

Portishead – Rail Link

Gordano Business Park Limited are carrying out a 23-acre development in the centre of Portishead. The company bought the site in 1966 from the MOD, who had used it as an aviation fuel storage depot. Its planning use was as a key employment location for the town and immediate area.

Since that time the site has been stripped of its original steel storage tanks and key infrastructural elements of a successful business park have been developed. Buildings completed include a 50,000 sq ft warehouse and over 50,000 sq ft of offices as well as other substantial commercial premises, including a nursery; hotel/restaurant and executive car leasing premises.

Future development proposals for the project include a further 180,000 sq ft of offices, including a possible 100,000 sq ft Headquarters-style building. Employment potential for the Business Park is around 1,200 jobs - with a consequent major impact on the local economy. The project would provide quality employment for local residents as well as substantially boosting Portishead's existing businesses.

Development of this scale would significantly reduce the number of cars leaving Portishead at rush-hour and alleviate some of the congestion problems that now occur at M5 Junction 19 and elsewhere around Greater Bristol. Plans for this further development have been in place for several years, but on-site development has been hampered and restricted for one primary reason – the absence of a rail link to Bristol. Positive steps need to be taken to procure adequate means of getting in and out of town for the considerable number of employees that the proposed development could attract.

Major investment into any local economy is never going to succeed without adequate transportation links, and medium-to-large scale employers will not consider relocating into a town where the one primary road access point is severely overloaded. A comparatively foot-loose employer of approximately 350 people has made it clear that if a rail link to Bristol existed, Portishead would be high on its shortlist of possible sites. That is just one of several potential occupiers who will end up elsewhere.

As one of several developers who have each invested many millions of pounds in Portishead, our experience allows us to say that the community will not reap the benefits that should result from the substantial recent residential developments of recent years unless the current opportunity to establish its economic future is grasped. The community has confirmed in its Strategic Development Plan that it wants employment on this site. That being so, there is a responsibility on the public sector to ensure that adequate means of access to and from the town are available. The restoration of the rail link to Bristol is essential to achieving that. Our challenge to the decision takers is simple: “You provide the rail link – we’ll construct the buildings!”

It would be short-sighted in the extreme if the opportunity to underpin Portishead's splendid new residential schemes with a substantial economic base is missed...