



*Working for the future of Alton*

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**Please reply to:**  
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Dear Sirs,

**Response to the Consultation on the  
Molson Coors Brewery Site Development Brief**

Firstly, two general points:

1. May we repeat our view that this redevelopment represents a unique and exciting opportunity for Alton. Not only is this a 'windfall' site, but we feel its central location requires a scheme that reflects its relationship with the town centre, so as to create a real 'civic identity'. In this sense we agree entirely with the opportunity it offers to exploit the River Wey as a 'nucleus' for public open space at the heart of the site, but for this aim to be achieved it must have the appropriate space assigned to it. At the same time we would advocate a more radical approach to residential development, especially given the current projections for Alton's future growth (25% over the next decade). The creativity that the site demands sets it apart from any other development, and although the DB draft makes reference to a 'vision' for the site, we do not see this meaningfully expressed in the narrative. Section 2 – Site Location and Context is an ideal place to express the opportunities for innovative design.
2. We do recognise that the purpose of a development brief is simply to act as a framework for future development, and not to represent guidance on matters of detailed design. However, if the document is to convey any sense of vision and overall aspiration for the town, we feel it is difficult to exclude some design aspects, especially when considering overall layout, civic space requirements, and ideas for residential development. We must surely give prospective developers a clear enough steer if they are to capture the 'vision'. Therefore we hope you will understand our need to incorporate some of these ideas in our submission.

The two attachments are intended to illustrate a) a suggested scheme for the whole site, and b) ideas for the kind of terraced apartment development we envisage. We make specific reference to these in the notes below. Our comments do inevitably, in part, cover similar ground to that contained in our previous response.

Specific Observations / Concerns

1. As we stated in our earlier submission, the landscaped space around the length of the River Wey needs to be considerably wider than indicated. Only if adequate 'lateral' 'space is afforded (not just a corridor) will it offer the 'breathing space' needed, in addition to allowing for flood risk

mitigation. We have attempted to show this on the attached plan, whilst deliberately avoiding the terms 'green corridor' or 'green spine', for the reasons stated. (Interestingly, the kind of space needed is reflected in the artist's impression on Board 7, but certainly not in the Illustrative Masterplan beneath it). Moreover, in order to realise the river's huge potential as a recreational space we regard direct pedestrian access under the railway line to King's Pond as essential.

2. We would strongly recommend that higher density apartments (incorporating roof terraces and balconies) should form a major component, for the following reasons:
  - An opportunity to create something far more distinctive, than an ordinary housing estate, and more fitting to the site's central location;
  - In order to meet the acute need of more 1 and 2 bedroom homes for first-time buyers. We note that that 56% of respondents to your earlier consultation took the view that "...any housing would need to be affordable and appropriate to first time buyers and young families".
  - The plan shown on Board 7 shows the majority of the site covered with relatively low density estate housing, offering approximately 130 dwellings, the balance being made up by a 'crust' of flats around the perimeter. We suggest that this would be a wasteful use of the land and inappropriate on this urban site. Instead we suggest a predominance of flats and maisonettes making use of roof terraces and balconies. We believe up to 250 units would be feasible on this basis.
  - Apartment blocks of this type and scale would lend themselves particularly well to green energy initiatives, by exploiting economies of scale.
  - Residents would have a very attractive outlook to the green space around the river, on the South side.

In Attachment 2 we show some examples that are indicative of this kind of development.

3. We suggest that in the southern part of the site mixed uses could be considered, such as flats above commercial premises. This part could be given a genuinely 'urban' character, with densely built-up blocks, providing a contrast to the landscaped central part.
4. We strongly advocate the removal of the barrier that the existing wall represents along parts of Draymans Way and Lower Turk Street, and would repeat our request for active street frontages along these lengths, including pedestrian ways into the site. The view of the site from Draymans Way to the Southwest is an important one, being one of the main entry routes to the town centre, and indeed this seems to be recognised in the draft Brief in its reference to a 'Key Visual Node' (Section 2.5). For this reason we believe an area of open public space around the southwest corner of site –perhaps a plaza with a fountain offering views into the site - would produce a far more attractive vista than the so-called 'Landmark Building' or continuous blocks of apartments.
5. We welcome the inclusion of a community facility, but since the existing Community Centre is likely to remain in existence for the foreseeable future, we would strongly recommend a facility that complements rather than replaces the existing building. With Alton's strong reputation in the area of the performing arts, there is a recognised need for a multi-purpose building that would serve the needs of theatre, music, and perhaps cinema and public functions as well. This too would recognise the forecast growth for the town, and the demand for such a facility, both now and in the coming years. Any such community facility should be easily accessible from the town centre, not 'tucked away', as the Masterplan on 'Board 7' suggests.
6. For vehicular access we are suggesting a new access point from Draymans Way leading to a road behind the suggested apartment blocks. This would remove the need for public vehicular access over the river, which we feel would seriously undermine efforts to create the wide recreational area around the river that we are looking for. If a secondary emergency access is

- needed then we would suggest (at most) a bridge reserved only for emergency vehicles, and a similar access from Russet Road. We recognise that the road frontage in Draymans Way would need to be set back in order to achieve adequate sightlines, due to a reverse bend in the road.
7. We are sceptical as to the need in the town for an additional hotel, but if there is to be one it will need to be sited so as not to cause disturbance to the more residential parts of the site and could perhaps be in the vicinity of the multi-purpose building. We suggest that it could be in the form of an 'apartment hotel' capable of residential use should this prove to be preferable in the long run.
  8. The outward facing street frontages will need to be designed carefully in relation to Draymans Way and Lower Turk Street. We believe that these could be relatively traditional in appearance while the interior of the site offers the opportunity for a more radical approach.
  9. We are not convinced that the indicative layout in Board 7 reflects the need to integrate social housing (apartments in his case) with open market houses. We need to avoid 'ghetto-ising' affordable housing.
  10. Possible uses for Culverton House might include a static exhibition on the site's history, accommodation for the CAB, and even a restaurant. We agree that a residential use would go well with its original purpose but feel that this would be a missed opportunity for a more public function.
  11. Although there is mention of Combined Heat & Power, the statement expresses a low level of aspiration that hardly reflects the opportunities that the site presents. Energy use, with its implications for climate change, is becoming the major topic of our time, and we would hope that this development could set a benchmark within the district.
  12. The site's topography, with considerable level differences between the site's interior and the surrounding streets - especially at the south-west corner - offers opportunities for undercroft parking without the need for excavation. Although this is mentioned we believe that a much larger area than has been implied could be decked over, and that this could provide additional public parking as well as meeting the needs of the site's residents and other occupants. This is shown on our Plan.
  13. Finally, we would repeat the need for a management system to maintain and care for the public and shared spaces - unless of course the Town Council will feel able to take this on.

We hope you will agree that we should have bold but realistic ambitions for this site, and trust that our feedback will be seen as a positive contribution to meeting these aspirations.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Carey-Thomas,  
Chairman, Built Environment Group.