

Agenda item 3

For decision – Consultation response to the revised plans for the Saxonvale development
Ref 2019/1180 OTS

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Summary

This report sets out Frome Town Council's response to the revised plans for Saxonvale dated 22 January 2020.

There are 17 amended plans/documents, these include revisions to the access road, Garsdale Avenue, response to the Transport Assessment Modelling Review, a revised illustrative Masterplan together with various updated supporting documents.

This response considers the original consultation response dated 20 June and how the amendments have dealt with our previous concerns/objections. A copy of the original response is attached at [Appendix 1](#) for reference.

In summary, some welcome amendments have been made to the plan including:

- A more pedestrian friendly approach to delivery of the proposed main thoroughfare – Garsdale Avenue
- The use of 'bartons' as a local character feature
- The introduction of more tree planting on parts of the site and the proposed area for relocated bat roosts although concern is expressed about the removal of trees alongside M & S which were shown in the original masterplan
- Response to the Transport Assessment Modelling Review and especially the proposed improvements to the Gorehedge junction but we seek assurances from the Local Highway Authority that the content of the Review is acceptable.

However, there is still a lack of clarity about the amount of affordable housing to be provided – we still support a minimum of 30% in line with policy. There is also no change in terms of the amount of non-residential space shown. This could in part be addressed by finding a workable solution to the delivery of flexible spaces to provide greater encouragement to those interested in making use of the ground floor for commercial purposes. The report makes some suggestions in terms of how that solution can be achieved.

A representative of the applicant, Acorn Property Group, will be present at the meeting to introduce the revisions to the plans and to answer questions. Cllrs will then be asked to consider their response.

Residential/Commercial Mix

We are disappointed that the amount of commercial and other non-residential floorspace has not increased and that the potential zone for the flexible units has not been included within the disposition of uses parameter plan since our last comments. As stated in our original response dated 20/06/19:

The disposition of uses parameter plan shows that there will be 4,181m² (45,000ft²) of non-residential floor space, 27,000 for office space and 18,000 for other uses including workspace and cultural uses. The town council's response to the pre-application consultation on 7/03/19 stated the site should deliver as close as possible to 7432m² (80,000ft²) of non-residential floor space.

Saxonvale is designated in the Local Plan as a Town Centre site. Policy CP6 sets out various allocations for town centre uses, including 5,760m² (62,000 ft²) of B1 (office) space and at least 6968m² (75,000 ft²) of non-food retail. This designation includes the Westway Centre. However it is difficult to see how any further development will take place there. Even allowing for a reduction in retail demand, the current proposals do not provide enough commercial and non-residential workspace. We need to defend the long-standing employment use at the Saxonvale site against the implied priority given to housing in the government's National Planning Policy Framework.

The current Mendip District Local Plan states that Frome needs to create 2700 new jobs by 2029, 850-900 of these jobs are allocated in the Local Plan to Frome Town Centre. That means that Saxonvale has to provide most of this employment land. The current application appears to only allocate enough land for 300 jobs; this is a net loss of 550-600 jobs. Therefore, it is crucial that the maximum amount of workspace is provided, and the balance of the land use is adjusted to achieve this.

Saxonvale should be developed as a dynamic mixed-use scheme avoiding segregated zoning for residential and commercial. This is more appropriate for town centre development and very much in line with the historic use pattern of Frome. We do not feel that the current proposal delivers this.

Live-work and flexible uses will help deliver more non-residential floor space and integrate the residential and commercial areas, meeting the aim for mixed use dynamic streets like the existing town centre streets. Page 52 of the Design & Access statement sets out the benefits of flexible units and how they could work within the Saxonvale development, by allowing the users to decide how they use the properties that will have active frontages at street level.

Figure 16.11 in the Design & Access Statement shows a potential zone for the flexible units outlining the active frontages in orange. These flexible uses are a key part of the development and should be identified on the disposition of uses parameter plan, to ensure that they are set as a key principle at the outline stage. The amount of live-work and flexible uses should be

significantly expanded from the amount currently proposed. They could also contribute to the reduction of car ownership and the need to travel.



Figure 16.11: Orange areas indicate potential for future active frontages (point 16.13)

We understand that the reason these properties are not being shown as flexible units is because they will have a C3 (dwelling house) use, so that there are no problems for purchasers obtaining a mortgage.

We presume that this would mean anyone who did want to use the property for retail or commercial uses going forward would have to apply for planning permission for a retail or commercial use. We feel that this is a barrier to those who want to use the lower floor for commercial and retail purposes.

One solution could be to apply a condition to those properties identified by the parameter plan, that effectively provides permitted development rights to be used for retail and commercial uses. This could include a set of codes to set operating times and types of uses i.e. non noise generating.

This would also include the right to return the property to a residential use without the need for consent, therefore making them truly flexible. It would need to be made clear from the outset to purchasers that the properties could be used for retail and commercial uses.

Access

We welcome the proposed changes to Garsdale Avenue which provides a more pedestrian friendly layout with seating areas and more landscaping, contributing to the absorption of carbon and providing a pleasant environment for residents. The pedestrian crossing points together with the median strips and 20mph speed limit will also make the area safer. We also welcome the use of 'Bartons' as a local character feature.

Affordable Housing

The percentage of affordable housing is still not provided, we reiterate our previous comments that we would expect to see a minimum of 30% affordable housing.

Design Review

We are pleased that the proposals were submitted to the Design Review Panel and that their recommendations have been considered through the revised plans. Particularly the landscape changes adjoining the Fishers Brook area with the boundary landscaping, maintaining more of a green boundary to the area and retaining more of the existing trees. We also welcome the proposed area for the relocated bat roosts.

Landscaping Principles

We welcome the principles for Tree and Landscaping set out in the Matthew Wigan/Nash Partnership document dated October 2019 and would like to see these conditioned as part of any approval.

The indicative Green Infrastructure Plan and revised Masterplan, shows more tree planting throughout the site, which we are pleased to see, however we are concerned the trees that were previously shown alongside the M&S building and the steps to the Kingsway have been removed. With the exception of the tree in the public square there will be no trees in this key area linking the Saxonvale area with the existing town centre.

Transport Assessment

We have noted the response to the Transport Assessment Modelling Review, and the proposed Gorehedge improvement opportunity which in principle we support. However, we would want to be assured by the Highways Authority that the content of the review is acceptable, if so, this should be secured through a S106 agreement.

Recommendation

That the above is agreed as the Town Council's formal response to the revised plans and documents.