



Frome Society for Local Study

Frome
and District
Civic
Society

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Nash Partnership
23a Sydney Buildings
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Dear Sirs,

SAXONVALE REDEVELOPMENT - PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Frome and District Civic Society (FCS) would like to make the following comments in response to the public consultation held on 11th and 12th January 2019. This response is confined to specific points raised on the display boards and in the questionnaire. Further comments will be made when more detailed proposals are brought forward. This response should be read in conjunction with our earlier comments on the Constraints and Opportunities plan to the Saxonvale Development team dated 6th December 2018, a copy of which is attached as an Appendix.

1. PUBLIC SPACES

Saxonvale 'street'

- FCS has major reservations on the proposal to “enhance Saxonvale by reducing traffic and prioritising pedestrians and cyclists”. The road is a C20th intrusion cut through the medieval street pattern. Our view is that integration between the new neighbourhood and the town centre will not be achieved by converting this street into a largely pedestrianised public space. It would require substantial investment in and reliance upon active frontages to both sides of the street to make this a successful pedestrian focus. This is a questionable strategy as it is not on a significant pedestrian desire line. There is a high risk of creating an ‘urban desert’, underused and possibly abused outside normal work/ shopping hours.
- The Silk Mill, Auction Rooms and The Bennett Centre (St Johns Church Hall) form an existing ‘hub’. Their settings should be enhanced with an emphasis on reconnecting, reinvigorating and reinforcing the historic and established pedestrian through-routes that follow the contours and desire lines. The steep slope of Saxonvale street is particularly unsuited to public/retail use.
- The pedestrian desire lines and footfall through the Saxonvale area will be principally along the contours in an east-west axis, between the residential areas and the town centre. General movement will therefore flow across, and not along, Saxonvale street. This focus on Saxonvale reinforces the present north-south ‘hard edge’ effect on the town centre and constrains future expansion. The aim of integration between the town and the new neighbourhood would be better served by allowing the town centre to merge into one or more public spaces leading to the natural desire lines. This would achieve a more organic layout and also enable such spaces to occupy the larger, level areas within the site, more closely related to and potentially integrating with the river and green space.

Streets and spaces for people

- The concept of a ‘main public space’ focused on pedestrians and cyclists should be examined carefully in the context of both the new neighbourhood and the town centre as a whole. The Market Place, a busy thoroughfare, is traditionally used on civic occasions and for the monthly Sunday markets. Food markets are held in the Cattle Market car park and the Cheese and

Grain. It is unlikely that the Saxonvale 'street' could afford a sufficiently capacious, level public space to provide a substitute for any of these functions. It would make more sense for new public spaces to be a 'string of pearls', developed on an appropriate neighbourhood scale along pedestrian desire lines to serve those living, working or visiting amenities in the Saxonvale area and beyond.

- In regard to other public, leisure or cultural activities, our view would be that indoor spaces maybe of greater value than outdoor. There is an opportunity for any such activities to help address the severe shortage of entertainment facilities for older children and teenagers in the town.

Riverside park

- The riverside area should reflect needs and desires across the town and not just for the Saxonvale development. Riverside walks to the north west of the town centre already provide a 'natural' environment, the opportunity should be taken to connect these amenities and the residents both sides of the river with a cycle and pedestrian bridge. This site should provide 'something different'. It should be 'landscape-led', with opportunities for play and relaxation; a community garden or sculptural landscape used to create a moderately cultivated space where people of all ages feel safe to walk or play. The inclusion of allotments or edible planting could appeal to residents.
- Many of the existing trees are in excellent grade A or B condition, particularly Horse Chestnut, Sycamore and Poplar. Through lack of grazing they have distinctive crowns extending to the ground. These groups of trees are a magnificent gift to the development and should be retained in their current state rather than urbanised by crown lifting.
- To achieve neighbourhood 'ownership' of the area, consideration should be given to introducing natural surveillance and active social/community frontages along the edge of the green space.

