

River Mole to attract visitors to Leatherhead?

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Mole Valley District Council's dream of "improving" and "enhancing" Leatherhead has taken a step forward after plans to regenerate Claire House and James House were submitted.

The site is part of the council's vision for a new riverside area to attract visitors to spend time in the town centre.

The plans, submitted by McCarthy Stone the council's preferred partner for regeneration, is for 37 one and two-bed retirement homes, a ground floor café and community space.

Developers McCarthy Stone said: "While the development is built around people in their later years this is not a development that offers care as you would find in extra care developments or care homes.

"Retirement living creates safe and secure environments for homeowners to continue to live an active, independent life and caters for downsizers who are typically selling or vacating their former family home and moving to a smaller apartment.

"Homeowners are generally the more active elderly rather than those who are in need of care or have more significant issues around mobility."

McCarthy Stone also plans to improve the car park and landscaping the area to the front of the building. The work is part of the wider Transform Leatherhead project.

Councillor Keira Vyvyan-Robinson, Mole Valley District Council cabinet member for property and projects, said: "The Claire House and James House project aims to create a landmark mixed-use riverside development that will improve the western gateway to the town and enhance the area around the River Mole.

"The application marks the next step towards the regeneration of the area and enhancement of the riverside area, a key project of Transform Leatherhead.

According to Mole Valley District Council, Leatherhead town centre is being re-invented, expanded and transformed.

It says the overall project, which also includes work on the retail and leisure quarter and Bull Hill, will "fully realise its potential as a distinctive, enterprising and highly regarded market town" adding that the "town's character, history and environmental setting will be celebrated and complemented by new and revitalised uses."

Not every aspect of the council's vision has proven popular however. A petition calling on the authority to reconsider plans to build hundreds of homes in high rise blocks on the popular Bull Hill park gained 1500 signatures.

Some fear the plans will destroy the green gateway into the town, potentially turning it into another Croydon or Woking and causing people to leave.

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