

Farm Terrace Allotment Group Meeting

29 August 2012

Held at Watford Town Hall

Present:

Lesley Palumbo (Chair) (LP)
Tom Dobrashian (TD)
Kathryn Robson (KR)

Head of Community Services
Programme Director
Partnerships & Performance

Watford BC
Watford Health Campus
Watford BC

Farm Terrace Allotment Holders

Councillor Jagtar Singh Dhindsa
Councillor Mo Mills

Vicarage ward
Vicarage ward

Apologies received from

Paul Rabbitts

Parks and Open Spaces

Watford BC

1	Welcome, apologies and introductions	Action
	<p>LP opened the meeting and welcomed those attending. She gave Paul Rabbitts' apologies as he was on leave and explained that he would be attending future meetings.</p> <p>LP informed the Group that ward councillors were attending the meeting. However, the meeting was primarily an opportunity for those Farm Terrace Allotment holders who had accepted the invitation to the meeting to share their views, raise issues and take part in discussions on their allotment site.</p> <p>There was concern raised that there might be Farm Terrace Allotment holders who would have been interested in being part of the Group but had not realised the meetings had been set up. LP and KR explained that there had been a letter sent to all Farm Terrace Allotment holders following the meeting on 17 July at Watford Football Club with an invitation to be part of the Group. Others had taken the opportunity to sign up for the Group at the meeting itself.</p> <p>However, it was agreed that it is important that Farm Terrace Allotment holders know that the opportunity to get involved is still open and so a further invitation would be sent out for the next two meetings. The aim is for the Group to be as representative as possible. The letter would be sent with the feedback to this meeting, which would also be sent to all Farm Terrace tenants.</p>	<p>KR to action</p>

2	Terms of Reference for the Group (Group)	
	<p>Draft terms of reference had been previously circulated to Group members. LP invited the Group to comment on the terms of reference and to add anything that was felt to be missing. The terms of reference are important as they set out the purpose and expectations for the Group and for its members.</p> <p>There was a comment with regard to the use of the word ‘future’ in the terms of reference. If there was no future for the allotments this seemed both unnecessary and misleading. LP explained that the Group had been set up at an early stage in order to engage with the next phase of the Watford Health Campus project. She noted that many on the Group were aware that the ‘preferred bidder’ had been announced and that TD would explain what this means as part of a later agenda item. However, it was noted that nothing was yet ‘set in stone’ in terms of the Health Campus and that was why it was important for the Group to identify issues for consideration at this time. It was agreed to review this part of the terms of reference.</p> <p>Clarification was sought as to who were the ‘stakeholders’ in the Health Campus. Watford BC, West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust and Watford FC were always referred to but other stakeholders were not acknowledged. LP explained that stakeholders was a term that referred to all those with an interest in a project or area of work. Farm Terrace Allotment holders were a key stakeholder, which is why the Group had been set up, but there were a whole range of others – which would include local residents, local businesses, hospital staff, patients etc. The Health Campus partnership comprises the three organisations (Watford BC, West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust and Watford FC) that have land owner interests in the site.</p> <p>Councillor Mills asked whether, as stakeholders, local residents would be consulted as the Health Campus scheme goes forward. LP said that this would be covered in the update by TD but that stakeholder engagement and consultation was an important element of the project.</p> <p>The Group agreed that, in relation to the Terms of Reference members were only speaking for themselves and highlighting their personal views and concerns unless they made it clear that they were raising issues on behalf of others.</p>	LP/KR to action
3	Watford Health Campus update – current position (Tom Dobrashian)	
	<p>LP invited TD to lead this agenda item.</p> <p>TD confirmed that in terms of the land on the Health Campus site, it is mostly owned by Watford BC and West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust (WHHT). The Health Campus partnership is working to deliver the new vision for the site and west Watford but the overall aspirations for the scheme have not changed.</p> <p>TD outlined what has changed, however, since 2007:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the nature of the delivery of a new hospital for Watford with the change in government funding for public sector projects (i.e. PFI funding is no longer available) 	

