

Tesco appeals in store bid

TESCO has lodged an appeal over its plans for a new foodstore at Mill Lane in Alton.

The decision follows East Hampshire District Council North Planning Committee's refusal of planning permission for a 6,112 sqm retail foodstore, on land at the Mill Lane junction with Montecchio Way, last week.

Tesco claims it would include over £1.1 million in additional benefits for the town as well as up to 320 new jobs for local people.

With pressure for more retail choice, it was a difficult call for councillors who decided, by 12 votes to 6, during at Thursday's meeting to heed officer recommendation to refuse on grounds that "it would have an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of Alton town centre and would lead to unsustainable transport patterns and undue interference with the safety and function of the highway network".

This, the second application for a Tesco foodstore on the site, had attracted 95 letters of support by residents calling for further shopping choice, increased shopping provision at the northern end of the town, an opportunity to make good use an unsightly brownfield site, and the opportunity of employment.

Around 30 letters had been received from those objecting, on grounds including overdevelopment, impact on town centre business, and increased traffic generation on an inadequate highway network.

Planning officer, Tony Witty said that Tesco had commissioned a retail



The supermarket giant wants to create this but some say it looks like the Titanic

impact assessment from Martin Robeson Planning Practice which, having carried out a sequential site test, had concluded that the Mill Lane site was the only suitable site for a new store.

Also, based on an assumed turnover of £23.5m, while it would take trade away from Sainsbury's and other town centre stores, there was thought to be sufficient surplus convenience expenditure available to support the additional floor-space proposed by Tesco.

This contradicted the findings of an independent retail impact assessment, commissioned by EHDC, which assessed Tesco's turnover as more likely to be in the region of £31.7m and concluded that there was insufficient convenience expenditure to support a store of that size. It also challenged the sequential testing by the Tesco agent, which dismissed the Coors Sports Ground site as being required for housing. EHDC says this is not the case and that it too should be considered for retail development.

The Council's retail consultant felt Tesco had over-

estimated the available convenience and comparison goods expenditure and that a store the size proposed by Tesco would lead to "an over-provision of choice which would be likely to encourage less sustainable shopping patterns and ultimately draw existing expenditure from the town centre, to the detriment of its trade and vitality."

While Hampshire Highways no longer objected to the impact of the store on the junction of Mill Lane with Montecchio Way, it had maintained an objection to the site as "an unsustainable location" because Tesco had failed to demonstrate that the proposed improvements to the Mill Lane/Wilsom Road/Ashdell Road cross-roads could deal with the predicted traffic requirements. Highways officers also felt there were wider implications for the highway network which were not being addressed.

While down to put the case for the objectors, Holybourne Village Association representative, James Bull, said that HVA had now withdrawn most of

its concerns since Tesco had agreed not to provide a Post Office counter service, which would have impacted on the village store, and had agreed to improve pedestrian access from Holybourne. Their major concern was for vehicular access to and from the village and they were calling for a roundabout at the London Road junction with Montecchio Way to address the issue.

Dave Crocker spoke on behalf of Alton Town Council which was maintaining its objection on grounds of overdevelopment and inadequate provision to deal with increased traffic, at both ends of Mill Lane.

Tesco's representative, Miles Young, sought to dispel these fears by emphasising the benefits of consumer choice, of regenerating a gateway site, of instigating £1.1m of improvements and providing local jobs.

Councillors were torn over concerns about the size and 'inappropriate, Titanic style' design of the building, of the impact on town centre shopping and highways implications versus demand for improved 'choice'.