

## 8 Prospects for Retail and Mixed Use Development: Appraisal of Key Opportunity Sites

- 8.01 DTZ has examined a number of key opportunity sites in the town centre, as identified in conjunction with the client, which may have potential for regeneration and/or redevelopment. In addition, we highlight other key areas/sites which are and will be important if Newhaven is to maintain its vitality and viability.
- 8.02 There are a number of potential development sites within the town centre which could have a huge impact on the appearance of the centre from key gateways and entrances (see Appendix 6). These include the Post Office at the top end of the High Street and the properties between 1 and 13 Bridge Street. These sites are at strategic entrances to the town centre and offer significant potential to improve the visual connections from adjacent areas and establish landmark buildings for the town.
- 8.03 The Telephone Exchange building, the Meeching Road/Marshall Lane area, the Somerfield supermarket, and adjacent multi-storey car park could offer an important opportunity to reinstate active frontages onto the ring road and enhance connections with surrounding areas.



*1 – 13 Bridge Street*



*Post Office, High Street*



*Somerfield Supermarket, South Way*

*Telephone Exchange, Lower Place*



Meeching Road/Marshall Lane

## **A - OPPORTUNITY SITES**

### ***Sommerfield/Newhaven Square***

- 8.04 The Somerfield store is effectively the main 'anchor' for the town centre and is part of a 1980's extension to the High Street, Newhaven Square. The convenience offer is vital to the town centre in terms of generating footfall, but the store and its environment is looking dated. The Square's owners have submitted a planning application which effectively seeks to reconfigure the existing Somerfield store, reduce the number of car parking spaces in the adjacent multi-storey car park from 180 to 80 and provide two new 5,000 sq. ft retail units. Unfortunately this application does not address a large blank wall which bounds the rear of the White Hart Public house and the approach to Somerfield from the High Street. The introduction of uses such as stallholders, or even new retail units would further improve the area. DTZ consider that this application will improve the appearance of this part of the town centre and boost the town's profile and draw.

### ***Post (sorting) Office (54 High Street)***

- 8.05 Following the re-location of post office counter services to 46 High Street these premises are lying partly vacant (collection/sorting operations still take place in the rear portion of the building and external yard). The Royal Mail's immediate priority is to let the space fronting the High Street. However, this will not be possible until the sorting operations which still take place at the rear of the building can be entirely divorced from the front part of the building - timescales on this are uncertain.
- 8.06 In the medium to long-term, disposal of the asset will be considered by the Royal Mail provided that sorting operations can be maintained in new premises in or around Newhaven, with easy access to residents and businesses. A new facility on an industrial estate is considered ideal, partly because conflict with residents regarding the amount and hours of operation and noise of van/lorry traffic is less of an issue. This type of location is also preferred as it is likely to be cheaper and more suited to modern sorting operations. All this would only occur if an acceptable commercial deal could be struck.

- 8.07 A short-term solution could involve matching a potential retailer (such as Superdrug) to a reconfigured unit. However, this would depend on how much retail floorspace the Royal Mail can create. A longer term solution would require a suitable location being identified for the new sorting facility

***Bridge Street***

- 8.08 The Bridge Street end of the High Street and Bridge Street itself is where nearly all the town centre's restaurant, bar, takeaway and licensed premises are located. The importance of the evening economy to towns and cities has recently been recognised in draft PPS 6 and can be a significant employer and attraction. The results of the household survey show that whilst only a very small proportion of people have an evening out in Newhaven, the provision of additional quality cafes/restaurants would attract them more to the town centre.
- 8.09 In light of these factors consideration should be given to the more formal 'branding' of the activities around Bridge Street to offer residents/visitors more of a clear leisure destination. This would need to be a commercial promotional/branding exercise, with some support from the local authority. Although Draft PPS 6 suggests that if considered necessary some formal designations through the planning process may be appropriate for larger centres, the good practice guide (forthcoming from ODPM) on this issue may also be appropriate for smaller centres.
- 8.10 We have noted the high number of vacancies in Bridge Street, but believe that this relates to the current landowners aims to comprehensively re-develop nos 1-13. Indeed in October 2002 an outline application by the landowner to create an 18 storey residential, office and leisure scheme was refused by Lewes District Council primarily on scale and design grounds. Interestingly, when considering the large pub/restaurant element, the Officer's report concluded that the benefits of such uses at this town centre location would outweigh the potential disbenefits of noise and disturbance. This view was based on the advice of Sussex Police. In addition, on the planning officer's report to committee noted that the planning authority supports high quality mixed-use development on this site.
- 8.11 The submission of the original planning application can be viewed as a positive sign that a landowner thinks it possible to build and occupy such a scheme. However doubts as to the schemes' commercial viability were expressed by the County Council's economic development section. The applicant's agent agreed that this scale of commercial development would appeal to a market not currently offered in Newhaven.
- 8.12 The potential of the site to create a recognisable gateway is important. Although English Heritage objected to the previous application due to impact to the town and on a view that the proposal obscured towards a hill top church to the west, CABA would not argue against a substantial building on this site as a matter of principle.
- 8.13 We have been informed by the developers agent that a revised development scheme is currently being prepared, with submission in the next six months. It is likely that a reduced scale scheme will comprise similar land uses as the previous application, (i.e. office, residential and A1/A3 uses).
- 8.14 DTZ consider that the strategic importance of Bridge Street must be recognised and reinforced. It acts as an important conduit between the town centre, the marina (and associated facilities), The Fort and the beach.

