

Western & Southern Area Planning Committee - 9 March 2021

Written Submissions

WP/19/00778/FUL - Land East of Mercery Road, Weymouth

Craig Oakes - President of Weymouth & Portland Chamber of Commerce

As previously submitted, the Executive Board of the Weymouth and Portland Chamber of Commerce fully supports the above application.

As a representative body of over 100 businesses in Weymouth we know business is eager to see progressive thinking, investment and development that will boost the town's economy.

We recognise there is a theoretical conflict between the retail-led proposals and the site's historic employment allocation, but all evidence suggests that the allocation is what's wrong, not the current proposals. The allocation simply isn't well-aligned with real-world demand or the site's actual characteristics. Despite marketing for more than 10 years, the site remains vacant and all the independent reports agree that there is no prospect of the site attracting predominantly B Class occupiers in future.

The Granby industrial estate has ample space for more industrial style use if occupiers want to come to or expand in the area.

In contrast, despite this being a very challenging time for retailers, there are several who are keen to come to Weymouth Gateway should the current proposals be consented. These would create much-needed year-round jobs, help retain residents' spending in our town, and draw shoppers into Weymouth who, in turn, will venture into town and the surrounding areas in order to make a day out of it.

As such, these proposals offer us a great opportunity to rethink what Weymouth can really offer as a visitor attraction – in and out of season. We have a great town and harbour that could draw large inward spend from visitors all year round, if only we have the courage to maximise their potential.

We believe the proposed scheme will:

- Make a long-vacant site productive for the benefit of residents
- Deliver year-round jobs (which is increasingly important in the current climate)
- Give the entrance to town greater vitality
- Create a draw for visitors, which could be capitalised on to signpost people to the high street/beach areas of town to help generate a general uplift. We understand the developers are willing to provide signage
- Stimulate new year-round economic opportunities
- Deliver the second (main) part of a multi-million pound investment – and how many others is the town currently being offered?

We are not alone in this view. We note that a recent public consultation drew more than 500 responses, with nearly 90% expressing overall support for the scheme.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to approve this application and shout loud and proud that Weymouth is open for business!

Cllr Richard Nickinson - Weymouth Town Council

The Mercery Road area already has other retail developments including Sainburys and Aldi and this development would be complimentary to those.

The Town centre would **not** be negatively affected by this development, as the business model of the proposed retailers could not be accommodated within the Town Centre.

The development would benefit residents of Weymouth and Portland and surrounding area, who would no longer need to travel to the Poole/Bournemouth area to access the retailing that this development will provide. This supports our climate change agenda of reducing carbon emissions. In addition the developer has agreed to install 39 electric vehicle charging points which will future proof our aim to be zero carbon from vehicles.

There are other sites available for the development of high tech jobs, including the Granby Industrial Estate, Link Park in Chickerell, Southwell Business Park on Portland and the Dorset Innovation Park at Winfrith, which is an Enterprise Zone and is developing into an advanced

engineering cluster of excellence for the South West and is very much supported by Dorset Council.

The amended plan allows for some light industry to be incorporated if demand allows.

I do not believe that the decision of Weymouth Town Council to oppose the application reflects majority view of Weymouth residents. The Consultation and discussion on line, shows overwhelming support for this development from residents. I would urge Members to support this application so that we can continue to move forward to regenerate the area quickly, following the damaging effects of the current pandemic.

Dawn Rondeau - Chief Operations Officer, Weymouth BID

Whilst the data gleaned from the general public's questionnaire clearly shows unequivocal support for the Weymouth gateway project due to inward investment driving substantial economic and social advantages for the residents of Weymouth, there was a mixed response in terms of direct feedback from levy payers. However, of those that responded 75% were supportive.

To quote one of our small retailers in Weymouth, "There are pros and cons for both, as a small business owner in Weymouth I'd personally like to see the town benefit from bigger chains and more diverse stores. Once you get one, more will follow."

At present the site is derelict and has remained vacant for many years. There has not been a proposal for development forthcoming and therefore the benefits that the scheme would provide far outweigh the loss of the desired high-tech jobs and employment recommendations. The continuing closure of national brands is widely forecast, and Weymouth along with other towns and cities is no different, with the additional pressures on social housing and employment exacerbated by well-evidenced seasonal fluctuations. The nearest multinationals mentioned in the proposal are over 30 miles away and thus investment of these national chains at a time of retail uncertainty would undoubtedly bring visitors to the town.

