

Appendix 5

Report to Steering Group following Feb/March 2023 Consultation

1 May 2023

For the Melksham NHP Steering Group meeting 3 May 23

Background and Purpose

The Made Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan (JMNP) commits Melksham Town Council to progressing a Town Centre Master Plan to direct and guide the future planning and investment of the town centre. This is supported by Town Centre Policy 9 in the made plan. The JMNP2 process and Locality Technical Support has enabled and resourced the progression of Town Centre Master Planning.

A DRAFT Melksham Town Centre Master Plan Report (2023) was produced for the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan Review by consultations AECOM through Locality Technical Support. AECOM undertook the work as a technical exercise in consultation with JMNP2 representatives and Place Studio.

This is a summary note of stakeholder and community consultation that was undertaken in relation to the Consultation on the draft report. It was undertaken by the JMNP2 Steering Group with input from Place Studio.

The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Ensure businesses and other key town centre stakeholders were aware of the master planning process and had an initial opportunity to engage in its production.
- Enable members of the wider community to contribute to the draft report
- Enable Wiltshire Council and other land owners an opportunity to engage in land-use planning for potentially available town centre development sites
- Build the knowledge and priorities of stakeholders and the community into a final document
- Provide community led priorities to inform forward action planning in delivering priority objectives and projects.

Consultation also addressed engagement on emerging evidence related to other areas of JMNP2 policy.

- Local Green Space Designation
- Local Non-designated Heritage List
- Production of a Local Design Guide and Code (By AECOM)
- A communications update on progression of Housing site allocations

Feedback on these matters is recorded separately related to each policy topic.

Summary of Process

Town Centre stakeholder and wider community engagement on the draft town centre master plan report was undertaken by the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group between 8 February and 19 March 2023. It combined a series of engagement opportunities.

- One invited stakeholder three-hour event on 7 February
- Three open community drop-in events were held at The Campus on 8, 10 and 11 February.
- These were followed by further period of exhibition at Melksham Campus and Town Hall until 19 March.
- This was accompanied by online consultation including opportunity to complete the questionnaire.

In addition to drop-in and online engagement, Steering Group representatives reached out to Wiltshire Council as owners of key regeneration sites and as planning authority to ensure its views and intentions were as clearly understood as the Council was prepared to be.

Full records of material exhibited and feedback received have been made and can be made available as part of the TCMP and JMNP2 evidence base.

Engagement Content

Engagement included information boards as well as opportunities to provide feedback and suggestions. This was broken into sections.

The Whole Town Centre

- Views on the principle of undertaking a master plan
- Qualities about the Town Centre that are valued and to protect
- Issues that should be priorities for action and change

Three Regeneration Focus Areas

- Views on if these were the right areas
- Comments on report suggestions for future uses and design
- Open opportunities to make further suggestions

To a significant extent the scope of topics identified in AECOM's report shaped engagement themes and prompts for input.

Attendance

- Stakeholder Event
- Drop in Events
- Questionnaire Returns
- Number of Comments

A record of attendance is contained within the collated event raw data.

Summary of Feedback Received

General Comments

- General strong support for the masterplan and many commenters excited with the potential regeneration of the Cooper Tires area Cluster 3.

- The majority of comments were in-sync' with AECOM's key topics
- Two areas of feedback highlighted apparent emphasis and lack of priority;
 - A significant number of comments identified green spaces and the river as primary assets
 - There was very little response to matters relating directly to sustainability and carbon reduction

- Many commenters expressed that regeneration should be focussed on leisure retail and community facilities.
- Generally, there were concerns about more residential development.
- However, creating smaller and affordable homes in apartments was also suggested.
- 92.52% Agree with the identified regeneration clusters.
- Specific ideas for various sites were expressed.

Comments on TCMP Priority Topics

The following themes attracted the most interest and suggestions;

- Town Centre Vitality and Offer
- Walking including for health and wellbeing & Car Parking
- Heritage and the Appearance of the Town
- Greenery and Green Spaces
- The Riverside and Water

A lack of feedback indicated less direct engagement with Sustainability and Climate

Summary of Key Topics Feedback

Economy and Vitality

Shopping;

- A broad range of local independent and national chain shops. Eg Devises

Things To Do;

- Improved leisure and hospitality offer
- Family focused including cinema, bowling places to eat
- Places to socialise day and evening; cafes, bars, restaurants.
- A place to dance!
- A permanent Melksham museum

Community Facilities;

- Re-opened public toilets
- Facilities for families and young people

Town Centre Business;

- A local business hub
- Access to banking

Heritage and Distinctiveness

Conservation and Enhancement;

- Protection of historic high street buildings
- Conservation of key historic buildings
- Eg Unicorn Public House
- Improvement of shopfronts

Regeneration;

- Removal and regeneration of 1960's infill eg High St/Lowbourne
- Smartening of pedestrian precinct

