

Introduction

On the 27th March 2014 a public consultation event was held at the Watford Rural Parish Hall. The event was organised by Three Rivers District Council and attended by themselves and their consultant team. The purpose of the event was to allow the local residents the opportunity to see and understand the current design proposals for the District Centre and the supporting three remote sites, and ask any questions they may have. It was also the Councils intention that the event would allow residents to provide feedback both face-to-face and through feedback forms provided. This report is the summary of that event and of the period afterwards during which the public was invited to offer their feedback.

During the event the Three Rivers Council team were on hand to discuss various elements of the scheme with specific regard to social housing and the local retailers. Terence O'Rourke, who as planning consultants were on hand to discuss all planning aspects of the proposals. Finally, Levitt Bernstein Associates represented by architects, landscape architects and urban designers talked residents through the current proposals and answered any questions about the design. One of the key objectives for Levitt Bernstein was to demonstrate how the design has evolved since the previous consultation and how it has, wherever possible, responded to feedback received at that event.

The Council and Levitt Bernstein also presented the Councils preferred design options for a new swimming pool at The Centre. Whilst these were presented separately from the main South Oxhey regeneration project, feedback was welcomed.

Key positives drawn from the consultation

Additional/new housing

- Huge need for renewed, better quality housing
- An increase in housing as mixed residential

Supermarket

- Necessary for those who need easy access retail
- Has the potential to create more jobs in the area
- Majority in favour, although mixed concerns about its size. Some people believe it will be too large, while others believe it will be too small and won't compete with neighbouring shops in Watford.

Public spaces

- Covered walkways, seating areas, tree lined boulevards, the narrowing of St.

St Andrews Road

- More user friendly with meeting spaces where locals can gather

Green spaces

- Preservation of existing green spaces
- Being provided with communal gardens/courtyards

Overall proposal

- Positive attitude to all aspects of the proposal

Main concerns raised at the consultation

Parking

- Parking costs
- Additional parking needed for increase of population created by proposal
- Security of underground parking

Building Heights

- Belief that 8 storeys on corner is too high
- Concerned that height of buildings will not fit into the surrounding context

Retail

- Concern for loss of local retailers
- Disruption of trade during the construction process
- Existing shopkeepers are concerned that they'll be out of business.
- Will supermarket damage trade for small businesses
- Concern the proposed centre is too large and won't be supported by community

Residential density

- Concerned about strain on current resources with an increase of residential

Community facilities

- Worries about coexistence of different community facilities and space for them all under one roof

Relocation

- Many are concerned about where they will live while their property is being demolished and if they have a chance of returning back to that location once it's built.
- Whilst people understood the necessity for some relocation in the first instance to allow parts of the proposed scheme to be started, many asked for more details to clarify how this would be done.

Affordability

- Worried that it will be too expensive (retail wise)
- The new housing scheme cater for those on benefits (which involves a lot of the people currently living in the estate). In addition to the growing concern that people will be 'priced out' of the area after the build.

Residents Feedback

345 people attended the consultation. Of the 345 people encouraged to give written feedback, 114 feedback forms were received.

Total: 114
In favour of the proposal: (63%)
Against the proposal: (22%)
Neutral to the proposal: (15%)

Gender	Demographics
	Male: 39%
	Female: 61%
Age	0-19: 0%
	20-34: 8%
	35-49: 38%
	50-64: 27%
	65+: 27%

All Local Residents

South Oxhey: 79%
Oxhey Hall: 10%
Carpenders Park: 11%

Feedback Summary

On the 27th March 2014 the South Oxhey Initiative design consultation was held at Watford Rural Parish Council Hall. There were 345 attendees on the day between 10am and 8pm. On arrival visitors were given a feedback form to fill in and return at the end of their visit or by post before the 11th April. A team from Three Rivers Council, Terence O'Rourke and Levitt Bernstein were on hand to guide the residents through the proposals illustrated on the consultation boards and freestanding model. Of the 345 visitors 114 of them returned written feedback. The feedback forms included a series of questions enquiring into the visitor's response to the proposals presented. The outcome was a majority 63% in favour of the proposals.

On the day of the consultation we experienced a majority in support of the proposal. It has been our past experience with similar events, that more negative than positive concerns get relayed back in the form of written feedback. It is therefore more probable that the support for the proposals may even be in excess of 63%. The support focused on how the new scheme would be a vast improvement to both residents and retailers.

The result of the 27th March consultation has shown some development from the previous consultations that took place on both the 25th of June and 27th of September 2012. Where previously there was concern over the risk of the demolition of the library, residents felt encouraged by the decision to preserve the newly built/refurbished library. There is still a strong support for the introduction of a large supermarket. There is an additional concern about the affordability of the new scheme and how it will financially affect the residents. Numerous feedback forms noted frustration at the possible timescale of the proposed scheme, with many expressing a hope that the regeneration may take place sooner. Some people expressed concern over the likely disruptions the scheme would cause them, both through noise and through potential road closures.

There was a general consensus that the new scheme was fresh, bright and modern. It was felt by the majority of residents that the area was in need of regeneration and that the changes would help raise the profile and improve perceptions of South Oxhey.

Key themes from the 27th September Consultation Feedback forms

Parking

There was still a lot of concern regarding parking and many residents were keen to know about the parking strategies. Residents expressed support for an increase of private residential parking and liked the fact that the spaces were hidden by communal courtyards and residential development. They appreciated the need for more parking but some raised concerns about the security of the parking. People were encouraged to know that the scheme now did not include any underground parking, following previous concerns about anti-social behaviour. The accessibility of parking was raised with particular reference to shopping for the elderly and disabled. Also raised was a concern of a potential loss of free parking. Some people raised the question of difficulties caused by delivery vans.

