

Agenda item 3

For decision – Saxonvale consultation response February 2019

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Summary

Acorn Property Group will be presenting their masterplan for the redevelopment of Saxonvale at the meeting as part of their consultation exercise that included their public event at the Silk Mill on 15 and 16 February. The purpose is to enable as many people as possible to hear about their proposals and ask questions.

As with the previous consultation in January, Frome Town Council will be submitting a formal response.

The report below sets out a recommended response which will be considered following Acorn's presentation.

Frome Town Council formal consultation response

General

The development of the plans for Saxonvale are still at an early stage and there may be further changes made pre and post application. It is appreciated that there are still many areas of current exploration being pursued and some questions cannot be answered at this stage. We also appreciate more detailed information will follow in a reserved matters application; including ground contamination, impact on neighbours and the housing mix.

It is also understood that a detailed planning permission for the design of the new Garsdale Road will be submitted in conjunction with the outline application and that this will set limits on the amount of housing and non-residential floorspace and, ultimately, the overall layout.

FTC would welcome the opportunity to engage further through the planning process to influence these details. However, at this stage in the process, we support the following elements of the masterplan:

1. The inclusion of FTC's land in the masterplan which will enable a comprehensive development of Saxonvale to be brought forward in line with the Neighbourhood Plan and Mendip's Local Plan policy
2. The mixed-use approach to regeneration
3. The concentration of non-residential elements of the scheme in the area immediately to the east of the road called Saxonvale.
4. The proposed stopping up of Saxonvale to relieve Vicarage Street and the provision of a new route for commercial vehicles servicing Iceland and Marks & Spencer
5. The aspiration to provide a pedestrian footbridge over the river and a walking/cycling route through the site
6. The decision to opt for a riverside park with a natural character

Elements that require further attention by Acorn Property Group

Space for commercial and community/creative uses:

It is clear that several new buildings are envisaged to enable office-based businesses to be accommodated, which is a positive development. However, it is not clear as to how much space will ultimately be delivered. A minimum of 35,000 to 40,000 sq. ft. is identified. We expect to see much more. Given the buoyant state of the office market in Frome and the locational preference that many businesses show for town centre, we believe there should be circa 80,000 sq. ft.

The former Western Warehouse is shown at (No.33) on the masterplan and the accompanying text states that non-residential activity is envisaged on the lower two storeys with apartments on the upper two floors. As previously stated in our January consultation response:

“We see this building as the heart of the cultural quarter catering for business and creative users.”

The inclusion of residential provision on the two upper floors will restrict the activities of their non-residential neighbours on the lower floors. This will, in turn, reduce demand for these commercial premises.

All the floors should be available for non-residential uses. In addition, they should have active frontages that will help generate evening activity. As we have stated previously, this development requires:

“restaurants, pubs and hotel accommodation that encourage greater evening activity and space for cultural and community activity, for example a town square, that will enhance the town centre as a destination.”

Provision needs to be made for these uses within the next iteration of the masterplan and in the subsequent planning submissions.

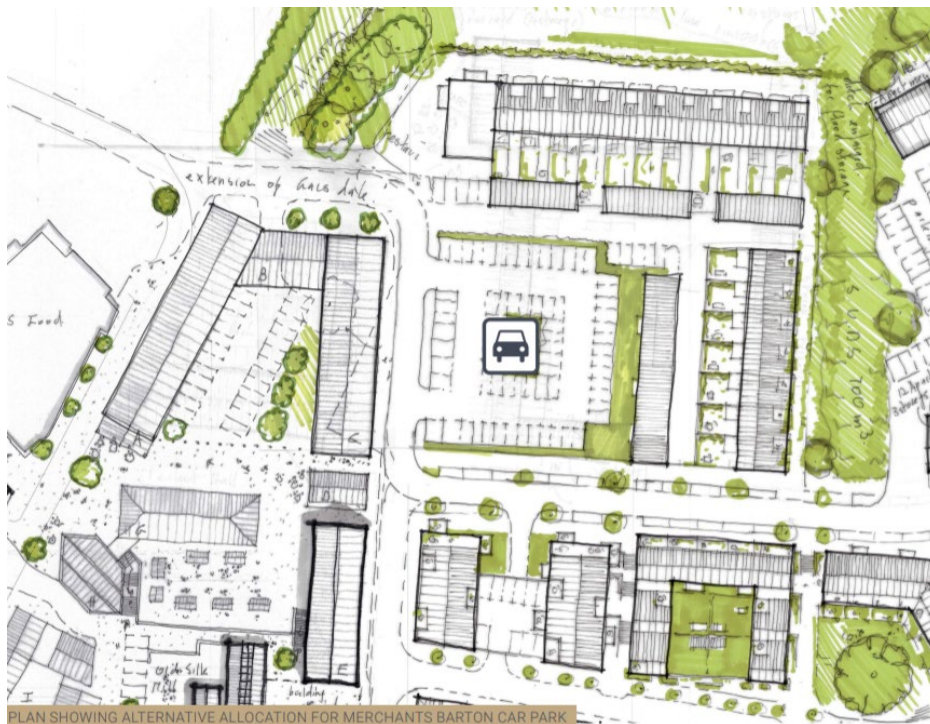
Relocating Merchants Barton Car Parking

Two options have been proposed: the area shown at (No.29) on the masterplan and an alternative area further within the site.

