

## **Meeting notes from Faringdon Town Council Highways & Planning Meeting**

**13<sup>th</sup> July 2010**

Cllr Hickmore welcomed everyone to the meeting and then went on to say that three questions had been received from a collection of groups within the town. He then read the questions out and explained that the committee would not be able to answer these questions, however he felt that they had all been answered by Tesco's in their planning application and suggested that the answers could be found in the Risk Assessment, Impact Assessment and Traffic Assessment documents. He then asked member of the public to speak.

Trevor Wynn explained to the committee that the town is not against Tesco (or any other supermarket) coming to Faringdon – it is the timing that is wrong. He feels that once the housing development of Park Road is completed this would be the time to look at a new supermarket. He stated that the Town Centre is already dying through lack of footfall and it will only get worse with the introduction of an out-of-town store. Trevor thinks that development of the Budgens store and the area around Portway is the best option. The free parking introduced by VWHDC is starting to encourage people to come to town but feels that parking issues will need to be addressed to encourage more people.

Daphne Saunders explained the background to the 2001 Healthcheck that looked at what people wanted for the Faringdon of the future and stated that by 2015 the town should be sustainable with local foods and energy. This has already started but the introduction of a Tesco store will jeopardise this plan.

Cllr Hickmore went on to point out that this committee is only advisory to the VWHDC and as such will only be looking at planning issues, i.e. is the proposed development needed and is it lawful. He then quoted Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4) and suggested that the town council are statutory consultees, however he urged everyone to respond to VWHDC Development Control in both writing and by speaking at their meetings.

Pat Saunders asked if there was a need for another supermarket, to which Cllr Wise stated that there have been various assessments of the retail needs in Faringdon and the latest stated that 73% of all grocery purchases are done outside of the town. The most recent report commissioned by VWHDC states there is a need for another supermarket in Faringdon. Cllr Wise said that because of the loss to other towns this must be addressed and Tesco sees this as an opportunity. He feels that the key issues that must be addressed are the loss of jobs and the fact the the new store would be built outside of the town centre. A discussion followed and some points were raised.

- 1) Faringdon is the only town in the area that has to pay for parking around its main shopping area.
- 2) The VWHDC say that if the retail offer is good enough then people will pay to park
- 3) Another supermarket in town is fine but, the problem is it will be in a place that is inappropriate for the town.

James Pye then raised points.

1. Linkage between the site and the town centre. The edge of the centre should be within 2/300 metres of the shopping area. Tesco states that it is 311 metres to the boundary of the centre.
2. The Retail Impact Assessment states that the diversion of existing trade would be just 1% with the exception of Budgens this cannot be correct.

3. There is a need to look at sequential development as stated in PPS4 and 6.

Sarah Allen-Stevens commented that she is not disputing the fact that we need more retail space but asked can we afford the loss of B2 and B8 land?

Cllr Hickmore thanked members of the public for their input and invited them to raise points and questions during the Town Council discussions that were to follow.

Cllr Hickmore started the discussion by pointing out that he had been told by Faringdon House that they wished to develop the land behind the Gloucester Street car park but he had been unable to find a partner, he went on to explain that this makes it a dead proposal. He suggested that future development of this site could be for small retail outlets and perhaps a museum. He said that the Tesco proposal is ready to go now.

Cllr Keeble asked if James Pyes questions were grounds for refusal. A discussion followed and Cllr Hickmore stated that PPS4 stated that 380 metres is the distance rather than the 2/300 metres as stated. Cllr Keeble asked if the sequential assessment had been done to which Cllr Hickmore replied that Tesco has comprehensive evidence to show that sequential planning has been done.

Simon Tiensa then pointed out that the Impact Report does not take into account that Budgens and Cost Cutters have had their planning proposals agreed. The fact that Savilles have changed their minds over the need for another supermarket does not make sense and indeed Cost Cutters were not mentioned in the Savilles report.

Cllr Leniec confirmed that he is against the development. He stated that it is necessary to look at whether the town needs it and if it is appropriate to change the use from B2 -B8. He feels that the major retailer who has bought the land really doesn't care what happens to the rest of the town. He said that the VWHDC have made the problem for the town centre retailers by enforcing parking charges. He stated that no matter what Tesco say people will not come into the town centre and that convenience shopping will be the blight of town centre retailers. Cllr Leniec went on to say that the huge amount of paperwork that has been produced to support this application is only to baffle people with science. The town has already lost employment sites and to change this B2-B8 site to retail with low level jobs and wages is not acceptable.

Cllr Thomson agreed completely with Cllr Leniec and said that it is necessary to look at Abingdon and Wantage they have lost their independent shops but have gained free parking. Putting a supermarket on Park Road will be to the detriment of the town centre. Cllr Hickmore replied that if the number and variety of shops is correct people will come into the town centre.

Cllr Keeble commented that they should be looking at the change of use to begin with and as there are already two supermarkets in town this is not necessary. Cllr Hickmore replied that the whole community must be regarded - there is a disadvantaged group of people in the town who, for various reasons cannot get out of the town to shop and also cannot afford the prices that are charged in Budgens. Cllr Leniec responded that there is a weekly bus to Abingdon that is paid for by Tesco.

Cllr Boulton stressed that it will be important to have small/start up shops built and that rents in the town centre are too high for new businesses.

Cllr Hickmore asked Sarah Allen-Stevens for an update on the 420 Business Park to which she responded that there is interest from local businesses that need to move to bigger premises soon.

Cllr Hickmore noted that the Town Council had always supported increase in population to encourage larger chain stores into the town. He said that to be able to refuse the application it will be necessary to have a good evidence base.

Cllr Leniec referred to Town Council policy which is to look for B2-B8 employment land for more sustainable jobs and stated that this proposal goes completely against the Towns Councils own policy and that this is very wrong. He proposed that the Town Council rejects this application.

Cllr Hickmore disregarded this proposal and suggested that the Town Council should accept the application with the same comments as were made for the initial planning in January 2010. A heated discussion followed and Cllr Hickmore accepted that there needed to be changes made, namely

1. 106 monies would only bring short term relief if used to provide free parking and so the VWHDC must provide free parking for the first 2 hours.
2. B2-B8 land must be replaced as a matter of urgency and the Town Council will insist on early acceptance of planning for new B2-B8 sites such as Wicklesham Quarry
3. Tesco must have a restricted product range.

Cllr Hickmore than asked for a vote for the amended comments above. This was carried.

For: Cllrs Hickmore, Marsden, Barker, O'Keeffe, Boulton and Gillman. Against: Cllrs Leniec, Wise and Keeble.

Cllr Leniec asked for his proposal to be voted for regarding the change of use. This vote was lost, but is was agreed that the change of use must not go ahead until new B2-B8 land is identified.