However, our members request that a diverse range of retailer are reflected in the plans, not 'more of the same' in order that the site complement the town centre; rich in independents. Feedback suggested that enhancing the perception of Weymouth as a retail destination, would

encourage shoppers who would otherwise travel further afield to make a day of visiting the town.

The developers have actively engaged with the BID and assured us of their commitment in driving visitors to the town by means of signage and a noticeboard showcasing maps, events and promotions. The BID will ensure that promotion of its levy paying community is prominent and visitors to the shopping complex are educated as to the wealth of independent shops, businesses, beach, heritage and vibrant night-time economy; encouraging visitors to stay in the area.

The chairman of the board may have a conflict of interest with regards the development of the gateway, therefore the Chief Operations Officer and Vice chair have led on discussions with the developers, in order to ensure transparency on this matter.

David Vogwell

I submitted my objections and identified several technical shortfalls in this planning application and its predecessor. My comments, and those of other commentators, have been dismissed in the “Planning Officer’s Report for Committee”, dated 18 February 2021, which appears to be based on some fragile arguments.

However, I will not go further into that or the bulk of those objections because they are on the Planning Portal, clear for all to see, including members of the Planning Committee. I will, however, restrict the remainder of this statement to one, headline issue; that of the proposed type of employment to be used on this site.

It is widely known that Weymouth is a deprived area and in need of serious regeneration to provide an improved thriving community. The cornerstone to this is employment. Not just any employment but enterprises providing higher grade jobs, attracting well qualified staff, who command higher salaries. The high-quality jobs in the area that have been lost over the past 25 -30 years have not been recovered and the town now relies heavily on the low paid seasonal tourist trade and retail businesses. I fully recognise these tourist and retail jobs need to continue but a rebalancing of the skills base and associated community is desperately needed; not simply more of the same. Otherwise, Weymouth will remain a deprived area and likely sink further.

I understand Dorset Council is committed to the regeneration of Weymouth. To approve this planning application on the grounds of a limited number of low paid permanent retail and temporary construction jobs would be a disservice to that commitment and the people of Weymouth. Those residents are looking to the Council to provide the future vision, sustained growth, and support for the area. The small amount of land the Developer proposes to set aside for future skilled employment is derisory and inadequate to achieve such growth. Retail complexes are not the answer, particularly those populated with the type of retailers and food outlets such as those proposed.

A further point on a balanced community; Dorset Council has a commendable ambitious planned increase in housing stock for the area but, without more residents earning higher incomes, there will be few people who will be able to aspire to owning one of those many new houses.

I trust the Planning Committee will seriously consider the proposed employment use of this site and, certainly not allow the construction of something simply to fill an unsightly piece of land.

Claire and Brian Allen

In summary of the application itself, the 2015 Local Plan for West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland, identifies the land in this application as being a "key employment site". The Local Plan itself states generally that (a) within key employment sites, applications for light-industrial, general industrial and storage and distribution will be permitted subject to proposals not having a significant adverse impact on surrounding land uses. (b) The use of key employment sites for employment purposes other than the above may be appropriate only if it can be proven that the use provides on-site support facilities or demonstrates an economic enhancement over and above the permitted key employment uses; (c) Retail uses will not generally be supported unless in exceptional circumstances such as having trade links with employment uses or are un-neighbourly in character and (d) Other uses that do not provide direct, on-going local employment opportunities will not be permitted."

Material consideration objections:

- Noise and disturbance from: (a) delivery lorries turning/reversing in close proximity to homes (b) lorries unloading (c) the 24 hour drive through and antisocial behaviour this is likely to attract
- Traffic: (a) It is already difficult to exit from both Monmouth Avenue on to the Dorchester Road, and exiting Spa Road on to the Dorchester Road. In addition, I noted that the entrance/exit to the proposed retail park, is located almost opposite the entrance to the Ambulance Station which could then cause problems for emergency vehicles.
- Risk of flooding: (a) the site already holds a lot of water after significant rainfall - where will this water go with the reduced capacity of land to soak up the rainfall. (b) due to poor drainage systems and culverts, after significant rainfall homes at the bottom of St Andrews Avenue are unable to use their downstairs toilets and raw sewage fountains from manhole covers in the gardens (Wessex Water are aware and concerned).
- Smells: From the drive-through especially, venting on the rear of the units and pollution from lorry exhaust fumes.
- Light pollution: From lighting along the access road, delivery bays and turning circles especially.

