

## Mansfield Local Plan Examination – Main Matters, Issues & Questions

Response of Aldergate Properties Limited April 2019

### MATTER 7

This response to the Inspector's Matters is additional to, and does not replace our earlier submissions upon which we still rely (and which are attached for ease of reference, to avoid unnecessary duplication in this response and because we are not sure whether the Inspector has seen other than the summaries produced by the Council).

#### ***Main Matter 7 - Whether or not the plan will contribute to the vitality and viability of Mansfield town centre, the District Centres and Local Centres***

##### Response

We will not repeat our previous representations but would reinforce our firm opinion that this chapter of the Plan departs from National Policy. As drawn, its policies are likely to undermine rather than protect and enhance the vitality & viability of the District's town centres. We note the Council's reluctance (Responses to RT8) to duplicate the provisions of the NPPF but fear that brevity may harm clarity.

The Council also appear to express the view (Response to RT10) that the Local Plan will have more weight than the NPPF when it has been adopted. We are not sure that that is correct. Whilst it will have more weight than the Publication Draft, we do not believe that it will carry more weight than the NPPF 2019. There is some tension, between using the NPPF 2012 as a measure of Plan compliance, and subsequent use of the Plan's Policies for decisions on planning applications - for which NPPF 2019 will be a material consideration. There is something to be said therefore in favour of having Plan Policy compliant with the current NPPF to avoid arguments that the Plan is out of date.

#### ***1 Is the 500 sqm threshold for impact assessments in Policy RT1 based on robust evidence? Are the proposed new Local Centres at Berry Hill (Policy SUE3) and Pleasley Hill Farm (Policy SUE1) justified by the evidence?***

##### Response

We support the adoption of a local threshold of 500 sq m for Mansfield town centre but based on a gross floorspace of 500 sq m rather than as drafted on a net basis. We note the Council's reason for using net is, apparently based, on "informal" advice from PINS. We have not seen that advice but in any event, that does not provide sound justification for the use of net areas – with all the difficulties that presents.

The National Planning Guidance refers to gross retail floorspace in respect of the "default threshold" which it defines as;

*"Gross retail floorspace (or gross external area) is the total built floor area measured externally which is occupied exclusively by a retailer or retailers, excluding open areas used for the storage, display or sale of goods."*

There are no sound reasons for this Plan to differ from the use of gross floorspace, nor does the evidence base suggest any local reason to depart from its use.

The Inspector reporting on the Waveney District Council Local Plan) found in his report of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019 ([consult.waveney.gov.uk/gf2.ti/f/943170/47502213.1/PDF/-/Final\\_Inspectors\\_Report.pdf](https://consult.waveney.gov.uk/gf2.ti/f/943170/47502213.1/PDF/-/Final_Inspectors_Report.pdf));

*“The principle of a locally-determined threshold for an Impact Assessment is set in paragraph 26 of the NPPF and Doc C8 details the justification for the 350sqm threshold level in Waveney. This evidence, which amongst other things considers the average size of retail units in the district’s retail centres, their vitality, viability and vulnerability and the size of recent out of centre development, is persuasive.”*

**In fixing that threshold Waveney Council had drawn on consultant’s advice in Inquiry Document C8 and which records at Paragraphs 1.7 and 1.8;**

*“1.7 A local impact threshold for new retail development provides local planning authorities with more scope in assessing and considering the impact of new edge and out-of-centre floorspace on the vitality and viability of their respective town, district and local centres, including both trading impact on existing floorspace and also the potential impact on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in accordance with the NPPF (Paragraph 26).*

*1.8 Recent retail trends indicate that there is a greater tendency for the development of smaller retail schemes at out-of-centre locations nationally and locally (and also, on an individual unit basis, a trend towards slightly larger units for some retailers – but still typically below 2,500 sqm gross). In many cases, proposals are below the NPPF’s default threshold, and where a local threshold is not in place, applicants often do not have to undertake an impact assessment. Notwithstanding, this is no guarantee that such proposals might not significantly and adversely impact on the role, function, vitality and viability of a District’s network of centres, either individually or cumulatively over a period of time.”*

**It may be of some help to consider other recently set thresholds, many in nearby locations, as shown in the table below.**

Town	Threshold (sq m)	Plan Date	Plan Status
Melton Mowbray	200 GROSS	2018	Adopted
Newark on Trent	400 GROSS	2019	Adopted
Arnold	500 GROSS	2018	Adopted
Beeston	500 GROSS	2018	Examined
Hereford City	700 GROSS	2015	Adopted
Nottingham City	1000 GROSS	2018	Examined

A 500 sq m gross threshold for Mansfield town centre is justified by the evidence base. It reflects its vulnerability to out of centre retailing, the fact that the average size of retail unit within the town is only around 210 sq m, and the limited number of units in excess of 500 sq m (Para 7.5 at R1).

Whilst threshold levels may not be directly related to the size of a centre, lower thresholds are we believe appropriate in the case of the District Centres and even lower still in

respect of “local centres” (should any remain following review of their function) to reflect the fact that they are vulnerable to impact from even smaller out of centre proposals.

We are not convinced that the Retail Hierarchy set out in RT1 is justified in ranking all Local Centres as town centres. We note that the current Adopted Plan contained only 3 Local Centres whilst the current proposal increases that number to 8 including those within SUE’s. We are not aware that any recent out of centre proposals have been required to carry out sequential/impact testing of local centres, only of Mansfield town centre and its district centres.

The National Policy Guidance excludes from its definition of town centre, small shopping areas, which are of purely neighbourhood significance. The Council’s justification for the retail elements of the SUE’s is that retailing is intended only to serve immediate day to day needs of the new housing (and only then, where those needs not already being met locally). There is no need or justification for new “town centres” per se.

Existing town centres should be the beneficiaries of and supported by expenditure capacity generated in the SUE’s. It is very disappointing to note from the Council’s responses on SUE3 that a Sequential Test was NOT carried out on the proposed retail element of this development before permission was granted. One has not been carried out to date.

At 1600 sq m the additional retail allocation at Pleasley Hill Farm is unjustifiable. At that scale, it is far in excess of local needs, and is likely to further harm the ability to achieve qualitative improvements in Mansfield town centre.

***2 Are the requirements in Policy RT2 reasonable and justified and does the policy provide an appropriate framework for further policy guidance? Is this contained in the Local Development Scheme (K4a)?***

Response

Support proposed modification to “negotiate” rather than secure.

***3 How have the specific percentage and sales area thresholds in Policy RT3 been arrived at and are they based on robust evidence? Is the designation of secondary shopping frontages relevant having regard to changing retail trends?***

Response

We have nothing further to add at this point.

***4 Will Policy RT4 be effective in securing qualitative improvements to Mansfield town centre? Why is the requirement in paragraph 2 restricted to major development?***

Response

We have nothing further to add at this point.

***5 Is the scale of retail and leisure development proposed in site allocation RT6a at Ransom Wood Business Park justified and would this have any implications for the viability and vitality of Mansfield town centre or any of the District and Local Centres?***

**Response**

We believe this question relates to RT6b, rather than RT6a.

In short the answer to the first part of this question is no, for the reasons already given. The justification of this proposed retail allocation is somewhat confused and the Council's responses to our objections appear to rest on two reasons:

1. The findings of the D2N2 Visitor Accommodation Strategy – The Report of Key Findings (at Page 60) simply records that “a hotel site is currently being marketed at Ransom Wood Business Park and that there is live budget hotel interest”.
2. Meeting the needs of the occupiers of the Business Park.

Whilst it may be (or have been) correct for the D2N2 Report to suggest the Mansfield needs a hotel (one is now under construction in the town centre) and to record this site as a potential location, that is not justification for a retail allocation.

Quite how “local needs” can equate to an allocation of 1750 sq m of retailing is beyond our comprehension. We also query the necessity for any “allocation” for retail development for immediate local needs – which is not established in the evidence base and in any event for which a generic (rather than site specific) criterion based policy would suffice.

The site is not within a town centre; is not adjacent to a town centre nor does it connect well with any nearby centres.

The immediate area is largely commercial and industrial in nature and there are very few “chimney pots” nearby such that any development would have to draw trade from a very much wider area. Regulation 19 Responses seem to imply that such development would then be subject to the Sequential and that Impact Tests would need to be satisfied. Quite how that could be done after allocation is unclear.

The site has not been Sequentially Tested (but would fail that test), nor has the impact its development would have upon past, present or future investment in any town centre been considered.

We are unsure of how this sites promotion for alternate uses (Regulation 19 Responses) renders this site unsuitable for employment purposes. It is well related to existing B1 and other Employment development and there is no evidence to suggest that B Class development is either unsuitable or not viable at this site.

***6 Is the allocation of sites with planning permission in Policy RT7 justified?***

**Response**

The Council's Regulation 19 response does not justify other than the mere recording of "out of centre commitment" permissions and the amount of permitted floorspace which has been included within its calculations of quantitative capacity. For the sake of clarity town centre and edge of centre "commitment sites" should be allocated – probably more appropriately under Policy R6. Future applications, on the remaining "commitments", should the existing permissions lapse, would then fall to be considered under a generic criterion based policy covering out of centre proposals. Support for this approach is found in the wording of NPPF Paragraph 23 bullet points 8 and 9.

***7 The following questions apply to Policies RT8, RT9 and RT10:***

***a. Is the policy clear and will it provide sufficient guidance for decision making?***

**Response**

We believe these policies are poorly drafted, are not sufficiently clear, and are likely to lead to inconsistent and poor planning decisions contrary to Government Policy and render the Plan unsound. RT10 side-steps the Sequential Test. Any proposals on the existing Retail Parks (and on any out of centre sites) in the District must only be dealt with based on robustly drafted and robustly applied criterion based policies - to include the sequential and impact tests of the Framework.

We cannot agree with the Council's PD/335 response that Policy RT 9 has been carefully worded (even with the proposed explanatory text amendment) to preclude other than "corner shop" development. At 250 sq m any retail unit is highly likely to need to draw its trade from a catchment far in excess of that appropriate to a neighbourhood shopping function. In addition, whilst we agree that neighbourhood Parades do not "form part of the sequential test", it does not follow that they should not be afforded policy protection – which appears to be at least partially provided by Policy IN7. We see no reason why valuable neighbourhood facilities should not be protected from the impact – whether individual or cumulative – from out of centre proposals.

