

Tamworth Redevelopment

Some personal views which have a bearing on what I think would benefit Tamworth and could be implemented locally, along with some that would require investment from central government in order to implement them. For that reason I have included Christopher Pincher as well as the Leader of the Council Daniel Cook and the Leader of the opposition Simon People in the mailing list.

I have replied in this manner as I found the consultation feedback form far too constrained and vague, although I have tried to address some of the issues raised in the consultation document. In particular I don't think that the Gungate development can be seen in isolation. It needs to be part of a larger plan both locally and nationally.

In order for real progress to take place there needs to be cooperation between different bodies to get the maximum impact. I hope you will give this some consideration and pass it on as appropriate.

1. I appreciate the value of the income to the Borough derived from parking charges. However I question the wisdom of building a Multi Storey Car park (MSCP) in the town centre. Having travelled fairly extensively in Britain and Europe, I struggle to recall any that have added to the visual beauty of the area in which they are sited, and most are an eyesore, and they further detract from the surroundings due to the traffic flows to and from them. The ones that do work are those that are actually underground with the space above put to good civic use. I realise that there are archaeological considerations, but I have seen these actually preserved and incorporated into the structure. A good example is in Nijmegen, Holland where the underground car park shows off Roman structures. Many European car parks also incorporate safe cycle parking, which I believe is a must, especially with more people using electric bikes and wanting to store them safely. Incorporating rentable lockers with a mains plug in them could enable cyclists from further afield to charge their batteries, along the lines of the lockers you see in some shopping centres that allow charging of mobile phones.

For Tamworth, where a MSCP would make most sense is adjacent to the Railway Station. Surely working with Network Rail, the council could build a MSCP on that site. As well as providing extra parking for rail travellers, it would have the advantage of keeping traffic out of the town centre area. The access route that the council has promoted between the station, town centre and Ventura would then be used! At the other side of the town centre, but also on the access route, the Jolly Sailor Car Park could be promoted to visitors. I take it that given the push on electric vehicles, multiple charging bays would be provided.

2. Having cycle routes through the town centre area is a good idea, however they need to be joined up to cycle routes that connect all areas of the town. Apart from some good routes to the South East of the town centre, most of the cycle paths, where they exist are unconnected, and it seems that developers of new housing schemes are not being required to build in cycling as a means of transport (or leisure).

I hope that the council has plans to connect the new Anker Valley development (and eventually Arkall Farm) by footpath and cycleway to the station. At the moment there is a footpath some of the way along the river on the new estate, but that stops a few hundred metres away from the station and the Public Footpath just becomes a bog. With very little investment this route could provide good access to the station and town centre, and would save a lot of traffic causing congestion and pollution on Ashby Road. Similarly, I despair that Brindley Drive is not connected, at least for walkers and cyclists to the station and then to the town centre.

3. I believe providing more housing accommodation in the town centre is the way to a flourishing town centre. Again, in European and some British towns and cities that have vibrant centres, you find that the spaces above retail and business premises have people living in them, people that then use the local amenities. I realise that the council doesn't own many of the town centre properties, but surely by working with owners and landlords, these properties could be developed for housing whilst retaining the business below.

With regard to the Gungate Precinct I think housing is ideal. However I would like to suggest that what is lacking in Tamworth (as in many UK towns and cities) is quality apartments. Not, I must emphasise, the rabbit hutchies that go under the description of retirement apartments, but sizeable 2 to 3 bedroom apartments with full width balconies to provide private outdoor space. These can be

seen in much of Europe and modern ones have the following characteristics: Secure (usually underground) parking. Secure storage rooms for bikes, suitcases etc, usually by the designated car parking spaces. Communal heating, either from CHP or Ground Source heating, rather than each having individual boilers. As much floor area as would be found in a 3 bedroom house. If built to high standards (especially regarding sound insulation) such apartments would be attractive to the thousands of retired people in and around Tamworth. They still want space for when children or grandchildren stay and room for hobbies. They also want to have their own personal outside space, provided by a balcony. Also, not all younger people want to live in conventional houses, living in good quality town centre flats can be desirable. Being in the town centre makes public transport, shopping and culture easily accessible on foot and would boost the town centre economy.

4. As the council has highlighted, the town has many historic features, but also many bland or even ugly buildings resulting from 1950's and 60's developments which replaced what we now recognize as historic and attractive structures. Although some planners and conservationists oppose the idea, new buildings can be built that look like the medieval buildings that once stood there. You only have to look at many parts of Europe to see whole areas that were rebuilt after the war to look like the original historic structures (although built to modern standards) and which are magnets for tourists now. Colehill and Lower Gungate have many fine buildings, if new buildings matched them it would add to an attractive townscape.

New housing doesn't have to look like the bog standard designs that builders are so fond of. More modern designs like that off the Addenbroke's Road in Cambridge, or the Climate Innovation Project in Leeds could really put Tamworth on the map.

5. To thrive in the future, the town needs to attract visitors who want to do more than visit shops. Many towns that attract visitors do so because they offer opportunities for walking and cycling (or using mobility scooters). They also maximise the rivers and canals that flow through them by providing well surfaced accessible paths that can be used by different groups. Where good paths exist alongside waterways, you see walkers, cyclists, mobility scooter users, parents with children, roller skaters, runners. Tamworth is at the confluence of two rivers and has canals going north west, south and east. Yet little is made of them. By working with neighbouring authorities and the Canal and River Trust, surely work could be started on good quality paths alongside these. At the moment they are virtually inaccessible except to the most intrepid of walkers because of their muddled uneven surfaces. Even in dry conditions they are not really accessible to many users.

Providing maps and good clear signposting for visitors, showing walking/cycling routes, would attract many people looking for an active day out, who would then potentially spend money in the town. The Castle Grounds are very attractive as, in a different way, are the areas around Borrowpit and the Tameside Local Nature Reserve, yet, as far as I can tell, connections within these areas are not flagged up. How many people know that Tamworth has an Aquaduct and that you can walk to it from the town centre?

There is the potential for many fine walks utilising routes along the rivers and canals in and around Tamworth. I suspect that few local people, let alone those from further afield are aware of the possibilities for walking in this area. If the council (along with neighbouring authorities) published maps of routes on their websites, more people would be encouraged to walk them.

6. If the local canal towpaths were properly surfaced, not only would cycling commuters use them to travel to Birmingham, Coventry, Burton, Derby, Lichfield, Stafford and further afield, but many people would be attracted to use them for leisure purposes. We have met many people cycling in Europe who have given a cycle touring holiday in Britain a try, but have been put off by sharing routes with unforgiving road traffic. Putting in place a good traffic free infrastructure utilising canal towpaths and disused railway tracks would attract many visitors and therefore support a multitude of businesses such as B&B's, Hotels, Pubs, Cafes, Cycle Hire/Repair shops. Tamworth would be ideally situated to attract such visitors given it's proximity to the junction of two major canal routes. Of course the benefits to Health and Well-being are immense.