

BIRCHERLEY GREEN: CALL FOR NEW PROPOSALS

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM HERTFORD CIVIC SOCIETY MEMBERS

General

“The development should have a good mix of shops, restaurants, business premises and housing. People felt that bars and restaurants should be part of the plan with a mix of independents and chains.”

“Will the hotel ever be built? We have 3 significant hotels, pub accommodation, some guest houses and Ware's Premier Inn just 3 miles away - and what with the recent announcement about Premier Inn's stunted building programme will we eventually be looking at the whole site.”

Partial Refurbishment

“We need urgent action to give life back to the centre otherwise there is a danger it will be fatally wounded! Taking that into account it seems that alterations/extensions to the existing buildings would be the most practical. I have never been a huge fan of Bircherley Green but I do not believe it was worse than the new proposals.”

“No more demolitions. Make best use of existing buildings, by encouraging adaptations and good sensitive design.”

“Open the gates and get footfall through the area again to help WHSmith and other struggling shops or we shall lose them too.”

“Cover the existing closed off area (hopefully with glass or similar) to make it an all year/all-weather facility.”

“It's always concerned me that we should be demolishing an area that is less than 40 years old. Was it really that bad? Sustainability?”

“Most of the buildings have not yet been demolished. So firstly, consideration should be given to whether some could be retained and refurbished, rather than demolished. We know that not all the traders previously in the centre wanted to leave. Some may be willing to return. The existing building on the left beyond W H Smith when entering the site from Railway Street, would be the prime candidate. The upper storeys, which seemed to be unused, could be converted into flats. An advantage to the owner would be that they would get at least some income sooner and would not incur the cost of redevelopment. Refurbishment would also be a 'greener' solution, as redevelopment wastes the 'embedded carbon' in a building less than 50 years old. Retail tenants might have to be offered an initial rent-free period to entice them in, especially if building works were going on opposite. If the way into the service yard for this building, past WH Smith's, were modified by altering the archway and steps, it could be made available for service traffic (but only during the evening and night), so that there would be no need for any service vehicles to use the riverside.”

“Maybe retain and re-use all of the buildings from the iron gates next to WH Smith down the east side. Demolish the former Starbucks. Keep the buildings on the west side past the iron gates to and including the former Boots unit. Demolish the false arch next to Starbucks to open up the area to the river - widen by taking part of what was formerly the wine and spirits section of Waitrose. Lay out a landscaping plan.”

“Does development need to involve knocking down any of the existing buildings in the Bircherley Green area? Perhaps the existing ones could be adapted to provide a Tesco Express type of small convenient supermarket which people arriving by bus would welcome the use of. The toilets, car park and bus station facilities could be refurbished and reopened fulfilling a rather desperate need!”

“Keep as many existing retail units as possible, revamping as necessary - offer to e.g. Boots, Mudlarks.”

“... toilets , cafe and waiting room to be reopened urgently

* reopen multi-storey car park ... urgently.

* Shops be made available as pop up units with low rental and no council rates

* help “Mudlarks” relocate”

“Suggest should try utilising the buildings that are left, incorporating the benefit of the river frontage, however the large brick wall that was Waitrose should go as it hides the view of the river.”

“..... support the suggestion about the refurbishment of existing buildings.”

“Why not repurpose/ refurbish existing buildings particularly opening up the back of the old Waitrose building to the river frontage.”

“Use existing retail units (maybe refurbished) to reinstate the footfall beyond W H Smiths unit.”

“If opening up to the river is a desirable aim, it could be done within the current construction quite easily. Consider for a moment the old Waitrose layout. It would be possible to ‘knock out the wall’ where the dairy, fish and deli sections once were. The blank walls could be replaced with large windows and job done! While this would be a crude action, knocking down the whole site with the primary aim to build flats may also have been a crude and a costly option.”

“Replace any buildings unsuitable for reuse as necessary with a view to providing space for activities such as rehearsal and community events.”

Car Park

“Car parking is a key issue.” “Keep the car park.” “Improve Car park or reopen asap.”