Streets and Public Realm

Appearance and Image;

- Cleanliness and upkeep of streets and furniture, including on town centre gateways
- Opportunities to "dress" the town centre eg Southgate Bath butterflies.
- Street scene design to compliment heritage buildings
- More street planting and flowers

Town Centre Management;

- Address traffic speed and noise
- Street management to enable "café culture" for outside hospitality
- Improved public seating eg Market Place benches

Green Space and Water

Making Connections;

- Make the most of high quality of existing green spaces
- Creation of linking "green walks" through the town centre linking to green spaces and the station

Wildlife and Nature;

- Increasing town centre nature
- Increasing ecology richness within parks and green spaces

Riverside Access;

- Linking into and enhancing riverside walk

River activity;

- Encourage kayaking and boats

Riverside Development Sites;

- Develop to create increased riverside vitality.

Still Water;

- Create a (or make more of the existing) lake!

Movement Connectivity and Accessibility

Walking and Cycling

- Walking and Cycling Connections;
- Wayfinding
- Good and safe connections to the town centre including from the station

- Signed walking and cycling connections linking town centre to green spaces and the countryside

A Healthy Town Centre;

- Signed walking, dog walking and running routes linking green spaces, riverside and park Safety;
- Safe pavements for pedestrians and lanes for cyclists
- Improved pedestrian crossings eg Bank Street/Lowbourne and entrance to campus.

Pedestrianisation;

- Partial pedestrianisation from church St to Lowbourne
- Pedestrianize the Town Bridge

Buses;

- improved links between station and town centre

Car Parking Management;

- Improved management of existing car parking including;
- Conservation area resident parking
- Increased free disabled permit parking
- Free local business parking and Campus car park management
- Parking controls near take-aways

Public Car Parks Capacity;

- Optimising capacity including decking at Kings St.

Feedback on Regeneration Clusters

Cluster 1 The Civic and Campus Quarter

73% Support

Suggested Uses

Leisure and Culture

- Adventure centre, like The Arc in Chippenham
- Ice rink Skate Park, BMX track
- Entertainment; cinema/bowling/laser tag
- Drama Club and Theatre

Housing and Community Facilities

- Subsidised community/cultural space
- Doctors Surgery
- Housing on the old Blue Pool and Lloyds Bank

Business

- Small business spaces,

Blue Pool

- Retirement flats are not suitable at the Blue Pool due to the noise from the Assembly Hall.
- Make the old swimming pool a bowling alley.

Assembly Hall

- Assembly hall should remain a music venue/use for leisure
- theatre, opera, lectures and cinema use
- Assembly Hall is too big, old and expensive and occupies a valuable site.
- Build a new hall which attracts new acts and bands and which could be used for wedding receptions etc
- Redevelop into homes and cafe/bars

Melksham House

- Melksham house should be a public building
- Arts quarter with sculptures in ground
- The library into Melksham House,
- Melksham museum
- Transfer Assembly Hall use into Melksham House for smaller events and a new hall built at the back of the old library.

Lloyds Bank

- public amenities, cinema, exhibition space, reading rooms, a museum.

Campus Access;

- Entrance to Campus should be off A350, use the same entrance as cemetery to make both safer.
- Market Place entrance reserved for foot and pedal traffic,

Cluster 2 Former Library, Restaurant and Car Park

72% Support

Suggested uses:

- Flats and affordable housing with active ground floors supported
- Leisure cultural facilities in this area
- Nursery
- Local hospital, GPs, nurses, care hubs
- Community project space in the library.
- Retail
- Nightlife, a cinema / bowling alley

Cluster 3 Avonside, Cooper Tires and The City

94% support

Regeneration principles:

Most popular

- Accessible river path, to use and enjoy the riverside: 77.88%
- Walk & cycle links between the station and town centre: 67.26%

- Cultural and entertainment facilities 60.18%

Least Popular:

- Re-establish the historic street pattern 27.43%
- Reflect interesting features within a modern context 30.97%
- New homes 31.86%

Suggested Uses

- Extension to the centre of Melksham
- Mixture of housing/flats, leisure looking onto the river
- Supplemented with the Kennet & Avon canal link as proposed by Wilts/Berks Canal Trust. Marina and mooring points (linked to canal)
- Riverside open space and sports pitches

Conservation;

- Conserve the main old house. Potential museum,
- Repurpose the 1930's old Cooper tire canteen.
- Keep Coopers entry sign,

Wider Cluster Area

- Avonside converted to riverside apartments.
- More consideration to area around train station

Suggested Refinements and Changes to the Draft Town Centre Master Plan Report

Purpose of the TCMP Report and Scope for Changes

The AECOM Town Centre Master Plan Report is an independent technical report and evidence base of the Neighbourhood Plan.

It informs and influences policy and strategy. It provides a strong national context to Town Centre planning.

