

CR3 Forum

Response to Caterham Masterplan Public Consultation

April 2017

The CR3 Forum is the body preparing the Neighbourhood Plan covering Caterham Hill, Caterham Valley, Chaldon and Whyteleafe, on behalf of the four Parish Councils. One of its principal aims is to restore balance, growth and sustainability to the area. Planning for the future of the Caterham Valley and Hill centres is a key part of that.

Extensive consultation and analysis has been carried out for the Neighbourhood Plan and the associated Caterham Town Design Statement. There is now an agenda of local issues and priorities that is being translated into planning policy. The Forum supports the Masterplan initiative and is encouraged that it has recognised and drawn upon this work.

Restoring balance means a more dynamic town economy. Many people wish to work locally and set up their own businesses but there has been a long term decline in local employment compared to other parts of Surrey. The continual replacement of business and employment premises with residential has led to the loss of c.50 ha of employment space and 1000 local jobs, mostly in Caterham and Whyteleafe.

The Colliers report notes that Caterham attracts a significantly lower worker spend than comparable towns. This is because it has significantly less local employment. The risk is that the town increasingly becomes an unsustainable dormitory of absent commuters.

The Neighbourhood Plan seeks to retain existing office and commercial use within the town; and to create modern, adaptable premises for new high skill, high value employment. A supportive business environment for small independent shops, professional services and enterprises of all kinds is crucial to the future success of Hill and Valley.

Achieving a sustainable balance for the town is difficult when site values are always highest for residential use. Affordability is a key part of sustainability and town centre investment should not be focused solely to the highest return. The more joined up approach inherent to a Masterplan can begin to address these issues, for example through town zoning.

The Masterplan offers the opportunity to redesign and re-purpose both centres. It should plan for a balanced mix of large and small retail, office and commercial sites with residential, leisure, civic and cultural facilities. New ideas such as live/work premises, craft and artists' studios can make the town offer more varied and attractive. All this will encourage people to live, work, visit, shop, learn, eat and be entertained within Caterham.

Diversity is the key to providing a viable town, resilient to current and future challenges. Each centre contributes differently but the Masterplan should consider how they can create a greater collective impetus for Caterham.

A further objective of the Neighbourhood Plan is to make the streetscape more attractive by conserving existing historic character, whilst driving up the standards of new design for

buildings and street furniture. The streetscape can be made more appealing by adding pocket green spaces and planting. At present there are few places for shoppers and workers to sit and chat. The extensive hard landscaping of Church Walk precinct appears designed to encourage people to pass swiftly through.

Central green spaces such as Timberhill Park and Townend could be used more creatively for leisure and community events that draw in visitors. Additional public open space would improve the offering, as would a cinema.

Improving the streetscape must include addressing the dominance of through traffic and parking. Cars and buses compete for space. Both can be intimidating for cyclists and pedestrians. More imaginative approaches to traffic calming and management are needed.

Ease of access and free parking whilst people shop or enjoy a meal are crucial to the offering of small towns like Caterham that have many competitors within easy reach. None of the main car parks are well signed for visitors unfamiliar with the town. Waitrose does not have easy access to the upper decks. Longer stay parking is also needed for workers and commuters who presently compete with residents and shoppers for street parking.

Street congestion has been worsened by blocks of flats with insufficient on-site parking. Spaces of 1.5 per residential unit are essential especially in the town centre environs where there is a lack of street parking nearby. This standard is still not being achieved, for example in proposals for the Rose and Young hotel and the residential conversion of Quadrant House and Maybrook House. The Masterplan should address the planning policy implications.

Repeated flash flooding has badly affected homes and businesses in Caterham. Drainage systems cannot cope with the volume of residential development and impermeable hard standing within catchment areas. The Masterplan considers development opportunities for Townend on the Hill and The Square in the Valley. Both are known for flood risk. Improving flood resilience is one of Tandridge District Council's top corporate priorities for 2017. The consultants should therefore liaise with the working group set up by the Flood Authority (Surrey County Council), National Flood Forum and the Caterham Flood Group.

Clearly there are many challenges but also many opportunities. The CR3 Forum wishes to draw upon the expertise of the consultants with regard to comparative towns, in helping to formulate realistic and definitive proposals for the next stage of the Masterplan. This should include a structured delivery programme and a costed business case.

Funding is the key. TDC could consider a joint venture development partnership with one of the principal landowners such as Waitrose, using its new property fund. This would be a tangible sign of the Council's commitment to investing in the renewal of Caterham.

The Forum welcomes the positive ideas and options being considered. We will support Tandridge District Council in translating them into action, through the priorities and policies of the Neighbourhood Plan. These can provide a powerful tool for urban renewal, if combined with the opportunity for more coherent town planning offered by the Masterplan. For that reason the final Masterplan should become a Supplementary Planning Document.