



Maidenhead Civic Society

Making Maidenhead A Better Place

A strategic review of amenity



The aims of the Society are to improve the environment and facilities in Maidenhead and to stimulate public interest in its future. Maidenhead should be a place people want to come to, to live, to work or simply to visit. To this end the Society liaises with other local bodies and other Civic Societies both in the UK and abroad.

Introduction

Maidenhead's history is long and successful. That is due largely to its unique accessibility. Since the first settlement in the 13th Century, its history has been determined by its location. It was the first Thames crossing point on the Great West Road. Each transport era, from the pack mule to the motorway, the stagecoach to the streamlined jet, with certain inevitability has brought new blood, new building – and growth.

Consequently, the town has been exposed to continuous and often rapid change. Each age made its mark. Victorian builders and philanthropists in the railway age perhaps demonstrated the most coherence in their development of the town and its suburbs. Otherwise, new building over the years seems to have been a series of short-term responses to immediate needs, forming a patchwork quilt of styles and uses. Similarly, its facilities, services and amenities have grown consequentially, without any overall plan or coherence. In the sixties, in common with many other towns, the motivation for the last of these “makeovers” seemed to be change for change's sake. Since then, piecemeal development has chipped away at the remnants of earlier periods, to the extent that there are few remaining features, man-made or other, which make a town visually attractive.

We are encouraged, therefore, that after several unsuccessful attempts at a plan for reviving the town centre, there is a process in place for its rejuvenation which hopefully will be protected from the vagaries of political change. The Society, along with other amenity groups, is playing a significant role in this process and we are pleased that several of the ideas conceived in the first edition of our Strategic Review are coming through in the emerging plan. Nevertheless, we are eager that the town plan and other policy documents forming the Local Development Framework, while robust and sound, are not confined to the “safe options” but open the door to ideas that will help revitalise Maidenhead and its surroundings as an attractive and exciting place to be. We make no apology, therefore, for focusing on aesthetics. Artistic or architectural style is the fingerprint of character. Maidenhead's physical appearance should more properly reflect its achievements and those of its residents, and the character of its Thames Valley setting.

The Strategic Review by the Society aims to stimulate debate and encourage a coherent approach to what is needed – to identify long and short-term objectives for the continuous upgrading of those features which we believe will make Maidenhead a better place.

Martin McNamee – Chairman, Planning Group, Maidenhead Civic Society

Making Maidenhead a Better Place

A Strategic Review of Amenity (2009)

Main Points

- **Planning & Development** – put residents and the interests of the community first. New buildings and redevelopment must enhance an area’s character. High standards of design should be insisted upon and inappropriate densities resisted.
- **The Town Centre** – should be the distinctive heart of the community. It should reflect Maidenhead’s success and location, and provide an attractive and engaging mix of civic administration, business, commerce, retail and, importantly, residential housing.
- **Environment & Ambience** – The Thames Valley setting lends much to the image and perception of Maidenhead and is an asset that deserves protection and enhancement.
- **Leisure** – revive the sense of Maidenhead as “the place to go”. Find imaginative ways of improving the amenities of the riverside, provide more and better footpaths and open spaces, improve existing sports facilities, particularly for young people, and extend the “green belt” to the Thames through Maidenhead.
- **Travel & Transport** – ensure that Maidenhead is easily accessible and welcoming to people, however they arrive. Encourage the use of sustainable transport and create an integrated transport hub at the railway station.
- **Culture & Heritage** – explore opportunities for putting Maidenhead on the cultural map, reflecting local achievement and the wealth of local talent.



BACKGROUND

The Civic Society first published its Strategic Review of Amenity in July 2004. It was a distillation of more than 100 ideas and suggestions for “making Maidenhead a better place”, drawn from a survey of its members.

The Strategic Review resonated with the public and inspired the “Great Debate” in the Maidenhead Advertiser, culminating in a readers survey in early 2006. The feedback from this and the views expressed at a subsequent public meeting – which gave a platform to the inaugural ideas for the Waterways Restoration group – were to have quite an impact.

As well as influencing the preparation of the Borough’s Core Strategy (which was subsequently rejected), as part of its campaign the Society had called for a cross-party approach to the future of Maidenhead. And at the end of 2007, although there’d been a change of administration, the Council enabled the Partnership for the Rejuvenation of Maidenhead (PRoM), a cross-party group with an independent chair, to look at town centre regeneration.

