

Planning application 49/22/0022 – Demolition of buildings and erection of residential development comprising of 25 flats, community enterprise hub and associated landscaping, car parking and servicing at Golden Hill Brewery, Wiveliscombe

As ward councillor, I have objections to this application. If recommended for approval, criteria should have been met for the application to be referred to Planning Committee for decision.

Aspects of the proposals are to be commended but I am concerned about some features. I have long said to representatives of the applicant (SCS/SCCLT*) that this may not be the best site for their proposed project.

Welcome aspects include the 100% affordable housing, potential for community enterprise, nature friendly design features, new walkway along the access road to the old brewery site, and the energy efficiency and generation measures. Potentially, the development of a challenging brownfield site is also to be welcomed, providing the proposal does not have too many offsetting negatives features, which, unfortunately, is the case with the proposal.

Problems with the application include the following.

a) Parking

Car parking dominates the approaches and views from ground level on the main east and west sides of the proposed development. The applicant has stated no more than the 20 spaces proposed can be provided, which include 5 accessible bays and electric vehicle charging facilities.

Council parking standards require 29 spaces for the dwellings, and I believe another 5 spaces for visitors and 3 spaces for the employment hub, which is a total of 37. The proposed development only provides just over half this number.

There is already a lack of parking in nearby Golden Hill and Coopers Heights, and conflicts over parking can also arise in Hauling Way, where a new development of 14 houses is currently being built. The Old Brewery Road leading up to the proposed development contains retail, trade and industrial premises, which lack off-street parking and so result in on-street parking on a road that is frequently used by lorries and heavy vehicles, as well as by the cars of workers and customers of the businesses.

It is suggested parking requirements for the proposed development will be reduced by the type of tenants in the dwellings and the welcome provision of a car share scheme. However, there can be no certainty these will sufficiently reduce the parking needed.

The parking provision is so far below the council standard requirements that parking from the proposed development is likely to over-spill into neighbouring areas, adding to existing parking conflicts and problems.

* Somerset Co-operative Services CIC and Somerset Co-operative Community Land Trust

b) Density and design

There are problems with the size and height of the proposed development. As shown in the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, the main building would be a highly visible and dominant addition to the town. It would partially block two of the most prominent landmark structures, which are the old brewery tower and chimney.

The size and height of the proposed building would have a negative impact, both when viewed at distance and from the Old Brewery Road. For the latter, the new development would obscure and take over from the views of the tower and chimney, as shown on pages 48, 49 and 50 of the LVIA. To a slightly lesser degree, this would also occur at greater distances, as shown on pages 53 and 54 of the LVIA. The old brewery tower and chimney are prominent landmarks viewed from many locations around Wiveliscombe, which should not be diminished in this way.

In my view, the high density and the intrusive size and height of the main building, together with the lack of parking provision, suggest the number of dwellings would result in considerable over-development of the site. The number of one bedroom flats also suggests the applicant is trying to achieve and include too much within the constraints of the site.

The quality review panel suggested (February 2022) that the applicant consider “delivering some of the accommodation at the base of the site, as mews houses with undercroft parking or individual garages in place of the parking spaces located on Hauling Way”. In my view, this would represent a better design, enabling a smaller and lower building at the top of the site. I think less dwellings and a greater range in terms of bedroom sizes is also required, as well as more usable outside space for the residents.

The design of the proposed development needs to be improved and it is not appropriate for a Conservation Area.

There should be no more than two floors at the top of the development site, with the number of dwellings reduced, to avoid landscape intrusion and over-development, and more parking and more outside space needs to be provided for residents.

The quality review panel said “the proposal does not yet sit comfortably within the Wiveliscombe townscape” and raised several issues to be addressed, including with regard to “the distribution, height and massing of residential units”. The panel acknowledged the local demand for one-person/one-bedroom units, but it also questioned “whether these smaller units, and the overall tenure mix, are futureproof and could support a sustainable community”.

The panel asked for design improvements to be considered, including “further thinking to ensure privacy for bedrooms currently located next to deck access”. “Reversing floorplans” was one method suggested to achieve this. However, it would seem better to retain views to the east from living areas. So, for me, the lack of bedroom privacy from the deck access is another problem resulting from over-development of the site in the proposal.

Finally on design, I have doubts about the serrated roof profile proposed. It may be better for the roof to fit with the design and shape of existing buildings on the old brewery site, including the Tower, Oast House and Malthouse.

c) Loss of employment land and conflict with established business users

Currently, the site is employment land. Businesses long established nearby include Quantock Engineering and the showrooms of Yew Tree Antiques, which is a partly online retail business.

Quantock Engineering have operated from adjoining workshops since the early 1980s. The main entrance to the proposed development is directly in front of the main access to Quantock Engineering, which would create inevitable conflict. It appears the design of the proposed development has taken no real account of the needs and current operations of Quantock Engineering.

