

Friends of Lewes Society

SDNP/15/01146/FUL: North Street Industrial Estate, Lewes, East Sussex

Hybrid planning application (being a full application as to Phase 1 and an outline application as to the remainder being Phases 2 & 3) for the demolition of existing buildings and the redevelopment of the North Street Industrial Estate, North Street, Lewes for a mixed use development.

1. The Friends of Lewes Society recognises that redevelopment of the North Street Quarter represents a significant change to the town of Lewes by virtue of both its location and scale. It supports the vision contained in the Design and Access Statement “to create a sustainable, high quality and distinctive mixed use development which respects the townscape and landscape character of a unique setting, while delivering social, cultural, economic and practical benefits to the Quarter and the wider community”. It also supports a Design Code covering all three phases of the project which has been developed following an extensive analysis of the various streetscapes and wide range of buildings found in Lewes, which contribute to its unique character. Conforming to this Design Code should be a condition in any approval of this planning application.
2. The Society welcomes the redevelopment plan and believes it will regenerate an existing rundown area and deliver long term social and economic benefits to the town. It regards the scale of development to be appropriate, with a mixture of civic, commercial and residential buildings. The Society approves of the proposal that all housing will be designed as lifetime homes and that specialised affordable housing will be provided for smaller households and those requiring extra care. The proposal for civic buildings at the junction of Phoenix Causeway and “New Eastgate Street” is endorsed, as it has a wider benefit for the town and provides a scale and presence appropriate to one of the main gateways to the town.
3. The Society understands that decisions on much of the detail of the proposed development will be considered as “reserved matters”, both in relation to Phase 1 and more particularly for both Phases 2 and 3. These include the detailed design of the individual groups of buildings, the streetscape and public spaces, the landscape and planting proposals and the various flood protection measures. The Society does not object to this approach provided that a planning condition requires a Liaison Working Group to be established at which local stakeholders, including the Society, are involved and given the opportunity to advise and influence decisions on the various reserved matters as the development proceeds. The Society has a strong interest in the structural methodology, design details and materials to be used throughout the development and looks forward to further consultations on these most important issues.
4. The provision of 416 residential units over the three phases will go a long way towards meeting the need for new housing in Lewes, as required by the draft Core Strategy, and the site is an ideal brown-field location for housing, given its close proximity to the town centre. Although 40% of the residential units will be at rent levels defined by national and local planning policies as ‘affordable’, the Society considers they are likely to be beyond the financial means of most local people in need of such accommodation. Whilst welcoming the proposal that first priority will be given to local people to purchase 15% of the affordable homes, it does not believe this will contribute materially towards meeting genuine affordable housing needs. As there is a specific need for 1 and 2 bedroom units the Society therefore considers that these proposals should go further and proposes that the ratio of 1 and 2 bedroom units in the provision of affordable units could be increased. Furthermore, it considers Lewes District Council as a landowner of part of the North Street Quarter should include houses and flats at truly social rents within the development in accordance with its role as the local housing authority. It also believes that the density of housing development

in phases 2 and 3 should also be increased, whilst retaining the character of the area via implementation of the Design Code.

5. The Sustainability Statement (paras 2.2.8 to 2.2.14) sets performance values for the thermal performance of the proposed buildings which are slightly higher than the 2010 (current) Building Regulations. A condition should be attached to any approval which requires an independent verification report, covering U-values, thermal bridging and results of air-tightness tests, to be submitted prior to occupation of the buildings in each phase.

6. The Society supports the provision of a total of 6,049 sq m of commercial units, including a Health Hub plus a range of flexible work and community spaces, which will provide employment. The provision of a further 7,000 sq m of commercial space in Malling Brooks, where planning approval has already been given, is welcomed. These provisions together constitute an area available for the relocation of existing businesses on the North Street Industrial Estate similar to that presently available and should enable existing businesses on the site to relocate wherever possible.

7. The Society recognises that there may be a cultural heritage value in retaining some of the existing ironworks buildings as a reminder of Lewes' historic past. However, the current buildings only represent a small part of the original industrial complex, as many were rebuilt after a fire and are not particularly old. It understands an application has been made to English Heritage for their listing and the outcome is awaited. Pending a decision, the Society's view is that a choice has to be made between retaining some or all of the buildings and demolishing them in order to be able to design a completely new street pattern. On balance it favours the latter, recognising that demolishing the existing buildings is essential for delivering phase 1, and it welcomes the applicant's intention to incorporate some of the existing artefacts into the new buildings.

8. The Society supports the provision of long term flood defences in accordance with the River Ouse Flood Management Plan as it provides much-needed protection to the western side of the town and in particular the Pells residential area, which currently remains at risk of flooding. Construction of flood defences for the whole site would be preferred in Phase 1 but it understands that businesses on the phase 2 and 3 sites need to be relocated and the existing buildings demolished first. The Society has concerns that the timing of phase 2 and 3 development may be influenced by economic factors, which could put the delivery of total flood protection at risk. The Society therefore seeks planning conditions that mitigate this risk and secure flood risk protection for the whole site within a defined timescale.

9. The Society welcomes the proposal to fully integrate the North Street Quarter with the centre of the town, the existing residential areas immediately to the west and the facilities on the opposite bank of the River Ouse. It supports the provision of direct vehicular access to the site from Phoenix Causeway, with access to a large public car park, and introducing a street pattern that will enable local traffic to either park or avoid using the existing town centre. The proposed new links with existing routes would improve access and movement within the North Street Quarter. Preventing traffic using East Street as a through route is welcomed. The development makes good use of the river frontage and the provision of a continuous riverside walk on the west bank and a new bridge across the River Ouse for pedestrians and cyclists is supported. Overall, the Society considers the road and pavement infrastructure to be well-considered and the street hierarchy for vehicles and pedestrians is good. The focus on pedestrian access is endorsed.

10. The Society is pleased to see the proposal to collect evidence during the phase 1 development to assess whether Phoenix Causeway should become a shared space. It believes it is important that the impact of such a change on traffic coming into Lewes, a market and county town

that serves a wide area, is carefully considered before a decision is taken on whether such a scheme is implemented.

11. The Society supports the proposal for key publicly accessible buildings to act as useful landmarks within the new development. However, it is not convinced by the proposed appearance of a tall rectangular chimney in plain brick. It does not reflect the architectural character of Lewes and the Society therefore objects to its design, although not the concept.

12. The Society is encouraged to see the provision of a performance space at Phoenix Wharf. However, it is not clear what facilities will be provided or how this space will be managed and it looks forward to further consultation and debate over the development of this proposed facility.

13. The Society welcomes and broadly supports the scale and intent of the landscaping scheme. The Design Code should specify tree species and include a tree-planting strategy which would achieve a well-integrated and consistent planting scheme throughout the site. However, the general density of planting falls below what it would like to see and it considers the forecast canopy cover percentage for the development should be defined. The town's current cover is currently around 26%, and this should be viewed as a minimum standard. The Society feels it is essential that a long-term landscape management plan for the whole site is made a condition of approval and would welcome further consultation on matters relating to this issue.

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