



Moulton Parish Council

<https://moultonpc.org.uk>

Response to feedback regarding the proposed Regent Street Backs redevelopment scheme

Introduction

The council would like to thank every parishioner who attended the informal information evening at Royal British Legion in September, who wrote to the parish council or who contacted councillors to express their opinions and views about the proposed scheme.

Moulton Parish Council has received a number of responses – both formally and informally – to the proposed redevelopment scheme of council-owned land to the rear of Regent Street. The parish council has considered all the replies received – both positive and negative – and produced the following response that addresses each point or concern raised.

Background

Current use of the land

Moulton Parish Council are the current landowner of the brownfield site to the rear of Regent Street and currently rent plots of land to parishioners, as well as allowing around fifty cars to park without charge.

In the tenancy agreements, the council lets plots solely for the parking of the tenant's private motor vehicle or for the erection of a garage to house the tenant's private motor vehicle. All garages must adhere to a specification provided by Moulton Parish Council and the garages must not be used for business or trade.

There are eleven garages (and another approximately twenty plots) not currently occupied, with around 21 current tenants paying an average of £65 per year for 26 plots. The council maintains that this under-occupancy and under-utilisation of the site is an inefficient use of the space. In addition, the cost of upkeep on the land is considerable, and over the last twelve months, the council has spent more on maintaining and managing the tenancies, the grass and the trees, than it receives in rental income.

Redevelopment

The community has long wanted to see improvements to this area. The unkempt nature of the "Regent Street Backs" was noted in the Village Design Statement (2008) and a majority of the respondents to the Moulton Parish Plan in 2004, agreed with the statement that "the improvement at the back of Regent Street is a priority."

Due to the responses received from the community in the past few years when creating the Moulton Neighbourhood Plan, the then parish council added Policy H5: Redevelopment of Regent Street. This was:

The redevelopment of the land to the rear of "Regent St," locally known as the "garage area" will be supported within this plan subject to delivering a suitable housing mix and appropriate parking for new and existing residents. Development proposals should meet the design criteria ... and the Housing policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Neighbourhood Plan was accepted in a referendum in July 2019, with over 90% of the voters approving the plan.

Moulton Parish Council are now delivering on that mandate with this proposal to improve and redevelop this parcel of land.

Proposed Scheme

Moulton Parish Council have partnered with a housing association to create a proposal which provides over 90 free-to-use car parking spaces for the existing residents, and 24 properties that meets the identified housing needs of the community. The current proposal also has an administration block, two community gardens, cycling infrastructure and EV charging points.

While working with our partner, Jigsaw Homes, the council had the following overriding aims, in accordance with Neighbourhood Plan, and the consultation responses:

- Affordable low-density accommodation, predominantly designed for the older generation, that would not negatively impact on existing properties.
- Parking for new and existing residents to meet the current and future needs of the community.
- An administration building for Moulton Parish Council, PCSO and community group use.
- Addition of two paths from Main Road to Whitlow Lane, improving safety for pedestrians.
- Improved road surface for the access road to the rear of Regent Street and car parking area.

As Moulton is on NCR5 and close to Whitegate Way, Moulton Parish Council also requested cycling infrastructure to encourage healthy and sustainable transport to and from the site.

The proposals are available to view on our website at <https://moultonpc.org.uk>

Allegations against the council

Secrecy of Redevelopment

Moulton Parish Council reject wholeheartedly any allegations that there has been a lack of openness and transparency with the production of these plans. The “Regent Street Backs” project has been discussed at public parish council meetings and is a standing item on our published agenda for the last two years. Parishioners have attended our meetings, and asked us direct questions as to progress about these activities, and we have been as transparent as we are permitted to be.

Moulton Parish Council responded to numerous questions during the Neighbourhood Plan consultations about our intentions for Regent Street. Letters sent from Moulton Parish Council in January 2019 and February 2019 to the Neighbourhood Plan inspector and a developer seeking to build on a greenfield site, are a matter of public record and were part of the Neighbourhood Plan consultation portal. Both highlighted that the council had received expressions of interest in working with Moulton Parish Council to bring our above policy to fruition.

