

LAND SOUTH SIDE OF THE HIGH STREET (“LSSHS”) T & F GROUP

FORMULATION OF COMMUNITY NEEDS FOR REDEVELOPMENT OF LSSHS**1. Introduction and purpose**

The aim of this paper is to generate a discussion first within the T&F Group and then with other significant parties. The goal is to develop those discussions into a draft paper that will identify local community needs and aspirations for the LSSHS redevelopment, lead to public consultation so that the document gains a wide measure of public support, produce a positive influence on the dynamic planning process, and embrace the planning strategy of Central Bedfordshire Council (“CBC”) which the T & F Group recognises is a major influencer and participant. The paper draws on the previous 12.9.2020 paper from Cllr Clive Palmer.

2. Timescale

The aim will be to move as quickly as possible to develop a document that can exert an influence over the planning process and the infrastructure discussions that accompany it. This is because the T & F Group recognise that the ball is already rolling insofar as there is a current application (from Mayfair 500) for development of part of the site. Starting with the intention in early April 2021 to aim for a better-developed version of this paper by the summer of 2021, it is planned that iterations of this paper will contain updated timescales that ensure the Group maintains a good momentum to achieve real progress.

3. Which Strategy?

The LSSHS occupies a swathe of land behind the South side of the High Street stretching between the Post Office in Church Square to the Duncombe Drive car park. (CBC have a good map of this area that will be needed for the public consultation paper). The development of this area represents a major strategic opportunity for the centre of Leighton Buzzard. The land is currently in multiple ownership; a key issue will be whether the most realistic redevelopment strategy is one that covers a comprehensive redevelopment of the whole of LSSHS, or whether a step-by-step approach could produce earlier progress without sacrificing the strategic potential of the whole. Current CBC planners’ advice is that the step by step approach should be able to produce this earlier progress without sacrificing the overall strategic opportunity.

4. Development Scope

In no special order, the more obvious candidate elements of the redevelopment strategy appear to be

	Use of space	Comments (CBC paper suggests a total area of around 2.5 hectares)	Possible Space Allocation (indicative)	Generating footfall when during day?	Possible phasing (Early/mid/late)	Possible finance
1	Retail	Discussion needed to review the current retail offer in the town alongside the implications of the move towards on-line shopping and click and collect outlets for inline orders, pushed by the current pandemic. Smaller specialist shops?	16%	9-5		
2	Residential	Accepted that residential development will be a key driver for developers wanting to make things happen – and a key producer of infrastructure yield to fund other elements.	40%			
3	Hospitality	E.g. hotel: coffee-shop(s); café(s): “pub”/bar(s). :-Possibly an early project, i.e. the current Mayfair 500 Travelodge application.	8%	8 till late		
4	Public/community	E.g. performance space with accompanying facilities: meeting rooms: museum: tourism office: etc. This element is expanded below.	14%	9 till late		
5	Essential or “social” services	Candidates are e.g. Policing Hub; re-located Town Council offices: relocated TACTIC Centre outreaching for young people: daytime meeting spaces for older people particularly living alone: a Mens’s Shed facility: Central Bedfordshire Council office(s) and information hub , etc.	4%	9 -5 mostly		
6	Business / Commercial Office spaces	a) Start-up business units, incubator, Creative Industries. b) If evidence suggests shortage of space in the town centre, e.g. for “hot-desk” rented office space for meetings and meet-up space for business sectors. c) Ordinary business space, Creative Industries. Depends on demand in current and foreseeable economic climate, 10% of the area?	3% 2%			
7	Health	The Leighton Buzzard Health Hub? A permanent vaccination centre?	2%	9-4		
8	Education	A local college outpost?				

9	Facilities targeting youth, children.	Commercial led ? Children's play (indoor/outdoor), Cinema, Bowling Alley (the latter is relevant for adults too)	2%	9-4		Commercial finance
10	Indoor market	A permanent crafts-oriented market.	1%			
11	Restaurant(s)	Say, an 8 till 6 affordable hot-food operator and a 7 till 11 higher-price facility. – depends partly on the Mayfair 500 application.	3%			
12	Car parking	Probably multi-storey – 500 cars	8%			
13	Heritage display	For example, a narrow-gauge engine with sand cars on rails – or a replica Vickers Vimy plane.				
14	Conference centre	Separated out from the public/community item (or listed under Hospitality, tbc.)				
15	Public open outside space	Outside seating areas, performance area, in landscaped/green areas, 4% of the overall area?				s106 / CBC land ?

