

Lidl GB – New Close Lane, Witney

Notes for Lowlands Planning Committee

Lidl has traded in Witney since 2009. Its store has been very successful but is now too small to meet the needs of its customers, so that it needs to relocate.

We submitted this planning application in September 2018. The fact that the application has been with the Council for more than a year reflects the very thorough approach that Officers have adopted to testing how it relates to your policies and objectives for the town - even though it is for a relocation, and not for an additional store.

The focus has been on three main areas – retail policy, design and highways.

In relation to retail policy:-

- The proposal is for relocation, so that Lidl's existing trade will transfer from one site to another and trading patterns will remain essentially as they are now.
- We have, however, considered any additional impact that might arise from the net increase in floorspace. A majority of that impact would fall on Sainsbury's and Waitrose, both of which are trading very well, and very little on the town centre.
- The above only holds true if Lidl agrees to close its current store when the new one opens. Lidl's lawyers and yours have agreed on the content of a Unilateral Undertaking which your officers are satisfied 'gives up' the existing use at Ducklington Road, in a legally binding way.
- Lidl's proposals have been scrutinised by your retail consultant, Peter Shearman, who has advised that, with the Undertaking in place, there would not be any significant adverse impact on the town centre. Please note that the objections from your Policy Manager, and Business Development Officer, that are recorded in the report, pre-date Peter Shearman's advice, and pre-date the completion of the Undertaking.

Having reached agreement with officers on retail matters in May, we then focused on whether the design, layout and landscaping proposals that we had submitted were the most appropriate for the site.

Your officers thought they were not, and were concerned in particular with:-

- whether the building was best located, as submitted, along the southern boundary; and
- whether the proposed landscaping scheme adequately compensated the removal of the Leylandii from the site frontage.

Lidl took these points fully on board and, following further work, submitted revised proposals on 20 September. The main changes made are:-

- re-siting of the building along the western boundary to create space for new landscaping on the southern boundary – screening the store from views from the allotments and A415;
- a layout that avoids any retaining structures, or development extending into the root protection areas of off-site trees along the northern and southern boundaries;
- more tree and shrub planting on the eastern boundary to supplement the retained hedgerow, so as to screen the car park and soften views of the store, and scope for planting with the revised parking layout.

I would emphasise that these changes have been driven by your Development Management Officers, having regard to the objectives of the design and landscape policies of the plan.

Finally - in relation to transport - I would emphasise that the Highway Authority has no objection to the proposals for access, layout, new and enhanced pedestrian crossings, or in relation to highway impact.

Submission from Sue Kench – applicant

Mrs Sue Kench addressed Members and explained that she was hoping to build an ecologically sound and low cost building. She advised that she was having to sell her home due to a relationship breakdown. She was a committed member of the community and worked as a health care assistant at the Eynsham surgery.

Mrs Kench stated that she and her architect had received extensive pre-application advice prior to submitting the application and was therefore surprised when the application was proposed for refusal. Especially as the issue of car parking had never been mentioned.

She had received advice from Steve Sensicle at Carter Jonas who had agreed that the application was policy compliant and should be approved. This was based on the fact that she was seeking to extend an existing building which was already being used for residential purposes. She currently let her property out on the Air B&B site and had been using the parking space proposed for some time.