The following year, PRoM published an outline vision and action plan for the town centre which contained a dozen of the suggestions from the Society’s Strategic Review.

However, our Review has wider implications. It is also a living document that should evolve as needs and circumstances change. While many of the Society’s ideas for the town centre have been fully incorporated and in some cases improved by PRoM, others have emerged. Moreover, while the town centre is a priority, our perspective extends to the residential and amenity areas which surround it.

With this first revision, therefore, the Society aims to inspire and encourage public interest in ensuring a healthy balanced environment between the built and the natural, to create a vibrant but civilised, tasteful and appealing place that we are proud to call home.



Planning & Development

In recent years, standards of architectural design have generally improved. However, there is still much that is mundane - planning rules are founded on minimum requirements. We should like to see an urban renaissance in design and style contributing to an improved quality of life. We suggest the following positive moves to improvement:

- Insist on high standards of design and development and the policies to deliver them
- Ensure that what is good is preserved and what is new adds character to the area
- Employ area planning briefs, including design codes, to ensure that new development demonstrably benefits the community
- Encourage local communities to set up residents groups as statutory consultees on new developments
- Extend the use of the 'gateway' idea to distinguish local areas and create a sense of place and purpose in local communities
- Insist on a better balance between commercial and residential development
- Balance town centre shopping with out-of-town and local shopping enclaves
- Give full weight to the preservation of the 'Green Belt'
- Focus on the use of derelict and 'brownfield' sites for redevelopment
- Demand adherence to the policy for 'green' provision in every new development
- Enforce policies for dealing effectively with buildings in a run-down state

Housing

Imposed housing targets, if pursued, could seriously affect Maidenhead's character and lifestyle. To assist in managing this impact and resist the pressure for inappropriate densities, we suggest:

- An annual review of housing requirements in terms of type, size, etc., to achieve a proper balance of future needs against existing housing
- The use of 'planning briefs' to ensure any new build or alteration is appropriate for its location

We envisage that any housing development will include a proportion that is 'affordable', with particular attention to the town centre, and underline the need for 'starter' homes. We would also like to see:

- Tighter and more proactive management of 'infill' development
- A campaign to restrict permitted development in the flood plain
- Adherence to all other aspects of government flood guidance policy, including the adoption of up-to-date flood plain maps
- All developments matched with appropriate infrastructure – services, schools, shops, road capacity and amenities
- Industrial activities in residential areas relocated to designated areas

Town Centre

Maidenhead Civic Society welcomes the Council's creation of the Partnership for the Rejuvenation of Maidenhead (PRoM) and supports its aim for a comprehensive plan for the heart of the town.

Taking an holistic and coordinated view of the town centre, the Masterplan should provide for:

- A distinctive identity reflecting its success and Thames Valley setting
- A wide range of shops and services, business and administration
- A sensible balance of uses in predominantly mixed-use developments
- A much higher proportion of attractive residential accommodation, including houses
- Improvements to travel and transport arrangements, including:
 - An integrated public transport centre
 - Welcoming "gateways"
 - Easy and convenient pedestrian and vehicular access
- Attractive spaces, e.g. a town square, and links between places of interest, including the station, the river and civic, leisure, sporting & retail centres
- A major communal building – arts or conference centre and hotel
- A restored waterway between the town centre and The Thames
- Aesthetic as well as practical considerations of design

Key to the success of regeneration will be an adequate infrastructure. Dramatic improvements to traffic and transport facilities and the provision of fibre optic cabling are two top requisites.



Travel & Transport

Recognising that accessibility is Maidenhead's *raison d'être*, dramatic improvements in its travel and transport arrangements are required. The decision to undertake a comprehensive transport study as part of the Masterplanning process for the town centre is welcome. However, the effects of growth and increased housing across the whole of Maidenhead need to be considered as part of an overall plan for the necessary coexistence of motorists, pedestrians, cyclists, bus and train travellers, commuters, visitors and tourists.

In particular, ways need to be found of breaking down the barrier imposed by the ring-road and railway line to enable easy access to the town centre.

