



**PLANNING COMMITTEE:** 11 January 2011  
**DIRECTORATE:** Planning and Regeneration  
**HEAD OF PLANNING:** Susan Bridge

**APP: N/2009/0843**                      **Erection of an extension to the existing Sainsbury's food store, including reconfiguration of car park (including car park deck), reconfigured vehicular access, new pedestrian ramp access, new goods on line loading area, and associated works (WNDC Consultation) at Sainsbury Superstore, Gambrel Road / Weedon Road, Northampton as amended by plans received by WNDC on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2010.**

**WARD:**                                      **St James**

**APPLICANT:**                              **Sainsbury's Supermarkets Ltd**  
**AGENT:**                                      **Indigo Planning Ltd**

**REFERRED BY:**                              **Head of Planning**  
**REASON:**                                      **Strategic Significance**

**DEPARTURE:**                                **No**

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**APPLICATION FOR CONSULTATION BY WNDC:**

**1. RECOMMENDATION**

- 1.1 Although there are no objections raised to the principle of the expansion of the store given its substantially reduced floorspace as now proposed in the revised scheme and the proposals generally accord with the tests set out in PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Economic Development, the Council raises a **HOLDING OBJECTION** unless and until:
- 1.2 WNDC are fully satisfied that such an oversized structure is not unsustainable, that adverse trade diversion from other centres does not occur resulting in a significantly adverse impact on town centre vitality and viability and town centre investment and that the overall bulk of the design and car decking is acceptable in this location.

- 1.3 WNDK should ensure that sales floorspace is restricted to the levels proposed in the submission and that the comparison goods offer does not exceed 25% of net sales floorspace. Comparison goods shall be defined as that set out in Appendix A of PPS4. Failure to secure this limitation through planning conditions or a Section 106 agreement would result in a strong objection from Northampton Borough Council.
- 1.4 WNDK should emphasise to Sainsbury's the importance of their presence in the Grosvenor Centre in Northampton town centre and seek methods to maintain their presence in the town.

## **2. THE PROPOSAL**

2.1 The application for an extension to Sainsbury's at Sixfields was submitted to WNDK in October 2009 with the following documents and information:

- Plans
- Planning and Retail Report
- Transport Assessment and Travel Plan
- Design and Access Statement
- Phase 1 Environmental Study
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Air Quality Assessment
- Energy Statement
- Statement of Community Involvement

2.2 After initial discussions with both WNDK and NBC working in tandem, design changes and further retail information were submitted in February 2010, and again in August 2010 and October 2010. This additional information included revised plans, including the final revisions in October 2010, draft heads of terms for an obligation maintaining Sainsbury's presence in the Grosvenor Centre and several retail analysis responses including an investigation into further sequentially preferable sites.

2.3 The initial 2009 proposals were for a 4,644 square metre sales floorspace expansion with a resultant superstore split of 61% convenience goods and 39% comparison goods. This has been substantially reduced through negotiations and the proposal is now for 2,489 square metre sales floorspace, resulting in a proposed superstore with 75% convenience goods and 25% comparison goods. The sales areas are laid out below:

Sq/m	Overall sales area	Convenience sales area	Comparison sales area	Extension	Conv/ comp ratio
Existing	3,559	3,025	534		85:15
2009 proposal	8,203	4,965	3,238	4,644	61:39
Current 2010 proposal	6,048	4,536	1,512	2,489	75:25

