

Panel's Response

The Panel welcomes the location and positive mixed use embodied in these proposals. The location, directly adjacent to Cross Street, is an excellent location for a supermarket and non-food retailing that, if well designed, will complement the retail offer provided by the town and support multi-purpose trips.

The Panel is pleased to see the integration of a library and cinema into the scheme, and is heartened by the thinking for the reuse of the slaughterhouse buildings and the principle of providing housing or apartments on the site. The inclusion of a clear north-south route between the town centre and library/cinema/car park is also welcomed.

With regard to the specific layout, the present scheme benefits over the previous one by the reduction of the food store frontages from three to one, and the successful rationalisation of servicing into a less prominent, but equally effective, location. This creates the opportunity to invest fully in the visible retailing frontages and create a suitable form of massing and architectural expression for these building types within a traditional urban setting.

The Panel, however, has the following concerns:

Public Space and Car Parking:

Despite the statements made in the presentation about the creation of a 'new urban square,' this is not supported by the drawings, and in fact it is not apparent to the Panel that the scheme creates any clearly defined, distinctive or well designed public spaces. The scheme is clearly dominated by car parking and in this respect there is a lack of clarity by all concerned about what level of parking provision is either necessary or desirable in this location. Such an assessment should be based on a clear parking strategy for the town, as well as an appropriate standard based on the proposed uses in such a town centre location. The dominant space provided within the scheme is that of a car park, and it would be useful to know how much parking is needed so that other qualities within the layout could also be pursued.

The Panel does welcome the proposal to include underground car parking in such a location, although the extent of it is uncertain. Such parking could be used to "free up" surface space for other forms of development.

Rather than conceiving of the dominant space as a car park, the Panel would like to encourage the designers to consider this space as a major public space in the town which also contains cars. This is so that the form, frontages, materials and planting of the space is given more attention, and so that the new scheme adds something of greater character and distinction to what is already a very attractive town.

Residential Scheme Adjacent to Priory Lane:

The Panel has strong reservations about the form of the suggested residential scheme adjacent to Priory Lane and floating over the supermarket/town centre car park. Priory Lane provides servicing to existing businesses on King Street, as well as rear access to a number of properties. Whilst the Lane could provide rear access to residential properties in the scheme, the main frontage of any housing should be away from Priory Lane, and in this

respect the Panel would welcome a scheme where homes front onto the proposed pedestrian link between Market Street and the cinema/library/Fairfield car park.

The Panel do not think that providing a public car park on ground level under housing within a town centre creates a positive residential environment or a safe and attractive public realm in adjacent spaces.

Lion Street Frontage:

Our greatest concern relates to the proposals for new housing along the north side of Lion Street and the rather superfluous open space at the south western corner of the site. We do welcome the effort taken to provide this very important frontage to Lion Street so that the street can have a clear form and character within the town. However, the massing, scale and architectural expression of the proposed frontages do not sit well with the existing buildings across the street and at this point the scheme appears to lose its integrity and respect for the adjacent conservation area. The architectural expression for the supermarket frontage, and adjacent retail unit was likened to the form of a 'car showroom'. The Panel recognises that such building forms are not a common feature of the town centre, and that far more subtle and sympathetic forms should be found. In addition the Panel encourages a form of housing that fits comfortably with the facing buildings, and which creates a coherent and attractive street view.

The drawings and photo-montages could have made clearer which parts of the slaughterhouse were to be demolished.

Summary

The Panel applauds the intensification and mix of use contained in these proposals and the creation of a more definite perimeter to the site. We welcome the creation of a strong north/south pedestrian walkway linking Market Street with Bailey Park, and would like this to be reinforced and strengthened where possible by development fronting it from the west. We also welcome the configuration of buildings to the east which should provide only one exposed edge to the supermarket.

However, this scheme needs to be fitted into the Abergavenny context with greater care. This is an important site in an historic town and it appears that the design approaches at different scales do not relate well to the whole or to the surrounding townscape. The development adjacent to Priory Lane offers the opportunity for creating a frontage to the north-south route through the site, but the ground floor parking arrangement is not satisfactory. Most importantly, Lion Street should be conceived as an enclosed street with restored frontages, respecting the character of the adjacent conservation area. The creation of a more intimate entrance to the site from the south would reinforce this approach, especially as it is thought that the supermarket does not need to be particularly visible through this frontage.

The Panel would be happy to review this scheme again, as the design process develops.

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