Make the station area Maidenhead's transport hub

- Combine a renovated train station with a bus terminal, adequate and attractive parking, easy access pick-up and drop-off points and a taxi rank
- Make bus travel a viable alternative for in-town travel and give a concerted effort to make cycling in and around town safe and convenient



We would also like to see:

- Serious attempts to switch commuting from private to public transport
- Provision for alternative forms of propulsion for public/private transport
- Consideration of the impact of Crossrail and other Thames Valley link proposals
- The re-introduction of a rail service from High Wycombe, perhaps a monorail, which could continue via Dorney Lake to Windsor
- The provision of adequate car-parking, where possible underground,
- Better signage to car parks with space availability information
- Priority parking for residents
- Visitor incentives, e.g. Free parking at lunch times, and short term, low cost parking meters
- The abolition of Pay & Display and machines that don't give change
- Standardised speed limits of 30mph, except on dual carriageways

Environment

Maidenhead's association with The Thames and its proximity to acres of Green Belt land are not only cherished assets, they help to determine its character. The Society was instrumental in helping to devise a policy for The Thames through Maidenhead and supports the local authority in its stated intention of preserving the Green Belt. Both areas need continuous scrutiny.

The Thames Valley setting lends much to the image and perception of Maidenhead and is an asset that deserves protection and enhancement. More should be done in the built environment to reflect that setting, to add to the sense of place and wellbeing.

Conservation Areas play their part in this respect and these should be regularly reviewed with a view to extending them and their number. Owners of business and retail premises, particularly absentee landlords, should be aware of their obligation to the community for ensuring their properties present the best possible face to the street.

Much of urban Maidenhead is well-foliaged but an effort needs to be made for the "greening" of those areas which are not. We advocate a tree-planting campaign with the aim of making all roads in Maidenhead tree-lined, where practicable.

The Society applauds the local authority for its recycling initiatives and street cleanliness and supports its campaign to improve the understanding that every one of us contributes to these issues. However, we believe Maidenhead could do more to take advantage of Renewable Energy sources. We should be aiming for a zero or even negative CO₂ footprint by exploring the use of:

- Combined Heat & Power units and district heating systems
- Hydro, solar & wind power sources

Leisure

Maidenhead's natural amenities are well used and appreciated by residents and visitors. Much has been done to improve amenities in the town centre, particularly in terms of events. But more imagination and effort is required to revive its reputation as a destination. In particular we should:

- Improve access to and use of existing open spaces (Kidwells and Grenfell Parks) and improve facilities for teenagers
- Find imaginative ways of linking riverside and town centre
- Encourage the sympathetic redevelopment of Skindles and the former paper mill site on the South Bucks bank
- Adopt a landscape strategy to ensure the conservation of the River Thames environment

There is huge potential to exploit the opportunities afforded by the Thames riverside to enhance and extend facilities for residents and visitors.



Make more use of Riverside area and explore possibilities for realising riverside's full potential, including:

- Completion of the Thames Path missing link at Bridge Gardens
- Occasional pedestrianisation
- A footbridge to Boulton from the South Bucks bank
- Summer events
- Public moorings and boating facilities
- Pedestrian crossings

- Re-instate the Bridge Gardens bandstand or create a new one on Ray Mill Island

Continue to enhance the town's parks, gardens and open spaces already available and find new opportunities to add to their number:

- Build on the success of events in parks / spaces at weekends

Similarly, devise a programme for bridleways and public footpaths in the area, to:

- Create and maintain a proper network of local paths & cycleways to uniform standard, promoting their use with easily read maps

Deal once and for all with the quality of the York Stream environment, to ensure the restoration of clean, substantial flows of water throughout the Stream's length:

- The Environment Agency to manage all flows in local stream systems in a way consonant with appearance and the environment
- Protect and enhance the Green Way and the provision of pathways in association with the Waterways enhancement

Make provision for new, and improve existing, sports facilities to encourage:

- Sports / pastimes such as football, walking, cycling, cricket, tennis, swimming, rugby, athletics, etc., particularly by the young



Culture and Heritage

Explore ways of capitalising on the town's accessibility and unique heritage to make it a cultural destination:

- Build on the successes of Norden Farm, Desborough Hall and the Library to extend arts and cultural facilities
- Support the provision of musical events in the town and consider the merits of staging a Maidenhead Arts Festival
- Create a concert hall or similar public arts amenity
- Provide an adequate space in the town centre for exhibitions and expand the area available in the Library



The Civic Society gives specific support to the Heritage Trust in its provision of a town centre Heritage Centre. Additionally, we would endorse:

- A depiction of its history and people in public art
- Recognition for its areas of archaeological interest
- An extension of its listed buildings and conservation areas

The Society's Strategic Review of Amenity is a living vision. By its nature, it will go on being modified as new needs are seen and as present ones become less important.

