

HORSHAM SOCIETY

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Mr Tom Crowley
Chief Executive
Horsham District Council
Park North
North Street
Horsham, RH12 1RL

Dear Mr Crowley

OBJECTION TO PROPOSED LIFESTYLE FORD DEVELOPMENT – DC/13/1599

I am writing on behalf of the Horsham Society to object strongly to this application.

Summary

1.1 The Horsham Society welcomes in principle Waitrose's aspiration for a larger store in central Horsham and hopes that a suitable development vehicle can be found to enable it to move to a new site in the near future. However, this application, which of course is for considerably more than just a new Waitrose store, is not acceptable in its current form.

1.2 Similarly, while we are very unhappy with the poor land assembly behind this proposal, we accept that without HDC's willingness to use its compulsory purchase powers it is likely that this unsatisfactory site will be developed as a piece in the near future.

1.3 The application significantly fails the tests in the Horsham Town Plan and we are, therefore, seeking refusal of this application so there can be a fundamental reassessment of how a development, including a new Waitrose store, could be made to work more satisfactorily on this site.

1.4 A more successful scheme might, for example, involve an innovative approach to bridging Albion Way, reorientating the building's relationship with Albion Way, the inclusion of the Bishops Weald site, substantially less non-food retail space,

and / or a residential development on the south side facing an enhanced Riverside Walk.

Conformity with the Horsham Town Plan SPD

2.1 The application forms part of a much larger area identified in the Horsham Town Plan SPD, approved as recently as September 2012, for comprehensive redevelopment with the following requirements:

- creation of a high quality western extension to the town centre
- improvement of the gateway environment
- enhancement of the quality and safety of the connections across Albion Way
- not to detract from the current offer in the town centre
- development of the south side of Bishopric to form either a number of larger retail units or a single anchor store
- development to contribute to improved access, such as extension of the river path or formation of an active frontage to create an attractive, tree-lined street that people would enjoy visiting
- prioritising pedestrian movements
- encouraging the creation of a new vehicular route or the major redesign of Albion Way
- parking must demonstrate it meets the wider vision for the town centre.

2.2 These are therefore the tests that the Council has determined that any redevelopment proposal must satisfy. In our view this application falls well short.

Inherent flaws in the proposal

3.1 There are three initial problems with this application, which significantly compromise its ability to deliver an acceptable scheme. Two are due to the nature of the proposal: inadequate land assembly and the exclusion of Bishop's Weald; the other is due to a fundamental weakness in the SPD.

Inadequate site assembly

3.2 The application excludes Bishopric Court and the shops fronting Bishopric. This prevents the scheme from playing its part in reinvigorating a substandard shopping area and possibly prevents it ever being redeveloped successfully in the future. It also makes it impossible to achieve the successful visual and pedestrian connectivity with the town centre that is essential if shoppers are to be encouraged to use the wider facilities of the town centre.

3.3 The poor site assembly makes it virtually impossible for any scheme to fully meet the requirements of Town Plan and for this reason alone the application should be refused.

Exclusion of Bishop's Weald

3.4 This site lies on the east side of Albion Way. Although in the ownership of the developer and scheduled for redevelopment, it has not been included within this scheme. Its absence prevents a better visual and possible pedestrian integration between the application site and the town centre. Though not in itself a reason for refusal, it represents a missed opportunity to mitigate other deficiencies in the application and could provide the key to a better alternative scheme

A new vehicular route

3.5 The adopted Town Plan foresees the creation of an alternative vehicular route to the west of the application site and the downgrading of Albion Way. It has become apparent that there was never adequate consultation between HDC and WSCC as the highway authority over this proposal, which in the County Council's view it is not viable.

3.6 This is such a fundamental error that it means that it almost impossible for any developer to meet fully the Council's requirements for connectivity with the town centre. This is certainly the case if the development site, as in this application, does not include the corner of Bishopric and Albion Way.

Proposed site and layout fail to overcome these difficulties

4.1 The inherent problems of visual and pedestrian connectivity with the town centre are exacerbated by the limited nature of the site and the layout which places the buildings on the western edge with no active frontage to either Albion Way or Bishopric. The attempts to establish visual connectivity are contrived and unconvincing.

4.2 The developer's attempt to mitigate the problems of pedestrian connectivity, involving a redesign of the pedestrian crossing point across Albion Way between the western and eastern arms of Bishopric has been dashed by WSCC's refusal to agree to a single phase pedestrian crossing.

4.3 This failure to meet the critical requirements of the Town Plan mean the application should be refused.

Parking provision

5.1 The town needs more parking if it is to attract increasing numbers of shoppers and tourists. Therefore any new scheme of this nature and size should not only provide adequate space for its own needs but ensure that it contributes to the wider vision for the town. In particular, this means that large destination stores should contribute to the town's wider economy by facilitating their patrons' use of town centre facilities. An essential feature in Waitrose's advocacy of this scheme has been the availability of free parking for customers. To meet the wider needs of the town and to broaden the contribution to the local economy, it is essential that the free period should be no less than two hours and that there should be sufficient parking space to allow this. In turn this means that it is essential that parking provision is no less that the WSCC maximum standard.

