

Andover's current economy

The £24K salary that Tesco may be offering at its proposed megashed must seem tempting in Andover, where average earnings are well below those of all neighbouring towns (see inset table).

But saying yes to Goodman will widen this gap.

The strategic issues have been addressed by several reports including Andover Vision, produced by community effort in 2006 and endorsed by TVBC's Corporate Plan 2007-2011; the Long Term Economic Strategy (LTES) produced in 2007 for TVBC; and the LDF Preferred Options report (2008). These come to the unanimous conclusion that Andover needs to move towards a higher skill economy. Here is what they say:

Town	Average Earnings
Andover	£20,157
Basingstoke	£23,080
Newbury	£26,102
Salisbury	£26,611
Winchester	£29,509
national average	£24,478

Source: Calnea Analytics, 2008

LDF Core Strategy, Preferred Options, January 2008

(para.12.2) *"The Long Term Economic Study, notes that characteristics commonly associated with a competitive economy are lacking in Andover. The main problems identified are the lack of highly skilled people, high value jobs, quality employment sites, university links and quality social and cultural infrastructure. The concern is that the local economy could stagnate or decline if it cannot respond to a changing business environment."*

And here is what they say about what is needed:

Andover Vision, 2006:

(It's our time for 21st Century Enterprise) *".. we want to bring new skills into the town, new skills to support business growth and create the high quality employment opportunities we need. To that end, the former Andover Airfield is already being converted into a business park ..."*

LTES, October 2007

(para. 4.2) *"However, in the longer term, it is possible to imagine a higher value-added local economy with higher levels of highly skilled jobs, requiring NVQ4+ professional qualifications. To achieve this, several things need to happen, including ..."*

- Opportunities need to be taken now, using existing land allocations, to attract new and better jobs to Andover for reasons cited elsewhere for the need to create a sustainable and balanced community. In turn, these employment opportunities will provide training and will attract further higher-order investment."*

These recommendations clearly envisage TVBC using its planning powers to achieve strategic economic objectives.

Goodman's proposal

The proposal for a distribution centre is the exact opposite of what is required. Documented evidence from Solstice Park shows that high tech companies do not want to share a site with a distribution centre. The rest of Andover Business Park will not be devoted to anything except storage and distribution. Indeed, Goodman appear to have done nothing to market the later units of the site as B1 & B2, although the Airfield is being advertised in trade journals as a distribution park.

The megashed and its attendant noise, light, landscape and traffic drawbacks will deter quality employers - and their staff - from wishing to move to Andover.

There is also the risk that some existing businesses will be tempted to move elsewhere when the arrival of the megashed diminishes the quality of their working environment, or the living environment of key employees, or exacerbates their transport problems by adding to the A303 congestion. With companies - and government establishments - becoming ever more willing to move, can Andover afford to take this risk?

Out-commuting

The LTES noted that there are many people with higher skills living in and around Andover who choose to commute elsewhere for employment. It commented on the potential to create skilled local employment opportunities to draw some of this out-commuting back, as well as encouraging higher socio-economic groups to spend more of their time and money in the town. Clearly a storage and distribution park will not do this.

Demographics

Andover has no desperate need for new employment of just any type. Although Andover is due to receive a substantial amount of new housing over the coming decades, the effects of this on the borough's working population will be partially offset by the continuing fall in the number of people living in all the existing houses (forecast to fall by 10% in 20 years) and the demographic trend towards a lower proportion of these people being of working age.

Conclusions

There may be some short-term gain to the local economy by allowing this development, but in the longer term it will drive away quality jobs and cause pay levels in Andover to lag even further behind those in neighbouring towns. Andover will have wasted the opportunity of this prime greenfield site to redress the balance of its employment base. People will continue to out-commute to find high quality work.

With recent press announcement of links with Winchester University and enhancement of Andover College, one facet of the move to a higher skill economy for Andover is being addressed, but the creation of a massive storage and distribution park is a move in the wrong direction - it is a step back to the old Andover, settling for second best.

STOP! ALLIANCE August 2008