



SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF ASCOT AND ENVIRONMENT

Newsletter – Spring 2024

In the six months since I took over as Chairman from Patrick Griffin much of my time has been taken up with dealing with the London Square planning application for Ascot Centre and in that time I have been thinking about producing a newsletter to inform members of what is happening, only to defer writing anything until we have some concrete news. But I am disappointed to tell you that, as of today, we are no nearer an answer.

Let me start by setting the scene. The area, to which the application relates, has been considered as a potential development site for a number of years, but in that time has only been used as a car park, on busy race days, and as a site for occasional Sunday car boot sales. This was because the site, with the remainder of the area to the south of the High Street, was identified in the local development plan as Green Belt. So despite rumours of supermarkets and the like nothing could be built on the area.

LONDON SQUARE DEVELOPMENT SITE



SOURCE MAP - SITE AREA : SOUTH OF ASCOT HIGH STREET PUBLIC CONSULTATION

In 2011 a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, of which SPAe was a member, was set up to examine the future of Ascot Centre, and they invited the Prince's Foundation to work with them to facilitate a community workshop to develop plans for the area. Through a series of community events in 2012 the Steering Group and Foundation received support to:

Maintain the distinct character of the three main villages and the separation between them

Preserve the green and leafy appearance of the surroundings

Meet the new housing demand in a way that is sympathetic to the area, maintaining a mix of housing types

Improve Ascot

Create an economic environment that supports micro, small and medium businesses and shops

Ensure our roads and streets provide safe and accessible routes

This vision had the support of 86% of all respondents.

PRINCE'S FOUNDATION VISION 2013



The Prince's Foundation produced a Report in 2013 which identified potential development areas to the north and south of the High Street, at Heatherwood Hospital and the station. It further recommended that the areas to the north and south of the High Street should be released from the Green Belt, but that prior to any outline or detailed planning application a master plan for the area should be produced by the owners/developers and submitted to the local community, the Parish Council and the Royal Borough for consultation and approval. Furthermore a comprehensive parking analysis and strategy should be included in the master plan.

The principles of the report were incorporated in the Development Plan for the Borough, which was approved in 2022, and incorporated the requirements for a master plan to be prepared by the owners/developer and a Placemaking Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) by the Royal Borough.

In December 2023 London Square submitted amended plans, such that the proposal is now for 117 dwellings, and 1,798.9sqm commercial and 278.5sqm community floor space.



The Development Plan indicates that before any of the areas of land identified for release were brought forward a Placemaking Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) should be prepared by the Royal Borough identifying policies and priorities for the area. This process started in 2023, but was then deferred due to lack of funding, only to be recommenced in early 2024. The Royal Borough has recently published an indicative timescale for the adoption of this SPD indicating completion in autumn 2024 following two workshops and an online Public Survey.

The Royal Borough have nevertheless indicated that they will consider the planning application ahead of the publication of the SPD and that it might go to a Council panel meeting in the spring.

Despite the attendance of SPAE committee members at all of the various meetings to discuss the SPD we have received no feedback from the officers on their views of the proposals or how discussions have progressed with the developers. Although personally I believe it is likely that the officers will be recommending approval and the delays are due to negotiations on social housing and the amount of community space.

SPAE's objections to the proposals remain and I attach a copy of Patrick's excellent letter outlining these for those who have not seen it before. Although I was not involved in the public consultation for the Prince's Foundation report I believe that the general conclusions and recommendations are sound and it is wrong that the process has been disrupted by an unsympathetic developer. We have met members of the new administration to outline our concerns, worked very closely with the Community Stakeholders Group and will continue to object to the planning application on all fronts. Market conditions have changed since publication of the Foundation Report and it is unlikely that the amount of additional retail space indicated could be justified, although the need for a focal point or square remains. I have always believed that the connection between the racecourse and High Street should be strengthened although this is not easy and there are not many other major sporting venues with strong links to town centres.



SOURCE DHA ARCHITECTURE LTD South of Ascot Public Consultation

My personal objection to the proposals relates to the design which I believe does not reflect the green and leafy feel of either the town or surrounding area and would only be acceptable in a city centre. Three and four storey houses and blocks are not Ascot and not what I believe families want.

We have reconsidered the judicial review route but currently find we have neither the resources or the grounds to recommend the cause of action to our members, but will keep it under review.

Lastly, I am sad to report that our numbers are declining and we need more members. It would be helpful if I could say that we have stopped the London Square development and nothing would give me greater pleasure, but we may defer it and/or get a review of the design, but as the site is identified in the Development Plan it will be impossible to stop entirely, although with current market conditions don't expect an early completion.

Peter Spooner

SPAE CHAIRMAN