

Reserved Matters Planning Application 25/0158/FH: Folkestone Seafront plots F, G and H

1. The vast majority of the objections raised against the Reserved Matters Application (RMA) for plots F, G and H essentially concern the principle of the development. It is crucial to recognise that this was settled a long time ago, both by the allocation of the harbour and seafront as one of the strategic housing schemes for Folkestone in the Council's adopted local plan, and by the grant of outline planning permission for the site over a decade ago in 2015 and updated in 2017.
2. This is not, therefore, a speculative application on a greenfield site but one where we have taken a consistent approach that followed the plan-led system that implements a major element of the Council's own planning policy for Folkestone. Given that the harbour and seafront is allocated for up to 1000 homes in the Council's local plan and our updated outline planning permission sets the height and other dimensions within which detailed development proposals must sit, there can be no question of reconsidering the principle of the proposed development at this stage.
3. Planning permission has already been granted for the proposed development and the application before the Council is to deal with subsequent detailed matters concerning principally layout, access, scale, appearance, landscaping and public realm for plots F, G and H. We have listened throughout the process to the views of local people and all consultees and responded in revisions of these detailed design matters. Following the refusal of the previous RMA in January, we have made some further changes to the scheme to meet some of the concerns raised. These include moving a residential block further away from the platform of the refurbished Folkestone harbour station, as well as detailed attention to materials and signage to further enhance the heritage appeal of the station. We have also increased the provision of public car parking by over 50% and have included a car club to reduce the demand for car parking from residents. The position now reached is a proposed development which is not only fully compliant with the requirements of the outline planning permission, but in our opinion is now the optimum in both policy and design terms.
4. Many of the objections made against this RMA concern impact on the heritage of Folkestone harbour station. The Council is reminded that the award-winning comprehensive refurbishment of the harbour station and its associated buildings was entirely our initiative. There was no requirement to do so in the

original outline planning permission, however we have invested heavily in what is now an undeniably popular and commercially successful new asset to Folkestone. Objections which criticise the RMA for adversely affecting the achievement of the bringing back to purposeful use a completely redundant, abandoned and derelict range of buildings and structures, fail to appreciate this context. It would be bizarre for us to deliberately jeopardise the integrity and financial success of the Folkestone harbour station and its heritage appeal through the development proposed by the RMA.

5. Although a substantial scheme in its own right, the harbour and seafront development complements and reinforces the comprehensive regeneration efforts for Folkestone as a whole. So popular is the harbour, particularly following the installation of the refurbished railway wagons as unique and bespoke restaurant kitchens and dining facilities, that if the RMA is approved work will start in assessing the viability of refurbishing the three Pullman carriages which we own and which are presently languishing in a siding at Shepherdswell. These could be installed alongside one of the harbour stations and add to the huge appeal and attractiveness of our wide range of food and beverage offers.
6. We are also very aware of local concerns about the adequacy of visitor car parking at the harbour. Whilst the RMA is fully compliant with the car parking requirements of the County Council, as the local highway authority, our long term intention is to construct a multi storey car park on the site of an existing surface car park we own off Marine Parade.
7. Conversely, if the RMA application is refused, it is unlikely either of these further regeneration initiatives would be progressed. Moreover, our heavy financial investment in the harbour needs to be recouped through the profits of residential development, the subject of the RMA application. If this does not take place, continuing investment in the harbour would be unlikely and there would probably have to be a curtailment in the range of our activities in order to reduce costs.
8. If the RMA is approved, we will be required to pay over £5m, the balance of the Section 106 obligation applicable to Plots F, G and H, entered into following the grant of outline planning permission. This includes a very substantial contribution to local GP services and a further contribution to the Leas Lift. Plainly, if the RMA application is refused, these obligations will not arise and the consequences for these long-awaited and highly regarded regeneration initiatives will be for the Council to justify. In addition, the Council will be faced with a major failure of the housing provisions set out in its own local plan and it will be required to look elsewhere in Folkestone for at least half of the housing

numbers which the harbour and seafront site allocation would otherwise provide.

9. The Council's Planning Committee is reminded of the legal advice we have received about the extent of decision-making discretion in determining a RMA. We have every expectation that having received outline planning permission, that there should be no impediment to the implementation of the scheme. We hope to avoid the costs to us and the Council of going to appeal if the RMA is refused.

Folkestone Harbour (GP) Ltd

16 June 2025