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# Commercial Availability Study

In support of a planning application to South Somerset District Council for the proposed demolition of existing workshop/store building and erection of 2 buildings to accommodate a total of 14 flats at The Old Wool Store, East Street, Chard, TA20 1EP.



On behalf of Messrs. Brinkman and Lampey.

Prepared by:

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13 March 2008

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REF: AJP/SAB/1528

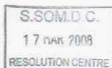


## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Commercial Availability Study is prepared in support of a planning application to South Somerset District Council for the proposed demolition of an existing workshop/store building and erection of 14 flats comprised in two 2-storey buildings.
- 1.2 A previous planning application ref. 07/04557/OUT was refused on grounds that *"The proposed development by reason of the loss of employment land and buildings would have a significant adverse effect on employment opportunities in Chard. This is contrary to Policy ME6 of the South Somerset Local Plan 2006"*.
- 1.3 In subsequent discussions with the Case Planning Officer, the applicants were advised that in order to address this concern, any future re-submission of this application should be accompanied by evidence to demonstrate that the proposal would not result in a significant adverse effect on employment opportunities in Chard. This evidence should include both an assessment of the suitability of the site itself for future employment potential, and a study of the current availability of commercial premises elsewhere in the town.
- 1.4 An independent firm of commercial agents, Messrs. Hatfield White, were instructed to prepare an assessment of the employment potential of the application site, and their report accompanies the current application. This Commercial Availability Study addresses the second issue, being the availability of commercial premises elsewhere in Chard at the present time.

## 2.0 METHOD

- 2.1 Research into the availability of commercial premises in Chard was undertaken via three methods. Firstly, an internet search was made of the websites of local commercial agents. Secondly, a physical survey of the main commercial areas of the town was undertaken, to check for agent's boards on appropriate properties. Also, a telephone survey was undertaken in order to contact various commercial agents and property owners, together with the Council's Economic Development Service, to verify the availability of commercial space and to confirm details of the individual properties.
- 2.2 The survey was undertaken during the months of January and February 2008.



### 3.0 RESULTS OF STUDY

3.1 The survey identified the following industrial or storage property as being available to purchase or rent in Chard during the time of the study. These uses may be directly compared with potential uses for the Old Wool Store premises.

- Millfield Industrial Estate Units 17 & 18 – Total of 8,000 sq. ft. industrial / warehouse space available to let in whole or in part.
- Millfield Industrial Estate – 8 further units of industrial / warehouse space let on licence or short term let only, with longer term occupiers being sought.
- Bartlett Park, Millfield Industrial Estate – Unit of 2,000 sq. ft. industrial / warehouse space, including office and toilets, available to let.
- Chard Business Park – 3,106 sq. ft. industrial / warehouse unit to let.
- Millfield, Chard – Former MAV premises. Detached bungalow together with a small industrial complex formerly occupied by an engineering company, available to purchase.
- Victoria Business Park. 5 general industrial units for sale or to let ranging from 1,750 sq. ft. to 7,750 sq. ft. Premises comprise a series of single storey modern business units with roller shutter door access and a personnel door, with allocated car parking.
- Crimchard Business Centre. 5,000 sq. ft. industrial space available to let.
- Chaffcombe Lane, Chard. 3 commercial buildings available, comprising 3000 sq. ft., 2080 sq. ft., and 800 sq. ft.
- Chard Business Park – 3 vacant plots remaining, areas 2.66 acres, 0.62 acres and 0.72 acres, for B1 / B2 / B8 development.

3.2 There is also currently a high availability of other commercial property within Chard, with the survey having identified the following premises:

- 30 Fore Street. Office accommodation totalling 4,155 sq. ft., arranged over basement, ground, first and second floors, available to purchase.
- 8 Fore Street. Retail property to let in prime town centre location.
- Beeching Close. Food production unit 11,565 sq. ft. on a 0.7 acre site, including modern butchery, meat packing and processing facilities, offices, canteen, locker room etc., available to purchase.
- Stringfellow Gallery, Holyrood Street. Retail unit with a parking space, 408 sq. ft., available to let.
- Somerset House, Fore Street. First floor single room offices or suites. 4 offices available, total 693 sq. ft. to let.
- Buck House, Fore Street – First floor offices available to let.
- Lloyds Pharmacy premises, 61 Fore Street. Investment property with sales and consulting room on ground floor and ancillary accommodation on first floor, let on passing rent of £11,000 per annum.
- Robert Frith Optometrists premises, 35 Fore Street. Investment property with two storey accommodation, let on passing rent of £9,500 per annum.
- Hentons premises, 9 Fore Street. Retail investment property with offices on upper floors and with planning for development of 4 mews cottages to rear, let on passing rent of £14,500 per annum.

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- 3.3 Although beyond the scope of this study, we are also aware that there are other commercial premises available in the nearby towns of Ilminster and Crewkerne, as well as in some of the larger villages within the locality.
- 3.4 Feedback from a number of agents or property owners has pointed to a present general lack of demand for commercial property in Chard, with a number of premises having remained empty for some length of time. Many agents are offering inducements to attract occupiers, with landlords needing to be increasingly flexible on terms. Some properties are being let on licences or short term lets, in the absence of occupiers prepared to sign a longer term agreement, a situation which creates uncertainty and restricts the viability of investment property. This demonstrates that levels of demand for commercial space in Chard are not particularly high at present.
- 3.5 Looking further ahead, the South Somerset Local Plan includes provision for approximately 13 hectares of additional employment land within the Chard Key Site between Fumham Road and Tatworth Road, thus ensuring the future availability of additional employment opportunities for the town.



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4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 From the study, it can be seen that there is presently a high availability of commercial space in Chard, either to let or to purchase. This is especially so in the case of light industrial or storage accommodation, which are perhaps the most likely uses that might be accommodated at the location of the Old Wool Store site.
- 4.2 Considerable additional employment opportunities are also provided for in future, with 13 hectares of employment land having been allocated within the Chard Key Site.
- 4.3 The existing Wool Store premises are not suitable for many commercial uses, due to the limitations posed by the design and construction of the building, the poor access into both the site and into the building itself, and the projected cost of the necessary repairs and alterations to the structure. Equally, it is highly unlikely that the premises could be viably redeveloped for commercial use. These matters are addressed in more detail in the accompanying Hatfield White report.
- 4.4 The many restrictions of the Wool Store premises, coupled with the high availability of commercial property of a much higher specification elsewhere in the town, means that any potential commercial occupier looking for premises in Chard at present would find their needs much better met by alternative accommodation to the Wool Store site.
- 4.5 In summary it is considered highly unlikely that the Wool Store premises would be likely to attract a viable employment re-use, as prospective occupiers would be put off by the limitations of the property, and would find their needs far better met at alternative premises that are currently available elsewhere in the town, or are to be provided in future. On this basis it may be concluded the proposed redevelopment of the site for residential use would not have an adverse effect on employment opportunities in Chard.

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