- 2.4 The expansion proposals would mean that the store is substantially rebuilt and refurbished with extensions southwards and eastwards towards Gambrel Road and into the car park, which in turn, incorporates a new elevated parking deck.
- 2.5 The main store rises to include a first floor atrium at the south-facing frontage, meeting the first floor car park deck and resulting in two entrances to the store, a lower and upper access with escalators connecting the two floors.
- 2.6 The store would increase in height from largely 7 metres (9 metres at its highest) to 10 metres (12 metres at its highest) to accommodate the new floor.
- 2.7 Much of the first floor sales areas originally proposed have now been omitted after negotiations with the planning case officers because the impact on other centres would have been unacceptable and damaging, but a small sales area for comparison goods and concession space remain. The height of the building proposed would allow space to create a larger first floor area in the future, however this would require a separate planning permission.
- 2.8 It is proposed to modernise and improve the service access from Gambrel Road at the same point as the current access point with a mini-roundabout and a home delivery loading area is added to the northern elevation of the building.
- 2.9 A new access arrangement on Gambrel Road is proposed along with widened and improved 'in and out' lanes towards the parking areas. Car parking overall would reduce from 558 spaces at present to 514 spaces in the proposed decked arrangement. The petrol filling station is proposed to be refurbished and the pedestrian route improved with ramps alongside steps from the Weedon Road subway.

### **3. SITE DESCRIPTION**

- 3.1 The application site is the existing Sainsbury's superstore at Gambrel Road, Sixfields. The store is largely as conceived and permitted in the late 1980s on a 3.1 hectare plot on the north side of Weedon Road.
- 3.2 Customer access is via a tight T-junction with Gambrel Road with service access a short way further along the same road to the north. A Sainsbury's petrol filling station is located on the access road in the south corner of the site and the entire west, south and east boundaries are screened by mature trees, shrubs and hedges. The large free car park for 558 cars is positioned on the south side of the site and it is on this aspect of the store where the main entrance is located.
- 3.3 Sainsbury's Sixfields is a slightly dated 6,880 square metre gross internal area store, with a 7 and 9 metre high roof with a tower over the entrance on the south east corner. The current sales area of 3,559 square metres has 85% of its area devoted to convenience goods with only 534 square metres allowed to be non-food (comparison) sales due to a 15% comparison sales floorspace restriction in an original planning condition.
- 3.4 The surrounding area is dominated by commerce, leisure and the busy roads that pass through at this gateway to the town. To the west over Tollgate Way is a storage centre and Golby's, to the east Sixfields Retail Park, to the south the cinema, football ground and restaurants and to the north and northeast light industrial, storage, tyre fitters, etc.
- 3.5 Sixfields is not a recognised retail centre in terms of the Development Plan or emerging Joint Core Strategy, nor would it be defined as a centre having regard to the guidance given in PPS4.

### **4. PLANNING HISTORY**

- 4.1 86/0646 – Outline shop and car park
- 4.2 87/0973 – Erection of supermarket, car park and petrol filling station (approved with legal obligation to maintain a town centre store for 5 years and control of comparison goods to 15% of overall floorspace)
- 4.3 98/0682 – Store extension and car park revisions – smaller store extension close to the Gambrel Road access, no decision issued.
- 4.4 Various advert and plant permissions from 1988 to the present day.

## 5. PLANNING POLICY

### 5.1 Development Plan

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a planning application to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material planning considerations indicate otherwise. The current Development Plan comprises of the East Midlands Regional Plan, the saved policies of the Northamptonshire County Structure Plan and Northampton Local Plan 1997.

### 5.2 National Policies:

#### **PPS4 – Planning for sustainable economic development**

PPS4 set outs a methodology for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to accommodate and provide for sustainable economic development and in particular an approach for development it defines as ‘town centre’ uses.

Retail is defined as a town centre use by PPS4 and its plan-making policies guide how LPAs should plan positively to establish the qualitative and quantitative need in their areas and then provide sustainable solutions for accommodating that growth.

A central part of this positive approach relies on LPAs applying a sequential approach to site identification with the ‘town centre first’. Sites must be considered first in the town centre, then edge of centre, district centres and then where appropriate local centres. Alternative sequentially preferable sites must be tested to assess whether they are viable, suitable and available and there is an emphasis on applicants being flexible in the sequential search.

For development management purposes, after establishing broader retail need, the impacts of proposals are considered in two ways: a series of planning impacts (Policy EC10); and by a series of retail impacts (Policy EC16). These impacts are referred to as ‘gateway tests’ and should not be found significantly adverse if permission is to be considered.

