

Future Wolverton is a Community Benefit Society which seeks to achieve the sustainable, creative improvement of Wolverton. Established in 2013, we have 118 members, made up of local residents and businesses.

Many of these members joined the organisation after we successfully led the development of the Wolverton Town Centre Neighbourhood Development Plan on behalf of the Town Council. The Neighbourhood Plan achieved a 90% yes vote at the Referendum in July 2015, and became part of the Development Plan for Milton Keynes in September 2015.

Policy W3 of the Wolverton Town Centre Neighbourhood Plan sets out the principles which should guide any redevelopment of the Railway Works site, if a redevelopment plan should come forward.

One of these principles is that the employment uses on the site should be retained in accordance with Milton Keynes Development Plan. We have concerns about the lack of detail in the application regarding the retention of the railway employment on the site. We believe that MK Council need to be assured that the area of land set aside for the Railway works is sufficient not only to be address the current needs of Knorr Bremse but to enable growth of their operation – and growth in railway employment – in the future. We understand from an industry source that a new contract has resulted in the employment of 60 new employees, and that work is taking place to clear parts of the site to create sufficient car parking for these workers. It would extremely unfortunate if insufficient land was not made available for future growth, with the consequence that the operator had to re-locate the entire business at some point in the future. The Council need to be absolutely assured that this planning application will preserve railway jobs in Wolverton for the long-term.

We will now assess the outline proposals against the design and planning principles of policy W3.

IMPROVING LINKAGES & MOVEMENT

A – Providing new pedestrian and vehicular routes within those parts of the site that are publicly accessible, reinforcing the character of the site which has a strong east/west orientation.

We note that consideration has been given to both pedestrian and cycle routes within the site, but we have some specific concerns:

- There appears to be an interruption to the canal side pedestrian route and cycle way, where one of the residential blocks appears to be located canal-side. We believe this to be an unfortunate “gap” in what would otherwise be an attractive (and we are sure well-used) leisure route.
- It is also disappointing that this cycle route does not link up with the redway that runs to the west of the site, and is one of the main routes for people who live in Wolverton to access Old Wolverton and Ouse Valley Park. Indeed the plan entitled “Pedestrian & Cycle Routes” does not even indicate that there is a redway link in this location.

- All the internal pedestrian routes appear to follow the lines of the proposed new road network within the site, and whilst we note that they will be 4m in width we remain concerned that there is no direct access to the canal-side for people visiting the site. Way-marking will be essential if people are to avoid getting lost in the road network, and we would like some reassurance about the legibility of pedestrian routes.

B – Ensuring that the new pedestrian and vehicular routes within those parts of the site that are publicly accessible make as direct links as possible with Stratford Road and the town centre.

Wolverton lacks an internal redway (cycle route) network, but the pathway alongside the Stratford Rd wall is rarely used by pedestrians, tending to be used by cyclists who feel unsafe on Stratford Road and want to access the Town centre or Station.

We are concerned that the outline application does not given consideration to the creation of a redway route to replace the footpath alongside the wall on Stratford Road. (see page 50 of the Wolverton Town Centre Neighbourhood Plan). This would enable better access for cyclists from the site to the Town Centre and Railway Station.

Whilst we recognise the constraints of the site (in terms of the location of the car showrooms) this means that there is only two direct pedestrian and vehicular links with Stratford Road (the South East and South West Gateways), one of which is on the side of the site furthest from the Town Centre.

C – Ensuring priority is given to pedestrian and cycle movements and creating links as direct as possible with existing bus stops.

Whilst we appreciate this is only an outline planning application and further Travel Plan information will be required, there is very little reference to bus stops within the Transport Assessment, and no positive proposals – other than a Welcome Pack for residents - to improve access to public transport.

Indeed, the only mention of the bus stops (which are currently all on the north side of Stratford Road) is in the context of the need to move one of them.

We would have liked to see specific proposals to promote sustainable patterns of transport, and the installation of a bus stop on the site side of Stratford Road, to ensure that people do not constantly have to cross a very busy road to use the buses.

D – Providing access for heavy vehicles serving the railway works by a new access taken to the north of Tesco from the end of McConnell Drive

We note that access to the Railway Works site will be via McConnell Drive.

CONSERVE THE UNIQUE HERITAGE OF THE SITE

E- Any proposed openings through the wall along Stratford Road should be

kept to a minimum in size and number and carefully detailed to retain as much of the wall's integrity and role as a symbol of Wolverton's origins as a railway town as possible.

We note that the majority of the wall will be retained along the central section of Stratford Road where the Employment uses for the site are proposed.

We would encourage St Modwen to think creatively about the ways in which the Wall can be enhanced, and existing gateway features conserved.

