

Tavistock

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

11th February 2019

Dear Councillor Sanders,

As Chairman of Tavistock Business Improvement District (BID) I am writing an open letter on behalf of our members – the businesses in Tavistock town centre. While our BID is ‘for’ investment in Tavistock, in a poll we conducted, the overwhelming majority of business owners do not support the proposal by West Devon Borough Council (WDBC) which would see you borrow £10.631 million to build a hotel on Abbey Rise car park for lease to a national hotel chain.

Tavistock BID is concerned that no professional independent evidence has been gathered to support the hotel chain’s claim that the local economy will benefit by £2.7 million. WDBC has undertaken no studies of its own to assess demand and the project takes no account of existing supply. No impact studies have been done. The Council has not consulted local stakeholders, such as the business groups of town, and has made no provision to deal with a loss of 9% of the town’s total parking.

Outwardly the proposal has been presented as ‘good news’ because it demonstrates a willingness and ambition to invest in local communities and a confidence in Tavistock as a destination. However, we believe this proposal is actually flawed and is a bad deal for both the businesses and people of Tavistock. If the hotel is built the following negative impacts will occur:

[Impact on the heritage and conservation sites – any development should not damage or impair our World Heritage Site. Tavistock BID and others in our community with a special interest in preserving and promoting our heritage assets believe this is the wrong location for a development of this kind.](#)

Loss of vital car parking – the proposed hotel is contrary to the Council’s parking strategy which aspires to preserve and, if possible, improve parking in the town. Car parking is essential to the economic vitality of the town centre. The loss of 56 prime car parking spaces and subsequent demand from the hotel would cause a major parking problem and severely damage visitor footfall.

The hotel is a risky business proposition with negligible return on investment – the estimate is just 1% return which equates to a net financial return of £50,000 per annum. [Current revenue from the car park stands at £50,000 per annum.](#) It is in fact an expensive, contentious and speculative venture that brings with it consequences for our heritage assets, our townscape and our local businesses.

There will be high potential for damaging effects on local accommodation providers - increasing supply of hotel accommodation will not automatically lead to an increase in uptake. It may actually push prices down and reduce the profitability of local accommodation providers.

At the Question and Answer meeting you held on 4th February with Tavistock District Chamber of Commerce, Tavistock BID members and others, it was said the project proposal was considered to be marginally viable and not the best on the table. It can be deduced therefore that this project is contrary to the logic that a high-risk decision should carry the possibility of a high return. This is actually a high risk / low return project and there is thus no obvious sense in it.

WDBC members when they meet on 12th February should evaluate carefully the commitment of borrowed money to a risky project and we would urge you to reconsider the approval of its funding. Tavistock BID considers it would be better to find a lower risk higher return project that brings investment within the Borough. Our town looks to the Borough Council to be a responsible investor that gains support from the businesses, our community as a whole as well as those active in safeguarding our heritage assets, for instance Tavistock Town Council and Tavistock Heritage Trust.

In the interests of encouraging the development of a better idea for investment in our community I have sent a copy of this letter to all West Devon Borough Councillors, to the Tavistock Times & Gazette, to Tavistock Town Council and to Tavistock Heritage Trust.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K Hailey', written in a cursive style.

Kevin Hailey
Bid Chairman