The planning impacts are:

- Carbon impact
- Accessibility
- Design
- Regeneration
- Employment

The retail impacts for main town centre uses not in a defined centre are:

- Investment in affected centres

- Town centre vitality and viability
- The effect on delivery of Development Plan site allocations out of centre
- Trade diversion from acknowledged centres
- Other locally important impacts

PPS1 - Delivering Sustainable Development  
 PPG13 – Transport  
 PPS23 – Planning and Pollution Control  
 PPG24 – Planning and Noise

**5.3 East Midlands Regional Plan 2009**

Policy 2 – Promoting Better Design  
 Policy 22 - Regional Priorities for Town Centres & Retail Development  
 Policy MKSM SRS Northamptonshire 2 – Northampton Implementation Area  
 Policy MKSM SRS Northamptonshire 3 - Northampton Central Area

**5.4 Northampton Borough Local Plan**

E20 – New Development  
 E40 – Planning and crime and anti-social behaviour  
 T12 – Development requiring servicing

**5.5 Supplementary Planning Guidance**

Planning Out Crime in Northamptonshire SPG 2004

**5.6 Other Relevant Local Documents**

**Pre-submission Draft of the West Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy**

The draft Joint Core Strategy will be considered by the Joint Strategic Planning Committee on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011. This document and its guidance on the retail hierarchy will be available for WNDC to take into consideration when determining this planning application, and reinforces the need to prevent harmful impacts on the town and other defined centres.

**Pre-submission Draft Central Area Action Plan**

One of the key areas in the Plan is to improve the shopping experience in Northampton town centre, including the offer for both comparison and convenience goods to create a prosperous town centre.

**Other Relevant Documents**

Northampton Town Centre Retail Strategy (May 2008) prepared by CACI Ltd for NBC

West Northamptonshire Retail Study 2008 to 2026 (February 2009) prepared by CACI Ltd for West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit

## **6. CONSULTATIONS / REPRESENTATIONS**

### **6.1 NBC Tree Officer – no objections**

## **7. APPRAISAL**

7.1 The application for extending Sainsbury's at Sixfields was submitted in October 2009 and in the interim period there have been a number of policy changes at local, regional and national level. At a local level, the Pre-submission Central Area Action Plan (CAAP) has been published and issued for public consultation under Regulation 27, which identifies a regeneration vision for the town centre including locations for retail growth. Although the Secretary of State had attempted to revoke the East Midlands Regional Plan in July 2010, following a recent High Court decision, it has been reinstated and forms part of the Development Plan (see section 5 above).

7.2 At national level, PPS6 for town centres was superseded almost 12 months ago by PPS4 – Planning for sustainable economic development.

7.3 The Sainsbury's proposal is one of a number of current applications to increase supermarket floorspace in the Northampton. The majority, including this one, of retail applications being submitted are to be determined by WNDC. In considering these applications, NBC works with WNDC following a development team approach to combine the relevant expertise that each authority holds. Both authorities appointed independent retail planning consultants to advise them on the technical attributes of the applications being tabled.

### **Retail Need**

7.4 In planning Northampton, the Borough Planning Authority has prepared numerous retail studies of the town for many years. A range of studies have been compiled including two by CBRE in 2004 and 2006/7, CACI in 2008/9 and by Roger Tym Partnership through the Joint Planning Unit in 2010.

7.5 All the aforementioned studies conclude that there are both comparison and convenience retail floorspace needs in the town to varying degrees.

7.6 PPS4 – Planning for Sustainable Economic Development, the Regional Plan and the emerging Northampton Central Area Action Plan all seek to direct comparison floorspace growth towards the town centre, thus enhancing its vitality and viability in delivering regeneration projects such as the Grosvenor Centre redevelopment. Expansion of retail floorspace which would impact on the town centre and undermine investment proposals would be contrary to national and local policy.

