

Plans for the redevelopment of Churchfields Industrial Estate as part of the Salisbury Vision – your questions answered

Q. What is the Churchfields Industrial Estate?

A. It is a 33-hectare industrial estate, a short walk from Salisbury city centre, which has grown piecemeal over 40 years into the district's biggest employment site.

Q. How many people work there?

A. There are around 4,500 people working for 165 companies with an estimated combined turnover of £600m.

Q. That's good, isn't it?

A. There is no doubt that the industrial estate is the area's most important employment centre, but there are a number of problems which need to be addressed. It is poorly situated and would be better served as a redeveloped mixed use site, with a four-star hotel and conference centre, offices and much-needed affordable homes, while retaining existing 'light use' businesses.

Q. What are the problems?

A. Firstly, it is widely accepted that there are a number of businesses on site which are inappropriately located. They generate excessive HGV traffic which clog up local residential roads and the city centre, causing congestion and pollution. Something needs to be done about this now as it

is virtually certain that plans for the Brunel Link and Harnham Relief Road, which would have reduced this problem, will now not go ahead.

Secondly, the site is already full. There is no room for expansion because Churchfields is hemmed in on three sides by the River Nadder and water meadows and the railway line on the fourth. To retain existing businesses, and attract new ones, we need to offer them room to grow. In other words, Churchfields cannot offer future growth.

Q. Why wasn't this all sorted out years ago?

A. A lack of a masterplan to guide development back in the 1970s meant that Salisbury lost out on new living, working and leisure opportunities. The industrial estate gained a momentum of its own, and nobody has grasped the nettle since then on how the site could better serve the needs of Salisbury. Over 40 years the place has become shabby and neglected. Rejuvenation is required.

Q. So what is Salisbury Vision's proposal to redevelop Churchfields Industrial Estate?

A. There could be a four-star hotel and conference centre, along with offices, much-needed affordable homes and existing 'light' businesses.

Q. Why a four-star hotel and conference centre?

A. Salisbury doesn't have such a dedicated, upmarket facility. Most cities do, generating visitors and money and creating more local jobs. The famous views across the water meadows to Salisbury Cathedral, coupled with a scenic path into the city centre, would prove a major draw.

Q. Why offices?

A. Salisbury has little in the way of purpose-built, modern office accommodation, and it would mean being able to meet the requirements of office employers and other growing economic sectors. Prestigious companies will be more inclined to take root here if Salisbury can offer vibrancy and a good quality of life. Employees would spend money in our city, and the proximity of the railway station means many could commute or live locally without relying on cars. Salisbury is home to four major financial services businesses and we must make sure they, and other potential companies, don't walk away through lack of suitable space. Also, Salisbury currently 'loses' 12,500 workers every day to other areas.

Q. Why homes?

A. It is anticipated that the Salisbury and Wilton area could provide 8,700 new homes, around 435 a year, towards the government building target of three million homes in the UK by 2020. Churchfields could potentially provide 500 homes.

Q. Why affordable homes?

A. Average house prices in Salisbury in 2007 were more than 11 times average earnings, compared to the average of nine times in England and Wales. House prices in Wiltshire grew by 233% between 1995 and 2006, with Salisbury losing youngsters and graduates to more affordable cities and towns. There is also an acute shortfall in affordable homes. Evidence shows that by 2009 an estimated 669 households every year will need affordable housing. The housing waiting list continues to grow, standing at 2,894 in May 2008. A rising elderly population – an extra 10,000 by 2026 in south Wiltshire – also gives rise to the need for specially designed homes.

Overall, the population of the district is expected to grow by about 14,000 by 2026. Housing development at Churchfields would have an important role in meeting demand. Few other city centre sites offer such scope.

Q. But house prices have been falling...

A. Cautious mortgage lenders are reverting back to lending three to four times a person's annual earnings, which would include a cash deposit, so it would still be difficult for many youngsters in Salisbury to get a foot on the housing ladder even if prices halved. More than 16% of all our households in south Wiltshire are home to key workers, such as nurses and teachers, many of whom cannot afford open market housing.

