



Elected Members Briefing Meeting: 10th October 2023

Proposal: Mixed Use development - Residential (Class 8, Class 9 and sui generis), Class 1A (Retail), Class 3 (Restaurants and cafes), hot food takeaways/public houses, Class 4 (Office), Class 10 (Non-residential institutions) and Class 11 (Leisure) with associated access, landscaping, outdoor space and public realm works, parking and infrastructure.

Site: Artizan Centre 37 College Way Dumbarton

1. Purpose

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide Members with information relating to an application for Planning Permission in Principle at the site of the Artizan Centre at College Way / High Street, Dumbarton.

This briefing will give members an opportunity to understand the proposal and highlight any issues which they consider the proposal ought to address. The merits of the proposals are not being considered, and no decisions will be made at this stage. The agreed procedures and protocol for Elected Member involvement at the pre-application stage are attached as appendices.

2. Background

The site is located in Dumbarton Town Centre and comprises a 1970's built shopping centre known as the "Artizan Centre". The site is 2.8 hectares in area and comprises five two and three storey buildings predominantly in retail use. Approximately 50% of the retail units are vacant. The site is presently in the ownership of the Council. The site includes buildings fronting High Street which are within the Dumbarton Conservation area.

Partial demolition of the vacant Artizan units to the rear at Risk Street (including the former post Office building) will commence later in 2023 and is expected to take 24 weeks. The substation located within one of the units will be retained for a period of time following the demolition, and relocated within the next 18 months as part of the next phase of the redevelopment works.

The Council received £19.9m from the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) to tackle the decline of the town centre and deliver three key projects in Dumbarton: Glencairn House; Connecting Dumbarton and the redevelopment of the Artizan Centre. The overall LUF programme value including the Council's £2.2m contribution is £22.1m. £10.165m has been allocated towards the Artizan Centre to cover acquisition, part demolition, project developments and consultancy as well as construction works. The Council must spend all grant funding by the end of the funding period, 31 March 2025. In the LUF application the Council committed to delivery of the following outputs for the Artizan centre:

- Enable delivery of 105 total residential units, all of which will be affordable homes.
- Enable the delivery of a new 4,750m² Civic Centre as part of the redevelopment in central location.
- Enhance 730m² of ground floor retail property.

Stakeholder engagement has included two public consultation events undertaken in 24th August and 28th September 2023 and online public consultation between 24th August – 9th October 2023.

3. Site Description

In the past the site was originally housing for the large industrial population of Dumbarton set out in narrow 'rigg' plot formation along College Street. It also previously hosted bowling greens along with a Free Church. When the Artizan Centre was first built in the 1970s, it featured a large town square bounded by shops, the Denny Theatre and Concorde Community Centre and the Free Church. The square was built over in the 1990s by further retail buildings, forming the outdoor shopping mall. Today, the site comprises a mix of occupied and vacant buildings, car parking, service yards and hard landscaping with a variety of uses including retail shops, cafés and a dance studio.

4. Development Details

The vision for the site is to deliver a transformative regeneration project that:

- Creates a resilient and thriving place that meets the needs of the wider community.
- Rebalances uses to provide a more resilient mix and stimulate footfall.
- Consolidates retail, introduces new town centre housing and creates positive public place.

Like many town centres across Scotland, Dumbarton must look to ensure its long term sustainability, as shopping patterns and the retail sector evolves. As such, the proposed regeneration of the Artizan seeks to introduce a mix of uses, including a possible health centre and a number of new homes across the site. In addition, the regeneration will also deliver significant areas of new public realm, including much needed green space, public space and landscaping. In consolidating retail areas and introducing supplementary uses, as well as new residents, it is intended that Dumbarton Town Centre continues to be a thriving and sustainable neighbourhood.

Planning Permission in Principle (PPiP) is sought for a mixed use development led by a masterplan approach, illustrating how the site could be developed with the proposed uses. A phasing plan will be associated with the masterplan which will demonstrate how the site may support development coming forward over time.

In summary, the proposed development includes:

- Up to 112 residential units of different types and tenures;
- Circa 5,000m² Primary Healthcare facility;
- Circa 2,800m² of active ground floor use within retained buildings of retail, restaurants, cafes, hot food takeaways/public houses, Office use and Leisure uses;
- Circa 1,700m² of first floor use within retained buildings of retail, office and leisure uses;
- Circa 350m² of active ground floor use within new buildings of retail, restaurants and cafes, hot food takeaways/public houses, Office, Leisure uses;
- Creation of car parking of 80 spaces and internal access roads; and
- Creation of new Public Square with hard and soft landscaping spaces and pedestrian routes.

