

Hitcham and Taplow Society(HTS) and Ellington Road and District Residents Association(EDRA) meeting with Land Securities(LS)

Land Securities, the owners of the Bishop Centre, asked to meet with the Management Committees of the Hitcham and Taplow Society and the Ellington Road and District Residents Association to discuss its proposals for the redevelopment of the Centre.

The essence of the Land Securities proposals is to demolish the existing 36 Bishop Centre shops and to build a 30,000 square feet supermarket at the end of a long row of 10 various sized shops each with a mezzanine floor. Parking will be increased from 397 to 439 car spaces plus 96 cycle parking stands.

Land Securities have planning permission in place for 95,000 square feet of retail space and for an additional access to the A4. This proposal indicates that it will be seeking an increase to 131,000 square feet.

The South Bucks District Council Core Strategy supports the redevelopment of the Bishop Centre in a "**form and scale**" based on "**localised need**" and it "**must maintain a scale and role which does not impact adversely on other centres**".

The two Committees met with Nick Duffield, Retail Portfolio Director, Land Securities and Alex Wilson, Indigo Public Affairs, on 5 September at Taplow House Hotel.

To be able to speak from a clear mandate, prior to the meeting the two Committees asked their members to respond to a questionnaire listing seven key issues.

- 1 Is there a need for another supermarket in our locality?
- 2 Which goods/services provided by the existing Bishop Centre shops will you miss?
- 3 Is there a major shop you would like to have a branch in the Bishop Centre?
- 4 Which types of independent shop would you like to see in a new Bishop Centre?
- 5 How will the proposed shopping centre impact on the local community and businesses?
- 6 Are you concerned at the increase in traffic there will be on the A4 and local roads?
- 7 Do you agree with Land Securities that "the local area deserves a better shopping experience"?

There was a spirited exchange of views on many of the points raised and occasional disputes regarding the accuracy of statements of facts, but agreement was unanimous on several key issues.

First and foremost, the statement in the SBDC Core Strategy 1.3.4 that the "Bishop Centre is in need of upgrading" is not contested

Second, superior, deeper and diverse landscaping around its highway borders is a vital element in the re-development of the Bishop Centre.

Third the need for a 'national brand' anchor store is critical to the success of a re-developed Bishop Centre for landowner, tenants and customers.

The SBDC Core Strategy 2.2.19 recognises that the "Bishop Centre ...is a unique out of town shopping centre with a variety of shops". Here is the main divergence of opinion. How will that variety be secured in the re-developed Bishop Centre?

Through their responses to the questionnaire Taplow residents have made it very clear that they wish to retain a similar unique 'village' of independent niche shops and services. Land Securities consider that the place for such shops and services is 'the High Street' and such a retail offering in an out of town shopping centre is not viable for either landowner or tenant. It indicated this to be an adamant and non-negotiable position and it considers it to be quintessential to its re-development proposal.

The two Committees saw a better way for Land Securities to realise its expressed desire to meet the wishes of the local communities, suggesting it take a creative look at its proposals to endeavour to include parade(s) and/or arcade(s) of smaller units at lower rents adding to the value of the customer experience when visiting the anchor store and the adjacent large chain stores. Such an out of town shopping centre would indeed be unique and certain to attract both single and family shoppers.

Many contested points concerned the potential for traffic problems. Based on their first hand experiences of the regular daily congestions on the A4 , most of the responses to the questionnaire expressed conviction that the proposal would bring an increase in the traffic on roads -both A4 and local - already over their capacity.

Land Securities said its traffic consultants disagree and when the planning application is submitted it offered to meet again with the traffic consultants in attendance to explain the findings of their traffic survey and their proposals for traffic management.

Concern was expressed for the predicament of the existing businesses now under a lease which allows the landowner to give just 6 months notice to vacate their premises.

Regarding the high proportion of responses to the questionnaire saying NO to the need for another supermarket, LS said that many suitable 'anchors' had been approached but non were interested including John Lewis. TESCO does see the need to be in this location in order to maintain its competitive position with the nearby Sainsbury and Waitrose stores.

The Land Securities proposals were presented to the general public at an exhibition on 8/9 July and several articles and letters about the proposals have appeared in the Maidenhead Advertiser.