

**EMPLOYMENT LAND AND MARKET
COMMENTARY**

**LAND OFF BLACKBURN ROAD
LONGRIDGE**

**ON BEHALF OF
B K W DEVELOPMENTS LIMITED**

May 2017



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Trevor Dawson is instructed by B K W Developments in support its proposal to bring the site forward for employment use.
- 1.2 The site comprises an area of level land lying immediately off Blackburn Road (B6243) on the edge of Longridge.
- 1.3 Trevor Dawson is one of the largest Commercial Property Consultants in Lancashire and over the last 28 years has assisted in the delivery of existing and new employment opportunities. We have been pivotal in the delivery of some of the county's major employment sites, particularly on the M65 and A59 corridor.
- 1.4 Trevor Dawson will undertake an assessment of the employment trends in Longridge and future requirements for employment land in the existing and future plan process, and will demonstrate that future requirements can only be satisfied by the subject site coming forward.
- 1.5 We will conclude that the subject site is deliverable and will make a vital contribution to the future economy in Longridge and the Ribble Valley.
- 1.6 Statistics and data have been taken from various reports and documents prepared and commissioned by Ribble Valley Borough Council and Longridge Town Council.

2.0 INDICATIVE SCHEME

- 2.1 The site adjoins local established businesses, is of a regular shape, flat with an existing access from Blackburn Road.
- 2.2 The indicative scheme shows the potential to provide 2,139 square metres (23,025 sq. ft.) of B1 office and 7,946 square metres (85,535 sq. ft.) of light industrial B1, B2 and B8 accommodation in a range of unit sizes from starter units to those accommodating SMEs.

3.0 LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Employment Land Study Refresh carried out for the Local Planning Authority in May 2013 is the most relevant report for assessing the supply, need and demand for employment land in the Ribble Valley and underpins the Adopted Core Strategy.
- 3.2 The report concludes that based upon short and long term take-up rates overall in the Ribble Valley, that the land allocated needed to increase to between 8 and 11 hectares throughout the Plan period, excluding the Samlesbury Enterprise Zone. On a proportion basis this assumes a minimum 2 hectares of development appropriate to Longridge for new development.
- 3.3 The report recommended that the Council should designate 6 key employment sites one of which is in Longridge on the Shay Lane Industrial Estate. It also stated that new allocations in Longridge should be explored, including the subject site.

3.4 Furthermore, the report endorses that employment development should be directed to the main areas of population growth, namely Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

3.5 The Longridge Neighbourhood Development Plan is an integral part of the Plan process and has been prepared in consultation with the Longridge community of businesses and landowners. One of their key objectives is to protect and enhance employment opportunities. It recognises the important economic role Longridge plays by providing local employment opportunities, reducing the need to travel and supporting local shops and services.

4.0 ECONOMIC CONTEXT

4.1 Longridge is a market town with a population of 7,491 (Census 2011) and is second only to Clitheroe, the principal market town in Ribble Valley which lies eleven miles to the east. Longridge is the only main settlement in the western part of the Ribble Valley. Preston is located seven miles to the south-west.

4.2 The 2011 Census showed that 46.7% of Longridge residents were aged over 45, compared to 44% for Lancashire as a whole. 30% of Longridge residents were aged under 25 which is a clear indication that future employment opportunities were required.

4.3 Data from the 2011 Census confirms that the vast majority of Longridge Residents commute to work outside the town, principally in Preston and Blackburn. This highlights the issues for Longridge residents of their travel to work and the logistics of getting to each part of the borough and adjoining boroughs.

4.4 Recent employment development in the immediate areas has principally centred around Junction 31A of the M6 in Preston.

4.5 Local employment is split between the retail service sector, manufacturing, building, food and haulage companies based in the Town Centre, the Shay Lane Industrial Estate and stand alone sites.

4.6 Notable employers include Singletons, Carefoot Construction, Obas UK Limited, Butlers Cheeses, Ribble Farm Fare Limited, Krempell Group and William Pye.

