

Supermarket-led development: asset or liability?



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Barratt's development in Milton Keynes
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Contents

Introduction	2
Supermarket-led development: asset or liability?	4
The reliance on standard solutions	5
Principles of good supermarket-led design	7
1 Relating the building to its neighbourhood	8
2 Achieving strong environmental credentials	9
3 Getting the housing right	10
4 Creating good public realm and reducing car dependency	11
5 Planning for the long term	12
Strengthening the role of local planning authorities	13
What should happen next?	15

Introduction

Supermarkets are often involved in creating large parts of our towns and cities. Fewer stores are built to stand alone: often they come with a mix of housing, sports facilities, shopping streets or schools.

For all their commercial success, supermarkets have to deal with powerful neighbourhood opposition. There have been hundreds of local campaigns in the UK against applications to open them, often related to their environmental and purchasing practices. Research has shown that 50 per cent of people think the size and strength of supermarkets should be controlled to stop them putting local independent retailers out of business¹.

Also of great public interest, but much more overlooked, is the issue of design and placemaking.

Conventionally, CABI's role has been to advise on design, leaving economic evaluation to the local authority. But with supermarket regeneration projects becoming more complex, we have observed that it is increasingly difficult to separate design and placemaking from economic impact. What local communities tell us is that a lot of supermarket-led development amounts to

a large plain rectangular building and car park in the middle of town. This can actually undermine regeneration, local character and sense of place, and compound traffic problems.

For this report, CABI has drawn on 30 of the major supermarket schemes which we have reviewed. Two thirds are mixed use and most are proposed for significant sites. Given that the sector is buoyant, and these developers are so well resourced, every scheme should reasonably be expected to make a positive contribution to the locality and to the wider prosperity of the town centre. So we look at how local planning authorities could work with developers to create schemes which are commercially viable and enhance the place in which they are built.

There are examples of good design to draw on, such as the Grand Union Walk housing for Sainsbury's, and the Tesco store in Ludlow where the roof profile successfully echoes the contours of the hills which form the town's backdrop.

Some more recent schemes also show a determination to create an attractive place.



Grimshaw's Grand Union Walk housing scheme for Sainsbury's in Camden was completed in 1988 and it is still a desirable place to live. Residential units take the form of individual houses, capitalising on the canalside setting. The south facing wall to the rear needed to be blank to exclude lorry noise, so their living space at first floor level is top lit. A double-height dining area opens out onto a balcony

At Fulham Wharf in London, a Sainsbury's development proposes active frontages at street level and new public routes and spaces with generous landscaping. This kind of pedestrian-friendly scheme proves that there is no need to choose between commercial success and good quality places. Everyone wants both.

But it has to be said that in most of the schemes CAGE sees, it is clear that the basic model for a supermarket on an out-of-town brownfield site has simply been transported to a town centre setting. This is not an oversight. The standard supermarket shell is the product of the intensive refinement of a tried and tested commercial model. The retailers and their developers tell us that this model still serves them very well in a highly competitive commercial world.

This creates a number of problems. Out-of-town sites are usually very straightforward to develop, but urban centre sites almost never are. There is also a far greater complexity to supermarket-led development itself now that it locks together building uses with very different cycles of renewal. The life of housing, for instance, is not the same as the life of retail space and the potential for adapting the latter in ways that could support

the former needs to be designed in from the outset. And grocery shopping patterns are changing. The number of us shopping online, for instance, is predicted to double to 25 per cent by 2014², and this could have radical implications for the building. All these suggest the need for greater flexibility in design to meet future business and community needs.

At a recent CAGE design review, it was suggested that supermarkets could be likened to cruise liners. Both are massive and self contained: they aim to meet all customer needs in one place. So supermarkets increasingly come with the butcher, the baker, the chemist and the computer store, as well as accommodation. But while a cruise liner vanishes over the horizon, the future for a supermarket berthing in a town centre is bound up with the viability and vitality of that place. CAGE believes that it is time for them to let down the gang plank, and think more about their impact on the place where they arrive.