Area 29



Alternative area



The first option is a significant reduction in the number of existing spaces from 68 to 41. The alternative option is further removed from the town centre and not as well placed for current users. In addition, the amount of spaces in the alternative option is not written on the plan but it appears to show 70 spaces, which needs to be clarified.

Consideration needs to be given to how well used the existing Merchants Barton car park is and that the creation of further commercial uses in this area will generate the need for more public parking. As stated in our previous comments following the January consultation:

“Merchants Barton currently caters for a lot of parking permit holders, presumably for those working within the town centre. It is important that this provision is not lost and improved. Commercial activity should be encouraged and supported to ensure the growth of local business. At the same time, sustainable forms of transport for those visiting should also be available in line with the Town Council’s Transport Strategy. A creative solution is required to address this.”

It is not felt that either of the car parking proposals address these points.

Any new car parking areas should be enhanced with trees.

Highways & Public Transport

(No 39) The elimination of the steps and ramp between Kingsway and the Saxonvale site would provide a level access and help to integrate the existing town centre and Saxonvale. However, the creation of the pedestrian area would result in a dead-end road mid-way along Saxonvale with no apparent turning points other than around the proposed live/work units (identified as No 40) on the plan. This would not be an acceptable arrangement for the occupiers of those units.

Large delivery vehicles will still be able to access this area via Vicarage Street, King Street and Church Street with some of the businesses there requiring deliveries. The corner of Vicarage Street and Saxonvale is a popular parking area for people visiting businesses, further limiting the ability to turn around in this area. As well as providing a turning area, consideration should be given to a 7-tonne weight limit for accessing Vicarage Street, King Street and Church Street.

Areas 39 and 40



The masterplan made no reference to public transport links, car clubs or the opportunity for electric car charging points. Whilst it is appreciated these are details that would form part of a reserved matters application, it is felt that as this is such a key consideration for the site that some indication of how any necessary infrastructure can be accommodated should be provided.

Residential parking

We support the proposed residential parking areas/courts that will enhance the streetscape by keeping frontages clear of parked cars. We also support the proposed residential parking ratio reflecting the site's urban nature. However, it is not clear whether there will be any measures in place to ensure that the roads through the site will not become congested with on street parking and this needs to be included in the next iteration of the masterplan.

Footbridge over river

A footbridge over the river is essential for this development to meet the role and vision for the site, as set out by MDC and Acorn to provide "high quality streets and public spaces that better connect existing residential neighbourhoods to the town centre". As per our previous comments to the January consultation, links with Rodden Meadow via and the provision of a pedestrian bridge are essential.

We are pleased to see that there is an aspiration to place a new footbridge over the river. However, if the technical feasibility study currently being undertaken determines that it is not possible for a bridge to go in the location suggested then alternative locations should be explored.

One such alternative could be a bridge running from the north-east corner of the proposed green space across to Rodden Meadow. This would create a valuable green infrastructure link – first with Rodden Meadow and then with the residential and commercial parts of Frome to the north, north-east and east of the town. Significantly, it could also form part of a natural and scenic route to and from Frome train station.

In addition, by virtue of links with the town's existing footpaths and public rights of way, it would open up numerous opportunities for fully or predominantly traffic-free routes and circular walks around Frome including an extended walk along the river corridor. As such, an assessment of an alternative bridge at this location should be explored whilst the proposed bridge link across to Willow Vale is being considered.

Tying together with new paths and bridge(s) on the site that then link to existing routes throughout the town, such as the NCR24, would mean that this development has the potential to provide good quality cycle and pedestrian access.

Provision of open space

We welcome the provision of the proposed open spaces along the river. We would like to explore the possibility of taking over the Riverside Park area as Public Open Space.

Environmental sustainability

On the wider environmental level, and given that Somerset County, Mendip District and Frome Town Councils have now declared a climate emergency, it is important that consideration is given to how this development will contribute to the declared target of Frome becoming carbon neutral by 2030. Please confirm that Acorn will explore ways of minimising

the ecological footprint of the development as a whole. We are very happy to advise Acorn on these matters prior to more detailed proposals coming forward.

Housing mix and affordable housing provision

It is understood that through the pre-application stage, Acorn will be giving thought to the mix of housing on site and the amount of affordable housing to be delivered.

Frome Town Council's position statement agreed at Town Matters Committee on 19 September 2018 sets out the following in relation to housing and we request that this forms the basis of the next set of proposals:

'A broad range of dwellings in terms of size, cost and tenure. To address the pressing need for more affordable accommodation in the town, we would expect to see social rented and shared equity opportunities as part of the mix. The recommendation is a minimum of 30% affordable housing. We would also like to explore the possibility of delivering housing that meets the needs of young people and families who are currently priced out of Frome and the growing number of older people ('downsizers') whose future housing aspirations are not being met by either specialist retirement developments or mass-market housing products.'

Recommendation

Agree the above response to the Acorn Property Group's Saxonvale masterplan proposals.