

## Possible Move from Stompond Lane to Waterside Drive

Ever since I started reading this paper, I have been struck by the air of mystery and secrecy which surrounds this proposal, which is, arguably, the largest single development that the Council has contemplated since it started looking in earnest at replacing the Walton Swimming Pool and the Elmbridge Leisure Centre about 10 years ago.

The mystery starts with the enigmatic title of the paper, Sports and Recreation Facilities, Waterside Drive, Walton-on-Thames, which gives no inkling to the casual reader of the Cabinet Agenda that this is about the potential relocation of two locally important sports clubs with significant capital and running cost implications.

My interest deepened when I realised that the Football Club, whose lease expired in 2004, has applied to the Court for a resolution of the terms of a new lease, and that there has been a Court Order, with a date for a hearing set for April next year. With this background, and knowing that the issue of what to do with Stompond Lane Sports ground has been raised from time to time over the past decade and probably longer, one might have thought that something about sorting out the future of Stompond Lane would appear in the Council's Corporate Plan 2011 – 2012 under Leisure and Cultural Services or the Resources' Directorate's Asset Management and Property Services – but no. Walton Playhouse refurbishment gets a mention, the former Walton Library building, Elmbridge Museum, the preparations for the Olympics, but no mention of Stompond Lane.

Fast forward to last month, and the most recent issue of the Forward Plan for the Cabinet Agendas, which was on the Agenda for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29<sup>th</sup> September – less than 3 weeks ago – no mention here either. At that Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting – less than 3 weeks ago – we also had the Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Cultural Services give a presentation on activities in the last year and what is coming up in the weeks and months ahead. The Portfolio Holder had time and space to tell us about how we are going to support the Visit Surrey Tourism campaign, but not that we are planning a major re-development project involving Stompond Lane.

There was another chance to air the matter and get feedback. Last Monday, one day before the Cabinet meeting's papers were issued, we had the Let's Talk Elmbridge event at Walton Centre for the Community. Lots of people turned out, a marvellous opportunity to test the reaction of local people to the idea of relocating Walton & Hersham FC and Walton Athletics Club from Stompond Lane, the football club's home for almost 80 years down to waterside Drive. But no, not a murmur about this project.

Now, however,, the core proposals are outlined. Council will be asked, if Cabinet so recommend, to approve spending up to £65,000 on consultants' professional fees in respect of outline planning consent for the relocation to Waterside Drive scheme. The implication of such fees being needed is that there is a lot at stake, but how much is carefully not mentioned in the publicly-available papers.

Nor is there any evaluation of what other options are available to the Council. Is a redevelopment of the Stompond Lane site for the football club, with the Athletics club being found alternative premises not possible? Certainly such a scheme has been mooted in the past.

Perhaps, before we spend a shedload of money on consultancy fees we should ask all the sports clubs affected what they think about the proposals? Do they positively support them?

Perhaps, before we incur these professional fees we should undertake a public consultation to see whether the people of Walton and Hersham, and indeed the rest of Elmbridge, support these ideas?

Perhaps we should come clean with our residents and tell them what would happen to the Stompond Lane sports ground if Walton & Hersham FC and Walton Athletics Club move to Waterside Drive and tell them how much we think this project might cost?

Overall it seems to me that a major project such as this needs first an open and honest appraisal of all the options that are available.

Secondly we need to have the considered views of the sports clubs directly affected set out clearly for the Council to see. We pride ourselves on supporting our sporting heroes. Why not involve them properly in their future accommodation arrangements?

Thirdly we need to test the reaction of our residents to the proposals. And before we can do that we need to tell them what we think the various available options are, what costs might attach to these options and what benefits there might be from them.

So far, we are a long way from being in such a position, and I should like to ask the Leader what he plans to do in response to these suggestions.

Chris Sadler  
Councillor, Walton Central Ward