
Tesco Creates More Uproar in Orpington



Tesco have submitted a revised planning application for the Station Road, Orpington site that increases the retail space by 90%.

In 2005, Tesco obtained planning approval for a redevelopment of the multi-storey car park in Station Road, Orpington. An artist's impression of the proposed building is given above. This was despite opposition from many people on the grounds of inadequate car parking provision, the likely increase in traffic congestion, and the impact on local residents. Businesses who occupy the adjacent offices were particularly concerned about the car parking provision, and other retailers in the High Street were worried about the impact on their customers due to the proposed size of the store.

More information on the history of this development and how Tesco finessed the planning system and persuaded councillors to support it can be seen on our web site at

www.bromleytransport.org.uk/Orpington_car_park_HTML.htm

The objections submitted by the group that represented the combined interests of the above objectors can also be seen at:

www.bromleytransport.org.uk/OCPAG.htm

Retail Space Almost Doubles

The new application states that "Tesco wishes to provide a substantially wider range of retail goods..." by introducing "a full cover mezzanine floor and reorganising the use of other space". The new "net sales area" will be 7,423 square metres in comparison with 3,917 square metres in the former plans, so the space will almost double.

In fact Tesco estimates that the store turnover will increase from £39.9 million under the old plans by 2008, to £73.3 million.

Car Parking Provision Reduced

Other changes in the new plans are the following revisions to car parking provision:

Public car parking provision down from 210 to 199
Offices car parking down from 255 to 219
Residential parking up from 32 to 43
Store staff parking up from 450 to 478

That makes an overall reduction from 947 to 939 when BBRAG had previously shown that the figure for parking provision was grossly inadequate to cope with existing usage already. And now there will be even more parking required to cope with more shoppers at the store, and to provide parking for additional shop staff (after all turnover is forecast to be up 83%)

However, Tesco is still saying that “there will be sufficient public car parking available within Orpington Town Centre to cater for the existing levels of demand”.

Tesco Admits More Traffic Will Appear

Tesco concedes that the larger retail space will cause an increase in traffic. They estimate 19% on Fridays and 29% on Saturdays. Is this realistic bearing in mind the extra turnover that is forecast, and the increased attractiveness of the store as a “destination” shopping centre? It seems very doubtful. And we previously pointed out that there is already major traffic congestion on Station Road during rush hours which the new store, even in its former incarnation, could only make worse.

Almost certainly more traffic will divert down the back streets, increasing the impact of noise and pollution on local residents, and having a negative impact on road safety.

Tesco Goes Back on Its Previous Comments

Some readers may remember the public meeting that was held to discuss the original development. At that meeting Tesco said they had no plans to include a mezzanine floor, in response to a specific question from a member of the public.

Politicians Get it Wrong Again

Both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats have circulated flyers to Orpington residents about the latest Tesco proposals as part of their election campaigns. The Conservative one says: “The Car Park is coming to the end of its structural life”. This is a statement that has been made by other people, including a former Liberal Democrat councillor, but it is simply untrue.

I have obtained all the past reports to the council on the existing car park using the Freedom of Information Act and although there were doubts raised some years ago about the structural integrity of the building following the collapse of a multi-storey car park elsewhere in the country, in fact it later was accepted to be in a basically sound condition. It would need some refurbishment in the future to retain it in use and to generally modernise it, which could easily have been paid for out of recent profits from the car park revenue (it has been exceedingly profitable of late as little has been spent on maintenance). But it certainly does not need rebuilding, and potentially has many years of useful life still left.

Make Sure You Object

If you want to stop this new proposal, it is important that you put your comments in writing to Bromley Council. Please write to: The Chief Planner, London Borough of Bromley, Stockwell Close, Bromley, BR1 3UH quoting reference DC/06/01277/FULL1. Your objections should arrive before the end of April 2006.

It is of course just possible that if Tesco cannot obtain approval for the additional retail space, then they might cancel the whole project, so do make sure you object again even if you submitted objections to the previous application (you will need to repeat many of the same arguments of course as this is a separate application).

An Interest Declared

The author of this note has to declare an interest. After seeing the way that Tesco ran rings around local councillors, and finessed the planning regulations to maximise their own interests during the consideration of the previous planning application, he purchased some shares in the company for his wife a few months ago.

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21 April 2006