

Andrew Williams – The plan to restore Jellicoe Water Gardens

In a sense it was a very easy decision to make. The council has the water gardens. They are, both a unique feature for the towns like Hemel Hempstead that aren't repeated in other places, but they are also a key feature of the town centre itself. So, you know, there was never any doubt that, they should be replaced or, or that the work shouldn't be done. And, and we're aware that there was quite a lot of work that was needed. But, having a project that was seeking to enhance the whole of the town centre, it was very clear that a very important part of that work was going to be the water gardens. Developing Hemel as an attraction for people to visit, for shopping, for leisure, for the whole retail experience, the water gardens had the opportunity to add something that our competitive towns didn't have. And therefore it was a very simple decision, at the early stage that doing something with the water gardens in terms of their restoration was, simply a no-brainer really, there was no alternative. It was something that we felt we needed to do.

The alternatives were fairly limited because it's a registered park. Therefore, any work we wanted to do was going to be very much in the guidance of English Heritage at the time or now, Historic England. The restoration had to be very sympathetic to Geoffrey Jellicoe's original design. There weren't going to be lots of options around chopping and, and changing. This was about ensuring that the original design and legacy we had, was enhanced and maintained, rather than an alternative scheme being put forward.

Through the Hemel evolution programme, and, and prior to that looking at how the town centre would need enhancing, we had put together a.. team to do that, through our regeneration service. and therefore it was just simply a case of ensuring that that team had the necessary skills and and people in place in order to develop the bids, and to take forward the scheme. Clearly a lot of the more technical work, environmental impacts and things like that we have had to use external sources but, we have had a team in place, in recognition of the importance of, of regeneration in terms of improving our town centre, improving the water gardens, and adding to the, to the overall economic viability of our town centre. So, we decided several years ago that we would have a team which would work on all of these projects as a team, rather than taking say the water gardens or the Marlowes as one off projects. It was a package, and the team was assembled to deliver that.

One of the very common comments you get, from people today is that town centres are very much the same, you know the same shops and very much similar experience. You could visit one, you could visit, 10, and by and large you'd be seeing a similar number of shops, and you'd have a very similar experience. So what the water gardens adds to us is something that is unique. A good proportion of our car parking is one side of the gardens, and the town centre is the other side, so a large number of the visitors to Hemel town centre will pass through the gardens. And what we've been conscious of, is

that there's very little dwell on that journey between the two. It's just simply seen as the shortest path from the car park to the town centre. An important part of this project is to encourage a more leisure based use of the gardens so people don't just see it as a 50 yard dash from the car to the shop or to the bank, or wherever it is they might be going but somewhere where people would feel more comfortable sitting, relaxing, maybe having a coffee. I know the uK weather can't always be guaranteed to be sunny every day, and there'll be some days when sitting in the gardens won't be very attractive when we're having one of our rainier sessions but, you can have a picture of an enhanced garden on a nice sunny day, where people visiting the town centre would see that maybe having a sandwich, having a snack, sitting in the gardens with a coffee, relaxing reading a book or something for half an hour, becomes an integral part of visiting the town centre, and part of a more pleasurable experience in terms of using Hemel Hempstead.