• 2. RESIDENTIAL AND OTHER LAND USE

Homes for a variety of needs and aspirations

- FCS supports the general proposal for a residential-led mixed scheme, including the statutory minimum provision of 30% affordable homes.
- Purpose-built apartments would help to address the shortage of this accommodation type in central Frome, which would be of interest to both first time buyers and active down-sizers.
- Some retirement homes would be appropriate and popular in a location so close to town centre amenities. We do not see the site as appropriate for large scale care home accommodation, although consideration could be given to assisted living accommodation.
- A modest element of family housing would help create a truly mixed neighbourhood, but should not compete with the current surfeit of new car dominated 'executive homes' elsewhere in Frome.

Space for enterprise, social and community activity

- FCS agrees with the overall aim of providing flexible spaces within buildings, for commercial and other uses, with particular emphasis on flexibility for the future.
- We support the concept of social, community and cultural hubs within the development, provided that this does not override other considerations, such as residential amenity or parking availability. Silk Mill and The Bennett Centre are an obvious existing focus but, as suggested above, should not be seen as the principle 'anchor' to the development. the opportunity should be taken to create new community spaces and activities focussing on the heart of the site, allowing the 'centre' to extend on level land eastward with flexible use units. This would future-proof the town, facilitating long term organic expansion/ contraction of town centre commercial and business uses.

- There is an interesting opportunity to create street-level flexible commercial premises for small enterprises and live/work uses, bringing active frontages into play in more residential parts of the development, with apartments/ maisonettes on the upper floors. There are ample precedents for this form of development in Frome's historic core.

3. DESIGN AND SUSTAINABILITY

Creating character and identity

- The principle of "using the topography, good quality materials and elements of contemporary design informed by local character to create a sense of place and new views" is supported, but needs substantiating. The creation of urban forms on this site must follow the syntax and character of Frome town centre, formed principally by terraces and perimeter blocks.
- The Western Warehouse should be retained as a significant heritage asset. Our preference would be for public or community use. This use should not conflict with the interests of residents or other occupants of the new neighbourhood. Relocating the Somerset Skills and Learning Centre on the upper levels could be considered. Development by a local Trust for shared serviced studio/ office space for rental would also be welcome. The lowest ground floor level should be retained for active public use, feeding a public space to the north.

Sustainable use and management of natural resources

- The principles as set out are sound, but need to be carried through into specifics for us to comment.

Parking to support the town centre and avoid cluttered streets

- Any public parking lost to development should be replaced in full and sited conveniently for shoppers and visitors, particularly for people with mobility issues. Additional parking provision will need to be made for new business, community, leisure and cultural amenities on the site, especially those that draw customers from outside the town.
- Given the urban location of the development, car parking standards for dwellings might sensibly be aligned with other major Somerset towns. However, car ownership will remain significant. Non-allocated residential parking in parking yards would be the most efficient use of available space. Future alternative uses of parking space should also be considered in view of potentially disruptive technology that could significantly alter car ownership patterns.

4. PRIMARY TRAFFIC ROUTES

- It is not possible for the development plan to advance even to outline planning stage without early consideration of vehicular access. Vicarage Street should be protected from through-traffic, especially heavy goods vehicles. Measures should be included to curtail the present high level of rat-running through this narrow historic street. It may be useful to consider reversing the vehicle flow of King Street/ Church Street.
- The Garsdale route to the site should form the primary vehicular access, but a balance needs to be struck between the traffic generated by the development and the negative impact on traffic congestion and air quality on Christchurch Street East and West. Provision of convenient and useful cycle and pedestrian links through the site should be given equal importance. Proposals for resolving these issues will be a priority in order to fulfil the potential of the Saxonvale site.

We trust these comments are useful and look forward to seeing the consultation results.

Yours faithfully

Richard Swann (Chair)
BSc(Hons) BArch(Hons) RIBA
for and on behalf of

Frome & District Civic Society