



Saxmundham Town Council

The Old Police Station, Station Approach, Saxmundham, Suffolk,
IP17 1BW, Tel: 01728 604595, VAT Registration No: 571060663

Email: townclerk@saxmundham.org

www.saxmundham.org

Chief Planning Officer
East Suffolk Council
East Suffolk House
Station Road
Melton
IP12 1RT

31st July 2019

For the attention of Chris Green

Dear Sir/Madam,

Saxmundham Station Building - Planning application DC/19/2685/FUL from Abellio Greater Anglia (Mr John Mottershead):

Opinion of Saxmundham Town Council and related comments

I am writing formally on behalf of Saxmundham Town Council to set out our opinion in relation to this application.

Saxmundham Station is in the centre of our fast-growing town, set in the Conservation Area. It also acts as 'Gateway' to the wider East Suffolk coast and other attractions. What happens to it is of fundamental importance to the town, as well as to the tens of thousands of rail users to and from the wider region.

First impressions matter. We had, until the fire of February 2018, a fine Victorian 2 storey building which – until boarded up some years earlier and allowed to decay – formed a decent entry-point to the town.

While initial plans were discussed back in November 2018 at a meeting at which the Town Council was represented, our Council – and more importantly, our residents generally - had not been consulted by Greater Anglia on their plans, which include not only the Station Building, the subject of this application, but for their site as a whole which we learn is to become in effect a paved carpark.

Once we learnt of the lodging of this application, we set about consulting our town's residents. We organised a public session to discuss the proposals, which took place last night (Monday 29th) and was followed by the Town Council's consideration of the application, in order to meet your deadline for our response.

At the public session, which was attended by around 80 members of the public, we were joined by two members of the Greater Anglia team, invited by us, who explained the plans for building, platforms and car park area, and sought to answer questions. We greatly welcome this first opportunity with GA to discuss their

plans of fundamental importance to the town, but it was simply not possible to explore or resolve satisfactorily all the issues raised in the time available.

Not only is the Station set in the Conservation Area, it is also in an area which the Final Draft Local Plan highlights within the Saxmundham Strategy:

“The strategy for Saxmundham is to:

a) Enhance the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre, including through protecting and enhancing the historic core of the town and the railway station”.

At para. 12.279, the Draft Plan cites the Ipswich Borough & Suffolk Coastal District Retail and Commercial Leisure Town Centre Study (October 2017), which also identifies “redevelopment/regeneration of the area around the railway station” as an opportunity.

Our Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group has also identified the wider station area as a key potential site for regeneration, in which the Station Building and the GA site as a whole would form key components, and we have written to Greater Anglia and Network Rail to offer our full co-operation in assessing the potential for the area, which would bring economic, social and environmental benefits.

After listening to the representatives of Greater Anglia and to the points raised by local people, and after considering the application and related documentation, the Town Council resolved as follows:

Saxmundham Town Council welcomes the opportunity to discuss with Abellio Greater Anglia the redevelopment of Saxmundham Station and, in particular, the wider area around the Station.

We also fully share the objective of an early, well-designed Station Building for Saxmundham and will work constructively towards it.

The Town Council nevertheless has serious concerns about the current application and therefore opposes it.

Our grounds and concerns include:

- ***The proposed building design, which does not meet the required standard or scale for the location and heritage of the building***
- ***The absence of provision in the application for community and/or passenger-serving uses of the building, such as a café or shop***
- ***The large size of the space reserved for 'operational purposes', and the consequent smallness of the waiting room***
- ***The need for adequate shelter and seating on platform two, which, although not part of this application, should be designed as part of the Station as a whole.***
- ***The absence of provision of WCs***
- ***The need to design the Station Building in the context of the wider site, including any landscaping, to be sympathetic to and consistent with its Conservation Area status, and the potential for the future regeneration of the wider area.***

Our concerns, and points related to other aspects of the proposed development of the site, are further detailed in the attached Annex, which forms an integral part of our representations.

At last night's public meeting, Greater Anglia's officers undertook to provide further information including drawings that would show the proposed design and 'look' much more clearly. They also indicated that after a period when the larger room would be used for "operational purposes", it might be made available for commercial or community purposes. However, this is not stated in the planning application.

One important issue involves the relationship between the Station Building, for which this application has been made, and the rest of the GA site, which is mainly to be turned into a larger (paying) car park, and for which no application has been made. We assume this is considered by GA to be permitted development under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. Although this was not discussed at our meeting, I have consulted my councillor colleagues, and we believe it would be far better to deal with the whole area (building and car park) together, as the issues inter-connect. The local planning authority does have power to require this, if necessary.

As an example, in the attached Annex setting out our concerns, the issue of car park and landscaping is referred to, on which we have not been consulted. In a Conservation Area, the quality of landscaping of and around a large car park is important. We draw attention to the issue of 'trees and hedges' (last point in the Annex), as the planning application for the station building argues – incorrectly in our view - that there are no trees on the adjacent (car park) land which might be important for the landscape character.

(We have also noted a point of apparently inaccurate wording of the planning application: "...the construction of a new flat roof to the single-storey brick structure.." which is in fact contradicted by the planning statement and drawings for the building, which show a pitched roof for the main area.)

We are confident that, with appropriate information, consultation and some improvements, an acceptable solution can be found, given the will and a little more time. We are anxious not to let the present awful condition of the Station continue for long, but it is worth a little time to get the right design and solution.

For information, we have drawn up a petition to Greater Anglia which summarises many residents' concerns, has proved popular, and which asks GA to :

- (i) carry out full consultation, as a matter of urgency, with residents and users of the station over the design of the station building and surrounds, to find a solution acceptable to all parties, in keeping with the heritage of the building, and the Conservation Area,
- (ii) ensure that the building is available for services for rail users such as café, and relevant community facilities
- (iii) work with the Town Council and interested parties on plans for a redevelopment of the station area that brings economic, social and environmental benefits.

Yours faithfully,

Jeremy Smith
Chairman,
Saxmundham Town Council
07951 032 283