, may in fact lead to other companies leaving (e.g. M&S, whose latest strategic review states the need for fewer small stores – is the Hertford store safe?).” “We need small shops so people can shop in town.”

“Shops must be affordable (in terms of rent and rates) or they will open and in short time close down.”

“Offer incentives to prospective shopkeepers to open an upmarket kitchen shop, a high-class butcher, fishmonger, shoe shops and men’s clothing retailer in Maidenhead Street. Improve the shops frontages which look cheap and have a hotch-potch of styles.”

“I am afraid we now use Welwyn Garden City Waitrose, and the nearby bank.....but miss the convenience and ambiance of Hertford. Sainsbury’s car park has difficult access and Tesco is not convenient for the rest of the town.”

“Motor vehicle traffic flows and motor vehicle ownership is expected to change rapidly looking to the future

- Further pedestrianisation of town centres, to reduce pollution, for safety, especially during the evening (as requested by the Police) and encourage healthy forms of getting about (walking!)
- Limiting access for private cars in order to ease the flow of public transport and non car modes of transport (pushchairs, mobility vehicles, bikes, e-bikes, even, possibly, scooters)
- Non-polluting public transport (trams, electric buses, trolley buses, e-taxis etc)”

“There is a long strip of railway land along Railway St which could be developed for public parking.”

“A simple multi storey carpark at both North and East stations would make use of the railway more desirable and relieve on-street parking.”

“What about a Park and Ride service?”

Implementation

“Bircherley Green requires a robust Public – Private Partnership if it is ever to meet the long-term needs of the community and the profit requirements of the owners.”

“Revisiting the concept of a “bus station” in the high street (e.g. possibly Fore Street) could provide an ‘olive branch’ to the developers, who, in return would need to accept the principle of working with local Government and the NHS to provide social services alongside commercial ones.”

“My view is that the consented proposals are too complex to be viable in Hertford. Mixing a hotel with residential, office, retail, car parking and community uses is just too much for an already difficult site in the centre of the town.”

“I think the council need to be bold and be willing to really question the policy set out in their urban design statement of 2016 which calls for a mixed-use scheme. How mixed-use can it viably be? Is there really a need for more large-format retail given people are spending less on the high street? Will they let, or just be boarded up? Is this an opportunity to concentrate the town centre to a smaller more vibrant area?”

“I think it needs to be kept simple, less uses but high-quality design and build in order to be viable and therefore deliverable. It would be a shame if the new owners go through a similar process and end up in the same position with a ‘policy compliant’ consent they can’t deliver.”

“I hope for the future of the town they can come up with a solid deliverable scheme, with a few frills but not too many to make it unviable.”

“Ensure that Hertford Theatre, Hartham Leisure Centre and Bircherley Green are not all closed at the same time for redevelopment.”

Models from other areas

“Ware has small independent-shops. I note the liveliness of Ware compared with Hertford and feel it relates to the more adequate parking facilities there.”

“How do places like Hitchin remain so vibrant?? They seem to have a lot of specialist shops in small units and a covered market. They also have free parking for periods of 2 hours”

“Take a look at Saffron Walden where Saturdays are buzzing with street food along with a thriving market which Hertford appears to have lost.”

“Recent visits to Thame and Witney in Oxon and to Ely have demonstrated how retail is still thriving in old market towns where car parking is free.”

“In South Cambridgeshire there is a new town, Northstowe, (www.northstowe.com) being built with a completely new, and carefully investigated and researched, shopping and social central area. Perhaps we could look at that and see what is so special and what is good so that it can be used here in Hertford. It has received very high praise from a multiplicity of people involved and interested and experienced in this type of centre. No reason why we can't ride on the backs of these planners?”