In addition,

Fast food outlets: There is evidence (the last study of fast food outlets in England (31/12/2017)) showing that Weymouth and Portland have 84 such fast food outlets. The national average is 96.1 per 100,000 people. Weymouth and Portland's figure per 100,000 is 128.3 outlets, so we already have well in excess of the national average. Public Health England (a government funded organisation) (reported on the BBC on 28th June 2018) want authorities to refuse new take away applications.". There is already a McDonalds Drive-Thru at Jubilee Retail Park and therefore there is no need for another.

Mr J Matthews

I object to the application for this retail development – formerly Class A1, 3 and 5 because:

1. Increase in traffic and due to the nature of businesses it would be continuous flow of traffic which puts more pressure on traffic emerging on to Dorchester Road from Spa, Monmouth, Hetherly and Icen roads.
2. This type of development is just going to draw trade out of the main town of Weymouth and following the current pandemic there is reduced requirement for indoor shopping of this nature.

Any development must include previous undertakings to have a sound barrier inserted on the southern edge and enhance evergreen tree planting to reduce noise, pollution and visual impairment to local residents.

Any improvements to Dorchester Road traffic control should be identified before any development is permitted and the costs passed to the developer, not wait and fund it from ratepayers at a later date.

Further to this I request improved description of the elevation drawings to accurately describe the height of the buildings and where the 'base' point will be – for example will these buildings be on an elevated base or stilts?

The original application was for class B development (now Class E (c and g); this was prior to the pandemic and with an increase of online business this would be the better option.

Councillor David Harris - Weymouth Town Council

I am writing to you with my hat on as leader of Weymouth Town Council regarding the application to allow 5 retail units to be built on the Mercery Road site. When we were studying the draft Dorset Council local plan as a town council it became clear that there was a conflict between the Environmental policy statements and the plans for this development. Employment opportunities should be near to dwellings and more highly paid jobs were required in the Weymouth and Portland area. To use up some of the very small amount of commercial land available for lower paid jobs in retail seem to be contrary to this statement leading the DC local plan. Equally it does not recognise the damage this will do to the already run down town centre. We have so many empty premises in the town it is

important that no more retail businesses should be encouraged away from the town centre until the centre of the town has been fully occupied. No further retail use should be allocated to this site and so this application should be rejected.

**Cllr Lucy Hamilton, Chairman of Planning and Licensing Committee,
Weymouth Town Council**

Weymouth Town Council welcomes investment in our town. We have ambitions for high-skilled, high-pay jobs. We have ambitions for good employment, closer to home, to attract new and growing businesses.

However, Weymouth Town Council objects to the use of this land for retail and catering for two main reasons. One: it goes against Dorset Council Planning Policy. Two: it goes against Dorset Council Economic Policy.

Firstly: planning policy. In the current Adopted Local Plan, ECON2 provides for the protection of key employment sites. It states “retail uses will not generally be supported”. Paragraph 7.8 provides for 14 hectares of mixed-use employment at this site, known as Mount Pleasant Business Park. This land is designated primarily for B use employment and is the only such key employment site within Weymouth Town Council boundaries. David Walsh in his response to the application challenges the benefits of this scheme.

The emerging Local Plan provides for 131 hectares of employment land across all of Dorset. However, the predicted requirement is greater: it is 131-151 hectares. We need more employment land, not less. We need to reduce out-commuting to meet net zero targets.

COM7 is for a safe and efficient transport network. It’s also towards those net zero targets. “Development that generates significant movement should be located where the need to travel will be minimised and the use of sustainable transport modes including public transport, walking and cycling can be maximised.”

Secondly, economic policy. In their evidence for the Dorset Local Industrial Strategy, Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership confirms the pressures on employment land. The chief challenge is infrastructure and connectivity. The Mercery Road/Mount Pleasant site is well connected to the A354 Weymouth Relief Road. The LEP states projected demand (until 2033) in

the west of Dorset is 78% for industrial uses (B1c, B2 and B8) and 22% for B1 office. The success of Link Park, the Granby and Lynch Lane in neighbouring Chickerell proves it's possible with determination to build and market for light industrial use and for new and growing businesses if you do it the right way.

Dorset Council's Plan 2020 to 2024 states: We will deliver sustainable economic growth, increasing productivity and the number of high quality jobs in Dorset. Dorset Council will "raise career aspirations and improve skills". Dorset Council aims to "enable economic growth in the Southern Dorset corridor to improve social mobility, reduce commuting and increase productivity". Dorset Council "will enable provision and take-up of workspace".

