

Anstey Residents Group is asked "What do you Want?"

The Anstey Residents Group enjoyed a successful inaugural meeting on Sunday 6th September at the Alton Town F.C. Sports & Social Club - with approx 100 local residents attending from Anstey Road, Anstey Lane, London Road, Lansdowne Road, John Eggars Square, Shipley Close and surrounding areas.

Chaired by Paddy Mendham, who was supported by a committee of local residents, the meeting gave those living in the area the chance to voice opinions and concerns over the *expected* planning application for an Asda supermarket and petrol forecourt on the Coors Sports ground.

Whilst the opportunity was given to all those present to voice positive support for the proposed Asda development, 100% of attendees said they were opposed to the plans.

Also in attendance, at the invitation of the group, was District and Town Councillor Ms Pam Bradford (Lib Dem), who is also Chairman of the Alton Town Council's Recreation Committee. When asked by the Chairman for her valued input on the subject, Councillor Bradford firstly asked the group *why* they were meeting. She said, "If I am supposed to be representing you, I need to know what you are thinking and what you are arguing about."

Thanking Councillor Bradford for her input, the Chairman explained residents had gathered to discuss the proposed development, to form an action group and committee who will work to publicise and coordinate the opinions and feelings of the local residents going forward.

Councillor Bradford then asked the group: *what did they want* developed on the Coors Sports & Social ground? She said, "You have had the offer of housing which you objected to, you now have the offer of a supermarket which you are objecting to...you need to decide what you want on the land and make a positive proposal which may not yet have been put forward." When asked by the Chairman who this proposal should be put forward to, Councillor Bradford suggested Coors themselves.

The overriding call in response to Councillor Bradford's question was, "we want another Shipley Close on the land!"

Some members of the Group wanted to ensure it was publicised that not all local residents are opposed to Coors developing the land.

The wishes of the Anstey Residents are for housing of a sensible density, in-keeping with the existing aesthetics and historical nature of the area and most importantly a development that will not exploit and threaten the facilities and infrastructure of the local environment.

However - the group are very aware that in a recession, housing development is unlikely to provide the financial impetus required for Alton Town Council to fulfil their 'agreement in principle' to re-house the current sports facilities on the land. There will also be members of the local community very much in favour of an Asda coming to Alton. Therefore, the group are under no doubt they face an uphill battle when the Asda application finally comes in.

Various key areas of concern emerged from the meeting, which will be explored in more detail by the committee going forward including;

- The affect on high street retailers
- Traffic levels
- Traffic capacity of Anstey Road
- Noise pollution
- Light pollution
- Safety (residents, school children, Treloars, Drivers)
- Environmental hazards

- Contamination
- Anti-Social Behaviour

A particularly valid point was put forward by one member who had studied the approved planning application for housing in the Chandos Lodge area of Anstey/London Road - traffic assessments for which showed that once the Chandos Lodge housing is complete, Anstey Road's traffic capacity will have reached 86% - leaving very little capacity left for year on year growth of the town's traffic let alone a brand new supermarket and petrol station with space for hundreds of cars.

One local resident offered their 29 years of managerial experience within Sainsburys and suggested that a store of the scale Asda are proposing, would most likely be a 24 hour outfit which would generally command in the region of 35,000 customers visiting the store per week, 90% of which would be using a car and 20,000 customers per week visiting the petrol forecourt alone. The committee hope to draw upon this gentleman's experience and knowledge in the future.

Members expressed dismay that an initial Environmental Impact Assessment was deemed unnecessary for the Asda development by East Hampshire District Council and that the covenant on the land, dated 1935 whereby the land is supposed to be reserved perpetually for recreational open space save for a strip of a maximum of 10 houses, is likely to be ignored if a mutual planning gain between Coors and the council is achieved.

There was also confusion over why the development would be allowed to progress to formal application status, bearing in mind the land is classed within planning policy as an 'out of town site' and the recent application by Tesco's on Mill Lane was rejected on the grounds of an out of town site drawing shoppers away from the high street. Indeed Tesco's planning agents, Martin Robeson Planning Practice, have said of the site that it is, "unsuitable to accommodate a supermarket of an appropriate size, not least because of the inherent problems of relating such development to immediately adjoining residential properties" - and that "in planning policy terms, (it is) an out of centre site and therefore has no retail planning policy preference" to their proposed Mill Lane development.

The meeting was not deemed as a 'not on my doorstep thank you very much' exercise - rather, the 100 strong local residents seem far more concerned with discussing how best to approach Coors, Alton Town Council and East Hampshire District Council to ensure the land is developed in a sensible way that will benefit Alton's future as a thriving market town, attract more people to want to live in the area including city commuters and families, without alienating and forcing out existing residents in the immediate vicinity.

It is the group's wish to work alongside both councils, and Coors in a constructive fashion when the formal planning application comes in and the views of those who are not opposing an Asda in the town will be respected.

The turn out for the meeting could not have been better, and the group were extremely grateful for Councillor Bradford's attendance and call for opinion. We must also thank the Alton Town F.C. Sports & Social Club for allowing the meeting to be held and the club's President/Chairman who manned the bar.

It is clear this is an issue which will be at the forefront of a lot of local people's minds for the foreseeable future and many consider that it will take a 'group effort' and a 'clever' approach to the formal planning application in order for the Anstey Residents Group to have sway.

The Anstey Residents Group Committee will now continue to meet on a regular basis and would like to urge all those local residents and retailers who could not make the meeting, to visit the website www.ansteyresidents.org.uk to keep abreast of the group's developments and most importantly to email in with any ideas or opinions, be they for or against having an Asda in Alton info@ansteyresidents.org.uk. If you live, work or shop locally – your opinion really does matter and you can make a difference to this cause.