Q. Where do house builders stand when it comes to supplying affordable homes in their developments?

A. We are recommending a minimum 40 per cent of affordable homes in all new schemes of five or more homes.

Q. What do you mean by existing 'light' businesses?

Some businesses on Churchfields would complement the four-star hotel and conference centre, offices and affordable homes because they don't generate lorry traffic and operate quietly. It would not be necessary to relocate all the businesses.

Q. What other problems are there at Churchfields?

A. Walking or cycling into the industrial estate is not pleasant. There is little off-road parking so cars park on the roads, creating hazards. The constant noise of lorries, plus the dangers they present to pedestrians and cyclists,

is also a factor. It is felt by many that Churchfields is somewhat bleak and shabby.

Q. How many hectares of land are required to accommodate new and expanding businesses in the Salisbury district within the next 18 years?

A. Up to 64 hectares – equivalent to nearly two Churchfields. It will be a tough challenge to find the right places acceptable to everyone, but we can't shy away from difficult issues. It is in the interests of everyone that Salisbury's economy moves forward.

Q. How much additional employment is anticipated?

A. Official figures estimate 13,500 new jobs within the next two decades. If south Wiltshire is to have a thriving economy we need to make sure that there is enough land so that existing businesses expand and we can attract new ones.

Q. So where would existing businesses at Churchfields be relocated?

A. Most businesses, understandably, prefer to be located in Salisbury, and this means that the majority of this land would be in or close to the city. One strong contender is land at Harnham, south of the Netherhampton Road, as there is room for development.

Q. But what about residents who live on Netherhampton Road and Harnham Road?

A. The western half of the A3094 is ideal for heavier traffic as it is a direct route to the west via the A30 or A36. Businesses reliant on HGVs coming from the east and south would be strongly encouraged to avoid using

residential Harnham Road and New Harnham Road by using the Salisbury ring road and coming back in from the west on the A3094.

Q. Are there any sites that can completely avoid residential streets?

A. Unfortunately, there are no appropriate alternative sites near the city centre. Solstice Park at Amesbury does offer a great choice of business space, but we know that many city businesses need and prefer to remain in Salisbury. However, proposed mixed-use developments at Old Sarum and Fugglestone Red, might be able to accommodate some Churchfields businesses.

Q. Surely we can do without a modern, sustainable local business park and spare the trouble of upheaval?

A. No, for the reasons already outlined. This is the difficult challenge we face – balancing the economic needs of the city with what is acceptable to local residents. Also, the economic importance of Salisbury having a four-star hotel and conference centre, modern, purpose-built offices and affordable homes cannot be underestimated. There is a clear and compelling case for employment growth and housing growth to ensure Salisbury is a place to invest. Churchfields is the most viable option.

Q. Isn't the Churchfields issue undermining the long-term confidence of businesses there?

A. That is not the intention. The idea is to provide a practical solution which will see all the various businesses prosper, whether it be at a new site or at Churchfields. Most business people at the site are acutely aware of its cramped nature and the problems caused by HGVs driving through the historic city centre. They can see the bigger picture.

Q. What is the Salisbury Vision?

A. It is a joint private and public sector initiative to revitalise key areas within the city of Salisbury whilst ensuring that its historic uniqueness is protected. The partnership's aims are to create high-quality facilities, new jobs and an improved and sustainable environment for the people of Salisbury and beyond. Salisbury Vision project members are Salisbury District Council, South West of England Regional Development Agency (South West RDA) and Wiltshire County Council.

Q. What level of public consultation has there been regarding the development of a new set of planning policies for the district, which form the backbone of the Salisbury Vision?

A. Extensive. Some 6,000 people responded to the first round and around 8,000 comments were received on the second. There is public and business support for the Churchfields redevelopment.