

Cross Party Working Group for Town Centre Regeneration – Consultation Sub Group

Second meeting – 7pm, Wednesday, 16th January, 2008

Venue: Civic Centre, Dartford in Room B12

Attendees:

Cllr Jeremy Kite (Leader and Chairman of Group)
Cllr Geoff Prout
Cllr John Muckle
Howard Stoate MP
Bob Heasman (Town Centre Partnership)
Graham Harris – Dartford Council
Rob Scott – Dartford Council
Christopher Borkowski (St James's Investments)
Kelly Edwards, Nick Bohane (Green Issues Communications – community consultation)

By invitation:

Peter Wagstaff (Wagstaffs Design), Pauline Mason (The CC Group)

Apologies: Cllr Patsy Thurlow, Cllr Tony Martin

1. Standing item: Project Planning Update – Christopher Borkowski, (MD St James's Investments)

Mr Borkowski reported that the architects are proceeding with developing appropriate and exciting proposals for Lowfield Street.

Cllr Kite requested that the Masterplanning of the area and the scheme design should pay close attention to providing coherent links with the Park. He emphasised that the Lowfield St plans needed to respect the Council's vision for an Edwardian Park.



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2. Presentation on the naming of the proposed development (Wagstaffs Design, The CC Group)

It was explained to the meeting that there would be two presentations on the above topic:

2.1 The first - by Wagstaffs Design - would present a proposed name for the group that will be bringing the scheme forward to people of Dartford via the public consultation. This name would collectively represent Dartford Council, St James's Investments and Tesco and would be the name that brought forward the public consultation. It would be short term name only that would be used during the period of consultation.

Wagstaff presented a suite of names which included Lowfield Partnership, Lowfield First, Lowfield Vision, Lowfield Street Forward, and Lowfield Street Together

Cllr Muckle commented that he felt that the partners should promote a name that residents would identify with and would allow them to recognise immediately the consultation programme. He therefore strongly endorsed the use of 'Lowfield' as part of any name. Cllr Kite commented that the name might include the word 'new'. After discussion, the group as a whole felt that the name "Lowfield Vision" best captured the spirit of what a major regeneration scheme is trying to achieve and would be easily recognisable by the wider population of Dartford.

2.2 The second presentation - by the CC Group – addressed how the scheme might be named if it is built. Having carried out comprehensive research in Dartford including face to face interviews, the CC Group had concluded that the name should pay homage to Dartford's history but at the same time be forward looking and inclusive. The theme that seemed to resonate best with these objectives is the idea of papermaking and paper. Dartford was long associated with papermaking and in fact, Fool's Cap paper was invented here. The CC Group then presented "The Watermark" as their preferred choice with an alternative of "Waterleaf". Watermarks are embedded in paper and also speak to Dartford's close proximity to water.

The Consultation Sub Group responded extremely well to both the theme of paper and the choice of "The Watermark". Howard Stoute felt that the paper theme was a very good idea but commented that 'Watermark' might be stronger than 'the Watermark'; Cllr Prout said he liked the heritage theme and that the name was a move in the right direction. Cllr Muckle liked the theme and name. Cllr Kite strongly endorsed it. The CC Group were charged with continuing their work and further developing both the name and showing how it could be developed for street names, street furniture and individual buildings.



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3. Update on Consultation (Green Issues)

Kelly Edwards from Green Issues Communications updated the Group on the consultation programme. Many of the previous suggestions made by the Group had been acted upon such as: carrying out a survey in each one of the Council wards; consulting with the business community on the contents of a survey; drawing up a larger consultation area; and holding outreach exhibitions beyond the main one. Green Issues has also met with Theresa Ryskowska, the planning policy manager at Dartford, to understand and integrate with the Council's own consultation programme. As a result Green issues will utilise the Council 'thermometer' voting system. Ms Edwards reported on the market research conducted in the Town Centre which was broadly very supportive of town centre regeneration.

Ms Edwards gave a status update on the community shop which would host the first public exhibition in early February and then is scheduled to remain open as a drop-in centre on each Saturday following the exhibition for a period of months.

Ms Edwards outlined plans for the first exhibition saying that it was planned for three days and that individual invitations letters would be sent out to over 15,000 residents. In response to requests from Councillors, there would be outreach exhibitions so that the consultation can include those living outside of the town centre. The initial thinking was that the outreach exhibitions would be in the Tree Estate and Wilmington.

Cllr Kite commented that he would like to see a more comprehensive outreach programme of exhibitions and that he would like to see the main exhibition extended for one week rather than 3 days*. He - along with Graham Harris – voiced concern that the planned Tree Estate drop-in exhibition might be too close to the by election taking place on 21st February. He also commented that the exhibition strategy could include venues such as Dartford Football Club and the Orchard Theatre to target people who might not attend the main exhibition. It was agreed that Green Issues would adjust the strategy for the outreach exhibitions and report back to the Chairman with an amended plan.

Cllr Kite also was concerned that residents should be given realistic choices in terms of the community space planned for the scheme rather than a 'wish list' that could not be fulfilled. Bob Heasman commented that any available space might be used for a business start up scheme similar to The Hatchery.

Green Issues advised that one idea for the exhibition would be to allow residents to register for the jobs that would become available at any new Tesco, once built. This met a certain amount of resistance as it might deflect from the scheme proposals, but, in the end, it was agreed that the overall benefit to Dartford residents would be such as to justify this course of action.



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Various useful suggestions were made by the Group in terms of promoting the public exhibition: for example, utilising the video screens on Fast Track buses and erecting giant posters on the sides of Council buildings. These ideas will be incorporated into a schedule of pre-exhibition activities.

4. AoB

4.1 The issue of safety in the development was raised by Mr Borkowski. Whilst he felt that the presence of a number of flats overlooking the Park would naturally increase surveillance, he committed to proving the resources to make the Park safe for residents at any time.

4.2 Howard Stoate requested that the next meeting on the subject of public consultation should be to the full Cross Party Working Group. Feedback from the first exhibition could be provided. The Group took up his suggestion.

4.3 Cllr Kite requested a press file should be available at the next meeting.

Date of next meeting of Full Cross Party Working Group – provisionally scheduled for the fourth week of February: to be confirmed.

* Subsequently the developer requested an initial 3 day public exhibition with the exhibition open on subsequent Saturdays at the community shop followed by the programme of drop in exhibitions outside of the town centre.

