

Highworth



Town Council

Council Offices
3 Gilberts Lane
Highworth
SWINDON
Wiltshire
SN6 7FB

Tel: 01793 762377 or 763511
Email admin@highworthtowncouncil.gov.uk

Town Clerk Mr D C Lane

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEB-SITE AT:
www.highworthtowncouncil.gov.uk

P35.

MINUTES OF THE EXTRA-ORDINARY PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING 13th FEBRUARY 2018

PRESENT

Councillor (Mrs) P Webster (In the Chair)

Councillor: R Acres
A Bishop
(Mrs) J Bishop
(Mrs) J Clark
G Edwards
(Mrs) A H Livall
K Smith
(Mrs) L Vardy
S Weisinger

IN ATTENDANCE

Two Members of the Public, One Member of the Press, Mr David Dewart (Planning, SBC), Mr George Beard and Mr Taylor Cherrett (representatives for Aldi).

APOLOGIES

86. Councillors A Durrant, C Adams and P Adams, (Mrs) M Penny (Attending Meeting at SBC) and N Gardiner (Unwell)



Highworth is a Fair Trade Town



Twinned with Wassenberg



Twinned with Pontorson

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEB-SITE AT: www.highworthtowncouncil.gov.uk

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

87. None

CORRESPONDENCE

88. a. E Mail from Planning Officer regarding Planning Applications S/17/1771 and S/OUT/17/1772
Verbatim copy below:

I am writing this email to let you know that planning officers have concerns with the two applications above. Principally we have concerns about the retail impact on Highworth Town Centre, poor pedestrian and cycle access and loss of employment land of the proposed AI store and therefore consider that the proposal is not in accordance with the relevant policies of the adopted Swindon Borough Local Plan or Policy 3 of the Highworth Neighbourhood Plan. The Policy officer's comments on this application will be scanned in online. Consultants acting for the Co-op and Asda have also objected to the proposal on retail impact and their comments are online.

As far as the employment application is concerned whilst access is stated as 'not reserved' on the description of development no actual access to the public highway is shown on the plans. It is therefore dependent on land outside of the control of the applicant coming forward for development which is unacceptable and makes the proposal undeliverable.

- b. Email from Resident re: Aldi Planning Applications. The Resident has complained that the second Noise Assessment was carried out exactly as the first was. He requests another assessment be carried out prior to granting any acceptance.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

89. **Planning applications S/17/1771 and S/OUT/17/1772 Land north of Blackworth Industrial Estate:**

Applications are in regard to the building of an Aldi Supermarket

COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

90. Highworth Town Councillors were made aware in the email shown in **CORRESPONDENCE** above, that it is likely that the Planning Department at Swindon Borough Council is minded to refuse the above applications for the reasons explained in the email.

Councillors disagree completely and wholeheartedly with the assessment that the siting of this Supermarket in Highworth will have a damaging effect on the High Street. The High Street is significantly devoid of retail premises, with a wedding shop, dog groomers, florist, one small newsagent, The Emporium (Gift Shop), an award winning delicatessen, a hardware shop, a Christian bookshop and a specialist butcher remaining. Consensus of opinion is that these businesses would not lose significant trade to the Aldi store. The Councillors have been informed by the proprietors of these businesses that they do not see Aldi causing them a loss in trade, rather that a number of them are counting on the Aldi bringing in more footfall to the Town Centre and cannot wait for the boost to their business.

The view of Councillors and Residents is that the store will actually attract visitors to Highworth and a significant number of these **will** visit the High Street and use our local cafes, shops and hostelrys. At present, the town is losing trade and the Town Centre is in decline as most residents go out of Highworth to do their main shopping. The Saturday Market is the only attraction to the High Street on a Saturday and without it the High Street would be virtually deserted.

In their responses to both the Consultation held by Aldi and in their responses to the applications, a larger than normal number of residents have stressed that they are desperate for another supermarket in Highworth and cannot wait for Aldi to set up in the town. Reading the responses on the applications web there was an overwhelming response, almost totally unanimous in support. In the Town Councils experience there has not been such an overwhelming response to any Planning Application and, what is unusual, is that this is virtually a 99% positive in favour response throughout the Town.