5.2 The submission by WSCC demonstrates that the proposed provision of only 401 parking spaces is completely inadequate to enable this requirement to be met in peak times and would require a charging regime that created a positive disincentive to stay beyond the minimum time needed to complete a destination shopping trip. There is only sufficient parking space for the food store and 20% of the proposed non-food retail space.

5.3 Failure to provide sufficient parking space would lead to a charging regime that encouraged destination, single store shopping to the detriment of the town's economy, potential traffic bottlenecks affecting the town's main traffic artery, and ultimately damage the viability of the retail units.

5.4 The wholly inadequate provision for parking means the application fails to comply with the Town Plan and should be refused.

Overdevelopment of the site

6.1 The Town Plan provides for either a number of larger retail units or a single anchor store on a much larger site. This application is for both a large food store and three large footplate non-food stores, and an additional mezzanine floor. This is a significantly larger development than envisaged by the Town Plan on a much smaller site. It is also a much larger development than divulged in pre-application discussions.

6.2 It is this proposed overdevelopment, creating a 4,779 sqm foodstore and no less than 6,726 sqm of non-food retail space that is primarily the reason why the proposed car parking is so inadequate. Assuming the food store is as given, the parking provision can only support 1,200 sqm of non-food retail. Put another way, there is no parking provision for over 80% of the non-retail space.

6.3 The proposed over-development also leads to a building frontage that is overbearing, a requirement to remove trees near the river and a failure to leave sufficient space to make the desired improvements to the riverside frontage.

6.4 This gross over-development results in the application failing to conform to the Town Plan and it should be refused.

Visual and pedestrian connectivity

7.1 The attempt to create a visual connection between the Albion Way edge of the car park and the end of the eastern arm of Bishopric is contrived and unconvincing.

7.2 The pedestrian connectivity between the site and West Street is both too long and unacceptably poor. The minimum requirement should be a single phase crossing in Albion Way associated with a new MOVA signaling system. There is no provision for the developer to indemnify WSCC, possibly through a bond, in the event that a single phase crossing proves unviable within, say, ten years.

7.3 The developer's option appraisal demonstrates that they are more concerned with maximising retail floor space and sightlines for vehicles approaching the store than connectivity. Reorientating the buildings and car parking could improve visual and pedestrian connectivity. As submitted the proposals fail to meet the requirements of the Town Plan.

Enhancements to the public realm

8.1 The so called public realm improvements in the eastern arm of Bishopric are unnecessary and we are completely opposed to the opening up of the view westwards from this area. It would not improve the view towards the new stores but simply create a view onto an inner ring road, and increase the acoustic problems resulting from the traffic flow. There are public realm improvements that would be worthwhile such as the replacement of the Shelley fountain by a new quality sculpture, preferably including water.

8.2 We are opposed to the removal of any trees adjoining the southern boundary, the need for which arises simply because the proposed buildings are sited too close

to the river. The opportunity to create an improved riverside area has been ignored and the creation of a dead area, which the developer admits could attract anti-social behaviour, is unacceptable. The buildings must be pushed back to allow a significant addition to the riverside area as was the case with the Sainsburys development. The application fails to meet the requirements of the Town Plan.

Traffic movements

9.1 The proposed access and ingress point on the Staples roundabout looks unsatisfactory and is likely to lead to tailbacks. Consideration should be given to a new light controlled junction.

9.2 The plans are inconsistent in the way in which they depict traffic movements in and out of the service area. The articulated vehicle sweep assessment shows vehicles turning right out of the service road going right across to the opposite kerb where there is currently on-street parking. This would necessitate the loss of valuable on-street parking. Large vehicles turning across traffic in Bishopric would be problematic, particularly as WSCC has ruled out a new signal junction.

9.3 The proposals are not satisfactory.

Design

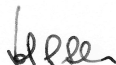
10.1 The proposed design would produce a frontage facing Albion Way which was too tall, overbearing and unduly fussy. It seems designed to produce the effect of an enormous banner advertising retail names. It would need to be as simple as possible and considerably lower.

10.2 The design of the other elevations is bleak and overpowering, particularly the south elevation facing the Riverside Walk. The design would not create a high quality western extension to the town centre, or improve the Riverside Walk, and fails to meet the requirements of the Town Plan.

Conclusion

11.1 The Society is very disappointed by the quality and nature of this proposal and its failure to deliver the requirements of the Town Plan. We urge the Council to reject the application and enter into new discussions with the developer to create a scheme worthy of the town and which as far as possible conforms to the Town Plan.

Yours sincerely



John Steele
Secretary, Planning Sub Committee