

Late Report

Subject : Retailing in Amesbury
Retail and Leisure Needs Study by GVA Grimley

Report to : Northern Area Committee

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1. Introduction

1.1 At the Northern Area Committee meeting on 13th December 2007, members considered the Retail and Leisure Needs Study produced by GVA Grimley. It was resolved that:

1) *the committee notes the GVA Grimley Retail and Leisure Needs Study and endorses its conclusions with regard to Salisbury city;*

2) *the committee considers the conclusions with regard to Amesbury to be flawed and believes the Northern Area and Amesbury are suitable for retail development and retail choice;*

3) *the committee considers that future studies should not be undertaken without councillor involvement from the outset.*

1.2 At the subsequent meeting held on 17th January 2008 the Committee considered an application by Lidl Foodstores to erect a neighbourhood foodstore on land at the Minton Distribution Park on London Road, Amesbury. It was resolved that consideration of this application should be deferred. It was further minuted that:

Councillor Westmoreland expressed his dissatisfaction that the planning officers' report on [the Lidl application] referred to a study by GVA Grimley. The Northern Area Committee had previously expressed their discontent with the conclusions of this consultant with regard to retail in Amesbury. It was requested that a report be brought to February's Northern Area Committee by the Head of Forward Planning and Transportation informing the panel of the outcome of their resolution in December.

1.3 This report responds to the Committee's request and also seeks to update Members with regard to the old Coop site.

2. The GVA Grimley study

2.1 The GVA Grimley study was commissioned, along with a number of other consultant studies, to inform the preparation of the Council's Local Development Framework. As such, the study now forms part of the LDF evidence base. GVA Grimley were selected following competitive tendering and are recognised to be amongst the leading retail planning consultancies in the country. The lead consultant, Chris

Goddard, has an enviable reputation in the field. The study is consistent with Government guidance contained in Planning Policy Statement 6: *Planning for Town Centres* and officers believe it to be technically sound.

- 2.2 On this basis, officers will continue to refer to the study when formulating policies and proposals in the context of the LDF and in making recommendations on planning applications. The Northern Area Committee's resolution of 13th December 2007 is noted and it is fully appreciated that the committee takes a different view of the soundness of the study. However, officers believe that there are no steps that could be taken to resolve this disagreement. In practical terms, whilst officers will continue to rely on the study's conclusions, the final decision locally on planning applications or policy making rests with elected members (subject always to the intervention of the Secretary of State through the call-in procedure and the binding decisions of the Planning Inspectorate on Local Development Documents). Members should have regard to the conclusions of the study and to recommendations based upon it in coming to a determination, but where they believe it to be appropriate they have the ability to come to different conclusions regarding the particular matter in hand.

3. Recent developments in respect of the old Coop store

- 3.1 Since the planning applications for Lidl, Tesco and Asda were received, the old Coop store in Salisbury Street has been the subject of interest from two other retailers. Aldi are negotiating terms for the lease of the existing store, with minor changes to its external appearance, and Sainsbury have expressed an interest in the site. A planning application has now been submitted (it has not, at the time of writing, been formally registered) by Frobisher Retail, with Sainsbury being cited as the intended end user. This proposal anticipates the demolition of the old store and its replacement with a larger store of 1858 sq m (20,000 sq ft) net convenience retail floor space. This proposal compares with the Tesco proposal at 1950 sq m (20,990 sq ft) and Asda at 2415 sq m (25,996) (both convenience floor space only). The Frobisher scheme also proposes a decked car park on the existing Centre car park for 188 vehicles. The car park is owned by SDC. The Cabinet would make the final decision concerning land ownership issues.
- 3.2 Once registered, the Frobisher planning application will be a material consideration that Members will need to take into account in their deliberations on the three other retail applications in Amesbury. Planning Policy Statement 6 advocates that town centres are the preferable location for new retail development. If there are no sites available in the existing centres, then edge-of-centre sites should be looked at, and then out-of-centre sites, providing they are or will be served by a choice of means of transport, are close to the centre and have a high likelihood of forming links with the centre. Proposals for new retail development in town centres are not required to demonstrate that there is a need for the development, unlike proposals in edge or out-of-centre locations. The concern with edge or out-of-centre development is that it could undermine the vitality and viability of town centres and could have an adverse effect on town centre investment.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 Officers acknowledge that local Members have concerns about the GVA Grimley report and the future of retailing in Amesbury. A report on the matter was presented to the December meeting of the Northern Area Committee. Whilst it is regrettable, there is clearly a difference of view between officers and Members about the quality of the conclusions of the GVA Grimley report. Officers believe the report's conclusions are robust and a sound, objective, technical analysis of the issues. It is

understood that Members do not think that the study adequately reflects local circumstances. It is rare for Members and officers to disagree fundamentally over planning issues. Fortunately, the system allows for such disagreements and, subject to the intervention of the Secretary of State and the Planning Inspectorate, it will be for Members to resolve the issues on the basis of all the evidence before them.

- 4.2 The proposal to invest in the town centre through the redevelopment of the old Coop store will be a material consideration that Members should take into account when determining proposals for edge or out-of-centre retail development in Amesbury.

5. **Implications:**

- **Financial:** None.
- **Legal:** As set out in the report.
- **Human Rights:** None.
- **Personnel:** None.
- **Community Safety:** None.
- **Environmental implications:** None in relation to this report.
- **Council's Core Values:** A thriving local economy;
- **Wards Affected:** Amesbury East and West and other Northern Area wards.