

Purfleet on Thames Community Forum
 Minutes of open meeting held Monday 31st October, 2011
 Venue: St. Stephen's Church

No	Item
1	<p>Welcome John Welcomed everybody to the meeting.</p>
2	<p>Apologies for Absence None</p>
3.	<p>Minutes of Last Meeting Minutes of the last meeting (September) were approved as a true record.</p>
4.	<p>Updates/Matters arising from Previous Meetings There were no matters arising from previous meeting.</p>
5.	<p>Guests Speakers</p> <p>Graham Farrant, Chief Executive of Thurrock Council</p> <p>The Chief Executive stated that his presentation would focus on Purfleet in particular and Thurrock as a whole.</p> <p><u>Purfleet</u> He started by talking about the regeneration. He acknowledged the reservations made about the project (ref. Minutes of September 26th with Simon De Vere) but also reiterated the importance of bringing forward the regeneration. As he stated "the council has a responsibility to make this happen".</p> <p>The plan is to get the right mix of housing. It will however not have high levels of affordable housing. Unlike Tilbury which is full of affordable homes, the council needs to develop more houses for wealthier people.</p> <p>It is normally easier and cheaper for developers to build on green belts but the regeneration, the council is forcing developers to rather work on already developed land.</p> <p>He however noted some key challenges with the road network that need addressing in order to ensure that the regeneration achieves its full potential. These are the M25, Junction A13, and A1330 that lead to severe congestions. As such, in really bad times, there can be a 12 mile toll back. The council, he said, will soon be campaigning for a free toll flow, i.e. about 15%-20% improvement in the flow of traffic. According to the Chief Executive, the congestion is a national bottleneck for the southeast and the government would need to spend between 50-350 million over 3 – 5 years to ease the problem.</p> <p><u>Lakeside</u> He mentioned that there is a plan for a 50% expansion in retail space at Lakeside. He acknowledged that leisure always seems to be pushed to subsequent phases but sometimes never happen. The council will therefore push for leisure to be considered in the first phase of the expansion project this time round.</p>

Grays

The traffic infrastructure will be upgraded with the Woodview campus of South Essex College brought into town. The objective is to make Grays a more vibrant town. This however depends on the campus being turned into housing estates.

The NHS does not have the capacity for a full health centre in Grays but are exploring options for a community hospital.

Tilbury Marshes

For the development of Tilbury, Graham stated that there needs to be a compromise between maintaining conservation and creating jobs. At the moment there is planned creation of 10,000 jobs at the London Gateway???, and it is meant to be Europe's most modern container port. At the moment only small containers are coming in but the project will lead to about 16,000 containers per boat coming in.

That will amount to about 60% of the UK market within 50 miles of London. It is an opportunity for goods to come and taken to the point of retail leading to an increase in lorry movements across the UK. This will only be possible when the problems with junction 30/31 are sorted.

The objective is to create about 10,000 jobs over the next 10 years. In this regard, Graham mentioned that "if the managers of those industries are not from Thurrock, the council would have failed". These industries, he said, will require crane drivers highly skilled in IT and Engineering – making it the most modern job in logistics.

Thurrock Services

Some services are quite good. These include adoption services, Thurrock's above national average performance for secondary schools as well as improvement of the three primary schools that were at the bottom. These are commendable. Thurrock is generally clean. The council is making an effort to ensure well maintained spaces, spend some capital on infrastructure to make residents proud (except Purfleet which seems to be the forgotten village of Thurrock – as noted by members of the forum)

Some services however need to improve, like the failing council housing repairs services. Services in Thurrock are also not necessarily customer focused. Graham stated that the council is not as responsive as they need to be. To improve upon services there is need for modernisation of IT systems that are not only expensive but slows the pace of work. There is need to improve IT and other systems for efficiency. An example of the effort to improve efficiency is the closure of cashiers' offices at the councils while opening up about 70 places where cash can be paid (including the use of post offices)

Questions, Comments and Answers

1. Would it be worth considering re-opening the recycling centre which was closed down last November?

Answer: It was a difficult decision to take but the recycling centre was closed due to lack of use (also because there was no waste disposal facility). The Chief Executive will explore the possibility of reopening.

2. How much change can be made to the published plan? How many people need to object to a particular aspect of it to ensure that it is acted upon (changed)? Why would the corporation chop down woods to build 20 houses (around the Caspian way area)?

According to the member who raised the issue, she has read the ecology report, and because that area is not maintained by the council the plan is not properly reviewed for the right decisions to be made.

Answer: The Chief Executive reiterated the importance of letting views known as input to the decision making process (even though many felt that any views spoken/written by residents in Purfleet have not received the deserved attention and consideration)

3. We do not need high rises as mentioned in the last meeting.

Answer: It is a framework and we need to get the investment into the area. We might sit here and six years down the line find Purfleet as derelict as it is now but the right decisions have to be made.

The plan will however make sure the river is valued. The design will be an improvement over Grays where the tower blocks completely block the river front.

4. The forum has always said there is no need for tower blocks but 4-5 storeys are enough. There seems to be a plan to use up all green spaces in Purfleet. Purfleet needs the green spaces. The project was meant to be community driven but apart from the fact that it is not community driven, concerns of members over the plans are also not considered in the decision making process.

No specific answer to that.

5. All flats will be buy-to-let (point about lack of family homes)

Answer: We need stability within the community as well. No developer will want to do without a tower block.

6. The council should note that there is an existing community that has lived here for a long time. This is people's lives. We do recognise that things change over time. Change is good but it shouldn't take away the things are already good in the community.

Answer: Very good point about the fact that there is an existing community. We need to value the existing community. We could start remodelling the Garrison Estate to ensure communities get integrated.

7. Are you a local resident?

Answer: 70-90% of council employees live in Thurrock.