***b. Is it based on a robust evidence base?***

**Response**

The Council's Regulation 19 Responses do not indicate that these policies are robustly based. It is incorrect to state the Policy R10 should not dictate a minimum size of unit, on the basis that that would apply to the existing Retail Park. There are Conditions in place on the existing to prevent sub division (and control the range of goods sold) specifically to prevent changes in character to units which would harm the town centre. Those types of planning condition are in common use to protect town centres. We note the proposed modification to the explanatory text ( M70) but in our view that isn't sufficient. A generic rather than site specific policy is to be preferred and which would apply to any out of centre applications, including at the retail parks). It would encompass the NPPF requirements for sequential & impact/investment assessment and provide that, where

permitted, such permissions would contain conditions to restrict the range of goods to be sold and the minimum floorspace of any unit to protect the town centre.

We would also add that there is nothing wrong in principle with large town centre units selling bulky goods. The design & appearance of Retail Warehouses can take many forms and need not be restricted to “shed like” appearance, nor necessarily with flexibility need they be inappropriate to town centre sites.

***c. How will the policy be implemented and would it be flexible to respond to specific circumstances including viability?***

**Response**

We see no reference to such as to viability in the policies or the evidence base.

***d. Is the policy positively prepared, justified by the evidence and consistent with national policy and will it be effective? Are any modifications necessary for soundness?***

**Response**

Without wishing to repeat earlier arguments may we restate that the Sequential and Impact Tests of the Framework should not be side stepped by Local Plan Policy.

***8 Will the plan provide the quantitative as well as qualitative needs for retail and leisure development over the plan period and should any further sites be allocated to meet the long term requirement for comparison floorspace having regard to Table 7.11 of the plan?***

**Response**

The Plan Policies do nothing to ensure that the qualitative needs of Mansfield town centre are secured. Unless the town centre is firmly put first then we feel its qualitative needs will remain unmet.

At Paragraph 3.12 of Document R1, it records, drawing on earlier reports, that the absence of a food supermarket in Mansfield town centre is “a key qualitative shortfall”.

The qualitative shortcomings are referenced again at Para 5.12 which states;

“It is recommended in the 2014 Addendum that any *additional provision should be concentrated in Mansfield town centre in the first instance, as there is currently no supermarket provision in the town centre following the closure of the Tesco at Stockwell Gate (with the exception of limited provision in the Marks & Spencer store). A supermarket in the town centre would further enhance the attractiveness of the town centre as a retail destination (i.e. It would give residents another reason to visit, with likely linked-trips benefits for other retailers), and the strong accessibility of the town centre by public transport means that provision would be readily accessible by residents in deprived areas to the east and west of the town centre.*” (Our emphasis applied)

We believe, as does Mansfield's town centre B.I.D, that out of centre retailing is extremely damaging to Mansfield's future prosperity.

In our view too many out of centre consents have been given in the recent past. The Court has agreed the Council has not followed Policy and it is therefore essential in our opinion that the Policies of this plan are unambiguously clear in putting the town centre first. This is particularly true in respect of the qualitative need for a supermarket in Mansfield town centre given that the quantitative capacity has been seriously eroded by out of centre stores.

The Council's less than rigorous approach to out of centre development has caused harm already. Footfall has fallen, rents have fallen and vacancies have increased. We would invite the inspector to walk the town centre, particularly the once thriving secondary shopping streets, if she has not already done so.

The evidence base confirms (including at paragraphs 6.6 & 6.7) that the short to medium term quantitative needs can be met on existing identified sites.

We believe the Plan's proposed early review (within 5 years – IM1) in respect of retail provision is an appropriate time to consider the long-term need of Mansfield and to decide whether additional allocations are needed. In passing, we note that IM1 doesn't include explicit reference to retail matters, although these are referenced in the explanatory text and in Appendix 13 (monitoring/triggers). That time line would accord with the Framework 2019 at Paragraph 85(d) and the uncertainty of longer term need and capacity predictions.

***9 Is the approach to hot food takeaways in Policy RT11 justified by the evidence and consistent with national policy and guidance?***

**Response**

We have nothing further to add at this point.

***10 Overall, do Policies RT1 to RT11 represent a positively prepared strategy for the town centre, District and Local Centres? Are any main modifications necessary for soundness?***

**Response**

We regret that the Council has not taken up our suggestion to re cast this Chapter of the Plan in its entirety. It is confused, poorly drafted, ineffective and not compliant with the Framework. Nothing in the Council's Regulation 19 responses sways us from this view. The Plan lacks a credible criterion based policy in respect of out of centre "main town centre use" development proposals – instead opting for out of centre "allocations" contrary to the approach of the NPPF 2012.

## **Representations - Mansfield District Council - September 2018 Publication Draft Local Plan**

These representations are submitted by Aldergate Properties Ltd and its “sister companies” (Aldergate). We have made substantial investment in Mansfield District and its town centre. Aldergate own significant property interests including retail and office premises, and land and buildings within the district and Mansfield town centre. The companies and their directors have brought forward many successful schemes over the past thirty or so years.

In particular we own the former Courtaulds Mill site in Belvedere Street; adjoining the new multi million pound Transport Interchange in Mansfield Town Centre. This site has planning permission for town centre uses including retail. We therefore have a keen interest in a successful and thriving town centre.

These representations relate to **Section 3 – Spatial Strategy (Policies S2 and S4) and Section 7 – Retail (Policies RT1 to RT11 inclusive)**. To avoid unnecessary repetition they are submitted as a single representation.

We commented on the previous stage of preparation of the plan and although some changes have been made in the Publication Draft Plan it remains our firm conviction that the Plan is unsound, unjustified, ineffective and not legally compliant.

As Mr Justice Ouseley observed by in his High Court decision<sup>1</sup> on our application for Judicial Review (Appendix 1);

***...It is the purpose of the planning system to control development, that is to permit, prevent, encourage, inhibit or limit and condition it, so that the individual private or commercial interest and the broader public interest meet in reconciliation however uneasily...***

The Plan fails to do that.

For retail (and other town centre uses) the relevant policies are set out in Paragraphs 23 & 24 of the Framework<sup>2</sup>. These set very strong “town centre first” principles, which at Paragraph 24 positively require retail to be located in town centres rather than elsewhere. These policy requirements are continued in the 2018 Framework<sup>3</sup>.

As drafted the Plan is contrary to both its own strategic vision of the town centre (**7.2 & 7.12**) and the Framework.

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<sup>1</sup> Aldergate Properties Ltd v Mansfield District Council: Neutral Citation Number: [2016] EWHC 1670 (Admin) @ Paragraph 37

<sup>2</sup> By virtue of “saving” provisions the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 is applied to the “testing” of this Local Plan

<sup>3</sup> At Paragraph 85 onwards.



The Draft Plan contains policies, which encourage and allocate out of centre locations for retail uses without considering either the sequential test or the effect that such development would have on the town centre or on past, current or future investment in it. The plan explicitly states that the sequential test **will not** be applied in the case of development within **or adjacent** to two existing Retail Parks. In contrast the Framework says at Paragraph 27:

***Where an application fails to satisfy the sequential test or is likely to have significant adverse impact ... it should be refused.***

Far from enhancing or even preserving the health of Mansfield's town centre this Plan will be positively harmful to it. Retailers will be drawn out of Mansfield town centre. Retailers, developers and investors will have no confidence that their investment in the centre will be protected.

We firmly believe that the whole Retail Chapter should be entirely re-worked to put the town centre first. Its policies are so extensively tainted by failures to apply National Policy that the task of indicating amendments is beyond the reasonable scope of any representations and responses to the Publication Draft, but we will comment further below.

The town centre is not helped by the Council's history of misguided application of policy, for example in the "Aldi" sequential test, as referred to below and for instance its acceptance that Smyth's Toys were bulky goods retailing.

Given the extensive re drafting required we urge the Council to review this section of the Plan and to propose its amendment (by means of Main Modifications submitted to the Inspector) to make the Plan sound, compliant with National Policy and justified by the evidence base. We trust that the Council will in any event request the Inspector to recommend any Main Modifications he deems necessary.

### **Policy 7.10**

This specifically excludes the application of the sequential test to future applications for retail development on two retail parks located outside of the town centre. This is contrary to National Policy, which requires any retail developments that are not located within a town centre to be subjected to the sequential (and other) tests. The only attempt at justification is by reference to the potential to meet long term needs of the district (**Para 7.71**) and the suggestion that only bulky goods retailing will be permitted.

As a matter of principle bulky goods retailing is still retailing and is therefore required to satisfy the sequential test. Whether that test has been properly applied to recent applications for change of use to Retail Warehouses, for example Smyth's Toys at Portland Retail Park is highly questionable and we must therefore be concerned about the future decision making process. That concern is highlighted by Council's failure to apply retail policy as criticised by the High Court<sup>4</sup> which held:

***The District Council has misinterpreted NPPF 24, and the necessary sequential test has not been carried out and considered....***

In addition, of course, it doesn't automatically follow that bulky goods retailers cannot locate in, or that bulky goods cannot be sold, a town centre.

After all many of us have, for example, bought large items of furniture or large appliances and had them delivered to us, rather than taking them away with us from the shop.

It is also important to recognise that the sequential test is based on a "snapshot" in time; a proposal that satisfies it today may fail abjectly in the future, yet this policy removes it for the duration of the Plan - until 2033.

Exclusion of the sequential test isn't justified by reference to the potential to meet the long-term needs of the district. The Plan acknowledges that in the longer needs cannot be reliably quantified. That is particularly in today's uncertain world.

It has not been established that those long-term needs cannot be met in the town centre.

Given the uncertainties and continued pressure on retailers and town centres a precautionary approach is justified. As acknowledged by the Plan, (at **7.38 and 7.42**) the longer term needs of the town should be subject to future review at a time when they can be more reliably assessed.

