

BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING (OPEN TO PUBLIC) HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29 AUGUST 2012 AT 7.30PM AT TRINITY HALL BRIDGWATER

PRESENT: Cllr GJ Granter (Mayor of Bridgwater – in the Chair), Cllrs SB Austen, D Baker, AM Glassford, GJ Granter, MJ Lerry, DP Loveridge, A Moore, LP Redman, KF Richards, Mrs GJ Slocombe, BD Smedley, IC Tucker and J Turner (JP)

Apologies: Cllrs Monteith and Mrs Morley

Also present by invitation: Ian Liddell-Grainger MP

Post Office representatives: Tony Jones and Laura Tarling

and some 60 members of the public

27/12 PROPOSED POST OFFICE RELOCATION TO SAINSBURY'S (MIN 22/12):

The Mayor welcomed all present and outlined the process for conduct of the meeting. He related the previous resolution of the Town Council which opposed the relocation plans and gave rise to the special meeting. Press photographers were present and agreement obtained from those present to photos being taken. The Town Clerk advised of written questions submitted which had been forwarded to the Post Office for response at the meeting.

The Post Office representatives gave an update on the current position and the consultation process which was due to end on 05 September 2012. A decision on this stage was expected by the end of the month and all feedback would be considered and taken into account including all representations sent in writing to the Consultation Team.

Written questions were read by the Town Clerk from Mrs Sally Jones, M/s Glen Burrows, Mr Ken Hammersley and replies given by the PO representatives – supplementary questions were also dealt with. Mr Ken Trunks presented a petition of 2400 opposing the relocation.

Questions were then invited from the floor and responses given. Members of the Town Council also raised a series of issues. The representations arising from the meeting and the earlier town council meeting strongly opposing the move were compiled and submitted in writing to the Consultation Team as a follow up (*attached as an appendix to these minutes*).

It was evident that the entire body of opinion opposed the relocation and this was reinforced by each and every speaker who without exception called on Mr Tony Jones to reject the Sainsbury's proposal and readvertise the offer.

This was echoed by the MP.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Members of Bridgwater Town Council

RESOLVED: That the total opposition to the proposed relocation of the Post Office to Sainsbury's Supermarket be confirmed and all action possible taken to secure the rejection of the proposal and the re-advertisement of the offer of the service.

The meeting finished at 9.05pm

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Signed
Chairman

This representation follows the Special Town Council meeting on 29 August 2012 and confirms the total opposition of the Town Council to the proposed re-location into the Sainsbury's store. The Town Council and members of the public in attendance at the meeting were unanimous in opposing the proposal and this is further evidenced by the petition of some 2,400 handed to the post office representatives at the meeting. A meeting of the Sedgemoor District Council Community Scrutiny Committee reached a similar unanimous conclusion opposing the plan.

The Town Council objected to the proposal as soon as they were first informed as an inappropriate location, and disapproval has intensified throughout the period of consultation. The strength of feeling against the proposed re-location which is evident in Bridgwater is almost unparalleled.

Dealing with the consultation, as per the document issued by yourselves, the Council are disturbed by the fact that the information sheet seeks to compare the current temporary location in a portakabin with Sainsbury's rather than the previous location in Angel Place Shopping Centre or indeed the former Crown post office site on the Cornhill (in the centre of the town).

1. The proposed location is inconvenient to the vast majority of current and potential users. It may be appreciated by a number of Sainsbury's existing customers but the opposition is much more widespread from all parts of the town.
2. Access by vehicle in terms of having to use heavily trafficked junctions at the Clink/Legger, problematic traffic light junction at East Quay/The Clink and the busy Cannon roundabout is notoriously difficult. The car park at Sainsbury's is already fully utilised with a most difficult ingress/egress/exit at the Leggar due to conflicting vehicle movements for the Bridgwater Retail Park - giving high levels of congestion at the best of times.
3. Access on foot - and especially for those with disabilities - emphasises this as a poor location in the distance from the town centre with people having to cross the Clink - traverse the Clink/Legger junction and particularly the crossing from the McDonalds side to the Sainsbury's itself. To get to Sainsbury's from the east, people are faced with even more difficulty through the location of pedestrian crossings at the Cannon roundabout regarded as the most dangerous in Bridgwater.

This point is readily borne out by the petition referred to above and signatures collected by Mr Ken Trunks - himself a disability scooter user.

4. Reference is made to bus services - although for most parts of Bridgwater and the surrounding area a change at the bus station is necessary. The actual bus stop at Sainsbury's serving only limited services to the Street area. The location compares unfavourably with the alternative Eastover premises, which were immediately adjacent to the bus station.
5. Issues have been raised about the in-store location, particularly by one regular user who

dispatches 5 to 7 parcels daily and raises concerns about the ability to manage his requirements within the busy store and from the car park to the store.

6. The proposed move to Sainsbury's at best an edge of town centre location is a complete failure to assist and support the regeneration of the town centre, and pays no heed whatsoever to the desires of the community in Bridgwater and demonstrates a complete absence of any social conscience on the part of the post office.

7. Much has been made of the post office transformation programme, though presumably this was not meant to line the pockets of major companies such as Sainsbury's. An opportunity has been missed in this proposal for the transformation programme to not only work to the post office benefit but to work to the benefit of the town itself. The proposal surely goes against the doctrine of e.g. the Department for Communities and Local Government and the efforts promoted by the Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP (Minister for Housing & Local Government) and support he is driving to help reinvigorate town centres (in the nature of the Portas initiatives and efforts of Town Teams). The stance proposed by the post office illustrates a complete absence of any joined-up thinking across government initiatives.

It will be clear from all that has gone before that Bridgwater - and the people of Bridgwater - do not want an edge of town location - but want a post office in the town centre for all to use and thus restore a focal point for the community.

Please ensure that the outcome of this consultation is to reject the Sainsburys proposal and re-advertise the service.