**'There is no need to choose
between commercial success
and good quality places.
Everyone wants both'**



The geographical distribution of three major supermarkets as shown here in effect creates the shape of the UK – Tesco (red), Asda (green), and Sainsbury's (orange)

Supermarket-led development: asset or liability?

Done well, supermarket-led development provides the critical mass to make a place thrive. The sequential test and current planning policy statement 4 (PPS4) encourages such development in town centres precisely in order to promote sustainable economic growth. Supermarket-led development can restore life to a centre which has suffered from out-of-town or edge of town development, or just become very dated. In many mid-sized towns, the centre is blighted by a tired mall built two or three decades ago and treated by its owner as a pension rather than something to manage and maintain.

In these circumstances, a well integrated scheme, designed in response to community need and the local context, can inject economic vitality and reinforce the primary shopping area with a lively mix of commercial and other non-retail uses. Health centres, libraries, sports facilities and gyms can be arranged along streets and around public spaces, along with cafés and bars. Many local authorities have invested heavily in enhancing their town centres by improving pedestrian routes and streetscapes, and a good scheme will create attractive new open space and destinations to

support this. New homes can contribute to social vitality: apartments overlooking public space create natural surveillance, and their entrances on streets or squares generates 24-hour activity that makes the locality feel safer for everyone.

However, in practice, CABI finds that many schemes are not designed well enough to deliver these benefits. Supermarkets – and the developers with which they work – keep repeating the model designed for out-of-town sites, with rectangular buildings, large car parks and constant delivery. In our discussions with them, it is clear that variation is seen as the enemy of economy. This leads to big standard blocks being built in small, irregularly shaped sites, and design which bears no relationship to the neighbourhood.

The problems are often compounded by planning authorities seeking to maximise associated development. Supermarkets will deliver mixed-use schemes if they have to, but their priority will remain the delivery of an obvious and familiar workable retail solution. So the store building and parking is likely to be given prime position, whatever the elements in the rest of the development.



Vizion in Milton Keynes is a successful example of a mixed-use development. Led by Sainsbury's, it includes housing, community and not-for-profit facilities, commercial space and offices, with a well landscaped garden for residents on the roof top of the 10,000 sq metre store

The reliance on standard solutions

Here we describe some of the supermarket-led schemes seen by CABA which illustrate reliance on standard solutions, and over development. This kind of weak design will result in a scheme which is likely to be a local liability rather than an asset, adversely affecting how a place looks and feels and whether it will thrive long term.

A rigid store format and standard car parking approach was proposed by Tesco for an important and sensitive site in Halesworth, Suffolk. Inside the conservation area, its service yard and overflow car park detracted from the setting of adjacent listed buildings. The scheme undermined existing good connections into the town centre, positioning the blank rear of the store on a popular pedestrian route. No effort was made to create spaces or landscape in a way which would strengthen the sense of place.

A Tesco scheme proposed for the high street in Epsom, Surrey, tried to cram so much development onto the site, it inflated the building to five storeys in a neighbourhood of two storey terraced housing (see picture below).

A significant scheme in Bromley-by-Bow in east London which has received planning consent illustrates the impact of site layout giving precedence to the store. This new district centre includes 293 new homes, a primary school, a hotel and a new public park. While the monolithic Tesco store will enjoy a waterside frontage, the residential tower overlooks the northern approach to the A12 Blackwall Tunnel. The new primary school in the scheme is tacked onto the store's delivery yard, reached across the entrance to a busy car park.

Another scheme for Tesco, in St Helens, Lancashire, brought the opportunity to build a new stadium for the rugby league club. However, instead of placing this building in a prominent position, reflecting its value to the city, the developer awarded prime position to the superstore and its car park, and hid the stadium around the back. The scheme was granted planning consent despite its very serious shortcomings.