Making out of centre sites available now on the basis of long-term needs would prejudice delivery of the established short to medium term needs on sites within the town centre. There is, in any event, no evidence that Mansfield town centre cannot meet its long term needs. It is clearly considered able to meet its currently quantifiable needs. The Plan confirms this at **Paragraph 7.42**:

***Sufficient land to meet the short to medium term comparison retail requirement has been identified...***

The Framework positively requires retailing to be located in town centres and the approach to the sequential test can be seen to act as a phasing provision by only permitting out of centre retail development once suitable in-centre sites have been taken up.

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<sup>4</sup> Mr Justice Ouseley – Appendix 1 Paragraph 49

As drafted the policy would permit and could actually encourage existing large foot-plate retailers to relocate from the town centre to those locations. This is particularly disconcerting given recent history on the Smyth's application where the vitality and viability of the town centre has been jeopardised, seemingly to create short term out of centre jobs. This gave little regard to the long term viability of the town centre which is one of, if not the largest employers in the District.

Further, the wording of the policy is such that despite the Council's apparent assumption (**Paragraphs 7.71 7.73**) that any new development would be of retail warehouses (or extensions to them) there is no restrictions on the minimum size of units. With the sequential test by-passed this would allow development of such as small unit shops – despite the fact that they may readily be located in such as vacant existing shops in the town centre.

**Policy RT10** should be deleted – proposals which come forward through future planning application at the Retail Parks (or in other out of centre locations), should be considered under a robust criterion based Plan Policy drafted to apply the sequential & retail/investment impact tests of the Framework. This should be included as part of the policy rather than at present only by cross reference to other policies made in the explanatory text to RT10.

It may need to be considered whether the Policies of the 2018 Framework should be applied since, although the 2012 Framework will "govern" this Plan the 2018 Framework would nevertheless be a material consideration for a planning application.

The policy should also provide for the use of any conditions necessary (for example; minimum floor space or goods restrictions) to prevent future changes to a proposal which might alter its character to a form which competes with, or adversely impacts the centre.

## **POLICIES RT6 & RT7**

These policies are rather confused; both appear to identify retail & Leisure allocation sites.

**RT6** refers to retail allocations, whilst **RT7** lists sites that are commitments (sites with planning permission as at April 2018). We are told that these "... are allocated for retail and/or leisure use".

The explanatory text is however confusing; suggesting that those sites may not be "allocated" but subject to future review if the current permissions expire.

That is no doubt an appropriate reaction to those sites within **RT7** that are outside of the districts town centres – particularly given that the evidence base shows a current negative quantitative capacity for convenience retailing in Mansfield town centre.

That situation has arisen because the available expenditure capacity for convenience retailing has been taken up by recent out of centre permissions; which in our view were wrongly permitted.

Should these stores not be built more convenience expenditure would be "released" and available to Mansfield town centre to support a food store within it and for which there is a continuing qualitative need. Disconcertingly the Council instructed its consultant's not re-assess qualitative need.

Those town centre sites within **RT7** should be allocated in the Plan. They would be a "fit" within Policy **RT6**, if that policy is amended and retained.

For example Site **RT7b** - Belvedere Street – is within the town centre and has permission confirming its suitability to accommodate retail and other main town centre uses. It is adjacent to the town's recently built multi million pound Transport Interchange. The site is identified as a key development site in the Council's Retail Update 2016. This site should, as it were, be in "pole position". It is in a highly sustainable town centre location and is uniquely placed, adjacent to the Transport Interchange where it is able to benefit from, and give support to substantial public and private investment made to date.

**RT7e** - The Old Town Hall – also lies within the town centre and although of a relatively small size it warrants inclusion in the Plan as an allocation.

Those remaining sites listed within the table at RT7 that are not within the town centre should be deleted. Allocation of such sites is not supported by National Policy nor justified by the evidence base.

The existence of these "commitments" whilst relevant to capacity calculations & monitoring requirements doesn't justify protection in or perhaps even recording within the Plan. It is sufficient for them to be tracked in such as the Council's retail monitoring reports. **Policy RT7** could then be deleted.

## **POLICY RT6**

Deals with allocations – only two are listed. **RT6a** (site of the town's former bus station) which lies within the town centre boundary, and an out of centre site allocated by Policy **RT6b**.

The site at **RT6b** is on the outskirts of Ransom Wood Business Park. It occupies a roadside site (Main A617 Mansfield-Newark road) and is allocated for up to 1750 sq m of retail and leisure floor space. It is at best out of centre and arguably an out of town location; almost at the edge of the district, in close proximity to Rainworth town centre (in Newark & Sherwood District).

This site allocation should be deleted from the Plan.

There is no basis within the Framework for its allocation, nor does the evidence base indicate a need for it to be allocated.

The site has not been sequentially tested and although less than explicit, the supporting text at paragraph 7.34 suggests that this allocation is made only to meet the needs of the Ransom Wood Business Park by providing convenience floor space to meet day to day needs of employees/visitors. The explanatory text of the Plan (7.7) refers to local needs for residential and business parks are expected to be met by small scale “corner shop” development. This proposal is for twenty or thirty times more floor space than that.

To the extent that any such need exists it would be of modest. We believe any such need can be readily met within the Business Park itself. We understand that a restaurant was previously (and may still be) operating from within the business park.

1,750 sq m of retail/leisure floor space could not be viably supported from the day to day needs of the Business Park (or its immediate neighbours). It would have to draw trade expenditure from a very much more extensive area.

Hence, we suspect the choice of a roadside location on an A Road where clearly the development would draw trade from a significantly wider catchment.

Allocation for retail & leisure use is unjustified. The site may more appropriately suit an allocation for B Class employment use development. We are aware of a current Planning Application on the site, to which we have raised objection.

## **Policy S2**

There is no justification for the acceptance that up to 700sq m of comparison sales floor should targeted in ‘growth areas’.

As a major sub regional shopping centre Mansfield town centre is the appropriate location for comparison goods retail development. Growth areas will add to expenditure capacity but any comparison expenditure generated should be available for capture by Mansfield town centre.

Similarly any convenience expenditure in the growth areas other than limited daily needs “corner shopping” expenditure should be available to the town centre.

The Plan does not provide explicitly for convenience goods development in Mansfield town centre despite an unfulfilled need for a food store following the closure of Tesco’s Stockwell Gate store.

We also note with some concern the shortcomings within recent supporting reports and specifically that the Council’s consultants appear to have been instructed not to update previous reports on qualitative need. To be generous that may be because the Council accept, as we do, that the previously identified qualitative need for a town centre food store has not been satisfied.

Food Store operations are constantly evolving; the Co Op and Tesco for instance are re-entering the market and even the internet retailer Amazon is to commence town centre “bricks & mortar retailing” - possibly as a reaction to the threat of punitive taxes - which will likely affect the dynamics of internet retailing within the plan period. The “food discounters” are increasingly adopting more flexible formats, including multi-level stores, which are more readily accommodated in town centres.

This flexibility will no doubt magnify in the future if the planning system is used, as Mr Justice Ouseley says it should be, to cajole retailers and developers to make the right choices.

It should also be borne in mind that the Government has a real desire to ban the use of fossil fuel cars. In areas such as Mansfield where car ownership is low and electric cars are likely to be out of reach to many, the town centre becomes even more important as a retail centre where access via public transport is excellent.

#### **Policy S4 – Delivering Key Regeneration Sites**

It is simply untrue to say “A number of these sites lie within the town centre...” (**Paragraph 3.24**). Only Site 4a lies inside the town centre boundary.

**Paragraph 3.26** is also incorrect; not all sites are suitable for retail development.

#### **Regeneration S4a – White Hart Street Area**

Whilst there are opportunities within the White Hart Area for new development and redevelopment, it is silly to describe the area as a Regeneration Site of 3.5 hectares.

The large number of Listed Buildings in the area and the large number of ownerships severely restricts the prospects of redevelopment of the area as a whole. In addition there are a large number of properties in the area in economic use and which contribute to the diversity of the centre's retail and leisure offer.

It is unrealistic to expect wholesale redevelopment of this area even in the long term beyond the Plan period. It might more appropriately be described as an Improvement Area where new development on suitable sites within it will be supported and where Council intervention (subject to the availability of finance) might assist with refurbishment of premises and improvements to the public realm.

Blanket threats of Compulsory Purchase powers to assemble unspecified land/property within these areas will be counter productive – acting as a deterrent to inward migration & investment and driving existing businesses out of the area.

The long term aspirations of investors and occupiers will be undermined, leading to increased vacancies. The downward spiral which we believe started with similar previous Local Plan designations will continue. Given the current economic outlook the area may never recover.

### **Regeneration Site S4B – Portland Gateway**

As defined it totals almost 29 hectares.

It includes three elements:–

1. Land to the north of the railway line; which cannot be linked in any meaningful way to the rest of the “site”.
2. Land to the rear (west) of the Portland Retail Park, and
3. The Portland Retail Park.

With all respect to the Council this area simply cannot be termed as a Regeneration Site. At best there are areas (1 and 2 above) which could be improved or redeveloped but it is totally unrealistic to include within this ‘area’, the Portland Retail Park. What is expected here is unclear. The Portland Retail Park is a modern retail park.

Its occupancy levels are good. Quite why the retail park is deemed in need of regeneration and is included eludes us.

Area 2 is an area of industrial development at the rear of the retail park and again it is difficult to see how this area could be regenerated as a Gateway site.

The balance of site lies to the north of the Robin Hood railway line and it is perhaps this area which might be justifiably put forward as a regeneration site, although we see no reason why it couldn’t be brought forward in individual developments.

It is not clear how allocating these areas in the Local Plan will assist in regeneration, particularly as the Council recognises that redevelopment is not viable, nor likely to be viable within the plan period. We would add “if ever” to that statement.

We are concerned that acceptable development of part or parts, of such as the Riverside Area/White Hart Street and land north of the railway line maybe unjustifiably be prejudiced.

It is particularly pertinent to note that the White Hart Street regeneration area is a long standing commitment upon which the Council has made no progress since its allocation in the previous Local Plan. This perhaps indicates that however well meaning they are the Council is not being practical. Such policies can be counter productive if they are not effective.