Moulton Parish Council have not withheld our intention to make better use of the land by supporting a redevelopment approach, while delivering a scheme in accordance with the wishes of the parish.

Decision made outside the village

The assertion that the proposal was designed by people who are not part of our community is also untrue. The decision to proceed with this scheme was made by Moulton Parish Council. Every member of the parish council has to, by law, reside or work inside the parish or within 4.8km of the boundary.

As it is, every member of Moulton Parish Council lives within the parish boundary. The decision to proceed with this scheme was made by residents of the village, in accordance with the wishes of the community to improve our neighbourhood.

All councillors and employees are bound by strict codes of conduct, and their behaviour must adhere to high standards. This decision was made by councillors, who are bound to act with integrity, transparently and in the best interests of the community they serve.

No consultation with the community

This proposal is the product of extensive consultation with the community. The parishioners were publicly surveyed to produce the first draft of the Neighbourhood Plan, which stated the policy H5 - *The redevelopment of the land to the rear of "Regent St," locally known as the "garage area" will be supported within this plan subject to delivering a suitable housing mix and appropriate parking for new and existing residents. Development proposals should meet the design criteria ... and the Housing policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.*

This document, and the policies contained within, was then consulted on by Moulton Parish Council. We held a public open morning to explain the document and the council leafleted every household in the parish. After our consultation, the Neighbourhood Plan was reviewed and public consultations were held by Cheshire West and Chester Council and the independent examiner. At each stage, Moulton Parish Council publicised the public consultation within the village, and invited residents to comment.

Finally, the plan was subject to a referendum which the council made extensive efforts to publicise, including leafleting every property in the parish. The parish council have listened to the community at every opportunity and these proposals are a reflection on what the parish has stated it requires.

Decision made to financially benefit Moulton Parish Council

Moulton Parish Council rejected several more financially lucrative schemes because they did not address the needs of the community. The decision to proceed, and how to proceed, was made solely in the interests of the village.

On completion of this scheme, Moulton Parish Council will not have significantly benefited financially. The community are receiving a car park and administrative building as well as stipulating what is built in return for the land.

Decision made so Moulton Parish Council receive more Council Tax

Moulton Parish Council rejected several higher-density schemes because they believed that they were not in the interests of the community. It should be noted that the parish precept, which Moulton Parish Council charges, is shared between the properties in the village. Therefore, more properties to share the burden will result in a lower parish precept in each property's Council Tax bill.

There will be no benefit in parish precept to Moulton Parish Council to having more properties in the community.

Inappropriate method of disseminating information to garage tenants

Moulton Parish Council made all tenants aware during the tenancy renewal in November 2018 that they were continuing to formulate plans for the land, and that this would likely lead to an announcement in the coming year. Although during the informal information evening (and before), members of Moulton Parish Council stated that it was likely that the council would not renew existing tenancies, the council had already publicly stated and intimated that this scheme was progressing and that the tenancies were likely to end.

On 14th October 2019, the Council opted to vote to issue notice and not renew the tenancies from January 2020, and formal notice will be received by the tenants in due course.

During the informal information evening, some garage tenants did ask specific questions relating to their tenancy agreement, but as no formal notice had been served to those tenants, it would have been inappropriate for any councillor to provide any further comment.

Moulton Parish Council have already sold the land

Moulton Parish Council are the current landowner of land, which the Land Registry will confirm.

Exhibition of Plans

Lack of notice

Moulton Parish Council placed a notice on the Parish Noticeboard six days prior to the event in the Royal British Legion. Councillors also leafleted all the properties adjacent to the site at least four days prior to the event to ensure that they were aware of the informal information evening and publicised the event on Facebook.

We accept that for some this was short notice and apologise if any residents feel excluded because of this. We had designed this event to be a relaxed information evening rather than a formal meeting where non-attendance would have been disadvantageous. The plans are on the Parish Council website, and on the Parish Noticeboard, so the entire community could view the proposals, even if they were unable to attend our informal event in person.

