

The Baldock Society

**Summary notes from members' meeting held on
Thursday 21st August, 8pm at Baldock Community Centre.**



Q Questions from Members shown UNDERLINED

Responses from **Councillors Knighton, Muir and Weeks in RED**

Responses from **Councillor Kirkland in BLUE.**

5. Members' Questions and answers

5.1 There was an impression that of Baldock was a big car park.

Indeed, there will, in fact, be more car parking available than previously in the Town centre once the enhancements are completed. However, the car parking will be better planned and more organised. Parking in the High Street will be for 2 hours max and 1 hour max in Whitehorse Street in order to allow people to park and use the Town's facilities and hopefully to hope generate and support local businesses. Once the enhancements are completed the Council will allocate a dedicated car park attendant for the Town.

The rise in car ownership and the use of vehicles for even short journeys has led to extensive parking in all areas of Baldock. The Enhancement will ensure that some areas will have 1 and 2 hour controlled and enforced parking and this will deter those who want to leave their cars in the town for the day or even when they go on holiday.

5.2 There were many concerns about the appearance of the enhancement so far, including the tarmac pavements.

The current tarmac finishes are not the final surfaces. A final top coat will be added nearer the end of the enhancements. This will also allow for any further works to be carried out in these areas without the need for patches on the tarmac.

The tarmac paths will be covered with an embedded buff coloured small stone surface, at the end of the enhancement programme

5.3 There were concerns that the public had not been listened to with regard to the enhancement.

We do not agree with this comment. In fact, there has been far more public consultation on this initiative than most others in North Herts and certainly not in the experience of the planning consultants that we have been using. This was begun over 5 years ago when we were the first Town in NHDC to start a local visioning process. There have, more recently, been a number of public meetings, meetings with business, liaison with local stakeholder groups and wherever possible we have amended the plans following comments from these.

5.4 What is the point of the traffic lights at Knights Templar? There were concerns about increased journey times.

The traffic lights are part of the whole enhancement scheme. Since the bypass was opened we have seen a reduction in traffic in the Town. However, traffic flows are starting to increase again along Hitchin Street & Whitehorse Street by business and personal motor vehicles passing through the Town rather than using the bypass. It also establishes a gateway into the Town. The traffic lights at the end of Whitehorse Street are to be replaced with more modern traffic lights with a pedestrian phasing. The Whitehorse Street and the Weston Way traffic lights, when all fully installed, will be able to talk electronically with themselves to change the phasing of the lights dependent on traffic volumes. The lights will result in some traffic discomfort for some time, but will hopefully deter drivers and make them use the bypass instead.

The traffic lights at Weston Way have been renewed to stop the area becoming a 'rat run'. They are going to operate on a 'scoot system' with the ones which will be put into the Whitehorse Street/ 507 crossroads. The system allows the lights to communicate with each others and control the flow of traffic.

5.5 Following on from that, there was criticism of traffic issues at the Letchworth Gate roundabout.

Unfortunately, the Letchworth Gate traffic problems fall within the Letchworth area. However, as Baldock Town councillors we have raised the need to widen the road at the entrance to the Letchworth Gate roundabout when travelling from the St. Paul's roundabout. This will help with

facilitating drivers to use the bypass rather than coming through Baldock. We continue to argue for this.

All the Councillors have expressed their concern about the problems at Letchworth Gate and it was discussed at the Highways Committee meeting in June

5.6 Concerns were raised over shop front standards – especially in the conservation area. In addition, a member asked if anything could be done legally with regard to closed shops, to keep them in order.

We have always fought against any closure / re-designation of shops to residential properties in the Town. We need to maintain all the shops as we can and encourage more. We are working with the Town Centre Partnership on this issue. Agree with CG's comments re closed shops. There is a NHDC on standards for shop fronts. Good idea for the Baldock Society & the Town Partnership to take this issue forward.

There is a limit to how much the Council can impose standards for shop fronts, but this is definitely something which would merit attention, perhaps in conjunction with the Baldock Town Partnership.

5.7 Will rates be as high in new shops?

Unfortunately, NHDC has no control over private rents nor business rates. Business rates are set by an independent government body – the district valuer and the Council act merely as collection agents. Where we have tried to get locally reduced business rates we have been unsuccessful. Rates for new shops can be expected to be as high as the established ones.

5.8 How do we attract more specialist shops?

We have to make it more attractive for the businesses to come to the Town. We are trying to do this by the enhancement, development of the Town Partnership, opposing the closure of shops, etc. It will be a gradual process and cannot be achieved by one single initiative alone.

It would be nice to see more specialist shops in Baldock. The Town has been trying to get a new identity since the opening of the by pass. Baldock Town Partnership is aware of this and when a town centre manager is appointed he/she will try to attract new traders.

5.9 What is the story on Quenby's? A member had heard that Quenby's would be unable to have cars outside the front of the shop after the enhancement.

There was subsequent conjecture from a member that the Council had compulsorily purchased the frontage (based on suspicion that the land was Quenby's because of the location of the petrol pumps, but that NHDC had purchased).

There has been an agreement for a more limited area for displaying cars at this location. Details of the discussion are, unfortunately, confidential to the parties involved.

I am not a party to the confidential negotiations that are taking place between Quenby's and the Council.

5.10 Wheelie bins look terrible in the town centre.

Agreed they can be ugly at times. We need to educate / work with residents / business as to where they are located.

