



IPSWICH CENTRAL
committed to a better town centre

27 May 2009

Private & Confidential
Mr S Miller
Ipswich Borough Council
Grafton House
15-17 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2DE

Dear Mr Miller

Re: Spenhill Application – Grafton Way

I am writing to you as Chairman of Ipswich Central. I believe this is the first time we have commented on a specific planning application, in the existence of either the Ipswich Partnership or Ipswich Central. We are doing so in this instance, due to the large number of differing concerns raised by a variety of our stakeholders.

As a result of these concerns, we have specifically consulted with the St Peters and St Nicholas street traders, the large stores group, the independent retailers group and the Ipswich Forum which represents geographically and by business type, a representative cross section of businesses across the Ipswich Central area. During this consultation, Spenhill have been allowed to present their plans and vision and answer queries made.

I have received feedback from all these meetings and personally met with representatives of Spenhill to discuss the key points raised. They have been given two weeks to reply to the points raised, although not all information promised has been delivered.

As an organisation, the overwhelming majority of views raised by the stakeholders have objected to the application for the following reasons:

1 Requirement for 'comparison shopping' - whilst the DTZ report of 2005 noted the Town Centre needed more comparison shopping, a large Tesco would not fulfil this requirement. The ratio between convenience and comparison goods for the store has not been stated. From knowledge of other similar sized Tesco stores, it is reasonable to assume that this one would include a substantial comparison component.

This is not going to be a food supermarket, but a multi-purpose outlet, also offering a wide range of household goods, electrical items, clothing etc. It would trade at the lower end of the price structure and compete with a town centre that clearly has an over representation at the lower price bracket.

The town's leading retailers have stated to me, that it would severely affect their trading potential in Ipswich. At the current time we must ensure we do everything to support retailers already present in the town centre, not add to their challenges. The extra comparison shopping also needs to be of a far higher quality than the non food area of Tesco, to improve the draw of Ipswich. The element of 'non food' is a Tesco desire, not a Town Centre economic requirement.

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2 Out of Centre Development – whilst it would be good to see this site developed, we reject the view that it would add appeal to the Town Centre. It is not in the Town Centre, it is located well outside it and it is our belief that most customers do not combine their periodic large food shop with other shopping; particularly having regard to the comprehensive shopping offer provided within this type of Tesco store. The perception of a trip to Tesco and up to 3 hours free parking with an associated trip into the Town Centre is a “Trojan Horse” to gain support. No evidence has been shown to support this view and it was widely dismissed by our Large Stores Group, and in particular the managers of both the Buttermarket and Tower Ramparts shopping centres. The concept of linked trips from this location to the town centre is therefore a tenuous one.

We do not consider that the site is well connected to, or within easy walking distance of the town centre. Besides the distances involved, there are various barriers, particularly main roads that restrict pedestrian movement. In our view this will operate as a car dependent, freestanding, out of centre store, competing with rather than complementing the town centre.

In addition, Ipswich is in competition with other regional centres. In qualitative terms, the more new investment is placed outside the town centre, the harder it will be for the existing town centre to remain an attractive and viable place. In comparison, other nearby towns, such as Chelmsford, Norwich, Cambridge, and Bury St Edmunds have all attracted significant inward investment into the heart of their centres over recent years. This gives them a competitive advantage. Permitting an out of town store, such as that proposed, will make it that much harder for Ipswich town centre to compete.

3 Congestion – The town has, relative to its competitors, Norwich, Cambridge and Colchester, a relatively good traffic flow around its centre. However, there are a number of key bottlenecks, one of which is the dock area. No evidence has been given that Tesco can improve this and given the impact of Tesco traffic at Copdock at peak times, we believe the location of a Tesco store here will only exacerbate the problem.

Also consider the effect of increased pedestrian crossings in this area, in the light of the increased issues raised to us by stakeholders regarding congestion at the ‘Back Hamlet’ area, caused by one extra pedestrian crossing at the UCS building.

4 Public Transport – The site is currently not well served by the public transport routes in Ipswich and we have seen no detailed evidence of how this will be improved. We are concerned that its car dependency may not be the most sustainable environmental solution in the long term.

5 Town Centre Options – Ipswich Town Centre has two key sites that need developing first – the Mint Quarter and Civic Centre. Whilst accepting a requirement for more ‘food’ shopping in the Town Centre and comparison good square footage, this proposal achieves neither well.

The ‘food’ shopping element is out of the centre, the ‘non food’ offer not of the desired standard or quality and by allowing the development it could hinder the potential development of these sites. This could accommodate a good ‘food’ offer on their merit, or a more inspirational comparison goods offer.

In the view of most stakeholders, a good development in either of these locations would do far more to improve the attractiveness of the Town Centre, both locally and regionally, as well as providing a clearer and more direct linkage to the rest of the Town Centre. Prioritising delivery of



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these more suitable and available sites, will improve the overall vitality and viability of the town centre as a whole.

6 Adjacent Developments – We do not believe in the current market, there is any market requirement for more flats by the Waterfront. Again, whilst accepting that there is a shortage of hotel accommodation in the Town Centre, this development could impact other potential hotel developments in St Peters Port and certain of our stakeholders have raised concerns as to whether commercial partners could be found for these developments.

We are dubious of Spenhill's ability to develop the whole site and would need tight assurances that everything promised can be delivered comprehensively. Incremental or development of the proposed scheme would not provide the advantages being put forward by Spenhill. A store on its own would be the worst of all worlds.

The Organisation feels that this application is an attempt by Spenhill to win 'supermarket' business off its competitors in other out of town locations and decrease the burden in its two existing supermarkets at Copdock and Martlesham that are 'overtrading'.

There is no evidence that it will add to the attractiveness of the Town Centre or that there would be a material benefit from the linkage of trips for Tesco shopping and add-ons in the Town Centre. In fact, most businesses felt it would lead to further business closure over time, job losses and hinder other potential developments to the long term detriment of the town centre overall.

We would, therefore, ask you to act strongly in the best interests of our town centre and to reject the proposal. If you need more information from ourselves or our stakeholders, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

William Coe
CHAIR

Cc Liz Harsant, Leader, Ipswich Borough Council
Cc Richard Atkins, Councillor, Ipswich Borough Council
Cc James Hehir, Chief Executive, Ipswich Borough Council