4.7 Since 2010, several major residential developments have been permitted, further compounding the need for the creation of new employment opportunities to prevent Longridge from becoming a dormitory town.

4.8 Employment stock is generally at least 20 years old, centred in the main area of Shay Lane which is fully developed, cannot be extended and where the infrastructure and accessibility is poor. Other smaller infill sites account for the remaining balance of accommodation. There has been no significant employment development in the last 15 years which, coupled with the lack of availability, is affecting the dynamics of the market and thwarting opportunities for start-ups and SMEs.

4.9 Office occupancy serving the Town Centre is solely in historic converted accommodation, mainly centred around Berry Lane with limited parking. Over the last ten years no new build office accommodation has been provided within the Town Centre.

5.0 TAKE-UP RATES

5.1 Adopting RVBC evidence, Employment Land Study Refresh (2013), between 8 and 11 hectares of land is required to the end of the plan period. 25% of this should be in Longridge, ie between 2 and 2.75 hectares. This minimum assumption is not supported by factual evidence of take-up rates.

5.1 Since these figures were adopted there has been no significant take-up in Longridge, other than the redevelopment of small infill sites excluded from the calculations.

6.0 DEMAND

6.1 Both RVBC and Longridge Town Council agree that there is a strong need for future employment provision in Longridge. Preston City Council is also committed to support the development of Longridge as a key service centre.

6.2 The land supply is dwindling across the Ribble Valley generally with losses to mainly residential use. The geography of the borough dictates where the limited opportunities can be made available in the future.

6.3 Opportunities in Longridge historically and currently have been limited to windfall opportunities that came to the market from time to time.

6.4 We are aware of a significant well-known office occupier who, unable to find suitable modern premises in Longridge, relocated recently to Preston.

7.0 DEMAND SURVEY

7.1 Earlier this year we conducted a survey of local employers in Longridge (Appendix 1) and undertook discussions with key employers. Their comments highlighted the following:

- A desire to stay in Longridge if the right opportunity was identified.
- To improve the quality of their buildings, which were generally older and lacking overall amenity.
- Whilst many commuted out of Longridge, congestion was an increasing factor and would play a part in future relocation decisions.

7.2 The RVBC Employment Land Refresh 2013 and Longridge Neighbourhood Development Plan rightly confirm our findings that there is inherent demand and that the type of units to be delivered in future will need to be in a range of sizes, including starter or nursery units, providing opportunities for the start of new businesses and enabling existing ones to expand.

7.3 To halt the employment exodus from Longridge it is vital to create opportunities and break the pattern of potential falling demand.

7.4 This is an opportunity to bring forward an exceptional site of a quality and size which is commercially viable and will attract substantial inward investment not available elsewhere in Longridge, and meet the local identified need within the plan period.

7.5 The employment needs of the borough should not be weighted to one particular area such as the A59 corridor to the detriment of the other parts of the area. Economically the borough is diverse and this should be reflected in the provision of opportunities.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 Clearly all the stakeholders in Longridge, the Council and local businesses agree that the provision of employment opportunities is crucial to the future success of Longridge.

8.2 The current stock of property is poor generally lacking modern amenities to allow businesses to compete with adjoining areas, where a range of opportunities are being offered.

8.3 Small businesses, where cost is an issue, tend to be more local, employ younger people and require opportunities to tap ultimately into the wider employment offering. The development of the site will enhance local employment opportunities and strengthen the borough's economy.

8.4 The site ranks highly in market terms, is deliverable shortly by the private sector and adjoins existing employment. It is highly accessible on the eastern side of Longridge. There are no alternatives of this quality in Longridge.

8.5 In order to meet demand and attract inward investment it is vital to allocate an exceptional site, which is financially viable, deliverable and in an accessible, sustainable location.

8.6 For these reasons the site should be brought forward for employment use.