

A Store That's Right For Milngavie

(The title quotes Tesco's own Press Release)

It has emerged that most members of our local communities share common views of how the store should be redeveloped. What follows has been written in collaboration with the community councils and residents' associations of Milngavie, Bearsden and Strathblane and amenity groups and traders of Milngavie and now incorporates comments from the public at large.

Through the new planning consultation process, Tesco has a unique opportunity to develop and then maintain creative relationships with the people of Milngavie, Bearsden and the surrounding area, on whom the profitability of their store depends.

The Gavin's Mill Road site, at the historic core of Milngavie, is highly sensitive. It is encircled by the town centre Conservation Area, with its Listed Buildings, and by Lennox Park. Originally part of this park, the site is entirely surrounded by trees. It is bisected by the Allander Water, a key wildlife corridor, and the Allander Way, a walking/cycling route of regional importance. Historic buildings in the vicinity are small in scale.

Tesco now wish to 'deliver a store that's right for Milngavie'. It is essential that any re-development should protect and enhance both the special character of the surroundings and the vitality and viability of Milngavie Town Centre.

1. A store that's right for Milngavie, whilst remaining a local store, could accommodate a *small* increase in size.

The present store is popular with its customers because they can quickly and conveniently complete their shopping. Data from the Streets UK Survey commissioned by Tesco showed that most local shoppers (from Milngavie, Bearsden and Strathblane) *do not want an expanded store*, both for such reasons of convenience and also because of the economic, traffic and visual impacts. A compromise would be an expansion in floor-space of *no more than 25%* to allow, for example, for wider aisles.

(With 10,221 sqm floorspace, roughly double the existing store, the refused first proposal would have been one of the largest in the UK, totally inappropriate for a small town such as Milngavie and especially for this sensitive site. Most superstores of Tesco Extra scale are located in retail parks. The rapid growth of on-line shopping may render much floorspace redundant.)

2. The store should be redeveloped roughly on its present footprint, i.e. south of the Allander Water, and facing *towards* the town centre.

A modest increase in height of part of the building to allow a mezzanine level may be possible without significant townscape or visual impact – as suggested to We Like Milngavie by Land Use Consultants in their report.

3. The car park should remain in its current location where it was provided to serve the town centre 40 years ago.

There should be sufficient spaces for both Tesco and town centre users. For this a second storey may be required, which should be achieved by constructing the lower

storey at or near the base level of Gavin's Mill. Such a structure need not rise above the level of Woodburn Way nor extend close to Gavin's Mill. It would allow open views over the Allander Valley and should be designed to retain an open aspect to the Mill. A green roof or roof garden could be incorporated, as Land Use Consultants suggest. Parking provision for users of Gavin's Mill requires formal agreement.

4. **To protect that part of Milngavie Town Centre designated the 'Prime Shopping Area' in the Local Plan, the range of goods and services in the new store should be restricted by planning conditions, as indicated by the Appeal Reporter.**

These conditions should be robustly enforced by East Dunbartonshire Council. The list of exclusions can be discussed during the consultation period, but for example, *goods* should include books, and *services* should include post office, pharmacy, beautician, hairdresser, optician, travel agent, dentist and dry cleaner. (The existing store was originally intended only as a food store, but the planning conditions to restrict the proportion of non-food goods have not been enforced).

5. **The store building should blend with the 'attractive park and riverside setting', and be sympathetic to the setting of the listed Gavin's Mill and railway station.**

Natural materials, such as stone and slate, would allow this and more innovative approaches, such as a grass or sedum roof, should also be considered. The appearance of a large monolithic structure in the landscape (as with the previous proposal with its long, continuous roofline) should definitely be avoided.

6. **There should be genuine enhancement of the surroundings, including the public spaces and pedestrian/ cycle routes within the site.**

There is an opportunity to create an attractive landscape corridor, with benefits to wildlife, along the course of the Allander Water. This is currently confined within a narrow channel in front of the store. Parking should be avoided close to the river. Trees should be preserved where possible, particularly the avenue trees of Woodburn Way, as these contribute much to the setting of the conservation area and its listed buildings. Further planting would create a more sylvan setting for Gavin's Mill. An intriguing possibility would be provision of a lade, or equivalent, with a view to eventual re-activation of the mill wheel.

7. **Tesco state that they wish to "keep people shopping both in our store and the whole of the town centre". For this, the linking routes must be pleasant, well lit and easily accessible by all.**

There are opportunities to reduce gradients at the underpasses to the store. The Allander Way, which starts at the West Highland Way obelisk, could lead gently down a landscaped riverside ramp to an enhanced fish pass area (*not* overshadowed by a high building). At the Main Street end the possibility of a lift should also be considered.

8. **A new store must be at least as accessible to disabled people as is the present.**

The Disability Discrimination Act requires that there is "no detriment" in a replacement building. Parking spaces for blue badge holders must be no further from the store entrance than at present, and provision for Dial-a-Bus or MyBus for dropping-off and pick-up must likewise be close to the store entrance.