- 7.7 Convenience goods, primarily food and daily shopping, is somewhat different, in that shopping patterns are more generalised and regard should be had to responding to the needs of the community catchment areas. In most cases, the most sustainable locations for convenience retail growth will be in centres, including the town centre, district centres and the established commercial hubs around our town following the principles set out in PPS4.
- 7.8 The retail studies of Northampton identify varying figures for present convenience need (not least due to their different dates of completion), but all suggest there is immediate capacity for growth in food floorspace in the near term.
- 7.9 Although retail need as a planning requirement in development management is downgraded in PPS4 when compared to its predecessor PPS6, there remains a requirement for Local Development Frameworks (LDF) to plan positively by preparing local economic assessments that identify quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in retail provision. In the absence of a fully adopted LDF in Northampton, it is appropriate and reasonable to consider quantitative and qualitative need in determining this consultation response to WNDC. Furthermore, aspects of retail need also feed into the PPS4 impact tests set out below.
- 7.10 From the recent studies, it is clear that there is sufficient headroom for an increase in convenience sales floorspace in Northampton and of the scale proposed by Sainsbury's at 1,511 square metres in this location, without harming the vitality and viability of centres. This is indicated by the retail studies of the town over recent years and by other circumstantial facts such as the high trading levels at this store and others.
- 7.11 Turning to qualitative matters, the Sainsbury's store is almost 25 years old and showing its age in terms of design, layout and condition. Access to the store is not straightforward and car parking can be difficult. The lack of diversity and food range choice on the western side of Northampton is apparent and there is an acknowledged need for a qualitative improvement in convenience offer on this side of town.
- 7.12 Sainsbury's also refer to a long list of improvements that are necessary to bring the store up to modern supermarket standards. It is considered acceptable that the Sainsbury's offer at this site is in need of qualitative improvement and that this weighs in favour of on-site redevelopment of the store.
- 7.13 Comparison goods capacity in Northampton is distinctly different from convenience capacity due to the historic poor health of comparison retailing in Northampton town centre as a result of an unhealthy quantum of out of town comparison floorspace. Evidence of this unfavourable position is longstanding but most recently shown in the NBC 2009 Town Centre Health Check.



- 7.14 PPS4, the Regional Plan and emerging CAAP encourage the growth of the comparison goods floorspace of Northampton to be the substantial engine behind the regeneration of the town centre and a catalyst for a wider economic impact. Studies have consistently shown the leakage of comparison spending by Northampton residents out of centre and in many cases out of town. National and local policy are clear that this is an unsustainable pattern in the long run and it is evident that this trend has detrimentally affected the town centre's viability and vitality.
- 7.15 Sainsbury's propose an additional 978 square metres of comparison goods floorspace in their final revised extended store. The resulting store overall would be split 75:25 to convenience and comparison goods respectively. It is presently split 85:15 in a smaller store. It is acknowledged and accepted that modern large floorplate superstores will have a complementary incidental range of non-food merchandise. The larger the store, usually means the greater the comparison goods area as a proportion of sales area. Most of the newer very large superstores are moving towards offering a 50:50 split of convenience and comparison goods.
- 7.16 The retail studies of Northampton and the evidence submitted by the applicant show a large additional quantitative need for comparison goods shopping in the town up to 2026. The majority of the comparison goods floorspace headroom should be directed to the town centre and in particular the Grosvenor Centre using the sequential approach. Similarly, there is a need for a qualitative improvement in the comparison retail goods offer in the town, giving a better range of stores and goods, improved access and size of stores.
- 7.17 When considering the customer catchment of the enlarged Sainsbury's at Sixfields, it is expected that the majority of their comparison goods shopping needs will be provided by an expanded and improved town centre offer in Northampton. However, it is unrealistic to think that the entirety of these goods will be separated from supermarket shopping and it is reasonable to have a **very limited comparison goods offer** alongside the greatly dominant convenience floorspace at Sainsbury's at Sixfields. This additional 978 square metres of comparison floorspace at Sainsbury's Sixfields is likely to impact on the town centre (as discussed below), but the ratio (75:25) is incidental to the food offer and reasonable on this size of floorplate satisfying qualitative need, especially given the reduced extension aspirations for the store overall.