The quality of a scheme is of particular concern to many residents of new homes built within it. Some schemes propose up to 900 dwellings. Many of the apartments in the schemes which CABA sees will



This development for Tesco on the high street in Epsom proposed three levels of parking for 500 cars. Design approaches such as wrapping the store frontage with a thin layer of housing units, and introducing smaller shops at street level, were proposed. But at five storeys, the building had become too bulky for any such mitigation to work

‘All traffic on site brings noise, air pollution and safety issues, but a car-focused scheme can make residents’ lives grim in other ways too’

be an unpleasant place to live. All the traffic which supermarkets generate on site brings noise, air pollution and safety issues, but a car-focused scheme can make residents' lives grim in other ways too. In an Asda scheme proposed for the East Barnet Gas Works in north London, for instance, the apartments were accessed from the basement car park and along frontages adjacent to store parking entrances.

Apartments are also routinely single aspect. In that Asda scheme, for instance, at least 36 apartments faced only north, or were set back within corners which would restrict daylight.

So what was the response of the five planning authorities to the schemes described above?

In Halesworth, the local authority had good, up to date land use policy for the site, proposing residential and community use. It felt able to refuse the scheme as it did not fit with those aspirations. CABE's design review panel supported their position, as it did in Epsom where the Council did not have up to date town centre wide guidance but still felt confident about refusal on design grounds and because of its impact on a conservation area.

In Bromley by Bow, Tesco argues that their scheme is an obliging response to the local planning authority guidance, and this is correct – even down to the lamentable location of the residential tower. CABE felt that the guidance for such an important

new urban quarter, critical to local regeneration, could also have required far more from the new streets and better connectivity with nearby neighbourhoods.

In St Helens, CABE believes that had the local authority shown more confidence and vision, they could have reshaped the scheme into one for the town to be proud of.

The primary concern of East Barnet Council was the impact the scheme would have on the high street, but the scale of the store and poor quality living environment were also reasons for refusal. The scheme had not been adequately justified in relation to the sequential approach and adverse impact on designated centres.

On page 13, we look more closely at the role of local planning authorities. But it is already clear from the examples above that where councils have the confidence to stand firm and use existing policy (national or local) to support their case, they can negotiate better outcomes for their communities.

It is in everyone's interest to get a good scheme first time round. If the scheme put forward meets the demands of the business, the economic expectations of the council and the aspirations of planners for high quality places, this should be recognised in the planning process. Faster planning consent avoids costly delays.



This scheme in Bromley-by-Bow, east London is complex superstore-led regeneration which is driven by the Tesco-led investment opportunity, even though planning and design guidance underpins the scheme. The site layout gives precedence to the supermarket, which enjoys a river frontage. The residential tower will be sited where noise, air quality and outlook are at their worst, beside the northern approach to the A12 Blackwall Tunnel

Principles of good supermarket-led design

Underpinning every good supermarket-led scheme is a clear, locally informed brief. A good brief will specify what the design must achieve and what it is desirable to achieve, and reflect design principles set out in national and local planning guidance. Most design briefs for a supermarket scheme are written by the retailer long before any discussions with planners take place, but will be informed by the local development framework. So it is essential that the core strategy and associated documents, such as area action plans, clearly communicate what planners expect to see in terms of design quality.

CABE has supported around 100 local planning authorities in creating their core strategies. There is immense value in having a clear vision for a town centre, with the facilities, services and retail requirements identified and the relevant strategies for town-centre parking or sustainable transport fully reflected.

The mix of uses depends on location and what would work well together over the long term. The best mix for the site should emerge from collaboration with the communities that use the area and take full account of the needs of minority ethnic groups, older people and disabled people.

Overleaf we look at the following five issues that can help to inform discussions between local planning authorities and developers.

- 1 Relating the building to its neighbourhood
- 2 Achieving strong environmental credentials
- 3 Getting the housing right
- 4 Creating good public realm and reducing car dependency
- 5 Planning for the long term

© Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands



Fulham Wharf, a development proposal led by Sainsbury's and designed by Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands. The box of the store is concealed behind homes and smaller units. Front doors for residents are provided off a lively street, and shared surfaces favour pedestrians. It will create attractive new open spaces to play and meet, with generous landscaping, including a new public route to the river

1 Relating the building to its neighbourhood

The scale of the supermarket building is determined by many factors, including the size of the nearest competing store and predicted trading intensity, but it should above all relate to the site. Sites created by land assembly can be irregular and the large rectangular floor-plan of a typical supermarket will not always be a comfortable fit. However, PPS4 currently requires supermarket development to enhance the established character and diversity of the town, and recommends that local authorities ensure that operators demonstrate flexibility in terms of floor space and site configuration and car parking.

