



Overall Winner

Somerdale, Keynsham

Entered by Barton Willmore

The RTPI South West Awards for Planning Excellence 2019

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Project Summary

(100 word summary)

Steeped in history and loved by locals, the redevelopment of the old Somerdale Cadbury's Factory in the historic market town of Keynsham was a high profile, politically sensitive project which has delivered a high-quality, successful new neighbourhood and a valuable legacy for the local community. Barton Willmore successfully project managed and oversaw 19 specialist consultants and secured planning permission for the 90ha site, which faced multiple layers of complex constraints including: flood risk; green belt; ecology and important trees; maintaining and improving sports provision; numerous factory buildings; contamination and the Roman town of Trajectus found underneath part of the site.

Background

Please outline the background to the project:

- context and timeline

(insert your answer here – MAX 500 words)

An iconic landmark steeped in history and loved by locals, Somerdale, the former Cadbury's chocolate factory, has been transformed into a thriving new community. Situated in the historic market town of Keynsham, the factory employed in excess of 5,000 people at its peak and provided community and sports facilities used by the local community.

In 2010, the Kraft takeover of Cadbury's provoked a media storm, as despite earlier reassurances around Somerdale and the protection of Cadbury's UK manufacturing, the plant was closed. With concerns over job losses and the perceived threat of development, the redevelopment of the old Somerdale Cadbury's Factory was a high profile, politically sensitive project for the sub-region.

This had implications for Kraft Foods who as landowners (until it was acquired and developed by Taylor Wimpey post permission), retained their stake and attended all meetings with the Council to guarantee the redevelopment secured a positive legacy, ensuring their brand and the historic association with the site was not undermined. It also had implications, as B&NES were exerting their influence over the quality of the development, with very senior officers at B&NES engaging with Taylor Wimpey and Kraft Foods at the outset, setting out their ambitions for an exemplar development on one of their key regeneration sites.

The 90ha site experienced multiple layers of complex constraints including:

- Over 50% of the site was affected by flooding and not developable
- Over 50% of the site is in the green belt
- Very large factory buildings that were not listed but of strong character and highly valued locally
- A Roman Town was found buried under part of the site pre-application – subsequently designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)
- Whilst an opportunity, the large number of sports pitches and Fry Club were also a constraint to development and some required relocation
- A variety of ecological constraints, including bat corridors and an important river corridor
- Some important trees and groups of trees across the site
- Extensive site contamination
- One suitable main site access point
- Policy requirement to deliver 700 dwellings and a need for a new primary school, pre-school and new community/sports club on-site
- Air Quality Management Area very close to the site.

Despite this extensive list of potential barriers and issues, Barton Willmore Planning project managed and oversaw the work, co-ordinating the input from 19 specialist consultants. We submitted a hybrid application for redevelopment within 14 months of project inception and secured a unanimous resolution to grant planning permission at B&NES Committee just six months after the submission of the application. The decision notice was issued five months after that.

Key dates:

- Team appointed and project inception: February 2012
- Submission of a Position Statement to B&NES for their consideration: May 2012
- Formal pre-application submission to the B&NES Development Team: October 2012
- Hybrid application submitted: April 2013
- B&NES resolution to grant planning permission: 25th September 2013
- Decision notice issued: 19th February 2014

Background images:



Previous development – factory buildings



Previous development – factory buildings

Outcomes

Please outline what positive impacts the project has provided for:

- the local community
- the economy
- the environment

(insert your answer here – MAX 500 words)

Somerdale has created a number of local community benefits including:

- New neighbourhood of high-quality homes, surrounded by walkable, permeable streets and open spaces, with green corridors and riverside walks to open countryside beyond.
- 617 homes of which 179 (29%) are affordable.
- Retention and conversion of the iconic chocolate factory blocks A, B and C, providing a landmark and sense of place within the site and for Keynsham as a whole.
- Mixed use development providing multiple opportunities for social interaction and building relationships through the school, sports facilities and new Somerdale Pavilion, café/restaurant in the old factory buildings, walking through the neighbourhood or enjoying the playgrounds and variety of open space.
- Expanded doctor's surgery.
- New retirement village to house a growing elderly population.
- Financial contribution of £1.1m towards a River Avon bridge crossing linking the development (and other parts of Keynsham) to the Bristol-Bath cycle track.

