

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: CONSULTATION ON PLANNING APPLICATION -
MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL AT BURGHMUIR,
LINLITHGOW (0095/P/12)
Meeting: PLANNING COMMITTEE
Date: 27 MARCH 2013
Author: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In February 2012, West Lothian Council received a planning application for a mixed use development at Burghmuir, Linlithgow, adjacent to Junction 3 of the M9, comprising housing, retail, tourism, community use, and infrastructure works (see location plan). The infrastructure works include upgrading of M9 Junction 3 to a full 4 way interchange by the addition of west facing slip roads. The northern of these lies within the Falkirk Council area and was subject to a separate application for planning permission in principle (Ref: P/12/0058/PPP) which was granted by this Council on 14th January 2013.

1.2 Falkirk Council was consulted on the main planning application as a neighbouring authority and, on 4th April 2012, the Planning Committee approved a consultation response to West Lothian Council which stated:-

“That, in its response to West Lothian Council on the application for mixed use development at Burghmuir, Linlithgow, the Council:

- (i) Supports and welcomes in principle the proposal to upgrade Junction 3 of the M9 to a 4 way interchange; and*
- (ii) Objects to the proposed supermarket, on the basis that there is a risk of significant impact on vitality and viability of Bo’ness Town Centre, which has not been adequately addressed in the retail impact assessment.”*

1.3 A revised retail statement has recently been submitted by the applicant, Wallace Land, and West Lothian Council has sought Falkirk Council’s comments on this document. Clearly, the retail aspects of the proposal, and the potential implications for Bo’ness town centre, were a key concern for this Council in its original response. This report considers the amended retail statement, particularly in relation to Bo’ness town centre, and assesses whether any change is warranted to the Council’s views in the light of the new information. Account is also taken of the review of the retail statement carried out by consultants on behalf of West Lothian.

2. REVISED RETAIL STATEMENT

- 2.1 It is noted from the revised retail statement that the size of the proposed foodstore has been reduced from 60,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet gross floorspace. The reduced scale of store is comparable in size to the Asda store in Stenhousemuir. Around 75% of the net floorspace would be for convenience goods, with 25% given over to comparison goods.
- 2.2 The original retail statement gave relatively little attention to the implications of the proposed store for Bo'ness town centre. Bo'ness was not included in the primary catchment of the store, in spite of the fact that the site is located only some 2.3 miles (3.7 km) from the eastern edge of the town. There was no analysis of Bo'ness town centre, and no attempt to quantify the trade which would be diverted from it.
- 2.3 These deficiencies have been addressed in the revised retail statement. Bo'ness is now included within the proposed store's primary catchment, and indeed provides some 47% of the catchment population. There is an assessment of the town centre's character, vitality and viability, which concludes that it is "a reasonable healthy town centre that attracts moderate levels of footfall throughout the centre, but provides limited variety and choice in terms of retail goods and services". A 13% vacancy rate is noted.
- 2.4 In terms of retail impact, the convenience turnover of the proposed store is estimated as £18m (compared with £23m for the previous larger store proposal). As previously, the retail statement argues that, although substantial trade will be attracted from Bo'ness residents, most of this will be trade which is already leaving the town for stores in Grangemouth and Falkirk. The estimate of convenience trade which will be diverted from Bo'ness town centre is £1.65m (some 9% of the town centre's current convenience turnover), of which the majority (£1.29m) is from the Tesco store. Comparison trade diversion is estimated at £0.3m (some 5% of the town centre's comparison turnover).
- 2.5 The amended retail statement concludes that these levels of trade diversion will not have a significant effect on the performance of the town centre as a whole, or undermine its vitality or viability. It suggests that the Tesco store will be able to withstand the levels of impact predicted, and points out that, in any case, the town centre's vitality and viability does not rely solely on convenience retailing.

3. ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 The additional information and analysis on Bo'ness in the revised retail statement is welcomed.
- 3.2 The assessment of Bo'ness town centre's vitality and viability as 'fair' is noted. However, whilst there has been an improvement in its physical condition as a result of the THI, the level of convenience expenditure leakage remains a concern, the proportion of Bo'ness residents doing their main food shopping in Tesco having declined from 68% in 1998 to 39% in 2009. There is evidence that the Tesco store is under-trading (i.e. trading at levels significantly lower than company averages). The need for improved food shopping is highlighted in the Proposed Falkirk Local Development Plan, approved by the Council on 6 March 2013.

- 3.3 The level of convenience trade diversion from Bo'ness town centre predicted by the retail statement (£1.65m) appears a reasonable estimate. The review of the retail statement carried out by consultants on behalf of West Lothian Council gives a slightly higher figure of £1.9m. In either case, percentage impact will be of the order of 10%. However, contrary to the conclusions of the retail statement, this is considered to represent a significant degree of impact, bearing in mind that the convenience retailing function of Bo'ness town centre is critical to its future vitality and viability and its role as a District Centre. A new out of centre store at Burghmuir would accelerate expenditure leakage, reduce levels of activity in the town centre, and reduce the prospect of new food shopping investment in the town centre. This would undermine recent efforts to enhance its commercial attractiveness through the THI and other initiatives, and conflict with the Council's stated aspirations to improve food shopping and increase local expenditure retention in the town.
- 3.4 Consequently, although the scale of the proposed store has been reduced since the original submission, concerns about the impact on Bo'ness town centre remain. The level of impact predicted by the revised retail statement is not considered acceptable, in the context of the proposed store's out of centre location, and the policy support for existing centres expressed in Scottish Planning Policy, and the development plans of Falkirk and West Lothian Councils. It is therefore considered that the objection to the supermarket element of the Burghmuir proposals expressed in the Council's original consultation response should be maintained.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 **That West Lothian Council is advised that, in relation to the application for mixed use development at Burghmuir, Linlithgow, the Council maintains its objection to the proposed supermarket on the grounds that it would have a significant impact on the vitality and viability of Bo'ness town centre and undermine the Council's aspirations to improve it.**

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Director of Development Services

Date: 19 March 2013

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None