



**The likely redevelopment of the Debenhams site is an opportunity to create a vibrant new area for the Town.**

#### **Debenhams - Possible Sale of the Site?**

Current information is that the shop is due to close early in 2021.

M&G the owners of the site are understood to be selling the site. It is estimated a buyer would have to pay circa £20-25M for the site.

#### **The Crossroads of the Town**

The site sits on the old 'Cross Road' of the town, by the Town Bridge influencing the lower High Street, the River Wey frontage and Millbrook. The site is approx. 0.45HA and the current building has a floor area of circa 21,000Sq/M.

How the site is used in future will have a major impact on the Town Centre. The site is not part of the Local Plan adopted in 2019; it is identified as key site in the brief for the Guildford Town Centre Masterplan. The Masterplan will take at least 2 years to complete.

Plans for the Debenhams site may be proposed far more quickly.

#### **Future Options?**

How the site is developed will influence the attractiveness of the town centre, (the current building has provoked a variety of reactions over the years!); economic vibrancy, and public space and facilities; for decades to come.

The Society believes being able to present ideas to whoever buys the site is important. A block of flats or offices built with limited public use does not do justice to the Town or the Site. We also need to avoid the site being derelict for years – another North Street.

The Society has looked at options, the site could be:

- turned into a park beside the Wey, also providing a measure of flood protection, although the cost of the site makes this difficult to justify.
- redeveloped to provide dwellings (Flats) and/or commercial space.
- turned into a mixed-use site 'anchored' by a **Community Arts Centre** providing a variety of attractions.

#### **An innovative mixed use for the site**

In 2005 a Community Arts Centre was proposed in a new building on the Portsmouth Road Car Park.

The Society believes this concept should be revived to provide an 'anchor' for the site, which would also support a range of other activities. A Community Arts Centre would also provide an important element in a 'Cultural Corridor' running from the Museum - Yvonne Arnaud – Community Arts Centre (Debenhams) - Electric Theatre to Guildford Academy of Music.

The site might accommodate:

- **Community Arts Centre**
  - Multipurpose exhibition space – used for visiting exhibitions, loans from other museums etc.
  - Interactive Space for use by Media and Games exhibits
  - Arts - exhibition spaces, practice, and lecture rooms
  - Library (in 2005 the SCC library service were not averse to moving the Library).
- **Tourist Centre**
- **Gym and cycle hire station**
- **Small Retail Outlets and Restaurant and Café**
- **Flexible office/commercial space, and meeting rooms** – to support 'blended working' (mixture of home and office working post Covid).
- **Dwelling Space** added to the roof, replacing the unused areas and plant rooms on the roof.
- **Revamped exterior with public frontage to the river.**

### **Protect the Environment**

Building has a major environmental impact, with cement being a major producer of emissions.

A total redevelopment of the site would need to be tall to be a viable scheme, 8-10 stories has been mentioned, with considerable impact on the town.

The Society would urge careful consideration is given to re-purposing the current building. This would involve re-using the strong frame of the building, re-cladding, and reshaping, and adapting it for a new series of flexible uses. Re-purposing the building is cheaper than total redevelopment and quicker; potentially the need to build high is avoided.

This approach would also allow Guildford to show its green and sustainability aspirations.

### **More Details**

On our website is a fuller description of our proposals and discussion of options that might be considered. Please go to [www.guildfordsociety.org.uk](http://www.guildfordsociety.org.uk), where you can learn more about the Society, and follow the link on the Home Page or go to [www.guildfordsociety.org.uk/sitecritical.html](http://www.guildfordsociety.org.uk/sitecritical.html)

### **Next Steps?**

The society believes the site is a unique and exciting opportunity to enhance the attractiveness of Guildford and provide a range of benefits to the community. We have proposed **ONE** option that builds on the strengths Guildford has in the Arts to create a new attraction to complement an inevitably smaller retail presence in the town. We recognise that the building will have to be flexible as adaption to change over time will be required.

The site is unlikely to be acquired without an indication from the council on its attitude to change of use, we will be seeking to discover what the council are considering.

We would like to hear your thoughts so please let us know by e-mailing: [sitecritical@guildfordsociety.org.uk](mailto:sitecritical@guildfordsociety.org.uk)

We especially welcome ideas from local Arts Organisations, Small Businesses and Architects.

The Society will consider a forum to discuss with those interested.

There needs to be a debate **now** about how we as a community guide any redevelopment.

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