

BCKLWN Consultation on the Development of the Southend Road area of Hunstanton, 27 February 2020

Response from the Hunstanton & District Civic Society (HDCS)

Introduction

The Hunstanton and District Civic Society welcomes the opportunity to comment on the development under review. Several members of the Civic Society committee were able to attend the consultation event held at the Town Hall, Hunstanton on Thursday, 27 February 2020 which focused primarily on Opportunity Site E (as defined in Hunstanton Prospectus, March 2017): “Active Frontage on to Southend Road to provide a mix of uses”.

The Civic Society fully supports the principles of regeneration and recognises the challenges faced by BCKLWN in the current economic climate, but has serious reservations about the composition and scale of this proposed development that contradicts what was previously set out in the Vision for Hunstanton.

Reference documents

Vision for Hunstanton as identified by the Hunstanton Town Centre and Southern Seafront Masterplan, July 2008 and confirmed by the Hunstanton Prospectus, March 2017

- (1) An active town ... expanding the existing water sports and activities on offer;
- (2) A local town ... which meets the needs of its residents with an expanded core and acts as a good local service centre for retail, cultural and social activities;
- (3) A more attractive seaside destination ... where visitors stay longer and spend more;
- (4) A town that respects its heritage ... whilst looking to the future;
- (5) An environmental town ... making the most of the town's natural assets, linking town and seafront and emphasising the views.

HDCS comments

1. The proposed development is considerably larger than previously suggested by the 2008 Masterplan and 2017 Prospectus. Both indicated that there would be development along the Southend Road border of the car park comprising commercial units on the ground floor with accommodation above to create an active frontage with a mix of uses and involved the loss of perhaps a dozen car park spaces. This was designed to provide an attractive “gateway” into the town centre and was generally well received.

The current proposals extend the proposed development around the corners into both Seagate and Beach Terrace Road to create a block of flats around a central area, with the loss of 100 car park spaces. The reasons for the change in approach were variously given as follows: (1) revenue has to be generated to partially fund the southern seafront regeneration; (2) a smaller development is not economically viable for developers; (3) available figures indicate that, to date, the current 3015 parking spaces throughout the town have only been fully utilised on approximately nine days of the year.

Our opinion is that (1) revenue generated by this development will not be ring-fenced for development in Hunstanton and so may well be spent elsewhere; (2) economic viability should be addressed in other ways – for example, through subsidy or design changes; (3) a primary objective of the Vision is to increase the number of year-round visitors to the town; in the absence of an alternative transport strategy more parking spaces will be required, not less.

2. There is a rather dense, urban appearance to the development that is not in keeping with the town (particularly in this location) and allocation of less parking spaces to units due to their central location is likely to result in additional public spaces being used by occupiers and/or their visitors.

3. The Civic Society commends the architects for the way in which they have incorporated carstone materials, dormer windows and corner features but are surprised that they have not attempted to align the roofs in an east-west direction that would be most suitable for the installation of solar panels. The fabric first policy of good insulation is welcomed. (Housing minister, Christopher Pincher has requested businesses, designers and manufacturers come forward with ideas for low-carbon, elderly friendly homes.) Even if the buildings are in a north-south direction, the roofs can still be arranged in an east-west orientation.

4. We believe that the apartments will prove to be attractive to investors or the second home market because there are no gardens to maintain and once the front door is locked they could be left empty for several months at a time. The projected annual spend of £280,000 by occupants is based on national averages but will not be realised if, as suspected, a high proportion become second homes. Recent figures from the Borough Council show that 571 homes out of a total of 2894 (i.e. 17.9%) in Hunstanton are second or holiday homes. This represents 30% of the total number of second homes in the Borough.

We strongly recommend that if the development does go ahead the properties should only be sold to those who wish to use them as their principal residence. Principal residence may be defined as where the owner normally lives unless working away from home and where the owner is on the electoral roll and registered with the local health services.

5. It is reported that tankers frequently collect sewage that the Heacham plant is unable to process. Whilst we recognise that such matters should be addressed as part of the planning process, genuine concerns remain. It has been reported that there was an overflow into the Wash during a recent storm.

6. By eliminating the ground-floor commercial units, the development does not offer any long-term employment opportunities or wet weather venues for visitors that are essential for sustainable regeneration.

7. There is an overall concern about the height of proposed building developments, particularly those near to the seafront that blot out views of the sea (the same concerns also relate to the ongoing developments in St Edmund's Terrace). The open views from the town of the sea and the famous sunsets are a unique selling point for Hunstanton and should be conserved.

8. At present cars enter the main Southend Road car park via Beach Terrace Road and exit into Seagate. If cars have to enter and exit via Beach Terrace Road it may become congested and hazardous to drivers, motorcycles, cycles and pedestrians.

9. Miscellaneous

- The fact that the Borough Council is no longer proposing to relocate the Coach Park is welcomed and double lining it so that it can be used for car parking at weekends seems sensible.
- Wayne Hemingway said that he wanted quick wins for the southern seafront and proposed pop-up food markets and improved signage, but so far there are no details.
- When proposals were first made about removing the bus station, it was suggested that buses would be re-routed to serve more areas of the town but this does not appear to be happening.
- Since bus drivers will have to empty and lock their vehicles if they need to visit a toilet, space for at least three vehicles is needed outside both the Princess Theatre and the Spinney.

Concluding remarks

The Civic Society wishes to work constructively with the Borough Council on the future development of the town. Unfortunately, the Civic Society can see no merit in the present development proposals because they do not address the stated aims of the 2008 Masterplan and 2017 Prospectus.

Neither does the proposed development address the serious markedly skewed age structure of the population. The average age in the UK is 39, but in Hunstanton it is 59 with over 41% above the age of 65. That imbalance is neither healthy nor sustainable. The 2019 House of Lords Select Committee report on the Future of Seaside Towns recognised the problems of peripherality and the outward migration of young adults who seek training, employment or housing elsewhere. That outflow can be stemmed by improving connectivity, both digital and physical; by enabling access to further education, training or apprenticeships; and by providing starter homes that can be afforded.

Wayne Hemingway described the car parking areas of Hunstanton as its crown jewels that should not be sold off, but instead kept as open areas linking the promenade and town centre and used to promote social interaction and retail/event opportunities.

If they were to be sold off, the very least that should happen is for the town to receive a significant benefit from that action in line with "Priority Theme 2. Heritage and Environment. We want to ensure that the opportunities arising from the future regeneration of these sites are promoted in such a way that have positive impacts upon Hunstanton".