We are also aware that there is a current planning application on a significant parcel of the land north of the railway line (a site on Victoria Street) where 64 residential dwellings are proposed. It seems to us to be a more realistic expectation for the area to permit individual developments to proceed without fettering them by unworkable master planning exercises.

We would suggest that regeneration sites S4b and S4c are deleted and that S4a is amended to describe an area where improvements to existing buildings and development of new buildings on suitable sites would be supported.

### **Policy RT1 & RT8**

Mansfield town is a major sub regional centre and as such warrants “its own” policy. For example Criterion A is not considered necessary so far as Mansfield town centre is concerned but would be of importance to other lower order town centres. See below.

Market Warsop and Mansfield Woodhouse District Centres covered by Policy RT8 which also applies to local centres. Both are district centres and local centres are deemed to be town centres.

Amendments to RT8 should be amended that it is “free standing” and avoids the need for cross referencing to other policies on such as appropriateness of scale and character, thresholds for impact assessment etc etc.

The inclusion of local centres which are not yet built and which would therefore rank as town centres (presumably even if not yet built) for planning purposes is not acceptable. These centres may not be built in the format expected, or even at all.

We would also question whether the district has any local centres which should genuinely be ranked as town centres for planning purposes. We suspect that most if not all should be more accurately described as Neighbourhood Parades, even if some are larger than others.



We support the inclusion of a 500 sq m “impact” threshold for developments in the catchment of Mansfield town centre but not the use of a net floor space basis. Net floor space may be difficult to monitor and could vary from occupier to occupier and “re-fit” to re-fit”. A gross internal floor space (gia) of 500 sq m should be used. It is capable of being easily ascertained and monitored where necessary.

A lower threshold should be used to assess proposals affecting District Centres; say 250 sq m gia.

A still lower threshold is appropriate for lower order town centres (if any remain) of say 100 sq m gia.

In addition it should be made clear that developments below the threshold for formal impact/investment tests should still required to robustly demonstrate that they would not individually or cumulatively effect either the vitality & viability of a nearby town centre nor adversely affect past, current or future investment within it. As drawn the Draft Plan does not follow Paragraphs 23 to 27 of the Framework which includes a requirement to;

*include assessment of the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and wider area, up to five years from the time the application is made. For major schemes where the full impact will not be realised in five years, the impact should also be assessed up to ten years from the time the application is made*

**Policy RT2** Does not sufficiently follow the Framework on sequential AND impact/investment assessments. See earlier.

**Bullet point (c)** should refer to “negotiating” rather than “securing”.

It isn’t clear that what is intended under **bullet point (f)** or whether it is either effective or appropriate for the town centre. As expanded in the explanatory text the references to the Sites in S4 are inappropriate; especially as it isn’t clear what uses may or may not be permitted in any local development order.

Our first hand experience of “Master Planning” by theorist’s is not a happy one. For example, for many years we protested a proposal that the ex Brewery Site would not and could not provide the 1,000’s of sq m of new offices for which it was “earmarked” by the planners at Mansfield. We suggested residential – which is only now accepted.

**Policy RT1** - Delete reference to new local centres and insert new Neighbourhood Parades.

**Policy RT1.4** This isn't Framework compliant and in addition it should restrict local needs floorspace to an appropriate limit (say less than 60 sq m g/a) so that it provides only for the day to day convenience needs of the immediate locality - i.e. to provide corner shops/newsagents/takeaways etc. Comparison retailing should be prevented or at the least, restricted to being purely ancillary to convenience sales.

**Policy RT3** Should be amended to give more flexibility to the consideration of potential changes from and to A1 in both Primary and Secondary Frontage areas. As the Plan acknowledges the town centre may need to adapt to rapid changes. As drawn arbitrary limits on "lost" floor space and % frontage use would prevent that. Some changes cannot be controlled, for example those permitted by the GDPO; subdivision of units etc. Those changes which do need permission should only be refused if they would harm the town centre.

**RT4.2 (page 114).** What is "major development"? Surely it is not intended to apply all of the criteria in **RT4.1** to "all" development? Shouldn't this be covered elsewhere by "design policy"?

**Paragraph 7.26:** not sure whether "terrorism" needs to be explicitly mentioned here, nor how it can be "detected by design".

### **Policy RT5**

This policy provides another example of the use of the term "major development" and which does not appear to be defined in the Plan. If the policy is to be retained a) Major development should be defined (potentially at differing amounts for various uses) and b) it should be made clear that "support" for retail & other main town centre uses will not be given for development outside the town centre.

### **Policy RT9**

Amendment required confirming that retail development is only permitted where it serves only the daily convenience needs of significant new housing developments; that unit sizes will be restricted to not greater than 60 sq m g/a and that the proposal should demonstrate that it will not undermine any town centre or neighbourhood parade.

We consider the potential additional space to be excessive. (**Para 7.67**)

## **Policy RT11**

We were tempted not to comment but there are real questions as to the justification for such a policy.

Will/can it be effective? Is all takeaway food “fattening”? Will the locational restrictions actually reduce obesity in children?

Is insufficient background evidence available to demonstrate whether any real improvement can be achieved locally through this policy or otherwise?

The policy would be ineffective if for example most secondary schools currently have A5 units within 400 metres. Conversely if they do not how is the proximity to schools to blame?

Is it justifiable to deny takeaway food to the “older population” in such locations?

Wouldn't the use of conditions for example limiting opening hours to outside school hours during term time achieve a similar aim?

## **Maps Plans and Figures**

These will need amendments consequential to policy/text amendments.

## **APPENDIX 1**



Neutral Citation Number: [2016] EWHC 1670 (Admin)

Case No: CO/6256/2015

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE**  
**QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION**  
**ADMINISTRATIVE COURT**  
**PLANNING COURT**  
**BIRMINGHAM**

Royal Courts of Justice  
Strand, London, WC2A 2LL

Date: 08/07/2016

**Before :**

**MR JUSTICE OUSELEY**

**Between :**

**ALDERGATE PROPERTIES LTD**  
**- and -**  
**MANSFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**- and -**  
**REGAL SHERWOOD OAKS LTD**

**Claimant**

**Defendant**

**Interested**  
**Party**

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**Daniel Kolinsky QC (instructed by Browne Jacobson LLP) for the Claimant**  
**Tim Sheppard (instructed by Ashfield & Mansfield Legal Services) for the Defendant**

Hearing dates: 1 June 2016  
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**Approved Judgment**

**MR JUSTICE OUSELEY :**

1. On 5 October 2015 Mansfield District Council, the Defendant, granted planning permission to Regal Sherwood Oaks Limited, RSOL, the Interested Party, for the development of a food store of 1,925 sq. ms. at Sherwood Oaks Business Park, which it owned. The intended occupier of the food store was Aldi. The Claimant is a property developer, an associated company of which owns a site at Belvedere Street in Mansfield town centre. The site is also known as Stockwell Gate South. It has planning permission for retail, business, restaurant, hotel and other town centre uses. It has to include a minimum of nearly 4,000 sq. m. of retail floor space, without limitation on the goods which can be sold.
2. The Claimant objected to RSOL's planning application on the grounds that it would have a severe effect on the ability of its Belvedere Street site to attract investment, to which policy required a convenience store, such as that proposed, to be directed. Mansfield DC granted planning permission after consideration by its Planning Committee of an Officer's Report which recommended that permission be granted. It was granted subject to conditions, one of which was intended to limit occupation of the store to Aldi.
3. The Claimant challenges the decision on the grounds that the District Council: 1) erred in its approach to the sequential test required by paragraph 24 of the National Planning Policy Framework, NPPF, by ignoring sites in Mansfield town centre because Aldi would not locate there in view of the nearby location of other existing or permitted Aldi stores; 2) imposed a condition personal to Aldi without considering relevant planning policy objections to such a condition; 3) failed to consider whether the proposal accorded with the Development Plan, and policy R6 in particular, also failing to consider the adverse impact which the proposal could have on the viability and vitality of Mansfield Town Centre including future investment there, and 4) failed to consider the Claimant's contentions about the extent of the proposed store's catchment area.

**The facts**

4. The application, as described in the form, is for a 1,925 sq. m. food store and associated facilities. The application does not state that it is an application for a store for Aldi, though RSOL never made any secret of its intended occupier. Its site on the business park is out of centre, to the south east of Mansfield town centre by about 3 ½ miles, near the A617. Aldi operates another store at Nottingham Road about just under 1 mile south of the town centre; this store is very roughly of similar size to that proposed. It had planning permission for a third store of 1,300 sq. m. at Leeming Lane South, about 1 1/2 miles north of the town centre. RSOL's planning consultant and the District Council planners discussed what retail assessments were required for its consideration of the planning application when submitted. To understand the significance of these discussions, it is necessary to set out certain parts of the NPPF and Development plan policy.
5. Paragraph 23 of the NPPF, under the heading "Ensuring the Vitality of Town Centres" requires planning policies to be positive and to promote competitive town centres. In drawing up Local Plans, local planning authorities should:

- “Recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality;...
- Promote competitive town centres that provide customer choice and a diverse retail offer...
- Allocate a range of suitable sites to meet the scale and type of retail, leisure, commercial, office, tourism, cultural, community and residential development needed in town centres. It is important that [these] needs... are met in full.... Our local planning authorities should therefore undertake an assessment of the need to expand town centres to ensure a sufficient supply of suitable sites;
- Allocate appropriate edge of centre sites for main town centre uses that are well connected to the town centre where suitable and viable town centre sites are not available...”

Paragraph 24 is important because it contains the sequential test.

“24. Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan. They should require applications for main town centre uses to be located in Town Centres, then in edge of centre locations and only in suitable sites are not available should out of centre sites be considered... applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale.”

6. Paragraph 26 deals with impact:

“26. When assessing applications for retail, leisure and office development outside of town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date Local Plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floor space threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500 sq m.).”

7. The assessment should cover impact on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in centres in the catchment area of the proposal and an assessment of the impact it would have on town centre vitality and viability. Paragraph 27 of the NPPF is important; it states that where an application fails to satisfy the sequential test

or is likely to have a significant adverse impact on one or more of the factors referred to, it should be refused.

