

Supermarket refusal social engineering

Sir, - If Altonians are wondering where their promised new supermarket has gone, they would do well to ask Andrew Joy, the District Councillor for Ashdell, in whose ward the recent Tesco application foundered. In spite of an overwhelming public appetite for the introduction of the Tesco supermarket chain into the town, evidenced by an avalanche of supporting letters received by councillors, it was once again rejected by the planning committee.

Councillor Joy (Conservative), in an unlikely voting alliance with local Councillor Bradford (LibDem), almost single-handedly managed to trash the application to develop Tesco's site on Mill Lane. In this writer's view, he must take most of the responsibility for once again depriving Alton residents of the additional major supermarket for which they have been clamouring.

So ... gone is the planning package of improvements worth more than £1m, gone too are 320 new jobs that the store would have created. Lost also is a competitor to Sainsbury's that would have given Altonians more retail choice.

Voting in favour of the application was Councillor Glynis Watts (Conservative), whose common-sense approach was a breath of fresh air. She recognised that implicit in the planning officer's recommendation for refusal was the promotion of an insidious and intrusive sort of social engineering, where we are deprived of deciding for ourselves how we make choices about where and how we do our shopping.

It's a fact that most people just do not walk or cycle or even catch the bus to do their weekly food shop; even if they might want to leave the car at home, the weight and bulk of modern shopping inevitably means a car is essential company.

Let's hope that the entirely negative arguments that Councillor Joy so effectively deployed to thwart Tesco's plans, will resurface when Coors' ill-conceived bid to build a supermarket on their sports ground is considered by the planning committee.

Fat chance - though I would suggest, in the light of Councillor Joy's oft-quoted views about "opening-up the Anstey end of Alton with a significant retail presence along with a petrol station" (albeit in the middle of an entirely residential area).

This councillor has rendered the town a grave disservice; if he has the impertinence to promote the Coors site as an alternative, he will be perpetuating another.

Name and address supplied, Alton

Coors' wooden box threat to Anstey Park

Sir, – Alton Town Council are pushing ahead with their plans to approve proposals for sports facilities at Anstey Park to replace those at Coors Sports Ground and a full council vote is expected on February 10. Despite recent publicity, it seems likely that there are many Alton residents who are unaware of the very serious threats to Anstey Park contained in these proposals and this letter aims to highlight the detrimental consequences of these proposals.

The planning application is imminently expected, but the Coors' agent wrote to the town council on December 11, 2009, with the request that the council "will now very shortly feel able to fully verify that it is satisfied with the replacement provisions proposed for the sports and will formally inform the planners accordingly".

The threats to Anstey Park are two-fold. Firstly, it is proposed that Anstey Town Football Club should be relocated to the existing football enclosure. This necessitates an upgrading to the standard of the Wessex League in which Alton Town FC play. A major feature of this upgrading is that the fairly innocuous existing mesh fencing will require to be covered by close board timber fencing and that the attractive hedging running down the Anstey Lane side will be cut back "as necessary". It is difficult to imagine a more unattractive feature in Alton's lovely park than an enormous close board wooden box the size of a football pitch!

A further feature of the upgrading will be the installation of tall floodlighting towers around the pitch. There is also a plan to take over yet more of the park as a training pitch. This training pitch would be situated between the enclosure and the tennis courts and would require levelling, clearance and more floodlights. What is to be cleared is not specified,

but presumably many, if not all, of the established trees would have to go.

As if the radical changes to the enclosure are not enough, the second part of the relocation proposals are even worse because the intention is to block off the quiet and unspoilt area beyond the rugby fields leading round to Diggers Field and build a youth football hub with three pitches. In effect, the park would be cut in half and the use of a large natural area would be denied to the general public who up to now have had unrestricted use of the whole park for walking, exercise, relaxation, etc.

If the football hub is permitted, anyone venturing into this area will find themselves facing a range of security fencing, floodlight towers, wooden rails, gatch roads, gates, barriers, hard standings, etc etc. It is hard to believe that any council would support the destruction of such a pleasing, unspoilt natural environment.

In common with other groups and societies, the Anstey Residents' Group (ARG) is totally opposed to the relocation proposals and will be arguing that there are many important aspects and matters that need to be examined before any approval can be given; not least, a study in detail of the planning application yet to be submitted.

The threats to Anstey Park will only be removed if opposition on a large scale is displayed by all those Alton residents (in whichever part they live) who are against the relocation proposals. Please visit our web site www.ansteyresidents.org.uk for more information and then start writing to the councillors.

Anstey Residents' Group Committee, Alton