

Having lived in Woking for 39 years I have witnessed many changes to the town over the years, so feel appropriately placed to comment on the Woking 2017 Core Strategy. One very specific area has been barely covered, that of the development of leisure facilities. It is mentioned only in section UA18.

The Strategy states that: *“generally public satisfaction with leisure and community facilities is high at around 80 per cent and there are no major gaps in public provision”*.

How many young people did you consult? Yes the theatre/cinema complex is great and we do have a museum, but there is virtually no provision for young people - teenagers in particular - and there is little that would appeal to the slightly older age group in their late teens and 20s.

I have two sons, both now in the mid-20s, who grew up in Woking and I know that the main interest for them, like so many other young people, is music. Be it pop, rock, folk, metal, reggae, ska, alt, garage, punk or whatever, they like to listen to it and many of them like to play it as well, but Woking does not address this at all, there are no live music centres or places where they can go to hear or play music.

Forget the few pubs offering live music, they are not suitable for teenagers. Forget the night clubs, they are really late-night drinking establishments. I am talking about a centre for live music, a place holding open mic sessions where local musicians of all ages can meet and play, develop their skills and share their interest with like-minded people. Such a venue would provide an important cultural hub and make a valuable contribution to the community. It's something that would be used by all age groups and the fact that a town of Woking's size does not have one already is a deplorable oversight, whilst the fact that there appears to be no provision in Woking's future plans is a disgrace. The Strategy comments on Woking's cultural heritage, but unfortunately there is no specific mention about developing music in Woking, despite Woking having a musical heritage.

The only mention of any leisure facilities in the Town Centre is in section UA18, although the details are more concerned with ensuring any development fits in and enhances the character of the Town Centre rather than detailing what it could offer.

I am aware that the Phoenix Cultural Centre is trying very hard to establish a live music venue/cultural centre within the Town Centre and have been operating very successfully out of vacant retail premises for some time. But they are under constant threat of having to move out. Woking BC have indicated their support for what Phoenix hope to do and their plans would fit entirely with one of the Strategy's stated objectives: *“Woking Town Centre provides a strong cultural and entertainment offer and is an ideal location for the development of further facilities to strengthen this offer... Increasing the cultural and entertainment offer is in line with the Council's Cultural Strategy and will benefit the quality of lives of residents as well as boosting the economy.”*

The Phoenix Cultural Centre need help to establish a centre NOW, one that provides a safe community hub for a wide variety of cultural activities, not just music, premises that would be used throughout the day, by all age groups whatever their social, cultural or religious background. The vacant Rat & Parrot premises would appear to be a suitable stop-gap. It is an appropriate size, is centrally placed, has been standing empty for some time and is in an area already identified for leisure use. Could this not be considered? Alternatively, and possibly even more suitable, is the

empty YMCA Ypod which closed its doors last year? Its facilities seem to offer many of the things the Phoenix Cultural Centre are seeking. Whilst waiting for a purpose-built centre could Woking BC not help the Phoenix Cultural Centre establish a more suitable and secure premises?

I would stress that this issue is treated as a priority. Waiting 10 years or more until the premises within the area comes up for redevelopment is an insult to the people who are currently working so hard to provide Woking with a much needed and valuable community asset. I strongly urge the Council to address this obvious omission in their Strategy.

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