

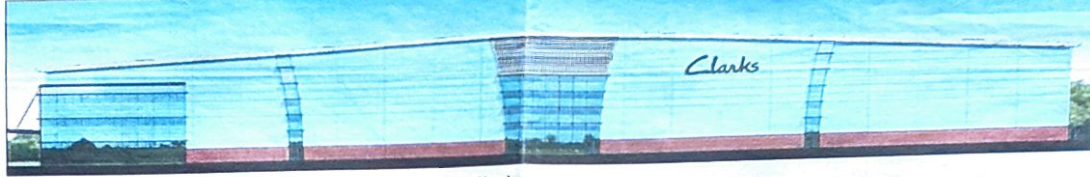
Matthew Smith reports on the exhibition of proposals for the Houndwood site in Street



Aerial view of the Houndwood site, with a computer-generated image superimposed to the left, to show what the new centre will look like



RPS senior planner Alan Pearce with the plan for the new Clarks distribution centre at Houndwood, Street



A computer graphic model of the new distribution warehouse, as viewed from ground level

Opinions differ over £70m Clarks plan

Mixed reactions have greeted proposals for a major business and housing development in Street. An exhibition of plans from C and J Clark for a new warehouse and housing estate in the Westway area went on display to Street Library on Friday - generating a wide variety of opinions among local residents.

The display includes maps of the development and artist's impressions of what the end result will look like, and visitors were able to register their views in a questionnaire.

Representatives from Clarks and RPS, the Bristol company involved with consultation on the project, were also on hand to answer questions.

Clarks propose to build their new warehouse next to the existing Houndwood site, on land earmarked for housing under Mendip District Council's Local Plan.

The company is seeking permission for a site swap, so that after the new distribution centre is built, the old buildings will be demolished and replaced with 350 new homes.

It is estimated the project would cost about £70 million to complete, with the finished warehouse standing at just under 60ft tall, and covering more than 320,000sq ft.

The exhibition outlines a number of advantages, not least the fact that the new development could bring more employment to the area.

However, Clarks have stated that if the plans are rejected when they go



Planning director of RPS Nicholas Tyrrell

before the district council next year, they will have to consider siting the warehouse elsewhere, leading to hundreds of job losses.

Several of those who attended the exhibition last week were impressed with what they saw.

"The warehouse has been there for a long time, and it does need replacing," said Keith Sturges, of West End, Street. "I cannot really see that it would be a problem, just so long as they definitely knock down the old one, because we do not want another Merlands on our hands."

Another Street resident, who works at the current Houndwood site and did not



The front entrance to the Clarks Houndwood site

wish to be named, was keen in support of the proposals.

"I think it would be very good for Street, and it will provide job security for a lot of people in the region," he said.

However, this view was not shared by everybody.

"I think it is just backward, basically," said David Fair, of Brutsche Terrace, Street.

"What they are saying is that if they do not get their way, they are going to put people out of work."

Joy Brown, head of Street's Neighbourhood Watch programme, also had reservations.

"We do need jobs and houses, but I

think the housing estate should be too large," she said.

"There are not enough services to cope with the influx of people, such as schools, doctors and so on, and traffic congestion is dreadful in the area already."

Even so, the exhibition organisers said they were delighted with how many people had turned out to see the plans, and that they would be listening carefully to what they had to say.

"The majority of views have been positive," said Nicholas Tyrrell, planning director with RPS.

"Obviously though, we will have to wait and see what everyone has put on their questionnaires."

"The important thing is that the display will be open for two weeks, so we would like as many people as possible to come along, fill in a form and share their views."

Mr Tyrrell will be at the library again on Friday, December 20, to talk to visitors on the last day of the exhibition, along with RPS senior planner Alan Pearce, project manager Dean Collier and Clarks property director Chris Peeth.

Meanwhile, a temporary structure has been built at Westway on the proposed site of the new warehouse, so people can see how big the new building would be.



Pictured above: Development plan of the housing estate, showing access routes for vehicles and pedestrians. Pictured left: An artist's impression showing the proposed housing development.



Pictured above and right: Four pictures of Cowmead, Bullmead and the other buildings which make up the existing Houndwood distribution site