

Agenda Item 4

For decision – Saxonvale amended plans

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Background

In May 2019, an outline planning application was submitted by Acorn Property Group. The site is owned by Mendip District Council, who have an agreement with Acorn for a phased acquisition and development of the land.

The planning application seeks outline permission, with all matters reserved except for access. A set of parameter plans form part of the application to define in broad terms key elements of the development proposal. An illustrative masterplan and associated material are also submitted with the application to demonstrate how the parameters could be translated into a development scheme appropriate to the site.

The application proposes a mix of residential uses, comprising residential dwellings, flexible live/work accommodation for residential/workspace/retail use and potentially residential care accommodation, providing up to 300 dwellings/accommodation units in total and 4,181m² (45,000 sq ft) of mixed non-residential uses comprising B1 office use, flexible B1 office/D1/D2 community, cultural and leisure uses and flexible A1/A3/A4/D1 retail/food and drink/community/cultural/creche/nursery/education/training uses.

In response to the application considered in June 2019, the town council objected to the application for the following reasons -

- The lack of commercial space proposed at 4,181m² (45,000ft²). We have previously stated we would want to see as close as possible to 7432m² (80,000ft²) provided.
- The access arrangements and the spine road would cause a barrier to pedestrian permeability and divide the site into residential and commercial zones.
- The pedestrian bridge across to Willow Vale needs to be included in the access arrangements and agreed at the outline stage.
- The traffic assessment and the surveys carried out are not adequate and there is concern over the assumptions made by the assessment.
- The amount of affordable housing to be provided needs to be clarified with a minimum of 30% provided, including social rented and shared equity housing.

Amended plans were submitted in January 2020, the town council welcomed those amendments, but they still did not deal with our objections relating to the amount of commercial floor space or the need for 30% of affordable housing provision.

The latest amendments submitted on 11th June 2020, that will be considered by the planning committee are summarised below –

- Amendments to Garsdale Avenue (main route through) Central median strip added to slow traffic and the bends have been widened to enable large vehicles to safely navigate the bends.

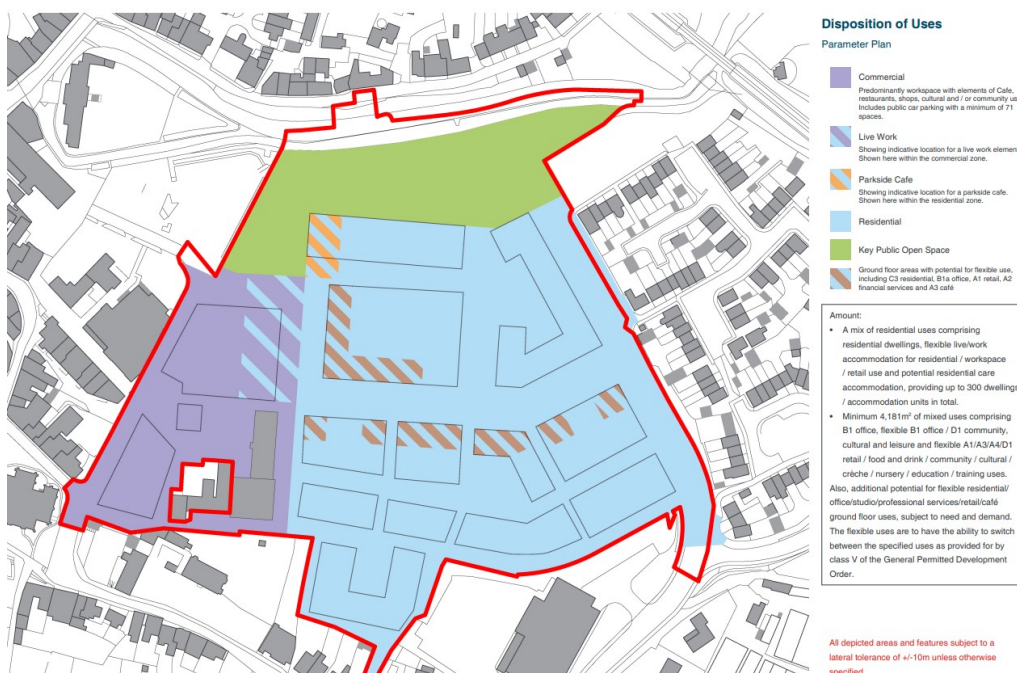
- Travel plans updated to address SCC comments.
- Vehicle access off of Vicarage Street to serve 6 car parking spaces is removed and will be pedestrian and cycle access only.
- Masterplan amended to reflect the above, including revised parking layouts.
- Building heights amended, the height of the buildings where the abattoir currently is has been reduced to two storeys and the buildings along the frontage of Saxonvale Road will remain at 3 storey but will now have an undercroft for parking.
- Site sections have been amended to reflect the above change in building heights.
- The disposition of uses plan has been amended to include “flexible uses” on the ground floor of some buildings. This will enable the property owners to decide how they want to use the ground floor, either as residential, retail, office etc.
- Agreement to limit vehicular access to the site from the top of Vicarage Street.
- Parameter plans amended to include a red boundary line for clarification purposes.
- An evaluation of the proposals against the One Planet Living framework by Bioregional.