<p>2. the move to a phased re-delivery of a new hospital rather than delivery in one go. This means the hospital plans are now focused on identifying what needs to be delivered and when. At the moment car parking, a new office to consolidate personnel in one location and a modern maternity unit are top of their list.</p> <p>3. economic climate – the downturn has impacted on financing for major projects and on important issues such as the price of land</p> <p>TD said that this means the public sector is having to look at how the Health Campus can be delivered in the new financial climate and to ensure we can develop a scheme where “the numbers stack up”.</p> <p>The Health Campus scheme has, over the last year or so, been focused on procuring a private sector partner. This is to create what is known as a ‘joint venture’ (between the private and public sector). TD explained that this does not involve a gift of land, which is what some people think, or handing over of control to the private sector – the council and the hospital retain control over what happens within the scheme and what is developed. The benefit for the public sector of the joint venture approach is that the private sector partner brings their development expertise, funding and experience to the scheme.</p> <p>TD said that Kier Property had been appointed as the preferred private sector partner and that the Health Campus partnership will be working with Kier over the next 2-4 months on the masterplan, business plan and the legal and financial agreements. Watford BC’s Cabinet will agree the preferred partner in November / December 2012 at which point they move from being the ‘preferred’ partner to the ‘approved’ partner.</p> <p>TD commented that there were still difficult issues in regard to the site to resolve with Kier including contamination and flooding. When the partnership has arrived at the ‘art of the possible’ then there will be engagement with stakeholders – expected at this stage to start in October. This gives the partnership around 5 weeks to work with Kier on options to bring forward. TD explained green space is an important aspiration for the site but so is family housing, new jobs etc.</p> <p>Following this period of detailed discussions with the land owners and the agreement by Cabinet, the joint venture will take forward detailed work on the masterplan and preparation of an updated planning application.</p> <p>A question was raised as to whether Kier’s options that were seen at the meeting in July included the allotments. TD said that it was important to remember that any plans shown in July were only figurative and were produced to indicate what might be possible on the site. This included using none of the allotments, 50% of the allotments or all of the allotments.</p> <p>The allotment holders on the Group said they understood the discussions on the Hospital were important but their main concern was primarily the allotments.</p> <p>Councillor Dhindsa said he could appreciate the need for housing but was concerned about the volume of housing being developed in west Watford and could other land not be found for the additional housing – not necessarily in west Watford. TD replied that the original planning application for the site would allow for 500 units. The indicative plans submitted so far would allow for between 500-650 units. LP / TD agreed to go back to Planning to ask about development figures. TD also commented that a new access road will be part of the infrastructure for the Health Campus site – this will help reduce congestion on roads in west Watford as it will</p>	<p>LP / TD to note</p>
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	<p>take a high volume of hospital traffic (visitors, staff and patients) including emergency vehicles.</p> <p>An allotment holder asked whether the Health Campus partnership is concerned about delivering new hospital facilities or the Health Campus overall. TD said the partnership was concerned with both – they are linked. An issue was also raised as to whether the ‘waterways’ were involved in the scheme at all, given the river running through the site. TD said that the Environment Agency was involved with issues relating to the river and wanted to see the land around it cleared up. LP commented that this was another indication of the range of needs that had to be taken into account as the scheme is assessed and analysed by the partnership.</p> <p>Concern was expressed as to the loss of allotment provision in west Watford – even given that overall allotment provision within the borough is good. This was agreed to be taken forward as an issue to address (see 4 below).</p> <p>A question was asked with regards to sustainability and Kier’s commitment. TD said that sustainability was a question asked of the bidders throughout the process and that Kier had a very strong approach to sustainability</p>	
4	What are the issues the Group needs to address (Group)	
	<p>An allotment holder brought forward ‘The Natural Choice White Paper’ and asked whether this had been considered in relation to the Farm Terrace allotments (see link below). LP said she would take this back for consideration.</p> <p>http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/</p> <p>They also said the help allotments provide in difficult economic circumstances needs to be considered. Another Group member agreed that being able to provide food for a family is an important contribution to a family’s budget and that it takes a long time to make land productive.</p> <p>The Group asked why people were not being allowed to take up plots on Farm Terrace. LP said that applications will be looked at in October / November as it would not be appropriate to take people on as tenants during a period of uncertainty. Once the future was clearer the council would be in a position to review. Allotment holders asked whether this could be reconsidered.</p> <p>LP summarised the issues to take forward:</p> <p>Sustainability / Environmental issues</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Natural Choice White Paper and its implications 2. Sustainability within the Health Campus scheme (including Sustainable Communities Act 2007) 3. Link between the Core Strategy and the Health Campus / development – does the Core Strategy support the Health Campus or the protection of green spaces such as allotments 	LP to note

	<p>4. Pollution impact from the road / development</p> <p>5. Green space provision in west Watford</p> <p>Health / Community issues</p> <p>6. Community benefits of allotments</p> <p>7. Health benefits – both physical and mental (exercise / stress etc)</p> <p>8. Economic benefits of allotments (people able to provide food for themselves and to share with others)</p> <p>9. What can be provided within the Health Campus scheme for older people</p> <p>Hospital</p> <p>10. What stage is the Hospital at now – how many phases are planned for its re-provision</p> <p>Impact of scheme on allotments</p> <p>11. Needs of allotment holders being offset against the needs of other stakeholders (such as the hospital) and the economics of the scheme</p> <p>12. Is there scope to integrate the allotments into the Health Campus and make a feature of them – an asset for the scheme</p> <p>13. Like for like provision of allotments if any re-provision is needed – will this be offered</p> <p>Engagement and communications</p> <p>14. All Farm Terrace holders to be written to advising them of the meeting</p> <p>15. Request to meet Kier – open to all Farm Terrace allotment holders</p> <p>Other areas</p> <p>16. Impact on Willow Lane properties</p> <p>17. What is a Local Asset Backed Vehicle (LABV) – clarification needed. Who runs this, who is on it, how does it work?</p> <p>18. Watford Football Club – clarification of their role and what benefits do they get from the Health Campus scheme</p>	
7	Next meeting	
	19 September 2012 – 7.30pm – Watford Town Hall	