8. As I have said, this proposal is for an out of centre site. There is no locally set threshold for impact assessment, so the NPPF default threshold was above the proposed size of store. It was not a site allocated for retail uses in any plan, old or up-to-date. The Development Plan includes the Mansfield District Local Plan 1998 saved policies. The emerging Local Plan was not given significant weight. Policy R6 is a policy saved from the 1988 Local Plan.

9. R6 states:

“Planning permission will be granted for retail developments... outside existing centres... unless it can be clearly demonstrated that they would meet all of the following criteria..-

“1. There are not other suitable locations available in the first instance within a defined centre or in the second instance at the edge of a defined centre;

2. The development would not directly, or when considered with other developments, seriously affect the vitality and viability of any nearby centre;

3. The development will not prejudice any future investment in existing centres or the implementation of Local Plan policies...”. (The other criteria are immaterial.)

10. It is convenient to note here policy R7 which relates to the relationship between the retail development and the character of the surrounding area, M16 which relates to movement and BE1 which relates to design, which featured in the Report along with Policy R6 as policies with which the proposal complied.

11. Following the discussion with RSOL’s planning consultant, the District Council’s Senior Development Control Officer sent her an email explaining what was required in carrying out of the sequential test and impact assessment in this case. It was crucial for the way in which the decision- making process developed. This email said:

“Although the proposed retail store is intended to serve a five minute drive time catchment area which encompasses the Oak Tree District Centre, it would essentially function as an out-of-centre supermarket due to its location away from the district centre, and its position alongside the A617. Retail is a main town centre use and therefore should be located in-centre, and only be permitted in edge and out-of-centre locations where there are no in-centre sites available.

In relation to Aldi’s current application at Leeming Lane South, it was agreed during pre-application discussions that the sequential assessment exercise would not need to include sites south of the Mansfield ring road/ A6191, as that area was



covered by the catchment area of the existing Aldi store on Nottingham Road. It was also considered unrealistic that Aldi would operate a second store in such close proximity to the Nottingham Road store, and it would therefore be unreasonable to require a search for sites that would not make commercial sense for the operator.

It is considered that we would need to take the same, realistic, approach to their proposal, therefore it is accepted that the catchment area (shown in the plan that is attached to the letter dated 12/2/15) is suitable. The letter also refers to the two local centres that are located within the catchment area. It is considered that any potential sites in or on the edge of these centres should be covered by the sequential assessment, in order that it is robust. (At this stage it has not been considered which sites may warrant investigation- but we would be happy to do this should a formal pre-application request be made).

Finally, in relation to the impact test- whilst this not a formal requirement due to the size threshold, however the current Aldi application is supported by a proportionate assessment in order to help highlight that there would be no adverse impacts.”

12. The upshot of this approach, because of the second paragraph set out above, was that Mansfield town centre sites were excluded from consideration in the sequential test. This was not because the 5 minute drive time catchment area on the map extended into the town centre only a short way and not as far as the Claimant’s site. It was because Aldi would not develop a store in Mansfield town centre where it would compete with Aldi’s other nearby stores. In May 2015 RSOL’s planning consultant submitted the Planning and Retail Statement as required. This first described Aldi’s retail model and trading characteristics which it said set Aldi apart from mainstream supermarket operators in the UK. Aldi was a “limited line deep discounter retailer...”. Its trading philosophy was said to be materially different because its aim was to offer “high quality exclusive own label groceries at heavily discounted prices”. All this and more resulted, it was said, in a “type of food retailing which is unique in its operational style and approach.” The deliberately restricted range of goods meant that Aldi customers “will often link their shopping trip with a trip to other shopping destinations.” Aldi sold a small amount of non-food products measured by the floor space they took up, and so Aldi did not compete with comparison retailers. Nonetheless it wanted no restriction on the range of goods to be sold.
13. The Statement then described the sequential test which it had undertaken and why. It included the email, set out above. It said that Aldi had been flexible, looking at sites up to 25 percent below the minimum size for a store of 1,925 sq. ms. It described this as considerable flexibility “given that the proposals as submitted are consistent with Aldi’s standard store format and business model”. The areas of search were described, but it is not the areas which were examined which are contentious, nor the conclusions in relation to the sites within them which were considered.
14. The contentious part is the indisputable fact that the area of search and sites examined did not cover Mansfield town centre sites including the Claimant’s site. This was

because to the north and south, in quite close proximity as described, there was an existing and a permitted Aldi store already. A further one in the town centre would not fit Aldi's commercial model, competing with its own trade in those stores.

15. The Statement also explained that no impact assessment had been carried out, because none was required for a proposal below 2,500 sq.ms. according to NPPF [26] and no locally set threshold required one for a 1,925 sq.m. proposal.
16. Shortly before the Officer's Report was prepared, the Claimant submitted the short objection to which I have already referred in paragraph 2.
17. The Officer's Report itself was informed by a document entitled "Planning Policy Observations", an internal policy analysis which was very largely adopted in the Officer's Report itself. One part however was not taken forward, which said, after dealing with a short term quantitative need - now reduced by the Leeming Lane South permission for an Aldi store:

"It is not considered that this store would have an impact on the committed floor space at Stockwell Gate South due to its distance and the presence of the existing Aldi store at Nottingham Road"

"This store" is the store proposed at Sherwood Oaks Business Park.

18. The Officer's Report was made public before the Committee considered the application on 23 September 2015. Its publication led to the Claimant making further objections on 22 and 23 September. These were reported orally in summary form to the Committee, along with the objection of another body supporting town centre regeneration. The Claimant's representations of 22 September objected to the use of a 5 minute drive time catchment area for the selection of areas for sequential testing, (and an inaccurate one to boot, said the Claimant); it objected to the way in which town centre sites had been ignored, and to the lack of examination of the impact of the proposal on the vitality and viability of Mansfield town centre and upon investment proposed there. The principle of "town centre first" had been side stepped. A little more detail was added as to why those were sound objections. Its 23 September objection referred to two Inspector-SSCLG decisions which the Claimant said supported its approach, emphasising that Mansfield town centre should not be ignored in the sequential test. It added "we can see no support for the contention that Aldi's commercial reluctance to compete with its own out of centre store can legitimately lead to excluding sites in Mansfield Town Centre from the sequential test required by the... NPPF. It simply cannot be correct of officers to advise the Council (and the Applicant for that matter) that Mansfield Town Centre can be ignored when considering the Sequential test."

### **The Officer's Report and the decision**

19. The Officer's Report described the proposal accurately in its heading but added, in the body of the text to the accurate language used in the heading, that the proposal was for an Aldi food store. The Report conveyed, barely needing to summarise them, the points from the Claimant's first letter of objection. The relevant Mansfield District Local Plan 1998 Saved Policies were set out in summary form. This summary referred

to the sequential test in Policy R6 criterion 1, but made no reference to criteria 2 or 3. It referred to the three other saved policies which I have already noted. It then said “as the policies are in accordance with the NPPF they should be afforded considerable weight.” It referred to a study of 2011 and an addendum of 2014 both commissioned by the District Council, which formed part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan and were material considerations for this planning decision.

20. The 2011 study had recommended that Stockwell Gate South include provision for a convenience/food store to meet the current qualitative shortfall in the town centre. The 2014 addendum said that by 2021 there would be a modest quantitative need for convenience floor space if the committed space were built; the need would arise earlier if no site were developed on Stockwell Gate South or on one other site (not in Mansfield town centre). The addendum recommended that any additional provision should be concentrated in Mansfield town centre in the first instance “as there is currently no supermarket provision in the town centre following the closure of the Tesco at Stockwell Gate...”. A supermarket in the town centre would enhance its attractiveness as a retail destination and encourage linked trips.
21. The Officer's Report commented that there was a quantitative need up to 2017 for 1,500 sq. m. of convenience floor space but the Aldi permitted at Leeming Lane South would absorb much of that capacity, while also meeting a qualitative need in the north of the District. But that would still leave a lack of convenience floor space in the town centre, as a qualitative rather than quantitative need.
22. The Report continued, saying that as the application site was out of centre, a sequential assessment had to be carried out. The Report referred to the agreement that the exercise did not need to include sites covered by the catchment areas of the existing store on Nottingham Road or the recently permitted store at Leeming Lane South, to the south and north respectively of Mansfield town centre, because it was “unrealistic that Aldi would operate a store in close proximity to these existing and committed stores, and it would therefore be unreasonable to require a search for sites that would not make commercial sense for the operator”.
23. The Report noted the centres and sites considered, and the reasons why they were not suitable. In order to be suitable for Aldi, sites needed to be at least 0.6 ha in size. The applicant was thought to have been fairly flexible in terms of more central sites, and in format and scale by looking for sites “which are slightly smaller than the application site”. Aldi’s reasoning for not being more flexible was based on *Tesco Stores Limited v Dundee City Council*, (dealt with below), set out in the Planning and Retail Statement with particular reference to paragraph 38 of the judgment, which focussed suitability on the developer’s proposals, not on some alternative scheme which might be suggested by the authority. The question, said the Report, was whether an alternative site was suitable for the development proposed, not whether the proposed development could be altered to fit an alternative site. The sequential test was thus passed and the principle of retail development acceptable. There was no separate discussion of impact.
24. The conclusion reads as follows:

“It is considered that the sequential assessment carried out by the applicant meets the requirements of paragraph 24 of the

NPPF and the conclusion that none of the sequentially preferable sites would meet the requirements of this proposal is accepted. Although the proposal is below the size threshold for requiring an impact assessment, the applicant has submitted a proportional impact assessment and this has demonstrated that the proposed store would not have a significant adverse impact upon the vitality and viability of nearby District/Local Centres. As such the principle of retail development at the site is accepted. It is considered that the sitting, scale, appearance and layout of the proposed development would not be harmful to the visual appearance of the surrounding area. Car parking and access arrangements are considered to be acceptable. The proposal is considered to accord with Saved Policies R6, R7, BE1 and M16 [29/09/20017] of the adopted Mansfield District Local Plan. It is therefore considered that there are no adverse impacts of granting planning permission what would significantly demonstrably outweigh the benefits of this development when assessed against the Framework.”

