

Asda Meeting 06.09.09

Date: Sunday 6th September, 2009 at 7.30pm

Venue: Alton Town Sports and Social Club

Event: Inaugural meeting of the Anstey Residents Group

The meeting was held to provide an opportunity for local residents and retailers to discuss the possible planning application for an ASDA supermarket on Coors Field (ATFC Ground) Anstey Road.

In his welcoming address Paddy Mendham asked for a controlled discussion explaining that the meeting was collectively to find a way forward and to establish an ARG action committee. He also asked for input from all present. Approximately 75 plus concerned Altonians were in attendance.

Tony Rice then provided an excellent, detailed and factual account of recent planning applications which have been submitted by Coors in order to develop the subject land. He explained that back in 2004 Coors had appointed an Agent (Atisreal) in order to secure a high-density housing deal where the construction of 185 houses was supposedly going to result in £5.25M being directed towards the provision of brand new sporting facilities for both Alton Town FC and the people of the town. It was pointed out that this application was rejected but was followed in 2006 by a second planning application for 155 homes (90 homes /hectare) but still with only 129 parking spaces. This second application was subsequently rejected.

In August 2008 the next planning application submitted by Atisreal on behalf of Coors was for some 150 homes, this time with 192 parking places and alarmingly so, more than 240 bedrooms. Upon the discovery of a covenant restricting the use of the subject land for sport/recreational pursuits and construction of a maximum of 10 homes, the application was withdrawn and Atisreal were sacked. Finally, attendees were brought up to date with news that in April 2009, Mr Glanfield of Glanfield Holmlund (Commercial Estate Agents in Alton) had been appointed as an Agent for Coors and had approached Alton Town Council (ATC) to establish a plan to move Alton Town FC to a secured ground in Anstey Park and the younger footballers of the town to new grounds at Diggers Field. This was agreed in principle by ATC and following this co-operation , DHA of Sittingbourne submitted an outline plan for an ASDA supermarket including a petrol station to be built on the Coors Field. The East Hants District Council then deemed that an EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) was not required despite being in receipt of 56 letters of objection from local residents.

Local resident Tony Grange-Bennett then presented the case that Anstey Road was a major arterial road into Alton which in addition to being a route in and out of the town, served as a route to five schools. The capacity of a road was stated to be like a container such as a jug with limited capacity. In other words, Anstey Road was deemed to be finely balanced where even the smallest incident was likely to result in major hold-ups and/or congestion. To make matters worse, recent traffic accident statistics include two serious car accidents on 26/06/09

and 13/07/09 where air ambulances were deployed on both occasions. To the surprise of attendees, it was also stated that during the previous high-density housing planning applications, Coors had announced that increased traffic flow in the area did not present any safety issues to the immediate Coors Field area. It was also pointed out that on page 9, para.5.5 of the commentary supporting the Chandos Place development stated that traffic studies on Anstey Road reported peak flow of 1594 vehicles/hour on a road having a maximum capacity of 1850 vehicles/hour. It was suggested to the attendees that the 14% spare capacity would be taken up with the normal year on year increase in vehicle numbers. A major supermarket development would therefore push this figure far beyond known available capacity.

At this stage the Chairman asked for opinions from any local residents attending the meeting. Their input was as follows:-

- Concern that a petrol station is somehow being proposed in the middle of an established residential area, very close to the adjacent properties. It was also stated that a housing development with a density similar to that of Shipley Close would be better for the town's retailers and be far more in line with what is actually needed by the town to attract families into the area.
- An account of recent communication with the Alton Herald and the subsequent publishing of an article concerning the ASDA EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) application was given and attendees were informed that future support would be provided to the ARG with close liaison with the local press.
- Concern and indeed surprise that the recent application from Tesco had been rejected on grounds that shoppers there would not shop in the town. It was suggested that some 60% of shoppers visiting Sainsbury's do not venture into the town.
- A resident with personal experience relating to the Sainsbury's Knap Hill store spoke of the environmental issues that accompany the presence of a large supermarket - the noise pollution, dust and petrol fume laden air and the ruination of a small village. In particular, 24 hour operation had resulted in car alarms going off at all hours of the day and night.
- It was suggested that both ATC and EHDC should be told in no uncertain terms that the £5.25M previously referred to is no longer on the table. It was also felt that the recession would have reduced the land value and this figure should be re-evaluated and not taken as given.