8. What does the council currently do to maintain the conservation area and what are the plans for the future?

Answer: The development corporation is now building the capacity to deal with the issue of conservation more efficiently.

9. The Chief Executive says it is important for residents to make their views and opinions known but the council never acts on any issues of concern to residents in Purfleet.

Answer: The Chief Executive noted that his bosses are the councillors who are employed by the local people. He just works with them to implement local strategies. Residents should rest assured that Purfleet is well represented.

The Local Development Framework will come back to the council to be endorsed or refuted.

10. Could the council rescind any proposal that has been agreed to?

Answer: If the planning permission is given, nobody will be able to rescind it. Locally elected councillors will be part of the debate.

The land will be sold for maximum value by the end of 31st March. If not, it will revert back to the council. When the land comes back to the hands of the council, they will be more in control of what needs to be done with it. The council's responsibility is to develop and deliver the strategy.

11. What is the council doing about bus services?

Answer: Buses are running commercial services now. If there is demand on the routes, the buses will run. The council already subsidizes bus services to the tune of about £600,000 (especially on services to Basildon), despite a reduction due to budget cuts. Some of the development will help improve transport services. The plan is not only going to focus on housing but social care, education and access to jobs.

12. The plan seems to be to build a town for people who live here only for a short while – there are no secondary schools. Children have to go elsewhere for secondary education. Families are more likely to move when children get to secondary school going age.

Answer: There is need to expand existing schools to take care of this need. Not every community can have a secondary school. There is not enough demand in Purfleet. However, the High House Academy will provide high level qualification for people working behind the stage. The National Skills Academy is being built to meet high demand of this profession.

13. Not many people want to work behind the stage.

Answer: Behind Stage work is in high demand now, just like operating cranes. It is therefore a national effort to put the Academy in Purfleet.

Sustainability and maintainability are big issues with big development projects. If massive development is done, there is risk of poor quality buildings, shoddy work and poor maintenance.

Answer: ???

14. Trucks are still passing through Purfleet, hitting the small roundabout and getting stuck.

Answer: Work on the Stone house around about will start on the 28th Nov 2011

15. Why pay an interim Director £100,000 a year when the council is trying to be more efficient?

Answer: There was somebody on loan for some time. The position has now been filled permanently to take over the development corporation. Savings have been made on the merger of two positions, the Director of Community well being and Head of Services, into one position. The council will end up becoming smaller.

The council will get support from the government not to increase council tax (budget savings???)

16. Does the council own the land around Caspian Way?

Answer: Will look into

17. Is it possible to get cameras at Junction 30/31 to control the traffic?

Answer: will Take this back and look into no promises

18. Repair of fence behind railway cottages – still hasn't been done as promised by Simon De Vere at last meeting in September

Answer: Chief Executive said he would talk to Simon. Hopefully he will get things right.

19. HGVS – a couple of issues: Cobelfret is not well signposted so sat navs take the truck drivers to the wrong places. Is there a plan to move the road to the back? Cobelfret bought the land with a plan to move the road and reduce traffic but there has been no planning application as yet.

Answer: The Chief Executive will meet with the Director in November. He will take the issue up.

20. Parking of HGVs – is there provision for that?

Answer: There is a four year temporary permission to park as is. The council has to explore appropriate sites for this. Purfleet is at the heart of the logistics industry – this makes it a really tough problem. It will be challenging but the matter has to be taken up.

21. In previous meetings, residents have disagreed on the location of the town centre. Is there a plan to release section 106 (money for other community development aspects?)

Answer: If we put in section 106 requirements, the development will not happen. The proposals should contain the entire infrastructure for the community to work.

22. Problem on the Mardyke – Someone needs to admit responsibility for the problem (commercial business from a private dwelling – downloading from big vans)

Answer: The Chief Executive agreed to send Parking Enforcement.

23. Parking enforcement has been there several times but has not been able to solve the problem which has been going on for a year now.

Answer: The Chief Executive decided to go down and have a look himself. He noted that in these cases, there is sometimes the need for different agencies to work together to get the problem solved.

Other points noted:

The Chief Executive noted that there is clinical restructuring group which talks about the needs and demands for health services to determine what needs to be done.

The primary school will be done right at the beginning. It is the first infrastructure requirement. We need a site for the primary school.

The town centre is the highest priority. The difficulty for the developer is investing without return because their returns are normally made from selling houses.

Final comments by John (the Chairman)

John noted with concern why anything to do with the Garrison is given immediate attention but other issues for the community are given the due attention. An example is the fact that funding for the Stonehouse roundabout was approved about 3 years now but hasn't been done. He hoped it will finally be done as promised by the Chief Executive.

John mentioned again that when residents of Purfleet have their say, they don't get any feedback.

Lorry movements (200 a day - Junction 30/31)

John requested that the original name of Purfleet, i.e. Purfleet-on-Thames, be recognised during the regeneration. Purfleet, he said, has a lot to offer.

There was however minor disagreement because the Uplands part of Purfleet is not on the river.

8. Any Other Business

No other business was discussed. John asked anyone with further questions to email them to him to forward to Graham.

Reminder about Veterans Day – wreath laying at St Stephens at 10.50am on Sunday 12th November on behalf of community.

Community Activities

Lynn' Kitchen – Free Computer Sessions (32 River Court, RM19 1ZY)

High House Cafe – Advert to put on website.

Cobelfret – Request for the Chief Executive to ask for a contribution toward Purfleet Christmas street lights has it the first year Purfleet Forum have no money to fund this .

9. Date and Venue of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on the 1st Dec at Royal Opera House This will be Purfleet AGM

	John asked for volunteers to help with the committee's work.
10.	End of Meeting John thanked everyone for the attendance and participation and the meeting was brought to a close.