

The Farnborough Society's contribution to the consultation on
planning for Rushmoor's Future

Delivering the Core Strategy

INTRODUCTION

The Rushmoor Plan Core Strategy Preferred Approach published by Rushmoor Borough Council in January 2010 set out the overarching strategy for the local development framework. It invited contributions during a consultation period which ran until 1 March 2010.

The Farnborough Society (TFS) notes that Aldershot and Farnborough are secondary regional centres, and therefore the focus for town centre uses, and Farnborough as a transport interchange where accessibility and interchange is of regional significance and should be protected and enhanced (3.9). Town centre uses include retail, leisure and entertainment facilities, offices, residential and arts, cultural and tourism uses.

The Farnborough Society wishes to emphasise its view that it is not adequate to consider Farnborough as a gateway to other parts of the region. It shares the Rushmoor Sustainable Community Plan Vision (3.14). It applauds the connectivity envisaged for cyclists and pedestrians. It supports the proposals for the greening of the town and the road and roundabout improvements.

TFS is encouraged by the demographic information contained in the Core Strategy. In particular we note that the population is maturing over the timescale of the document to 2026 and is already affluent, and this is set to remain the case. On the other hand it is a matter of much regret that at present there is a significant outflow of comparison shopping expenditure from Rushmoor to competing towns such as Camberley, Basingstoke and Guildford, and we would venture Reading too. TFS agrees that there is a need to strengthen the role of Farnborough as a secondary centre within the South East region and this contribution is intended to offer a vision which can be adopted and championed by the citizens of Farnborough and their representatives and servants. It should be adopted within the Farnborough Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document and substituted for the proposals for the civic quarter in the area north of Meudon Avenue. There is little merit, in TFS's view, in moving the current civic council offices from the south side to the north side of Meudon Avenue when the investment and resources could transform the town centre to significant innovative advantage.

It is a matter of record that there is a need to improve the town centre environment and evening economy. TFS are proposing a solution to the key issues which should be a major part of the proactive approach in the Farnborough Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document. It should not, however, just be a policy matter

but the subject of an action plan to make it happen! Our proposal addresses the call to:

- Improve the range and choice of retail and leisure facilities
- Develop the evening economy and cultural facilities
- Accommodate (*and nurture through positive endeavour*) future retail growth, particularly the independent sector
- Improve the quality of public spaces
- Improve the pedestrian links and connectivity between the town centre, railway station, edge of centre retail and IQ Farnborough

Further it will:

- Create a Town centre building on consultation already done
- Weld the existing and proposed new facilities and areas into a cohesive connected town centre
- Be attractive to both residents and those in the Blackwater Valley catchment area and beyond
- Retain high levels of consumer spending in the town centre and act as a magnet to visionary retail, cultural and leisure entrepreneurs
- Cater for the needs of our multicultural community in the provision of leisure and cultural facilities

THE FARNBOROUGH SOCIETY'S PROPOSAL –

THE CONTEXT

Before setting out the Farnborough Society's proposal some further points should be noted to ensure clarity about the context in which the proposal should be viewed.

It is not the intention to replicate facilities which already exist within the Borough. For example venues spread out across the Borough already exist for clubs and societies. These meet their needs and hire of such facilities as church halls or rooms in educational establishments generate welcome income if the pricing policy and the facility match the demand. The Princes Hall, Aldershot is a sizeable performance venue and Camberley Theatre is not too far away. FIVE leverages Farnborough's reputation and accessibility for large exhibitions, conferences and entertainments. The beloved West End Centre (Westy) caters for the Aldershot secondary regional centre.

The Tuesday market, though in decline currently, should be encouraged and the marketing of this valuable and appreciated

provision should be improved by the stakeholders better to reach its potential market.

THE PROPOSAL - THE FARNBOROUGH TOWN SQUARE AND THE CENTRE OF ARTS, CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT

The Farnborough Society proposal is to create a catalyst for change, a multi-purpose venue which would meet present and future demands on the community at its heart.

TFS wishes to see better utilisation of the informal civic quarter north of Meudon Avenue. Examination of the current and proposed developments, its geography, topography, its connectivity and accessibility to pedestrians, those with mobility problems, cyclists and public transport reveals that this area is the natural hub of the town. It has great potential.

At present, Farnborough has no heart. TFS's proposal for this site offers a new Town Square as a focus for the centre of arts, culture and entertainment. The vision for the use to which this area could be put is limited only by the will to make it happen. This could be achieved through partnership between the public and private sectors. The reconfiguration of the road system and the re-siting of the library are already set out in Farnborough Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document. However, the Elles Hall fails adequately to provide for the needs of the town in the 21st Century and needs to be demolished. Current users will be catered for in a new plan for the area.

TFS proposal seeks to stimulate the debate further in response to the Core Strategy for Rushmoor Borough and the supporting policies and plans. But the Farnborough Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document needs to be revisited, with TFS proposals clearly in mind

TFS has established through its own consultations that there is a significant demand for an accessible centre for the arts, culture, mixed entertainment and community ventures and activities. TFS proposals dovetail into the other elements of the Farnborough Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document and would complement the plan for a new library on the Iceland site. The new Centre, Town Square and its landscaped environment, on to which these new developments will front, will be a focal area to link all the elements of the town. This will draw people in by way of the existing and developing retail, catering and leisure facilities.

It gives maximum opportunity to restructure the town centre, and builds on the consensus already achieved in the plan agreed in July 2007. Further, it recognises that circumstances have changed in the intervening period when the expectation was for a cinema complex in the Pinehurst car park area. This would result in a less satisfactory open 'town square' space to the south of Queensmead.