There is a distinct lack of shops serving the town. Other towns in the area have multiple supermarkets competing with one another and serving them. This competition is healthy and ensures that their residents have choice of where to shop and the benefit of lower prices and more diversity in choice of goods. Highworth has not had this diversity of choice. Residents are trapped by higher prices and “take it or leave it” service, due to complacency on the part of a supermarket that believes it does not have to satisfy its customers, due to the lack of competition.

Highworth is unique for this district in that it is fairly distant from surrounding shopping areas. Residents are forced to own and drive a car to get to a decent main shop with over 67% of residents driving out of town for their weekly shop. This adds significantly to their cost of living. They are desperate to have within the town a supermarket that offers a variety of goods and that is renowned for its ability to provide these goods for sale at a significantly lower price than other similar establishments.

There is a high level of dissatisfaction with the Co-op in Highworth which, people inform us, offers a very second rate service. If anything, competition might ensure that the Co-op will up its game and improve the service it offers. People in Highworth unanimously have told us that the Co-op definitely needs competition as complacency has allowed the service and customer satisfaction to fall to an all time low. A large number of residents have been prepared to travel between 4 and 5 miles to visit an Aldi, in preference to shopping in Highworth. Most of the Co-op’s customers claim that their visits to the Co-op are **for the purpose of convenience shopping, rather than main shopping.**

The location of the store at the Blackworth Business Park is totally appropriate, in the views of the Councillors. This is allocated as Employment Land within the Neighbourhood Plan and, if the Aldi store comes to fruition, this business will offer, at least, 40 new opportunities for employment. There are a number of Highworth residents planning to apply for these jobs, if, and when, they happen. Aldi has indicated that they will advertise these new jobs in Highworth. Councillors do not accept that the setting up of this business will only result in the re-distribution of jobs within Swindon and will not result in a net benefit in the Swindon job market. There is a desperate need to produce jobs such as Aldi will offer, within Highworth. We would like to draw attention to paragraph 22 of the NPPF which states that Planners should avoid the long term protection of sites allocated to Employment Use where there is no reasonable prospect of the site being used for that purpose.

Policy 3 of the Highworth Neighbourhood Plan has been quoted as a reason for refusing the application. Policy 3 is:

Policy 3: Rural Settlement Boundary Land enclosed within the red outline shown on Figure 5 is defined as the settlement of Highworth. Within this defined area infill and other development consistent with planning policy in the development plan will normally be acceptable. Outside the defined settlement boundary land is defined as ‘open countryside’ and development here will not normally be permitted unless it complies with rural development policies in the Swindon Development Plan. The extent of the visually sensitive settlement boundary is defined on Figure 5 as a black line with hatching. This boundary marks the important edges of the town with regard to the setting and character of the historic hilltop settlement.

As can be seen from the map below, all of the designated Employment Land is already **outside** the Settlement Boundary and this Employment Land includes the site of the proposed Aldi. The proposed site is outside of the residential part of the town, but this is not seen by Councillors as a reason for rejection of the application. Adequate facilities for parking are included; parking is a problem in the Town Centre. There was a claim that by allowing Aldi to be included on the site that it would deny the expansion of the site to other businesses. The Aldi application offers employment which will include Highworth residents. Over the many years that the Blackworth Business Park has been in existence, there has been very little expansion. This application is for a store which includes an opportunity for expansion to take place.

Councillors agree that there are access and transport issues that still need to be addressed. They are satisfied that sufficient action has been taken in the Outline Plan to address the pedestrian access to the site, but vehicular access still needs a solution. Councillors do not agree that the whole plan should be thrown out just because of these outstanding issues, but that Aldi should be given the opportunity to come up with an agreed solution.

