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Notes at meeting 30 October 2006

Tony Michael planning

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- Purpose of the meeting was to record the Council's general approach towards leisure provision for young people, which needs to be taken into account in the production of the DR/UHS site appraisal study by the planning office;
 - A site map, with the current timetable and explanatory text for the project, was tabled;
 - Apart from the Cinema, for young people currently there was merely a low key use of part of the Depot Road/Upper High Street car park site by skateboards/BMXing etc;
 - For other age groups, current "leisure & social" facilities in and around the study area include clubs (eg conservative, Epsom) facing Church Street & Depot Road, the United Reformed Church Hall, the Baptist Church Hall, the small open space near the Town Hall;
 - Local parks included Mount Hill Gardens, Rosebery Park, Court Recreation Ground (older activities), Alexandra Park (outdoor activities);
 - A major priority of the Council in the town centre is to improve the provision for the young people (say 11-19) who gravitate there; two main rival groups/gangs appear to exist (chavs & grungers) with potential for confrontations mainly in the evenings; main interests are centred around skateboarding & BMXing, or the DJ/music scene, or internet/computer game activities;
 - Young people wished to "hang out" with friends in unstructured activity, but congregation in groups was leading to difficulties with the police, being moved on, anti social behaviour issues, underage alcohol consumption, noise and disturbance for local residents, imperfect personal development; lack of personal/cheap transport (eg no discounted travel tickets) was an issue, as was the cost of access to local facilities; some travelled to the town centre from elsewhere eg Ewell was not a draw;
 - Local youth facilities in the Town exist in the Rainbow Leisure Centre, Linton's Lane Youth Arts Centre, Yo-Yo Drop-in Centre in 24 South Street; the future operation of the last two being possibly subject to redevelopment pressures;
 - It was clear that the present provision for many young people locally was quite inadequate;
 - The principal need was for a town centre site that would provide for both skateboarding/BMXing (ideally under cover) and for the music and internet/computer game type activities;
 - Such facilities could then contain the present random activities; focus interests & energies; allow better personal development; allow for help to individuals where needed; allow young people to hang out with their friends in one place, out of the way, in some safety, being subtly supervised;
 - Other age groups were usually more able to take up opportunities (they often had better access to transport, more spending power & places to go, a more structured lifestyle), & providing new facilities for them was not as significant an issue as improving facilities for the young;
 - The Citizens Panel Survey 2006 also identified a need for local leisure facilities; the "Youth Matters" Green Paper from HMG has 5 main criteria which essentially promote "more places to go to, more things to do" for young people; Local Borough Plan 2000 policies (eg CF2) were designed to retain existing facilities and prevent their loss through redevelopment;
 - Funding for the creation/running of new facilities is currently limited; sources could include S.106, the Youth Development Service; the Council helps to start up facilities and develop them with the aid of Youth support agencies, and also the input of young people (to ensure that they were a success); the Council would not normally wish to run such facilities, but rather to grant leases to appropriate bodies and commercial operators;
 - A short term trial of skateboarding/BMXing was staged successfully in the UHS car park two years ago, using temporary equipment, on a space no more than c.15m square; also at Youth Leisure day 2005 (Ebbisham Centre) a mobile skate camp was well used by local young people;
 - **Conclusion:** the town centre therefore clearly needs a proper facility for the young; an indoor centre for both the music/internet activities and for skateboarding/stunt BMXing (indoor because of weather, also because it was safer, easier to control behaviour, & youth organisations could offer help to those individuals who needed it etc); a dual use approach could work (the young were at school during the working day for example);
 - Respecting local residents' amenity was vital.