

ASDA STATEMENT TO SAVE NEW BARNET CAMPAIGN MEETING

ASDA has endeavoured to engage widely in our public consultation on this scheme, which will create 400 jobs and provide access to affordable retail – preventing the leakage of trade to other north London centres that New Barnet is experiencing. The proposals will deliver over £1.6 million worth of investment into the transport network in New Barnet – which will help the traffic situation, even with our proposed regeneration of the old gas works site.

ASDA first met with elected representatives in March 2008 to discuss initial plans. They expressed some concerns and we went back to the drawing board – as explained at the last public meeting organised by New Barnet Community Association / Save New Barnet campaign group (NBCA-SNB). We subsequently tackled the issues over height, scale and density and significantly reduced these elements of the scheme.

Our public exhibition was held over two weekends in June 2008 (6th, 7th, 13th and 14th). Over 1,000 local people viewed the plans. We engaged with a wide range of stakeholders, including JCOSS – which led to our including school bus stops at the end of the site, allowing for safe pedestrian access to the school.

We also sponsored and participated in the East Barnet Festival to allow for further engagement with local residents and show our willingness to get involved in and support local community events.

We also met with New Barnet Community Association on two occasions between July and September 2008. We discussed a wide range of issues. Many discussions have followed since then.

We have demonstrated throughout this process a willingness to engage and indeed our efforts have shown that this consultation has been a genuine one – we have listened to concerns and changed our scheme accordingly.

We received a letter inviting us to this meeting a mere eight days prior to the event. ASDA made it clear to the NBCA-SNB campaign that this is frankly unacceptable, given the organisation and preparation it takes to do justice for meetings of this kind. We wanted to attend but due to existing diary commitments it has been extremely difficult for us to put forward the full development team.

We also made a reasonable request that NBCA-SNB would ensure that an impartial chair would preside over proceedings and that a proper agenda be set up. A number of local people have also raised concerns to ASDA that the event was primarily promoted to Save New Barnet supporters, excluding many other members of public.

In light of this and the late notice, our view is that it cannot be regarded as an impartial, representative forum for constructive discussion on the planning application.

We have found our public exhibitions and focus groups to be a far better setting for genuine consultation and discussion.

Be that as it may, we were happy to confirm our attendance as soon as NBCA-SNB confirmed they would put these entirely reasonable procedures in place to ensure a more democratic and constructive debate.

Sadly, the campaign group has not agreed to select an impartial chair and we find that to be contrary to the stated aim of encouraging 'effective public consultation'.

However, we have noted NBCA-SNB's concern over LB Barnet's refusal to set up a public meeting. We are confident that we have so far fulfilled our public consultation requirements to the letter – and believe that this scheme, which will create 400 jobs and meet several LB Barnet policy requirements, will offer great benefits to New Barnet.

In order to provide for the post-submission consultation that NBCA-SNB feel LB Barnet should provide, ASDA will commit to further invest in genuine, representative public consultation – despite having received no request from the Council, elected representatives or statutory consultees.

We will organise a series of properly organised focus groups in the area. By inviting members of the local community along to raise awareness and share views this will broaden the feedback and allow for more democratic and open debate.

We will invite a representative of NBCA-SNB to one of these meetings. Should it transpire through this process that a wider meeting would be helpful, ASDA will organise it in conjunction with the local authority.