



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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19/01670/FULL1 | Demolition of the existing public house and the erection of an A1 retail foodstore | The Porcupine 24 Mottingham Road Mottingham London SE9 4QW

I write to place on record my strong opposition to the aforementioned application, submitted by Walsingham Planning on behalf of Lidl Great Britain. As you will know, the site was subject to a very similar application in 2013 and was subsequently quashed at appeal in 2014, since when, to the frustration of the local community, it has remained vacant.

It is worth stressing from the outset that there is much anger that the site has been underutilised over the intervening years, and despite a clear desire for it to be put to better use, there remains significant opposition to Lidl's proposals. Indeed, whilst the applicant claims the scheme enjoys positive interest locally, this assertion not only directly contradicts the feedback I have received as the local Member of Parliament, but also the considerable concerns raised with the local ward councillors and through the Mottingham Residents' Association (MRA). In fact, at the time of writing, and according to the comments submitted on the Council's online planning portal, more than double the number of residents oppose the scheme than support it.

It is the belief of many in the community that Lidl has cynically and deliberately allowed the site and former public house to fall into disrepair in order to make this proposed redevelopment more appealing. It is simply not true that there has been no commercial interest in the site. As the applicant's own Viability Assessment makes clear, Lidl have received numerous offers over the last five years, as well as registering the serious and genuine interest of the Porcupine Development Committee (PDC).

In terms of the latter, no formal bid was made owing to the tokenistic and obfuscatory approach adopted by Lidl, with the owner refusing to positively engage with local residents, something both the ward councillors and myself raised with Lidl's senior management at the time. Instead, it has sought sealed bids for the site and has failed to identify its desired price for the land, despite repeated requests from the PDC. This is indicative of Lidl's strategy throughout this process, with the applicant doing the bare minimum to satisfy the



requirements associated with the site's former status as an Asset of Community Value. As a result, I have regrettably been left to conclude that Lidl has 'played the system' with the aim of securing a favourable decision upon resubmission.

There has been a public house on the Porcupine site continuously since 1688, and as the Inspector noted in 2014 in his Appeal Decision, '*there is significant evidence that the Porcupine Inn has in the past been a useful and valued community facility.*' Planning policy recognises that run down or poorly maintained facilities do not necessarily demonstrate a lack of need, and there is ample evidence that the Porcupine functioned as a profitable and well-managed public house until 2010. The business model of Enterprise Inns has been well-documented and was referenced during the previous application, accounting for the pub's subsequent fall in profit and sale to Lidl. Taken with the sham marketing exercise conducted by Lidl since the appeal dismissal, I would suggest the applicant's claim that a public house on the site in unviable is both flawed and unsubstantiated.

With regard to the current application before the Council, it is clear that very little has materially changed since the previous refusal in 2014. Ultimately, Lidl's proposals still represent an unwelcome overdevelopment of the site that would adversely impact local businesses and neighbouring residential amenity, result in the removal of two protected trees, and most importantly, create serious risks in terms of highway safety.

On the latter, the applicant has again failed to demonstrate how safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all people. There is no question that the proposed development would result in a considerable increase in the volume and character of traffic entering and leaving the site, and the applicant's suggestion that safety concerns can be overcome by narrowing the footway on the northern side of the carriageway – to the detriment of pedestrians, particularly those, young and old, who make use of Mottingham Library – is deeply worrying. Due consideration should also be given to the safety implications of a HGV needing to use the full width of the carriageway, especially in such close proximity to a busy roundabout.

Furthermore, I believe the proposed 33 parking spaces to be insufficient for a store of this size. Indeed, immaterial of the slight decrease in the store's sales area, this is a reduction on previous proposals, with the applicant conceding themselves that this provision would fall short of expected demand at certain times. It is also reasonable to assume that a number of these spaces would be taken up by employees, and with no indication of trolley storage for customers within the car park itself, that trolleys are likely to be dumped across the site. Taken together, it is inevitable that the end result will be spill-out onto the main highway or customers finding nearby on-street parking which is, as you are aware, significantly restricted.

It is disappointing that the applicant has spent so little time addressing concerns on the impact the proposals would have on local businesses and residential amenity. There can be no doubt that nearby independent shops in Mottingham Village will be put at risk by the presence of a large discount store, and no thought has been given to the impact the store will have on either Mottingham Library – a much-relied upon community facility – or the War Memorial, both of which are in the immediate vicinity of the site.



With long opening hours – much longer, it is worth noting, than a public house – residents along Devonshire Road will almost certainly be affected by the proposals. Noise from the car park will impact neighbouring houses from early in the morning until late at night, and the applicant does not specify, other than in general terms, how many daily deliveries will be typically made or at what times of the day. The disturbance this will cause local households should be a key consideration.

For all of these reasons, there continues to be significant local resistance to the proposals. Over the last six years Lidl has demonstrated a flagrant disregard of the wishes of the local community: it has deliberately run down what was a much-loved communal hub, has refused to engage cooperatively with local residents, and now, through these proposals, threatens the character of Mottingham Village and the viability of local independent businesses. It is an opportunistic application and one I trust the Council will reject.

Were it to go before a committee, I would be most grateful if you would circulate this letter to members in advance.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bob Neill'.

Bob Neill MP