### **Sequential Test**

- 7.18 The initial extension proposals by Sainsbury's were large and NBC officers were of the opinion that such floorspace was not inseparable from the existing Sixfields store, in other words Sainsbury's could build a successful store in a more sustainable location in the town instead of extending Sixfields to such a significant extent.
- 7.19 To clarify, Sixfields and Sainsbury's at Sixfields is out of centre and Sixfields is not proposed or justified to be a new centre in any current or emerging planning policy document.

- 7.20 Sainsbury's submitted a sequential assessment with their application, briefly looking for suitable, viable and available alternative sites in more central locations. To summarise, NBC and WNDG officers considered this an insufficient investigation and guided Sainsbury's in revisiting and widening their search.
- 7.21 Simultaneously during the application process, Sainsbury's floorspace, and importantly comparison goods aspirations have declined recognising the established policy position, changing the kind of alternative locations Sainsbury's should be looking at elsewhere in the town.
- 7.22 Sainsbury's have a medium sized and longstanding store in the Grosvenor Centre. The expansion of this in the short term is physically difficult and Sainsbury's are an important potential component of the redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre presently taking place with physical redevelopment scheduled to commence in 2014/15 with completion some years later. It is considered that some extra growth of floorspace could happen at the Grosvenor Centre, but not in the timeframe relevant in relation to the current proposal, which seeks immediate development.
- 7.23 There are other town centre and edge of centre opportunities for supermarket development, but the choices available in the emerging CAAP are medium term proposals that are unlikely to come forward in the first phase of the Plan period, 2010-2016.
- 7.24 Following the retail hierarchy approach of PPS4 (broadly the same as PPS6), Sainsbury's must consider other centres and edge of centre locations before looking at store extensions at Sixfields, with a mind to serving the catchment of retail need in the western quadrant of town.
- 7.25 Supermarkets, and particularly superstores, are usually best suited to larger centres, lest they dominate their surrounding commercial neighbours with their retail trading power. The main larger centres on, or near, the western side of town are identified in Appendix 15 of the 1997 Northampton Local Plan, but this Plan did not establish a hierarchy of retail centres (e.g. separately as local and district centres) and is now out of date in terms of PPS4. PPS4 gives guidelines to the type of uses that one might find in district and local centres and the Joint Core Strategy will give the town a solid retail hierarchy in accordance with these guidelines.
- 7.26 The larger centres on this side of town are relatively distant and primarily serve northern and southern catchments respectively. Extending food floorspace in these centres may be appropriate for their respective population catchments, but would create unsustainable movement and trade draw from the western suburbs if these alternative centres were used to serve their food-buying demands. The result would be residents of areas such as Duston having to travel to centres such as Kingsthorpe as a matter of course to carry out grocery shopping trips. This is not considered to be sustainable.

- 7.27 Having dismissed alternatives in defined centres that could serve a similar catchment to Sainsbury's at Sixfields, the applicant was asked to look at alternative sites. These sites, although they may be sequentially preferable, were not available within a reasonable timeframe or suitable for retailing. Other edge of centre and potentially more sustainable sites have been put to Sainsbury's and it is accepted that all of those tabled are either unsuitable, unviable or unavailable to a greater or lesser degree. Therefore, in terms of the sequential approach, there was no reasonable alternative to the expansion of the existing store at Sixfields.
- 7.28 To summarise, a range of sequentially preferable alternatives to extending the Sixfields Sainsbury's have been explored. Since the 2009 Sainsbury's submission, the proposals have shrunk to circa 2,500 square metres sales floorspace and the emerging CAAP has been published showing future development of the town centre.
- 7.29 Sainsbury's commitment to their town centre store is important for the vitality of the town as it maintains a mix of shopping types in the central area and prevents town centre users going out of town for food shopping, particularly for top-up shopping. Sainsbury's commitment to this (they have offered to enter into an agreement to stay in town) and then to potential town centre growth as part of a redeveloped Grosvenor Centre is welcomed in sequential terms. Opening new floorspace out of centre at Sixfields may provide a more commercially viable option for trading in the wider town for Sainsbury's that leads to them pulling out of the town centre to minimise trade diversion from Sixfields. Therefore, the threat of the new improved and extended store at Sixfields resulting in the closure of their more restricted and small-scale store in the Grosvenor Centre necessitates measures to ensure that both stores can continue to trade in tandem, protecting the vitality of the town centre.
- 7.30 There are no immediately available, suitable or viable sequentially preferable alternatives in any relevant centres, edge of centres or more sustainable locations for retail development of the type and scale proposed.
- 7.31 To disaggregate the floorspace proposed would not be the most sustainable solution for the town in retail terms. Sainsbury's do not have a standalone comparison store format which would take the 978m<sup>2</sup> of this floorspace proposed and they rely on the primary purpose of visits being food shopping. No sequentially preferable sites have been identified that would be available, suitable and viable for a disaggregated offer. It is considered that it would be preferable to allow supermarket growth on a site where there are positive qualitative gains to be had such as Sainsbury's at Sixfields, when compared to allowing supermarket growth in other out of centre locations in the western suburbs.

