

Longbridge Area Action Plan

At the meeting of the Parish Council held on the 18th September 2006, the Council considered the content of a publication entitled 'Future 4 Longbridge - Issue One - Spring 2006'. This publication, described as the **Longbridge Area Action Plan**, was in fact a proposal for the redevelopment of the Rover site at Longbridge.

The Council considered that within the publication there were a number of issues of concern. The first was that developments at Frankley and the Great Park were not included in the **Longbridge Area Action Plan**. In fact, neither of the above areas, nor the Rednal triangle, all of which represented the bulk of Longbridge Ward received more than a few words in the publication, yet these were the areas that would be most affected by the proposed changes.

On 18 October the Council received a copy of Issue Two of 'Future 4 Longbridge'. From the content it appeared that the publication had been sent to selected people who had been asked to comment on the options offered. The report, which can be obtained from the website, the **Longbridge Area Action Plan, Issues and Options Report, October 2006**, makes interesting reading:

The target is to create 10,000 jobs.

"Nanjing Automotive, who have a lease on one third of the site, plan to start car assembly in 2007 and anticipate quadrupling the current 80 people on the site in the next few years" [4 x 80 = 320 people].

The High Technology Park that has, over the past four years, been the source of promised future employment for the area is, in actual fact, a small area of 15 hectares on the former car park on Longbridge Lane.

How much work will this provide for local people? The options document shows that it will be many years before significant jobs will be available in the area.

The proposed target for jobs referred to above is an important aspect of the effect the redevelopment of the ex Rover site will have on the people of the Longbridge Ward.

Additionally, it was felt that the proposals for transport would be of concern to all those in the ward.

The **Longbridge Park and Ride** appears to be aimed at car drivers mostly from outside the area. But what transport arrangements are proposed for those residents who live within the ward and who do not have cars?

The re-instatement of the railway to the Great Park and Frankley was to be the answer for a large part of the ward and an improved bus service for the Rednal triangle would serve the remainder.

After many hours of consultation spread over a number of years, it was proved that the railway would be a viable option providing it was re-instated all the way to Frankley. Many houses on the Great Park were sold with promise of a rail service to the city centre with a journey time of 25 minutes.

Now a letter to RailFuture from St Modwen shows the reinstatement of the railway does not fit into their plans.

In the latest 'Future 4 Longbridge', on the subject of the railway to Frankley, it states "there are some concerns about the cost and feasibility of the train option".

Consideration of the Infrastructure Options detailed on page three of the 'Future 4 Longbridge' shows why the railway extension does not fit into St Modwen's plan. They propose to divert the A38 through the West Works which would require that an electrified rail line through the site would need a bridge or crossing to gain access to the West Works from the A38 Bristol Road South. The access to the A38 at this point is the most important thing to St Modwen.

Option A "Provide segregated busway-bus rapid transit"

This proposal has been put forward previously and found wanting. Additionally, there are no clear details as to how the service proposed by St Modwen would operate although it appears that it would involve a dedicated bus-way following the old Rover road to the new A38 then onto a bus/rail interchange at Longbridge Station.

There are a number of questions which need to be answered regarding St Modwen's proposal.

Question 1: What will be the frequency of the bus service?

Currently the frequency of the cross city train service at Longbridge is 10 minutes at peak time, 20 minutes off-peak

Question 2: Will frequency of the proposed bus service match the frequency of the current train service?

There is no indication of the proposed frequency of service in relation to the proposed bus service. However, unless the bus service frequency matches that of the train service, passengers will have to either wait for the train or the bus. This will discourage passengers from using the bus/rail service and they

will continue to use the existing bus service to the city centre.

Question 3: If the frequency of the bus service is a bus every 30 minutes, passengers coming out of town could have to wait 30 minutes for a bus at Longbridge, making the journey time from the city centre to Frankley over an hour. How does this fit into a rapid transport link?

[The running time for the 61 service from the City Centre to Frankley is only 43 minutes.]

Question 4: Will there be through fares?

Question 5: Would there be a bus to get passengers to Longbridge in time for the first train in the morning and would there also be a bus at the station waiting for the last train to get passengers to Frankley, even if the train is late?

Question 6: How would the proposed bus service meet passengers' needs under the Disability Rights Act which states that all new projects must meet their needs?

The railway from Frankley and the Great Park offered wheelchair users and those who have difficulty walking long distances the hope that they would be able to go to the city and The Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

The answers to the above Questions are not known.

