SE06/3633/F

DPDS CONSULTING

9.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1 The retail impact study is based on a project specification agreed with the Local Planning Authority. The specification recognised that the proposal is for retail development in an out-of-centre location but of limited scale and significantly below the threshold for a full retail impact study set out in PPS6. Nevertheless, because Ross-on-Wye is a market town in a rural area, it is vulnerable to competition from larger centres nearby and a cautious approach should be adopted.

9.2 The report addresses the retail tests set out in PPS6 and the Herefordshire UDP, viz:-

i) Need;

ii) The appropriateness of the scale;

iii) The sequential approach to site selection; and

iv) The likely impact on the town centre.

It also examines the vitality and viability of Ross-on-Wye town centre. In relation to these tests we conclude as follows.

9.3 There is a need for further comparison goods retail floorspace in Ross-on-Wye if it is to maintain its current market share. Expenditure on comparison goods in the towns catchment area is likely to increase from £61m in 2003 to £72m in 2007 and £82m by 2011. This is an increase of 34% in 8 years

9.4 On a similar basis there is a need for further floorspace suitable for retailing bulky goods. Expenditure on such goods is increasing faster than on comparison goods as a whole and the amount of expenditure available in the catchment area is likely to increase by £8m between 2003 and 2011.

9.5 It is important that Ross-on-Wye should maintain is market share. Otherwise it will tend to decline as the pattern of more frequent shopping trips to larger centres becomes established and the familiarity of what is available in the town declines.

9.6 There is a shortage of retail facilities for bulky goods in Ross-on-Wye both in terms of the expenditure within the catchment area and what is available in other towns. There is therefore a qualitative, as well as quantitative need for the larger retail units suitable for selling bulky goods.

9.7 The turnover of the proposal is likely to be between £2.67m and £3.90m, depending on the mix of retailers on the site. The higher level is only likely if one of the units operates as an electrical goods shop. The first retailers are known and the best estimate of the turnover is £2.67m but a general bulky goods condition is sought and the implications of retailers in the units are therefore assessed.

9.8 This turnover demonstrates that the proposal is appropriate in scale to the available expenditure in the catchment area and the role and function of Ross-on-Wye. At 480 sq m each, the units are at the bottom end of the size range for retail warehousing, which are more commonly 930 sq m each, and again this indicates that the units are of appropriate size for Ross-on-Wye.

9.9 There are no sites available within or on the edge of the town centre to accommodate retail development. The only possible site for development is the KyrleSt/Brookend St site. This not available for any development because of a combination of landownership and physical constraints. If it were available it would be suitable for development as a foodstore or a mixed-use development including unit shops. These uses would contribute more to the vitality and viability of the town centre than bulky goods sales.

9.10 Ross-on-Wye town centre is relatively prosperous for a town of its size and has maintained this position since our earlier report in 2000. However, market towns such as Ross-on-Wye are generally vulnerable to competition from their larger neighbours as a result of the increasing concentration of retailing in the largest national multiples which only operate from the larger towns. In these circumstances, it is right to be cautious and therefore, although the proposal is well below the threshold for retail impact assessments, we have examined the likely impact.

9.11 We have identified those shops in the town centre that would suffer competition from the proposed units because they sell the same category of goods. Competition is not always that direct, because although the goods are in the same category, they are often very different in quality and price. We have identified a maximum of 6 shops which sell the same category of goods in the town centre and might be affected by the proposal and estimate that at most, 2 or 3 shops could close, although it is extremely difficult to assess the likely closure of shops which are not run by public companies. The decision to close such shops is rarely the result of a single cause. However, the purpose of planning policy is to protect the vitality and viability of the town centre and not existing commercial interests. We conclude that even if all six shops affected by the proposal were to close, this would not affect the vitality and viability of the town centre.

9.12 In the first place the shops potentially affected are not destination shops which attract shoppers to the town centre on their individual trading attractions. Secondly, they would be a very small proportion of the 218 units in the town. Thirdly, the units vacated would be re-occupied within a reasonable time. Growing expenditure on comparison goods in the catchment area (an extra £21m - +34% - between 2003 and 2008) and the very limited opportunities for extensive redevelopment in the centre is likely to maintain or increase demand for retail floorspace in the centre. A turnover of retailers within town centres is a normal part of life which is essential for the adaptation of town centres to wider economic and social changes, without which town centres will cease to meet the needs of residents.

9.13 We have concluded that there would be some benefits to the town centre in that the proposal would reduce journeys to larger centres and reduce the propensity to regard the centre as the main shopping centre. However, these benefits are rather intangible and we have made no attempt to quantify them.

9.14 For these reasons we conclude that the proposal would not have any significant effect on the economic health of the town. We have gone on to consider the impact in relation to the items for consideration of impact listed in

PPS6 and conclude that there would be no adverse impact on the vitality and viability of the town centre.

9.15 We therefore conclude that the proposal meets the planning policy tests and complies with the relevant retail policies (TCR2 and TCR9) of the Herefordshire UDP.