Economic benefits

- The completion of 100,000sq ft of high quality B1 office space, 55% of which is occupied.
- The development will create over 2,000 jobs, of which, circa 1,000 jobs are associated with the operational development (i.e. the completed school and pre-school; office space in factory Block C; doctors' surgery; Somerdale Pavilion; Chocolate Quarter care home extra care apartments and other facilities).

Environmental benefits:

- Curating a place that responds to the countryside, river setting and industrial heritage.
- Retaining the existing landscape of mature trees including the boulevard of mature chestnut trees which are a defining feature of the entrance to the site, as well as retaining woodland to the north, the south-east corner and along the river and margins of the Hams. A new area of woodland has also been created in the northern part of the site.
- Retaining and enhancing foraging habitat and providing green routes through the development for bats and providing new roosting opportunities by installing bat boxes on-site.
- Installing low impact lighting to minimise light spill on the environmentally sensitive river corridor.
- Preventing resident's access to parts of the riverbank to minimise disturbance to otters and other wildlife using the River Avon corridor.
- The creation of a wildlife zone and new wetland area within The Hams.
- The remains of the Roman town buried under the Hams is protected in situ.
- New drainage system provides a 10% betterment on past runoff rates discharging to the River Avon.
- An 11% reduction in regulated CO2 emissions beyond the requirements of the 2010 Building Regulations through passive design and energy efficiency measures.
- The Somerdale Pavilion built to BREEAM Very Good standard.
- The provision of open space exceeds requirements, e.g. 2.4ha of formal POS required, 20.6ha of sports pitches and formal play areas provided, 2.4ha of natural greenspace required, 15.4ha of natural greenspace provided.

Outcomes images:



New school



Somerdale Pavilion



Chocolate Factory



Roman remains



Completed development

Planning contribution

Please outline how the project has benefitted from the involvement of a planner or planners:

BW Planning were entirely responsible for leading the project in working up the application and ultimately securing permission and managing all the complexities associated with it – achieving planning permission for a high-quality scheme over a short timescale. BW Planning also oversaw the implementation of the project including the submission of subsequent reserved matters and discharge of conditions applications.

Key features of our **leadership and vision** included:

- Preparing a high-level milestones plan which included dates for key outputs to drive the project, supplemented by detailed task sheets which ensured progress was maintained and key issues progressed at team and LPA meetings.
- Driving solutions on the project which cut across disciplines – e.g., the delivery of 700 homes required the relocation of sports pitches onto the Hams, whilst balancing the requirements of Sport England and the Fry Club's requirement for a higher quality, first team football pitch (raised above the flood plain), weighed against the flood risk and ecological constraints on the HAMS and protecting the SAM. The issue of sports pitches alone cut across three different statutory consultees: The Environment Agency, Historic England and Sport England and involved detailed input from sports consultants, the Fry Club, flood risk engineers, masterplanners, ecologists and heritage consultants.
- In addition to close team management and one-to-one client meetings, identifying key external players and **working in partnership** with them was critical to success. By holding meetings every three weeks with the Somerdale Working Group¹, we were able to monitor and ensure that proposals were emerging in line with council policy. We also held technical meetings with Council departments on issues requiring detailed collaboration (e.g. overcoming access constraints with the Highways Authority; establishing the quantum and location of the employment with economic development officers, agreeing the built heritage to retain / demolish with the Council's archaeologist and planners – some of these issues taking many months to resolve); as well as meetings with government agencies. We also designed in very effective stages of community and stakeholder involvement and built in a design review via the B&NES Urban Regeneration Panel.
- Pre-application, we opted for an efficient 12-month period to work up a planning application alongside continuous engagement with B&NES, with two main opportunities for formal LPA comments on initial masterplan proposals (Position Statement) and a more detailed pre-application inquiry. This was especially effective, and we were instrumental in designing and making this pre-application arrangement work both in choreographing the outputs, timing and leading the negotiations that stemmed from them.
- We secured detailed consent for the Somerdale Pavilion and first phase of residential, whilst achieving the flexibility required for later phases. The added complication was that flexibility was required for the factory buildings, but legislation is such that proposals for change of use are to be provided as a full application. We prepared a precise, extensive development description and a list of plans for approval. The change of use of the factory buildings were applied for in full, with B&NES allowing detailed plans to be conditioned – an approach we had investigated and agreed with B&NES in advance. The complex hybrid application has worked effectively and facilitated the implementation of the development and vision for the site.

