

Planning Services,
Leeds City Council,
Merrion House,
110, Merrion Centre,
LEEDS, LS2 8BB,
West Yorkshire.
20th April, 2023.

Dear Sirs,

Application 23/01057/FU – Mercure Hotel Site – Wetherby.

I write as Chair of Better Wetherby Partnership (BW) to object to the above Application for the various reasons set out below. I confirm that BW wish this objection to be posted on the LCC Plans Portal and am also attaching the BW objection to previous Application 22/06966/FU. The purpose of this is to underline nothing has changed in terms of Planning Policy or other decisions over time which in the submission of BW renders this current Application spurious.

Retail Planning History – In 2012 a Planning Application (12/00113/FU) was lodged for a retail store and other associated works on this site by J. Sainsbury. The Application was refused by LCC, the principal grounds being impact on the vitality and viability of Wetherby Centre and the location of the proposal in a Conservation setting. Significantly the Applicant did not appeal the refusal. Additionally, and equally significantly, the site had no allocation in any Planning strategy at the time, for retail use.

Current Planning Situation – Since the Sainsbury Application in 2012, the Planning situation has changed, almost certainly hardened with regard to this site. The Leeds Site Allocation Plan (SAP) has been adopted and is live, after Public Scrutiny and the Wetherby Neighbourhood Plan (effective to 2028) has also been adopted after Public Scrutiny when 89% of those responding to the Consultation process agreed this site should not be developed for retail use, only 6% felt otherwise. All this is in contrast to the 'support' responses on the LCC Plans Portal which can best be described as pro forma in nature and mostly lacking any substance in Planning terms. Finally, the existing Leeds Core Strategy, live until 2033 makes no allowance for this proposal. In all instances the Mercure site is classed as suitable for Housing development, although BW would prefer to see a hotel development here.

Consultations – Looking at the LCC Plans Portal, Consultee responses are at an early stage however, BW notes the following responses as at W/C 16th April:-

Climate Change – Insufficient information provided.

Contaminated Land Team – issues from previous Application (Lidl 22/06966/FU) not addressed.

Travel Plans – Not updated. This despite the Consultee response apparently coming after the Applicant's submission.

Flood Risk – incomplete.

Landscape Team – cannot support, significant issues.

Yorkshire Water – objection due to restrictions on access to network.

Additionally, there is no Retail Impact Assessment which is perhaps no surprise given the Sainsbury decision and the dismissal of the Lidl Appeal at Ledbury, Herefordshire by the Inspector on vitality and viability grounds. BW would encourage LCC to view this Decision in addition to the similarities pointed out by BW in our Objection letter of 20th November, 2022 which is attached here for ease of reference.

In terms of the voluminous Traffic Impact Assessment submitted, BW reserves its position as there is no mention of a Lidl illuminated sign which will be necessary on the main road network adjacent the site entrance to identify the presence of the now hidden store, avoiding traffic incidents due to sudden braking to access the site. Other information is at best sketchy and BW awaits the Consultation but notes the Highway comments in the previous Application which was withdrawn.

In conclusion this Application appears to BW to be what could be described as 'half hearted, spurious and speculative' and for this and all the other reasons above and in our letter dated 20th November, where still relevant, this Application should be refused.

Yours faithfully,

Roger Owen,
Chair,
Better Wetherby Partnership Ltd.

Address as letterhead.

By email and post.