

BREWERY SITE - ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTIONS FROM THE ALTON SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

EHDC have indicated that the Illustrative Masterplan set out in the Development Brief is not set in stone, and that there is scope for constructive alterations. This note sets out a summary of improvements that could be made while adhering to the key features of the Development Brief. They have been discussed with EHDC, and are presented as a comprehensive, overall improvement, but some elements could be implemented in isolation. A copy of the Illustrative Masterplan is attached for ease of reference.

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

1) Widen the green space on either side of the river to provide a public park of approx 0.75ha by increasing the density of the housing, to include some quality apartment buildings

The desire for a generous riverside park and play area was a key feature of responses, and an important aspect of the legacy of this site. The inclusion of some quality apartment buildings on the N side of the site would enhance the setting of the riverside park. An increase in size of the riverside park to 0.75 ha could obviate the need to provide off-site public space under CP 18.

2) Hotel

Commercial evidence has shown that a hotel would be viable. This would preferably be an apartment hotel with self-catering facilities. Such a hotel would help draw people into the centre of Alton.

3) Convert the NW corner of the site (Zone A) to residential.

This part of the site is not well suited for locating a replacement Community Centre, where some 70% of its 1,000 weekly attendees arrive by car: there is not enough parking space shown in the Illustrative Masterplan, and it's on a slope. This part of the site is much better suited to medium-rise apartments, possibly with basement car-parks.

4) Move the Community Facility and the Employment Units to the S of the river.

The activities within the Community Facility should be looked at in conjunction with those offered by ATC. The Employment Units and parking space should be in Zone C & E, giving good access to the A31, and best resilience to possible flooding. It is noted that there is a project group within EHDC planning, specifically set up to assess all such facilities in the town. Our preference would be to site the new Facility on the southern part of the site, and for it to be combined with a tourist office and the CAB – a true 'community hub'. Alton needs a good multi-purpose performance space which could be provided here.

5) Access all buildings to the N of the river via a new entrance off Draymans Way

The currently proposed access from Lower Turk St cuts the riverside park in half, via a road bridge carrying a significant amount of traffic - with implications for the park's atmosphere and the safety of the public. This access – which also serves most of the S of the site - also carries the risk of causing congestion around the Ashdell Bridge, with its priority flow system. Our proposal would spread the traffic load more evenly, and allow the route over the bridge to be used for emergencies only. Such an access could be sited immediately next to the northern boundary at Draymans Way.

Access to all buildings S of the river should be via a road running between the curve of apartment blocks and the town houses in Zones E & F, and sited to maximise the open space leading towards the river. This would avoid passing through the Community Facility and Employment Units.

6) Affordable Housing

The DB calls for 40% affordable/social housing. We believe that the population of the site should be spread out and integrated, assisted by our proposals 1) and 3) above, so as to avoid creating a 'ghetto' situation.

7) Alter the housing mix to increase the proportion of smaller (1 -2 bedroom) units

We query whether the mix shown on the Illustrative Masterplan with its heavy preponderance of 3-5 bedroom houses, divided into a number of suburban-style closes, is really what Alton needs or wants. The Brewery site may be in the "Newtown " part of Alton, but it is bounded by the railway line, Lower Turk St and Draymans Way, so is very urban in position and character. We believe that the proportion of smaller units should be increased, aided by our proposals in 1) and 3), and that the layout and access of the housing should be more urban in style.

A slight increase in the total number of residential units may be needed to cope with viability concerns. While the surveys of Project Board and the Society indicate concern about the number of houses on the Illustrative Masterplan, we suspect that the real concern is the lack of public and community space provided by this unique development opportunity.

8) Include a " Landmark " building

There should be something special viewed from the outside of the brewery site" bowl " to show that it's there. A building on the corner of Draymans Way and Lower Turk St would serve, with space around it so as to give a view of the riverside park and housing beyond and below. A micro-brewery among the employment units might be encouraged, to continue the heritage of the site.

9) Parking requirements need to be addressed as a specific concern

The Brewery site as developed according to the Development Brief, when combined with our minor suggestions, will generate a need for around 500-600 parking spaces if agreed standards are maintained. This subject is covered briefly in the Development Brief, but will surely be a key issue in making the site something special. Well-designed basement parking, plus perhaps some undercroft, will be essential.

CONCLUSIONS

The Development Brief is a good and thorough bit of work, supported by three separate public consultation periods. However, its findings and conclusions, as expressed in the Illustrative Masterplan and tested by public surveys, do not fully meet Altonians' aspirations for this unique site with its opportunity for civic regeneration and pride. As the Illustrative Masterplan is clearly intended as guidance for developers (although described as 'flexible') we believe it is vital that the proposals made in this formal note are considered as constructively as they were made, and that the built result will be something in which we can all take pride.