Venue

Moulton Parish Council chose to use Royal British Legion, a social club within the parish, to exhibit the plans. The Royal British Legion is at the heart of the community and offers a suitable room for such displays. We therefore considered it an ideal venue for the informal information evening.

Behaviour of councillors

Every member of Moulton Parish Council attended the informal information evening and tried to answer queries and questions posed to them as accurately as they could. This was a relaxed event and not a public meeting, and the members of the council were not expected to dress or act formally in the surroundings.

Attempt at secrecy

Over seventy people attended the event in person, and the Regent Street page on our website has been visited by over 400 unique visitors. We reject the accusation that Moulton Parish Council, and the councillors, tried to suppress this information. We publicly announced the proposals and wrote to every property that bordered the site to encourage engagement.

Alternative proposals

The council received the following alternative proposals to our scheme.

New park

The council received feedback that they wanted the entire area turned into a new green space.

Moulton Parish Council considered this unviable for the following reasons:

- This would cause a large number of motor vehicles to be displaced and would increase not alleviate the parking problems in the immediate vicinity.
- This would not address the identified housing needs within the village.
- Removing the current brownfield elements of the site and converting it to a new green space would cost over six figures, and the Council could not afford this without a significant increase in the parish precept.
- Such a scheme is contrary to the agreed neighbourhood plan policy H5.

Residents should note that there are two community gardens in the scheme.

Do nothing

The council received feedback that they wanted the entire area left as-is and not redeveloped.

Moulton Parish Council considered this unviable for the following reasons:

- The community has stated that they want to see the land redeveloped and realize a more efficient use of the land.
- The council has received numerous complaints and comments over the previous twelve months about the state and current usage of Regent Street.
- This would not address the identified housing needs within the village.
- Such a scheme is contrary to the agreed neighbourhood plan policy H5.

Sell land

A couple of responses have asked Moulton Parish Council to sell the land either to the owners of Regent Street, or to someone else.

Moulton Parish Council do not believe that this is a suitable course of action for the following reasons:

- The community has stated that they want to see the land redeveloped and realize a more efficient use of the land.
- This would not necessarily address the identified housing needs within the village, or be in accordance with neighbourhood plan policy H5.
- The Council are bound by law if offering the land for general sale to put it onto the open market to ensure the best value is received for the community. This could potentially lead to it being purchased by a national housing developer and larger, more lucrative housing being built and would remove the availability of community parking spaces.

Provide garages

The council received feedback that they wanted some car parking spaces to be developed into garages. Moulton Parish Council considered this undesirable for the following reasons:

- Because one garage consumes more land than a single car parking space, the erection of garages would reduce the amount of free car parking space considerably.
- The erection of garages would spoil the open space and street elevations, as designed.
- The sole purpose for the let of the garages, was to house a single residential motor vehicle, and Moulton Parish Council are providing alternate means to safely park such vehicles in the car park.
- Such a scheme is contrary to the agreed neighbourhood plan policy H5.

It should be noted the current average charge is approximately just 11% of the market rate that is charged by housing associations in Cheshire for a garage. Despite this extremely low charge, the council is still unable to let out a significant number of plots. There is no evidence that providing garages would be of benefit to the wider community and would be fiscally irresponsible to pursue.

Provide allotments or smallholdings

The council received feedback that they wanted some car parking spaces to be developed into allotments. Moulton Parish Council considered this unsuitable for the following reasons:

- This would dramatically reduce the amount of free car parking space.
- Such a scheme is contrary to the agreed neighbourhood plan policy H5.
- The erection of fences and boundaries would spoil the open space and street elevation, as designed

Until October 2019, there had been only one recent request from parishioners for allotments, but on October 14th 2019, eight further parishioners asked Moulton Parish Council to consider offering this facility under the Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908.

However, Moulton Parish Council are already exploring the possibility of other sites in the vicinity that are more suitable for allotments, and expect to be making an announcement in the near future, if our negotiations are successful.

Provide shops

The council received feedback that they wanted the land to be developed into a parade of shops. The council considers this unviable.