“Car parking to be provided either new build or refurbishment of the now closed multi story.” “Car park a MUST to attract visitors to the town.”

“Also, it is easy to see the multi-storey car park as a core structure that must remain but with a blank canvas does it have to?”

“Parking in Hertford has never been so problematical in the 35 years we have lived here as it is now.”

“... the Council needs to provide a lot more car parking space for locals and visitors. With the closure of the Bircherley multi-storey and Bull Plain, we are effectively left with Gascoyne Way, Hartham Common and St Andrews Street.”

“I would like to comment on the need for facilitating access to the town centre, so that shops and facilities thrive, by providing adequate parking.

“All of the suggestions would require suitable parking provision as part of the development. This parking should be reasonably priced. Consideration should be given to measures such as pay on exit parking to encourage people to remain in the town centre for as long as they need.”

“The current multi-storey is always full when I go.... someone said it's because Council staff now use it.”

“I moved to Hertford a year ago and was influenced by its apparent accessibility I have walking difficulties...so have been disappointed by the loss of the central carpark.”

“I would suggest that a temporary use of any available space as an interim car park during the forthcoming delay in development would help to revive the dying heart of Hertford.”

“In view of the size of the Bircherley Green site retention or replacement of the existing multi-storey is essential to provide much needed car parking.”

“This should be retained and seen as a public benefit and a public amenity, so the running of it should be the responsibility of the Council. If it were transferred to the Council on a 99-year lease the owner would receive a rent and would not have to fund maintenance, though initially the lease would have to be a peppercorn to compensate for the cost of bringing the car park back into use including renewing the lifts. The Council could in due course recoup the cost of running the car park from charges - because of the convenient central location these could reasonably be set higher than charges in other Council car parks.”

“Parking is of prime importance here. Since the multi-storey car park is there, perhaps this could be one of the places which need not be touched at all but opened again as soon as possible.”

“Car parking is itself a perennial problem. The present charging system is still cumbersome and needs a car number identification / exit system. The central area is the one area where a rebuilt car park wrapped into the scheme might rise another floor.”

“My view is that whatever is built and installed on the site must be underpinned by realistic and suitable parking facilities nearby; we do not want a repeat of the excellent creation and enhancement of Hertford Theatre with inadequate consideration given to parking requirements.”

Bus Station

“The bus station must stay – this is for social rather than economic reasons.” “Decent toilets and bus station facilities... bleak and cold at present.” “Retain bus stops and multi-storey car park, renovate and apply new facias.”

“I have counted 11 bus stops in the centre of Hertford, in addition to the Bus Station. Highways rejected the option of a ‘bus station in Fore Street’ correctly, I believe, in the context of then current traffic flows and vehicle ownership. However, the context is expected to change rapidly looking to the future (ref: Government’s “Future of Urban Mobility: Urban Strategy” March 2019).”

“The current location of the bus station forces medium distance services (e.g. 310 and 724) to make twists and turns which I see as unnecessary, excessive, polluting and which can throw them off their schedule (no joke when you are travelling to Heathrow!) Currently, school buses use The Wash as the de-facto interchange bus station.”

“Improve the appearance of the Bus Station - Re-open the Waiting Room and WCs etc. If phase 1 (proposed hotel development) doesn't happen move the bus station further "inland". Some associated work in Railway St on the approach which should already have double yellow lines around the traffic island near the Friends Meeting House.”

“It would be in accordance with sustainability criteria to use revenue from higher charges to fund the bus waiting room, as a contribution to making public transport more attractive.”

“I would recommend revisiting the concept of a bus station in the high street. The high street (e.g. possibly Fore Street) would be un-incumbered by private vehicles other than ‘blue-badges’.”

“I am concerned about the idea of the bus station being moved to Fore Street. With the high buildings both sides and the propensity of buses stationary but with engines running at key periods during the day, this may create a "fumes alleyway" that will not be pleasant and will be potentially harmful to health - at least the current bus station is in a broader open space where fumes can dissipate more easily (not all buses have engine cut-outs such as those on the new fleet of 310 buses). And with Hertford being a terminus for many services buses often wait parked for up to 20 minutes to start their new leaving time - hence clogging the area if Fore Street is considered.”

