

ACRA

Alliance of Christchurch Residents Associations
Representing over 10,000 local homes

David McIntosh
Chief Executive
Christchurch Borough Council

By e-mail

10th August 2012

Dear David

The Three Amended and Resubmitted Supermarket Applications

Thank you for your letter of 27th July

We understand that the re-run of the planning meeting to consider these applications is now scheduled for 3pm on 23rd October 2012. As this meeting is likely to attract a lot of attention from local residents can we suggest that a larger, better ventilated venue than the Council Chamber would be appropriate. Perhaps the stage of the Regent Centre would be an apt choice?

There appear to us to be three key issues that underlie the current unsatisfactory situation.

The first is the quality of the work undertaken by planning officers in conjunction with the applicants prior to the formal submission of plans. There was clearly something lacking first time around. For example ACRA told those making the Beagle-Stony Lane application that their design was too high for the area and that the entrance and exit plans for delivery vehicles were unacceptable. We are informed that, surprisingly, neither point was mentioned by CBC officers and were thus ignored by the applicants. Both issues were of course picked up by Councillors at the planning meeting and the applicants have recently shown us a new design that takes account of these and other shortcomings.

The second is the quality and strength of the legal advice and guidance provided by CBC to Councillors both before and during the planning meeting. The eventual outcome demonstrates that CBC performance fell short of what was required and this must not be allowed to happen again.

The third relates to the circumstances surrounding the old Magistrates Court Site in terms of its availability and suitability and thus its impact upon the Sequential Test.

We understand that this site is substantially owned by The Dorset Development Partnership and that Dorset County Council is the major member of that organisation - to quote the Public Sector PLC website:

We are closely integrated into the delivery of the (Dorset) County's Asset Management Strategy. The County is seeking to generate substantial revenue savings through the rationalisation and disposal of surplus properties. The partnership will seek to accelerate this programme, increase the savings and generate enhanced capital receipts.

Detailed consideration of the site made a very late entry into the planning process first time around for reasons we can only guess at but which are no doubt related to the above statement. However, the need for DCC to convert assets into cash, no matter how acute, must not be a determining factor in how Christchurch develops its town centre.

We are informed that the site is at a historic location in Christchurch (For example, Barrack road is so called because that is where Cromwell garrisoned his troops). We believe that any attempt to develop the site will have to satisfy a substantial archaeological interest that will considerably delay the whole process.

The Police Station on site contains holding cells for prisoners that we are informed the local force is unlikely to surrender easily.

We consider the site to be *wholly unsuited to development as a supermarket*. The impact upon the local traffic at the junction of Barrack Road and Bargates would be untenable. The visual impact upon the centre of town would be detrimental. The effect upon the Waitrose, Co-operative and M&S stores could be sufficient to oblige them to close.

We can see no advantages to Christchurch town centre of a supermarket on the old Magistrates Court site and can easily predict local animosity and considerable resistance to such a scheme. We can see no detriment to the town centre that would arise from any of the three proposed supermarkets.

For these reasons we believe that the requirements of the Sequential Test can safely be over-ridden so far as all three applications are concerned. We believe that the site needs to be developed but in a manner far more befitting of the needs of our town centre.

We would be grateful if you could make this letter available to CBC Planning Department as part of the public consultation regarding all three represented applications and through them the Councillors who make up the CBC Planning Committee as well as the developers.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

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