



Kim Tagliarini
Elmbridge Brough Council
Civic Centre
High Street
Esher
Surrey
KT10 9SD

9 Broom Close
Esher
KT10 9ET

3rd April 2023

Dear Ms Tagliarini,

Esher Residents Association Open meeting 21/03/2023

We recently held an open meeting with residents to find out their thoughts on the future of Esher and its town centre. It was attended by about 60 people and this letter contains the key subjects that people wanted to talk about and some of their solutions.

Please do use it to contribute to Elmbridge's 'Vision for Esher town centre' consultation.

Traffic

Everyone acknowledged Esher's traffic problems and understood that long terms solutions (Simon Smith's newsletter article on new roads to connect to Hook) take a very long time to deliver.

Shorter term ideas to deal with the traffic ranged from:

- Stop Portsmouth Road from being a dual carriageway, put in traffic calming measures via different road surfaces (see Exhibition Road between the Natural History Museum and the V&A), reduce speeds to 20mph and let the traffic sort itself out. It will find other routes.
- Put in more crossings to prioritise pedestrians.
- Put in a pedestrian subway to link north and south Esher.

Cycling

There was a discussion about the need for more/better cycle lanes. Esher is part of a much enjoyed cycle route from London to the Surrey Hills, yet the cycle lane provision is very poor indeed.

Reducing the width of the Portsmouth Road towards Kingston and adding a significant cycle lane was seen as a positive by some and an exemplar of what could be achieved in Esher.

Parking

There was general acknowledgement that costly parking is a massive obstacle to a successful High Street.

- In the slip roads and behind The Bear there is already free parking for up to 2 hours. This is on public roads controlled by Surrey CC.
- Elmbridge offers a little known 30 minutes free in front of the Civic Centre (but that is really for visitors to the Centre).

However, it was felt:

- Elmbridge should offer 1hour free parking in its car parks.
- Shop staff should be offered reduced/free parking all day.

Slip roads

Some felt that these, or some of them, could be closed to offer a better pedestrian experience, or to allow cafes to offer pavement eating places.

There is also the opportunity, of closing some of the slip roads, to offer angled parking (current slip roads are too narrow to negotiate with modern car sizes). This would require Portsmouth Road to be single lane to allow for maneuverability.

We then discussed Esher's "purpose". What role does it fill in peoples' lives?

Esher's purpose

Historically the town has been a staging post, somewhere to change horses and stay a night on the way to Portsmouth.

Has that "staging post" morphed into a successful nighttime economy? What else would people like it to be? This proved hard to pin down, especially in such a large group, however, when asked where they prefer to shop, residents favoured Cobham and Claygate. A good mix of independent and national shops in a slightly more pedestrian friendly/sociable environment.

Residents want:

A butcher, a baker, etc - traditional, high quality independent shops, but Simon Smith's (ERA's retail expert) advice is that they won't thrive in Esher as rents and rates are so high.

Simon suggested that some slots could be filled by short term, high quality, pop-up shops, that, if they fly, may well stay in Esher. Elmbridge should look to encourage these.

Cobham's success is put down to their very successful Chamber of Commerce. The majority of its members (independent shop owners) have very recently voted to back a proposal for Cobham to become a Business Improvement District. Contrasting this, Esher has a new Chamber of Commerce, but few of the local retailers attend and it was voiced that Esher's retailers need to find a leader able to galvanize others and help shape the town's offer.

Civic Centre development

Rather than focus on shopping, much of which is going online, there was a sense that we could look more closely at how the Civic Centre site could be a successful mixed-use development with new housing, small office units, some retail, cafe, library, concert hall, health centre/doctors group practice – a civic space that would give life to the town.

Although the idea of a mixed used (retail/residential) development would be very appealing there seemed to be a strong view from those present, who said they worked in commercial property, that it would have to be very much a residential led development to be economically viable.

Could we concentrate the High Street around this new Civic Hub and allow the extremities of the town to become more housing orientated?

It was also recognised that we need more play areas for children and perhaps more child orientated shops (see The Craft House Sheen <https://thecrafthouseuk.com>).

Just do something!

There was a very strong sentiment in the room that residents are losing patience with Esher, with some considering moving to Cobham because of the more sociable experience of the High Street.

'Just do something' was voiced by a few residents and people are looking to the Civic Centre to deliver considerable change to the High Street.

It seems there is much to do and a lot of lobbying Surrey CC on the road network not to mention the potholes that seem worse than ever.

I hope this helps.

Kind regards,



Simon Leifer
Chairman
Esher Residents Association



07411 043123
esher.ra@gmail.com
www.esher-residents.com