F- Conserving and enhancing the historic buildings on the site, informed by further investigative work which may take place as part of a development framework for the site.

We welcome the involvement of Purcell in the development of the master-plan for the site, and welcome the retention of more of the existing structures on the site.

However, we have some concerns that without any specific and definite “use” there is a risk that the retained ends of the buildings could fall into disrepair, and ultimately be removed from the site. We would much rather have seen a positive use of the retained structures, even if this is just as part of the residential development as in Wolverton Park.

Our understanding is that the residential master-plan currently shows the “ends” of the buildings being used as publicly accessible open space. In our view these areas of land need to be “owned” by someone – for instance they could be a communal garden for the residents in that block, or be given over to allotment use. This would support the development of community connections, and help build a sense of community on the development.

We hope that active uses for the conserved buildings will be actively considered by St Modwen during the preparation of the detailed planning applications.

G- Contributing to the net gain of public and green spaces in the town centre by providing on-site high quality green infrastructure and public spaces including sustainable urban drainage landscaping schemes.

We are pleased to see the creation of public and green spaces on the site, and welcome the inclusion of features of the site – such as the traversers - into the design of the public realm.

We are particularly pleased to see the inclusion of a SUDS in the plans as specified by the Neighbourhood Plan.

Again we have concerns about where the responsibility will lie for the long-term maintenance of these public area and green spaces, and hope this issue will be addressed in the more detailed planning application for the residential development.

H –Exploiting the asset that is the Grand Union Canal by maximising opportunities to access the canal from the town centre, encouraging

recreation and tourism

We have already indicated our concerns (see commentary under A above) that the Canal Walkway is forced to go in land at one point by the location of the residential units. We feel that this is an interruption to the enjoyment of the canal-side, and would like to understand why this is necessary.

We would also like to see this route linked with the redway that runs to the west of the site, in order to give people “some-where to go” – i.e. you start your journey on the canal-side walk and link in with the existing redway and access the rest of the canal and Ouse Valley Park.

PROVIDE NEW DEVELOPMENT THAT:

I – Re-uses historic buildings and provides sites for new homes. Consideration should be given to a proportion of streets being designed so that speeds are slow (10mph) so as to meet the needs of children and pedestrians in particular, and where car parking is designed into the overall streetscape so as to not dominate it. A proportion of the new homes should subject to viability also meet the Lifetime Homes standard. Secured by Design and Safer Places best practice should be applied to the design of all the new housing.

We are pleased to see that the outline proposal is suggesting urban style housing to reflect the industrial nature of the site, and as detailed above would have liked some consideration to be given to incorporating the retained historic buildings into the housing development.

We would like to see St Modwen embrace a more innovative approach to securing housing developers for the residential part of the site, including working with the local community to consider a community-led housing development.

J. Contributes to the overall mix of employment uses in Wolverton, incorporating light industrial use and leisure use where viable and in respect of leisure uses subject to the sequential test set out in paragraph 24 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

We are pleased to see that the Heritage Centre now includes some light industrial/workshop units which will contribute to the overall mix of employment uses on the site. We encourage St Modwen to engage with the local community regarding the creative and artistic sector which is so strong in the Town, and which would benefit from co-location with the Heritage Centre.

K. Subject to viability, gives a particular emphasis to sustainability through the use of zero carbon solutions, designed for climate change and district heating.

L. Actively encourages the incorporation of a local energy network, such as a link to the Waste Recovery Park at Old Wolverton where practicable and viable to do so.

We would encourage St Modwen to engage with our sister organisation, Wolverton Community Energy, who have some innovative ideas and proposals for creating a zero carbon development on the site. We understand that Wolverton Community Energy will be making separate comments on the outline application following discussions with St Modwen.

DELIVER NEW INFRASTRUCTURE:

M. Subject to viability on and off-site infrastructure will be provided to support and mitigate the impact of development, in particular school places and health care provision for all new residents.

We remain concerned that insufficient consideration has been given to the infrastructure required by the development, in particular the school places that will be needed if families move into the development.

Wyvern School is already the largest First School in Milton Keynes, and Bushfield School has had to expand recently to cope with the increase in population.

We would like to see consultation take place with The Radcliffe Community of Schools as soon as possible, so that their views on the needs of the local area can be taken into consideration.

Access to healthcare remains a concern for existing residents, and the Local Authority should seek sufficient contributions from the developer to support the expansion of services at Wolverton Health Centre.

N. Water efficiency measures should be introduced into any new development, including the introduction of sustainable urban drainage systems which reduce flood risk and add ecological value and interest to the development. Opportunities should be taken to reduce any water flows currently discharging to the surface water network.

We welcome the creation of a SUDS area on site, and hope that opportunities to include water efficiency measures in the residential units are also considered.