

27th April 2016



Mrs Claire Jones-Hughes
The Programme Officer
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Employment Land Local Plan Examination - Statement

Introduction

Eastbourne & District Chamber of Commerce Limited (EDCC)

The Eastbourne & District Chamber of Commerce (EDCC) trading as Eastbourne *unLtd* is one of the largest town based Chambers in the South East representing upwards of over 600 member organisations. Our motto is Enterprise, Socialise, Realise and we aim to encourage businesses in all sectors, of all sizes, to join us and turn those words into something tangible. Eastbourne and the surrounding area not only has a very active and successful business community, but also offers one of the best quality of life experiences in the South East.

EDCC enjoys excellent partnership relationships with all neighbouring local and district councils, our MPs, the South East LEP, the Federation of Small Businesses, Locate East Sussex, Let's Do Business Group and all our neighbouring Chambers of Commerce in East Sussex through ACES (the Alliance of Chambers in East Sussex). The success of these relationships have been held up as an exemplar to best practice for the furtherance of supporting business and growing the local economy.

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enterprise | socialise | realise

Derek Godfrey

This statement was written on behalf of EDCC by Mr Derek Godfrey

Derek Godfrey is Managing Director of Ellis Building Contractors Ltd which over 25 years has emerged and now established as a regionally recognised award winning business with a highly motivated and professional workforce. Derek has also been a Director for 10 years of Eastbourne & District Chamber of Commerce, over 7 years of which he has been Portfolio Holder for Commercial and Economic Development. Derek has extensive experience of economic development in Eastbourne and the surrounding area having served as a business representative on the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) since its inception in 2010 and served as Vice Chairman for four years, and set up Team East Sussex (TES) which is the federated arm of SELEP covering East Sussex which he Chaired for three years. It was under Derek's Chairmanship that Funding was successfully secured via the LEP Growing Places Fund to support the building of the first anchor unit business park premises at Sovereign Harbour now known as Pacific House which was delivered on site in partnership with Sea Change Sussex.

Derek is passionate about local business and committed to the South East and East Sussex as a highly attractive business destination.

Summary of Position

EDCC has been asked by the Planning Inspector to participate in the hearing into the Eastbourne Employment Land Local Plan.

Before the introduction of Local Enterprise Partnerships Local Authorities tended to compete for funding support based on the levels of their deprivation and regeneration requirements. Eastbourne had never fared well in this environment. With the introduction of the Local Enterprise Partnerships more emphasis was directed towards additionally supporting locations where there was significant "oven ready" growth potential. As part of a LEP wide initiative to promote economic growth SELEP identified two primary growth locations in East Sussex, the largest being Eastbourne and the other Hastings together with their surrounding conurbations. With this emphasis and support Eastbourne has been very successful in generating a culture of enterprise and business growth. With its undoubted work life balance appeal and advantages of its proximity relative to London and other energised and growing locations Eastbourne is growing a reputation as a very viable business destination with a receptive, open-for-business culture.

EDCC support the Eastbourne Borough Council's view that the office space allocation at Sovereign Harbour should be preserved because we believe there is a case and market for away from town centre offices. We also believe that there is a case for locating and building new town centre offices as well but this should not be at the loss of or in place of the provisions being put aside for Sovereign Harbour.

EDCC appreciates that Eastbourne Borough Council's view is not one unilaterally arrived at but is one derived from a consultation process over many month including many consultees, made up of among others, EDCC members and board members. This is in common with the approach in recent years adopted by the Local Authority in the spirit of localism which has been fully embraced and is very active.

Responses to Inspectors Questions

Matter 2 - Employment Strategy

EDCC believes that there is a demand for offices within the Eastbourne Town Centre. This information is supported through the collaborative work EDCC is engaged in with local businesses and sector group organisations like TechResort. EDCC are themselves looking for alternative premises in order to expand to more appropriate offices as its role becomes more pivotal in supporting existing, new and emerging businesses, and to date are struggling to identify suitable high quality office accommodation in the town centre.

