

A recent report by CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), entitled *Supermarket-led development: asset or liability?* supports residents' call for a more imaginative redevelopment of Leigate.

The Leigate Redevelopment Working Group represents local residents in seeking an appropriate redevelopment of the Leigate shopping centre. A recent report by CABE, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, supports the points that we have been making in our discussions with the developer, St Modwen. We believe it also puts a firm responsibility on Lewisham's planners to insist on any scheme respecting both Lewisham's and national planning policy. It also requires the planners and the council generally to assist the local community in achieving its objectives.

CABE makes the following points:

- Supermarket developments often consist of a large plain rectangular building and a car park. This can undermine regeneration, local character and sense of place, and compound traffic problems. Given that developers are so well resourced, schemes should be reasonably expected **to make a positive contribution** to the locality and to wider prosperity.
- In most schemes it is clear that the basic model for a supermarket on an out-of-town brownfield site has been transported to a town centre setting. It is time for supermarkets to **think more** about their impact on the place where they arrive.
- A well integrated scheme, **designed in response to community need and local context** can inject economic vitality and reinforce the primary shopping area with a lively mix of commercial and other non-retail uses. Weak design will result in a scheme that is a liability rather than an asset.
- A local authority that has a **good, up-to-date land use policy** for the site can refuse a scheme that does not fit its aspirations.
- Where councils **have the confidence** to stand firm and use existing national or local policy to support their case, they can negotiate better outcomes for their communities. It is in everyone's interest to get a good scheme first time round. It is essential that the core strategy and associated documents such as area action plans clearly communicate what planners expect to see in terms of design quality.
- The best mix for a site should emerge from **collaboration** with the communities that use the area.
- The scale of the supermarket building is determined by many factors including the size of the nearest competing store but it should above all **relate to the site**.
- Planning guidance (PPS4) requires supermarket development to **enhance the established character** and diversity of the town and recommends that local authorities ensure that operators demonstrate flexibility in terms of floor space and site configuration.

- The proposal should demonstrate the thinking behind routes through and within the site. It should provide evidence that **connections through the neighbourhood will be maintained and enhanced**. Positioning large structures so they block the routes that people instinctively want to walk should be avoided. For most schemes, creating a pedestrian link to the rest of the town centre is of significant commercial value.
- Housing developments should provide a decent quality environment for residents, including clear and safe access routes home and a **real “address”** – a proud and visible front door to the apartments from the street.
- **Public space on the site should be people-oriented and supportive of neighbourhood activity**, for instance by hosting a local market. A good masterplan will generate a series of logical routes and generous, broad links that people would want to use, day and night. Strong landscaping helps to define character and a sense of place.
- Current planning policy already puts planners **in a strong position** to secure retail developments that respond to the local environment as well as meet the demands of business. It helps local authorities to resist arguments that in tough economic times they must lower their expectations and approve projects with they might regret five years on when the plans come to fruition.
- Changes to the planning system enable communities to take the lead in shaping their surroundings. Planning officers will be required to provide **a greater depth of support** and provide enough data to help local people make well informed decisions.
- A common reason for permitting weak schemes is prioritising the short-term value of the developer’s investment over its long-term impact on **the quality of place**.

CABE was the government’s advisor on architecture, urban design and public space in England. Its job was to influence and inspire the people making decisions about the built environment. It championed well-designed buildings, spaces and places. Government funding was withdrawn in 2010 and it merged with the Design Council with the status of a charity. It remains focused on improving the quality of the built environment. The *Supermarkets* report was published in 2010.