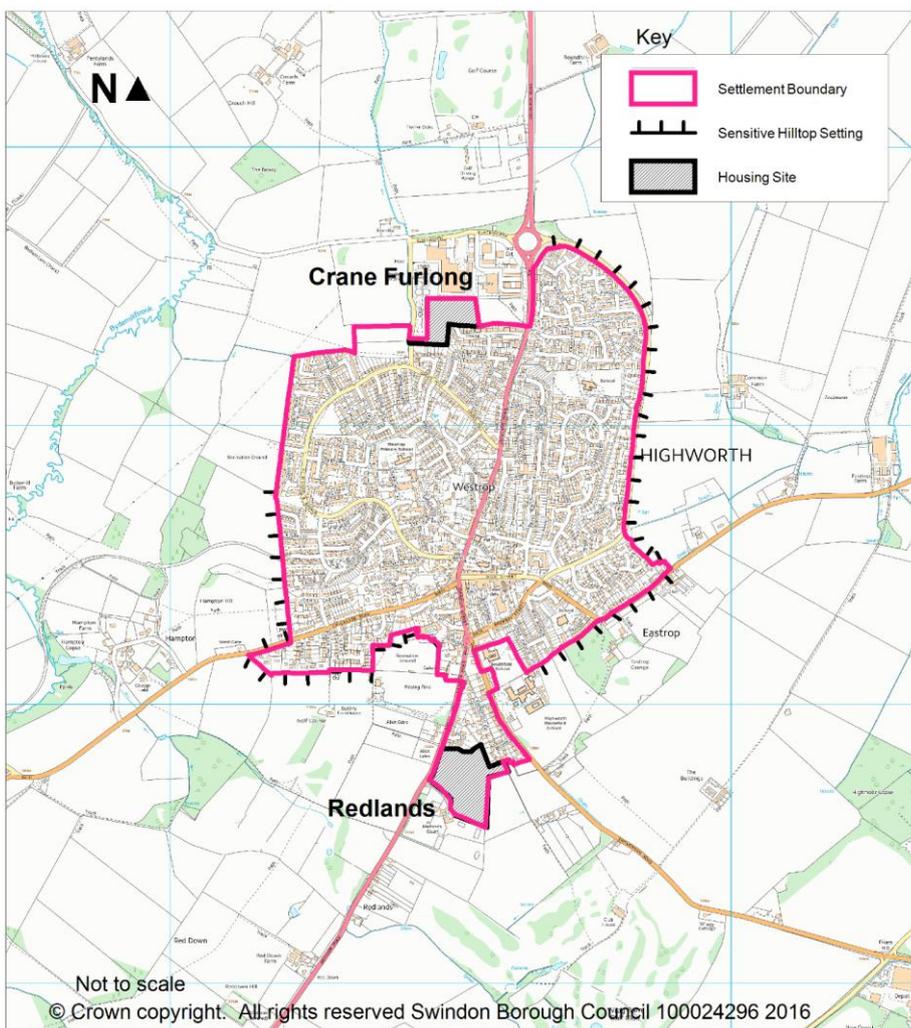
One Resident, who lives adjacent to the site claims that there has not been a proper Noise Assessment of the actual site in relation to the residential properties adjoining and Councillors agree that a proper assessment needs to be carried out.

SUMMARY

91. There is anger in the town that Swindon Planning Department is contemplating refusal of this application. Councillors echo this anger. They are appalled that the Planners are fixated on applying Policies and beliefs in unproven factors, such as adverse effects on High Streets and damage to existing similar businesses. They seem to have failed to take into account how these factors would apply to Highworth and have accepted them as a general truth, ignoring their fallibility when applied to Highworth. They have ignored the overwhelming need and desire of the Community for the retail outlet being offered, in spite of a record number of responses to the application, 99% vehemently in favour. Councillors and residents are unanimous in the belief that the opposite applies. They are convinced that this store can be instrumental in the rejuvenation and revitalising of the High Street. They are strongly of the belief that it is also vital to the survival of the Co-op that this competition is allowed to go ahead.

Highworth desperately needs this Aldi. Residents do not accept the arguments for refusal by the Planners in this case, as neither do the Councillors. The Planning Policy Officer in his advice demonstrates a huge ignorance of Highworth, its High Street, its paucity in retail outlets and the desperation of Highworth residents to encourage more retail into the town. It should be noted, as was expressed time and again at the meeting this is not about Aldi per se either for the Councillors or the Residents, it is about getting a store here and on that site as soon as possible.

Should the Planning Officer still be minded to refuse this application the Highworth Town Councillors wish this application to be put before the Borough Planning Committee For its consideration. There will be Councillor representation at the meeting of that Committee, both Town and Ward Councillors will attend and speak.



MEMBERS' BUSINESS

90. Councillor (Mrs) P Webster. She advised the Council that following its unanimous decision to remove and replace the tree on the Podium, it is to be felled in early March.

Meeting closed 6.50 pm