

Green light for Firepool

OUTLINE plans for Firepool, the first major phase in the regeneration of central Taunton, have gained the green light from the Borough Council's planning committee marking an important milestone in the town's history.

Regeneration specialist, St. Modwen, the development partner of Taunton Deane Borough Council on the £270 million Firepool scheme, has been given permission to press ahead with plans to transform the 4.5 acre Priory Road Car Park into new office and residential space.

The first phase of the Firepool development could deliver up to 600 jobs – a major economic boost for Taunton Deane at a time of economic uncertainty.

St. Modwen will now work up more detailed designs to build around 113,000 sq ft of office space, with an option of an hotel, as well as up to 49 apartments as part of the first phase of development for the wider 17 acre riverside site. The building zone will be set back from the River Tone by a new river park, which is part of a public realm planning application submitted by St. Modwen earlier this year.

Firepool, the first major phase of Project Taunton, is the largest town centre regeneration project in the South West with the potential to create up to 4,000 jobs locally. When complete, Firepool will become the new commercial heart of Taunton, comprising 500,000 sq ft of office space, over 400 homes and new leisure opportunities.

Borough Council Leader, Cllr John Williams, has been involved in the regeneration from its earliest days of the Taunton Vision, and is delighted to see the first commercial site development approved.

He said: "This is a momentous occasion - the start of the largest regeneration programme of any town centre in the South West and is a huge vote of confidence by our development partners, St Modwen, in this strategic employment site.

"It is so well placed, next to the main line railway station, in a wonderful riverside setting and very close to the town centre. It is a much needed boost for Taunton's economy, particularly in these difficult times and I welcome it."

Pete Davies, development manager for St. Modwen, said: "This is very positive news for Taunton's town centre. We are working with our partners to make sure that development is being delivered. We are already progressing plans to build the first office building at the site and this announcement shows the Council's commitment to the development as a major new build office scheme supporting the town and county's growth."

Ian Franklin is Project Director of Project Taunton and heads up the team tasked with delivering the town's regeneration as a whole. He said: "Firepool will be an important business hub, not just for Taunton but for the South West. The development is already creating quite a buzz in the business community and we're expecting it to be of interest to government departments looking to rationalise their

estate, particularly as the site is in local authority ownership, is next to the main line railway station, and can be reached in well under two hours from Paddington.”

ENDS