“If the hotel phase 1 option is not pursued we have vacant ground. Could the bus station be brought forward on to some of this ground allowing greater options for

redevelopment of the site to the rear and on the riverside. The revised bus station layout at Welwyn Garden City might help give some pointers into how the area might be designed to maximise space - or perhaps the new layout at Hatfield station."

Health Centre

"A number a people felt the suggested medical centre should be retained as part of the plan." "A health centre as proposed in the now defunct plans." "We need a doctor's surgery - desperately!" "We could do with a general medical practitioners' centre."

"The idea of a medical centre in the previous scheme seemed a very good one, both as a convenient location and an expansion of health facilities. Could this be expanded to include facilities for medical support professions – physios, chiropodists, etc.?"

"Doctors' Surgery (in conjunction with Boots?) but must be easily reached from car parks (the two surgeries operating together in narrow Castle Street is not satisfactory because there is no parking)."

"Perhaps the existing buildings could be adapted using some of the space as a medical centre which we were "promised". "Redevelop part of the former Waitrose building to include for the Ware Road Doctor's surgery (currently sharing at the Castlegate surgery)." "Suggest former Waitrose shop floor to be converted into doctors' surgery (perhaps negotiate with Wallace House surgery) and new Boots the Chemist."

"Replacement for some local GP services, excluding Hanscome House, which is a model GP service and should not be tampered with. (i.e. don't change what works). Consultation with the NHS to design a future-proof Health Centre, reducing travel to the QEII and Lister."

"Although the NHS commissioning group has not yet been able to commit to taking space for a GPs' mega-surgery or health centre, one will undoubtedly be needed as the housing allocations for the town in the District Plan are built out. To bridge the gap the Council (or an arms-length company) should commission the building of a 'shell' for the health centre and lease it on to the commissioning group when they are ready for it. At present the NHS is unable to take advantage of Section 106 monies from major housing applications because it cannot identify specific projects for which the funds would be used. The Council is not legally permitted to require funds under Section 106 for vague purposes such as 'mental health services', but proposals for a specific GP complex/health centre would qualify. If in the end the commissioning group decided they didn't want the shell after all, the Council would still have an asset in terms of potential office floorspace, or as a last resort could convert the shell to apartments to protect their investment in getting it built. Could the ex-Waitrose building be the shell?"

Residential

“Residential with regards to the specific needs of Hertford town centre” “Possibly, some homes, for committed non-car users!” “Of course, there is always a need for more social housing!”

“Whilst apartments would be appropriate as part of a mixed residential / retail /etc redevelopment of part(s) of the site, there should be no assumption that tall or dense development should be permitted just to give the owner / developer a profit. This would mean it might well be impossible to secure any element of affordable housing.”

“No more flats - Hertford now has way too many and really needs more 2-up-2-down cottages to encourage social and community development for the future.”

“Consider replacing former retail outlets that included Carphone Warehouse and Starbucks with three or four storey leasehold townhouses with small courtyard gardens to rear.”

“Planners should recognize the contraction of shops and shopping and encourage a larger area within the town centre for residential development, not only by piling small flats on top of shops / cafes etc. but perhaps seeking some 3 storey expensive town houses with front gardens onto a path along the river – look at the attraction of the Folly opposite and other developments along the river.”

“I would support a scheme almost entirely of housing. If a hotel is viable then it would work well alongside new homes. If the housing was a tenure which promoted low car use, such as elderly housing or build-to-rent, then that would work well in the town centre.”

How about a row of town houses opposite (Folly Island), leaving a towpath against them and allocate some parking spaces adjacent - after all, Bircherley Green was once mostly residential, though dreadful.