The loss of parking and garages between Bridlington Road and Henbury Way was a concern for some residents. Another resident suggested the scheme should make use of allotments between Prestwick Road for parking, which would serve both the station and the shops parking needs. The majority wanted parking to remain free and their concern focused on how a large superstore would affect their future parking.

Building Heights, Residential Density and Traffic

Building heights and residential density were again talked about in much detail with the residents. Many liked the fact that the redevelopment would create a focus of facilities at the centre of South Oxhey. Many people were satisfied to see that there would be lowering of the building heights along both Fairfield Avenue and Oxhey Drive compared to the previous scheme proposals. Some residents still remained concerned about the areas of 8 storey height but feedback was general positive about bringing the higher areas towards the centre of the development at the end St Andrews Road. Several people were encouraged by the widening of St. Andrews Road at Prestwick Road to create a market square, which would distance the heights from the residential housing on Prestwick Road.

Residents recognised the need to increase density to improve South Oxhey's business potential and local facilities; however several were concerned about the impact a larger population would have on the existing infrastructure and community amenities, such as schools and traffic. People were encouraged to know that a contribution towards facilities provided by the county council would be made by the developer.

Some residents mentioned that existing traffic on Prestwick Road by the petrol station and station approach was already an ongoing concern and hoped that any changes might help improve this situation.

Retail

There were numerous mentions of support for increased retail variety and opportunities, with particular focus on the proposal of a new supermarket. Many were excited about the prospect of an easily accessible supermarket that is not too large. A few residents highlighted the possibility of the supermarket providing local people with employment. On the other hand some were worried that the introduction of a large supermarket would hinder local retailers from continuing business in the area. Some were worried about the disruption of trade during the construction process. Residents raised their concerns about the proximity of Watford and how South Oxhey can't compete as it is presently the favoured destination of local shoppers.

The residents showed a keen community spirit, and this was particular evident in their concern for whether local shop keepers and traders would be 'priced out' because of the scheme. A number of comments wanted to know if retailers would be entitled to return to the shopping centre. Residents reflected on locals their current needs, which suggested support for charity shops, cheap stores and affordable cafes.

However, many residents noted how they liked how the scheme accommodated the provision for local shops and how it opened the area up. Some residents also highlighted that they liked how the shops were set back to accommodate the flexible trading market.

Negatives comments on the schemes future retail outlets included; that they would be too expensive and not in line with the local community; that the scheme would fail and the community would be left with an empty shopping centre; and refurbishment was better than new build.

Some residents felt that the needs of employment opportunities were a higher priority than the new scheme but agreed that the area was in need of modernisation and that the supermarket and other new retail had the potential to create new jobs.

The Local Community

With community spirit being strong and highly valued in South Oxhey, residents were concerned that this would be lost through the redevelopment process. Many were encouraged by the indicative phasing strategies to ensure as little disruption on the local community as possible.

Security was a concern with many of the older residents. They were especially concerned about the security within the housing blocks but also voiced concern about large open areas of space which they believed had the potential for anti-social behaviour. The design team made it clear that the proposed scheme would provide raised private gardens and courtyard areas that would available to residents only. The majority of residents suggested the introduction of new public landscape feature would be appreciated and add value to the area.

Whilst feedback to the Centre was not part of the main presentation feedback was received. Several residents weren't convinced the area needed a new swimming pool as they felt the existing facilities in the general area were sufficient. However the majority of residents were enthusiastic about the Council's plans regarding a new swimming pool and felt that the facility would be well used and help improve fitness and community interaction.

Public Spaces

The public and green spaces were the most supported proposal element with 46 mentions. Many appreciated the preservation and enhancement of all the existing green spaces with the addition of tree lined boulevards and squares. There was also support for the covered walkways and seating areas on St. Andrew's Road providing meeting spaces for the local community. It was recognised that a narrowing of the main shopping street, St. Andrew's Road, and improved surface treatment would make the spaces more user friendly and accessible. Many liked the idea of communal courtyard gardens. Other aspects that gained particular attention were creating a more open and dynamic Station Approach which would act as the gateway into South Oxhey and the introduction of a Market Square with designated space for pop up market stalls, also acting as an event space for local community events. Residents also mentioned that they would like to have more disabled access and public toilets in the area.

A few comments were made by residents challenging the provision of green space on the decant sites and questioned why new buildings were being planned on the pocket park in Ferndown Road. However it was pointed out that the Council had re-provided other playground facilities close by. People were keen to know that generous parking would be provided on the decant sites.

Redevelopment and New Housing for the area

Mentioned 35 times, many expressed a support for the comprehensive scheme as they believed renewal of South Oxhey was overdue and housing standards were in great need of improvement. The introduction of mixed-use buildings with both residential and retail was received very positively as it

was understood this would revitalise the main high street, St. Andrew's Road, and encourage people from outside the area to come and use the local facilities. Despite some qualms about the prospect of more people coming to the area, many were encouraged by the new lease of life that would be given to South Oxhey through landscaping of public spaces, increased accessibility, improved retail opportunities and enhanced housing standards. With South Oxhey's proximity to London and improved rail connections, many recognised the area's potential and need to expand with residential and retail development. Many concerns were focused on the preservation of the existing local community spirit. It is however recognised that through careful phase planning and giving priority to the existing residents and retailers in the area, these concerns could be diminished.