5. Planning Policies

The site is partly within the 'Clyde Mission' area, with National Planning Framework 4.

National Planning Framework (NPF4) –NPF4 does not contain any site specific policies for West Dunbartonshire. However, part of the Artizan Centre site does fall within the Clyde Mission National Development area identified as one of eighteen National Developments. It recognises that significant land assets are under-utilised across the Clyde, and that longstanding inequality, in relation to poor environment and health outcomes, require to be tackled as a national priority. The Clyde Mission designation aims to repurpose and reinvigorate vacant and derelict land as well as adapting the area to the impacts of climate change, where nature-based solutions would be particularly supported.

Mixed use redevelopment of the Artizan centre site would be in keeping with the Clyde Mission National Development. In addition, many of the general policies of NPF4 would be supportive in principle of the redevelopment of the site for mixed uses including Policy 9 (Brownfield, vacant and derelict land and empty buildings), Policy 15 (Local living and 20 minute neighbourhoods), and Policy 27 (City, town, local and commercial centres). Policy 16 (Quality homes) sets criteria for the development of homes on sites not allocated in the development plan for that purpose (which is the case for the Artizan Centre).

Flexibility in applying these criteria would be required when assessing any proposal for housing on the Artizan Centre site, and Policy 27 offers specific support for town centre living.

Policy 7 refers to the protection and enhancement of valued historic assets and places in terms of affecting the character of listed buildings and Conservation Areas.

Adopted Local Plan (2010) – the Artizan Centre sits within the identified town centre boundary, where there is support for new retail, commercial leisure, cultural and public service developments. Land to the north of the centre (north of St Mary's Way, GD2 (18)) is identified as a redevelopment opportunity for retail/business/ancillary parking. Land to the west of the centre (the car park, RET4 (6)) is identified for additional retail floorspace. The Artizan centre forms part of the retail core in the adopted plan, where there is a presumption against change of use from retail.

The Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area post-dates the Local Plan so there is no reference in the Adopted Local Plan.

Proposed Local Development Plan (LDP2, as modified, 2020) – the Artizan Centre sits within the identified town centre boundary. The Development Strategy for the town centre supports mixed use development and improvements to the Artizan Centre. Dumbarton Policy 1 supports a more diverse and vibrant town centre and encourages a range of uses, where these accord with Policy SC2. Policy SC2 identifies core town centre areas (Artizan sits within this) and supports use classes 1, 2, 3, 7, 11 (shops, financial/professional services, restaurants and cafes, hotels and hostels, and assembly and leisure) and public houses. Policies BE2 and BE3 protect Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas.

Depending on the actual mix of uses proposed, other policies from each of the plans could apply. Also, each of the plans contain general policies relating to matters such as flooding, design, sustainability, accessibility, biodiversity, etc that will also be applicable. For example, it is known that the Artizan Centre is in an area at risk of flooding, and each of the plans have policies relating to this (for example Policy 22 in NPF4 on Flood risk and water management). Different uses have different sensitivity to flooding, meaning some uses might be acceptable in a particular area, whilst others are not.

Revised urban strategy (2014) – the Artizan Centre is identified as a Large Project. The strategy identifies the Artizan Centre as having a negative impact on parts of the town centre and states the Council will support incremental change or radical redevelopment. Main uses in this area (including introduction of a traditional grid pattern to area to north) would be retail, office, some residential, leisure, food and drink and other appropriate town centre uses. Design guidance is provided. This shows development blocks to east and west of College Way, with northern block removed.

6. Main Issues

The main issues requiring to be addressed by the planning permission in principle application will include the following:

Placemaking and Design Principles: The mixed use redevelopment is being led by a masterplan approach. Placemaking ambitions should be embedded into the proposals which in turn will inform the masterplan layout as it evolves. The layout and architecture of the new development should ensure it maximises and takes advantage of its town centre location and the Conservation Area, deliver multi-functional green infrastructure spaces and biodiversity enhancements as well as harness opportunities for active travel. Dumbarton has a rich history and this should be reflected in the design and form of development to create a future-proof high quality development in the heart of Dumbarton Town Centre.

Masterplan: The masterplan approach provides a structured approach to how the site will be taken forward and developed in the future. It demonstrates the specific areas for the particular uses as well as identifying the specific requirements for active travel, green space and biodiversity. Any future applications for Approval of Matters Specified in Condition (detailed) will require to be guided by the agreed masterplan which would bring economic, social and environmental benefits to the local area.

