

FOREST HILL SOCIETY RESPONSE TO 'OPTIONS' PRESENTED TO STAKEHOLDERS 5TH February 2009

The Forest Hill Society Executive has given careful consideration to the Options presented at the Stakeholder meeting on the 5th February and subsequently made publicly available.

The issue was discussed in detail at the Forest Hill Society Executive meeting on the 10th February 2009 and those in attendance were unanimous in their view that:

- i) They strongly support the need to see swimming and leisure back in Forest Hill in the foreseeable future
- ii) Option 2 presents the best opportunity and scheme for Forest Hill
- iii) Option 3 is unacceptable

We would like the Mayor to ask his team to look at Option 2 and find ways of overcoming the issues which make it more difficult than Option 3. We are clear that Option 2 has many benefits and will gain acceptance of a very broad section of the community. We cannot accept that an option that was not even in existence several months ago should be so difficult as to be dismissed at this early stage. A re-analysis of the potential for cross subsidy, funding and costs needs to be undertaken.

The Forest Hill Society (FHS) believes that of the options presented, Option 2 is the right answer for Forest Hill. The Mayor needs to ask his team to look again at delivering it within a reasonable timescale.

It is important to state that the Forest Hill Society's position has been reached after a considerable amount of discussion amongst members of the Executive Committee, contact with many members of the Society and the Community and from various on-line discussions on the proposals. The FHS has also been in contact with a number of other amenity societies, residents groups and other local bodies in relation to this matter and are pleased that we, the Sydenham Society, the Tewkesbury Lodge Estate Residents' Association and the Save the Face of Forest Hill Campaign are all in broad agreement on this issue.

THE BENEFITS OF OPTION 2

Reasons why we are of the view that Option 2 is the best solution for Forest Hill and the surrounding area include the fact that:

- 1) It would bring swimming and leisure back to Forest Hill, something that a

very great number of the residents want to see.

- 2) It would help regenerate Forest Hill town centre. This is a really important issue as the Town Centre is not in good shape at the moment and since the closure of the Pools, Dartmouth Road has been in sharp decline. Reopening the Pools here would have significant economic and regeneration benefits that would in turn benefit the residents, the Council (through Business Rates etc.) and hence the whole Borough.
- 3) It would restore the 'civic focus' of this key Town Centre site and importantly encourage dual use of the library and other nearby facilities, making them all more sustainable in the long term.
- 4) It would maintain the Pools frontage as part of the trio of Civic Buildings. Whilst this is not important to everyone, it will minimize arguments about the impact of any development on the setting of the listed Louise House and Library. It will receive broad support across a wide spectrum of residents who variously want a Pool or want to keep the frontage, or both.
- 5) Maintaining the trio of Civic Buildings will facilitate consideration of planning issues should this area become part of the Conservation Area in the future.
- 6) It would support the objective for high quality contemporary design as a key part of this new public building. There is a high degree of trust in the abilities of Allies and Morrison, based in particular on their work at the Horniman Museum. They are seen to have the skills and experience needed for this sensitive project.
- 7) It would be close to a wide range of public transport. Forest Hill is one of the busiest commuter stations in London, it has a large number of bus services passing through it and it is well located for pedestrians and cyclists using the Town Centre.
- 8) It would have the least negative impact on the houses to the rear and for this reason would be much less likely to attract objections at Planning.
- 9) It would help reinforce the openness and strong character of Dartmouth Road. The Pool frontage would remain set back leaving space for landscape and public realm improvements in front of the building. These could be combined with providing level access to the front of the Library.
- 10) Redeveloping the Pools in a prominent and accessible location would attract people from a considerable distance (particularly from the north (Honor Oak, Brockley and south west Lewisham) and north west (East

Dulwich and Dulwich) where there is no modern public pools provision) aiding the long term viability of the project.