There is no evidence of any great demand for a row of shops in this area. There has been a well-publicised decline of retail shopping across the country and we do not believe such a retail-orientated development would be economically feasible or workable. Moulton formerly had a Post Office, newsagents, butchers, greengrocers, delicatessen and petrol station, all of which have now closed because the size of the community cannot sustain them.

Furthermore, if such a development was built, it could cause significant noise and traffic problems on Main Road, and would be contrary to the Neighbourhood Plan.

Build a new school

The council was asked to build a new primary school on Regent Street Backs as an alternative to our current scheme.

Cheshire West and Chester Council are responsible for the provision of schools. The current demographics of the parish do not support two primary schools. Furthermore, this would also mean that there would be insufficient car parking available in the village if the land was used for a school and this would be contrary to the Neighbourhood Plan.

Concerns

The council received the following concerns or suggestions to the scheme.

Allocation of car parking spaces

The council received feedback that residents wanted to be able to rent specific spaces to guarantee that they had a car parking space. The council also received feedback that they wanted each space to be specifically allocated to individual houses, with each house in Regent Street receiving one allocated car parking space. Moulton Parish Council considered both suggestions and believe that the comments are valid propositions and potentially appropriate addenda to the scheme.

As the 96 car parking spaces is an increase on what is currently available on the site, we do not believe residents should struggle to find a car parking space. While we do not want to subject our parishioners to an additional administrative burden needlessly, as this has been specifically requested by more than one household, Moulton Parish Council will review this option over the coming months as to its viability and necessity.

Overlooking gardens

When planning this scheme, Moulton Parish Council were clear that they did not want a proposal that introduced houses which overlooked gardens. Concerns have been raised that the Administration Block will overlook the property in Main Road.

Moulton Parish Council will work with the developer to ensure that there are no windows on the east side of the first-floor of the Administration Block to ensure that there will be no loss of privacy. Due to the angle of the Sun and the houses on Regent Street, the council also believes the impact of shadows will be minimal for most of the year.

Construction time restrictions

Moulton Parish Council are not the planning authority so cannot enforce planning restrictions, but have already discussed this concern with the developer. Jigsaw Homes are a member of the Considerate Constructor scheme, and are experienced in developing residential sites.

We will ask Cheshire West and Chester Council, the planning authority, to ensure that any planning permission includes a stipulation to restrict the hours of working to appropriate hours only, given the nature of the site. Such restrictions were in place during other development work in the parish, and Moulton Parish Council have already stated to the developer that such restraints are required during the realization of this proposal.

Construction upheaval

Moulton Parish Council have partnered with a company who are committed to considerate construction. In the recent national Considerate Constructions National Site Awards, they were recognised for a development in Stalybridge.

We cannot answer queries regarding the detailed plans for Wheel Washing, Sweepers or security patrols, because neither ourselves or our partners are at that phase of our planning; these are high-level conceptual proposals that will form the basis of the planning application.

Moulton Parish Council can state, however, that they have partnered with a trustworthy, professional housing association who will work to deliver this excellent scheme with the least impact on the community.

Car parking during construction

Moulton Parish Council have already advised the developers that the community cannot countenance any building work which would restrict access to all of the site during construction. We have stated we would like the developers to work in phases, taking blocks of the site at a time.

We acknowledge that we will probably need to relax restrictions on the car park in Main Road, and open discussions within the village to accommodate car parking of contractors during the development.

No need for EV charging points in the car park

The UK Government's current policy is to phase out all petrol and diesel-powered vehicles by 2040, although they are under pressure to bring this to 2030. Sales of electric vehicles are up 150% year-on-year. Moulton Parish Council would like to ensure that the nearby residents, who might not have been able to install an EV charging point, are able to switch to electric vehicles as traditionally powered vehicles are phased out from UK roads. We understand that these charging points may not be in use immediately, but they will be required in the near future.

