

Article added 23 October 2018

The regeneration of Worthing Town Centre

Worthing Borough Council and West Sussex County Council are working together to drive forward the regeneration and renewal of Worthing town centre. Town centres are changing with a shift from retail to greater leisure and visitor activity uses driven by changes in shopping behaviours, increasing use of out of town shopping centres and the internet and an increased desire from tourists to enjoy cultural and active experiences. Many parts of Worthing town centre are in need of long overdue regeneration and the work we are conducting to bring these areas back to life reflects the need to bring in new uses that match changing visitor desires and the need to provide housing for people in Worthing who are struggling to get a foot on the ladder.

In 2016/17 I was elected as Chairman of the Greater Brighton Economic Board and I was delighted to be able to secure nearly £10million of Government to be invested in regeneration projects in Worthing in early 2017. We have already spent around £4million of that fund on the demolition of Teville Gate and the purchase of the former Police Station site on Union Place. Now flattened, work will soon commence to turn Teville Gate in to a temporary surface car park while we work with the freeholder of the site to bring forward a planning application for a mixed use development that will comprise of housing, retail, cafes, and ancillary leisure uses. Teville Gate House which has not been demolished is owned by a different freeholder and we continue to work with him and HMRC who still have a lease on the building to bring forward a plan to redevelop alongside the redevelopment of the rest of Teville Gate.

In November we will publish plans for the redevelopment of the site now owned by the Council on Union Place. There will be much needed housing and office space on the redevelopment and new leisure uses that will attract more people in to the town centre.

Another site on our list of projects is the Grafton Car Park. Long an eyesore on the seafront and increasingly a cost to the Council Taxpayer due to the cost of ongoing maintenance we plan to bring the car park to the market as soon as possible. Unfortunately the redevelopment of the site is not straightforward due to numerous ownerships and access rights through the car park to M&S for deliveries and adjacent flats for residents' car parking. We have begun to solve some of these issues by buying the freehold of some of the shops that are under the car park using the Council's strategic property fund.

West Sussex County Council has committed £5million to the redevelopment of the public realm along Portland Road, South Street and Montague Street and Worthing Borough Council intend to use s.106 and CIL contributions from town centre developments to support this work. Consultations have taken place with residents and businesses and the initial drafts of proposed improvements were received positively.

Through the Greater Brighton Economic Board we were successful in obtaining grant funding from the Government's One Public Estate scheme to support the planning work for a redevelopment of the Civic Centre Car Park. The north west corner of the site is going to be built on and a Health Hub will be there containing a new premise for two GP surgeries, the Community Health team, Mental Health

services, accommodation for Community nursing team and local NHS management and a pharmacy as well as some housing. A planning application will be submitted in the New Year with building work expected to commence later in 2019 and a planned opening date of Spring 2021.

Some time ago I attended a conference with the Council's Director for Digital Services. We heard from a telecoms company about work being done in other parts of the country to deliver ultrafast broadband. Britain is well behind many other countries in providing these high speed internet connections so we made exploring this a priority. I am very happy to say that we struck a deal with West Sussex County Council to use funding from a pooled business rate pot to invest in ultrafast broadband for businesses and public services in Worthing. In October work will begin to lay the fibre cables in Worthing town centre and by Summer 2019 Worthing will be the first town in the South East to have ultrafast broadband.

Earlier this year we published our Economic Strategy and our Seafront Investment Prospectus. Both set out ambitious objectives for the town over the next decade and I would encourage everyone to have a look for them on the WBC website to see what our longer term aspirations are.

Finally I would like to mention our theatres. Over the past four years the programme has been revamped and audience numbers are growing massively. The direct subsidy for the theatres programme has been reduced dramatically as a result and we have new evidence that shows a growing economic benefit to the town from the investment we make in the theatres. We are now taking steps to release the theatres from Council control to let the theatres be run by a third party, quite possibly a charitable trust, not dissimilar in nature to the one that now runs our leisure centres so successful. It is my belief that this will enable the theatres to prosper further and to be an even greater driver of cultural regeneration for Worthing.

Daniel Humphreys

Leader of the Council

Worthing Borough Council