EDCC is aware that over the last 2 to 3 years there has been a number of office blocks in the St Leonards Road part of the Town Centre that have been converted into flats as part of the permitted development initiative introduced by Central Government. The St Leonards Road area was once home to a number of large companies occupying the office buildings who have moved out of the area over the last 5-10 years. EDCC is aware that the office buildings in this location had been under occupied and the area's reputation as a business area has diminished. EDCC is also aware that the quality and design of these now converted buildings were no longer fit for purpose or in keeping with modern business requirements both in terms of design layout, flexibility and location. The lack of take up of these buildings as office accommodation must not be wrongly construed as a lack of demand for appropriate modern business space.

EDCC is aware that rental values for office accommodation in the town centre is increasing as demand increases and due to the reduction of available stock with the loss of the low quality

stock in the St Leonards Road area. Alongside the development of office accommodation on the development sites identified in the Town Centre Local Plan, EDCC would be supportive of redeveloping existing sites for office accommodation in other locations in the town centre.

EDCC is supportive of the provision of additional office accommodation in the town centre, however we believe that this should not be at the expense of Sovereign Harbour. EDCC is aware that businesses who do not want to be located within the town centre are looking for accommodation, and believe that Sovereign Harbour can provide alternative accommodation for these types of business. It is really important that we have an accommodation offer that recognises that there is a clear demand for both town centre and out of town “business park” type offices.

EDCC are encouraged by the development of Pacific House, which it is understood is performing above current expectations in terms of occupancy, and feel that a reduction in the office space allocation will prevent Sovereign Harbour from becoming an established location, which will have an adverse impact on the local economy. We also understand from our members that Pacific House is proving to be a very attractive location for businesses and therefore proving to be an excellent Anchor location to kick start the development. The full allocation at Sovereign Harbour will help to promote and market Sovereign Harbour as a business destination, and as the location is established and its reputation increased, this will further increase demand for similar accommodation in this location.

The organisation Seachange Sussex have a strong track record of delivering employment space in other locations in East Sussex, and EDCC are confident that they will be able to successfully provide business accommodation to turn Sovereign Harbour into a fully fledged business location with a strong reputation for providing desirable high quality business accommodation.

It is the belief of EDCC that if we cheaply give up commercial land in Eastbourne we will simply not get it back. We are aware of local businesses are looking for sites to expand and that other businesses have been looking to relocate to the town but have struggled to find suitable large sites locally. There are potentially very limited options for these kinds of businesses. The issue is not simply about how much space is available in total, but also about the *quality* and *diversity* of the offer, both in terms of new and second-hand space. In particular as a coastal town – Eastbourne is constrained not just by the sea on one side but also by areas of high landscape value immediately inland such as the restraints of South Downs National Park and marsh land.

Eastbourne and East Sussex are emerging from the recession and proving to be key growth locations. There is a strategic plan for economic growth which is shared and supported through

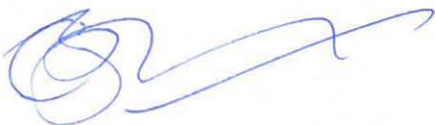
the alliances and partnerships born out of a localism agenda. We would therefore ask that this plan be respected and the office space allocations at Sovereign Harbour are retained in order to help our economy to continue to grow, prosper and reach its undoubted potential.

Matter 3 - Town Centre Allocations

EDCC very much supports the vision for the town centre as set out in the Town Centre Local Plan. Already there has been an £85 million investment in the Arndale Shopping Centre with additional retail space, new cinemas and restaurant offers that will further support a diverse town centre economy. EDCC look forward to additional developments in the town centre that can complement this significant investment and provide a huge boost to the town centre economy. In order for the town centre to be successful, EDCC feel that a range of different types of development are required in order to bring people into the town centre to spend their money. A growing town centre population also helps to increase the prosperity of local businesses.

EDCC are supportive of a mix of developments being provided on developments in the town centre, and feel that it is particularly important for the economic health of the town centre that development sites are not dominated by one particular use. EDCC is of the opinion that additional office accommodation should be provided in the town centre alongside retail uses and residential development. **If there is concern at all from EDCC, it is that the ELLP does not fully account for the demand born out of the success of initiatives to put Eastbourne on the map as a business destination for new businesses and for existing businesses as they grow and as a consequence, potential demand for town centre quality business premises, and those out of the town centre, will exceed that presently provided for as an allocation in the ELLP.**

Signed for and on behalf of the Eastbourne & District Chamber of Commerce Ltd



 Derek Godfrey
Director

