

3, Common Side,
Epsom,
Surrey,
KT18 7HT

26 November 2009

Planning Department
Epsom & Ewell Borough Council
Town Hall
The Parade
Epsom
KT18 5BY

Dear Sir,

Planning Application 09/00650/FUL

On Tuesday, 17th November, I chaired a public meeting at the Phoenix Club in Depot Road to discuss the application by Tesco Stores Ltd for the redevelopment of 40-58 Upper High Street to provide a new food retail store. I assured the meeting that I would take note of their comments and pass these to the Planning Department but encouraged them also to send their own letters of objection or support.

It is regrettable that neither representatives of Tesco nor council officers were able to attend the meeting; no councillors other than Liberal Democrat councillors attended either. Those present at the meeting commented on the absence of these interested parties and I would encourage planning committee members and council officers to attend such public meetings in future and to hear the views of local residents first hand.

The overwhelming majority of those attending the meeting opposed the proposed development. However, one person was brave enough to speak in its favour and the meeting accepted that there are those who support the application.

The overwhelming mood that I picked up from those who attended the meeting was incomprehension –

- that Tesco could submit an application that was more intense than the one that was refused in 2006;
- that there is any need for a store of this size in this location;
- that the 2007 public consultation and Development Brief on the future of the site could be so completely ignored;
- that Tesco seem to have bounced the system by submitting this application before the results of Plan E can be adopted by the council;
- that discussions between Tesco and the planning department can have been ongoing for more than 12 months without any opportunity for councillors to state their position regarding sale of the council-owned land.

The council was considered to have done itself no favours with its handling of this application. Several people argued that the council should nip the application in the bud by stating its refusal to sell its own land to support the proposed development.

Size

The principal planning objections expressed at the meeting relate to the size of the development and the consequences of this. The development is felt to be far too large in

comparison with the street scene and with the neighbouring conservation area and is far larger than the application refused in 2006. This is evidenced by the fact that the built development and access roads will cover the entire site, a footprint considerably bigger than the Helical Bar application. A majority of those at the meeting felt that the built part of the development should be restricted to the footprint of 42-50 Upper High Street.

With 5 above-ground storeys, the building will be up to 4 times the height of neighbouring houses in Upper High Street and of those opposite. It will block daylight as well as signals from satellite TV.

Site and building design

The design of the store is felt to be out of keeping with its surroundings, particularly the neighbouring Pikes Hill conservation area. Pikes Hill residents rejected Tesco's comment that the design of the building "preserves and enhances" the conservation area and were offended that such a development could be proposed right next to their properties when they are subject to strict restrictions.

The rear of the building has a glass design, leading to issues of light pollution for residents of Pikes Hill and Treemount Court.

Entry to and exit from the site will be directly behind the rear of the properties in Pikes Hill and Treemount Court and the vehicle delivery area is proposed at the south-east corner of the site - it could not be nearer to residential properties. At least the previous Helical Bar proposals placed the loading area further down Upper High Street closer to non-residential property.

Traffic, highways and car-park

The size of the store will clearly encourage considerably more traffic to the area. Tesco's own figures estimate up to 12,000 car movements a day, a substantial increase on the figure suggested by Helical Bar in their rejected application. At its peak, Tesco estimates an additional 1,132 movements per hour over and above existing movements.

Residents fear that this will add to already existing traffic danger and is unacceptable in an area already suffering from congestion and rat-running in local roads. On-street parking is already at capacity and concerns were expressed that pressure for parking in local roads will be increased. The number of car-parking spaces on site does not appear to be adequate to accommodate the peak traffic predicted by Tesco, which does not indicate whether employees (up to 320) will be permitted to park on site.

The increased traffic was also seen as a potential danger to school-children from Wallace Fields and Glyn who walk to and from school in the surrounding roads.

To alleviate the increase in traffic, it was suggested that Tesco must create a park-and-ride scheme.

The extra shopping trips are, of course, additional to the deliveries to the new store and an average of 19 deliveries each day, including 11 deliveries by Tesco lorries, will in itself have a damaging impact on local residents.

To accommodate these deliveries, Tesco is proposing highway improvements at the entrance to the site and in the Quadrant. Far from making "a vast improvement to traffic in this area", as Tesco claims, residents argued that the changes were proposed solely to accommodate Tesco delivery lorries, they would make the traffic flow worse and would create pedestrian danger by removing railings and barriers. The road network alone makes this an inappropriate site for such a large store.

Concern was also expressed about the loss of public car-parking on this site. The arrangements that would be made between Tesco and the council are not clear. Will free parking displace short-stay parking on other council-owned sites? What level of charges would apply after the initial free 3 hours? Would the beneficiary of these be Tesco or the council? What level of occupancy does Tesco expect in the car-park and will there be adequate parking available for people visiting other businesses and the cinema?

Commercial impact

Whilst it was acknowledged that the general business community in Epsom supports the application, the effect on independent shops in the nearby area is likely to be less benign and would directly force the closure of some of the small, valued, privately-owned shops in the Upper High Street. One resident spoke of her personal experience in Purley where the arrival of the Tesco supermarket had decimated the smaller shops. Residents demanded that a Retail Impact Assessment should be performed before the Planning Committee considers the application.

Conclusion

The opinion of local residents who attended the public meeting is very strongly opposed to this application. There are a large number of planning reasons to reject it and, on behalf of the residents present at the public meeting, I call on members of the planning committee to refuse approval.

I would be grateful if you would ensure that this letter is circulated to all members of the planning committee.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Linscott