

1. Presumption in favour of sustainable development. (Planning Officers Report)

Plan for Growth “to achieve strong, sustainable and balanced growth that is more evenly shared across the country and between industries”

Leighton-Linslade has half of its disposable income spent on comparison goods spent in Milton Keynes – that is £70 million. 40% is spent in the town. That is not balanced. And the retail industry balance is skewed as the town has not the range of clothing stores it needs as over half of this income £35 million is the main reason that MK is used.

The Government proposes “radical changes to the planning system to support job creation by introducing a powerful presumption in favour of sustainable development, opening up more land for development, while retaining existing controls on greenbelt land.”

The sequential test is that land in the town centre is priority with land on the edge of the town centre with good links next. Out of town centre sites and out of town sites are not favoured. Tesco is an out of town site – PPS 4, Planning Inspectorate, ILLB, GRPS, Homebase agree that it is. Leighton-Linslade has two preferable sites and has done since the mid seventies. Between the two is 750,000 square feet of land both have good links and are central to the community.

LPA’s should “Prepare local plans on the basis that objectively assessed development needs should be met and with sufficient flexibility to respond to rapid shifts in demand or other economic changes.”

To assume that the Tesco application would be the best in the short term – simply because it is there, Tesco can pay for it and it causes less work for the Council seems to be the basis for the recommendation. This is not objective, certainly not for the people who live here. The problem for the town is much greater and the demand of the population is for more choice in shops which they have indicated in two surveys one official and one conducted by ILLB. This restricts choice. The town’s population would rather have a choice of shops here first than travel to Milton Keynes which is getting more expensive and would save them money. The Tesco bid does not meet this need the South Side does.

“Approve development proposals that accord with statutory plans without delay”

The South Side of the High Street potentially can be developed quite quickly. This is the preferred choice in the Government Policy and therefore the Council are obliged to do something about it. The rest of the land assembly should be possible. The Planners argue it would take time. South Bedfordshire had 20 years to do something about it but seemed to have had no political will to do so. With the potential of up to £70 million there should be little problem to get developers interested especially when the likes of Waitrose and M&S Simply Food have expressed interest. These two and a number of other retailers Tesco cannot compete against as their offer is lower quality and certainly does not have the kudos of these two brands. And if, as stated by the Planners, there is a higher number of ABC1 people in the town then they certainly will not go to Tesco when there are better offerings in the town centre. However, one must not forget the other social groups who are equally as important. The town centre as the hub of the local community is an essential part of the main Government and Central Bedfordshire plans, that means all and most people statistically are against the Tesco extension and the reverse is true for support for the South Side being developed most if not all people want it.

“Grant permission where the plan is absent, silent, indeterminate or where relevant policies are out of date.

The local plans before were silent on the Tesco site for the simple reason- there are preferred sites, therefore there is no reason to grant permission for this extension. The evidence against it is too strong, the two sites of South Side and Bridge Meadow are the best candidates and the Council has spent time and money to look at these two sites.

“The Tesco site is one of the most sustainable locations in the urban area and the proposal clearly accords with the policy of SD1”

The Tesco site is clearly not one of the most sustainable in the urban area. The LPA has clearly of the mind that this is a site that be done quickly without too much cost to Central Bedfordshire and that the better preferable sites would take longer whilst admitting that the apart from the time factor the Planning Officers have concluded that apart from the time and land issues “the site is clearly suitable” and totally disregarded the Planning Policy Schedules which are still the statutory regulations. Tesco is across the river from the bulk of the town; there are huge problems with reaching Tesco without use of a car and **20% of households do not have a car and two thirds of the population live across the**

river from Tesco. The town centre site for retail is much better and sustainable – everybody can reach it.

Job Growth. The Tesco proposal if it goes ahead would mean the demolition of Homebase and the loss of 56 jobs at the very least (Homebase also state that cleaning and contractual jobs will also be lost) and there would be a net gain of 84 jobs full and part-time. In other towns where supermarket development has been unchecked there is a loss of jobs in the immediate area, shops staff, accountants, window cleaners. And Tesco make job promises and rarely keep them. In one town – Accrington- they promised over 400 jobs and took on 191, most of the store staff from the branch they closed. There has been too much assumption that Tesco are right.

However, if the South Side was developed then the jobs created would be positive with a number of retailers brought in and more and better job opportunities for the local people with the knock on effect that the existing town centre shops will take on extra staff and the few empty units would be rented out.

LPA's should adopt a positive and constructive approach towards planning applications for economic development. Planning applications that secure sustainable economic growth should be treated favourably.

A lot of the land on the South Side is Council owned land. There is little reason why this should not be put forward as the preferred option as there will be much better opportunities for the town here than Tesco.

Sustainable development for Leighton Linlade is long term thinking. Sustainable is making sure that the population of here and the local villages in our catchment area has the fullest range of shops and services to make sure the town is self sufficient for day to day needs for everybody. With fuel prices going up and the costs of just surviving going up then it is the duty of Central Bedfordshire to find, with consultation with the public, the best solution in the long term.

The people of Leighton Linlade want a greater range of shops to cover the mix from lower cost and quality to the higher end where they can get to easy and cheaply and to use Milton Keynes as the second choice. This means a greater range of shops to improve what we have already which the South Side will deliver. The Tesco extension will not fulfil this – we have to get the people and their money back into the local economy not going off to Milton Keynes which is another area altogether. The Tesco extension is not the right way for the town and using the argument that it can be done quickly and only fulfils part of the needs of the town is frankly wrong. Please read the Planning Inspectors Report.