

SEAFORD COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP



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John Crawford Esq
Chief Executive
Lewes District Council
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Dear Mr Crawford

CRADLE HILL INDUSTRIAL ESTATE

As you will be well aware an important thrust of the East Sussex Coastal Renaissance Partnership's Strategic Study, being carried out with funds made available under SRB Round 6, is the economic regeneration of the communities along the coast. This will provide the engine to create employment and help drive community improvements and social regeneration. The study addresses this by including the identification of suitable brownfield sites and the encouragement of new and enhanced business activity in the area.

The Seaford Community Partnership, which was recently formed within the framework of the CRP, recognises the importance of these themes for the regeneration of our town. It is essential that new businesses are created, with particular emphasis on small starter units which will be in keeping with the nature of the town and avoid contributing to heavy commercial traffic within its precincts. The contribution we are making to the CRP study therefore addresses this aspect of Seaford regeneration.

It is the perception of the Seaford Community Partnership that there is a scarcity of light industrial accommodation in Seaford suitable for start up business.

The financial pressure to convert industrial buildings into residential over the years has resulted in a substantial loss of industrial floorspace in Seaford and this trend is still continuing with the proposed redevelopment of a mini industrial estate behind Sutton Parade in Alfriston Road.

On Cradle Hill Industrial Estate the smallest industrial units have an area of 1050 sq.ft. but rentals are generally too expensive for most startup businesses who require smaller, more affordable workspace from around 400 sq.ft. Ideally

rentals starting at around £4000 p.a (£80 per week) are affordable compared with the cheapest rents on the estate which start at £7000 p.a. plus rates.

Due to strong market demand from established businesses the smallest units on the estate, quickly relet to established businesses. However due to the uncertainty of any new venture a new business would naturally be wary of entering into an inflexible lease with an onerous repairing liability.

From the perspective of a small business the ideal scheme would offer a choice of small units let on inclusive rentals on flexible monthly licence terms. There are examples of successful schemes in Brighton, Hove and Shoreham Port.

Following consultations at the community workshops, the Seaford Regeneration and Community Partnership identified that there was a need for employment generating activities including a business park development at Cradle Hill. As the adjoining greenfield site is currently not ripe for development our efforts are being concentrated on regenerating the existing estate as most of the existing buildings are “tired” and the estate has a generally run down appearance.

LDC, as freehold owners of the estate, have a unique opportunity to encourage and promote a sustainable local economy with the introduction of pro-active estate management policies. Objectives should include a policy to encourage the provision of starter business space on the estate as this will lead to employment opportunities for local people.

LDC are currently disposing of a 1.83 acre site (plot 43) which is being marketed by their agents, Oakley commercial for either a warehousing or light industrial scheme.

It would be helpful if LDC could facilitate a development of smaller units with a policy decision to prepare a development brief which will support this objective and provide the necessary guidance for a developer to build starter units. As such a scheme is more management intensive this may result in a reduction of the previously anticipated capital receipt but the real benefit will be the provision of workspace to help local companies provide jobs.

Whilst that it is recognised that some capital is required from the land sale to compensate a third party landowner this should not result in a scheme which does not achieve the wider objective regenerate the estate and to encourage small businesses. Instead, consideration needs to be given as to how to achieve the Council’s objective to raise capital, whilst at the same time facilitate the development of small units. Lewes District Council could also consider other opportunities on the Cradle Hill estate to realise capital. For instance instead of letting Unit 17 (former scrap metal recycling) for £7500 p.a. it could consider outright disposal on a long lease at a peppercorn rental.

Other opportunities include the grant of longer ground leases to existing occupiers in return for a capital receipt. The Council could revisit its current policy to grant new 69 year leases, particularly as the market norm is 125 years. Existing occupiers may find themselves with premises unsuitable for a loan where the unexpired lease has less than 50 years. Such a situation can leave a business that wants to relocate somewhat trapped and will therefore work against regeneration, leading to stagnation of the estate.

In conclusion we would like to see clear policies with the objective to regenerate the estate including the creation of a seed-bed of starter units. Lewes District Council will also benefit financially from the success of this policy as the successful starter businesses will in turn expand into larger units on the estate. Lewes District Council as land owner have a key role to play to encourage and promote a successful local economy to help local businesses thrive, so creating opportunities for residents to work locally in long term employment.

Yours sincerely

David Schueler

Peter Sinclair

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Joint Chairman

Business Development Task Group Leader

Yours sincerely

David Schueler