### ***Telephone Exchange***

- 8.14 The Telephone Exchange comprises 1,168 sq. m and is located on Essex Road, behind the main retail focus of the High Street. With the car park opposite and the potential incorporation of service roads leading to the rear of High Street premises, this represents a large potential redevelopment site. The Telephone Exchange is owned by British Telecom with land occupied by the car park in Lewes District Council ownership and roads in the ownership of Highways authority. Given the recent trend for digitising the analogue telephone network, British Telecom were approached by DTZ to discuss potential redevelopment opportunities.
- 8.15 Our discussions have revealed that the site is used as an engineering store and base, as well as an operational telephone exchange. Whilst the engineering base and store could conceivably operate from an alternative (e.g. industrial park) location, the exchange itself is far more problematic. This exchange is the result of an amalgamation of two previous exchanges in Newhaven and now is the only one serving the area. Consequently BT have no alternative exchange to relocate the operations. In addition the rapid rise in Internet broadband uptake has meant that requirements for space for operational equipment is increasing. Rules to ensure new entrants to this market can compete fairly require BT to if necessary, share exchange locations. The costs in relocating an exchange of this size (solely serving Newhaven) would, we were informed, be several million pounds.
- 8.16 Unfortunately, these factors indicate that a redevelopment of this site is unlikely to be forthcoming, unless a very high value generating use were to be proposed. DTZ believe that given the size of the town, the limited retailer requirements (which would likely generate the highest value here) and its peripheral location relative to the main retail core, such a use is unlikely to come forward. As a benchmark, BT indicated they would struggle to see how a redevelopment scheme could be brought forward for this type of facility even in neighbouring Brighton.

### ***Meeching Road/Marshall Lane***

- 8.17 This comprises a Victorian classically inspired office building and smaller modern office accommodation. The buildings are currently occupied by elements of the County Council Social Services department. Whilst the building is not statutorily or locally listed, it is one of the few distinctive buildings remaining in the town centre.
- 8.18 Other than the Post Office site discussed previously, this site represents one of the only opportunities to achieve new mixed-use, retail-led development, best suited to the needs of modern retailers. Given its prominent location on the ring road, and Meeching Road's function as a conduit into the town centre, redevelopment of this site could result in a 'gateway' into the main retail core. Retailers (such as Argos) who currently have larger floorspace requirements and who cannot be accommodated in the town centre currently, would, our investigations reveal, be more attracted to purpose built units ideally out of town. However, our discussions indicate that if a large enough site could be created in the town centre, possibly at this location, then retailers such as Argos would consider altering their requirement from out of town to in town. Further investigations are required to ascertain whether this is a realistic scenario.
- 8.19 Furthermore, the loss of a period office building may prove unacceptable to local people and ultimately the Local Planning Authority. Given the site is occupied currently and the complexity and issues concerning potential demolition, we consider this to be a longer term opportunity site, particularly when viewed against the Post Office (largely vacant, existing retail and High Street location). If redevelopment were to occur here, we suggest that it be

undertaken via a planning or development brief in consultation with local residents, traders and business.

## **B – ADDITIONAL KEY AREAS/SITES**

### ***The Fort***

- 8.20 The Fort lies just over 1km south of the town centre and was formerly a military facility now converted to a museum and visitor attraction. Currently open from the Spring to Autumn months the facility is an important attraction for the area. Consultants have been appointed to examine how the Fort can improve its visitor attraction, how it should be marketed and how to ensure the sustainable management of its natural habitats. The consultants are also examining how The Fort can broaden its remit to cover wider social inclusion issues such as education.
- 8.21 Ultimately a framework will be drawn up to guide The Fort's future development as a visitor and tourist attraction. This plan will then be used to bid for funding to carry out any development works. It is understood that several draft recommendations from this work could tie in with wider aspects of this study, such as overall enhancement of the visitor attraction and area (such as new benches, better signage, etc), better pedestrian environment, better interpretation through to physical design treatments and upgrading of the attraction's facilities.

### ***The Beach***

- 8.21 The sandy beach is situated to the south of the town centre, directly below the Fort, and is regarded as a 'hidden gem' by locals. It is one of the very few sandy beaches in East Sussex and as such is hugely popular in the summer months. Unfortunately basic amenities such as public toilets do not exist. The car-park area is in the ownership of French port operators and they have been pressed by local organisations and individuals to invest in upgraded/new facilities to enable the area to be more attractive to locals and visitors.

### ***Denton Island***

- 8.22 The opening of the training centre on Denton Island marked a major stage in integrating this area with the town centre. The construction and opening of the Sure Start Nursery will continue this integration process. The continued regeneration of this area is important, and given the current single link to the island from the town centre, future development should enable a positive gateway to be created, perhaps through bold iconic design.

### ***Railway Quay***

- 8.23 The adopted local plan (Policy NH21) allocates 5ha of land for port related uses, however if the area becomes surplus to the direct operational requirements of the port it states that a mixed use development incorporating residential, business, leisure, food and drink or Factory Outlet Centre (FOC) uses will be appropriate. A draft design brief for the area was subject of public consultation until 12<sup>th</sup> April 2004. This maintained the residential prominence of the scheme (target minimum 200 dwellings), but was less specific in setting out additional uses. It is suggested that two (statutorily listed) railway sheds could accommodate cafe, bar, art gallery, craft workshop and museum uses, with reference to retail uses limited to ensuring that any such use would not affect the vitality and viability of the town centre.
- 8.24 DTZ understand that the FOC use (no floorspace amount specified) was put forward by the local authority at a late stage of the local plan review. We understand that there was no

commercial operator either supporting or promoting this element of the scheme. We strongly recommend that the FOC use on this site be reviewed and recognised, as it could have an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre.