

Carnival Phase 2 Frequently Asked Questions – 28 April 2017

Engagement

- Why was Carnival split into two phases?

The Carnival is part of the Council's overarching Wokingham town centre regeneration project which also includes developments at Peach Place and Elms Field. We wanted to complete Carnival Phase 1 early so there were sufficient car parking spaces to meet local demand before we started work on Elms Field and closed the Paddocks car park.

We also wanted to carry out more research and consultation on what type of facility we could deliver at Carnival, so splitting the project into two phases was the best solution

- What's been happening with the Carnival proposals since outline consent for both phases was approved in 2015?

We started building Carnival Phase 1 in June 2016 and the new car park is due to open shortly. Wokingham Superbowl are in the process of getting ready to start fitting out their new unit and expect to open their brand new bowling alley later this autumn.

Alongside this we've continued to look at what facilities residents would like to see provided in the local area, including public consultation on the Library Offer in spring 2016 and the Leisure Strategy in winter 2016. We've taken the time to look at some of the best examples of facilities being run elsewhere in the country and have carried out more comprehensive surveys of the existing building and plan to see what needed to be done at the existing Carnival Pool leisure centre. All of these have been fed into our proposals for Carnival Phase 2 and helped refine these latest designs.

- What's been happening with the other regeneration proposals in the town centre?

It's been a busy couple of years for the regeneration. Since 2015 we've managed to secure planning consent for Elms Field which we will start building later this summer, and have also started building the Peach Place phase of work in the heart of the town centre.

- Have there been any changes since we last saw the designs?

Some elements of the latest scheme look very similar to the layout we consulted on in 2015 as core principles remain in place. These include things like the desire for a bigger leisure centre, an element of new homes, and the ability to link the new facility and car park to the new Elms Field development via a new pedestrianised promenade with an improved signalised pedestrian crossing across Wellington Road.

We've continued to refine the scheme and, having considered a variety of information have made some key changes. These include the decision to knock down and rebuild the facility rather than simply extend and refurbish. This decision has given us greater flexibility across the scheme so we have also refined our proposals further by moving all residential to the western edge of the site (rather than including some above the new

leisure centre) and changing the layout of the facility so it's more visible from Wellington Road and can have a big new entrance space.

- Why are you rebuilding rather than refurbishing the existing centre?

When we shared the original proposals in 2015 the suggestion was to retain and refurbish the existing swimming pool so we could maintain swimming in the town centre for as long as possible. Since then we have carried out more comprehensive surveys of the existing facility and found the level of refurbishment required is more extensive than originally thought.

As refurbishment would come at a significant cost and would require the pool to close for at least a year, we looked in more detail again at our options and realised that rebuilding the centre would allow us to deliver a far better facility than originally proposed.

The rebuild option will allow a much more effective layout for the whole centre by using upper levels for studios and the gym, allows us the increased flexibility to co-locate other services such as the library to the site, and is better value for money in allowing us to create a centre with much lower operating and management costs through sustainable design and increased energy efficiency. It also allows us to make the most of the frontage along Wellington Road, creating an exciting community building that links into the rest of town rather than hiding as the existing pool site does.

- What can I comment on?

We decided not to ask any specific questions as we wanted people to be open and share their thoughts and ideas on the proposals. We're really keen to hear from residents about other things, such as what they think of the layout of the centre and the co-located facilities we're suggesting providing. We would also like to hear about the types of activities on offer that they'd like to see in the new facility, such as in the new library or public space, or if they are a local group that might use the new performance space or hire a room.

However some of the facilities proposed in the new leisure centre, such as the size of the swimming pool or the number of indoor sports halls, are based upon the requirements of the population (both existing and future) in the local area and take into account all the new housing developments which will be happening around the area. As these items respond to local population and demand they are fixed and cannot be changed in response to comments.

- How will you use our feedback and comments?

We will be collating people's comments about the proposals and using them to help refine our designs ready for a detailed planning application this summer.

Some of the planning application will be very detailed, such as engineering drawings showing all the technical details of the new pool and plant. Other parts, such as the

proposed library space, will simply be included as basic shells where further design work is required before the facility opens in 2021. We will be using feedback from this engagement to look at these internal spaces in more detail. We're expecting that there will be further engagement in the coming years so there will be other opportunities to comment on the new facility.

- What happens when the planning application is submitted?

This summer we will submit a planning application for Carnival Phase 2. The application will include detailed drawings for the new building, including floor plans and elevations. At this point people will also be able to submit comments as part of the formal planning application consultation process. We will be letting people know more about this closer to the time of submission.

Shared spaces

- Why are you moving lots of services into one building?