- Alton Town Councillor Pam Bradford made it clear that she could not comment on matters prior to an official planning application as any comments made could be seen to be prejudicial in the future. This was respected, however, it was clear to many attending that their interests may not appear to be on their elected councillor's agenda. Nevertheless, Mrs Bradford's attendance was very much appreciated by the ARG committee who have every intention to support Councillor Bradford and her ATC colleagues in determining a solution which is good for the town, one which presents a way out from a somewhat difficult to comprehend £5.25M spending promise that supposedly is to materialise from the sale of the subject land. Councillor Bradford asked residents if they didn't want high-density housing, didn't want a supermarket, then, what did they want? From what was witnessed at the meeting, in the coming months there will be no shortage of concerned Alton residents and/or retailers who will demand that the ATC find a way out from what could become an increasingly hard to keep £5.25M spending promise, one which could result in the ruination of Alton as a thriving market town.
- At this stage of the meeting it was suggested that a development with a density of build similar to Shipley Close would be a sensible consideration. This suggestion underlined the sentiments of many of the attendees at the meeting whose wish is for a solution that facilitates the sale of the subject land, additional housing and improved sports facilities for Alton Town FC and the people of the town.
- A new resident to Alton asked for some background to the recent refusal of Tesco's Mill Lane planning application. It was stated that one reason for refusal was that the planned development would not enhance the centre of Alton.
- Edward Hepper, vice-Chairman of The Alton Society demonstrated concern for what is being proposed by ASDA. A highly articulate and credible account was given, identifying concerns over increased traffic flow on Anstey Road (often close to grid-lock), surprise that it had been decided that an EIA was not required (in the middle of what is a residential area) and finally grave concern about yet more loss of green space in the town. It was stated that Alton is already short of green space for the townsfolk to enjoy.
- A question was raised concerning the covenant and how it would come into force. A member of the ARG committee answered saying that if both

parties i.e. Coors and ASDA were in agreement that development should proceed, the covenant would cease to apply.

- A concerned resident voiced his concern as to how many petrol stations does Alton actually need?
- Very sadly, a lady resident attending the meeting shared with all attending the stark reality that a shop she previously owned was unfortunately no longer trading in Alton. She expressed her concern that a supermarket such as ASDA would not just sell food. It would sell just about everything, directly affecting the business of smaller retailers in town. The town of Shepton Mallet was sighted as an example where the town centre is destroyed when too many supermarkets are in competition with only estate agents and charity shops remaining.
- A local resident, Paul Davis, gentleman with significant personal experience in the operation and management of large scale supermarkets spoke very candidly about what residents should expect to see and hear from the proposed ASDA development . It was suggested that there would be up to 30,000 shoppers per week and some 20,000 could buy fuel. Around 90% would come by car, there would be light pollution, dust pollution and deliveries would be made throughout the night. In fact there would be 24 hour noise from the movement (banging) of roller pallets being loaded and unloaded. It was also stated that residents close to a large Sainsbury's in Bracknell had regularly complained about excessive noise levels.
- A resident living in a cottage situated on Anstey Road reported that his house already vibrates when trucks pass by. He was genuinely concerned that a significant increase in delivery vehicles travelling to what is in reality an in-town location, will damage his property.
- A resident asked attendees how it could be possible that so many hundreds of cars should be allowed to enter and park outside a supermarket when even in the case of high-density housing, only around 190 parking places were proposed.
- A resident with personal experience of working with The National Trust cited the fact that there is a Lime Tree at the corner of the site which is within the conservation area.

- A resident expressed concern that much of the current development in the town is happening at the other end of Alton.
- Finally, the gentleman representing the Alton Society reminded everyone in attendance that written comments can be submitted by all residents, however, only one representative can attend planning meetings on behalf of those residents.

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