

Amphill Road, Flitwick — Aldi Stores Ltd

Central Bedfordshire



Through an evidence-led and collaborative strategy, Planning Potential secured planning permission for a foodstore on a greenfield, greenbelt site, in Flitwick. We believe this is one of the first ever consent of this type in the UK.

The proposed retail development on a greenfield, greenbelt site, in an out-of-town location, raised a range of complex planning policy challenges. In addition, the greenbelt nature of the site also meant that any application could be viewed contentiously. It was therefore crucial to build a strong case around the Very Special Circumstances (VSCs) supporting development, whilst engaging with the local community.

We produced a Retail Impact Assessment that demonstrated significant quantitative and qualitative need for a new discount retailer to serve the local area. We undertook extensive public engagement programme, which reached over 10,000 local people and included presentations to both Flitwick and Amphill town councils. The feedback supported the conclusions of the RIA and showed that an overwhelming number of local people wanted to see increased local shopping choice.

Early pre-application meetings were held with Central Beds Council to scope out sequential searches. Our analysis demonstrated that there were no alternative sites. Further VSCs of the case included promoting more sustainable shopping patterns through clawback of trade, and the economic benefits of the proposals.

The application was recommended for approval and resolved to approve at Committee.

The application was subject to challenge from a competitor, and the decision was subsequently quashed. We responded by undertaking fresh analysis and preparing further evidence that went far and beyond what would normally be required for the nature and scale of development. This only provided further proof of the extent of need for the development locally and was independently reviewed by the Council's retail consultants. The application was reported to committee again, where Planning Potential represented the client, leading in presentation and fielding member questions. Thanks to the robustness of approach and extent of engagement that had been undertaken throughout the entire process, members again resolved to grant planning permission.

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Summary of Achievements

- Securing the first consent of this kind in the UK
- Production of retail impact assessment
- Building case for Greenbelt VSCs
- Extensive and co-ordinated planning and communications approach, securing significant support from local politicians and the community
- Securing resolution to grant consent and successfully passing through planning committee
- Liaison with Secretary of State during referral
- Successfully overcoming third-party challenge