

Bull Hill scheme defended as lifeline for Leatherhead

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A controversial 400 home development, that has faced huge backlash from the community, is the best way to save Leatherhead from 'dying', councillors have said.

It came after an opposition motion calling on Mole Valley District Council to seek guarantees on the financial benefits and improvements to the Swan Centre as part of the Bull Hill regeneration scheme was shot down.

First by the large numbers of the ruling Liberal Democrat group who walked out of the debate claiming it could prejudice them against any future planning decisions.

Then by Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson (Liberal Democrat: North Leatherhead) who quickly pushed through an amended and softened down motion that called on the council to continue working with developers Keir Partnership to secure the financial benefits and improvements.

The unamended motion was originally been put forward by Cllr Gerry Sevenoaks (Independent: Ashted Park).

He said: "Bull Hill would literally change Leatherhead as a town. "The question is for better or for worse?

"There is no doubt that this is a controversial project that will impact the town , with increased traffic congestion and building works for the construction of over a number of years. It will look like carnage".

"Crucially it does not have the full support of residents as demonstrated in the public campaign against the development and negative feedback from the so-called consultation. At its inception the Keir Partnership provided all sorts of wonderful benefits to the residents of Leatherhead."

"Affordable housing, social housing, refurbished Swan centre, cinema, financial profit for investment in the town. Sadly and predictably these financial and community benefits have diminished and materialised. The profit share is down from £22m to £14m, reduced car parking, and no cinema or leisure facilities, and we see there is no social housing."

"How has this been allowed to happen?

He added: "Having already given up £4million worth of land, Mole Valley council could be left with no profit to invest in community benefits for Leatherhead town centre. The result being that Leatherhead will look like Croydon-on-Sea and with a continued rundown town centre with no investment. What have the people on Leatherhead done to deserve such municipal vandalism?"

Councillors defending the amended softened motion said there was a strong silent majority in favour of the project, and that the redevelopment had not been an issue for residents on doorsteps at the recent May elections.

Cllr Claire Malcomson (Liberal Democrats: Holmwoods and Beare Green) said: "Whatever happens it will improve Leatherhead because Leatherhead, as mentioned, is a dying town, and it needs improvement.

"It needs more housing to feed the shops, and entertainment, and the theatre, and that is the whole point of it.

"Yes, some things have had to be cut back because the climate has changed, but I do think ultimately Leatherhead will benefit from this."

Chris Caulfield Local Democracy Reporter

Image: Plans for Bull Hill Leatherhead (image Leret Group_

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