

Otley - employment lost versus housing developed

As local bodies involved in the promotion and support of Otley's business community and infrastructure, Otley Business Improvement District, Otley Chamber of Trade and Otley Town Partnership all support the inclusion of 5 hectares of employment land within the proposed East of Otley development. Considering that scheme has raised the question of the wider effects of the loading of Otley with accommodation in recent years and the neglect of employment considerations

1. Context

As a town of around 15,000 people, Otley has borne the brunt of the increasing pressure on traffic and public services infrastructure that has been exerted by the steady and disproportionate increase of domestic dwellings

Once self-sufficient in employment terms, Otley is now dependent on its retail, service and hospitality sectors for employment opportunities, has very little industry remaining and has dwindled to the point of being at risk of becoming a dormitory town

In the last 10 years a number of residential developments on greenfield and brownfield sites, plus building conversions (including a number of formerly substantial employment sites) have included:-

Adlington, Bridge Street (48 units of accommodation), Development Engineering Services, Wharfebank Mills (12), Garnetts Mill (245), 23-25 Manor Square (8), Massingberd, Leeds Road (14), Prince Henry's Court (3), Primitive Methodist Chapel, Station Road (14), Old Tannery, Leeds Road (10), LCC's One Stop Shop, Boroughgate (6), Rumpolecroft (135), and Wharfedale Hospital (61) plus a number of smaller conversions, many of them converted shops and businesses for example Suburban Style Bar (2), Chevin Trek (2), Park Lane College (3) and approximately another 10 shops/businesses granted consent for conversion to residential

Further housing pressure is planned at Ashfield Works (60 bed care home), Inglewood Children's home (TBC), former Atkinson Dacre offices on Boroughgate (7), former Nat West Bank (7 unit HMO), inevitably at Otley Civic Centre (TBC), the proposed East of Otley site (initially 550, with one scheme showing 650), Yeoman PH (consent granted in 2017 for 5 dwellings as yet undeveloped, consent lapsed), Summercross PH (consent granted for conversion to 48 bed care home in 2009 now lapsed, derelict and up for sale) and Manor House (consent granted for conversion of former architect office/bar to 2 flats and 5 person HMO)

Anecdotal public sentiment is very much that Otley is used as a dumping ground for housing developments, fulfilling quotas at the expense of the town's self-sufficiency

2. Lost employment

In the last 10 years alone, for want of the type modern warehouse/light industrial accommodation that is more readily available in nearby towns, Otley has lost skilled employment at the following:-

- J Barber/Artemis – once Otley's oldest business relocated to Harrogate, whilst in Otley rented warehouse space in Guiseley and Cambridge for want of local accommodation
- Canvasman – manufacturer of canvas coverings, relocated to Baildon (now employs at least 12 staff)
- Development Engineering Services – precision engineering aircraft parts, relocated to Baildon, now infill housing (now employs 15 jobs lost to Otley)
- Eriks – relocated to Bradford, building now derelict

- Massingberd VW Audi – now infill housing
- Otley Ford – now a supermarket
- Premier Vanguard – UKs largest till rolls manufacturer relocated to Bradford (employs 80+)
- Produmax – precision engineering aircraft parts relocated to Baildon, (now employs 79), building now a gym

Additionally significant job losses have been suffered at:-

- Armitage Monobond – manufacture of WC cistern parts (74 lost jobs), site now part redeveloped
- Garnetts Mill - paper production now moved to India

3. Current supply

With available development sites consistently earmarked for housing use, Otley offers very little supply of modern warehouse/light industrial units for businesses to relocate, expand to or start up in

There is only one designated business park within Otley, converted historic mills at Wharfebank Mills suited to technology, creative and communication uses but a few miles away at Pool there are modern units at Pool Business Park and Whiteley Court, the success of which indicates local demand

- Wharfebank Mills – converted historic mill for tech, creative and communications type uses rather than manufacturing or warehouse/light industrial. *Contact Siobhan Riley, Facilities Manager 01943 466444 sriley@chpmanagement.co.uk and Rory Stead roy@atkinsonassoc.co.uk at Atkinson Associates, their agents 07773 173023*
- Pool Business Park – phased development, currently 18 units. *Contact dan.brumfitt@ffsproperty.co.uk also info@poolbusinesspark.com*
- Whiteley Court – 10,000sqft of mixed use in 5 modern units adjacent to Weidmann Wheatley, all fully occupied on completion. *Contact richard@de-commercial 01943 662662*

An application at Gallows Hill for 15 units in 3 buildings has been refused on environmental and access grounds

4. Similar towns

Otley measures up poorly against employment provision in other market towns and places of a similar size and demographic such as Ilkley, Knaresborough, Thirsk, Ripon and Wetherby

5. Summary

In summary, whilst recognising Otley is a desirable place to live and welcoming new customers to town, the imbalance towards imposing further housing whilst ignoring the required corresponding attention towards employment and infrastructure has been severe

The opportunity of 5 ha of industrial accommodation land at East of Otley is desperately needed to defend against further chipping away at Otley's integrity as a self-sufficient, independent town and further employment sites are desperately needed to redress some sort of balance

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