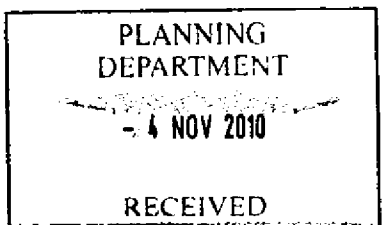


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Welwyn Garden City
Thursday, 4th November 2010



Representation with regard to Tesco's Application for the Cereal Partners Site

Dear Sirs, Mesdames,

Tesco PLC

Tesco is one of the top three international retailers in the world, with around 2,000 stores and 326,000 people in 13 countries across Europe and Asia. ⁱ

Tesco is not an organisation with local interests at heart. Despite a headquarters being based in Welwyn Garden City, they have no loyalty to this town. This was demonstrated by offshoring many of their locally-based IT operations to India, leading to many redundancies here. Their objectives are global in scope. Within the UK, their aim appears to be to dominate every possible aspect of the British economy and every corner of the land. Their huge profits (£3.4 billion) are enabling them to pursue this increasingly aggressively - they recently announced that they intend to increase their development programme by 40% compared with last year. In - for most – straightened times, Tesco have the power to "buy virtually any site in the country to develop a new supermarket ... employ the most experienced lawyers to make sure (they) get planning permission ... and ... allow the new store to run at a loss while it's establishing itself." ⁱⁱ

In the meantime, smaller local businesses will go to the wall. This is exactly where Tesco want them.

Tesco's self-declared strategy ⁱⁱⁱ is to "be as strong in non-food as in food." Having already colluded with other supermarkets to all but wipe out greengrocers, fishmongers and bakers, they have, in recent years, moved aggressively against newsagents, clothes retailers, cd/dvd and electronics shops, banks, insurers, mobile phone companies, garden centres, stationery shops, furniture stores and, of course petrol stations. 115 of their stores even have opticians and around 270 have pharmacies.

Tesco is a ravenous beastie, never to be satiated. Hoe Street, Liverpool is an instructive example: Tesco pressed for (and received planning permission for) a ninth store at this location "despite there being a total of eight other Tesco stores (In Express, Metro and Superstore formats) within less than or equivalent to a mile from its proposed location". ^{iv} The Norfolk town of Sheringham has been resisting the corporation for over 13 years, but despite having had four planning applications and an appeal rejected, Tesco are still at it. They have huge resources, and count on wearing their opponents out.

Tesco's representation in the Welwyn Garden City region

Locally, they already have a huge store in Hertford – open 24/7. Much closer, in Hatfield but on the very fringe of Welwyn Garden City, they have another 24/7 monster – recently expanded. They have two massive stores in Stevenage, one (on the town's southern flank,

nearest Welwyn) currently undergoing a huge expansion, and a smaller store in Welwyn village which, in spite of a prior agreement not to sell bread and cakes – does so.

Current retail provision in Welwyn Garden City

Welwyn Garden already has substantial food stores - Sainsbury's and Waitrose and Morrison's – all recently expanded – and smaller outlets at the local shopping areas. The town centre hosts a range of other, smaller shops. Many of these have been struggling and there is a regular turnover due to business failures. Several properties are empty. WGC seems to abound now in charity shops, chain cafes, phone shops and opticians, but we retain the splendid John Lewis – a cornerstone of the WGC identity – a fine book shop (an increasing rarity), a Boots and WH Smith, Blockbuster, Next, modestly-sized Marks and Spencer's and Debenhams stores, a Black's camping shop, a pet shop, an independent optician and a bakery. All of these live comfortably in the town and contribute in their way to its harmony. Despite the diversity of this collection, it is no exaggeration to say that **Tesco will compete directly with every one of them**. Tesco make no apology for this: in their previous, rejected, planning application, they allocated 25% of a smaller proposed Tesco store to non-food lines. This time, they have really made their intentions clear.

Under the current planning proposal, the Tesco store has grown substantially in size, and the proportion of food to non-food is now 60% food and 40% non-food. This is a sharp deviation from the earlier proposal, and amounts to **a declaration of intent** against all competing shops of WGC town centre and the outlying shopping zones (e.g. Howlands, Shoplands). They have no intention of co-existing with them.

Submission

I would submit therefore that Welwyn Garden City is already well-provided with supermarket space (Sainsbury's, Morrisons, Waitrose). The town centre and outlying shopping zones also retain a diverse collection of other businesses which would be vulnerable to the arrival of a Tesco in the middle of the town. There is therefore no need for another large store – and absolutely no need for another Tesco. If a WGC resident feels they simply have to use them rather than a competitor, it's a very short hop to the Hatfield store – on the fringe of town, or Hertford or Stevenage, all within a few minutes' drive.

If Tesco is allowed to get their foot in the door here, they will barge it in: the store in a few years' time will become considerably larger than allowed for in the current plans. With the proposed departures of the Post Office and Argos, there will be plenty of room for them to put this into effect. The Council is asked to consider what strategy they will adopt to address the bankruptcies and vacant lots across the town and in and around the Howard Centre that would accompany Tesco's arrival.

Furthermore, the proposed development looks cheap, generic and wholly unsympathetic to the existing architecture of Welwyn Garden City. Despite some unsympathetic views, the

Howard Centre does actually fit in, and thought was obviously given to the heritage that it was going to merge with. The Tesco proposal includes a number of very small dwellings squeezed in between narrow lanes. No thought seems to have been given to relieving the austerity of the design with feature trees and vegetation – an absolute key feature of the town.

Welwyn Garden City, along with Letchworth and a few other sites around the world, is the product of a movement whose aim was the betterment of mankind's lot. We are the guardians of that inheritance. This is not the dead weight of history: the city, and the maintenance of its ethos, is studied by architects around the world for the benefit of future generations

The site under discussion will, at some point, be redeveloped. That decision, when it is made, will define that site – and the atmosphere of the Garden City - for years, decades, perhaps generations. I trust that the decision of the present board will be guided with that long-term view in mind.

I urge the Council to decisively – and definitively - reject the Tesco application.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Mitchell

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