- 11) It would allow the Willow Way site to be redeveloped for some form of employment led mixed use. This could include residential above (as long as there was no net loss of employment potential), or for proper live work units. The consideration of the site for alternative uses is supported by the London Plan, could form part of the emerging LDF strategy if supported by an Employment Land Review, or it could even be test marketed for employment uses and if there is no interest this is further evidence that the a broader mix of uses should be considered. The redevelopment of this site for an appropriate use will also benefit the area around the secondary centre at the northern end of Dartmouth Road, but a major public use is not appropriate.

We are convinced that there are ways of looking at the project which will make Option 2 deliverable despite the difficulties identified in the presentation. Willow Way site can be rezoned for residential use in time if there is the political will to do it. In reality, if achieved through the emerging Lewisham Core Strategy / LDF it should not take any longer than it will to sell a large apartment led scheme in FH Town Centre, when we already have a half built one of those blighting the area. It seems

Although the FHS wants to see the Pools provided within a reasonable timescale, the Society believes that it would be acceptable to wait a little longer if this is necessary to deliver Option 2. However, the Society does want to see progress and are not willing to see the project put 'on hold'.

WHY OPTION 3 IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE

- 1) Option 3 is not an acceptable alternative as it relocates the Pools out of the Town Centre and fundamentally threatens the viability and vitality of the area. It would be the nail in the coffin for Dartmouth Road.
- 2) Many people in Forest Hill see the Civic Hub as an important part of the Town Centre and the loss of this would be very unwelcome.
- 3) Willow Way is not the site for a prominent leisure building. It is closer to The Bridge and the new Crystal Palace Pools Facility and would be a much less attractive a destination for those living in the north of SE23 and beyond.
- 4) Relocating the Pools to Willow Way and providing only housing on the Pools site would result in a net loss of employment overall as the only site that provides employment would be Willow Way. At the moment both

sites have the potential for employment. This cannot be the intention of Lewisham's Planning Policies. In fact the Town Centre is an important location for employment that would be further eroded by this loss.

- 5) Housing, and particularly more apartments, is not the right proposal for the Pools site. Option 3 proposes large, bulky buildings that would seriously impact on neighbours. It does not provide any clearly identifiable public space to replace the lost pocket park (the spaces around the buildings would feel more like they belonged to the flats than anyone else).
- 6) There is particular concern that Option 3 would mean that the Pools site would remain semi-derelict and empty for the next 3-10 years, whilst the Town Centre slides even further downhill and the Council are pressured to fund regeneration projects to help it recover.
- 7) Whilst Option 3 maintains the Pools frontage, it would not be accessible to the public in any way. Although not everyone agrees that keeping the Pools frontage is a priority, if its retention facilitates a scheme that more people can support then that is a good thing and a further reason for Option 2.

OPTION 1

Apart from being undeliverable in the current climate the Society does not support Option 1 as it would cause a considerable split in the Community and threaten the deliverability of the project further. There is specific concern about the proximity to Dartmouth Road and the impact of the new access road on the frontage. It proposes almost no open space in the location of the existing pocket park and its impact on the setting of the adjacent Listed Buildings is a further concern.

LOUISE HOUSE

The FHS strongly supports the need for a non-residential use for Louise House and ideally one that is Community focused. We would ask that the Council supports the emerging proposals for an Arts Centre on the site in any way that it can.

DESIGN COMPETITION AND CONSULTATION

The Society still supports the principle of a design competition as part of the OJEU procurement process for the Pools site as they believe that this is the most effective way of delivering high quality design, that also involves the Community in the decision making process. However, if the Council could find a way of delivering Option 2 and ensuring that Design Quality would be a key consideration then they could accept that this may not be needed.

We are clear that proper consultation with residents is needed for the Pools site. This should not be about ticking an option or nothing (as was the last consultation in the summer of 2008); it should be about engaging with local residents and finding out their priorities and objectives for the development so as to inform the project and ensure that people understand and buy into the process as it progresses.

Forest Hill Society
12 February 2009

hilary@foresthillsociety.com
Penelope@foresthillsociety.com

Michael@foresthillsociety.com
Andrew@foresthillsociety.com