

# **BRIDGWATER TOWN COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES OF A SPECIAL PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2015 AT 7.30PM AT TRINITY HALL BRIDGWATER**

PRESENT: Cllr Steve Austen (Mayor of Bridgwater - in the Chair), Members of Bridgwater Town Council, Town Clerk and Members of the Public (approx 100 in total)

Also present by invitation: Mr James Stubbs, Head of Property, representing Somerset County Council, and Mr Nick Tait, Planning Policy Manager, representing, Sedgemoor District Council

APOLOGIES: Cllrs Granter, Mrs Slocombe, and Turner, Ian Liddell-Grainger MP, and Mr Chris Hocking

### **FUTURE USE OF LAND AT NORTHGATE, BRIDGWATER (SITE PLANNED FOR TESCO DEVELOPMENT NOT PROCEEDING)**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The Mayor welcomed all present and outlined the process for conduct of the Meeting. He referred to the commitment given by the Town Council at the January meeting to organise this Special Meeting to examine the future of the “ex-Tesco” site. The Press photographers were present, and agreement obtained from those present to photos being taken. The Town Clerk advised of written submissions received.

#### **2. BACKGROUND AND CURRENT POSITION:**

Cllr Brian Smedley gave a power point presentation of the 10-year history of Tesco’s involvement in the site, part owned by SCC and part by SDC; covering the Enterprise Centre/Workhouse/Blake hospital site (SCC) and the former Splash swimming pool site/part Brewery Field and car parks (SCC).

#### **3. COMMENT FROM JOINT OWNERS, SCC AND SDC**

- i. James Stubbs pointed out that until the decision of Tesco, the SCC land had been under contract and that with the new situation the future of the land holding would be reviewed. Preliminary meetings between the County and District Councils confirmed an intention to work together on the future of the land and any proposals. The County Council would also be examining this as a possible location for County service needs in Bridgwater.
- ii. Nick Tait commented on the District Council’s position, explaining that this was too early in the process to confirm the way forward but that they would work with the County Council. Mr Tait then outlined the planning context in relation to the Bridgwater Vision, not necessarily specific to the site as planned by Tesco and the LDF core strategy through to 2027 which incorporated the site in the Town Centre. He commented on the opportunities presented by the new situation in terms of retailing, (of comparison goods sites in Bridgwater) and what leisure uses might be acceptable and considered. He confirmed that the Planning

Policy was flexible and would fall into place in a review of the Core Strategy now underway. This would give an early opportunity for public consultation both in policy terms and on any proposals coming forward.

#### **4. CORRESPONDENCE:**

The Town Clerk read a letter from Ian Liddell-Grainger MP in which he emphasised the importance and significance of the site, the need to bring forward sustainable proposals and not to rush into plans without input from the people of Bridgwater themselves. He considered the location deserving of something constructive and special that would benefit the Town and the people of Bridgwater.

Mr Chris Hocking put forward opinions questioning the need for another large supermarket and to the limited appeal of ideas for an ice rink or bowling alley which had not necessarily succeeded in towns bigger than Bridgwater. Going forward Mr Hocking suggested that part would be appropriate for factory outlet shopping and together with, or separately, a “Centre for Somerset” offering a further attraction to visitors to the County. He envisaged this could include craft areas, shops selling Somerset goods as well as combining with historical interests including a link to the Docks. This could also complement other heritage attractions in the Town.

Mr Alec Western was in attendance, and recited the letter he had submitted emphasising the need for any development to achieve a balanced environment and a development worthy of the Town, suggesting that the site was too valuable an asset and that therefore no decision or sale should be undertaken for at least a four year period while all options were considered and brought into the public domain.

The Town Clerk also relayed information provided by Wessex Water Authority in relation to plans for a large underground storage tank in the Northgate car park. *(It has since been established that this location is not within the site under discussion but the car park adjacent to the Job Centre).*

#### **5. OPEN FLOOR COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS:**

During this part of the Meeting, 22 people put forward views and opinions on the current position and the future use and/or development of individual parts or a combined plan. The issues and concerns and ideas in summary:

- A request for information on County land needs in Bridgwater;
- Whether the best would be achieved by separate developments or jointly worked up schemes between the two Councils; need for clarity in the process to be followed; With the current proposals for demolition, the opportunity now afforded to retain the Workhouse/Hospital site (an undertaking was given by Mr Stubbs, that although contracts had been let and were currently being managed in relation to asbestos and demolition, to halt that part related to older buildings, the Workhouse/Hospital);
- Question how the location fitted into the Bridgwater Vision, the need for recreation and leisure, and heritage to be respected, need for green space leaving the Brewery Field intact and offering the chance to link to the Docks, the River Parrett and heritage;
- Emphasis of need for new facilities given the expanding residential development in Bridgwater, both leisure but also shopping (eg a John Lewis type department store);
- The need to be realistic on what plans came forward bearing in mind any elements requiring public funding and need for financial stability; keep expectations at a

- reasonable level;
- Essential with any development to achieve linkages to the Town Centre as intimated in the Tesco planning approval; also to have regard to limitations of town's road infrastructure;
  - The energy displayed in Town pride which engendered that people wanted a say in the future of the site; at consultation should be two way and meaningful. Engage people from the outset rather than what seemed to be the current attitude of the District and County Councils to the Town;
  - Essential that time was taken over the future of the site not to rush into the first offer and achieve what was most beneficial for the location and the Town;
  - Suggestion for shops and retailing which could provide a hook to shoppers and complement and enhance existing Town Centre; more residential development not needed on this site;
  - Need for planners to come forward with a design for any development, so that commonness prevailed in the type of development proposed and ensure a standard of development worthy of Bridgwater was achieved;
  - To accept this golden planning opportunity, ensure the review of all relevant opportunities so that this aids the review of the Core Strategy and produces the best result;
  - Need to protect Rights of Way;
  - View that any proceeds from the site, if secured, should be reinvested in Bridgwater.

## **6. CONCLUSION:**

Emphasis on the location and importance of the site strategically related both to the Town Centre as existing, and as planned in the Core Strategy. Essential to ensure developing proposals going forward are jointly processed by County and District, that proposals are not rushed and that most significantly the people of Bridgwater are given the opportunity to engage from the outset so that what eventually emerges was worthy of the Town with meaningful engagement.

Notes to be referred on to both SCC & SDC in capacity as landowners and highway and planning authorities.

At the conclusion of the Meeting, the Mayor thanked all for their contributions and attendance, emphasising how this illustrated the interest and showed the worth of the site under discussion.

The Meeting finished at 9.40 pm.