Proposed uses: The adopted Local Plan (2010) and Proposed Local Development Plan (LDP2, 2020, but prepared in 2018), predate the COVID pandemic and the significant changes to the future of town centres that were accelerated during this period. These plans predicted a continued retail focus for the Artizan Centre, which is now, similar to many other town centres, less viable. The most current part of the Development Plan (NPF4) supports a more mixed use future for town centres, including town centre living. Neither the Adopted Local Plan nor Proposed LDP2 envisioned residential development on the Artizan Centre, meaning its development for residential purposes does raise some conflict with NPF4, which sets criteria for residential development on unallocated sites. However, it is considered that this is a matter of timing, and that in principle support does exist for residential development.

Relationship with adjacent uses: The massing of the new buildings should respond to the context of adjacent buildings, as well as define key routes and spaces within the site. Part of the site fronting High Street is within the Dumbarton Town Centre Conservation Area and therefore any new development should be in keeping with the character of the Conservation Area and adjacent listed buildings in terms of massing, scale, design and materials. New development should add to and strengthen the Conservation Area status and act as a catalyst for further development in the town centre and support long term town centre regeneration.

Proximity of Mixed Uses: In order to deliver a mix of uses on the site, the design proposal must carefully consider the proximity of different uses, ensuring public routes and spaces are activated by relevant uses at ground floor, whilst also ensuring that the privacy of new homes and future residents is maintained at all times. The introduction of defensible space, as well as maintaining legible pedestrian routes through the site to manage these relationships has been encouraged.

Phasing: Critical to the delivery of any masterplan is ensuring that phasing strategies are considered at this early stage, to manage practical delivery, but also reduce the impact on existing businesses. Unlike many masterplans, which deliver building forms first, with landscape being the final phase, the proposal seeks to place the new areas of landscape and public realm as the initial priority for phase one. In doing so, residents should start to benefit from the redevelopment at the earliest possible time, with new areas of high quality landscape to enjoy, as well as improved pedestrian routes through the site and wider town centre.

Accessibility and Parking: The site is highly accessible with good connections to the other parts of the town centre, bus stops and the train station. The redevelopment should encourage use of more sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling. The historic north-south route that previously existed on the site would be reinstated. This supports greater pedestrian connection to Dumbarton Station, as well as providing opportunities for large areas of public realm. There are a number of town centre car parks in close proximity to the site together with the provision of 80 spaces within the site.

Green Infrastructure and Public Realm: The new development should demonstrate that landscape character, fabric and amenity have been carefully considered and guide future development of the site in terms of creating a quality place with character. The new areas of public realm should have a positive sense of enclosure which is critical for such spaces as well as providing opportunities for recreating a modern town square in the heart of the town centre.

Community and Economic Benefits: Consideration should be given to the wider community and economic benefits it brings to the local area in terms of creating jobs for local people and providing wider health and wellbeing benefits. Local people will benefit from these facilities as well as it will attract visitors and tourists to the Town Centre and wider area.

Flooding: The entirety of the site is within the SEPA future coastal flood risk area (accounting for climate change). NPF4 places a higher threshold on flood risk than previously was the case. For Dumbarton town centre this an increased coastal flood risk level of 85cm by 2100. Previous areas at risk of coastal flooding were those below 4.41m. Post NPF4 this now extends to areas below 5.26m. A further freeboard allowance of 60cm is required for the finished floor level of new buildings. This presents a significant challenge to the Artizan project. Whilst residential can be built above these levels with basement parking, safe access and egress needs to be maintained.

At present the phasing of the development would potentially create 'islands of development' which are unacceptable under Policy 22 of NPF4 and continuing discussions are taking place with SEPA and the Scottish Government to agree a solution and a way forward for the development.

Contamination – As with any brownfield redevelopment site, matters relating to possible ground contamination will require to be addressed. A Site Investigation will require to be carried out and this together with the wider development proposals will be considered by the Council's Environmental Health team in terms of the scope of work and information required to be submitted with the planning application. This engagement has already commenced during the pre-application stage.

7. Next Steps

All Elected Members are invited to attend a presentation on the proposals by members of the design team, and to participate in a subsequent discussion.

Following this pre-application meeting, the applicant intends to finalise their planning application for submission and address any comments received during this meeting.

On receipt of any such application it would be advertised in the press, weekly list and the Council website to allow the public to view the plans and make representation. The application would then be presented to Planning Committee and Council for consideration and determination in due course.

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Date: 2nd October 2023

Appendices: Location Plan

Procedures and protocol for Elected Member involvement at the pre-application stage

Wards affected: Ward 3 – Dumbarton

