

The Appeal Hearing and Inquiry

Tesco's Appeal against East Dunbartonshire Council's refusal of planning permission for their "Extra" superstore took place from Tuesday to Friday February 1-4 2011.

Spokespersons for the community were well supported by audience throughout.

Tuesday featured a round-table discussion dealing with the design of the development, its visual impacts on the town, and on its conservation area and listed buildings. Provost Gotts and Councillor Stewart forthrightly defended the Council's refusal. Grahame Lawson and Don Martin, led by Peter Swinson spoke as third party for the community, with technical support of professional landscape architect Martin Tabor.

The focus on Wednesday, spilling over to Thursday morning was retail: the vitality and viability of Milngavie's shopping precinct, with Peter Swinson leading for the community. Much depends on whether the superstore can be expected to increase footfall in the precinct as Tesco claim, or decrease it as the community strongly believes. This and the following session on Traffic were formal, with witness statements and cross examination - for Tesco by their London-based QC Mr Patrick Clarkson.

Thursday morning saw one of several lighter moments. With Mr Clarkson about to pour ridicule on the outrageous suggestion that Tesco might compete with precinct hairdressers, Community Council spokesperson Margaret Dunn was able to present him with a press report of Tesco's latest venture - into the beauty business, with value haircuts in 70 stores! (This had appeared in that very morning's Daily Mail, and was sent to We Like Milngavie independently by three supporters). Both Margaret, and Rona Miller who spoke for the precinct traders, were unflinching under fire.

So also was Grahame Lawson speaking for the community on traffic, a professional with extensive and highly relevant experience. The week ended with an accompanied inspection of the site and surrounding area by The Reporter, in heavy rain. For this the height of the proposed store was roughly indicated by two very large helium balloons.

The sessions throughout were presided over by the Scottish Government Reporter, Mr Trevor Croft. He conducted the sessions with unfailing courtesy and friendly consideration to all parties and public alike. The parties have to send him written closing statements, and then await his decision in a few weeks' time.

Commenting afterwards, Robin Brown, Chairman of We Like Milngavie, said that the community spokespersons had presented their statements in a very competent manner. They were the front line of a great team effort of volunteers, strengthened by knowing they were speaking on behalf of no less than fourteen local organisations.