You have a chance to honour those pledges today. Save this site for skilled jobs, well paid jobs. Deliver for Weymouth.

Craig Blatchford - Agent

My name is Craig Blatchford, and I'm the Head of Planning at Montagu Evans. I specialise in retail and commercial planning and have been advising occupiers, developers and owners of land and property for 30 years.

The Site has been vacant for over 10 years despite being made available for development including for B Class use in accordance with its allocation. The proposals before you today represent the only commercially viable use for the Site. Our Retail Impact Assessment has been assessed by the Council's external retail advisor, who conclude that the proposal is acceptable in retail policy terms.

Our extensive consultation exercises since May 2019 show strong public support for the proposals. However we are aware of some local resident concerns regarding flooding, noise, lighting and traffic. In our opinion, these issues are not unique to the proposals - the same issues would arise in the event the Site were developed for B Class employment uses, potentially to a greater degree.

The Council's Flood Risk Management Team have confirmed that the proposals will not have any detrimental impact on existing flood conditions. The works include an attenuation pond within the north east corner of the site, which will provide a new ecological habitat as well as contribute to drainage improvements.

The applicant has also facilitated Wessex Water's recent works to repair existing sewers which run across the Site and which serve the local area. This will resolve existing drainage issues highlighted by local residents. The existing tree and landscaping bund to the rear of the Site will be pro-actively managed, and strengthened through the introduction of additional ever-green planting. Furthermore, a solid acoustic barrier is to be installed and the lighting strategy has been designed to minimise any potential impacts on residential amenity. The Council's EHO has agreed these measures.

The Council's Highways Officer concluded that the proposal will not have an adverse impact on the local highway network. In addition, the applicant is happy to provide a contribution of approximately £145,000 towards local cycle infrastructure improvements.

The proposed development will represent a sustainable development, including achieving a BREEAM rating of Excellent, provision of at least 32 electric vehicle charging spaces and inclusion of renewable energy technologies that will reduce carbon emissions.

A Bio-Diversity Management Plan has been agreed in consultation with Dorset's Natural Environment Team, including the translocation of reptiles and creation of new habitat of high ecological value on the eastern part of the site.

The planning application has been subject of extensive internal and external review by the Council since August 2019, and your Officer's recommendation is for approval. We endorse that recommendation and respectfully ask that you approve the application.

London Metric Property UK - Applicant

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

LondonMetric is predominantly an industrial and logistics property owner. We have owned this vacant Weymouth Gateway site since autumn 2017. Since then, despite the Local Plan allocation of the site for Class B uses, there has been no commercially viable demand for this use in this location, reflecting the available supply of better-suited sites for Class B uses nearby.

However, there has been strong demand for large-format retail warehousing and complementary restaurant uses – we have agreements in place with Dunelm, Costa Coffee, B&M and McDonalds to operate at the site.

Throughout the process, we have engaged and consulted widely and collaboratively with stakeholders (including local residents, business and educational groups, and councillors at all levels in the former and current governing structures - through in-person and online public exhibitions, presentations and meetings) – and evolved the scheme in response to feedback.

There is significant local support for the proposal – with 88% of 500-plus respondents to the recent online exhibition in favour of the development, and we have the backing of the Weymouth Chamber of Commerce as well as the South Dorset Business Advisory Panel. We are also working with

Weymouth BID's Board on ways to promote Weymouth Town Centre to those shopping at Weymouth Gateway.

Our proposals will deliver significant local investment and provide some 280 year-round jobs for the community. There will be additional spin-off benefits for the local economy through indirect job creation, and an increase in business rates receipts of circa £6million for the Council over a 10-year period.

We have delivered an Aldi foodstore on the adjoining site – providing significant investment into the local economy and, importantly, creating some 30 new jobs. We are also facilitating the expansion of Medisave next door, to Aldi which would also allow the business to expand local employment and investment.

We continue to proactively progress and improve the sustainability standards of our properties and developments. Whilst not a planning requirement, we are committed to increasing the BREEAM rating of this development from Very Good to Excellent, and we will continue to review the sustainability credentials of the scheme during the detailed design stage. We are also happy to be contributing approximately £145,000 towards improvements of the local cycle route network, which will be implemented by Dorset Council.

We hope you will come to the same conclusion as your planning officers, the local community and the key stakeholders: that the proposals provide an opportunity to provide much-needed investment and job security, delivering long-term benefits to Weymouth, and approve this planning application.