Insufficient disabled spaces

Although the plans did not show any disabled spaces, the plans were not a detailed car parking diagram. For car parks of 51-200 spaces, the advice from British Parking Association is to have three disabled spaces plus 3% of the car park. Using this formula, the proposed car parking area would have a disabled provision of seven spaces.

Moulton Parish Council expect that the car park will be designed and built to a high standard and will meet all accepted specifications. We require our partners to include suitable provision for all users of the facility, and will restate our expectations during the planning phases to come.

Introduce a Parking Permit Scheme on Church Street and Regent Street

Moulton Parish Council are not empowered to offer such a scheme. This is a decision by Cheshire West and Chester Council, and a residents' permit scheme is something they will only consider if there is a groundswell of support from the residents of impacted streets.

The motion on 14th October 2019, at Moulton Parish Council, was to support a residents' permit scheme, if wanted by the local residents of the impacted area. If requested, we will help facilitate those representations to the unitary authority, but we cannot initiate or impose such a scheme.

Tree Preservation Orders

Some comments related to the trees on the site being protected with Tree Preservation Orders. As far as Moulton Parish Council is aware, there are no orders on any tree on the site. Moulton Parish Council have removed several trees which were either dangerous, or followed complaints that the tree sap was damaging private motor vehicles.

Moulton Parish Council regularly plant and maintain trees and bushes throughout the village and will be ensuring that appropriately-sized plants are established in the community gardens and our current local green spaces, to replace the trees removed during this development.

Local residents will not be able to access the properties

There is no reason why parishioners will not be able to buy or rent those properties. Many of the homes on the new estates on Beehive Lane and Jack Lane have been sold to families who lived elsewhere in the village.

Moulton Parish Council had always intended to publicise, within the parish, the availability of the new properties when they become available. The key motivation for this proposed scheme is to meet the needs of the wider community, and we will therefore liaise with our partners to ensure that the community has a suitable opportunity to acquire residence of these properties when they are released.

Insufficient school places

It has been raised with Moulton Parish Council that such a development could place an additional burden on the local school. The council has specifically demanded that the majority of the low-density, low-rise accommodation provided is tailor made for the older generation, as per the housing needs identified from the community surveys and consultations. The parish council does not expect this development to have a significant impact on demand for school places.

However, Moulton School currently have a number of spaces in both Reception and other years, this in spite of the much larger developments of Honeyvale Gardens and Weaver Grange.

Development could negatively impact house prices

It has been claimed that this development may lower house prices in the immediate area. Moulton Parish Council cannot comment on the prevailing housing market within the community, and nor would it offer any opinion on what, from a plethora of external factors, were most responsible for an increase or a decrease in property values in the immediate vicinity over a certain time frame.

However, the parish council assert that redeveloping the brownfield land, and providing safe car parking for the local residents, as well as offering a valuable asset to the community will be a benefit to the area.

Administration Block usage

This building will be owned by Moulton Parish Council and will be predominantly used for community administration. We have no plans to have long opening hours, especially late into the night, other than Moulton Parish Council meetings. We also envisage daytime community use of the building, and a base for the Police Community Support Officer, when they are working within the parish.

There are five car parking spaces directly outside the building, and a car park directly opposite, adjacent to the War Memorial.

Junctions with Whitlow Lane and Main Road

The plans suggest that the new road is a one-way highway from north to south. The parish council have informally discussed the possibility of the road being a one-way street with the developer, although our preference would be a south to north road. Any such decision of that kind would be made by Cheshire West and Chester Council's highways team after detailed analysis.

It would be therefore ill-advised for Moulton Parish Council to offer any further comment regarding this.

No surveys have been undertaken

Moulton Parish Council can confirm that they have not commissioned, paid for, or requested any detailed surveys, including structural surveys, land reports, traffic analysis or tree studies. The exhibited plans are a high-level conceptual proposal that will form the basis of the planning submission, and the required expert opinion will be obtained by our construction partners at appropriate junctures, as required.

Next steps

Moulton Parish Council will work with the developers, in accordance with the above feedback, to produce a submission for the planning authority. We will publicise the planning application via our communication channels, so the community can make their submissions to Cheshire West and Chester Council.