

Town Council Comments - all 5 Applications

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the chairman and members of this Special Planning Committee meeting today.

The Chairman of the Planning Committee, accompanied by the Town Council's Deputy Chief Executive Officer, agreed to a meeting at the developer's request with Mark Booth of Wildmoor Developments Ltd on 21st November to discuss the 9th November Planning Committee's submission to the District Council which had recommended refusal of the planning conditions compliance application.

From this meeting further information was supplied by Mr Booth to clarify Wildmoor's position from which it is understood that:

- All the investors, principally a pension investment fund and the cinema operator (the latter incorrectly reported in the press as having withdrawn from the scheme), are in place;
- All the pre-implementation conditions, prior to demolition and construction works that would enable demolition to proceed, have substantially been met as confirmed by the the Planning Case Officer;
- Land assembly of all the land and retail units, on which the development depends to proceed, have transfer agreements on a fixed date to the principal investor in place.

On this understanding therefore, it is has been agreed that the Town Council will withdraw its objections to the approval of the pre-implementation compliance conditions planning application, that will be considered at today's special meeting of the District Council's Planning & Licensing Committee, noting that this is 24 hours before the conditioned planning consent of 2014 is due to expire on 24th November 2017.

In conclusion, in the margins of the meeting, it is perhaps worth remarking that a number of forthright but positive discussions were entered into with Wildmoor Developments where it was pointed out that communications on the progress of the application might have been improved. Also, but more importantly, that the empty, derelict retail premises, a number of which have been boarded up following incidents of vandalism, have detracted from the strong vibrant retail offer that the Town Council is trying very hard to promote.

Mark Booth subsequently gave assurances that he would welcome a more frequent and open dialogue with the Town Council and that he would consider doing something to improve the appearance of these retail units if, for any reason, there is going to be an unplanned and unforeseen delay in commencing demolition and construction works.

He gave a further assurance, provided the pre-implementation planning compliance application is approved, that demolition work would commence shortly after, a matter which has subsequently been discussed with the planning case officer to facilitate insofar as that is practically achievable within the National Planning Practice Guidance framework.

(END)