

Minority Report from The Godalming Town Council Conservative Group in response to the Central Godalming Regeneration Proposals

The Godalming Town Council Conservative Group are opposed to the proposals from Waverley Borough Council entitled "Central Godalming Regeneration" and deal with this in seven sections below.

1.The Context

We note the desire of the Waverley Borough Council Lib Dem/Green/Labour/Farnham Residents Administration to upgrade the WBC Headquarter offices at The Burys. We note the financial challenges that WBC and many other local authorities in the country face. We reject the proposition that the Waverley Administration should raise funds for the rebuild by destroying Crown Court Car Park and building houses. Crown Court Car Park was passed to WBC in trust for the people of Godalming from the old Godalming Borough Council in the early 1980s. The reasonable needs of thousands who use the car park each week and the financial viability of many businesses that rely on it should not be sacrificed for some 26 houses to fund the rebuilding of WBC's HQ. The mistake of building on Crown Court should not be further compounded by the building of an expensive and inappropriate multi-storey car park at the WBC HQ - less easy to use and more distant. WBC has already committed or spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on this ill-fated project. WBC and its consultants should halt this initiative now and rethink the whole strategy to exclude these proposals.

2. Crown Court Car Park

We oppose the proposed closure of most of Crown Court Car Park and its use for a housing development of some 22 to 29 houses and/or apartments. Crown Court Car Park is by far the largest car park in Godalming. It has some 300 car-parking spaces and represents some 60% of the publicly provided car park provision in central Godalming. It is very conveniently located close to the heart of the town, near the High Street and Church Street with their shops, banks, chemists and restaurants. It is also very convenient for the Parish Church, Moss Lane School, the play and leisure facilities in the Philips Memorial Ground and the Bandstand. It's wide flat space makes for ease of access and encourages both swift visits to banks and chemists and longer visits to shop, browse and eat. The Waverley Administration proposes the loss of some 250 spaces. Many of the spaces left will be allocated to EV points, local adjacent residents, the disabled and the elderly (how will that work?). Access also to the well-used and popular Wilfrid Noyce centre will be reduced. It is clear that very little of the car park will be left for the ordinary resident or visitor. Thus, the most convenient and easy to use car park in Godalming will be lost to a property development - something that can never be reversed.

3. The Burys HQ Car Park and a Multi-Storey Car Park

The Waverley Administration says that it is “targeting” neutral car park provision. WBC propose that a multi-storey car park be built at The Burys HQ site. The existing car park provision at The Burys is 119 spaces – used by Waverley staff, visitors, Councillors and tenants – most particularly the Police. That level of car park need will be required going forward – perhaps more depending on assumptions of home versus office working and the needs of future tenants. To ensure that future car parking at least matches the level of existing parking provision, the multi storey car park proposed at the site would need to have some 250 spaces, assuming that the provision of 119 spaces is adequate for the HQ itself. We doubt that a multi-storey car park that big can be built. A multi-storey car park at this site on the edge of the Godalming Conservation area and overlooking the Lammas Lands is inappropriate. A multi storey car park at the HQ site is much less convenient to use, offers worse access and is further from the heart of the town. There will therefore be a loss of parking provision overall and a reduction of facility and ease of use for the ordinary resident and visitor coming into Godalming. A multi-storey car park is not desirable in this or any other setting in Godalming. There is considerable uncertainty as to the parking capacity that WBC and its existing or future tenants may need, including the reasonable possibility that more staff may wish to return to office working. Any upwards flex will inevitably be at the expense of residents parking.

4. The location of the proposed Multi-Storey Car Park

No competent town-planner would advocate moving most of the main car park located today in the heart of the town half a kilometre down the road and close to the commercially provided car parks at Waitrose, Homebase and a rather more distant one at Sainsburys. This would cluster all the larger car parks together at one end of town and removes the existing car park as a main car park. This makes no commercial sense. In the business world location is important and so it is for car parks. Businesses in the High Street and Church Street will be commercially at risk because of the greater distance to the main car park.

5. The Wharf Car Park

The Wharf car park is a private Waverley staff overflow car park with some 85 spaces that the Administration proposes to close for parking in order to build 9 -16 houses and/or apartments. The case for this is more reasonable though risks of future WBC car parking need are uncertain with any trend back to office working and dealing with the car parking needs of future tenants at the new HQ. Any future parking need lost from the closure of the Wharf car park will be at the further expense of parking provision for the general public, as WBC will need to claw back parking at its site for its own use.

6. Housing Need

While we accept the need for more housing generally, we do not accept that the specific loss of the widely used and popular Crown Court Car Park for some 22-29 houses is reasonable. A single housing development in Godalming currently being built at Ockford Park will, when finished, provide some 262 homes of which 78 are affordable. The destruction of the main Car Park in Godalming, centrally located, easy to use, accessible and popular with the whole community and the villages beyond for say 26 houses, when some 10 times that number of

houses are being built right now in a single development elsewhere in Godalming is not a good, sound or reasonable proposition.

7. The Business Community

The proposals add further unnecessary risk to the businesses and retail establishments in the Town when the economic position is already critically poised. These are not our words but those of the Chamber of Commerce. See the text below of the Godalming Chamber of Commerce press release issued on 12th August 2022.

Godalming & District Chamber of Commerce is firstly very disappointed that Waverley Borough Council (WBC) failed to discuss with us in advance its proposals for the redevelopment of three commercial sites in the town centre.

The Chamber strongly objects to the main proposal, which is to build residential housing on Crown Court, the town's main car park which is ideally situated in the middle of the retail centre, just a short level walk straight on to the High Street and conveniently positioned for all businesses including those in Church Street and the Upper High Street.

The Chamber has long argued for additional car parking capacity and would have liked to see more parking provision for business workers, resident and shoppers visiting the town. The redevelopment of Wharf Street with no additional parking provision is a wasted opportunity and should be reconsidered.

The Chamber understands that WBC needs to redevelop its existing facilities at The Burys and would welcome the inclusion of pop-up retails shops and office accommodation for small businesses and for those currently working from home. While this site is said to be on a Flood Zone, any residential development should be considered for this site and built above car parking and retail and/or office accommodation to overcome that.

John Taylor, President of Godalming & District Chamber of Commerce, said: "These plans are very ill thought out. Moving our main car park away from the centre of the town and replacing it with a less accessible, multi storey car park will not benefit our retail and commercial sector which is still struggling post Covid".

"We would ask Waverley to actually engage with the business community and work with us to create a development which will improve our town centre, help people start new retail businesses and make it easier for people to come and spend money in Godalming. While we welcome the consultation by Waverley ([here](#)), we have devised a survey of our own and would ask Chamber members, business owners and Godalming residents to let us know what they think. Our survey can be found at [\[link expired\]](#)".