

## **ABG/1615/51 – Tesco Stores Ltd**

### **Demolition of existing garden centre. Extension to store and car park. Tesco, Marcham Road, Abingdon**

#### **1.0 The Proposal**

1.1 The Tesco superstore on Marcham Road currently has a gross floorspace of 9,275 sq.m and a net retail floorspace of 6,365 sq.m (including the garden centre). This application seeks permission to demolish the garden centre and extend the main store building to the front and side. The garden centre would be replaced by additional car parking, while a re-organisation of the existing car park is also planned. Gross floorspace would increase by 2,490 sq.m to 11,765 sq.m, and net retail floorspace would increase by 1,996 sq.m to 8,361 sq.m. Extracts from the application drawings are in **Appendix 1**.

1.2 The main reasons behind the proposal are to increase the amount of retail floorspace, mainly for non-food (comparison) items, and to improve internal circulation space particularly around the tills. The proposed extensions would be fully glazed to allow much more natural light into the store. The design has been amended to address concerns expressed by the Council's Consultant Architect.

1.3 The site lies in the flood plain. The application is a departure from the development plan because of a conflict with retail policies and has been advertised as such. It comes to Committee due to the number of objection letters that have been received.

#### **2.0 Planning History**

2.1 Planning permission for the store was granted in 1981 (ref. SAH/1615/8).

#### **3.0 Planning Policies**

3.1 Policies S3 and S4 of the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan deal with proposed expansion of retail development outside Abingdon town centre. These seek to direct new development to edge-of-centre sites where possible. Where this is not possible, new development can be permitted on out-of-centre sites provided –

- it is not detrimental to the vitality and viability of the town centre
- the site is accessible by a choice of means of transport
- the visual impact of the proposal is acceptable, and
- the proposal would not prejudice land for housing or business development.

3.2 Policies D1 and D3 require all development to be acceptable in terms of design and highway safety. Policies D16 and D17 seek to ensure that any development within an existing floodplain does not exacerbate flooding either through additional built form or increased run-off. Also relevant is Policy S11 which supports the refurbishment of Bury Street Precinct.

3.3 Similar policies in the Second Deposit Draft Local Plan 2011 are S1, S7, DC1, DC5, DC13 and DC14.

3.4 National guidance is provided by PPS6, "Planning for Town Centres". Paragraphs 3.3-3.29 deal with assessing proposed retail developments, including extensions to existing stores.

#### **4.0 Consultations**

4.1 Abingdon Town Council – do not object provided there is no harm to the vitality and viability of town centre shops.

4.2 Local Residents – 5 letters have been received raising the following objections:-

1. Increased risk and extent of flooding
2. Impact on the local retail economy
3. Additional traffic and highway safety problems

4.3 A letter has also been received on behalf of Sackville TCI Property (GP) Ltd, who are the long-term leaseholders and managers of the Bury Street Precinct, which raises concerns about the application (see **Appendix 2**).

4.4 County Engineer – no objection subject to a financial contribution to ABITS, a reduction in the proposed parking spaces by 20, and the completion of a travel plan for staff (see **Appendix 3**)

4.5 Environment Agency – no objection subject to completion of flood mitigation works within the site (see **Appendix 4**).

4.6 Consultant Architect – supports the revised design (see **Appendix 5**).

4.7 County Archaeologist – no objection subject to an archaeological informative.

## 5.0 **Officer Comments**

5.1 This application raises the following issues

- The impact on the vitality and viability of Abingdon town centre
- Whether there is an alternative edge-of-centre site available
- Transport and parking
- The impact on flooding
- The visual appearance of the proposal.

5.2 With regard to the first issue, the implications of the proposal in terms of retail policy have been carefully assessed by the Council's retail consultants, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP). This has involved a detailed examination of the applicant's retail impact assessment and of supplementary information submitted in response to queries raised by NLP regarding the assessment. In conclusion, NLP consider the proposal should not harm the retail base of Abingdon town centre. This is largely because there is a projected surplus in available expenditure on convenience and comparison goods shopping by 2011 for the Abingdon retail catchment which should sustain both the town centre and the expanded Tesco store.

5.3 Officers have also been mindful of the impact this proposal might have on potential plans to refurbish Bury Street Precinct. The company that manages the precinct has expressed concerns about the proposal, but has not objected. Officers have been assured that this is an accurate reflection of the stance of the company on the application. In light of this, Officers consider there is no justification for refusing the application on the ground that it would harm any plans to improve the precinct.

5.4 Turning to the second issue, national and local retail policy require a search to be undertaken to find more centrally located sites for a proposed out-of-centre retail development, including an extension to an existing store. However, it is a fact that in Abingdon the availability of potential edge-of-centre retail sites with suitable space and access is limited. Sites previously available for such use, such as the Vineyard Action Area and West Central, are now either developed or in the process of being developed. Officers have suggested two potential significant sites in Ock Street worthy of investigation, namely the Post Office Sorting Depot and Knights builders' merchants. The applicants have approached both site owners but without a positive response in either case. Consequently, it is concluded that there are no sites that are more centrally located for the proposed development.

5.5 The third issue is transport and parking. A Transport Assessment was submitted with the application and this has been carefully considered by the County Engineer. He considers that the increased traffic flow from the proposed extension would not have a significant impact on

the local road network. He notes however that the amount of parking proposed exceeds maximum standards by 20 spaces. Provided no more sustainable site is available (as concluded above), the County Engineer's recommendation is one of no objection subject to a Section 106 Obligation to secure a financial contribution to ABITS and a travel plan for staff, and the reduction in the amount of proposed parking by 20 spaces, which can be controlled via a condition.

- 5.6 Regarding the impact on flooding, the applicants have discussed the proposal in detail with the Environment Agency. The floor level of the existing store building and the proposed extension lie above the critical 1 in 100 year flood level, but much of the site is below that level. A flood compensation scheme has been agreed for the site whereby any proposed increase in levels on that part of the site lying within the flood plain will be countered by a corresponding lowering of levels elsewhere on the site. Subject to the implementation of this scheme the Environment Agency raises no objection.
- 5.7 Finally, concerning design, the application drawings have been amended in response to concerns raised by the Council's Consultant Architect concerning the junction of the proposed extension with the existing building. Following these amendments, the Consultant Architect now supports the proposal.

#### 6.0 **Recommendation**

- 6.1 *It is recommended that authority to grant planning permission is delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair and/ or Vice-Chair subject to:-*
1. *Referral of the application to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as a departure from the Development Plan, and a decision not to call-in the application;*
  2. *The completion of a Section 106 Obligation to secure a financial contribution to ABITS and a travel plan for Tesco staff;*
  3. *Conditions to include materials and detailing, reduced parking, and flood compensation.*