Quantock Engineering supply services and machinery to the sawmilling and woodworking industries, which includes the building, maintenance and refurbishment of large industrial machines. They operate a range of heavy metal working equipment from their site and have a store of large and heavy metal parts used for the machinery they build, maintain and refurbish.

Lifting equipment and a large heavy-duty forklift truck are used to move supplies and machines to and from lorries and the working areas. This takes place where the main entrance is proposed into the development. Loading and unloading could safely coincide with the brewery previously located on the development site, but it looks an impossible mix with the residents, visitors and traffic that would be generated by building dwellings and an enterprise hub on the site, with, in effect, shared use of the main access to their entrances.

This is a major conflict and reason alone to refuse the planning application.

Photos and descriptions in appendix A provide further details on Quantock Engineering operations and use of the area in front of their works.

In the pre-application comments of 10 February 2022 from Somerset West and Taunton Council, it is stated that “the onus will be on [the applicant], as the ‘agent of change’, to demonstrate that the proposed residential use can be integrated effectively into the area without adversely affecting the existing business or resulting in them having unreasonable restrictions placed upon them”. The applicant has failed to address this requirement in the proposals and reports supplied.

Policy CP2 of the Adopted Core Strategy 2011-2028 for Taunton Deane states: “Proposals which lead to the loss of existing or identified business, industrial or warehousing land to other uses, including retail, will not be permitted unless the overall benefit of the proposal outweighs the disadvantages of the loss of employment or potential employment on the site”.

There are benefits to the proposed development (as listed at the start of these comments), but they do not outweigh the disadvantages and problems that would result.

It is worth noting that this is primarily a residential development proposed on employment land. The total floor area of the 25 proposed dwellings is 1,227 square metres. The community enterprise hub will be only 91 square metres.

Facilities to be offered by the community enterprise hub are already offered at other locations in Wiveliscombe, including the nearby Enterprise Centre at Sandys Moor, Wiveliscombe, which offers

7 light industrial units, 10 small serviced offices, and 2 meeting rooms accommodating up to 10 people with interactive screen technology, as well as parking.

d) Energy performance and car share

My biggest concerns are covered in the sections above.

The car share scheme and energy features of the application are positive proposals to be welcomed, although they could be improved.

The car share scheme is essential to allowing some reduction in parking provision. However, insufficient evidence is provided to show how it will reduce the need for car ownership in a housing development of the size proposed. More certainty may also be needed that the car share scheme and its benefits can be sustained in the long term.

High standards of insulation, a ground source heat pump and PV solar panels are all very positive proposals to be welcomed. If, with a revised design, the application were to be approved, it should be ensured that these features would be delivered by the development. The applicant may also wish to consider how they could do even better.

The Energy Statement says the development will comply with Policy DM5 of the Taunton Deane Core Strategy and improve upon Part L of the Building Regulations.

The Council's guidance on Climate Positive Planning (Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate and Ecological Emergency, 2022) notes: "Good design makes the most of opportunities for passive heating, cooling and lighting through its layout, landscaping and orientation and ensures that building fabric is energy efficient so as to reduce the need for energy intensive heating, cooling and lighting".

The Council is committed to working towards carbon neutrality by 2030 and has also published a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit as an aspirational best practice guide to follow in designing, specifying, constructing and fitting out a Net Zero compliant new build (or retrofit) project. Following this toolkit guide should enable the applicant to further improve the energy performance of their development.

e) Recycling and refuse

The bin store is close to the entrance of the development, but it appears that Somerset Waste Partnership's Developer Guidance (<https://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/developer-guidance/>) has not been followed. This requests for communal properties or flats that "individual containers should be provided unless agreed with SWP prior to the planning application being submitted". Individual containers for each dwelling ensures high levels of personal responsibility for waste, increases recycling, and helps SWP to identify issues and communicate with residents.

Cllr Dave Mansell

Wiveliscombe and District Ward - Somerset West and Taunton Council

Upper Tone Division – Somerset County Council

4 August 2022

APPENDIX A – Quantock Engineering operations and access



LEFT - This is the large forklift truck used by Quantock Engineering to move equipment and materials, including to load and unload lorries on the access in front of their works.

BELOW – The access road in front of Quantock Engineering, where lorries are loaded and unloaded. The main access from Golden Hill to the proposed residential development is on the left of this photo in front of the Quantock Engineering works. To the right of the photo is a yard owned and used by Quantock Engineering, which shows the lifting arm (yellow) used on the forklift. This preparation area has planning permission for a 10m x 7.5m building to accommodate existing activities, including preparation of machinery, and to provide additional secure dry storage of materials.

