

Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council

Proposed comments on the draft Brunel Centre Development Brief

Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Town Council welcomes the publication of a draft development brief. The town council supports the Vision Statement on page 5 of the brief and believes that the combined ownership of the sites within the brief can unlock positive opportunities for the development of Bletchley.

We note that the brief sits within the context of the Bletchley Urban Design Framework SPD, a policy which the town council strongly supports.

Community engagement work undertaken to inform that SPD, the Town Deal Investment Plan, and the developing Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Neighbourhood Plan points to the community's continued desire for change in the physical environment and appearance of the town centre as described at s 1.19.12 of the SPD.

The town council remains committed to the aspirations of

- Opening up the physical and visual links between the town centre and the railway station including provision of an Eastern facing entrance and changes to the Brunel site
- Improving the quality of the public realm especially safety and wayfinding
- 'Green' improvements to Queensway and creation of space for public/community activities and events
- Addressing car parking – enforce illegal parking and plan for more car parks
- Reuse and redevelopment of empty buildings for new uses
- Improved access to the Redways network and improved facilities for pedestrians and cyclists including links to the station and greater permeability of the town centre
- Investment in culture and heritage to nurture the community and celebrate the area's distinctive heritage linked to Bletchley Park.

As well as the key placemaking themes shown in S3.5 of the illustrative masterplan in the SPD.

Therefore we have the following specific comments to make on aspects of the brief.

Relationship to Central Bletchley Urban Design Framework SPD (adopted 2022)

As noted above, the town council is supportive of the Urban Design Framework SPD but the brief does not appear to take the SPD any further forward in terms of detail. The brief does not include land in the Town Centre West opportunity area of the SPD which includes the former Co-op building and the car parking land on Albert Street. Yet the SPD correctly defines the former Co-op building and the Wilko building as crucial to defining the northern side of a new larger Stanier Square. The Wilko building is already in the ownership of MKDP; but the brief seems to allow for the retention of this building in apparent contradiction of the SPD.

We welcome the parking study (which was proposed in the SPD) and is now being undertaken by MKCC and the commitment in the brief that the council will be commissioning a parking strategy for Central Bletchley (p35 – 4.8.6) but the exclusion of the current car parking sites on Albert Street and the failure to synchronize the development brief with the parking study completely undermines the value of the brief. Decisions about the numbers and distribution of car parking spaces affect the whole town centre not just the area contained within the brief and we argue it is premature to produce the brief without sight of the results of the study. The brief and the parking study outcomes are streams of work which should inform each other.

Land uses

The land use requirements in the development brief are ambiguous and too flexible in comparison with the SPD. We would like to have seen more detail and stronger guidance for developers on the requirements for housing numbers, commercial space and mix, and potential community use. For example on page 31 at 4.2.5 the brief states it will support a range of complementary “main town centre uses” (as defined by the NPPF) including evening economy, community/leisure and cultural. This is not very specific and the next section 4.2.6 is vague about the requirement for a multi-use community hub which “might” house the Library and a Health Hub. We would ask that the potential relocation of public WCs is also included along with the provision of an indoor town centre community meeting space to replace that which has already been lost from the library in Westfield Road. The town council supports

the development of an evening economy but does not wish to see specific reference to nightclubs and casinos (p19 2.72)

The town council anticipates housing densities of 150 -250 per hectare as prescribed in HN1 of Plan:MK and notes that “taller buildings will be sought that capitalize on Central Bletchley’s sustainable location”. But the design requirements are also imprecise and we would welcome details about maximum building heights so that residents can understand what is planned and how it is justified. The town council would welcome strengthening of the parts of the brief that require that high standards of amenity should be provided along with good design for this housing (p34 - 4.6 and 4.7). Also, policy HN2 must be adhered to and the town council wants to see genuinely “affordable” housing provision which should include affordable service charges.

The town council supports mixed use development with retail development at ground floor level recognizing and welcomes the recognition in the brief that retail development should be capable of serving the daily and weekly convenience shopping needs of the increasing number of residents living in the town centre (p 31 - 4.2.2). It is recognized that provision of retail floor space of an equivalent size to the existing buildings may not be necessary. There is a limit to the to the volume of commercial floorspace which the town centre can sustain without risk to the critical mass of retail and commerce in Queensway. Active frontages with retail uses are considered important (p31 - 4.2.1) as are outward facing developments which connect with the public realm (p32 - 4.3.4). However the brief is not precise about spatial distribution of uses as it allows for any distribution on the three main development plots shown at p33 Fig12. So, for example, does this allow for commercial retail active frontages along the length of Oliver Road and Duncombe Street? This does not feel especially compatible with these residential terraces.

Within the brief there is little analysis or reflection on how the proposed redevelopment will impact on the rest of the town centre because it has been taken out of the context of the SPF which

Public Realm and Green Space

We agree that there are areas of poor-quality public realm around the edges of the Brunel Centre site (p27 - 3.4.4) and we want to see improved public realm provision

which is pedestrian and cycle friendly and which connects any new developments with the existing town centre, Stanier Square and Queensway. As well as the visual re-connection of Queensway and Buckingham Road there must be physical space for community events and activities both formal and informal and soft as well as hard landscaping “green” the area. We support the content at 4.5 of the brief (p 33- 34) but note that adequate provision must be made for the maintenance of any green spaces and soft landscaping which should not be derived primarily from service charges levied on leaseholders (fleecehold) but via alternative funding such as S106 commitments.

Sustainability, Flooding and Ecology

The town council shares the city council’s carbon reduction objectives and would wish to see any development exceed policy SC1 in Plan:MK. However it is recognized that measures to mitigate the effects of climate change increase development costs and so we support 4.10, 4.11 and 4.12 as written though we would like to see the lowest carbon emissions possible.

Identity, heritage and public art

The Central Bletchley SPD talks about “Creating a ‘Place Identity’ for Central Bletchley Building on Bletchley’s history of technology and innovation to create a long term future for Central Bletchley focussed around an environment that supports sustainable and healthy life styles .” (p38) The brief refers to Bletchley’s war time history, the proximity of the site to Bletchley Park tourist attraction and the IOT and National Museum of computing (eg p31 4.2.6) but it could place more emphasis on the role that this site could play in supporting tourism and acknowledging the heritage of our town. It is suggested that any public art which is funded by the development should recognize this heritage and that the design and or naming of buildings should seek inspiration from the local history and the vision of “Groundbreaking Bletchley and Fenny Stratford” which is embodied in the town deal’s strap line.

The town council does recognise that opening the view from the town centre towards the station and increasing good pedestrian links between Bletchley town centre and the railway station/former fire station site could also assist with this goal.

Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Neighbourhood Plan

The town council asks that the development brief strengthens references to the emergence of policy ideas in the Bletchley and Fenny Stratford Neighbourhood Plan and encourages developers to actively engage with both town councils in respect of their NDPs.

S106

The town council and many residents are keen to influence any S106 agreements which arise out of proposed developments on this site. Whilst we recognise that this is not strictly part of our response to the brief itself, we would like to state now to both MKCC and MKDP that we hope to be involved at as early a stage as possible in consideration of planning gains from developments on this site.

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