

Objection to the proposal within PO4: Distribution of Sites for Housing; Sites within the town centre, Leamington fire station

Summary

The development of the Leamington fire station site should not form part of the Local Plan. This site is of crucial cultural, visual and historic importance to Leamington as a whole. The nature of the community around the area should be preserved as representative of a harmonious, varied town community that the Local Plan aspires to achieve. There will be development of the site when or if the fire station is re-located and opportunities should not be lost to contribute the stature of Leamington Spa by simply specifying it as high density housing and precluding any other type of development. Whilst significant to the area, in planning terms fifty homes is a small number which could be accommodated within existing proposals or in other areas throughout the town, such as the site of the Royal Spa centre should it move to south of the town.

Why this proposal fails to support other preferred options within the draft Local Plan.

PO3 Included in this option is the desire to avoid existing settlements merging.

There are large multi-occupancy developments at Churchill house, Clarence Mansions, Westbrook House and Warwick Terrace and further such development at the fire station site would result in a continuum of all these residences and overwhelm the area.

PO4 All proposed town centre housing development lies within a small triangle to the northwest of the town bordered by the railway line, Warwick Place and Dale street. This seems disproportionate.

PO 5 Affordable homes: There are many small apartments around this site (see PO3 above). A development of fifty homes, being greater than the number houses on Grove Street would swamp the diverse character of the street.

PO6 Grove Street is an exemplar mixed community. There are retail properties, houses of multiple occupancy, student accommodation, young families, retired couples and working households. No one element outweighs the other. The tower block on Brook Street houses owner occupiers and social housing tenants. The balance of this mix would be lost with a development greater than that which already exists.

PO13 'Much can be done to deliver inclusive, safe and healthy communities through the Local Plan by controlling the location and design of development.'

This site is a sensitive location in Leamington, of interest to many town residents and the future of the site is of concern to them. The vibrancy of the Grove Street community would be overwhelmed by inappropriate development. For these reasons the development of the site needs to be given careful consideration outside the Local Plan.

PO14 Transport: Any development will lead to road safety issues (many young families, wide street, speeding cars), parking problems (especially after 5pm) and congestion. There is no reassurance in the plan that they have been given due consideration.

PO15 At a density of 50 homes it is difficult to see how this development will 'make a positive contribution to the quality of the natural and historic environment' of Leamington town centre. There will be no space for green space or gardens and little scope to reflect the historic significance of the site.

How this proposal misses the opportunity to achieve other preferred options in the Local Plan

PO8 Economy: Currently the site offers employment. Planning decisions at this stage should not exclude a continuation of this. The draft Local Plan says that existing employment land will be protected.

PO9 Retailing and Town Centres: The contribution this site makes to the town centre needs to be carefully thought through. A rush to residential development, whilst fulfilling a planning need for brownsite development, may prove a missed opportunity to benefit the Leamington community as a whole.

PO10 Built environment: The design of buildings at this site is of key importance to Leamington town centre; the fire station has been voted the most ugly building in Leamington. Many residents are ashamed of it in comparison to Leamington's Regency architecture. Also a development of fifty homes is not in keeping with the principle of sustainable garden towns. Under these guidelines the density range for dwellings in a district or local centre is 35-40 dwellings per hectare. The fire station site is approximately half a hectare or around 20 houses. The proposal of 50 homes is over twice that.

PO11 Historic environment: This option says that protection from inappropriate development will be provided. Development of this site when the fire station moves is an opportunity for planners to redress past mistakes. This is an historically important site being the site of the home of Dr Jephson, father of Leamington spa in whose honour the gardens were planted. Past mistakes have allowed it to become an embarrassment to the town.

Grove street lies in the conservation area and houses on the West of the street are listed. This was a decision taken in the past to discourage over representation of houses of multiple occupancy and encourage families to live in the town centre. This has been successful with Grove Street having a diverse yet balanced variety of homes. (Nine of the twenty three properties on the west side of Grove Street have children of nursery or primary school age) Any development should be respectful of this and not overwhelm the existing community.

PO17 Culture and tourism: If the site of the old Ford factory on Princes Drive is seen as the gateway to Leamington then this site could be seen as its front door. It is the first major cross roads in the town as people arrive in town or travel north. It should be visually well designed and distinctive to visitors, setting the tone for Leamington.

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