

Newsletter July 2022

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



A warm welcome to our latest newsletter. We know it's summer because as we go to press Wimbledon fortnight is in full swing – pardon the pun!

Well, when a leaflet from Lidl dropped through my letter box recently announcing their intention to submit a planning application to demolish the Mercure Hotel on Wetherby Road and replace it with a supermarket, there was a strong feeling of déjà vu as, you may recall, a similar planning application by Sainsburys was refused a decade ago. We have since had a number of people asking for the position of BW on this

proposal. You will find this clearly explained below.

I know that you have heard this from me before, but we really do need additional support for our efforts on behalf of our town and community.

Our search for a Treasurer continues. There must be numerous people who have technical expertise in specific business situations. We understand the busy lives people lead these days, but please consider helping our efforts. If you feel you can give up a little of your time to help, please get in touch. The contact details are shown in this newsletter and can also be found on the website. Alternatively, if you would care to contact me by phone on 07973 805055 or by email at roger.owen.3@btopenworld.com I will be pleased to provide more information.

Enjoy the summer! Thanks for reading.

Roger Owen

Chair: **Better Wetherby Partnership**

LIDL – POTENTIAL PLANNING APPLICATION

The supermarket chain, Lidl, recently announced that it intends to submit a planning application to build a new store on the site of the Mercure Hotel on Wetherby Road. They propose to demolish the hotel and replace it with a large Lidl store along with a new elderly care facility. They are currently canvassing the views of local residents in advance of making a formal planning application.

It is important to highlight that in July 2012, Leeds Planning Authority refused an application by Sainsburys to demolish the Mercure Hotel and replace it with a supermarket. The grounds for refusal included that it would have a significant adverse impact on the vitality and viability of Wetherby town centre - basically that it would have serious and negative consequences for local town centre shops – and furthermore it would be harmful to the character and appearance of the adjacent Conservation Area.

A photograph of a Lidl leaflet. The leaflet features the Lidl logo and the text 'A new Lidl store for Wetherby'. It also includes a small image of a proposed development and a call to action: 'Have your say'. The leaflet text reads: 'Lidl intends to submit a planning application for a new Lidl store and elderly care facility on the Mercure Wetherby Hotel site off Wetherby Road. Before we submit a planning application to Leeds City Council for the proposals, we would like to know what the local community thinks of the plans.' It provides contact information for feedback: 'wetherby.expansion.lidl.co.uk' or 'lidlwetherby@new-stores.co.uk'. The leaflet also includes the website 'wetherby.expansion.lidl.co.uk' at the bottom.

Working to ensure that the physical character of Wetherby and District is protected and developed for the benefit of the community of both current and future generations.

email: betterwetherby@gmail.com

web: www.betterwetherby.com

Facebook: [#BetterWetherbyPartnership](https://www.facebook.com/BetterWetherbyPartnership)

BW believe that the strong reasons for refusal in 2012 remain and are even more valid today. In recent years, many town centres have experienced decline with substantial numbers of empty shops. We are fortunate that Wetherby has avoided this problem even through the COVID pandemic, remaining a thriving, vibrant place. The town is already well served with many excellent independent shops along with two supermarkets - Morrisons and ALDI – and food stores such as Marks and Spencer, the Co-op and a Sainsburys Local. The fact is that the impact of a new large store built at this important gateway to the town, will be considerable, as noted in 2012. It will undoubtedly have profound and negative consequences for Wetherby, especially on our excellent local shops.

Another significant point is that since the refusal of the Sainsbury's application a decade ago, the [Leeds City Council Site Allocation Plan \(SAP\)](#) has been published. The SAP identifies sites for housing, employment, retail and green-space to ensure that enough land is available in appropriate locations to meet the growth targets. ***The SAP states that this particular site is suitable for older persons housing/independent living if the hotel is to go. It also highlights the fact that the site affects the setting of the Wetherby Conservation Area and any future development should preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.***

BW strongly opposes the Lidl proposal and our position has been made clear to the supermarket management. The decision of BW is not a reflection on Lidl. The same decision would equally apply if another large supermarket wished to build on this site. We encourage local people to respond to Lidl with a clear message that this is the wrong place for a new store.

RACECOURSE APPROACH DEVELOPMENT – SWINNOW PARK

BW continues to question the 'Specialist' evidence submitted by the Developer's consultants in respect of Noise and Air pollution. Despite having made our views known on several occasions to Taylor Wimpey (TW), LCC Plans Panel and Planning Officers there appears to be a marked reluctance to accept there is a problem with both air and noise pollution from the A1(M) Motorway. The submissions of BW, which hold some weight are being largely ignored. Whilst some mitigation is now proposed, the BW view is that this probably does not go far enough, the results being potential health issues for future residents of the RA development. At the very least there should be some independent modelling and quantitative assessment of the impact of the proposed barriers between the A1(M) and the Swinnow Park development.

From recent exchanges with LCC it is very clear that Officers are apparently accepting submissions without challenge of any meaningful nature. This is unfortunate given the very good spirit of co-operation which has existed up to now with TW and BW and others such as Wetherby Civic Society. Unless this situation can be brought to a conclusion which will safeguard new residents then BW will have to take the matter further and we are currently exploring opening discussions with our own specialists.

Time now is becoming of the essence given the progress which has been achieved on the scheme to date.

LAUNCH OF WETHERBY AND VILLAGES CLEAN RIVER GROUP – SATURDAY, 9TH JULY

In the [May edition of the BW](#) newsletter we reported on concerns of discharges of raw sewage into the River Wharfe and questioned how Yorkshire Water will be able to cope with and manage the additional pressures arising from the building of up to 800 new homes and consequently a large growth in the local population.

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A polluted river poses obvious risks to people and animals, so in response to these concerns, the Wetherby and Clean Rivers Group was recently formed under the leadership of Ward Councillor Linda Richards. The aim of the Group is to achieve Bathing Water Status for the River Wharfe in Wetherby and Boston Spa.

To obtain this designation from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) it is necessary to prove that the public plays, paddles and swims in the river. The Group has arranged for volunteers to count the numbers of people on the riverbank and playing in the river during the summer months up to the 30th September 2022. Long shot photos will be taken to back up the count as evidence.

Achieving Bathing Water Status is an important first step to ensure that DEFRA regularly monitors the river so it is considered clean enough to paddle, swim and play in.

The launch of the initiative takes place on Saturday, 9th July, firstly at 10am at Wetherby Town Hall, followed by an event at Boston Spa Village Hall at 2pm. People are encouraged to support this important campaign to help protect the River Wharfe and the local environment.

More information can be found at www.wetherbyandvillagescleanrivergroup.com and also on Twitter at [@wavcrg](https://twitter.com/wavcrg).

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT BW? CONTACT US:

If any local organisations wish to learn more about BW, a talk about our activities can be arranged.

We also very much welcome and encourage volunteers and supporters to assist our efforts.

Please contact us with any comments and queries. If you wish to be included on our mailing list please send a request by email to betterwetherby@gmail.com. Please feel free to share this newsletter - the more people that are aware of these important local issues, the better.