477 words

¹ Attended by following key officers from B&NES - Strategic Director, Development & Major Projects; Regeneration Manager, Development & Major Projects; Senior Development Officer, Development & Major Projects; Senior Planner - Major Developments, Planning Services

Sustainable development

Please outline how the project has supported:

- positive short, medium and long term public benefit
- a balance of economic, social and environmental objectives
- the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

(insert your answer here – MAX 500 words)

The project encapsulates what a sustainable development is, achieving excellent gains across all three sustainable development objectives. In the short term (first two years), immediate public benefits include:

- The construction and opening of the Somerdale Pavilion to ensure continuity of sports/community provision before the old Fry Club was demolished.
- Relocated sports pitches prior to their loss and provision of a new, Somerset County League standard football pitch.
- Extension to the station overspill car park for public use.
- First phase of residential development and affordable housing.

In the medium term (2 – 10 years), with phase 1 and 2 (362 dwellings) and all non-residential uses now largely complete, a vibrant and thriving neighbourhood is emerging for residents and visitors to enjoy. The third and final phase of housing (225 dwellings) is now under construction and the whole Somerdale development is due for completion in 2022.

In the long term, Keynsham will benefit from a sustainable new neighbourhood providing a high quality of life for its residents; services and facilities for the wider community to use; and diverse employment and high quality B1 office space to support economic diversification of the town.

The development performs well against the UN's Sustainable Development Goals with affordable homes for 179 households on low incomes and a new school within walking distance which helps with equitable access to housing and education. Mixed tenure and range of house types for younger people, families, as well as specialist older people accommodation has created a mixed community with opportunities to get to know one another and develop community cohesion and reduce inequality. The development promotes good health and well-being with access to sports and walking routes and play spaces on site, as well as easy access to the wider countryside. A doctor's surgery is also located on site and older people will have access to bespoke care packages. Passive design and energy efficiency measures have been implemented across the development, helping reduce energy costs for occupiers and the Somerdale Pavilion is built to BREEAM very good. The development has been designed to accommodate waste recycling lorries to support recycling. Clean water is available to all residents and development is safe from flooding.

The development is creating over 2,000 jobs, with circa 1,000 associated with the long term on-site operational development, and the construction of 100,000 sqft of modern office space has been completed. Improvements have been made to two junctions within the locality and over £2m in financial contributions paid towards station improvements, a pedestrian/cycle bridge over the River Avon to connect with the Bristol-Bath cycle track, improved pedestrian/cycle links and bus service contribution. The improvements to public transport have made the development more sustainable, providing a mix of uses in a very accessible location, enabling people to walk, cycle or use public transport in going about their daily lives, minimising impacts on climate change.

Sustainable development images:



Somerdale Pavilion



Chocolate Factory



The Avenue



Walking entrance to the development



Riverside walk

Community benefit

Please outline how the project has provided:

- positive and constructive engagement and dialogue with local people and businesses
- a better quality of life for people, especially for disadvantaged communities
- tangible benefits for communities such as facilities, infrastructure, jobs, training etc

(insert your answer here – MAX 500 words)

Stakeholder engagement and dialogue

During the early stages of the project, a stakeholder workshop was held with 30 people from the Town and District Councils, residents' groups and community bodies (e.g. Keynsham Heritage Trust, neighbourhood police, Transition Keynsham, Historic Society and Business Association). Key site information was provided, and small groups were tasked to prepare a vision and concept plan for the site. On the back of this, the design team worked up a preferred concept plan which was presented at a public exhibition attended by 1000 people.

A further stakeholder workshop was convened to consider the design and character of the redevelopment, followed by a further public exhibition (attended by 470 people) setting out the more detailed proposals for the site. This was good practice because it was programmed at the right time to inform the proposals and created genuinely interactive, design led, informative discussions with local stakeholders working up the proposals for the scheme, which were shared with the public for wider comments.

