

Report: Vaughan Rd community workshop Ground Floor and Public Realm Tuesday 28 July 2016

Date: Thursday 28 July 2016 **Time:** 7.00pm to 9.00pm
Place: Harrow Spiritualist Church, Vaughan Rd (opposite the car park).

Introduction

- This workshop was held to allow some focused discussion, and creative and intelligent reflection, on possible uses for the ground floor of any new development on Vaughan Road, and on the implications of that for the surrounding public realm, in contrast to more general events looking at the potential development as a whole.
- It is important that anything that happens on and around the ground floor is:
 - i. **possible/practical** (works within the constraints of the site and the immediate area),
 - ii. **desirable** (something that the local community would like to see happen), and
 - iii. **viable** (can operate in an economically sustainable way) – while the Council does not necessarily need to make income from the ground floor, they do not have funds to run the space, so activity needs to be cost-neutral, albeit potentially helped by reduced rates and rents.
- The workshop was therefore an opportunity for those with an interest in supporting community activity, or in ensuring that any development benefits local people, or in making sure that the public space around the development feels safe and pleasant, to collectively consider those parameters, and to start to suggest some ways forward.
- By the end of the workshop we aimed to have the beginnings of a Community Vision for the space, including a list of priorities and some strong suggestions about the kinds of uses that might be appropriate and that the Council and design team should seek to investigate further.

Caveat

A number of participants stressed that their participation should not be interpreted as support for re-development. Many hold concerns around parking, specifically the negative impact of loss of the car park on residents and facilities for whom finding a parking spot can already be problematic. However, they were suspending their concerns in good faith for the workshop duration. It is important therefore not to understand the positive discussion and the findings reported below as an endorsement of the overall proposed redevelopment of the site, but as a useful set of supplementary information.

Who attended?

In total 16 community participants attended, of whom:

- 6 were members of the Spiritualist Church, the workshop hosts
- 1 was a member of Honeybun Estate TRA
- 1 was a member of Friends of West Harrow Park Committee (also a Vaughan Rd resident)
- 8 were individual local residents from nearby streets, i.e. without an additional declared group affiliation, of whom 4 lived on Vaughan Rd.

QUESTION 1: WHAT IS POSSIBLE?

This question was not addressed with an exercise, but by presenting people with the necessary background information to ensure that, when discussing possibilities, people were able to contextualize this within knowledge of what is practically achievable on the site.

Spatially: we used a large model and a diagram to help people understand the site, and to see the likely location and size of the two proposed ground floor spaces, and the courtyard area between, which would also form one of the main entrances to the flats above. Key issues that

need to be considered include the ground floor location, the proximity to the railway and the road, and the lack of possibility of offering any loading bay or on-site parking.

Commercially: some research had already been commissioned into what might, or might not, work on the ground floor. We explained this:

- (i) retail of any significant scale would not work because of the lack of loading bay or equivalent,
- (ii) professionally-managed start-up workspace would be unlikely due to the relatively small floor area. *However* this does not stop the Council itself - or a partner - creating and managing some kind of workspace, studio space or workshop space that might incubate new businesses or support small existing local ones,
- (iii) restaurants or takeaways serving significant amounts of hot or fried food would not be work due to it not being possible to accommodate the necessary scale of kitchen ventilation. *However*, a café or coffee shop serving light meals and hot drinks could be accommodated.
- (iv) a GP surgery or health centre would probably not work as this would normally require more car parking provision than is possible on the site to cater for patients with mobility issues.

QUESTION 2: WHAT IS DESIRABLE? IN TERMS OF OVERALL PRINCIPLES?

Setting aside specific uses, the first exercise we carried out – in small groups - explored general principles and priorities that would be important that ANY development at ground floor level adhered to. These, expanded at subsequent consultation, could form the basis for a List of Principles or a Community Vision against which proposals for ground floor activity could be tested.