Planners can ask developers to undertake context appraisals and to produce schemes that show how the store links into its surrounding neighbourhood. Supermarket designs that do not respond to their site are unlikely to comply with the local core strategy and so should not be granted planning permission.

The brief needs to indicate what sort of street presence the form and massing of the buildings should create. Site masterplanning is usually generated by a retailer and developer working to a template. The interior layout needs to provide clear direction for the customer – this limits queues which in turn minimises the car parking required – and a rectangular plan form works well for this, but access, storage and servicing usually means blank facades on three sides. This can affect the quality of bordering streets, making them dead and unwelcoming. It is a constraint that can prompt somewhat arbitrary design responses,

such as the addition of wooden cladding to all elevations. But CABE has also seen exteriors which respond to their context more successfully, such as the Sainsbury's in Sherborne, Waitrose in Ely and the Tesco store in Ludlow (see picture below). Screening the store with residential and commercial units can provide balance, as can moving subsidiary elements out of the box: so for example the deli counter or the pharmacy could operate from a separate shop frontage.

The brief should demonstrate the thinking behind routes through and within the site, and provide evidence that connections through the neighbourhood will be maintained and enhanced. Positioning large structures that block desire lines should obviously be avoided. For most schemes, creating a pedestrian link to the rest of the town centre is of significant commercial value: according to industry experts, outside London 20 per cent

of the trade (and more of the visits) will walk in from the town. So planners seeking well designed and attractive links to town centres should be pushing at an open door.

The scheme should make a place feel safer as a result of the natural surveillance from well frequented streets, day and night. Street safety is a particular issue for people who already feel vulnerable through age or disability, and the Equalities Act 2010 requires local authorities to ensure that no development has an adverse impact.

In major cities, the compact hypermarkets on brownfield sites close to big roads tend to focus solely on the car, with multi-level car parking, in order to attract affluent customers from a wider region. But they are often built in the middle of communities that are far from affluent, and need to demonstrate that the interests of those people have also been taken into account.



This Tesco store in Ludlow, Shropshire was designed by MJP Architects and completed in 2000. It responds well to the town in terms of scale and the materials used. The building's most prominent feature is its 55m curved roof which echoes the undulating hills which frame the town. The building is also unusual in being substantially naturally lit, which creates a more attractive internal environment as well as helping to reduce energy use and carbon emissions

© James O. Davies/English Heritage/N.M.R.

2 Achieving strong environmental credentials

Local planning authorities are in a strong position to show leadership in securing the highest standards of energy efficiency and environmental responsibility from a scheme's developers.

Currently planning policy statement I (PPS1) requires local authorities to ensure that strategies address climate change through policies which reduce energy use, reduce emissions from travel and freight, promote renewable energy, and take climate change impacts into account in the location and design of development.

The major supermarkets take energy efficiency very seriously, given the enormous energy demand from their heating/cooling outputs, but still CABC sees schemes with features such as large south-facing glazed areas with no shading devices to mitigate the significant heat loads.

The standard template for the building limits opportunities to use natural daylight and ventilation, but rooflights are often possible, even through roof gardens or rooftop car parks.

We have observed that there can be advantages in setting firm commitments to BREEAM and Code for Sustainable Homes targets through the planning process. Applications can set benchmarks for sustainability, including estimates of carbon emissions as kg CO₂/m². The larger supermarkets are subject to the CRC Energy Efficiency scheme which requires that they monitor and then reduce their energy use. When supermarkets are building new schemes, it

makes sense to take advantage of passive design to reduce the need for energy use in the first place.