25. The reference to “a proportional impact assessment” is something of a mystery. There was no separate document from the applicant beyond the Planning and Retail Statement. The Planning and Retail Statement is silent about impact, whether on town centre or on any nearby district or local centres. It deals with a sequential test for those other centres but that is all. Indeed, the Report specifically explains why no impact assessment is being done at all. It repeats a comment in the pre-discussion email about a proportional impact assessment being undertaken, which appears to be without foundation. The recommended conditions included condition 3 which limited the floor area for the sale of comparison goods to 20 percent. giving the reason that this was to safeguard the vitality and viability of town centre. At that stage there was no proposed condition seeking to limit occupation to Aldi.
26. The Officer’s speaking note for the meeting, which was read out, said that the application proposed “a 1,925 square metres Aldi food store...” The note summarised the more elaborate grounds of objection received from the Claimant. It explained the sequential test as agreed at the pre-application stage, notably that the search area would not cover the catchment area of Aldi’s existing and committed stores. The Officer specifically addressed objections to the methodology used in defining the area for the sequential test which excluded Mansfield town centre sites, but said that case law and appeal decisions clearly accepted the approach taken: the site must be suitable for the commercial requirements of the operator.
27. The size of the store was less than the threshold set out in the NPPF and so no impact assessment was considered necessary.
28. It added, what was not in the written report, that there should be a personal condition tying occupation to Aldi by requiring that “the permission shall enure for the benefit of Aldi and no other retailer on the basis that the recommendation is based on the application and taking into account the specific commercial considerations of the potential operator”. The agent had confirmed that Aldi was tied into a contract to take this site and that if this condition were imposed, it was likely to withdraw from the proposal.

29. The applicant's planning consultants made representations about the proposed condition shortly before the meeting. The terms of that objection are instructive in relation to the principal issue argued on behalf of the Claimant. It said:

"I've had a think about this, and a personal permission seems onerous; are you suggesting that if the site were occupied by any other discount food retailer that you would be refusing planning permission?"

I can confirm that the store will be occupied by Aldi. However, we do not consider that a personal permission in this regard would satisfy the tests set out at paragraph 203 and 206 of the NPPF. We do not consider it to be reasonable or necessary for a condition to be attached stating that the store can only be occupied by Aldi. This would imply that the LPA consider that the proposal would be unacceptable if the store were to be occupied by an alternative food retailer which would clearly not be the case."

The objection also said that the restrictions on floor space, and the design, should offer sufficient comfort. The store had been specifically designed to Aldi's requirements. The District Council was of the view that, because of the weight given to Aldi's business requirements and in particular in relation to the way the sequential test was carried out, the permission should be solely for their benefit. So a condition was to be imposed stating that the development "shall ensure [sic] for the benefit of Aldi stores and no other retail operator" for the reason suggested in the Report.

### ***Tesco Stores Limited v Dundee City Council***

30. Before turning to the submissions, I need to set out parts of the decision of the Supreme Court in *Tesco Store Limited v Dundee City Council* [2012] UKSC 13, [2012] 2 P&CR 9, because the District Council's understanding of it was critical to its approach. Tesco challenged the grant of planning permission for a supermarket on a large industrial estate out of centre. The City Council had had to consider whether such a store met criteria in the Development Plan, the first of which was that "no suitable site is available in the first instance within and thereafter on the edge of city, town or district centres". The City Council had interpreted "suitable" as meaning "suitable for the development proposed by the applicant". Tesco contended that it meant "suitable for meeting the identified deficiencies in retail provision in the area". The question of what "suitable" meant was a question for the Court, although its application was a matter of planning judgment. In addition to the Development Plan itself, the Plan incorporated Scottish Planning Policy Guidance, which was replaced in generally similar terms by other Scottish planning policy statements. Although the policy documents at issue in that case have some similarities in wording and certainly in purpose to that in the NPPF, the Court was not considering English planning policy documents.
31. Lord Reed, with whom the other Justices agreed, said at paragraph 24 that he accepted, subject to a qualification, that the City Council's approach was correct that "suitable" meant "suitable for the development proposed by the applicant" rather than "suitable for meeting identified deficiencies in retail provision in the area". He

concluded that that was the natural reading of the policies. It seems to me that his reasoning in paragraphs 25 to 27 is related very much to the control of development at the application stage. Hence the focus of “suitability” on that which was applied for. He then referred to the qualification and paragraph 28 is important:

“28. I said earlier that it was necessary to qualify the statement that the Director and the respondents proceeded, and were correct to proceed, on the basis that “suitable” meant “suitable for the development proposed by the applicant”. As paragraph 13 of NPPG 8 makes clear, the application of the sequential approach requires flexibility and realism from developers and retailers as well as planning authorities. The need for flexibility and realism reflects an inbuilt difficulty about the sequential approach. On the one hand, the policy could be defeated by developers’ and retailers’ taking an inflexible approach to their requirements. On the other hand, as Sedley J remarked in *R v Teesside Development Corporation, Exp William Morrison Supermarket plc and Redcar and Cleveland BC* [1998] JPL23, 43, to refuse an out-of-centre planning consent on the ground that an admittedly smaller site is available within the town centre may be to take an entirely inappropriate business decision on behalf of the developer. The guidance seeks to address this problem. It advises that developers and retailers should have regard to the circumstances of the particular town centre when preparing their proposals, as regards the format, design and scale of the development. As part of such an approach, they are expected to consider the scope for accommodating the proposed development in a different built form, and where appropriate adjusting or sub-dividing large proposals, in order that their scale may fit better with existing development in the town centre. The guidance also advises that planning authorities should be responsive to the needs of retailers. Where development proposals in out-of-centre locations fall outside the development plan framework, developers are expected to demonstrate that town centre and edge-of-centre options have been thoroughly assessed. That advice is not repeated in the structure plan or the local plan, but the same approach must be implicit: otherwise, the policies would in practice be inoperable.

29. It follows from the foregoing that it would be an oversimplification to say that the characteristics of the proposed development, such as its scale, are necessarily definitive for the purposes of the sequential test. That statement has to be qualified to the extent that the applicant is expected to have prepared his proposals in accordance with the recommended approach: he is, for example, expected to have had regard to the circumstances of the particular town centre, to have given consideration to the scope for accommodating the development in a different form, and to have thoroughly assessed

sequentially preferable locations on that footing. Provided the applicant has done so, however, the question remains, as Lord Glennie observed in *Lidl UK GmbH v Scottish Ministers* [2006] CSOH 165, para 14, whether an alternative site is suitable for the proposed development, not whether the proposed development can be altered or reduced so that it can be made to fit an alternative site.”

32. Lord Hope joined in rejecting Tesco’s submissions and in particular the contention that the City Council’s approach would rob the sequential approach of all its force. He said [at 37]

“It is the proposal for which the developer seeks permission that has to be considered when the question is asked whether no site is suitable within or on the edge of the town centre.”

33. The whole purpose of the exercise is directed to what the developer was proposing not to some other proposal which the planning authority might seek to substitute for it which is for something less than that sought by the developer. He concluded in paragraph 38 that the context of the phrase indicated:

“38... Here too the context indicates that the issue of suitability is directed to the developer’s proposals, not some alternative scheme which might be suggested by the planning authority. I do not think that this is in the least surprising, as developments of this kind are generated by the developer’s assessment of the market that he seeks to serve. If they do not meet the sequential approach criteria, bearing in mind the need for flexibility and realism to which Lord Reed refers in para 28, above, they will be rejected. But these criteria are designed for use in the real world in which developers wish to operate, not some artificial world in which they have no interest doing so.”

### **Ground 1: the application of the sequential test**

34. Mr Kolinsky QC for the Claimants submitted that the District Council had misunderstood *Tesco v Dundee*; he did not contend that that decision was inapplicable to English planning policy. Mansfield town centre could not be ignored because a proposed operator was not prepared to compete with its own stores. This would frustrate [24] of the NPPF. It failed to apply the requirement for flexibility with which Lord Reed qualified the meaning of “suitable” as “suitable for the development proposed by the applicant.” Mr Sheppard for the District Council submitted that the Council had correctly understood and applied *Tesco v Dundee*, and especially [28] and [38]. It had focused on the commercial requirements of the proposed operator; and there was no point in asking it to look at sites which were not commercially suitable for the development proposed, so far from suitable that no adjustment or flexibility could make them suitable. The Planning and Retail Statement showed, as the Officer’s Report had accepted, that the applicant had shown some flexibility over the size of sites it had looked at.

35. I have no doubt but that Mr Kolinsky's essential argument is correct, for a variety of reasons. In my judgment, "suitable" and "available" generally mean "suitable" and "available" for the broad type of development which is proposed in the application by approximate size, type, and range of goods. This incorporates the requirement for flexibility in [24] NPPF, and excludes, generally, the identity and personal or corporate attitudes of an individual retailer. The area and sites covered by the sequential test search should not vary from applicant to applicant according to their identity, but from application to application based on their content. Nothing in *Tesco v Dundee City Council*, properly understood, holds that the application of the sequential test depends on the individual corporate personality of the applicant or intended operator.
36. I shall approach this first by construing the NPPF, without considering *Tesco v Dundee City Council* because the language of the Scottish policies is to some extent different, and it did not consider the language of the English policies relevant to this case. First, although the language of "suitable" and "available" features in both the plan-making policy in [23] NPPF and in the development control policy in [24] NPPF, it is inevitable that their focus will be different at the two stages. But there is a sensible relationship between them; they are not to be read simply in isolation from each other. The plan-making policies plainly do focus on allocating sites to meet retail needs, as a town centre use; but policies and site allocations have to be sound and their effectiveness depends on their commercial realism. That approach properly involves planning for development to go to commercially realistic allocated sites where a particular type of development is seen as publicly beneficial, and discouragement, to the point of refusal, for such development elsewhere. The development control policy in [24] NPPF deals with applications for town centres uses out of centre where there is no up to date Development Plan embodying the policies of [23] NPPF. But the development control policy aims to achieve as much of what an up to date plan would achieve as possible. It is not intended that the absence of an up to date plan creates a rather different world in which retailers could enjoy a much greater degree of temporary freedom based on their individual commercial interests.
37. Second, and related, NPPF [24] positively "requires" retail investment in the first place to locate in town centres rather than elsewhere. Its thrust is rather more emphatic than policies which advise developers and retailers to have regard to the circumstances of town centres, as in *Tesco v Dundee* [28]. It is the purpose of the planning system to control development, that is to permit, prevent, encourage, inhibit or limit and condition it, so that the individual private or commercial interest and the broader public interest meet in reconciliation however uneasily. NPPF [24] cannot therefore be interpreted as requiring "suitability" and "availability" simply to be judged from the retailer's or developer's perspective, with a degree of flexibility from the retailer, and responsiveness from the authority.
38. Third, and of critical importance here, still less can it be interpreted as envisaging that the requirement or preferences of an individual retailer's trading style, commercial attitudes, site preferences, competitive preferences whether against itself or greater competition should dictate what sites are "suitable" or "available" subject only to a degree of flexibility. NPPF [23] and [24] are simply not couched in terms of an individual retailer's corporate requirements or limitations. That would be the



antithesis of planning for land uses and here, its default policies. It would take very clear language for such an odd result to be achieved.