New homes would bring people into the town centre to support the facilities that are already there, cafes, bars, dentists, doctors, the theatre, both train stations, shopping centres, swimming pool and Hartham Park are all within walking distance. Simon Balle all-through school is also within walking distance.

If new build retail development (for larger retailers) isn't on the cards at the moment, we might prioritise residential accommodation of some sort to get people to live in the centre of town – work / living units, perhaps flats? Either would provide a market for shops / food locations and increase footfall, perhaps even allow some of the existing structure to be retained for units which might be newly profitable given new residents.

“Live / work units could also be included rather than just standard residential flats. Creating live / work accommodation within the development would generate foot traffic through the week.”

Retail

“Shopping must be included. We must urge the planners and developers to seek at least one small community food shop such as a co-op, or other grocery chain. There is a large community within walking distance and many people who are dependent upon bus transport for shopping facilities.”

“A small well stocked food-market (to assist bus passengers and others, often the elderly who cannot walk far).”

“At the other end of the shopping scale, smaller shops for more specialized trading would be desirable - there are few men’s clothing, no shoe shops or cheap medicine / cosmetic shops. There are many other specialist shops one can list and, of course, the developers can only let where the demand lies. Developers are often fixed in their ideas and large multiple retailers are easier to manage and thought to be more secure, but the evidence is that this pattern is rapidly changing and developers, like everyone else, must learn to work harder for their money.”

Identified needs that may be catered for - High quality food store(s), ideally supporting local producers to reduce ‘food-miles’. As an incentive, short term, level parking, adjacent to the store(s), would be needed. Pharmacy with a full range of services, including beauty, travel and early years products Every day clothing stores (e.g. seasonal & underwear) to generate regular footfall.

“I would like to see a quality food / grocery store with 'level playing field' free / money back parking arrangements that apply to every other food shop in Hertford - Coop x 2, M&S, Tesco, Sainsburys - right in the town centre where Waitrose was.”

“A central food store convenient for bus users and drawing others into the town centre. Can Marks and Spencer be persuaded to relocate and expand?”

“We did wonder whether Marks and Spencer might be interested in moving to a larger store in a town where there isn't a Waitrose to provide top-tier food supermarket competition.”

“I believe the priority should be to attract more small retailers and hold on to those we have got. And that does not include restaurants, hairdressers or nail bars of which we have more than enough.”

“Need to tempt and secure a couple of national players to benefit the smaller shops and act as an “attraction”.”

“Many stressed that a few medium size shops would be welcome, including major retailers like Boots and H & M but it was recognised that this may not be sustainable.”

“Boots to return with its excellent selection of goods.” “Enlarged and efficient Boots Chemist.”

“Other retail units in the hope that the old might be attracted back and new enterprises might start up - a shoe shop / a haberdashers.”

“More upmarket retail, deli, organic, butcher, specialty shops.” “Encourage the return of smaller service shops i.e. Car Phone Warehouse, cobbler, Travel Agent.” “Surely Hertford has enough in the way of coffee shops and restaurants. Specialist shops should be encouraged.”

Market

“An improved Market Day is necessary” “Hertford Market really suffers on wet days”

“An indoor market area - these are really becoming popular in other towns offering a chance for small traders.”

“I think the incorporation of a covered market would be a good idea. Encourage traders to reconnect with the town with low overhead and the possibility of sharing pitches on a daily basis to get even more trading opportunities. Successful traders might well wish to move out into more permanent premises to deal with the empty shops problem. Lower priced trading opportunities might also encourage landlords to lower the commercial rents on shops.”

“Encourage East Herts to erect ornate (think Covent Garden) market stalls in the area in front of WHSmith to house the fruit and veg stall and fish stall throughout the week and at weekends, keeping Market Square clear for coffee drinkers, White Hart drinkers and pedestrians to enjoy.”

Riverside location

“Everyone I spoke to stressed that the river should be a focal point. It is unique and a lovely aspect and should be incorporated as a feature.” “Making use of the river frontage for leisure, restaurants, cinema/music room facilities would be a major plus.” “Use river frontage to advantage - open public space/s (piazza-like?) / outdoor dining / cafes.” “Restaurants and bars making full use of the riverside position.” “It was suggested that bars and restaurants could be facing the river and would also support the hotel.”