Comprehensive redevelopment of a site creates the opportunity to put in place infrastructure such as combined heat and power. This can be even more valuable if it becomes a catalyst for a town centre-wide network, for instance exporting waste heat from the retail units to nearby sheltered accommodation.

Even though Sainsbury's new megastore in Crayford has doubled in size, by introducing a geothermal system as part of the refurbishment it has cut energy usage by 30% and helped to reduce its electricity bill by 60%. The technology has been used before at Sainsbury's in Greenwich but here is the first time that it also extracts excess heat generated by the motors in the store's fridges, and captures it for re-use.

Supermarkets can also respond to climate change by taking a holistic approach to their use of natural resources. This will range from the longevity of the materials used in building, and their potential for re-use, to the management and conservation of water. Rainwater can be collected, for instance for use in non-food areas.

With flash flooding becoming more frequent in urban areas, it is worth designing open space with porous surfaces, rather than the usual hard paving and tarmac, to slow the flow of rainwater to the drains. Generous planting in the spaces around the building will also increase absorption.

For detailed advice on how to create sustainable urban environments at the different scales of building, site and neighbourhood, visit www.cabe.org.uk/sustainability.



© Alexander Koller

Designed by ATP and completed in 2006, the Maximarkt supermarket in Wels, Austria, benefits from full height windows which flood the sales hall with natural light

'Planning authorities are in a strong position to show leadership in securing the highest environmental standards from the scheme's developers'

3 Getting the housing right

One of the most serious issues for mixed-use supermarket-led development is the quality of the housing, as outlined above on pages 5-6. Mix and type of tenure needs careful consideration when deciding whether the site really is suitable for housing.

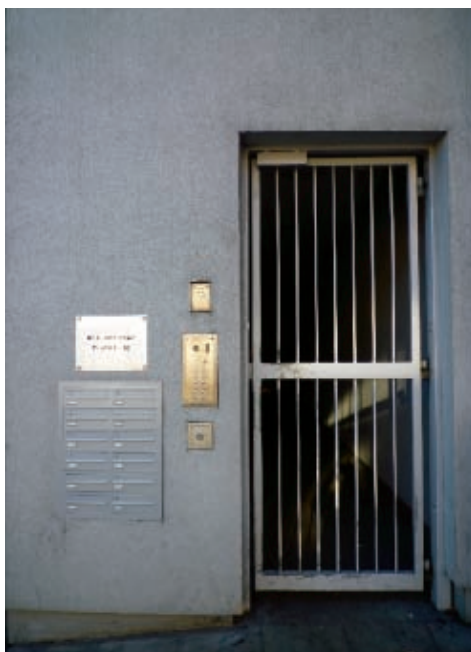
Building homes is a significant long term commitment to the local community, and good housing can add immeasurably to the overall quality of the development. Yet economic pressure often significantly affects the quality of design. The housing component of a scheme is not generally a significant source of value for the developer. We have been told it is often included on the guidance of local planning officers as a way to meet targets for social housing in a world where the council cannot directly invest to build it. Private residential housing then needs to be included to help defray the cost of these low-cost units.

There are several key things to consider when ensuring that supermarket-led housing development will provide a decent quality environment for residents. These include clear and safe access routes home, and a real 'address' – a proud and visible front door to the apartments from the street. There needs to be clear differentiation between routes for the shopping public and the residents' private world. Circulation within the building should be straightforward, so that residents do not have to negotiate a succession of long internal corridors to reach their apartments.

CABE has seen a number of schemes where balconies overlook the delivery yard or a parking podium. It is possible to use the podium to create attractive, secluded gardens and amenity space for residents, free of service ducts and plant.

'Building homes is a significant long term commitment to the local community, yet economic pressure often significantly affects the quality of design'

© Nick Hornig



Residents in supermarket-led housing developments are entitled to enjoy a high quality environment, starting with a proud front door off the street (picture on far left). The gate shown near left, by contrast, fails to say 'welcome home'

4 Creating good public realm and reducing car dependency

© Collado Collins



Highams Park, a major Tesco development in north London, proposes 260 homes around a park which is at the heart of the scheme, providing attractive views for residents

Open space in supermarket-led schemes generally amounts to a large expanse of tarmac dotted with the occasional tree. This is because the purpose of open space is often defined so narrowly – for parking cars and for servicing buildings across the site.

