

Bognor Regis Regeneration Sites

Response to Call for
Expressions of Interest

About Seaward Properties

Seaward Properties ('Seaward') is an established Chichester-based property company that is at the forefront of designing and building award-winning residential and commercial developments across the South and South-East of England. Founded in 1972, Seaward has an enviable reputation as an award-winning developer, with a commitment to creating high-quality schemes which are design-led and respond to the character of an individual area.

Seaward has an excellent track record of delivering innovatively-designed developments to outstanding specifications, creating environments where people really want to be. Keynote schemes of late include the £28,000,000 redevelopment of Eastgate Square in Chichester, which included land previously owned by Chichester District Council. The company has also successfully completed a number of previous developments in Bognor Regis.

Seaward believes that developing practical working relationships with third parties through open dialogue is the cornerstone of achieving successful outcomes. Consultation and engagement, therefore, play a leading role in the scope of all projects. This has led to the business gaining a reputation as a property developer with flair and imagination.

- On the basis of the above, we believe this project needs to be viewed and considered differently; delivering and bringing new uses to these sites is about achieving their 'redevelopment' not 'regeneration'
- With redevelopment being the focus and new watchword for these sites, a more measured and realistic view should, in our opinion, be considered by ADC
- The redevelopment of these sites could, potentially, act as the first phase of a town-wide regeneration plan and vision, which seeks to advance the earlier masterplan produced for Bognor Regis in 2004
- Historic approaches to seeing development delivered on these sites have failed on the basis that they have been driven by developer-led masterplans
- Recognition must be given to the fact that, to date, there is no clear mandate from the local level for the scope and core requirements of the project
- In light of the above and in order to achieve the redevelopment of these two sites in a cost-effective, positive manner, a new grass-roots development plan is needed based firmly on local community dialogue and collaboration
- Seaward has the experience, ambition and skills to help generate what is ultimately desired by all parties, which is securing some form of physical, social and economic value from the delivery of new uses on these sites

"To move this project on, there needs to be a clear understanding of what is really at stake, a clear understanding about what this could mean for the town and a clear understanding about what, in development terms, is actually best for Bognor Regis."

Introduction

As a Chichester-based business, Seaward has followed the progress of the Bognor Regis Regeneration project with interest over recent years and noted the departure of the previous development partner.

Following Arun District Council's (ADC) call for expressions of interest, Seaward considered that as a business it has something positive to offer and also say in respect of this project.

This submission is Seaward's formal response to ADC's call for expressions of interest. However, this submission does not follow the requirements set out. Our submission is based around a critical review of the project, an understanding of the key considerations and what these mean in terms of seeking to move proposals forward.

Executive summary – a new approach for the Bognor Regis sites

- If the aims of ADC are about regeneration, then a larger vision is needed – in essence, achieving regeneration will take more than the sum of these two sites
- If the positive outcomes of regeneration are to be fully achieved, then the town, its operations and its current structure needs to be considered as a whole and through a long-term, phased approach

The current vision – our assessment

We all recognise the complexities that come with development projects, be they large or small, residential or commercial. However, in this case, perhaps, the project has become too complex on the basis of the aspirations and objectives initially set out?

Whether the above point is accurate or not, what we do know is that much time, energy and investment has already been spent on this project. What remains as the missing piece of this development puzzle is the critical one – delivery. Seaward has observed, over several years, the trajectory of this project and what is overwhelming is the fact that there is no clear mandate.

A set of 'core requirements' remain, but, fundamentally, are these the right requirements if little consensus has been achieved and if the project is yet to be delivered? What does this tell us? In Seaward's view, this clearly tells us that there is a real need to consider a new approach without the 'development baggage' of recent years and not necessarily based on a developer-led masterplan.

An alternative vision

While Seaward acknowledges the requirements set out by ADC for those parties submitting expressions of interest, it is the company's firm belief that, when seeking to deliver value, (physical, economic and social), from the two sites in question, the below are key considerations. It is these considerations which have informed the alternative approach now being advocated.

The bigger picture

Regeneration is multi-faceted and, if this is the key objective of ADC, then a vision and project scope much larger than that offered by the two current sites is needed. Achieving regeneration is, therefore, something that is much bigger than the sum of these two sites put together.

If regeneration and its many social and economic benefits are to be realised through changes in places, uses and connections, then the way the town presently functions needs to be considered in the long term. In essence, a phased approach is warranted if real regeneration is to be delivered.

With this understanding, clarity over what is truly at the heart of this project can be obtained. This should lead to reduced requirements in terms of what is expected and, importantly, greater flexibility.

"The regeneration of this town is about much more than the sum of these two sites – it is about a long-term, phased approach based on understanding how the town presently functions and how people would like it to 'operate' in future."

Understanding and redefining the project

The two sites in question need to be viewed and considered differently. Instead of being branded as 'regeneration', the project needs to be redefined as one of 'redevelopment.' The issue of regeneration has, in Seaward's opinion, clouded the debate and the resultant progression of realistic and deliverable proposals.

