

PORTFOLIO: ECONOMY AND PLANNING

CABINET – 3 SEPTEMBER 2003

PETITION RECEIVED RELATING TO DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS IN RINGWOOD TOWN CENTRE

1. At Council on 21st July a petition was received “calling for a referendum regarding the planning application lodged by UCG Ringwood for the redevelopment of Ringwood Town Centre (Application no. 75580)”.
2. There are currently two planning applications submitted by the owners of the Furlong Centre (UCG/ UCG Ringwood), both of which remain undetermined.
3. The two planning applications are:
 - Application Number 68762: submitted March 2000: Retail development proposing an additional 9000 sq. m. (gross) floorspace in the Furlong car park area of Ringwood Town Centre.
 - Application Number 75580: submitted July 2002: A substantially revised scheme proposing 12,789 m.sq. additional town centre floorspace, being primarily retail floorspace and including relocation of a Safeway’s supermarket, together with a cinema.
4. Although the proposed development in both schemes has been substantially on land within the Council’s ownership, the Council has not been party to the development proposals. Its only involvement in the schemes has been in its role as the local planning authority. The planning applications have not been determined yet partly because of technical issues that remain to be resolved.
5. Members need to consider whether a referendum is the right way forward in the current circumstances. Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 advises that: “... *when determining planning applications they (the members of the local planning authority) must take into account any relevant views on planning matters expressed by neighbouring occupiers, local residents and any other third parties along with all other material considerations. However, local opposition or support for a proposal is not in itself a ground for refusing or granting planning permission, unless that opposition or support is founded upon valid planning reasons which can be substantiated.*”
6. There is nothing in law that requires a Council to hold a referendum on receipt of a petition such as that handed in at the last Council meeting although the Council could, of course, hold a poll of some sort if it chose to do so.
7. There has already been public consultation about the future of Ringwood town centre and it may be more productive to develop ideas with the local community and its representatives rather than hold a referendum on the current planning applications.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. If a referendum were held on a similar basis to a normal election, the costs involved could be up to £8,000 or £9,000. These costs could be reduced by reducing the hours of voting etc.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

9. These will be considered in detail in deciding the planning applications.

CONCLUSION

10. The value of carrying out a referendum on the planning applications is very limited as a referendum cannot commit the Council to a particular decision. However, it is clear that the uncertainty relating to the two planning applications being undecided is undesirable. The applicants have been asked if they are willing to withdraw them, but if not then they should be determined by Planning Development Control Committee.

ECONOMY AND PLANNING PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S COMMENTS

11. As owners of land included in this application, the District Council has not been involved to any extent in the drawing up of these two planning applications. In these circumstances it is unlikely that any development along the lines proposed would proceed without the Council's full participation and I would be seriously concerned about the impact of the proposals on Ringwood town centre. No support from the Council would be considered without further public consultation. Therefore a referendum need not be considered at this stage and I recommend that the Planning Development Control Committee proceeds to determine the two applications as soon as possible.

RECOMMENDATION:

12. **(a) That the Cabinet asks the Planning Development Control Committee to determine the planning applications (refs: 68762 and 75580) as soon as possible;**
(b) That the proposal to hold a referendum on the planning applications be not supported.

Background Papers: "Hands off Ringwood" Petition (placed in Members' Room)

Further Information: Louise Evans (023 8028 5359) or Graham Ashworth (023 8028 5352), Policy and Plans Team.