

BRIDPORT AREA DEVELOPMENT TRUST

West Dorset District Council
Stratton House
58/60 High West Street
Dorchester
Dorset DT1 1UZ

For the attention of Andrew Martin

Principal Planning Officer

3rd February 2012

Dear Sir

Proposals for the development of land at St Michael's Trading Estate by the erection of 105 dwellings (66 houses, 4 maisonettes, & 35 flats), new commercial floor space, provision for 'the Trick Factory', associated car parking, & vehicular & pedestrian access.

Outline planning application nos. 1/D/11/2012 and 1/D/11/2013:

I am writing on behalf of The Bridport Area Development Trust (BADT) in response to consultation on the above proposals. The BADT is a charitable organisation, set up in 2009 with the aim of promoting and realising the transfer of ownership of community assets (land and buildings) for the benefit of the Bridport community. Implicit in this key objective are the BADT's aims, inter alia, to promote employment and secure the regeneration and restoration of buildings and areas of Bridport which contribute to its historic character and heritage.

BADT objects to the current applications for the following reasons:

1. The inappropriate development of an historically important industrial/commercial area.
2. The loss of existing (occupied) commercial/employment floorspace.

1. The inappropriate development of an historically important industrial/commercial area.

Bridport has been the home of the rope and net industry since the early 13th century and according to English Heritage 'Bridport's textile industry is one of the oldest documented industries in England'. [Bridport and West Bay: *The Buildings of the Flax and Hemp Industry*: Mike Williams] Its industrial buildings, townscapes and landscapes are an important part of this heritage.

The character and buildings of the St Michael's Trading Estate are a significant element of Bridport's industrial heritage including those buildings regarded as having seen 'better days'. The area represents an important historic asset to the town. The historic layout and buildings, now incorporating a wide variety of seed bed commercial and industrial uses, should be safeguarded in accordance with its conservation area status and regenerated in accordance the District Council's 2002 Regeneration Framework.

The BADT considers the development of the major part of the St Michael's Trading Estate for housing wholly inappropriate. It is contrary to the Council's Local Plan Policy WA6 which requires that a mixed use development of the St Michael's Trading Estate should ensure 'the overall increase in employment opportunities.' It is also considered that the proposed development will have an adverse impact on the historic character, townscape and use of the conservation area contrary to national guidance (PPS 5) and Local Plan Policy SA21.

The proposed development is also without proper justification by the applicants having regard to national guidance PPS 5. It has not been shown that 'conservation through grant funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is not possible' (policy HE9.2) or that 'evidence has been provided that other potential owners or users of the site have been sought through appropriate marketing and that reasonable endeavours have been made to seek grant funding for the heritage asset's conservation'. Indeed it is understood that despite the continued deterioration and lack of investment in the buildings on St Michael's Trading Estate, the landowner has shown little interest in seeking grant funding to remedy the deterioration of the buildings. (Ref WDDC report March 2006 on HERS initiative).

The BADT is currently pursuing proposals to restore and bring the Bridport Literary and Scientific Institute at 51 East Street back into community use. The use of the main rooms for a new discovery/interpretation centre are being explored, at the heart of which will be Bridport's rope and net industry – which has so crucially shaped the town and its surroundings. The character, layout and buildings on St Michael's Trading Estate are an important part of this heritage which will be diminished by the threat of the proposed development.

2. The loss of existing (occupied) commercial/employment floorspace.

The proposed development will result in the loss of over a third of the existing floorspace on the St Michael's Trading Estate. Nearly all of this floorspace is occupied by a range of small commercial/industrial start-up enterprises. From these enterprises, a new cultural and creative quarter is emerging within the historic fabric of the Estate, which is attractive to visitors and makes an important contribution to the economic growth of the town. Government policy (NESTA Research Reports) places emphasis on the contribution of creative industries to economic growth – national, regional and local – and notes that it is this sector of economic activity which is growing faster than other sectors in the UK economy. In the current economic climate these activities should be safeguarded and protected from speculative development proposed by the applicant.

BADT consider that the proposals are contrary to Local Plan Policy ET1. This policy identifies two exceptions to the retention of industrial and commercial sites. The first is where the employment use is causing significant highway, environmental or amenity problems and it has been shown that no appropriate viable alternative employment uses could be attracted to that site. The second exception is where it can be shown that the mixed use proposals would offer important community benefits, opportunities for regeneration and will not result in a significant loss of jobs in the area.

The existing employment uses on the site do not raise highway issues and any perceived environmental/amenity problems are the result of years of neglect and lack of investment in the site; it is clear from the outline application that proposals will result in a significant loss of employment floorspace and jobs. In outline form the proposals are speculative with all matters reserved except for access and layout; the applicant's Viability Report accompanying the application makes clear that the proposals whilst viable are not

deliverable and the S 106 Document submitted with the application states that the level of financial contributions 'need to be a matter of negotiation with the Council'. Against this background, the proposed community benefits and opportunities for regeneration are therefore also speculative and must be disregarded.

In summary, BADT consider that the development proposed in the outline application and accompanying application for demolition of buildings within the conservation area should be rejected by the Council on the basis that the proposals are contrary to guidance contained in PPS5 and Local Plan policies as outlined above. The proposals are speculative and will result in the loss of occupied employment floorspace as well as existing jobs. Emerging enterprises which are making an important contribution to economic and employment growth in Bridport will be put at risk and the loss of the historic fabric and layout of this area which makes an important contribution to the character and heritage of Bridport will be irreparable.

The Council is urged to refuse the applications.

Yours faithfully

Diane May

Director and Trustee

Bridport Area Development Trust.

c/o The Old Post Office

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