

Finchley Society concerns re North Finchley Regeneration

The regeneration of North Finchley Town Centre is the most important transformation of an area of Finchley for several decades and the Finchley Society has thus taken a great interest in this from an early stage.

We are producing these comments in response to the recent public discussions about the future of the Lodge Lane Car Park, and as a reflection on the present state of implementation of the North Finchley Town Centre Framework SPD (Feb 2018) (the SPD).

Need for a Masterplan

Before detailed proposals for parts of the development are made a Masterplan should be agreed that considers the entire North Finchley regeneration, providing context and setting a holistic framework within which individual elements can be evaluated and progressed. Without this context it is not possible to say whether a specific proposal will fit in with the whole. For example, the provision (or otherwise) of parking in the Lodge Lane car park cannot be evaluated without details of what is proposed for the other parking areas such as Stanhope Road or Woodhouse Road, both identified for possible development in the Land Agreement. This masterplan must align with the vision of the SPD.

Derogation of the SPD

We are concerned that the SPD is being increasingly regarded as irrelevant and out of date. The SPD was produced after extensive consultation with stakeholders and the public, and represents the Council's vision for the regeneration of North Finchley. The SPD is not prescriptive in its detail, but it remains a material document for planning purposes, and its themes and overall approach should be used "to inform planning discussions with developers" (SPD para 1.16). Recent suggestions by the developers for a second focal point for leisure activities, namely the Lodge Lane car park, ignore the approved zoning approach in the SPD for a single such focus for leisure and culture in the Tally Ho area. They also draw in issues related to the redevelopment of the Great North Leisure Park (GNLP), specifically the provision of cinema and bowling facilities. Proposals are being put forward piecemeal, possibly to satisfy the developer's constraints and pressures arising from other activities, such as the development of the GNLP, rather than to meet the requirements of the SPD and the needs of local residents and businesses.

Need for a Detailed Parking Study

There has been much talk of parking studies for the Lodge Lane car park and surrounding area. However, it is not clear if these have been completed, are recent and relevant, or are being used to inform development decisions. The need for an evidence based approach to parking throughout North Finchley is demonstrated by the many parking related comments made at all public meetings, so publication of the status and results of such studies is urgently required.

Inadequacy of Public Consultation

Public consultation has been poor and very narrow. It ignores the use of both North Finchley Town Centre and the GNLP as resources used by residents from further afield. There continues to be a general lack of awareness around the Regeneration and other proposals such as the GNLP, as evinced by comments at the recent Lodge Lane information events. Despite several calls at North Finchley Partnership Board (NFPB) meetings for the advertising panels in the town to be used to publicise the various initiatives under way, showing links/QR codes for the various information websites, nothing has appeared. Use of an empty shop as a part time drop-in centre and to display information boards has similarly been discussed but not implemented.

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Ownership of the Regeneration

We feel that the Council is allowing Regal JP to dictate the nature and scope of the regeneration, when it should be the Council that is the main driving force. Similarly, the NFPB is a Council-led forum, but is mostly given over to presentations by the various development bodies who seem to lead the agenda, with little direction or control from the Council. A consequence of this is that members of the NFPB have lost faith in its effectiveness, and despair at the lack of concrete progress on any of the main initiatives (development, placemaking and cultural activation, and public realm design framework).

Lack of Council Departmental Communication

We are concerned that there is poor communication between Councillors and officers, and between different departments, leading to confusion and mixed messages being delivered to the developers and the public.

Inappropriate development of the Lodge Lane Car Park

We believe that the Lodge Lane car park site is inappropriate for the provision of bowling and cinema facilities. Lodge Lane is an historic, quiet, and chiefly residential road. Amenities of borough-wide significance should be sited in the town centre with the other main leisure and cultural facilities at Tally Ho, benefitting from much greater visibility and access. Additionally, the car park area is too small to accommodate these as well as residential, parking and pocket park uses.