The current proposals would create an unnecessary contraction of the town centre given the otherwise compelling vision in the 2007 Farnborough Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document. There is no appreciable benefit in relocating to new, high-quality council offices other than the sale of the land for residential development, which is being catered for elsewhere. A planning opportunity lost, in our view.

The current proposals lack innovation and creativity and are extremely limited. The Farnborough Society's proposal for the civic quarter will provide a kick start to entrepreneurial enterprise. The creation of a vibrant quality expression of the ambition of the community of Farnborough would see a marked change in the market upwards.

Farnborough should be recognised as a centre of excellence not only for its aeronautical reputation and International Airshows but also as a desirable place to live and work.

The Council and its partners are to be commended for the nature of their regulation of the design and construction of the Business Park and airport to realising the vision. For the work in the spaces in the business park and the Airport provide key inspiration as to how the civic quarter might look. The centre should carry through design features already evident in the award-winning projects within the Borough. The key frontages and main entrances facing the new central public open space should be a matter of civic pride. The nature of the facilities should be appropriate in size and form to the uses to which they will be put. The centre should comprise a range of venues for the creation and display of local art and crafts. Meeting and performance spaces should be incorporated to cater for the diverse needs and interests of the community of Farnborough. These spaces would need to be supported in an integrated way with services such as lighting, audio, projection, staging, internet connectivity and catering.

Consultation with Society members and other residents within the Rushmoor area has led us to the conclusion that the Centre should include:

1. An auditorium of a suitable size seating say 200 which would be used for theatre, recitals, lectures, comedy and the like and would double up as a cinema with flexible seating including ranked or tables and chairs which could be drawn back and cleared to accommodate music and dance. The constraints on seating capacity would lend itself to a more intimate level of entertainment and move away from competition with cinemas showing 'blockbuster' films to the exclusion of all else.
2. A large, well lit foyer which would be used to display 2D art on strategically lit wall areas plus display cases to accommodate 3D art and sculpture. Encouragement should be given to local artists and craftspeople to display and sell their work with items available on an ongoing, frequently changing basis. Space should be made available in the foyer for free lunchtime concerts.
3. Refreshments should constitute a bar area serving alcoholic and non alcoholic beverages during evening performances whilst a coffee shop/restaurant serving light lunches etc – in the manner of a National Trust restaurant or the Yvonne Arnaud theatre café - should be available during the day time and early evening. It is envisaged that in the architectural planning stages the coffee shop would be sited in an area of the foyer which incorporates draw-back glass walls in order to facilitate the use of outdoor eating space into the Town Square.
4. A number of additional rooms should be made available in order to ensure that the Centre offers facilities for all Rushmoor residents and will, very quickly, attract those from outside the borough. It will be noted that people wishing to listen to live performances of jazz, folk, blues and similar club music are compelled to travel some distance out of the area to Cranleigh, Godalming, Horsham, West Byfleet, or in the other direction to Alton, Southampton and beyond. Therefore, we envisage that a dedicated, acoustically sound room be available to accommodate any number of specific music groups or clubs which would fill the space on a regular basis.
5. Younger people should also be served by the use of a smaller room (as above) or the auditorium by making the space available on a regular basis for aspiring young musicians to entertain their peers. These nights could be made strictly soft drinks events.

6. Other facilities such as a Discovery Centre within a re sited library should be made available both to the young, in partnership with local schools, and others.
7. Other rooms should be available for all manner of activities that would be of interest to all, from Yoga to ethnic dance groups and various craft groups. The existing users of the Elles Hall community centre could be accommodated in these rooms.
8. Different in nature to the current Tuesday Market, TFS should like to see a range of market activities taking place on the Town Square. Some, due to the nature of what might be on sale and the vagaries of the weather, could be held in the Centre or other suitable buildings around the square. These could include craftspeople selling individually designed knitted, sewn or woven articles, vintage clothing, hand made jewellery and such like.

More robust articles could be the basis of a monthly outdoor market. TFS wishes to stress that it is not intended to compete with the popular car boot sale or similar. This market should ideally be a strictly regulated local farmers' and crafts market which would incorporate such produce and crafts as can withstand outdoor conditions. Guest markets could also be hosted by arrangement and encouragement.

9. Members of TFS would very much like to see the Town Square used for regular street theatre. Since there are two local colleges offering Performing Arts courses, several amateur dramatic societies in the area and most likely a whole host of talented individuals, TFS considers that there is likely to be an untapped steady supply of those eager to perform. This would also include musicians who may not be ready to fill a hall with fee-paying members of the public but could be offered a much-needed opportunity to gain experience for free. TFS realises this would have to be carefully administered to avoid a host of entirely unsuitable activities competing inappropriately.
10. TFS envisages that this purpose-built centre and outdoor Town Square and open space would be fully used for a widely varied range of activities throughout every day and evening.

11. It is TFS hopes that something other than 'blockbuster' films, multi-franchised food outlets and the replication of retail outlets which characterise every other development will be on offer to the residents of Farnborough.
12. TFS firmly believes that by implementing all of the above, Farnborough will be lifted from the depressed state into which it has fallen and will quickly become an area which is desirable as a place to live, work or visit for a standard of cultural entertainment not available elsewhere, and to shop in quality retail outlets.
13. TFS promotes this proposal adhering to our motto - Preserving the Past, Shaping the Future. We know that everyone in Farnborough deserves better.

Consultation on this proposal would assist designers in the development of intimate, accessible, flexible spaces able to host a range of activities simultaneously. Events would take place throughout the day and into the evenings. Similarly, the open space, the Town Square in this proposal, would be an extension of the Centre into the open air and on out into the rest of Farnborough, giving it the cohesion it needs.

The proposal for a District Heating Network would of course incorporate this new set of ventures.