Potentially, the positioning of the project and the higher level view adopted has affected its delivery. To date, the requirement is to see a multitude of uses included on what are in development terms, very limited parcels of land – Seaward's viewpoint is that, at present, it is a case of project scale outweighing practicalities of site size.

With the understanding that all involved are looking at a redevelopment project, then a new approach based around a 'less is more' ethos could be the answer to delivering an achievable outcome. It is hoped, therefore, that an outcome based on such an ethos will deliver the kind of development and, critically, the value that all parties wish for – District Council, Town Council, residents and businesses alike.

"With a fresh understanding of the project and its scope and with a new ethos defined by 'less is actually more', it is hoped that a practical, viable and acceptable development can be delivered that generates real local benefit and value."

Recognising what we already know

To help inform this submission and Seaward's thinking around the project, contact was held with local residents, representatives and other interested parties.

This local engagement, supported by dedicated community relations and communication consultants, Remarkable Engagement, generated feedback both on this specific site and issues associated with the wider town. The key points arising from the engagement completed to date as are follows:

- A cinema remains an unwelcomed and, importantly, unnecessary use, especially given the existing facility which is now benefiting from further investment and expansion
- That residential development is acknowledged as commercially necessary, within the realms of a mixed-use scheme
- That a new hotel would be welcomed, but with recognition this would be of the premier-budget variety
- There remains a need for a large-scale, multi-use space for the town
- Car parking provision remains a key issue locally
- There is a wish to see new retail space delivered
- An understanding that more needs to be made of the town's best asset, the beach, through addressing issues associated with connectivity.

Aside from local feedback, Seaward also sought professional opinion, with an initial commercial appraisal on likely occupiers having been completed. Key to this is the feedback that securing a cinema on this site is now unlikely, contrasted with that from budget hotel operators, which presents a more positive outlook.

Other potential and viable options in terms of end-users include student accommodation, a casino, a gym and a supermarket.

"The feedback is clear – there is limited wish for and commercial interest in the delivery of a new cinema. With this outlook, it must be time for the 'core requirements' to be revisited and replaced with flexible criteria based around community-led aspirations."

People and plans, not plans and people

The context in which proposals for these sites have previously been prepared is a critical point worthy of consideration. By this, Seaward means that the methods by which plans have moved forward in the past have only led to conflict on the basis that proposals have been developer-led. In light of the status of the project, Seaward considers it fair to state that another developer-led masterplan is not an approach that will deliver a positive outcome.

As a result, Seaward now advocates that a grass-roots approach is adopted, based around real dialogue and collaboration with a broad range of local people and groups, from Bognor Regis Town Council through to Bognor Regis Civic Society, local residents, businesses and many others. To assist in refining the scope of the redevelopment of these sites and to assist in moving a new masterplan forward, Seaward proposes that a redevelopment steering group is established. With the scope of the redevelopment of these sites completed, Seaward would reach out to the wider community and seek input into the creation of a new, viable masterplan, which, hopefully, attracts local support.

Seaward, believes that this project must be based around a people first, plans second approach.

"It is hoped that by adopting a fresh approach, with local stakeholders at the core, a scheme will be devised which attracts firm local support, ultimately delivering value for all partners in the process."

Recommendations for the future

It is on this basis that Seaward has not submitted, in line with ADC's requests, a masterplan and a fully costed proposal. Instead, Seaward is offering an alternative practical approach and vision – in essence, a way forward. As Seaward is not proposing a masterplan, which could be perceived by some as the route through which to deliver 'answers', it is instead making a series of recommendations for the future.

Seaward's recommendations, which could be developed into a 'development roadmap', are based on its critical assessment of the current situation following the local engagement completed in recent weeks. The key recommendations are as follows:

- That a fresh approach is endorsed by ADC following recognition of the fact that adherence to the 'core requirements' is only likely to lead to further local difficulties
- The project and its scope is sharply redefined – the focus becomes redevelopment and not regeneration
- That this project is viewed as, potentially, the first of many which need to be considered in the wider context of the town and when connected will deliver the regeneration so desperately needed
 - Potentially, discussions around these sites could trigger the creation of a new vision for the town, building on the previous masterplan produced for Bognor Regis in 2004
- An appreciation needs to be given to timings – there is no real rush and, in light of this, pressure should be removed to allow for the progression of alternative proposals, firmly shaped and steered by community engagement
- Following the redefinition of the project, further community liaison is completed by Seaward's team with the key aim of forming a 'redevelopment steering group' to help devise a new masterplan
- That Seaward provides a professional team to oversee this process and to advise on emerging development strategies and proposals
- If this approach is supported by ADC, further discussions are held to agree financial terms and the scope of Seaward's role, which could be one of or all of the below:
 - Development management
 - Development management and final, preferred developer
 - Final developer