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**Oadby & Wigston Town Centres Action Plan - Enquiry 12th June 2012.**

**Robert M L Kemp - statement & possible questions.**

**1** Inspector's role, as detailed in Guidance Note, is clearly set out. My concern is principally that the proposals are both justified and effective as regards Oadby Town Centre.

**2** As can now unfortunately be expected, supporting documents are lengthy and I consider contain a great deal of information which I do not believe the average layman can possibly fully understand. I do not, therefore, wish to refer to them in any detail and must leave the Inspector to decide how and where this - my own - representation might fit in to the general picture.

**3** I noted at the Pre-hearing Meeting the Council's statement that the AAP has been subjected to a Sustainability Appraisal and your own assurance that the adequacy of such appraisal would be examined at this Enquiry.

**4** Some of my own views and concerns have previously been expressed to the Council. By way of elaboration:

**i)** I am mindful that the success of the proposals are ultimately dependant upon usage by both those who currently use the centre and by those who do not - both of these categories are further divided between those who live and/or work locally and those who do not. What market research has been undertaken amongst all such groups and what are the conclusions?

**ii)** Has such comprehensive market research included the different options as regards parking (e.g. adequacy of provision, both current and proposed; location; charges or otherwise; ground level or otherwise etc etc)?

**iii)** All proprietors of business premises will wish to increase their levels of activity. Has the Sustainability Appraisal included information as to the current levels of demand and supply as regards all such premises? I am concerned, especially, that the proposals might well include provisions for more cafes, bistros and other leisure outlets than can possibly be justified unless footfall is to increase significantly. Unless there is compelling evidence to suggest that will happen, the result could easily be even more units competing for the same size of cake or possibly a smaller cake if current users are discouraged for any reason.

I note with interest an article which appeared in the Leicester Mercury only last Saturday, 9th June, which referred to what was termed "the latest retail survey" of Leicester, completed in 2011. I hope the Council can confirm they have analysed this survey in which a poll of traders evidently gave reasons for the rate of un-occupancy as "astronomical" rents, out-of-town shopping centres and online shopping. The Council certainly cannot influence any of these factors and neither, necessarily, can developers. If high rents impact upon prices, the public alone can call the tune and some - perhaps many - of those using Oadby at present might defect.

This will all influence so-called "sustainability".

5 The Draft Public Realm Strategic Supplementary Planning Document - para. 26 - refers to the resources provided by O & W Council to South Wigston. I have failed to see any resultant improvement - in fact, travelling along the main shopping road in recent years it is only the worrying and depressing lack of activity I have noticed.

6 In my view, the focus of attention must be how to attract additional footfall in Oadby - and other town centres and I do not believe that can simply be achieved by drawing up plans in Council offices and then "consulting" formally. I believe a much more pro-active - and meaningful - form of consultation is essential and I remain to be convinced this has been undertaken.

RMLK/docs/bl.