## **Impact**

- 7.32 PPS4 sets five economic development impact criteria (in Policy EC10) and six retail impact criteria for unplanned out of centre retail proposals (in Policy EC16). These have been recently referred to as the 'gateway' tests that must all have no significant adverse impact for development to be acceptable.

**Retail Impact (PPS4 – Policy EC16)**

- 7.33 The national planning policy context for retail applications has changed from PPS6 in 2009, when the application was submitted, to PPS4 in 2010, and to which the applicant has responded.
- 7.34 The aforementioned 'gateway' tests Policy EC16 relate to the retail impact of proposals where they are not in accordance with an up to date Development Plan and are out of centre. The Sainsbury's site is not allocated for retail growth in the saved Northampton Local Plan and is out of centre.
- 7.35 For a number of the 'gateway' tests the impact is neutral or entirely irrelevant. The three main areas of retail impact concern raised by these proposals are (i) the impact on investment in centres within the catchment of the store, (ii) the impact on town centre (or other centre) vitality and viability and (iii) trade diversion from other centres.
- 7.36 Initial retail planning analysis of the Sainsbury's proposals as first submitted in 2009 indicated that the high level of comparison goods floorspace in particular was likely to have a significant impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre, which is not healthy according to recent NBC studies including the Town Centre Healthcheck 2009. There would be damage to the confidence of public and private investors in town centres projects, not least the Grosvenor Centre as reflected by letters of objection from Legal and General and House of Fraser indicating their great concern at the initial Sainsbury's proposals and the effect on persuading prospective tenants to commit to the Grosvenor Centre. It is also likely that the initial scale of the scheme would have harmed the vitality of other centres around Northampton by diverting comparison trade in particular. Therefore, all three relevant tests on retail impact were considered negative at the outset.
- 7.37 Sainsbury's revised the scheme in early 2010 and the retail planning advice to NBC remained that the impact on the town centre would be significantly adverse.
- 7.38 The following and final revision of the Sainsbury's proposals amounts to a 2,489 square metre sales floorspace expansion, comprising 1,511 square metres of convenience space and 978 square metres of comparison space. This is dramatically less comparison goods than the additional 2,394 square metres first proposed (resulting in 3,238 square metres overall) and now equates to an appropriate offer alongside the overall 4,536 square metres of convenience goods in the enlarged store.