Question 7: What guarantee have the residents of Frankley got that the rapid transport link will not be withdrawn at a later date if it was found to be unprofitable?

Following the problems experienced by residents living in the Rednal Triangle with the local bus service being taken off at short notice there is no guarantee that the bus/rail service proposed by St Modwen would be permanent. It should be remembered that a bus service can be taken off at very little notice.

Insofar as the reinstatement of the railway to the Great Park and Frankley is concerned, the Parish Council will continue to support and lobby for its reinstatement in accordance with its electoral mandate.

In contrast to what is happening in Longbridge, stations in the Hams Hall area are being re-opened. Frankley needs access to a rail service from the south of Birmingham to the north and east, where most of the work has gone. Easy access

to areas of employment will become the most important thing for the future of those residents who now live in the Longbridge Ward and for those who will live in new homes built on the Rover site.

Other issues raised in Future 4 Longbridge

Employment

Although the St Modwen's Plan appears to rule out any possibility of the re-instatement of the passenger railway to Frankley, St Modwen still want to retain the railhead for industrial use which would require the diversion of the A38 through the former west works site.

Referring to the retraining of ex Rover employees, many were retrained as HGV drivers but in the area of the A38 corridor over two thousands jobs have been lost. More are to go in Worcester. If St Modwen does not know what industries will locate on the site, how can they possibly know what training is required.

Mixed Use

At the outset, it was stated that the retail element on the Rover site would be a Neighbourhood Centre with a supermarket of a maximum 2,500 square metres gross (The size of a Tesco Express). This would not have an adverse effect on other local shopping centres. It appears that the options now available for consultation propose a town centre and superstore of 45,000 sq m. Tesco have made their staff at Redditch aware that they are interested in this site. When the idea of having an Ikea store on the west works site was floated there was strong local opposition, one of the main reasons being the traffic congestion such a store would create. But it now has to be questioned whether plans for large superstore are being resurrected through the back door?

It is somewhat ironic that areas like Frankley have been trying to regenerate its Neighbourhood Centre and have, so far, experienced a total lack support from the City's planners. When Morrisons (formerly Safeways) was originally in the planning stage, the local M.P. and City Councillors plus other groups went out of their way to oppose any further retail development on the Great Park. Should the question now be asked why is it, even in the draft proposals, that a Town Centre at Longbridge is included in the plans. Is it because this is what St Modwen want?

If the list under the heading of Mixed Use is examined closely, a very large centre would have to be built in order to accommodate even half of these ideas. How many are viable, and how many are just speculative.

Housing

Housing was always going to be part of this plan, It is where the profit is. Many times more profit is made from housing than from providing jobs. On the Great

Park over 800 houses were built. At an average of at least two adults per household there was a need to create 1600 jobs to balance the unemployment in the area. This target of 1600 jobs has yet to be reached, although the development is approaching the 10 years period of time which residents were told that the development need to reach its potential.

Given the size of the areas allocated for residential use in Options 2, 3 and 4 in the Longbridge Area Action Plan, there is concern at the ability of local industry to generate sufficient employment opportunities to meet the local demands.

There are no figures given for how many homes are planned, but in order to assist those people to be consulted to make a fair assessment of the options available, surely that figure should be included?

In conclusion, the **Longbridge Area Action Plan**, as outlined in the Future 4 Longbridge document, appears to be at variance on every issue to the Local Development Framework.

It is looking to change everything that is Longbridge; it excludes most of the residents of the Longbridge Ward. The elderly who make up a large proportion of the ward and those who are disabled are not part of these plans.

Employment prospects are long term, those children in first schools may get jobs locally but for those who would work or are in poorly paid jobs the short term is bleak.

After nearly four years of discussion there are no firm jobs in the market place unless you work for St Modwen or the City Council. Many people travelled outside the area to Bromsgrove and Worcester for employment but many of those jobs have now been moved to Hams Hall. Unfortunately, the current transport arrangements make travel beyond the city centre difficult. The rail link would put Walsall, Wolverhampton, Coventry, and now possibly Hams Hall within one hours travelling time for all residents of Longbridge for work or leisure.

So make the future of Longbridge for the people of Longbridge and Birmingham and not for the profit of those who will be gone from the area before the changes are finished.

New Frankley in Birmingham Parish Council
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