**Part 5: St Michael’s Estate Information**

BANP Vision-2030

Economic Plan Draft 1 Sept 2016

**St Michaels Trading Estate** (SW Quadrant) Bridport

St Michael's represents one of the earliest trading estates to be developed in the UK and is recognised as unique, not only for it's characteristic layout from 19th century rope and net manufacturing, but unlike others, it's proximity to the town center and the Bus and Coach terminal, thereby benefiting from considerable footfall, inter­ connectivity, and the resultant ‘cluster eff ect’

The estate maintains a high occupancy rate, thought to be 95-98% of available units, and the landowners hold a waiting list of prospective business tenants.

A working community has evolved over 45 years with a diverse and complementary mix including; design, manufacturing, repair services, trade, retail, artists studios and antique shops. It is now established as a host for the Vintage Market, Local Food Market, Bridport Open Studios, an international BMX competition, and the award-winning Red Brick Cafe.

With over 90 small businesses on the site, 229 employees (FTE) were recorded in July 2016.

The employment site sits across the river from the Skilling housing estate, the 2nd most deprived area in West Dorset.

The trading estate is recognised as an important provider of 'seed­ bed' or 'incubator' business opportunities where small-scale enterprises start before expansion to larger premises.

Examples; Clipper Teas, Top Gear, Bridport Timber and Floors, Keo Films, Fat Leaf etc.

In the last 5-10 years St Michaels has seen a surge of new economic activity, in particular, with the emergence of the 'Arts and Vintage Quarter' and the numbers of visitors has increased dramatically with up to 2,000 visitors recorded on days hosting Bridport Open Studios or the Vintage Market.

However St Michael's great potential to expand, as a key element in town centre expansion, has been limited by a lack of re-investment and a series of proposals to demolish working premises and erect around 100 residential units. Such proposals have failed to materialise on 3 occasions with the most recent application (2011) recording unprecedented levels of opposition by local residents at 98.7%.

Current emerging proposals for 95 new residential units are causing public concern and instability to established businesses, which operate under the threat of loss of Bridport's unique asset as an attraction to creative industry, trade and tourism. The loss of manufacturing usage would also further impact on the local economy.

The initial public consultation by BANP revealed that support for St Michaels, and the need for employment were among the top 4 concerns of local residents in the NP area.

**Local Plan 2015**

4.3.1 ’The loss of employment uses can impact negatively on local access to employment and the economic competitiveness of local areas. This in turn would undermine economic growth.’

4.5.9 ’The retention of tourism attractions and other employment sites.’

**Surveys;**

As early as 2002, the SW Quadrant Regeneration Framework stated (3.4.12); *"There is poor recognition of the area's Industrial Heritage that is abundant in SWQ and the town's Saxon origins. This has much potential in terms of education, leisure and tourism.* "

*(4.6)*

*"St M ichael's is a key employment site and it is important that it continues as it's main function.* "

Similarly, the Bridport 'Market Town Healthcheck' 2001 states (8.1.9); *"The town has an interesting history and this is not fully exploited in promoting the town to local residents and visitors.* "

WDDC commissioned a survey with Goadsby Ltd in 2009; Potential Employment Sites' 2009. For St Michael's it concluded;

*"The site offers regeneration opportunities for Bridport town centre. It is therefore recommended that this site is retained for employment use.* "

**Heritage Regeneration;**

St Michaels sits within the Conservation Area and is thought to offer immense potential for heritage regeneration and expansion of the local economy.While 4 heritage assets remain ear-marked for demolition, restoration, development and investment through grant-funding would be viable if these buildings came under the care of a community interest company.

An Industrial and Provident Society was registered in 2012 and presently has over 600 members and shareholders. The Community Interest Company wishes to offer the landowners a way to develop the site without the loss of a business community, local heritage, social infrastructure, and an important tourist attraction.

Given that the Local Plan 2015 has recommended St Michaels for 'Mixed Use’, Enterprise St Michaels members have voted to support no more than 40 residential units on the estate, the maximum level thought achievable without causing detrimental consequences to Bridport's environment and local economy.

Regarding Mixed Use, The Local Plan (Conservation Area) states; this is only to be permitted *'provided that neighbouring uses are generally compatible, and new uses do not detract from the character of the established area.'*

Both Enterprise St Michaels and Bridport Community Land Trust are able to access grant-funding which would enable Heritage Regeneration for economic expansion within this site. While the owners have been developing proposals for housing to replace existing workspace over several decades, the increased need for economic development in Bridport’s town centre now presents an unrivalled opportunity within St Michaels Trading Estate.

*NPPF 133. Heritage Assets/Conservation Areas. Permission for development involving their loss ’should not be given unless Conservation by grant-funding or some form of public ownership is demonstrably not possible.’*

The Heritage and Economic Regeneration Scheme 2006 (Hers) identified 5 aims for the SWQ;

1.Conserve and revitalise the historic area.

2.Reinforce the economic base of the area.