We showed the groups the ideas that had already been shared in early consultation, then asked them to add anything important that they felt was missing, and then to vote, as individuals (3 votes each) on which of the principles was most important. *NB. These findings, summarized below, should not be understood as definitive; this was a quick exercise with a small group. Nonetheless, they are useful in terms of indicating further avenues to be explored, and can be tested further at subsequent events.*

Outcomes

Previously suggested points are in blue; additional points made at the workshop are in black.

Points relating to the design and use of ground floor spaces and adjacent public realm

Principle: "Whatever happens or moves into the ground floor, it needs..."	Votes
To be attractive and in keeping with local area NOT featureless blocks/ Echo West Harrow not Harrow Centre (<i>in all aspects, not just architecture</i>) – participants chose to combine these points	8
To try to address parking issues in the local area.	5
To use existing expertise/resources e.g. Harrow Arts Centre, Usurp Gallery, local artists, musicians etc	4
Certain facilities for dance classes, concerts, food etc, so dance floor, stage, PA, lights, kitchen etc. But who looks after this?	4
To encourage local creative enterprises (arts, music, theatre) (Usurp)	3
To be a green space that promotes environmental diversity	2
To keep light pollution down to a minimum/ it must minimize sound and light pollution	2
Harrow Arts Centre space/ community space	1
To be run by and for local people.	1
To feel friendly, open and welcoming to passers-by	1
To be realistic about future management and maintenance	1
It needs to be flexible and adaptable in case situations change	0
To be realistic about the possibility of misuse and anti-social behavior	0

To feel integrated into the immediate public space	0
To be a sustainable project based on realistic expectations	0
To bring together communities old and new	0

Points relating to the wider development

Principle: "Whatever happens, it needs to ..."	Votes
Bus stop at the end of the road	5
Access by public transport	5
Housing – not enough units for needy/low income. Suggest 50% private vs 50% social	1
Cycle lanes in main roads	0

None of the above points should be dismissed on the basis of quick 'votes'; all have been made by at least one community member. However, based on the above, and the discussion that evening, the points below seem important to consider:

- (i) **The question of how we make any development feel as though it is part of West Harrow**, in terms both of its architecture, and of how it relates to the community needs, activity and character of the streets around the site.
- (ii) **The need to consider the planning and layout of the ground floor, and what happens there, in a holistic way with concerns about parking and public transport access in the wider area.** Even setting aside concerns about parking reductions through removal of the car park, we do need to consider how those visiting or using any new centre will access it.
- (iii) **The desire not just to support local creativity, but to ensure that those with creative skills and talents are seen as a resource to draw on** in the development of a local facility that really works for and with the community.
- (iv) **The need for the development to think about its wider impact**, in terms of light and sound pollution and environmental sustainability.

QUESTION 3: WHAT IS DESIRABLE? IN TERMS OF SPECIFIC ACTIVITY?

Earlier phases of consultation had asked people what they would like to see on the site. In advance of the workshop, we prepared:

- (i) **a map of the area**, charting the location of any existing facilities of the types named, in order to help us assess (a) existing provision and (b) local groups or partners who might be interested in supporting the development of facilities on our site.
- (ii) **cards for each named idea** - omitting the suggestion of a GP/Health Centre due to the issues discussed in Question 1 above – containing a set of questions to be explored.

Participants were asked if they would like to add any further ideas. They were then asked to bear in mind the answers to the previously discussed Questions 1 and 2 above as they carried out an initial vote (3 votes per person) as to which activity they felt was most desirable and appropriate. The most popular suggestions were then divided among small to explore the following questions:

- **What might be the challenges to delivering these facilities?**
- **What opportunities exist that might help make them happen?**
- **What would the implications be for the public realm surrounding the building?**

After that, we voted again, with each participant once again having 3 votes.

Numerical responses

The suggested activities are listed below, along with the number of votes at each stage.

NB. *It should be borne in mind that: (i) we were working with a relatively small group of local community members, and (ii) time was limited for detailed discussion. Ideally we would have discussed each suggestion in the same depth, but that was not possible within a short workshop. This means that ideas omitted in the first round of voting were at a disadvantage when it came to the second. The findings from this workshop should therefore not be regarded as definitive; more*

as a set of suggestions for future research and discussion from a group of committed community members to be built on at the next stage of public engagement.