- 7.39 Nonetheless, Sainsbury's have still failed to do a robust assessment of trade diversion from other centres when the new lower floorspace was submitted. Earlier iterations of the scheme had shown around a 1% trade diversion from the town centre and of course the scheme has reduced, but even that earlier figure was not agreed. At 1% trade diversion, it is considered that the impact on the town centre is low and not adverse. One could reasonably anticipate a reduction in impact in line with the reduction in sales space, but Sainsbury's have not tendered this information. **WNDC must be satisfied that the evidence to show that the retail impact on the town centre in particular is negligible.**
- 7.40 Sainsbury's have not submitted a detailed cumulative impact assessment, but the parallel retail planning applications presently submitted to WNDC and NBC do not amount to a commitment, as they have not been permitted. PPS4 only seeks cumulative impact appraisals from applicants when there is such a commitment. The combined effect of smaller multiple retail extensions, is a matter of concern and was reinforced by the Nene Valley Retail Park appeal in 2008/9 where an Inspector concluded that to allow a small retail extension would set a dangerous precedent for sequentially non-preferable small extensions (mezzanines, etc) that would have a higher cumulative impact on the viability and vitality of the town centre. This is most pertinent in considering the comparison goods element of the Sainsbury's proposal, but as has already been explained, with an acknowledged qualitative need and in the absence of a sequentially better site for a supermarket or supermarket extension, the overall ratio of 25% comparison goods to 75% convenience goods on this size of floorplate is considered a reasonable commercial mix that will not be significantly adverse or set a precedent for floorspace growth elsewhere.
- 7.41 Referring back to the three most relevant retail impact tests that PPS4 applies to out of town schemes, it is concluded that the impact on town centre vitality and viability and on other town centre investment is likely to be negative, but not of significant adverse impact to warrant objection. Although likely not to be significantly adverse, trade diversion has not been fully assessed in the latest revision of the scheme and therefore a holding objection is recommended.

#### **Planning Impact (PPS4 – Policy EC10)**

- 7.42 The five economic development criteria are for carbon impact, accessibility, design, regeneration and employment.

#### Carbon Impact

- 7.43 The proposals involve refurbishment of the existing, ageing store and result in an energy profile that, according to Sainsbury's submission, is no greater than the existing sales area. This effectively means that the extension will be 'for free' in carbon footprint terms and this is considered positive.

- 7.44 The design however does involve expansion capacity within a heightened superstructure as will be described below, which WNDC must be satisfied does not result in a building that is excessively large and therefore less sustainable to build and operate.

#### Accessibility

- 7.45 The store is not immediately surrounded by residential areas and effectively sits in isolation. Some improvements for pedestrian access are proposed but these are negligible compared with the poor position the store occupies. However, car domination at supermarkets is a long-established pattern and is often a matter of necessity as opposed to choice for the customer. Whilst more sustainable locations may exist in the town, these have already been dismissed in the sequential assessment. Sixfields is a central, and thus accessible, hub in terms of the western suburbs with well-established routes including bus routes. It is understood that the highway authorities raise no objections to the transport measures proposed and therefore raise no further objections to the accessibility of the extended store.

#### Design

- 7.46 The proposals add a large amount of built development and land use into a relatively small and constrained site by virtue of highways bounding all four aspects of the land. Sainsbury's have responded to these constraints by extending upwards, with a deck car park to the south side over the existing car park and bringing the store extensions south and east with an additional floor.
- 7.47 Sainsbury's have responded in their revised plans to design concerns raised by WNDC and NBC officers over the last year or so. There is particular concern about the appearance of the site, not least due to its position on Weedon Road being a gateway to the town, although it is accepted that the Weedon Road frontage is well-screened by vegetation, particularly in summer, and the store and car park are set some distance back from the road.
- 7.48 The design response to the comments made by WNDC and NBC has resolved some of the issues, particularly the visual impact on Weedon Road. But during negotiations the sales floorspace of the store has dramatically reduced to circa 2,500 square metres, yet the bulk of the original design remains, meaning a two storey supermarket with under-utilised spaces and voids within. Sainsbury's have reserved their position so that they would have the scope to expand internal sales space at a future date. This position relies on a presumption that this will be the right place in Northampton to expand retail floorspace in the future, which may not be the case (as discussed in the sequential assessment above). Therefore, an oversized building is proposed on the presumption that future permission will be given. There would appear to be other design responses available to Sainsbury's to prepare for future store growth that do not involve large decked car parks and an additional storey, although Sainsbury's claim otherwise.

