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Mr Alan Chew
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date: 3rd April 2008
our reference: S/PHRD/letters/sgm
your reference:

Dear Mr Chew

Re: New Barnet Town Centre and Asda / Tesco Aspirations

Thank you for your letter dated 7th March 2008 addressed to Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council concerning the above planning issues for New Barnet. The Leader has asked I respond to you on his behalf given that many of the issues you raise are planning related. He has already explained to Mr David Howard that he is unable to attend tonight's community meeting as this clashes with a programmed Cabinet Meeting at Hendon Town Hall.

I hope to represent the Council tonight and observe the discussions at your meeting but will not be able to participate too much in development discussions so as not to fetter the Council's local planning authority position on future planning applications that may come forward.

Like the Leader I fully appreciate your concerns regarding the potential impacts of emerging aspirations of possible development proposals by both Asda and Tesco for large retail store developments in New Barnet town centre on both the gas works site and in East Barnet Road. The Council's Planning Service has been aware of such ideas for some time but, following a recent ward member briefing last week with the two retail companies, it is clear neither Asda nor Tesco have been in any sort of realistic position to pursue their plans very far, mostly for land ownership and traffic reasons.

However, I can assure you the Council is taking a proactive role to ensure that New Barnet is planned in a sustainable and proper manner and that any future specific developments seek to enhance the town centre and benefit the local community. In this respect the Council is considering tonight at its Cabinet meeting a Suburban Town Centre strategy which identifies the Council's Three Strands Approach towards new development which seeks to protect and enhance Barnet's suburbs and bring forward improvements to town centres where there are identified opportunities for major redevelopment, such as New Barnet and the gas works.

As you may be aware the Council adopted a planning brief for the gas works site some eight years ago and this set the broad policy framework in addition to the adopted Barnet UDP 2006. These documents provide policy protection and support for the town centre and seek to maximise benefits for local residents. It has been appreciated that the policy approach needs some updating in the light of recent development pressures, including Asda and Tesco. It is proposed in tonight's Cabinet report on suburban town centres to include New Barnet for a specific Town Centre Development Framework, which will seek to take a masterplanning overview of the whole area and potential retail development sites and plan the town centre in a holistic way.

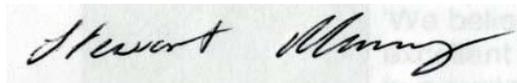
The programme for the New Barnet Town Centre Development Framework is this summer with full public consultation and community engagement being programmed, subject to approval of Cabinet. It is also likely that the Planning Service will hold a New Barnet Planning and Development Forum nearer the time of issue of the draft Framework to enable local people and community associations, including yours of course, to input to its contents and objectives. The Framework will seek to address the development site issues and pressures from individual developers, including Asda and Tesco.

It would be premature of the Council at this stage to comment on the Asda and Tesco aspirational plans other than to say that they would need to be fully in conformity with the Council's planning policy documents, particularly the adopted UDP and the future Town Centre Development Framework. Ultimately, any future planning applications will be the subject of full statutory assessment and scrutiny by the Council and its Planning and Environment Committee.

The impacts of future development proposals, including traffic, congestion, parking, design, density, residential development, height of buildings and impact on adjoining suburban areas streets will be fully assessed. No decision will be made until the Council is fully satisfied that strict planning tests have been met. As for the Council's view on whether an additional one or two new retail stores could be sustained, this again would be the subject of detailed assessment through the Town Centre Framework and/or statutory planning application consideration. I would expect that both Asda and Tesco already know that, despite being in competition with each other including the existing Sainsbury store there is a limit to retail demand in any one particular location and town centre, as well as cumulative impacts such as traffic which will constrain the amount of additional development.

I trust that is a helpful summary of the Council's planning position and I look forward to engaging with your Association over the coming weeks and months to help ensure New Barnet has a prosperous future. All the best

Yours sincerely



Stewart Murray
Director of Planning, Housing and Regeneration

c.c. Councillor Mike Freer, Leader of the Council
Councillor Matthew Offord, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport
Councillor Melvin Cohen, Cabinet Member for Planning and Environmental Protection
Councillor Joanna Tambourides, Ward Councillor (East Barnet)
Mr David Howard, New Barnet Community Association