

Good afternoon and thank you for letting me address the Inquiry.

My name is Paul Gadd. I'm the leader of Saffron Walden Town Council and I'm speaking on behalf of the Council.

We object to the application on 3 grounds, which we believe make the application unsustainable for the purposes of the NPPF.

Our first ground is the loss of valuable retail space. As you will be aware, the last Retail Capacity Study produced for Uttlesford District Council, in 2018, identified a major shortage of comparison retail shopping space, and could identify no suitable sites within Saffron Walden. As the Local Plan period extends this shortfall gets worse. In the last 10 years a number of retail schemes have been suggested within Saffron Walden, none of which has come forwards, and even the potentially available sites have extremely limited capacity. The Homebase site is unusual in being a relatively large retail site which is within easy walking distance of Saffron Walden town centre and within easy walking distance of a large number of houses. There is no suitable replacement site for it.

As you know the NPPF sets out a very clear policy preference for retail facilities using a sequential test - preference must be given to town centre sites, following these, edge of centre sites, and finally out of centre sites are a last resort. The 2018 Retail Study concludes that the town centre of Saffron Walden does not have the premises to accommodate the required additional comparison retail space, and nor are there any suitable edge of centre sites identified, or indeed any sites within the town development limits. Any new retail development of the size identified by the Retail Study must necessarily therefore be out of town.

The application site is well within the town and thus would, according to the NPPF, take precedence over an out of town site. Because of the identified need for retail premises, if permission were to be granted, the effect would be to change a required retail site from within town to out of town, in clear opposition to the policy direction of the NPPF.

Therefore, it is not appropriate to change use of this site away from A1 use.

There is no similar NPPF policy preference for locating Care Homes within towns. I imagine that you will hear evidence separately on need but there seems also to be no shortage of care homes or similar facilities in Saffron Walden, with a new facility to the north of Radwinter Road, planning permission having been granted for one to the south of Radwinter Road next to Tesco, and in just the last month the promoters of the Printpack site in Saffron Walden have publicised their proposals for further sheltered accommodation and extra care facilities. Since submitting our objection we have also become aware of the opening of a care home in neighbouring Newport; it opened at the start of the year and so far only 7 of roughly 40 units are occupied.

The Applicant will no doubt claim that there is a future need, but in our view it is clear that there is no current need for a new care home, whereas there is a very clear existing need for the Homebase. Replacing a central retail facility with a care facility would therefore exacerbate the lack of retail space, be contrary to the sequential requirements of the NPPF and have no compensating advantages for the purposes of the NPPF sustainability balance since there is no policy weighting given to the positioning of care homes.

Our second ground is the lack of car parking facilities, with the Applicant proposing 30 spaces rather than the Essex requirement for 42 spaces, or only just over 2/3 of the required spaces. Public transport serving Saffron Walden is extremely limited, and almost every year reduces. In our written objection we stated our concerns about fly-parking. The streets around Homebase are all heavily congested and any spare parking is very hard to find in non-Covid times.

Our final ground for objection is the lack of green space and the positioning of it. To summarise briefly, there is very little green space, what there is is placed right next to 2 busy roads, and it is well below road levels. As everyone knows pollutants are heavier than air and they fall, and they would fall onto any occupant of the green space brave enough to stand the traffic noise. The layout of the proposed home is completely unsuitable from a sustainability perspective.

We request therefore that the Application is rejected.

Thank you.

22 July 2020