Co-locating various facilities into one space has lots of benefits. Not only does it reduce the management and operating costs of running these services for the Council, it also opens them up to a much wider range of possible users. People have the opportunity to link trips together within the same visit, such as returning library books before going for a swim, or grabbing some lunch with friends after the gym.

- Will there be a problem with shared uses being incompatible, such as noise from the sports hall or studios intruding on the library space?

We've looked very carefully at the types of facilities that might use the space and made sure to take this into account. We're making sure that spaces are properly sound insulated and that no noisy activities, such as the gym and studios, are located above the library space.

Residential

- Why are there more houses being built here?

It's always good to have new homes in a scheme like this as it helps create safe and vibrant areas. With people living on site there will always be activity going on which helps discourage anti-social behaviour often seen around 'empty' areas where there are no houses to offer natural surveillance. The site is also in a very sustainable location, within walking distance of Wokingham train station and the facilities and services provided in the town centre.

There is a financial benefit to building new houses in the regeneration as income from their sale is being used to help pay for non-profit parts of the scheme like improved community facilities and the park.

- What types of properties will they be?

Rather than building houses we are proposing a mix of one and two bedroom apartments to make the most of the area available.

Discussions are being held with the Local Planning Authority in regards to the mix and approach to affordable housing.

- Will the homes have parking?

There will be some residential parking provided to the rear of the units, but the properties will also benefit from being adjacent to the new multi-storey car park meaning there is plentiful parking on site for both residents and visitors. The properties also benefit from being within easy walking distance from the train station and bus routes.

Library

- Has the decision been made to move the library?

No final decision has been made whether to move the library or not. We believe there are benefits to creating a new home for the library within the Carnival Phase 2 development, including lower operating costs and improved layout, but more work needs to be done to look at this in more detail. The Library Service will be looking at a more detailed business plan around the move for the council to consider.

As we need to move forward with the long process of securing a planning consent for the scheme we have identified a possible space within the design that could accommodate the library should the decision be made to proceed with co-location.

- Is this just a plan to shut the library?

Absolutely not. Whilst some of our neighbouring councils have been forced to close libraries due to financial pressures, Wokingham remains committed to keeping our libraries open. However to do this, and to deliver the range of extended facilities our residents tell us they want to see from a library, we have to continue to look at ways to make the services more cost effective. This includes looking at ways in which libraries can reduce operating costs, as well as ways they can generate income to self-fund through things like additional services and renting out rooms for meetings and events.

- When would the new library open?

Work to build the new centre is expected to start in 2019 and the new library would open in 2021. We would be keeping the existing library open whilst the new home is built, although we expect there would be a short closure to allow books and resources to be physically moved from one site to the other.

- What will happen with the existing site if it does move?

At the moment we don't know and have not made any decisions about the existing site. A recent report identified three possible options including re-using the existing building

for something else, the council redeveloping it or a possible sale to a private company. As it would be at least four years before the site becomes available we are a long way off making any decisions and would look at this closer to the time when service requirements are better understood.

- Why have you just spent money on Wokingham Library if it is going to move?

It's going to be at least four years before the existing library might close so we will continue to invest in maintaining it as a great facility for residents. Much of the money that has been spent recently involves putting in new technology such as the self-service desks. We've made sure that this equipment is moveable so it can be taken with the library to any new home rather than left behind.

- Is the space smaller than the existing library?

The existing library is 1,342 m² whereas the new library space is 1,000m² instead. Whilst this appears to be a smaller space, the existing library calculation includes all the ancillary areas such as the café, toilets, lift and stairs. The core library provision only takes up 841m² of this overall space. In the new facility all of these extra elements are included under the wider facility rather than within the 1,000m² library space, meaning that the actual floorspace available for books and other services is actually greater than that available in the existing space. In addition to there being more space for the service offer, the new building will be more flexible as an open plan space over a single level which we believe will help create a much better library for all users and allows for more efficient management.

- What types of facility would the new library offer?

At this stage we are only showing the library on the plans as large space but not the detail of how it could be laid out within the space. We started looking at the types of facility local libraries could include as part of the Library Offer consultation in spring 2016 and we will be taking the results of this, along with comments and ideas from this engagement, to start working up more detailed proposals. We're hoping that local people will continue to be involved in this process over the next few years.

- Will Elevate still be part of the same building?

At the moment we don't know whether Elevate would be located in the new space or not. The Elevate Hub is funded by time-limited Government and EU subsidy funds. Work is ongoing to look at longer term options for this service in that context to see if longer term funding can be secured. We will be looking in more detail at what services are located within the new library and wider facility as we move closer to opening it in 2021.

- What will happen to the existing Water Babies sculpture outside the library?

We haven't made any decisions about the sculpture yet but would be looking to discuss this with people further as part of the proposals to move the library. We'd like to hear

back from people what they think about this and whether it should remain on the existing site, relocate with the Library should it move to Carnival, or even move to a new location in the town centre.

