

# ***Bognor Regis Regeneration Board***

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Please address correspondence to:  
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28<sup>th</sup> August 2015

Dear Mr. Lynn

## **Re: Enterprise Bognor Regis - Enterprise Zone Status**

I am writing to you on behalf of the Bognor Regis Regeneration Board in support of the application for Enterprise Zone status for the Enterprise Bognor Regis strategic employment site. The Board was established in 2007 to act as an independent advisory body, bringing together leading representatives from the key public, private and community stakeholders in Bognor Regis. The Board recognises that a collective and cohesive approach can generate and secure the economic benefits sought by those who live and work in Bognor Regis.

The Board has three key objectives:

- To collectively promote Bognor Regis as a great place to live, work, visit and invest
- To consider, give opinion and comment upon how and to what extent planned and proposed developments contribute to:
  - the town's growth and development
  - addressing and overcoming the town's socio-economic challenges; and,
  - maximising benefits and opportunities for the town.
- To consider and evaluate strategies which impact upon the economic growth of Bognor Regis and offer comment, opinion and where appropriate modifications.

Board membership is drawn from the major private and public organisations including the University of Chichester, West Sussex County Council, Arun District Council, Butlins and Sime Darby London Ltd.

The Board fully supports the proposed application for Enterprise Zone status for Enterprise Bognor Regis which is a key driver for economic and employment growth.

**Enterprise Bognor Regis** (EBR) is a 70 hectare commercial and employment development site located on the northern edge of Bognor Regis in West Sussex. It comprises of four parcels of land with the potential to accommodate 150 businesses and provide 4,000 jobs. Arun District Council along with the Council's public and private sector partners have worked collaboratively to bring forward this strategic employment site via the Enterprise Bognor Regis vision in the draft Arun Local Plan, which has undergone extensive and widespread public consultation, with strong support for the growth and employment proposals. The core principles of the Arun Local Plan are growth and employment, on the back of existing and planned consents for housing that were and are being delivered under the extant 2003 Local Plan.

In line with the Government's call to simplify the planning process to facilitate sustainable development, ADC has proactively prepared a Local Development Order (LDO) which is currently undergoing public consultation for three of the four sites. It is anticipated that the LDO will be adopted in late 2015. This will grant permitted development rights for business related development and allow owner occupiers and developers to benefit from an accelerated and simplified planning process and a reduction in planning application fees.

The fourth site (Lec Airfield site) will be subject to a separate LDO when access from the Bognor Regis Relief Road (opening early 2016) is secured and funded to link through to the southerly border of the site with the A259 coastal route.

### **Barriers to Growth**

The Coastal West Sussex economy has excellent growth potential and Bognor Regis provides a strong strategic location for a range of employers. Despite this the town and wider coastal area have not experienced the same levels of growth and business formation as the rest of the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) area. One of the consequences is that the Arun District does not currently support the right type of jobs, in sufficient numbers to retain its own workforce. There are only 0.56 jobs for every person of working age, meaning that a significant number are commuting out to work. The town and the district are not therefore realising the full economic potential of the existing population, or its attractiveness as a place to live, work and enjoy. There are equally relatively few opportunities to employ the students attracted to the University of Chichester once they graduate and unlike the case with many other university towns, they tend to leave the area.

Two key barriers to business growth and workforce retention are recognised. Firstly, a lack of high-quality commercial premises – coupled with poor-quality, low-value existing stock – serves to diminish investor interest and end-user demand in the town and locality. Secondly, significant constraints on transport access mean that the town may lose out to better connected locations. A related issue is the reliance on low paid jobs and the lack of knowledge based opportunities that promote a more measured, mixed economy.

Arun District Council's Draft Local Plan (2013– 28) contains the emerging spatial strategy and strategic land use policy framework for the District up to 2028. The Council has determined that economic growth for job creation is its number one priority.

***'Strengthen Arun's economic base and provide local job opportunities by increasing, diversifying and improving the quality of employment within the district through the provision of appropriate employment sites, quality affordable accommodation and the development of business support and partnerships.'***

Arun's Draft Local Plan proposes delivery of 641 homes each year over the plan period. In order to mitigate the possibility of increased outward-commuting and to drive job creation and economic growth it is imperative that the Council creates a viable and competitive office/industrial property market. Securing Enterprise Zone status will be key towards addressing this challenge. Improved A29 access to the A27 is an important requirement recognized by the government through the £8m Growing Places Fund contribution and an additional Section 106 contribution to be to be secured through housing development identified in the Draft Local Plan. The establishment of an EZ will also give Arun District Council the foundation to set up innovative funding schemes such as Tax Increment Financing scheme, allowing the Council to borrow against the projected future uplift in

business rate receipts generated by the EZ. This mechanism would facilitate funding to provide the majority of the finance for the construction of the A29/A259 North-South link road from the Bognor Regis Relief Road which is reserved in the Arun Local Plan. This scheme will unlock the development of the 30 hectare Lec Airfield site and provide improved access to the major tourist destination at Butlins, the University of Chichester's campus in Bognor Regis and other key town centre regeneration sites.