This list will be incomplete; discussion will improve it. The suggested space allocations are simply intended to generate discussion and to ensure that the discussions over public/community use are anchored financially and therefore space-wise to the whole development. The Town Council may need to be tenacious in pressing for adequate non-residential space allocations.

The footfall column looks at whether the development can be kept “active” for as many hours as possible rather than closing down at 5.30 pm.

The “Phasing” column will be important insofar as the funds for building a public/community use facility will need to flow from somewhere: it won't be realistic to plan that facility to reach completion several years before any residential development is completed.

5. Public/Community space

Some of the candidate uses that have already been suggested are, in no special order, but we will need to get some sort of priority order:

	Use	Comment	What current provision exists in the town, and where is the unmet need?	Priority for T & F Group	Space allocation	Any visible running costs?
1	A partitionable performance space, with spaces for rehearsals, dressing-rooms, admin office, bar, community cafe, toilets – acting as a daytime drop-	The aim is for multi-functionality.	Need to define this clearly w.r.t the Library Theatre. The suggested capacity compares		60% in total	Admin / Marketing manager: bar staff; cleaners; ushers,

	in centre as well as a performance event space. Suggested capacity 500. Capable of live music performance, theatre events, film shows. With retractable seating. Income-generating.		with the Library Theatre's 170-200 capacity.			lighting, stage and audio staff
2	Large meeting room e.g. one able to hold 350 seated people for a single meeting. Capable of flexible seating; rows facing one-way for performances but more flexible for meetings. Income-generating.	Possibly using the same spaces as above in order to make most intensive use of the spaces.	Ditto. Which types/size of meetings are least well provided for at present in the town centre?		Part of the same 60%	Admin staff
3	Small meeting rooms, perhaps six. Capacity 30 seated. Hire-able separately. Income-generating.	Ditto			10%	Ditto
4	Museum/tourism/heritage centre with space for art and other exhibitions as well as permanent displays. Small shop for related items. Sufficient space to accommodate school visits. Some income generation.	Paul Brown of the LB Archaeological and Historical Society has done work on this possibility.	No current provision in the town.		20% (sharing space with 1)	Part-time curator. Part-time shop staff.
5	Supervision of space and management					

Items 1-4 in the table above capture the fair ([keenly interested/invested](#)) volume of representations that have been received by Group members from members of the arts, cultural and other sections of the public in recent months. They also capture many of the aspirations voiced by members of the public attending the drop-in event held in the White House in February 2020. This paper deliberately avoids going into the detail of many of the representations received; doing so now might divert our focus from the need to establish our preferred direction and strategy.

6. Supervision and management of space / facility

[Pending understanding of who would manage the facility \(an independent Trust, Town or CBC Council, private business, etc.\).](#)

[Staff team needed – posts to be determined once purpose is known, e.g. an overall centre manager, Volunteer coordinator \(Volunteers could help with running of a heritage centre\), specialist technicians, heritage curator, etc.](#)

7. Finance

Starting with the obvious: this will be an expensive part of an expensive re-development. Some hard thought will be needed to identify the likely sources of funds. There may not be room/finance for some worthy candidate uses. It will be important to harness and energise the undoubted enthusiasm of many of the public for improved town centre facilities whilst promoting a sense of realism.

- a) Possible sources: Negotiated infrastructure grants. Other Arts/Heritage grants including possible Arts/Heritage partners. Capital borrowing. Lottery funding. Town Centre Government funding.
- b) Operating model: need to look at options, e.g. directly run by Town Council, or by a Charitable Trust, or through partnership with CBC or with a private Arts/Heritage funder. Would a Charitable Trust confer funding advantages?

8. Next Steps (suggested)

- a) To discuss and develop a revised version of the table at 4. Above that lists suggested elements of the overall development listed at 4. above, that gains consensus support, especially regarding the preferred allocations of space.
- b) To discuss and seek to achieve a consensus view on the table at 5. above listing suggested elements of the Public/Community use, including generating some estimates of square footage requirements and what our priorities are. We also need to identify areas where we need more input from our own TC officers or others.
- c) To discuss how to tackle item 5 in the table at 4. above, i.e the “Essential or Social Services”.
- d) To agree what help is needed from officers regarding funding (7. above).
- e) To identify a timescale for next steps, including at what stage public consultation might begin.

Steve Owen
(Town councillor)
7 April 2021

Purple – CP

Blue - VC