



Saxonvale Outline Planning Application – 2019/1180/PTS

Frome and District Chamber of Commerce – Objection

1) Saxonvale

- a) Frome and District Chamber of Commerce represents businesses in Frome. Businesses employ people. People who work for businesses spend money in the town. Business and the community are dependent on each other.
- b) The Chamber's position on Saxonvale over the past decade has been that it is a threat if done badly, and opportunity if done well. We have been willing to wait for it to be done well and intend to ensure that it is.
- c) MDC, Acorn and Nash have consulted the Chamber, for which we are grateful. However, as in other relationships the Chamber is and will continue to be a critical friend. Where they do things right we will appraise them, where they don't, we will be honest with them.
- d) NPPF is a major threat to that. It would be easy enough for a national house builder to get planning consent to build another dull housing estate on Saxonvale, as they have on so many other ex-employment sites in Frome town centre. We welcomed MDC's acquisition of the site as an opportunity for something better. It enables MDC to take the lead it should have taken before as local authority, but also now as landowner.
- e) MDC has several different roles, as the planning authority, as the owner of the site and also as a local authority with obligations to the town and the people who live in it. MDC as a local authority will get income from the site in the form of business rates, council tax and sustaining the vitality of Frome. MDC should not behave like a landowner making a short-term profit out of the land with no responsibility for the future. It should take the imaginative and effective approach of other local authorities which is likely to be more financially profitable in the medium to long term, (e.g., Ashford Borough Council).

2) The Planning Application

- a) The Chamber agrees substantially with the points made by the Frome & District Civic Society and Frome Town Council about; -
 - i) Layout and the site being divided up by the main road
 - ii) The poor integration on and through the site
 - iii) The traffic generated by the number of residential units and the quality of the traffic assessment

- b) We will not repeat what they have said but would add: -
 - i) We have been calling for a comprehensive review of parking provision for people working, living and visiting the town centre for many years. That should have preceded this application but can still be done.
 - ii) Since the alternative access in the original development brief was not defended by MDC access has always been the fundamental limiting factor on this site.
 - iii) MDC needs to be wary of granting planning consent in the hope that a viable transport solution will appear. MDC did that with the Steiner Academy which still hasn't met the planning condition to produce a viable Travel Plan, is only yet half full and is not factored into the transport assessment for this application.

- c) Although this is an Outline Application we will comment on other aspects of the development which will be fixed by this application and for which MDC needs to plan now.

3) What does the Chamber want from Saxonvale?

- a) We need more than the 45,000 square feet net employment space presently proposed. MDC must justify anything less than 80,000 square feet net.
 - i) It has long been recognised that Frome needs more employment space. This is in the Local Plan, and in MDC's own research for this site. The local councillor who now heads the planning board has said that the need for employment space in Frome would be met by Frome Business Park and Saxonvale. Frome Business Park is full and Saxonvale goes nowhere near meeting demand. Frome is very good at attracting and incubating business, who as they expand have to leave to B&NES or Wiltshire because they cannot find space – that makes no sense.
 - ii) If MDC is not going to provide this space on Saxonvale it must show how it is going to deliver that space in Frome. MDC has a poor record of defending employment space in the town centre. If businesses move to Saxonvale from sites in Frome they must be defended.

- b) We want 20,000 square feet of cultural and community space in addition to this.

- i) There is no hard line between cultural and commercial activities. The Black Swan has served as an incubator for businesses in Frome that now have a national and international reputation and employ people. A vibrant cultural offer will enhance the value of the rest of the site, to the advantage of MDC and Acorn.
 - ii) A mix of cultural, commercial and residential uses is needed to provide a sustainable community. That is what we have in Frome and that is why people want to live here.
- c) A real mixed-use development
- i) The present proposal isn't mixed use. It is separate blocks of employment and residential space, divided up by a road snaking through the site. It doesn't provide a seamless integration extension of the town centre. There is a danger that the employment space will become a dead area which will separate the residential space from the town centre and also loss the opportunity to link through to the other parts of Frome and the station.
- d) Sustainable and flexible space
- i) The space must be development comprehensively and collaboratively. Although the 2012 development brief is no longer a planning document, it was forward thinking and is still relevant. Times change and Saxonvale needs to be developed to be flexible. Large cradle to grave employers like Bussmann Cooper, and now medium sized retail centres, are things of the past. The and business environment is changing more quickly than it ever has, and the devilment must provide for that.
- e) MDC to plan ahead about: -
- i) the control and management of the public space, which should be in the hands of people in Frome
 - ii) how they will control under occupation, by people buying weekend homes and Airbnb.
 - iii) How they will control changes of use, e.g. an Article 4 direction.

23rd June 2019