

## LOTS Hijack Council's Special Meeting

Written by John Eager

Friday, 07 October 2011 11:53 - Last Updated Thursday, 03 November 2011 14:00

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Ledbury Town Council decided last night to add supporting arguments to their proposal of two weeks ago to reject the Tesco planning application. The 'add-on' was supported by 8 councilors, with 9 abstaining and one refusing to vote. The council decided to use the reasons put forward by Rich Hadley of LOTS (Ledbury Opposes Tesco Superstore) as its supporting argument.

LOTS effectively hijacked the meeting with Mr Hadley delivering a calm, measured and intelligent rejection of Tesco's planning application to councilors.

Handing over a 3,578 name petition to the mayor Mr Hadley then outlined why the council should reject Tesco's planned move. He told council the application was counter to the Policy Framework, both local and national; that it was contrary to the Unitary Development Plan which stated that no extra retail space was needed in Ledbury for a further 14 years and that existing employment land should be maintained; that LOTS impact report by an independent top London firm [Dalton Warner Davis](#) revealed that the Tesco build was likely to undermine the viability of the town centre and, finally, that Tesco had not produced a sequential assessment exploring other possibilities, including the development of its current site.

Mr Hadley told the council that the impact report predicted that the Co-Op would be forced to close, losing consumer choice and car parking for Ledbury shoppers and that new low-profit enterprizes would take over the High Street. Businesses such as charity shops and takeaways would pay lower rents causing landlords to spend less on the upkeep of heritage buildings.

Councilor Jupp told council to accept these conclusions as supporting arguments to the resolution council passed two weeks ago. Mr Jupp wanted to add one other reason stating that the Tesco plan would interfere with Ledbury's Charter Market.

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Before the vote was taken councilor Bradford asked how the council could vote on a document being used as an 'add-on' that they had not even read.

Before the vote councilors had a debate which centred on what went wrong at the meeting two weeks ago, rather than the merits of LOTS and Councilor Jupp's 'add-on' to the resolution.

Councilor Martin Eager told council he was 'bemused and confused' that they had had their chance two weeks ago, but instead of properly debating the issue, council had 'squabbled' which led to a 'confused vote'. He went on to describe that meeting as a 'shambolic farce' and questioned whether after debating the issue again certain councilors might want to change their minds.

He reminded council that this was the most important planning decision they had faced in the last ten years.

Councilor Eager asked whether the council would behave the same way when the Sainsbury's proposal needed to be debated.

'I feel cheated' he ended up saying, and repeated himself 'I feel cheated.' When it came to the vote, councilor Eager again refused to take part.

Councilor Cooper attempted to apologise to the town on behalf of the council saying that the council had not acted responsibly, however she was interrupted by councilor Bradford who told her to 'speak for yourself' and not to apologise for others.

Councilor Watt, who also stands on Herefordshire Council and will vote there on the Tesco planning application, appeared to scold the council saying it had been 'tied in a knot' but now, tonight, 'they can do it' - presumably he meant the council accept these add-ons to the original resolution of two weeks ago.

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Councilor Francis, who had been away during the first vote, asked why none of the more experienced councilors two weeks ago had not intervened and demanded that supporting arguments be attached to the resolution.

### **Last night's special meeting potentially raises more questions than it attempted to answer:**

How will Tesco's supporters react to the council (or half of its councilors) using the LOTS statement as its own supporting arguments?

Why couldn't councilors find their own supporting arguments?

Why didn't council do this two weeks ago, as it should have done?

How could councilors who abstained two weeks ago, now vote in favour of these supporting arguments?

Can Herefordshire Council accept these 'add-ons' two weeks late? Are these 'add-ons' acceptable in law?

Was this 'special' meeting held according to the council's own standing orders?

Should the town council have Herefordshire councilors standing on it, who because of their first affiliation, refuse to debate issues like these and will not vote on them? How can councilor Watts say '*they* can do it' when he is referring to his own council? Surely any other councilor would say '*we* can do it'? Where do their affinities lie?

Councilors have been criticised for abstaining on these crucial votes. Why does half the council

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not have a view (yes or no) to this, or if they do why are they hiding it?

On at least two occasions the mayor, councilor Conway, who was chairing the meeting, was abruptly told by councilors how to proceed correctly. This is the same councilor who chaired the 'shambolic farce' two weeks ago, the 'squabble' that councilors mocked and then felt the need to apologise to the town for.

Does councilor Conway need guidance and support on council procedure, protocol and chairing meetings?