Leisure Centre

- Will the existing leisure centre need to close and, if so, how long will it be closed for?

In order to build the new facility we will need to close and demolish the existing centre before we can start work on the replacement. The new facility will take around a year and a half to rebuild so we'd be looking to close the existing sports centre in mid to late 2019 and reopen in early 2021.

- Where will I be able to go instead?

Whilst we recognise that this is not ideal, as there will be no public swimming facilities in Wokingham town centre, we do believe it is the right thing to do so we can get fantastic facilities for the longer term.

There are lots of Council owned leisure facilities across the Borough that people will still be able to use whilst the Carnival site is closed. This includes gym facilities at St Crispins Leisure Centre, swimming and gym facilities at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre in Earley, and swimming and gym facilities at Bulmershe Leisure Centre in Woodley.

- What will happen with classes like Swim School and Aqua Aerobics whilst the pool is shut?

We're currently in discussions with various providers interested in taking on management of the Council's leisure facilities across the Borough. The providers are all aware of the plans for rebuilding the centre and will be looking at how they provide classes like these whilst the Carnival site is closed in a few years' time.

- Will the new pool have water slides and a beach area?

We're not proposing to include these in the new facility as they take up too much room on site and are expensive to maintain. Leisure providers also tell us there is decreasing demand for these as part of their provision. The refurbished Coral Reef facility will also be reopened shortly in Bracknell with brand new flumes and lots of fun features for families.

- What do we mean by a gym for people with long term conditions?

We've recently introduced these facilities at Loddon Valley and Bulmershe Leisure Centres and they have proven a great success. These are gyms with specialist equipment designed to cater for people with long term medical conditions who are often referred by their doctors.

Commercial spaces

- Why are there commercial spaces shown and what could they be?

The Carnival site is set to become a leisure hub for the town centre. In addition to the council led facilities we are proposing think there are also opportunities to attract some additional complimentary businesses to the site. We've identified some areas we think could work for new leisure-led businesses, such as a restaurant or a large new soft play facility which could draw families to the town centre.

As with the other Regeneration proposals like Peach Place and Elms Field, the inclusion of commercial space also helps generate regular sources of income for the council. We will be able use this income stream to fund services, and invest in projects across the Borough for years to come.

Access and parking

- Will I be able to use the new car park?

Users of the leisure centre and library will be able to benefit from using the new multi-storey car park adjacent to the new facility. The new car park is set to open shortly.

- How will I get across Wellington Road?

We want to make sure people can get to the new facility easily and can benefit from the proximity to local shops and services. Part of this work includes installing a brand new signalised pedestrian crossing at the end of the promenade. This will help link the Carnival site with the Elms Field development and the town centre.

- What about public transport?

The Carnival site is currently within easy walking distance of the town centre, the Broad Street bus stops and Wokingham train station. The new layout will place the entrance even closer to these facilities and will also create improved pedestrian routes to make access easier.

At the moment there are very limited bus routes which run along or close to Wellington Road. However the council hopes to discuss this further with bus service providers and has made sure that the new designs could potentially link into a new route for local buses to drop off and pick up close to the new development.

Design

- What will the buildings look like?

Much of the proposed design is led by how the internal spaces are being used, with several big boxes like the swimming pool, library and sports hall needing to be accommodated and a desire to make sure these spaces have lots of natural light by using large windows.

We're also proposing a prominent new main entrance that can be seen from Wellington Road and Elms Field as we want to make the centre feel welcoming and open. We're also using elements like projecting windows, and cantilevered upper floors to break

down the large facades into smaller elements, with materials to create interest and help the building complement other projects in the area.

Costs

- How much will this cost?

Funding for this scheme has been allocated within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, which sets a budget of £29million for the scheme.

Carnival Phase 2 will be funded, in line with other town centre regeneration projects, through a combination of borrowing offset by income generated from within the scheme, such as residential sales and rental income from commercial units. There is also an opportunity to use developer contributions from developments in the local area for improving local facilities.

Wider site

- Does this affect other buildings on the Carnival site?

Burger King and the West Forest Gate office block are unaffected by the scheme and sit outside the project boundary.

The Wokingham Superbowl is moving to a new home on part of the ground floor of the new car park building and plan to open their brand new facility later this autumn. Their existing building will need demolishing before Carnival Phase 2 can be built.

The Southgate House office block will need to be acquired by the Council in order for Phase 2 to be delivered. The Council has been in discussions with the owners of Southgate House for some time and is committed to securing a relocation of the existing business within Wokingham. However the council is committed to delivering this scheme and have started the process of utilising compulsory purchase powers should these be required in the future.