Amended plans

The main considerations for the amended plans are the inclusion of flexible uses and the updates to the travel plan.

The flexible uses will apply to the buildings identified on the disposition of uses parameter plan, hatched in brown (see plan below). This will give the potential for the ground floor areas to have the flexibility to be used in a flexible way without the need to apply for planning permission to change the use. The uses include C3 residential, B1a office, A1 retail, A2 financial services and A3 café. This flexibility will enable these units to respond to demand.

As this is an outline application the plan is only indicative at this stage. Based on the area indicated for flexible uses, this could potentially offer an additional 1700m² of commercial floorspace. This would take the overall amount of commercial floorspace available to approximately 5900m². Whilst this total is still well short of our original requirement, if the flexible space is conditioned appropriately to ensure ground and first floors have independent access, it is more likely to be used for commercial purposes and thus will address our objection to some extent.



The framework Travel Plan has been updated to address local highway authority comments. This is a detailed report setting out how a travel plan will be implemented once the site is occupied and how businesses and residents will be encouraged to find more sustainable forms of travel. We would hope that the travel plan will aim for the same target or higher of the adjoining Trinity Park development, where the developers encouraged residents to aim to undertake no more than 50% of all trips to work by car on their own.

To ensure that the aims of the travel plan are met, a travel plan coordinator will be appointed to implement and administer the Plan. The co-ordinator will have the responsibility of liaising with outside bodies, including the Local Planning and Highway Authorities. It also states “The travel plan coordinator will communicate regularly with the Resilience Manager for Frome Town Council, to uphold the sustainability of the development”. We would want to ensure that all the monitoring reports are also made available. The travel plan does not deal with the core issue, that if more employment space is provided there is likely to be less out commuting if more employment space is provided.

Proposed response - for discussion

Access road

The access road still divides the site into zones as per our original objection, it should be noted that this hasn't changed, however we welcome the addition of a central median strip and the widening of the bends, and support the detailed design being secured by planning condition that will contribute to achieving a low speed vehicle environment and safe and convenient pedestrian routes.

We also support the revised arrangements for access off Vicarage Street to serve 6 car parking spaces becoming access for pedestrians and cyclists only. And the agreement to limit vehicular access to the site from the top of Vicarage Street.

Building heights

We welcome the reduction in height from three storeys to two, of the proposed buildings at the location of the current abattoir building together with the allowance for a partial undercroft to the buildings along Saxonvale.

Disposition of Uses (flexible uses) and Travel Plan

We welcome the fact that non-residential uses will be expressed as a minimum amount and the addition of the potential for flexible ground floor uses on Garsdale Avenue. The flexible units will have the most benefit if they include the provision of an independent access to the ground and first floors. The plans need to clearly state that ground floor and first floor will have separate access and it must be confirmed that no planning permission will be required to switch between uses. The flexible units must be sufficiently conditioned as part of any outline approval to ensure they are brought forward in any reserved matters application.

Whilst we have welcomed the inclusion of the flexible units, there is still inadequate provision of non-residential space. Saxonvale is by far our best opportunity to create more work opportunity in Frome town centre and thus begin to address the problem of commuting out of town (and reduce car use). The current proposals appear to be providing for greater residential occupancy than commercial/non-residential thus adding to the problem of commuting instead of beginning to address it.

The travel plan suggests ways in which commuting could be reduced and is aspirational, but this is still missing this big point that we need to provide more work opportunity in Frome so that people don't need to commute elsewhere. We would want to ensure that the travel plan sets a baseline target of 50% or higher is set for residents for trips to work by car on their own. In addition to communing regularly with the Resilience Manager, all the monitoring reports should be shared with Frome town council so that we can ensure the targets are being met.

A minimum of 1500m² should be added to the non-residential offering and all of this should be available to rent or buy independently of the residential dwellings. Ideally, we would like to see MDC buy at least some of the non-residential space so that it can be let to small start-up type businesses at low cost. We need affordable business space as well as affordable homes.

Bioregional assessment

We welcome the comments from Bioregional and would like to see a condition as part of any outline consent for a commitment to implementing the recommendations of that report, to further strengthen performance against the principles of One Planet Living.

The amended plans do not address our previous objection for the provision of 30% affordable housing for the development. The amount of affordable housing provision needs to be confirmed. Until then our previous objection still stands.

Whilst all the amendments have moved a little closer to something more acceptable, given the comments above and until those objections are dealt with, this is not an application that we can support.