



A CRISIS FOR THE WHITE HORSE BUSINESS PARK

A CRISIS FOR THE TROWBRIDGE AREA

A couple of years ago the Government allowed offices to be converted (not demolished and rebuilt) to residential accommodation without the need for planning permission. These are known as 'permitted development' rights. Before the change came into use Councils were given the opportunity to seek exempted status for their most important offices and Business Parks. This Wiltshire Council did, but the Government declined their application.

On 14 March the Council received a Prior Approval application informing the Council that the applicants intended to convert the office block known as The Pavilions (last occupied by Virgin Mobile) on the White Horse Business Park into 98 apartments. Transforming Trowbridge's understanding is that the Council has limited ability to refuse this application and can do so only on the grounds of highways and transport, flooding and/or contaminated land.

It is unlikely, therefore, that the Council can decline the application.

The only action the Council can take to prevent this change of use taking place is to pass a resolution (known as an Article 4 Direction) which effectively prevents the conversion going ahead without planning permission being obtained. The down side to such a resolution is that the applicants make look to recover compensation because their 'permitted development' rights have been taken away.

The Council must pass the resolution and implement the Article 4 Direction before 9 May 2016 the final date for reaching a decision on the Prior Approval application.

Transforming Trowbridge, the newly established private sector led partnership promoting inward investment and job creation, has the following as one of its

key objectives. *We will work to identify employers who have the ability to establish businesses in immediately available office accommodation on the White Horse Business Park, Trowbridge's premier employment location, the best example of which is the Pavilions which can provide accommodation for over 1,000 jobs*

As a consequence Transforming Trowbridge is strongly opposed to this application and is urging the Council to make an Article 4 Direction for the following reasons:-

- Building ninety eight units in a town which has major allocations for housing development and is awash with house-building is ridiculous. The Government's motivation for office to residential – to provide much needed housing – is not relevant in Trowbridge. This is in stark contrast to the limited employment land available at the present time. We have no shortage of housing but a shortage of jobs and buildings to accommodate them.
- The buildings represent Trowbridge's, if not Wiltshire's, best opportunity to attract a major employer to the area. Previous occupants Barclays Bank and, subsequently, Virgin Mobile, each employed significant numbers. The fact that it has remained empty for so many years is probably down to poor marketing. The Pavilions is the finest office block in Trowbridge capable of providing over 1,000 jobs. 100,000 square feet, easily sub-divided into two or three separate units, is the jewel in the crown of the White Horse Business Park. Its loss would be disastrous.
- The risk that the White Horse Business Park will become a housing suburb is real when other empty office owners discover that they will not be prevented from turning offices into homes. Other currently empty office buildings on the Business Park will be tempted to follow suit and submit similar Prior Approval applications transforming the Park into a residential area. This will ruin the image and reputation of one of the best Business Parks in Wiltshire.
- The danger that other established employers on the site will feel insecure and take steps to take their businesses away. Nutricia and Hitachi, two national companies attracted to the Park, may be tempted to leave.
- The properties that will be created if the development goes ahead will, because of the nature of the design of the building be of low standard and quality. The building is fitted out as a call centre it simply will not be

able to be converted with any quality.

- When the Government allowed the change of use from offices to residential to happen they never envisaged a building like this being the subject of an application. The driving force behind the legislative change was to fill empty buildings in towns or 'worn out' office buildings in areas with housing shortages.
- The Council, when the legislation was first proposed, made strong representations to the Government to grant exempt status to a number of Business Parks in the area, including the White Horse Business Park. That application was refused but the motivation for that application (the protection of job-creating investment opportunities) remains the same.

Members of the public, the Town and Parish Councils and Councillors are urged to make representations to Wiltshire Council urging them to make an Article 4 Direction for the White Horse Business Park to ensure that it is not transformed into a residential area. They must do so before April 12.



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Link to developing website <http://www.eberlintest.co.uk/test2/newsheadlines.html>

Transforming Trowbridge is a private sector led partnership focussed on promoting, facilitating and enabling investment opportunities in Wiltshire's County Town.

It is a unique partnership supported by major employers, local business and the local authorities.

The team are volunteers who are committed to ensuring that the rapid growth in population in the town is matched by parallel growth in businesses, retail and, above all, employment opportunities.