Cards that were discussed are highlighted pink

Suggestion	Votes pre discussion	Votes post discussion
Arts Centre Participants suggested combining this with workshops for creative and craftspeople .	11	9
Workshops for creative and craftspeople Participants suggested combining this with an arts centre/space .	4	9
Independent coffee shop	3	8
Community meeting space (multi-purpose)	5	6
Small independent shops (arts, fruit & veg, local traders) Participants suggested combining this with a community pharmacy .	2	3
Start-up space for small businesses	3	2
NEW ADDITION: Community Pharmacy Participants suggested combining this with small independent shops .	2	0
Youth club or centre Participants discussed combining this into the community meeting space i.e. youth activity would be provided.	2	2
Community pub	2	0
Child daycare facility	2	0
Indoor bouledrome	0	0
Café employing people with learning disabilities.	0	0
After-school club	0	0
Day centre for vulnerable residents	0	0
Day centre for elderly people	0	0

More detailed discussion of each of the ideas highlighted pink above

1. Workshops for creative and craftspeople

- Very desirable, especially if combined with others arts activity of some kind.
- There is no existing space of this kind in West Harrow, with the exception of Usurp Gallery on Vaughan Road (<http://www.usurp.org.uk>).
- Some interest in seeing this kind of activity as interlinked with/ a variation of start-up space for small businesses.
- It was pointed out that there is a local artistic community in West Harrow but this is not often made visible, partly because of the lack of opportunity to do so.
- Possible challenges identified were (i) finding consistent occupiers and (ii) noise from the activity in the workshops.
- Arts and crafts produced by the occupiers could be displayed in the windows of any development, bringing interest to street level.

2. Arts centre

- Very desirable. The only arts centre type space in Harrow is Harrow Arts Centre, which "is not even in Harrow". There seems to be a real hunger to be able to engage in creative activity in the west Harrow area.
- There are lots of creative peoples in west Harrow but this is not often made visible, partly because of the lack of opportunity to do so.

- It was stressed that Usurp Gallery, in the parade of shops on Vaughan Rd, does really good work and should be contacted – they might have ideas, they might be interested in a new space, they might have good connections etc.
- The relationship with the Arc House was briefly discussed: whether this would be duplication. The Arc House does not seem to have really made it onto people's radar yet. For those who do know about it, it does not seem to have made a massively good impression. It may be closer geographically, but is very much perceived as being outside West Harrow, and requires a trip through the subways, which is something that some people do not want to do after dark.
- The challenge to being a successful arts centre was seen as lack of space e.g. in terms of performance it would not be possible to hold anything other than small productions.
- In terms of implications for the public realm, the positive potential of being able to put on some kind of display was put forward.
- In terms of opportunities, bearing the 'reality' challenge in mind, it was suggested that a Community Arts Trust might be established. *NB. Look at examples elsewhere in the country. Luton seems to have quite an established and active one.*

3. Independent coffee shop

- Enthusiasm grew around this as a result of the discussion, although it was the idea of having some kind of sociable, good quality local café that appealed to people, not necessarily coffee specifically (suggestions were made that it might be a tea shop, or a dessert lounge).
- The challenge of being able to make deliveries was seen as an obstacle.
- However, opportunities identified were: the success of the café recently opened in West Harrow Park, the possibility of initial low rent or rates appealing to a potential entrepreneur, proximity to public transport (if this can be enhanced i.e. bus stops) and proximity to local shops.
- Such a facility was seen as potentially bringing lots of benefit to the local community and to the public realm. Not only would it be a nice place to get something to eat before or after church, but also somewhere to grab something on your way in and out of the town centre, OR somewhere to go in the evening (the lack of evening economy/nice places to go has been identified as previous events.)

