

Notes for Purfleet Community Forum Meeting
Tuesday 28th April 2009

Meeting was opened by Chairperson, John Rowles, who thanked everyone for coming along. John explained for the benefit of new people, the role of the forum and how it offers an opportunity for residents to have their say about development plans for Purfleet.

Minutes from the previous meeting were agreed. Matters arising were deferred.

The new Neighbourhood Specialist Officer, Mark Jordan, gave a very brief talk, explaining how he had only been in the post for one week. He outlined the current situation, admitted there was some catching up to do and assured the meeting that in future, he would do his best to ensure a police presence at all forum meetings.

Meeting then moved to the main focus of the evening, the presentation from Thames Gateway Development Corporation (TGDC). John explained to the meeting that 4000 flyers had been distributed to residents in Purfleet inviting them to put forward their questions for the TGDC in writing. All of the questions received had been forwarded to the TGDC and therefore should be answered during the course of the presentation.

John then introduced the members of the TGDC – Lois Bowser, Rebecca Lownds and Simon Devere. Lois began by acknowledging how important it was to speak to residents and how they would be happy to come back in future to give updates and feedback.

Lois outlined the role of the TGDC and how it fits within Thames Gateway South Essex. It has been tasked to deliver 18,500 new homes and 26,000 new jobs in Thurrock. Originally TGDC was set up for 7 years, this has now been extended to 10 and is due to end in 2014.

Some major projects have been achieved e.g. the new Learning Campus at Grays, the work at the RSPB and the Royal Opera House moving to Purfleet. There is land being made available for a new primary school in the Botany Quarry. Other uses are being advocated in the PRIDE project i.e. commercial and employment uses.

Lois also explained that development on this scale required extremely complex planning processes and partnership working. It was also acknowledged that in the past, development has taken place in isolation, with no overall plan for the whole of Purfleet.

Presentation by Simon Devere – (Programme Manager for PRIDE, Purfleet Regeneration and Investment Delivery).

In July 2007 a public consultation exercise had been carried out putting forward 4 options for the location of the new Centre. Option 3 had been the preferred choice of the TGDC, as best meeting the objectives for social and economic regeneration. Since that time, the Buncefield enquiry had an impact on the design brief and the corporation has now acquired Cory's Wharf and additional land. Further public consultation is now planned to gauge the comments of the revised scheme.

The proposed new centre includes 3,000 dwellings (mixture of flats and houses), retail space, cafes, restaurants, primary school health centre and employment opportunities (office, storage and commercial uses). There will be open public space (including a River Walk). In addition it is proposed to develop the rail station and build a link road between London Road and the A13.

It is proposed that the consultation will take place in July and will be of a similar format to previous consultations. Simon explained the timetable for securing all the necessary partnerships and planning permissions, with the actual work starting in December 2011.

Presentation by Rebecca Lownds – Royal Opera House Production Park

The site for the new production facility covers 14 acres and is now predominantly vacant. Construction is due to begin in September 2009 and the facility will be open in September 2010. High House forms an integral part of the development and some work has already been achieved to preserve the historical buildings including emergency repairs, which means that all the buildings are now secure. Funding has been secured for the next phase, which centres around the courtyard and the walled garden. High House is a longer term aspiration, dependent on securing additional funding, which the corporation are working to achieve.

The Production Park will house a range of buildings including small enterprise units for arts/crafts outlets. There will be public open spaces and play facilities.

The National Skills Academy will offer training for backstage skills in theatre and live music industries, for which there is an identified national skills shortage. The training would be for 16-19 year olds and adults. The Academy is due to open in 2001 and it is hoped that the first year students will be able to contribute to the opening and closing ceremonies for the 2012 Olympics.

The facilities at High House Farm will include teachings rooms, café/restaurant, offices and outdoor spaces. All of these facilities will be open to the public and it was hoped that some of the maintenance of the site could be undertaken by volunteers.

Lois Bowser then invited questions from the audience, on either the two projects or any other issues.

The questions centred around the following issues-

1. How will the current economic situation affect these proposals? Where will the money come from? There were concerns about building further homes when existing properties remained unsold and people were not able to get mortgages.

Simon Devere acknowledged there would be implications. The development of the Thames Gateway was a government priority. Some funding is already secured but partnerships with public sector agencies and private developers will be needed to implement the overall regeneration. There may be some slippage in the timescales if funding is not available.

Some of the sites previously owned by private developers had been offered for sale. TGDC has been able to acquire these sites. Simon explained that owning more of the land will allow the corporation more control over the developments and ensure a much more joined up

approach can be considered to the developments. There is more land that needs to be purchased and TGDC's options are either through negotiation with existing owners or compulsory purchase.

2. The provision of open space and play facilities has always been an issue in Purfleet – the previous planning application for development at the London Road play space had included a condition that the existing site should remain open until the new one was completed. This has now been altered and the site will be closed – leaving no play facility for the east end of the town. TGDC aim to keep the length of time to a minimum between this closure and the opening of the new facility.

A former recreation ground on privately own land has been closed for a long time. As it is generally considered that ultimately this parcel of land will need to be acquired by TGDC, is there no way of bringing this forward and opening the site as a play space again? Lois explained that currently there is no way for TGDC to do so.

3. The proposals for the PRIDe site include 3,000 new dwellings – will consideration be given to the ratio of what accommodation is already established. Most of the developments to date have been flats and the community feels more family homes are needed in order to balance this. Sustainable communities need a mixture of private and social housing.

Simon outlined that the plans for the site include retail on the old quarry site, with the remaining areas being residential. The old Cory's Wharf site will include a mixture of dwellings, with community facilities such as cafes and public/open spaces.

Previous applications had been made to build dwellings of 13 stories, these plans had been challenged and rejected. The forum had always argued for buildings of no more than 4 stories. Will this be taken into consideration?

4. Infrastructure always seems to be the last consideration – Purfleet is poorly served by public transport, health facilities, schools etc. Will the corporation work to ensure that infrastructure is a priority, not an afterthought?

The proposed route for the new link road includes land currently owned by 6 different people – will the land be compulsorily purchased? The uncertainty is having a detrimental effect on the businesses in the area. (Simon agreed to meet with the person asking about this outside of the forum meeting).

5. The plans for the new centre include the rail station – who will be responsible for this? If the station is to be closed it will have severe impact on the community. Purfleet has very poor public transport services and there are no alternative arrangements in place. Simon explained that the reconfiguration of the station is an aspiration of the DC, but would be funding from the national network rail funding. It is hoped that this can be achieved within the next 2 – 3 years, but there may be some slippage.

6. Plans include new shops and retail outlets. Existing shops are struggling to stay in business. How will the addition of new ones help this situation? Will any one want to open a new shop?

It is hoped that the overall quality of the development will attract people to the area and retailers will want to come to take advantage of this.

7. Purfleet has a number of heritage sites and conservation areas – in the past some of these areas have been damaged (e.g. the trees in the ‘dipping’ were cut down without any prior consultation with the residents). Will any future developments take into account the preservation of these important sites?

The final comment from the audience was that Purfleet needs to be considered as one area, with the development of the new centre, the outskirts face the possibility of being excluded again.

Simon explained that some of the previous problems had come about due to the isolated piecemeal developments by individual commercial developers. Now that the corporation were in control of more of the land, they were in a position to ensure a much more cohesive plan was put forward. They want to see a whole new community developed, not just new housing. This is a large scale, long term project. The processes for getting all the agencies on board to agree to a joined up approach are complex and cannot be achieved overnight.

The corporation are happy to continue a dialogue through the forum and attend future meetings.