

# NUTRICIA Wells

## Pre-Application Process

### Redevelopment of Nutricia Factory at Wells, Somerset

Partners included:

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The site, totalling 13.64 acres, has a long history of food production. Nutricia is a global company and in 2003 reviewed its business on a pan-European basis. The outcome was a decision to transfer production from the UK to Poland and Portugal.

Nutricia did not implement the decision in an abrupt manner. The company employed specialist Holland-based consultants to liaise with Mendip District Council and SWRDA to try to identify alternative food processing occupiers who could utilise the specialist employment skills of the workforce. Despite considerable efforts over a period of 18 months, that exercise was not successful and the decision was taken to sell the property vacant for industrial use or redevelopment.

This was the first large site in Mendip to be considered within the emerging Local Development Framework. Community involvement arrangements were discussed and formulated at each stage in conjunction with Council officers and elected members. The loss of employment site to residential development was a matter of heated public debate.

In May 2005 Nutricia, King Sturge and Carlisle Jessop met with local authority officers and councillors. The unsuccessful marketing of the site was discussed. The possibility of a mixed development of commercial, residential and recreational uses was discussed as well as community involvement.

Draft proposals regarding community involvement were presented to members of Mendip District Council and Wells City Council and site visits were offered to the site which, being a food factory, had been 'out of bounds' to visitors when in operation.

A public exhibition explaining the history of the site and development options was arranged at the factory and advertised in the local press. Local organisations and about 100 households in the immediate vicinity received personal invitations. Comments were invited at the exhibition or subsequently by email. The boards were displayed on-line and, by agreement with Wells City Council, they were also displayed at Wells Town Hall so as to allow the opportunity for further comments. Throughout the process the local press was kept informed and the Wells Journal reported progress and comments at each stage.

Three local companies, who were frustrated in their efforts to expand by the lack of good quality sites for offices, were identified. Whilst only occupying a fifth of the site area these companies would generate more jobs than had previously existed at the factory. A consensus on mixed use development emerged and a Concept Document containing design principles and an illustrative plan was prepared.

The consultation exercise was repeated and subsequently refined to take account of matters raised.

### Outcomes

In November 2005 Mendip Planning Board unanimously approved the Concept Statement for development of the site. The site will now be sold to a developer to implement the proposals.

### Lessons Learnt

Community involvement can lead to a better informed decision making process and facilitate change. Taking time to ensure options are explored and the background explained helps considerably.

