

Chairman and Councillors

Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening on the planning application for Cofferridge Close. For the record, I am Robert Gifford, Chair of Stony Stratford Town Council. I am speaking here tonight on behalf of the Council.

This application has taken a long time to reach you tonight. I would like to take this opportunity to explain to you what the Town Council has considered during this period.

Under the Council's terms of reference, this was deemed a major application. This meant that it must be dealt with at our full council meetings rather than at a Planning Committee. As a result we have held two open public meetings to agree our response to the current proposal. The first of these was in March 2011, the second in January 2013. Both of them were extremely well attended with over 80 residents at the first meeting and over 150 at the second. Apart from the developer at the first meeting, there were no voices in support of what is being proposed.

Your officers have set out for you good grounds for refusal of the current application. The residents of Stony Stratford would clearly, on the basis of views expressed at our both our full Council meetings and those of our Planning Committee, support that view. This is an application that will have a devastating effect on the economic fabric of the town and runs counter to the clearly and vocally expressed views of its residents.

Your Officers' report makes reference to the new National Planning Policy Framework. I would suggest to you that there are two key issues for you to consider. The framework talks of supporting an economy fit for the 21st century and describes town centres as the heart of their communities. I would suggest to you that a development that will increase in size by 140% in net floorspace is more likely to tear the heart out of a town centre rather than to enhance it. I would also suggest to you that a major food retail space is no longer the economy for the 21st century. Rather, we need to see an enhanced mixed use of this existing site, not a monopoly provider as proposed.

Paragraph A2.25 of the report rightly refers to the need to "help retain expenditure within the town". I would suggest to you that a new large supermarket will take money out of the town since its effect will be on our locally owned business such as the two butchers, our chemist and flower shop.

Stony Stratford is not opposed to change. Over the last year, a number of us have been working to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for Stony. A key starting point for that plan is the viability and vitality of our High Street. Cofferridge Close is a key part of that High Street. As our response to the current application said, we are not against an enhanced supermarket but opposed to one that will be so out of kilter with the rest of the town.

The Council has been unanimous in its opposition to what is in front of you tonight. In that position, I believe that it fully reflects the views of the community that we represent. As the first tier of local government in the town and as the body that has conducted two open public meetings about the application, we would urge you to support the refusal tonight and, indeed, add further grounds for refusal in a reference to the unsuitability of the scale of this proposal.

Thank you for listening.