- 7.49 It is recommended that NBC ask WDC to be fully satisfied that the oversized design does not result in an excessive amount of materials and energy use, thus unduly increasing the store's carbon footprint contrary to Policy EC10.2a of PPS4, and that the overall bulk of the design is acceptable.

### Regeneration

- 7.50 The extended store does little for the wider regeneration of the town outside of redeveloping and modernising the application site. There is the potential of some trade diversion from the town centre making regeneration there less viable, but this is considered to be likely to very low, but subject to further explanation and investigation by the applicant needs to be confirmed.

### Employment

- 7.51 Whilst the development will provide long-term jobs for the community, given the need to expand retail floorspace, this would happen somewhere in Northampton in any event. Therefore, retail jobs will be provided if developed here or elsewhere and the effect is neutral.

## **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 Supermarkets and superstores are an important part of the town's retailing sector. Most of the current stores are located in various types of centre or at the edge of centres and any new stores or new floorspace must follow the retail hierarchy set out in PPS4 with the town centre first.
- 8.2 NBC background studies and the submission of assessments by applicants show a quantitative need for more convenience and comparison floorspace and a better quality of offer for Northampton residents. It is accepted that there is a quantitative and qualitative need for convenience retail floorspace in the western suburbs of the town, but at a limited level before adverse retail impacts occur in the existing centres reducing their vitality and viability.
- 8.3 The Sainsbury's at Sixfields extension scheme has been dramatically reduced from early aspirations down to 1,511 m<sup>2</sup> of convenience sales area and 978 m<sup>2</sup> of comparison sales area and it now meets the qualitative and quantitative needs in the western part of town.
- 8.4 No suitable or viable town centre or sequentially better sites are immediately available and the Pre-submission Joint Core Strategy will quantify and direct future growth to revised centres in due course.
- 8.5 Store extensions are an acceptable method of serving retail need when sequentially preferable sites are not available. The growth of Sainsbury's will utilise existing infrastructure and allows the building to be made more energy efficient. Similarly, the quality of convenience goods offer needs to improve and these proposals allow this to occur.

- 8.6 These positive elements of the proposal outweigh the potential to wait for better locations to come forward in preferable centres.
- 8.7 The retail impact of the proposals is considered to be low and much reduced by the scaled down scheme that Sainsbury's have most recently submitted. Although WNDC must be satisfied that trade diversion from the town centre is further diminished in the reduced scheme, it is anticipated that investment in the town centre will be protected and the vitality and viability of the town centre is not significantly reduced by this scale and location of growth.
- 8.8 The comparison floorspace proposed has reduced from 2,394 m<sup>2</sup> to 978 m<sup>2</sup> resulting in a 75:25 convenience to comparison split in the store respectively. This ratio and level of comparison goods is considered duly commensurate and suitably incidental to the food sales element and satisfies qualitative needs. The impact on the regeneration of the town centre is much reduced and no longer significantly adverse.
- 8.9 In terms of planning impact and the tests set out in Policy EC10 of PPS4, the proposal is not considered significantly adverse in relation to accessibility, regeneration, jobs, however WNDC should be satisfied that the design is not excessively large thus having a greater carbon and visual impact than is necessary.

## **9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 NBC Town Centre Healthcheck Oct 2009 (RTP)
- 10.2 Northampton Town Centre Retail Strategy (May 2008) prepared by CACI Ltd for NBC.
- 10.3 West Northamptonshire Retail Study 2008 to 2026 (February 2009) prepared by CACI Ltd for West Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit

## **11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 None.

## **12. SUMMARY AND LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN**

- 12.1 In reaching the attached recommendations regard has been given to securing the objectives, visions and priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan together with those of associated Frameworks and Strategies.

<b>Position:</b>	<b>Name/Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Author:</b>	Richard Boyt	1/12/2010
<b>Development Control Manager Agreed:</b>	Gareth Jones	29/12/2010





Name: SW  
Date: 22nd December 2010  
Scale: 1:2000  
Dept: Planning  
Project: Site Location Plan

Title  
**Sainsbury's Superstore, 20 Gambrel Road**

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