3.Rescue 'at risk' buildings

4.Foster re-occupation of under-used buildings

5.Raise awareness of its historic importance

A grant of approximately £2m was offered at this time but was not taken up. \_

English Heritage submitted an objection to the still current application (2011); *'It would appear that the commercial pro file of the Quadrant may have experienced a significant up-li ft of late which in turn may prompt the need to review the principle of 'enabling' development which was accepted originally on the basis of commercial non-viability. '*

An English Heritage publication by Mike Williams concludes;

*'St Michaels Trading Estate is perceived to be the most dramatic illustration characterising the 19th century expansion of Bridport's Cordage Industry. A nationally significant area which underpins the raison d'etre of the town.'*

**Government Policies**

Adopted Local Plan 2006 ETl. 7.4.5

*'The loss of acceptable sites for general industrial use within easy reach of the main towns is of particular concern, due to the difficulties of providing new sites f or such uses. It is theref ore important that existing B1 , B2, and BB uses in appropriate locations such* as *industrial estates, are retained wherever possible.* '

Local Development Framework. Employment Land Review. 2.7

*'LPA 's are encouraged to identify a robust and def ensible portfolio of both strategic and locally important employment sites in their LDFs and, where appropriate, to safeguard both new and existing employment areas for employment rather than for other uses.'*

Corporate Plan 2012. A newsletter statement by WDDC;

*'By saf e-guarding the many important buildings at St M ichaels Trading Estate,* we *want to protect existing jobs and create new ones f or the town*

*.'*

Local Plan Guidance; 152

*'LPAs should seek opportunities to achieve each of the economic, social , and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and net gains across each three. Signif icant adverse impacts on ANY of these d imensions should be avoided.'*

NPPF states;

*'Town centres should be reserved f or commercial use wherever possible. ' 'Recent ref orms underline the importance of town centres'*

Planning minister, Greg Clarke

**Expansion Potential**

**NPPF 19. ‘Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth.’**

**NPPF 24. Vitality of Town Centres. ‘Preference should be given to sites that are well connected with the town centre, wherever possible.’**

**Local Plan 4.1.4. ‘The plan area has an outstanding natural and historic environment which makes an important contribution to the local economy.’**

**4.1.6 Regenerating the area’s vibrant town centres.**

**4.2.2 ‘Further employment allocations may come forward through Neighbourhood Development Plans.’**

**4.2.3 ’The expansion of existing employment sites and premises …can help bring about economic activity and local job opportunities.’**

**St Michaels Trading Estate lies adjacent to Bridport’s primary transport hub and the town centre car park (Rope Walks), providing high accessibility and sustainability as in the requirements of the Local Plan 4.5.7 guidelines.**

**It also borders the town centre boundary with shoppers and visitors creating significant footfall and spend within the site all year round. This means that the site offers significant benefits and attracts particular businesses which cannot be found at employment sites on the fringes of Bridport such as Vearse Farm or Gore Cross. This therefore conforms with the Sequential Test (ECON 4).**

**There is opportunity, and indeed proposals exist, to create a visitor centre, a heritage centre, an indoor market and indoor youth sports and leisure facilities in currently under-used buildings, and currently wasted land such as the old Cattle Market. The North and Western areas alongside the river Simene, are thought to be appropriate to help provide affordable housing and better public access to the river through landscaping.**

**Improvements to existing buildings in commercial use alongside the creation of further units would serve to increase the attractiveness to prospective businesses and to visitors alike, while providing optimum opportunities for local economic expansion.**

**One building in particular; the Stover Works of 1890’s rope and net making is recognised as both a Heritage Asset and an Asset of Community Value. The Localism Act 2011 provides the local community opportunity to purchase this historic building before it is considered for disposal. A portion of the Stover has been home to The Trick Factory, a BMX and skate arena of 17 years. It is proposed that the building can be appropriately renovated and its use expanded to include a climbing wall, trampolines, further alternative youth sports for all ages along with a cafe and heritage centre. This project would be highly eligible for grant-funding and could lead to the creation of jobs and a sustainable visitor attraction.**

**The development of Tourism.**

**4.5.2 ‘ The designated landscapes and historic settlements are particularly valuable for tourism and attracting inward investment’.**

**4.5.5 ’Some developments such as Arts and cultural tourism, help with the appeal of the area beyond the traditional tourist season. These types of development will be encouraged and supported.’**

Recorded visitor numbers to Bridport have increased by over 100% in the last decade.

In 'Resort' magazine, St Michael's has been listed as the number 1 attraction in the Bridport and West Bay area for several years consecutively, including currently in 2017.

St Michaels has also featured as a unique attraction in national publications such as the Times and the Guardian, also Dorset and Dorset Life magazines, Antiques, Tourism, and Art magazines, as well as several English Heritage publications.

It is considered that with only a modest level of investment, the historic site has the potential to significantly increase economic activity and employment opportunities in the area.

**Conclusion**

The success of such a site which attracts thousands of visitors each week despite having suffered from a lack of investment for several decades, can be put down to its setting, its richness of character, and the usually wide variety of businesses, services and outlets which it offers. This is irreplaceable and evidence to highlight the local desire to both retain and improve the trading estate is provided in the BANP consultations.

Therefore, it would seem logical to protect both the unique tourist attraction which brings a considerable spend to the local economy throughout the year, and the employment site itself, which would be able to provide an increase in access to employment in the Bridport area.

This could be achieved through the allocation of St Michaels Trading Estate as a Key Employment Site and by including the site in the Town Centre Boundary to which it already lies adjacent to.

(This contradicts other elements of the Economy Group’s submission and remains to be discussed).

Mixed Use Development would require the provision of residential units on the site which could be provided separately on land currently wasted on the North and Western fringes. To ensure that economic expansion would not be compromised however, residential units should be limited in quantity.

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