A more productive approach, for both developer and local authority, starts from viewing the site as urban space, just like the public realm across the rest of town, and thinking about how that status can be reflected in its design quality and in the materials used for its landscaping. This leads to the public space on the site becoming people oriented and supportive of neighbourhood activity, for instance by hosting a local market.

The current supermarket model entails a constant flow of heavy delivery vehicles and cars, and creating a good safe environment in that situation starts from the premise that pedestrians have

priority over drivers. It is possible to reduce the visual impact of car parking through enclosing it within a block: an expansive street level plot creates a gap which magnifies its impact.

A good masterplan will generate a series of logical routes and generous, broad links that people would want to use, day and night. Strong landscaping helps to define character and sense of place. Public routes, semi-private spaces and private spaces can be demarcated through level changes and gated access.

Reducing car dependency

The car is fundamental to the food retailer's current business model. Consumer habits such as the fast bulk shop are hard to change. Planning authorities are nonetheless obliged to encourage patterns of development which reduce the need to travel by car, and developers have a significant responsibility when choosing site location: it should be where 'everyone can access services

or facilities on foot, bicycle or public transport rather than having to rely on access by car.'³

PPS4 recommends a strategic approach to parking provision: car parks can be designed to serve the centre as well as the store, for instance by providing access from streets around the site.

Developers can also take a proactive approach to reducing reliance on cars without harming the business model. Credible transport alternatives, such as courtesy bus schemes, can be offered, and discounts for people using public transport or taxis. At some Waitrose stores, cyclists can hire shopping baskets on wheels. Other incentive schemes encourage off peak shopping to minimise the parking needed. The expansion of home delivery services reduces the number of car dependent shopping trips.

5 Planning for the long term

All local economies are subject to change and PPS1 stresses the importance of drawing up plans over appropriate time scales, and not focusing on the short term or ignoring longer term impacts or the needs of communities in the future.

The fees for architects engaged on supermarket projects are too tight to allow time for progressive thinking. Where schemes are led by developers, many run design competitions, but when it comes to food store shells, CABA does not see design teams regularly commissioned through competition. This can stifle creative thinking and leave the prevailing model of supermarket design unchallenged, making any real change for the better more difficult to achieve. By offering design teams space to think creatively, a well-managed design competition can open up a range of surprising and valuable possibilities, producing solutions that create better

spaces and better support commercial viability.

Shopping patterns are changing: industry analysts, IGD, report that 13 per cent of people shopped online for groceries in 2009 and this figure is expected to double by 2014. So supermarket buildings may need to be designed in a way which allows them to be adapted for new uses. Structural flexibility could include floor-to-floor heights suitable for future conversion to office use, and building in the possibility for lateral subdivision.

The inclusion of housing in mixed-use schemes makes it particularly important to design for change. Out of town, it is feasible to build on the premise that sheds can change use or be dismantled, but it is a different matter to unstick complicated building forms with a range of uses and different life cycles on suburban or inner city sites.

‘Out-of-town retail sheds can change use or be dismantled but it is a different matter to unstick building forms with different life cycles’

A 22,000 sq ft store for Preston-based supermarket group Booths, which has been designed to integrate sympathetically into the historic town of Garstang, Lancashire. The development includes a new public square. Architects: Damson Design



© David Millington Photography Ltd

Strengthening the role of local planning authorities

The quality of supermarket design reflects the capacity of local government to create great places (socially, economically and environmentally), and make decisions which balance all three.

Land in town centres is a scarce commodity but, curiously, there is still a constant threat of radical underdevelopment. So beyond the immediate economic dividend, there is scope to ensure every development improves the local environment and creates a more successful place – provided the scheme is well designed, with a good mix of use and form, integrated into its surroundings and straightforward to reach from all directions.