39. Any alternative approach would reduce the sequential test to one of the individual operator's preference, with the suitability of centres, sites and their availability varying from applicant to applicant each proposing the same broad type or even identical form of development. This case illustrates just why on the proper interpretation of NPPF [24], the identity of the applicant or proposed occupier is generally irrelevant. Even if the applicant had been Aldi, or if the application had been for a store to be occupied by Aldi, with an occupancy condition envisaged from the outset, the town centre would have been wrongly excluded from the search area on the basis of Aldi's particular corporate, commercial position or style. Any other approach would make nonsense of the sequential test to the advantage of an operator well-represented in the area, or one reluctant to compete with certain other retailers, however sensible that reluctance might be commercially. The applicant may not be a retailer; it may or may not have an operator identified, or one may be signed up or interested but the identity of which it is not yet willing to disclose. It would have to go through the full sequential test, and then obtain its retailer; but were the application made with retailer in tow, the test would be different. And were a retailer later signed up, it could require a different sequential test for the same application or a repeated application for the same development at the same site. That is not the intention of NPPF [24] or any sensible application of the sequential test.
40. In this instance, Mr Sheppard accepted, on instructions, that had the proposed operator been a retailer other than Aldi, say Lidl, or unknown or, as happens, not revealed, the sequential test would have had to cover Mansfield town centre. The forthright comment by RSOL's planning consultant on the proposed personal condition, set out above, is directly in point. Any other operator might well have failed the sequential test, and would have been refused permission. But Aldi uniquely, because of its existing out of centre representation, would have been better placed to obtain a further permission out of centre than any other operator. If Aldi and another operator had been looking to develop a store in the Mansfield area, Aldi would have been able to pass the sequential test ignoring the perhaps more difficult to develop town centre site; the rival, say Lidl, would have had no choice but to take it into account. On Mansfield DC's analysis, Aldi would have got permission for the RSOL site, leaving Lidl to contemplate a town centre site now facing greater competition. If Lidl had been the operator chosen by RSOL, it would have had to consider the town centre sites. That is not how the NPPF can have been meant to work.
41. This is not solved by the imposition at the end of the process of a condition restricting occupation to a particular retailer. That may be necessary for consistency of approach but it would reinforce the error of approach; instructively though it was opposed here by Aldi which had benefited from an approach unique to Aldi. The town centre remains where development is required; the out of centre development may inhibit or prevent a store coming forward in the town centre, and draw away town centre trade, trips, expenditure and vitality.
42. Fourth, there is a further reason why the identity of the applicant, as opposed to the sort of development it proposes, is not generally relevant to the sequential test. The sequential test in the NPPF is not just one of suitability; it covers availability: "only if suitable sites are not available, should out of centre sites be considered." A town

centre site may be owned by a retailer already, to use itself for retailing, who is not going to make it available to another retailer. It is plainly available for retailing, though only to one retailer. That does not mean that another retailer can thus satisfy the sequential test and so go straight to sites outside the town centre. “Available” cannot mean available to a particular retailer but must mean available for the type of retail use for which permission is sought.

43. I have referred to the general irrelevance of the identity of the applicant or proposed occupier to the application of the sequential test in [24] NPPF. I do so because there are instances where identity may matter, notably where the town needs representation by different retailers, or where town centre sites are being hoarded by developers/retailers who refuse to develop them, but also refuse to sell them. Extension applications are also a good example of a type of development which gives rise to problems for the sequential test, without meriting the answer that there is no need for one because the extension can only take place on the one site. There may be other good reasons too, why a court interpretation of a policy should not be expressed in terms which are too rigid. I add that I am not concerned here with the question of how an assessment of impact should be carried out where the identity of the proposed retailer is known, and that retailer may trade at a higher density per sq. m. than some others in the same broad convenience line.
44. I delayed the handing down of this judgment so that I could consider the judgment of the Court of Appeal in *Warners Retails (Moreton) Ltd v Cotswold District Council and others* [2016] EWCA Civ 606, handed down on 24 June 2016 and on which I told the parties I was prepared to receive brief submissions. The first instance decision and the fact of the appeal had been referred to before me. This case also related to the sequential test in [24] NPPF and *Tesco v Dundee*, though it also considered the Planning Practice Guidance of December 2009, relevant to that case but no longer in force by the time of the decision challenged in this case. It also turns on the particular Council report and the situation in Moreton-in-Marsh to which it was directed.
45. Nothing in it causes me to alter the judgment I had reached; and in particular nothing in paragraph 45 on *Tesco v Dundee*. I note the comment by Lindblom LJ in [31], in interpreting the 2009 PPG point that sites “should not be rejected on the strength of “ ‘the self-imposed requirements or preferences of a single operator....’ . Otherwise, the sequential approach would likely become a merely self-fulfilling activity, divorced from the public interest.” He added that the PPG also made it clear that the developer’s own intentions generally had some bearing on the application of the sequential test. Mr Kolinsky in his short response submitted that that was of some assistance. Of course, the PPG to which the comments relate is not relevant to this case. But the comments of Lindblom LJ are plainly correct as observations anyway, even without a PPG to underlie them. Mr Sheppard suggested that the dicta to the effect that the bounds set on an applicant's preference and intentions as to format and scale for the purpose of NPPF [24] depended on the facts and circumstances of a particular case, was broadly supportive of the Defendant's submissions in relation to the question of what constituted a 'suitable' site in the instant case;[30]. That may be so, but is of no assistance to him here. The town centre was not rejected because of some issue over format and scale, but over its location in relation to Aldi stores.
46. I now turn to whether what I have said requires modification in the light of *Tesco v Dundee City Council*. I do not consider that the approaches are inconsistent at all,

though the differences in the language of the policies but not in broad intent, require the English policies to be considered separately, and could lead to a different result. First, even on the narrowest view of what Lord Reed said, suitability is to be determined by reference to the development proposed by the applicant. The applicant proposed a 1925 sq.m. food store. It was not a food store for occupation by Aldi; Aldi was not the applicant. The sequential site search ought to have included sites where such a store could go. The town centre was not excluded because of the inevitably precisely drawn line to represent the inherently imprecise and debateable five-minute off-peak drive time. It was excluded because it made no sense for Aldi to develop a store which would draw trade from two of its own stores so close by. There was no justification for redefining the application. At the application stage and even more so at the pre-application stage, where the approach to the sequential test was set, it would not have been right to look forward to the possibility that a condition would be imposed limiting the occupation to Aldi, as being part of the application- and still less when the applicant opposed it. And, as I have said, such a condition, with all its difficulties, would not have met the purpose to which the sequential test was directed.

47. Second, the Supreme Court was not addressing the meaning of “suitable” with this sort of issue in mind. It intended the focus to be on the development proposed. It did not deal with and cannot have meant to cover all aspects of the role of the identity of the applicant or its proposed operator by the phrase “suitable for the development proposed by the applicant”, or by its other comments. The Supreme Court cannot have intended that the identity of the applicant or proposed operator, and the commercial requirements which flow from that particular operator’s manner of retailing, or competitive position, should determine the way in which the sequential search area was defined or the sites available for that type of development were considered for suitability.
48. What the Supreme Court rejected was Tesco’s argument about the role of need; there is no conflict between that and this judgment. What requires qualification in this context is the alternative construction, which it accepted in the context of the issues in that case. But it cannot have supposed that this alternative construction, accepted by way of contrast with the one it rejected, left no issues uncovered, all to be dealt with under the rubric of the “development proposed by the applicant”, qualified only by flexibility as to format and scale. The true focus of interpretative debate is still the wording of the policy in context, and here of the English policies. Policy interpretations arising from litigation may be context and argument specific, and not intended as substitutes for the text at issue for all cases and contexts. The good sense of the planning consequences of any given interpretation may be a guide to its correctness.
49. This first ground succeeds. The District Council has misinterpreted NPPF 24, and the necessary sequential test has not been carried out and considered. A material factor has not been taken into account.

## **Ground 2: the personal condition**

50. The justification for condition 20, that the permission should enure only for Aldi’s benefit, makes sense, and indeed follows logically from the way in which the sequential test was carried out. Once it was accepted that the area covered by the sequential test would have been different for any other retailer, such a condition might

even have been necessary. Indeed, the policy warnings against such a condition suggest that an approach to the sequential test which necessitates it, cannot be right. Of course, the condition now falls with the failings in the sequential test itself.

