



## **Planning Application Nos. 2008/1490 & 2008/1491**

### **Highams Green**

#### **Statement from the Highams Park Forum**

The Highams Park Forum has now had the opportunity to undertake a preliminary review of the latest Tesco application. There is considerable technical documentation to examine and it will be some time before we complete our assessment. This statement should be taken as our overall view of the latest proposals, and we will respond in more detail in due course.

You will recall that we gave evidence at the public inquiry into the previous Tesco application because of concerns regarding traffic generation, effect on the level crossing, increases in pollution, the scale of the development in relation to policy and catchment area, visual impact, poor design and lack of integration to the existing centre.

The current proposal is significantly larger than the previous scheme, with an increased floor area for Tesco of 5523 sqm (compared with 5016 sqm) and 261 residential units compared to the previous 79 units. It will therefore be necessary for the Council to consider all the issues of concern again.

There will be a need for the Council to undertake a Screening Opinion on whether an EIA is required. As you are aware, the Forum is concerned that this process for the previous application had not been handled adequately and the Forum was given misleading information. The Forum is of the view that this larger development should be subject to an EIA and requests that the Screening Opinion is undertaken in a thorough and open way.

The Forum is pleased to see that the design has been altered to accommodate our views on improving access to the Town Centre and moving the store away from the houses in Selwyn Avenue. However, the size and scale of the store – 350 parking spaces and a 4 storey hypermarket is still inappropriate for Highams Park

The introduction of additional housing is also of great concern. The density of the proposed housing is too high, and we would prefer architecture more in keeping with the surrounding neighbourhood.

The height of the blocks of flats is excessive and the height of the houses which back onto the gardens of the houses in Selwyn Avenue is also unacceptable. The flat roofs, bright colours, and stainless steel are not in keeping with the area.

Overall, this type of development is more appropriate to a densely populated inner city area, not a spacious suburb.

The 'Planning Statement' identifies a housing density of 343 habitable rooms/ hectare (hr/ha), which is in excess of the UDP standards and is appropriate for Inner London, but not for suburban areas such as Highams Park. This is supported by the 'London Plan', which identifies a maximum density of 450 hr/ha for an urban area with a PTAL of 2 and 250 hr/ha for a suburban area with a PTAL of 2.

The large number of residential units will add to the traffic problems and put pressure on local facilities such as schools and health care. We are aware of the policy to reduce parking numbers, but a provision of about 1 car parking space space for every 2 units would lead to additional parking pressures in the locality, particularly as this is in an area of relatively low public transport accessibility (PTAL 2).

Despite the conclusions from the Inspector on the previous proposal, our concerns about the impact on traffic levels in Highams Park remain. The current proposal will increase traffic levels beyond those of the refused application and the Inspector might have come to a different conclusion had this current proposal been before her.

It was suggested in the previous application that service vehicles would be restricted to Hale End Road and Larkshall Road, to avoid using Winchester Road. Since the public inquiry, Hale End Road has been subject to a traffic and environmental scheme that now makes this road unsuitable for heavy vehicles. Therefore, there is no acceptable route for service vehicles from the North Circular Road which is the most likely route and the closest Primary route to the site. It is not acceptable for all service vehicles to use Larkshall Road and other approach roads in Chingford as these are predominantly residential roads and are not part of the Primary or Secondary road network.

On Friday 3rd October 2008, the three main residents' associations of Highams Park (viz.: The Highams Park Forum, The Highams Park Society, and The Highams Park Residents' Association) organised an open Public Meeting to debate the latest Tesco Proposal.

Highams Park residents were invited to attend to participate in the debate and to listen to the views of other residents. 45 people attended the meeting in The Church Hall, All Saints Church, Church Ave.

Although the latest proposals attempted to address the reasons for rejection of earlier plans, the meeting felt that they do not address many of the concerns expressed by residents.

A straw poll was taken amongst attendees to gauge opinion:

- When asked whether they were for or against a Tesco store in principle (ignoring the details of the proposal) attendees showed a fairly even split of "for" and "against".
- However, when asked if they supported this current proposal, all attendees without exception voted against. All attendees had concerns (even those who supported the idea of a store in principle).

The main concerns raised were:

- Housing density. There was lots of criticism of the density of the housing, the social problems it could create, and the strain on services (e.g. schools, buses, trains, and health care).
- Evidence from other similar proposals shows that local traders do not gain an advantage from having a large Tesco next door. Most shoppers drive to Tesco and away again using Tesco as a 'one stop' shop.
- The removal of 23 protected trees and dozens of other trees on the site and the 'moving' of a protected 100 year old mulberry tree is unacceptable.
- The design of the 260 houses and flats on the site. These are planned to be in a modern flat roofed style. The flats are planned to be built in a brutal and industrial style of architecture. None of this is in keeping with our local area
- The proximity of the houses to Selwyn Avenue. These will be 3 storeys with only 20ft gardens. Many trees on the boundary line will be removed
- The height of the blocks of flats – 5/6 storeys
- The whole design will urbanize a suburban village-like area. Tesco are behaving as if they are building on an urban brown field site. Highams Park deserves a much better design than the current proposal.

- Traffic problems. It was generally felt that the planners did not properly understand the traffic problems and that the scale of the development would cause severe congestion. The level crossing makes it especially difficult. The routing of delivery lorries down narrow roads was also seen as a problem.

The main theme of the comments were that we do not live in a dense urban area. Any approved scheme must enhance our lives – not wreck our environment:

The Forum and the local community is therefore strongly opposed to the current proposals. However, if officers' are minded to recommend approval to the development, then the Forum would expect the following conditions:

- Adequate section 106 contributions should be obtained to mitigate the impact of the development. This should include contributions towards school and health facilities, public transport, traffic management, public realm, and street cleaning. The agreed contributions for the previous scheme were insufficient.
- The Forum is opposed to 24 hour trading; suggest no later than 8.00pm Mon - Thurs and 10.00pm Friday & Saturday.
- Servicing hours should have time restrictions to avoid busy times eg. school opening and closing times.
- Signing should encourage customers and service vehicles to and from the north as Winchester Road and Hale End Road are unsuitable for traffic increases
- The existing trees should be protected.
- Do not want a chemist, dry cleaners, PO, filling station or takeaways on the site.
- Tesco should implement a low lease scheme in the small shop units to encourage local shop keepers.
- Tesco should commit to recruiting local unemployed people;
- Should provide more public space eg a community hall similar in size to, for example, Theydon Bois village hall.
- Concern about how residential parking will be controlled. Planning policies require low provision of car parking, but this will lead to increased pressure for parking in the rest of Highams Park.
- Tesco should give undertaking to provide energy efficient development; building with sustainable materials and should aim to be carbon neutral.
- Store should become a 'showcase' design which would give good publicity to Tesco.
- Tesco should give an undertaking that they will 'locally source' produce.

10<sup>th</sup> October 2008