### **Regional Strategic Fit**

The Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for Coast to Capital LEP identifies Bognor Regis as a key opportunity area, contributing to the LEP area's capacity for the new employment and housing which are prerequisite to strong economic growth. Specifically, EBR is outlined as one of the LEP's major planned interventions, and one of two transformational development opportunities in the Coastal Corridor.

Whilst the West Sussex Coastal economy has high rates of employment, these are low value jobs that do not draw extensively on the knowledge economy. ADC's Bognor Regis Regeneration Charter recognises this by identifying higher education and skills attainment, raising average wages, improving competitiveness and sustainability of local businesses, promotion of best practice and active engagement with stakeholders as key priorities. EBR will address these concerns, which are expressed in both the SEP and the Coast to Capital Skills Strategy. In particular, EBR aims to provide high level skills for firms that draw more heavily on the knowledge economy and also provide support for employers who need to use high level skills to expand their businesses. Effective engagement with the local educational organisations such as University of Chichester and Chichester College is an intrinsic and essential component to further stimulate demand and attract knowledge based businesses and jobs to the area. The focus of the University's proposed new £15million Engineering and Digital Park on Sustainable Operations, Creative Digital Media, Data Science (Big Data) and Enterprise, is in line with SEP objectives and regional strengths. It is intended that it will be a hub for promoting networks of innovation in Coastal West Sussex.

### **Marketing of Enterprise Bognor Regis**

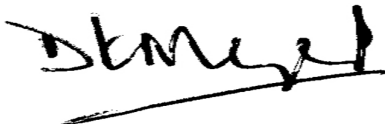
The commercialisation of Enterprise Bognor Regis has been enhanced by the decision of Rolls-Royce Motors to site their new Technology and Logistics Centre on the Oldlands Farm site. Another positive factor is the University of Chichester's Engineering and Digital Technology Park which aims to attract 1,200 additional students onto their Bognor Regis campus. This will provide high level education and skills for firms that draw more heavily on the knowledge economy and also support for employers who need to use high level skills to expand their businesses.

### **The Case for Enterprise Bognor Regis EZ Status - Summary**

1. EZ status would incentivise new development by giving access to:
  - Innovative funding schemes such as Tax Incremental Finance (TIF) – this would provide the Council with the opportunity to fund part of the cost of constructing the North / South Link and related infrastructure.
  - Business Rate Relief – this will incentivise development and occupier demand by offering an exemption from or reduction in business rate to prospective occupiers.
  - Business Rate Uplift - business rate uplift will be used to support the application of a relevant TIF mechanism for up-front de-risking of private investment in bringing forward the sites for development.

- Enhanced capital allowances for business occupiers – for businesses wishing to make significant investment in plant or machinery.
  - Superfast broadband to facilitate high end knowledge based businesses.
2. It would provide a robust and highly competitive marketing platform for EBR to meet the needs of growing businesses in the sub-region, nurture new business start-ups in partnership with the University of Chichester and Chichester College and deliver a competitive alternative for potential inward private sector investment.
  3. EZ status would act as a catalyst and a focus for positive and creative partnership working, embracing the local authorities including West Sussex County Council, Coastal West Sussex Area Partnership, and Arun and Adur and Worthing District Councils to drive private sector investment, skills training, job creation and economic growth.
  4. Arun's Draft Local Plan proposes delivery of 641 homes each year over the plan period. In order to mitigate the possibility of increased outward-commuting and to drive job creation and economic growth it is imperative that the Council creates a viable and competitive office/industrial property market. Securing EZ status is key towards addressing this challenge.
  5. The Council has already implemented positive measures to remove barriers to private sector growth through the proposed introduction of a Local Development Order and associated reduction in planning costs and a robust marketing strategy.
  6. EBR is a 'clean' geographically defined area extending to up to 70 ha and having sufficient potential critical mass to establish brand and identity to support a range of businesses and facilitate 'clustering' in a competitive marketplace; The marketing of the site has been enhanced by the decision of Rolls-Royce Motors to build their Technology and Logistics Centre at Enterprise Bognor Regis.
  7. There is currently no designated Enterprise Zone in Coastal West Sussex.
  8. The Council has established an excellent working relationship with EBR Landowners who have engaged positively with the Council in seeking to bring forward early development on the sites.
  9. The importance of EBR as the potential main driver for economic growth and job creation in Coastal West Sussex is widely recognised and supported by the Council's public and private sector partners including Coast to Capital LEP, and the local community.

Yours sincerely



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