51. But Mr Kolinsky's point is a little different: it is that there are policy warnings against such a condition, which were not placed before the Committee, and if they had been, the Committee might have decided that they could not impose it, and so, in the light of the way in which the sequential test had been carried out, could not grant permission. The relevant policy guidance is in the 2014 Planning Practice Guidance of the Department of Communities and Local Government. Such personal conditions were "rarely appropriate". An instance of where it could exceptionally be appropriate was where certain people or groups of people would benefit, such as agricultural workers. But the grant of permission for a permanent building on the basis of an individual's personal circumstances would "scarcely ever be justified." A condition limiting the benefit of the permission to a company would be inappropriate because its shares could be transferred without affecting the legal personality of the company.
52. Mr Sheppard submitted that, although there had been no reference to this guidance, the condition itself was not unlawful, since it reasonably related to the development, and served a planning purpose. Members had received training in the use of conditions and should be assumed, in the absence of contrary evidence, to understand the difficulties with personal conditions without the need for specific advice.
53. I accept that the condition is not itself unlawful, at least not for the purpose for which it was imposed. I can see that a condition related to Aldi is not affected by the fact that shares in it may change hands, and the objection that the occupier, while retaining the corporate name and legal personality, could become something quite different as a business, has less force than it might for a small company. But the other strictures against such a personal/corporate condition in relation to a personal condition are very strong. In reality, how enforceable would it be if Aldi left the building and some other occupier wanted to use it? Nor does it prevent Aldi changing its corporate style or trading in a different style.
54. I cannot accept that the Committee were aware of the Guidance on their aspect through training, in the absence of specific evidence to that effect. This is not just because this is not a very common point, but also because the evidence produced by the District Council did not show that their training had covered this particular aspect of conditions, and nothing more was forthcoming despite requests. In my judgment this Guidance was a material factor, not taken into account in the decision. I am not sure that, however, taken solely by itself, I would have quashed the decision on that account, because its purpose related to the basis upon which planning permission was granted.
55. I add, although not the argument raised, that the condition does not in fact restrict occupation to Aldi; it restricts the enuring of benefit to Aldi and to no other retailer. This is odd, since the benefit of the permission in the first place will enure to the applicant, and benefit may enure thereafter to Aldi plus any lessor of the site. This would contravene the restriction to Aldi, but not the requirement that no other retailer benefit. So the condition is meant to be read as requiring the benefit to enure to Aldi and anyone but another retailer, which unfortunately is not what it says. If occupation is to be controlled, it is occupation which should be the subject of the condition.

### **Ground 3: accordance with the development plan, and the assessment of impact**

56. Criteria two and three to Policy R6 of the Local Plan, part of the statutory Development Plan, applied to out of centre retail proposals: the viability and vitality of nearby centres should be not seriously affected, and the proposal should not affect future investment in existing centres. The Report had concluded that Policy R6 was in accordance with the NPPF and should be accorded considerable weight, and that the proposal accorded with the Development Plan.
57. Yet, Mr Kolinsky submitted, these two criteria were not considered in the Officer's Report or at the meeting. They were relevant to whether the proposal did accord with the policy or the Development Plan, and by s38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the decision had to be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicated otherwise. The subject matter of the criteria were also material considerations in their own right.
58. Mr Sheppard endeavoured to rely on the passage in the conclusions related to a "proportional assessment" of the impact on district and local centres having been carried out by the applicant. But for the reasons already given, this passage in the conclusions is simply incorrect; no such assessment was ever carried out. And it did not even suggest that an assessment had been carried out in relation to the town centre, a sub-regional centre.
59. His main submission was that the NPPF, in [26] had superseded those criteria, so that in that respect R6 was out of date, and those criteria should be given minimal weight. The comments in the Report about consistency with the NPPF related to the part of R6 summarised in the Report, and the reason the proposal accorded with the development plan was because there was no compliance with the first criteria, while minimal weight was given to the remaining two criteria.
60. **There is not much which is correct about that approach in law.** The starting point for any application is whether it accords with the development plan. The NPPF is a material consideration, which may indicate a conclusion otherwise than one which accords with the development plan. An out of date policy or part of a policy, is still part of the development plan, in relation to which a decision is still required as to whether the proposal accords with it. It is possible, if a proposal does not accord with the development plan, that the planning authority will decide to give greater weight to the NPPF if it supports the proposal. If the plan is out of date, or inconsistent with the NPPF, the planning authority can decide to give less weight to any non-compliance with out of date policies. But the starting point is accordance or otherwise with the development plan.
61. Here, leaving aside the breach of the development plan and NPPF in relation to the sequential test, the proposal may or may not have been judged to accord with the second and third criteria of R6, since they were not referred to in the Report. I note that the criteria do not as such require an assessment; they require a judgment about issues which would normally require an assessment unless the answer was clear enough without it. An accurate report would have said that it was not known whether the proposal accorded with those criteria because there had been no assessment or that there was no need for an assessment because the answer was clear enough without it. A judgment would then have been required as to whether R6 was complied with and,

if not, whether that meant that the proposal still accorded with the development plan as a whole.

62. The fact that at least one of the criteria, that relating to viability and vitality, had been superseded by the NPPF, did not affect the question of whether the proposal accorded with the development plan; it affected the weight to be given to the outcome of that exercise. The fact that the NPPF did not require an assessment of the impact on vitality and viability is not relevant to the interpretation of the development plan. The NPPF is not a tool for the interpretation of a development plan or at least of one which has not been cast in the light of its guidance. In reality, the District Council considered the weight to be given to the policy at the wrong stage.
63. By itself, such an error may not require the quashing of the decision, since had the correct analysis been followed, and had the answer been that the proposal failed to accord with the development plan on account of a breach of those two criteria, it is clear enough that the Report would have recommended that little weight be given to that non-compliance, and greater weight to the fact that it complied, as was thought, with the up to date, NPPF compliant, parts of the development plan. Again if that is how matters had been left and that were the sole issue, I doubt that I would have quashed the decision on account of the error in the point at which little weight was given to non-compliance with out of date policies, which did not comply with the NPPF.
64. The NPPF does not however on its face make the issues raised by the two criteria immaterial simply because no assessment is required. It is removing the burden of doing a proper, researched assessment. The issue may still be relevant, though the threshold must reflect an NPPF view that adverse impact is unlikely below the default threshold unless a local authority has decided that a lower threshold is relevant.
65. The issues were however of clear relevance here in view of what the District Council must or ought to have appreciated was an unusual approach to the sequential test, and one which excluded the town centre of Mansfield where there was a qualitative need at least for a food store and where it had been advised, in reports it had commissioned, food stores should be encouraged. The effect which the proposal would have on that hoped for investment, directly related to the vitality and viability of the town centre, was never addressed in the report. The report did deal with the lack of quantitative need, and the remaining qualitative need but simply treated impact as a matter of the requirement for what may be termed a formal reported assessment, and which was not now required.
66. It is possible that there was some brief Officer analysis of the position which led to the conclusion in the Planning Policy Observations, not carried forward into the Report, to the effect that no adverse effect was likely, because of the relationship of the proposals to the town centre and the Aldi Nottingham Road store. The fact that some thought must have been given to the issue is also supported by the reason for condition restricting the floor space which can be used for the sale of comparison goods, since those were feared to compete with comparison shopping in the town centre, damaging its viability and vitality.
67. But I cannot accept that the Committee considered the issue. I accept that they would have appreciated the significance of the location of the proposal, further from the

town centre than Nottingham Road, so that the trade drawn to Aldi from the proposal's catchment area, lying as it did largely to the south of the town centre, may well come from trade which was already lost to Aldi Nottingham Road. There would clearly be a considerable overlap in catchment areas between Nottingham Road and the proposal. But Aldi was going to get trade from somewhere other than its existing customers, and the large overlap did not persuade it not to compete with itself to that extent, so it must have been expecting considerable trade other than from that done at Nottingham Road. I do not know how the issue would have been appraised at a broad brush level, but it was for the Committee to think about it. Thinking about comparison trade is not the same as showing consideration of convenience trade, and especially in the light of what the Council's consultants had advised. The issue was a material factor not considered by the decision-maker.

68. They were deflected from it by the NPPF not requiring a formal assessment. But the way the sequential test was carried out, even were it right, made it more likely that an assessment of impact on the town centre, and on the likelihood of a food store coming to it, was material. Even without that approach, the effect of the proposal on that point was material in view of the earlier and recent consultant report, and the lack of quantitative need, while the qualitative need remained. And indeed the criteria of the development plan made it so. The relevant issue was ignored. I would quash the decision on this ground as well. It also removes any reason to accept that the decision could nonetheless survive the consideration of the development plan, defective as it was.
69. Accordingly, the decision is in legal error on this ground as well.

**Ground 4: the Claimant's version of the proposal's catchment area was not considered**

70. Mr Kolinsky put this point forward as tentatively as it deserved. He said that the Committee had failed to consider the Claimant's last minute version of a five minute drive time, which showed the catchment area of the proposal covering all of Mansfield town centre, and not just nibbling at it. The Committee was told of this last minute point. It reached no conclusion about it. But the precise edge of the catchment area was not material to the decision on the sequential test, or to the need for an impact assessment or to any of the factors which weighed with the Committee. I see no reason to suppose that it would not have come to precisely the same conclusion if it had concluded that the whole town centre had been within the five-minute catchment area. But this was not an issue which it needed to resolve for its decision to be lawful.

**Delay**

71. Mr Sheppard submitted that the application had not been lodged promptly, and, since the grounds of challenge had arisen at the time of the resolution to grant permission on 23 September 2015, the application should have been lodged earlier than the last week of the now six week period for lodging judicial review proceedings from the actual grant of permission on 5 November 2015.
72. I do not accept that contention. I do not propose to resolve the question of whether a promptness requirement applies even with the six-week period. When such a period was commonly imposed by the courts it was as the requirement of promptness itself.

Although the resolution can be challenged, it is well established that precisely the same grounds can be raised in a challenge to the actual grant of permission. Time runs from that. The newly truncated period for lodging the application reflects a desire for promptness. It would be a very strong case which could cut down still further on that six-week period, if promptness were still additionally required. Besides, this is not a rolled up hearing. The question of delay has to be judged against the fact that the decision falls to be quashed. There is no reason, even were there delay, not to quash the decision. There is no argument about prejudice. Mr Sheppard asserted that delay has had a “resultant impact” on the development coming forward. I see no evidence of that. RSOL did not appear. The personal condition may have had the effect Aldi said it would.

### **Conclusion**

73. This permission is quashed.