Current planning policy already puts planners in a strong position to secure retail developments that respond to the local environment as well meet the demands of business. It helps local authorities to resist arguments that in tough economic times they must lower their expectations and approve masterplans and large projects which they might regret five years on when the plans come to fruition. It provides the basis for negotiation with developers: every local authority is working to reduce carbon emissions, for instance, and planning policy requires patterns of development which support this.

‘Planning policy already helps local authorities to resist arguments that in tough economic times they must lower their expectations’

The right support for planning officers

In CABE's experience, planning officers have a critical role in articulating how high standards can be achieved. Pre-application discussions in particular present an important opportunity for the planning officer and the developer to better understand each other's objectives. Through them, they can ensure there is clarity about the local planning framework and the unique identity of the place expressed within it, which needs to be reflected in the emerging proposals. The officer who can draw on experience of how commercial operational efficiency drives decisions can marshal a good case for key aspects of community interest, as environmental responsibility and high quality public spaces. In other words, pre application discussions present an invaluable opportunity to align interests. The problems occur when they are cursory and uninformative, and sometimes it can help if officers have been given training in negotiation skills.

Success is of course predicated on the local authority having already defined what it wants from the site. The masterplan needs to be based on a clear idea of the character and function of the place that will be created. It will set up a framework for a hierarchy of uses as well as hierarchy of streets and spaces. It should also provide a sound basis for development and change. For many sites it is the supermarket which drives the value, and in the absence of strategic vision from the local authority, the interests of the retailer will naturally drive the masterplan.

Finally, planning officers need to have design skills in order to be confident that the proposal supports local expectations for the development. These might include safer, more inviting pedestrian routes, with traffic movement minimised; and building at a scale and in a way which enhances local character.

The changes ahead for planners

In the future, planners will have even more responsibility for sustainable economic development. PPS1 already emphasises the importance of good design, local distinctiveness and sustainable development. It also emphasises the need to think about how the local economy might change. This is particularly pertinent for mixed-use development because of its complexity and different ownership structures. Its long term value needs to be protected, for the developer and the community.

Changes to the planning system will also now enable communities to take the lead in shaping their surroundings, with local projects designed through a collaborative process. The community's attitude to new development and change will

determine the vision in the new neighbourhood plans. There will need to be better community understanding of aspects of planning such as land uses, standards for architecture and design, and sustainable development. So planning officers will be required to provide a greater depth of support and provide enough data to help local people make well informed decisions.

Neighbourhood planning means that local people will have the right to take a far greater role in the development of their community. While many communities welcome the addition of a new supermarket in the town centre, others will doubtless lodge significant objections. Local people are often more willing to support a new scheme if it is well designed and integrated and will improve the quality of the place.



© Harala Hamilton

Delivery bays dominate at Tesco Hammersmith at Brook Green in west London, positioned directly underneath the residential units

What should happen next?