Studies into key themes are high level and illustrative. They raise town centre principles and illustrate how could be applied with inspirational examples. The report is not intended to set out a detailed master plan or a strategy for its delivery.

It is however, important that the report identifies themes, assets and principles that have the input from engagement undertaken by the Steering Group. AECOM will therefore be asked to refine the report to reflect this. However, feedback will also inform the setting of more detailed projects, land-use criteria and priorities set out in a delivery framework. See C below.

Changes to the AECOM evidence base report will also need to be mindful of the limitations on the Locality Technical Support package that funded it.

As a result, requested amendments will be high level and relatively small. The feedback from the engagement will more significantly inform the strategy and delivery framework.

Proposed Amendments

Section 4 Engagement

The Steering Group will provide narrative to summarise engagement undertaken. This will closely follow narrative provided in this briefing.

Section 6 Development Principles

Updating of the section will focus on the analysis “today” sections to more closely represent the values and issues identified through engagement.

Changes will seek a larger specific section on green and blue infrastructure. More is needed in relation to the existing and valued green space and the river. Some of the Sustainability and Climate section provides inspiration for greening the Town Centre. More is needed in relation to inspiring green connections and waterside environments.

Whilst the sustainability and climate section did not generate significant feedback, it is a central plank of the JMNP and a contributor to the 2030 carbon neutrality target. The section should be retained.

Section 7 Regeneration Clusters

Land use ideas from the feedback should be cross referenced with the AECOM report. This will result in the removal of some suggestions that will not be feasible or popular. It will add suggestions in where they enrich ideas made by AECOM. Again, more references to green space and the river will be sought in relation to each cluster.

Section 8 Next Steps

The first next step should be to receive and sign off a revised final TCMP Report as an evidence base to the JMNP2. It may then be published.

NEXT Steps and Actions

The TCMP report sets out potential next steps. It is suggested these are refined. Refinements should reflect the approach to advancing JMNP2 and the parallel but distinct approach of advancing the TCMP.

JMNP2

The AECOM TCMP report will become part of the evidence base supporting the review of Town Centre policy 9.

TCMP

The approach could broadly follow the four stages outlined by Place Studio and validated by the Town Council at its January meeting.

Stage 1; Delivery Strategy and Process Plan

- Strategy Development
- Resourcing Analysis
- Schedule for Incremental Projects
- Securing grant funding for quick win projects (Town Council)

Stage 2; Helping secure a Melksham Community Led Partnership

- Joint Meeting/Workshop Facilitation
- Design and Facilitation of Stakeholder Dialogue and Engagement
- Design and Delivery of Community Consultation

Stage 3; Progressing the Master Projects

- Brief Agreement
- Analysis and Survey Coordination
- Scheme Concept Design to Specification
- Engagement Process
- Resourcing

Stage 4; Planning Application Dialogue/Review

- Development Proposal Assessment
- Pre-application Dialogue
- Town Council Application Consultation Response

Updating JMNP2 Draft Town Centre Policy 9

Parallel to completing the TCMP report, Steering Group will receive and be asked to validate revisions to Policy 9 to reference the need for development to respond to delivery of the TCMP priorities. The validated AECOM report outlines these.

Reporting Engagement

Engagement has closed. It has produced feedback that has informed;

- The town centre master plan report
- Local green Space Designations
- Local Non-designated Heritage Listing
- The Melksham Design Code

Feedback has now been collated. Reports of feedback produced.

It is now possible to make material available to stakeholders and the public.

The following methods are proposed;

General Communication.

- Thanks to all who attended and involved.
- Background
- Summary of what was consulted on, when and how.
- Potential link to material
- What events and methods were employed
- Attendance and who attended

Feedback

- Headlines on each topic
- NB using summaries produced.
- Links to full summary reports

Next Steps

- Summary for JMNP2 and
- TCMP (as above)

Wider Update (Optional)

JMNP2 General Update

- Updating on housing and other topics eg green gaps.
- A forward programme for JMNP2 consultations

JMNP1 Performance

- Highlighting recent planning decisions relating to speculative development
- refused quoting JMNP1.

External factors;

- NPPF changes to Paragraph 14 protection period
- Local Plan Publication

Circulation

- Emails providing thanks and links to updates and reports to;
 - JMNP2 Mailing List
 - Town Centre Invited Stakeholders
 - Key Partners
- Website News Update with links
- Social Media Links
- Melksham News Update
- Potential Town and Parish Council briefings.

Programming of Communications

Feedback related solely to the consultation can be dispatched during May.

If communications are to include forward programming it will be prudent to wait until we know about the NPPF and both Councils have agreed any resulting programme changes.

Recommended

Consultation feedback is provided in May. It contains a notice to watch for further updates.

Feedback communications and content is agreed informally by email with SG members before the next meeting.

A full programme and process update is provided later in the summer following receipt of information and decisions.

