

Item 5 – Public Question Time/Open Session

**Written Response to questions from Mr David Simcox in relation to
Item 9: Crewe Town Centre Regeneration Programme**

1. Parking and Access

The £11m multi-storey was originally built as part of the failed Peveril scheme, not as a replacement for Chester Street or Delamere Street car parks. The Council now says it can absorb that loss, but in practice the Multi Story Car Park is already a white elephant, loss-making, underused, and unpopular. What independent evidence is there that it will genuinely meet demand in the real world, once 300 new homes are added, and that shoppers and visitors won't be pushed away by reduced access and competition for spaces?

Response

The multi-storey car park has capacity for 389 cars and was developed in anticipation that some surface car parks in Crewe town centre would be redeveloped for other purposes, as well as for the second phase of the Peveril scheme. It is key infrastructure, providing a modern, clean, safe, lit parking facility that is appropriate to the size of the town and in line with the vision we have for residents, businesses, and shoppers.

Any new application affecting car parking will require an updated parking capacity assessment. It will be undertaken to inform any decisions regarding development proposals for Chester Street and Delamere Street car parks. Other surface car parks may be decommissioned in due course as we deliver on our plans.

2. Strategic Direction of Crewe Town Centre

Turning Crewe's town centre into a 300-home housing estate is not regeneration, it's surrender. Will the Council be honest about its strategy: is Crewe town centre still meant to be the retail, leisure, and business hub of the borough, or is it being redefined primarily as a residential quarter?

Response

Most town centres across the UK are facing similar challenges to Crewe in relation to reduced demand from retailers. This is a consequence of multiple factors including increases in online shopping. Many independent reports for towns across the UK will verify and support the same analysis.

The proposals are similar to other UK towns and will significantly diversify the town centre and drive direct footfall into the town centre and immediate amenity; it is for a housing led residential regeneration scheme for Crewe, but

will include non-residential elements on the ground floor, potentially including retail, offices and community uses. This strategy is to diversify the functions of the town centre and is reflected in regeneration policy and Local Plan policy (Strategic Location LPS 1 (Central Crewe): “Within the Strategic Location identified as Central Crewe, the Council will look to maximise opportunities for improvement and regeneration” and identifies that this will be achieved through a number of actions including “the delivery of new homes”.

These policies recognise that retail still has a key role, but there is an oversupply of retail floorspace, as evidenced by high levels of vacancy.

The strategy for Crewe is already being implemented – as demonstrated by the UTC, Lifestyle Centre, Youth Zone, and Cheshire Archive projects. Relative to other towns, Crewe has lacked a supply of town centre residential dwellings and policies identify a need for these. As demonstrated elsewhere, town centre living contributes to the vibrancy of town centres, creating local consumers, footfall and a physical presence that benefits local businesses and improves the sense of community and security.

In short, we will create a greater sense of place, dwell time and meanwhile space for leisure, business, retail, and residential uses, providing a blended mix but ultimately assuring sustainability.

3. True Regeneration

I’m not against regeneration, but regeneration has to mean shops, offices, and life in the town centre, not just housing dropped on top of a failed car park. How will this scheme guarantee those wider benefits for residents and businesses?

Response

The Council is seeking to ensure that, alongside housing, the new development will also include other uses, including commercial and community facilities that integrate and add to the current town centre ‘offer.’ Most residential developments of this nature provide the opportunity for these uses on the ground floor of residential blocks.

The Council has also been supporting retail and office development; it manages a grants programme that, to date, has supported 19 businesses in opening previously vacant premises in Crewe town centre. It has also remodelled the former Municipal Building offices to create a modern office and co-working space for businesses, with the intention of stimulating both business growth and town centre footfall.

4. Sequencing of Development:

We’ve seen failed schemes before, such as Peveril in 2021, where Crewe was left with half-finished sites. Why is the Council prioritising 300 homes before

delivering the shops, offices and leisure uses that would actually bring people back into the town centre? Isn't this putting the cart before the horse?

Response

The former Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council, and then Cheshire East Council have both attempted, over the past 20 years, to bring forward developments that were, respectively, retail and leisure led. These were stymied by macro-economic changes which meant that such schemes weren't able to be delivered. The outlook for such schemes remains challenging as they are unlikely to be viable without significant subsidy or acceptance of major risk to the Council. There is, however, strong evidence of interest from residential investors and developers and, when curated effectively, this can help stimulate the creation of other uses, attracted by the increase in the number of consumers on the doorstep.

5. Financial Viability and Risk

The report admits this scheme has a "significant viability gap" and depends on millions in subsidy from Homes England. If that funding fails, will Crewe be left with yet another stalled project? And if the Council has to step in, will residents end up footing the bill through higher council tax or cuts to other services? How will people be protected from paying the price of another half-finished site in the town centre?

Response

The actions identified in the report are the initial steps in the process and there is a risk that the proposals will not be delivered. However, the Council needs to have plans to communicate these with residents and stakeholders and, without these plans, nothing will happen. The Council believes it has identified a developer capable of bringing the funding together, but there are many steps before the development can proceed. As with the previous Royal Arcade scheme, the development is likely to be phased, with the first phase being the whole of the cleared site adjacent to the MSCP/bus station, and the use of the car park sites being in later phases.

Given the timescale involved, the Council is implementing temporary ('meanwhile') uses for the cleared site ahead of any permanent redevelopment. This includes a pocket park amenity and activity space, which is due to be completed and open next Spring.

6. Transparency and Accountability

Much of the detail about this scheme is hidden away in Part 2 confidential papers. The Chamber of Commerce has expressed support for the idea of regeneration, but even they, like residents and other stakeholders, have not seen the full facts. How can their support, or anyone else's, be fully informed

when so much detail is kept from public view? When will all the information be published so residents and businesses can properly judge these proposals?

Response

The information contained in Part 2 confidential papers relates to information about the developer the Council is intending to work with in developing more detailed plans. This contains commercially sensitive information that cannot be shared at this point. The next steps will be for Council to formally engage with the developer. They will then start to put together plans, addressing technical and commercial issues and engage with residents and stakeholders in the form and composition of its development proposals.

7. Legal Barriers

The report itself confirms there are restrictive covenants on some of this land. Have these been resolved, and could they delay or even prevent the redevelopment?

The Council's own title review found that the central car park land is "burdened by restrictive covenants that the land can only be used for housing purposes." Have these covenants been resolved, and if not, could they delay or even prevent the redevelopment from going ahead?

Response

The proposals are at a very early stage and there will be numerous issues to be considered and addressed before any development proposals are finalised. Issues such as this are normal for any form of development, but do not represent a major risk to delivery.