“Landscape the river side to make a pleasant place to enjoy the river and improve the view from Folly Island.” “Along the canal a cafe or restaurant adjacent to the Hertford Club would do well and could be part of a hotel. A public route along the canal and back to the town centre are essential.”

“Open up the water-front with an attractive development whilst being aware that the area can be in deep shade, so sitting outside might often not be attractive ... maybe a conservatory type development.”

“Units facing the canal could be created in the back of the ex-Waitrose building as previously planned, and glass / covered extensions built out towards the river (c.f. Tudor Square, Ware). If alternative access to the service yard near to Lombard

House were achieved the riverside could be traffic-free, giving plenty of room for planting, sitting, strolling, and possibly lowering the canal freeboard to obviate any need for fencing.”

“Open up view to waterfront by removing the former drinks department of Waitrose. Create waterfront cafes and restaurants in former Waitrose depot with apartments above. (Need to consider service bays and refuse collection sites here)”

“Maximum use of waterside position - water activities - water bus service?”

“The river frontage should be put to good use. ...specifically, how is another matter. Canoe and other boat hire, plus bike hire with “tow-along”s for kids. A water bus to deposit at both Ware and Hertford would be good. Floating puppet theatre / cafe, etc would draw visitors. The trouble at present seems to be to be that existing visitor numbers are too small for commercial enterprises to survive, but equally because shops are depleted visitors don't come.”

Leisure

“A really special restaurant ... yes we have masses, but mostly chains ... something a bit upmarket please.”

“Cinema - is there an elderly population to support dual use as bingo hall?”

“Support for idea that Hertford could do with a skating rink. There isn't one nearer than Hemel Hempstead. We felt that this would be something really inclusive and popular, different from anything we already have.”

Activities for children and young people – BMX / skateboarding / something similar to <https://kidzania.co.uk>

Sport facilities building on recent national successes e.g. netball & cricket art / music and crafts - small units for up and coming artists like the small shop in Bull Plain.

Employment Uses

“The retention of the proposal for some office space for the Housing Association.”

“Professional offices? is there demand?” “Space needed to encourage entrepreneurial start-ups.” “Temporary hot desking/meeting spaces would also do that as more people work from home.”

“Space needed for social enterprises of direct benefit to the local community (e.g. Mudlarks).”

Educational uses

- “A new college and eco-centre and associated spaces specialising in Hertfordshire Studies - Ecology, Bio-diversity, landscape, Conservation, the future etc - with operational links to HCC, the Museum etc and other local and County organisations with a rooftop dome as a natural history facility offering a day out for families and children to look at particular species (after all, we

are in the land of Wallace).” “Create a new much needed Primary School, which can be used by the community in the evenings and school holidays.”

Community Uses

“Could we persuade the powers that be to move their Family Court to new premises in the Green? We could then reclaim our Shire Hall for community uses”

“As well as a community centre of some sort, a few suggested a nursery could be included. These features would draw in people of all generations throughout the week.” “Instead of all retail have some of the shop areas made into an area for letting out to people providing activities for Mum’s with small children, dance studio, martial arts for the youth. This could bring people coming back into the centre and hopefully shop and eat etc.”

“Further suggestions that an open community space would be welcome, perhaps move the markets into the space as well as pop up events / shops and food stations to help draw people in.” “Spaces for temporary attractions e.g. displays, art/sculpture, markets, local information.”

Design Details

“Plenty of green planting on and around the building.”

“A planting scheme with provision for ongoing maintenance.” “Incorporate plants/greenery.”

“Use, as much as possible, of environmentally friendly features including - Grey water recycling, solar panels, good insulation of buildings and similar.”

“Breaking up the wall opposite the Folly will attract opposition from the residents. Somewhat odd because the wall is hardly attractive but their fear of losing "privacy" will be a consideration”