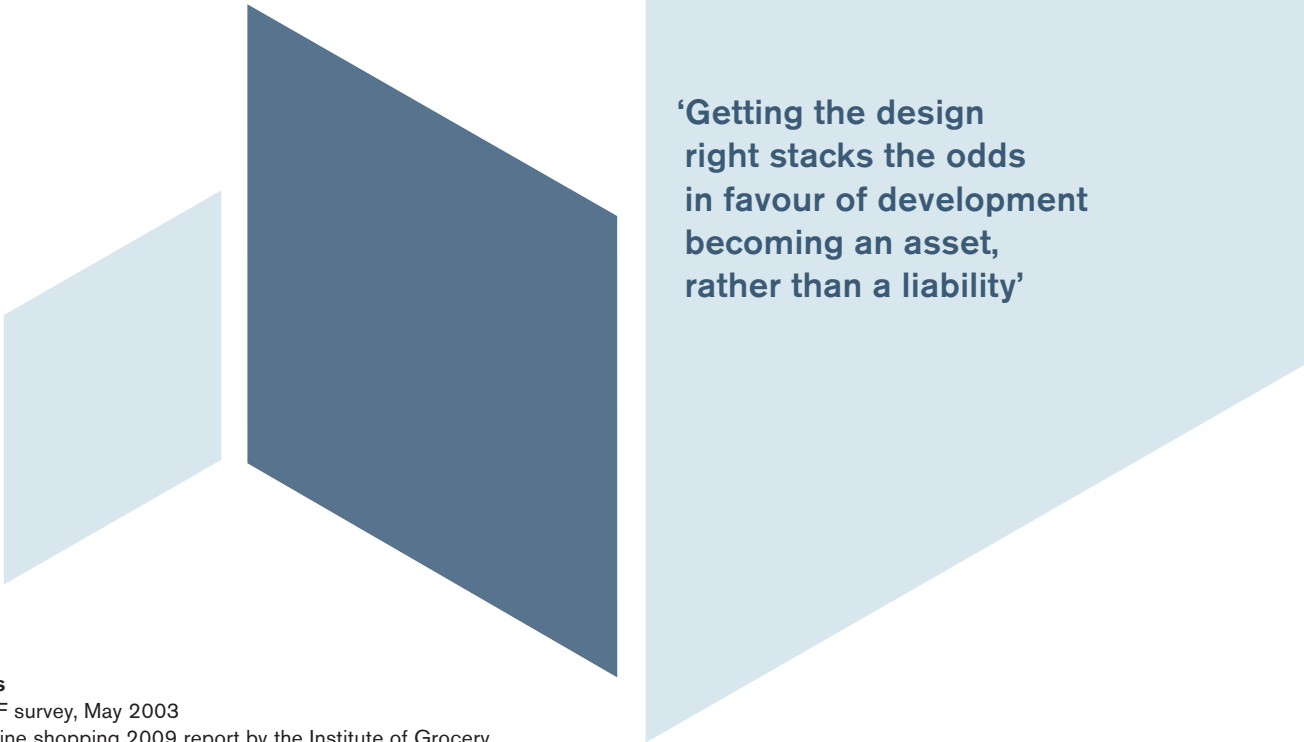
We know that supermarket-led development can bring real benefits to towns and neighbourhoods. Over the coming years, these businesses will be increasingly important players in job creation and physical renewal. Our experience suggests that where things go right, supermarket-led regeneration can be a real asset. But the benefits of this asset are not yet always fully realised.

Perhaps the most common reason for permitting weak schemes is prioritising the short term value of the developer's investment over its long term impact on quality of place. Sometimes councils with weak local economies are wary of refusing permission, which can be a source of conflict with officers who want to maximise the potential of the scheme to create somewhere that is well designed.

Finding a constructive route through the misunderstandings and competing priorities would go a long way to securing better outcomes for everyone: meeting the need for economic development for the local area, for the commercial viability of the store, and for sustainable placemaking.

Each of these should reinforce the other – the thread running between them is the goal of creating vibrant and viable town centres. So there are many shared interests between councils and supermarkets, and many of the seemingly intractable tensions could be resolved by applying design solutions. But where the differences are real, clarity about the trade-offs would help decision makers on both sides to achieve more of their goals.

Getting the design right won't make all the problems associated with supermarket-led development go away, but it would stack the odds more firmly in favour of such development becoming a genuine asset, rather than a potential liability.



'Getting the design right stacks the odds in favour of development becoming an asset, rather than a liability'

Notes

1 NEF survey, May 2003

2 Online shopping 2009 report by the Institute of Grocery Distribution

3 PPS1: Delivering sustainable development, page 11





Supermarkets now often create large parts of our towns, leading mixed use developments which come with housing, public space and other non-retail uses. These can bring valuable jobs and investment. But if they are badly designed, the development will undermine regeneration and any sense of place.

This report is based on design reviews by CABI of 30 major schemes from around the country by retailers including Tesco, Asda and Sainsbury's. It offers practical advice to planners and councillors on how to work with supermarkets to ensure that schemes are both commercially viable and enhance the place in which they are built.

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