4. Small independent shops

- This was a quite popular idea.
- There is seen as being a lack of small useful shops locally, with the parade on Vaughan Rd not very active – there are businesses there but they tend not to be the daily shop type.
- The problem of being able to make deliveries of goods, or for potential customers to park nearby, was seen as an obstacle.
- Likewise, it was pointed out that the site is not in a known shopping area – efforts would need to be made to 'pull' in potential customers, but this might happen if there was a product or activity that the store specialized in. Maybe an interesting food shop or a high quality gift shop.
- There was a lot of interest in having some kind of market locally e.g. like the Sunday Duckpond Market – what might the relationship be of this site to it? Spill out into the central space? Or store stalls and other event equipment in the inside spaces that could be brought out when required?
- There was interest in a community pharmacy being in one of the units (see below).

5. Community meeting space (multi-purpose)

- This was a pretty desirable option. There was discussion of it potentially meeting other needs as well i.e. putting on youth and local arts activity.
- Although there was a lot of interest in discussing this space, clear challenges were identified which a more entrepreneurial or commercial space would not have: (i) how would it be managed, both in terms of who uses it when and how the spaces are looked after, in a time of limited council funding, (ii) how would it be cleaned and supervised on a daily basis and (iii) how would people be made aware of it/ how would it be publicized?
- The opportunity was seen as being the real need for a space like this locally. We have been told on a number of occasions of people not being able to find space for activity that they

want to do, either because there is no appropriate space available, or because space is already booked. St Peters is really the only local 'competition'.

- When the new development next to the Vaughan neighbourhood resource centre opened, the idea was apparently that the resource centre might offer general community meeting space, but this does not seem to have materialized.
- In terms of implications for the public realm, the group identified: (i) the potential need to manage noise of people coming and going and (ii) the need for improved public transport.

6. Start-up space for small businesses

- This was a relatively desirable option, and might be combined with other uses above.
- The idea was seen as having potential because it could prove cost neutral or even profitable relatively easily, and would be likely to be accepted by locals if it were supporting local entrepreneurship or creativity. Again, the message of all the potential in west Harrow was stressed.
- There was seen to be real opportunity here because of the current focus of UK government on promoting start-up culture.
- In terms of implications for the public realm, this option was seen to offer potential because it would not be particularly noisy, in contrast to some other uses.

7. Community pharmacy

- This was a new addition and, although not particularly popular on its own, was discussed with interest, and seen as something that might be incorporated within, for example, local shops or even other uses in the ground floor area.
- The point was made that there is not an easily accessible pharmacy locally, and that health services are generally over-subscribed. Although the site may not be suitable for a GP or health centre, it could help meet local need in other ways.

NEXT STEPS

At 2 hours, this was a short workshop. But we made a good start on collaboratively interrogating the possibilities for a new community-focused space on the ground floor of the potential Vaughan Rd development. In order to progress the conversation, we discussed the following:

- (i) Harrow Council, working with the design team, to investigate the actual potential of securing and accommodating the kind of uses discussed. Whatever the final 'shape' of what moves in, it seems there is real local interest in:
 - **Promoting local arts, culture and creativity**
 - **Promoting local entrepreneurialism**
 - **Offering good quality space, whether commercial (café-style) or more traditional 'community' space, to meet the need and desire for people to congregate and to access useful services locally.**

Key now will be investigating both need (to build a business or funding case) and potential inhabitants, tenants, or service providers, to look at how some of these ideas might work effectively and sustainably in the space.

- (ii) Use workshop findings to support further consultation about possible futures with more local people, through the next drop-in design consultation, and through outreach work with those whose voices may not easily be heard through core engagement activity.
- (iii) Keep workshop participants involved, and informed of the outcomes of further research and consultation. If there were the opportunity to create some kind of community trust or body, it would be vital that local residents and groups were involved in shaping this from the outset.
- (iv) Hold a second design-focused workshop in the Autumn, once further research and design work have been undertaken, so that we have a clearer brief around which design possibilities can be discussed.
- (v) At the suggestion of the Council, hold a transport/mobility workshop for all interested local parties in the Autumn, so that those interested in addressing parking issues locally, and in opportunities to improve public transport, cycling and walking, can discuss this with the relevant council departments, politicians and – where relevant to Vaughan Rd – the design team.