The bins do look unsightly and it would be nice to have covered areas for them.

5.11 Where has the bus stop gone in the High Street?

Benches and bus stops will be replaced / re-provided at the end of the enhancement period.

The two bus stops in the High Street are shown on the plans for the town, so it looks as though the one that has gone will be replaced.

5.12 Will there be room for the October fair?

Yes, this has always been planned for both this year and after when the enhancements are completed.

There has been room for the Fair and this has been considered for other years in the Enhancement plans.

5.13 What about the market?

Unfortunately, the market is out of the Council's control. However, we have stated as a Council and as local councillors that we are very willing to work with the market operators to help develop

the market. The market will be relocated to the public square outside the Goldcrest after the enhancements are completed. This should help. Also, the Town Partnership are keen to work with the market traders.

The market will remain in a new paved market place, which will give it a more focal point.

5.14 There were concerns by members about poor market attendance.

Again, we will only attract new traders if people use the market. Please also see comments above. Disagree re the parking enforcement. It was the Baldock Town councillors who got the current parking restrictions in place. They are enforced from about 6am to 10am after which time all market traders who would be attending will have arrived. Waste collection was the responsibility of the Council when it was running the market as it is now with the current market contractors. If the rubbish is not collected properly we will get the Council to monitor & enforce the situation. General market attendance has decreased as the pattern of work has changed. However, the owners of the rights have not invested in the market and do not remove traders' rubbish.

5.15 How is the parking issue for the market resolved then?

Please see above comments on the market.

5.16 Regarding general issues around the town, CG asked if anyone had ever used the "Report it" option on the NHDC website. Nobody had. He said it has some limited options (e.g. a fly tipping category but not litter) but he had used different options and matters had been dealt with. Some members complained about lack of action by the Council. CG asked if they had reported their issues, to which the answer was no. CG reminded that if there was no complaint, nothing could be done, so it was important to do so.

All instances of this and crime must be reported to the Council / police. They cannot act on these issues if they are not reported.

5.17 Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of the local Councillors.

The Baldock Town Councillors consider they work hard for the town, its development and its residents. Indeed, we feel that there have been many positive developments / improvements over recent years. However, there is still much more to be done & we are committed to that. However, we are always very keen to discuss issues / concerns with residents and hear where they feel we could do more or do better. Please let us know.

5.18 There was much dismay from members about the loss of the buildings on the corner of South Road.

We share your views. Unfortunately, as the buildings were not listed we could not stop their demolition. It is now vital that we ensure that any house building on that land is designed as best it can be.

5.19 One member asked about the Rentokil building.

We oppose the demolition of this building. Nothing further to report to our knowledge at the moment.

5.20 CG mentioned that the developers proposing housing at Limekiln Lane had lost their appeal to planning refusal. One member knew more about the appeal loss – the inspector had been very critical regarding height and density in particular. Restrictions were placed on what could be proposed in future. That said, the member noted that there were no inspector comments about the potential effects of traffic from such a development.

The developers appeal against the refusal of the first planning application for housing on this land was thrown out by the planning inspector. We will continue to support residents to ensure that any housing development on this land is appropriate and in keeping with the surrounding residences.

5.21 CG also mentioned the Quaker House planning application had been withdrawn. One member noted that there is consecrated ground on the site, and wondered if this could be a barrier to certain development proposals

If anyone has knowledge of such issues as consecrated land can they please write to the Council's planners, as this could impact on any planning permissions.

5.22 Members were concerned that the access road to Osbourne Court was in a poor state of repair.

The land and access to the road is the responsibility of a number of bodies / people. However, the main bodies are the owners of Osbourne Court & Tesco. They should be asked to maintain this road.

5.23 Also regarding Tesco, CG noted the upcoming planning application from Tesco to add a mezzanine level and increase their trading area by another 20k square feet. They want to make food and non food a 50-50 split.

We are also still attempting to discuss with Tesco the development of a proper access route between their store and the Town in this area.

5.24 CG noted that Tesco are looking at the possibility of a path down from the store to the town – but this is early stage. As with a member's comment about the poor state of the memorial garden on Tesco's land, CG thought that if Tesco could afford to spend money on extra levels, that they could afford these things.

Please see above

5.25 Is there any development on the public toilet provision in Baldock?

There are still capital monies in reserve for the provision of new toilets. It has been agreed that we will await the completion of the enhancements before deciding what provision is required and where it should be located.

Money for the new toilets has been allocated. Nothing is going to be put forward until the enhancement is finished and then we can consult with the public as to where they should be situated.

5.26 On Mansfield Road, is there any chance of parking restrictions to reduce parking to one side only?

We have often been pushed by the fire service to improve access along Mansfield Road, in the past this has given rise to the double yellow lines at the High Street end of the Road. However, local businesses located there were concerned as to any potential impact that this would have on their businesses.

We have a commitment from the Council & Highways that we will be able to look at the effect of the enhancements on traffic flows, etc. and that there could be additional funding available to address major problems that this may cause. However, we do not know what the exact effects will be until the enhancements are finished.

5.27 CG asked members if there were any problems with vandalism, anti social behaviour, etc?

A few points were raised by members – for example gangs on Park Street, and cars speeding in the rear Tesco car park. On the latter, CG agreed that The Baldock Society would write to Tesco about the car park.

Please also report all instances to the police.

END OF QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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