The developer had direct contact with the Town Council and a residents' group neighbouring the site, which was invaluable to gather their comments and concerns, which were fed back to the project team.

Quality of life

From hosting a site visit on behalf of the RTPi last year, we learnt that the new community love their new neighbourhood. We met several residents who were thrilled that they had moved there, including an elderly couple who moved from the centre of Keynsham to Somerdale. Having everything on site, including a restaurant, pavilion, canal walks and green space and the location - with the train station a short walk away - makes this the perfect area for them to have moved to.

Tangible benefits:

- 617 homes of which 179 (29%) are affordable
- Chocolate Quarter care home (93 beds), 136 extra care apartments, A1 retail, and leisure uses
- Block C - 10,139m² of B1
- Medical centre
- New Somerdale Pavilion, vested in a charitable trust who lease the land and buildings to the club for a small rent
- Single form entry primary school and pre-school
- Extension and improvements to station overspill car park, owned by Taylor Wimpey but available for use by the public
- New high quality F1 football pitch
- Riverside walk, public realm, open spaces and play areas
- The creation of circa 2,000 jobs
- A financial contribution of £100,000 towards the cost of delivering a local training, skills and employment package
- Target to provide 17 apprenticeships in construction, with 19 apprenticeships provided and filled to date, with the potential to offer more over the remaining 3 years of construction
- Improvements to two junctions within the locality and over £2m in financial contributions paid towards station improvements, bus service contribution and pedestrian/cycle improvements.

Community benefit images:



Play area



School



Play area



Public transport routes



The Chocolate Factory mixed use development

Leading practice

Please outline how the project:

- is creative and innovative
- is an exemplar that is transferable across the UK
- promotes equality and diversity

(insert your answer here – MAX 500 words)

The proposed and now delivered scheme is a creative response to the site, which is testament to the multi-disciplinary working and creative solutions that were facilitated and encouraged by Barton Willmore.

Exemplar, creative and innovative features of our working include:

- Effective working with the LPA.
- Deliberative stakeholder involvement and securing high levels of interest at public exhibitions.
- Encouraging Taylor Wimpey to create bespoke house types for parts of the site where needed (e.g., along the river path and The Avenue and overlooking the Hams (this is very unusual for volume housebuilders).
- Bringing real clarity on the application type, description of development and approved plans which formalised the vision for the site, has remained intact through time and throughout the subsequent reserved matters applications.
- Being clear to the developer about what is required in terms of quality and mix in order to create an approvable scheme and being open and honest with the LPA about what is/is not commercially deliverable (e.g. it was not possible to retain the powerhouse). Much of the site's success is down to the mix of uses, which Barton Willmore had a pivotal role in securing, leading the negotiations between the developer and B&NES on land use mix and phasing and conceiving the set of plans required to ensure flexibility in the delivery of these uses over time. For instance, achieving flexibility on the detailed design and phasing of the factory buildings in the permission gave Taylor Wimpey time to find a suitable developer to take on this element.
- The quality of urban design and architectural response was important; however the planners navigated the whole process and carefully managed all workstreams, including engagement to ensure the best proposals were put forward that could be supported by decision makers and the community but which were ultimately viable and deliverable. The leadership of the whole process, securing unanimous support of the LPA, followed by successful delivery, planned, permitted and completed within 10 years (2012 – 2022) demonstrates the quality of this development and all who worked on it.

Equality and diversity

Providing homes of different types and sizes, including affordable housing and specialist housing for the elderly, has created a diverse community in terms of age, income and background, and the school, sports facilities, open spaces and retirement village provide opportunities for this diverse community to interact with one another and develop cohesion. A wide range of jobs have also been created, providing access to employment for those at different skill levels. Overall, a superb living environment has been created in a sustainable location where people can access their everyday needs on foot or public transport, providing equitable access for those without a car. As a result of the development, the Somerdale Pavilion and its extensive sports facilities are now protected in perpetuity and transferred to a charitable trust, available for use by the whole of Keynsham. In addition, a financial contribution of £100,000 towards the cost of delivering a local training, skills and employment package has been given to B&NES to support people into employment and 19 apprenticeships in construction have been provided to local people seeking work in construction to date.



A variety of house types