

Royston Town Talk – Wednesday 7th October 2020

In attendance:

Cllr Tony Hunter (NHDC)

Cllr Ruth Brown (NHDC)

Cllr Jean Green (NHDC)

Cllr Gerald Morris (NHDC)

Cllr John Davison (Royston Town Council)

Cllr Michael Harrison (Royston Town Council)

Cllr Marguerite Phillips (Royston Town Council)

Cllr Steve Jarvis (HCC/NHDC)

Cllr Fiona Hill (HCC)

Ash Hawkins (NHDC Officer)

Anna Gouveia (NHDC Officer)

Tony Hunter chaired the Town Talk and opened the informal meeting at 615pm. Tony welcomed the members of the public and asked for any questions.

A question was raised about what the Council and others in the town were doing with regard to the possible closure of Morrisons. The resident raising the question said he had recently moved to Royston from Welwyn Garden City and asked if there was a Pressure Group that was trying to stop the closure of the store. The resident said he was 76 and had moved near to the town and would use Morrisons for his shopping. The resident asked why the town was not fighting to keep the shop open and why other food retailers had not been asked to view the building.

Tony Hunter (NHDC) was first to respond stating that Sir Oliver Heald QC MP, County Councillor Fiona Hill and himself had been in contact with Mr Potts (CEO) and others at the Head Office of Morrisons and numerous others, including councillors, had also been involved in trying to keep Morrisons in Royston. Tony also pointed out that action groups have, historically, formed in Royston when an issue arises, such as the recent planning application for a housing development at the top of Briary Lane, which was subsequently refused by NHDC Planning.

John Davison (Town Council) responded to the resident's query on why other food retailers had not looked at the Morrisons site by stating that supermarkets keep a very close eye on each other and would have known of Morrisons' closing down. John also added that Morrisons stated that their store was not economically viable.

John Davison also reinforced the statement made by Tony Hunter that it was NHDC Planning that had refused the application for housing and that the decision was not made by the Pressure Group.

Tony Hunter also confirmed that other supermarkets had looked at the Morrisons site.

Fiona Hill (County) said that it had been confirmed that the CEO of Morrisons, Mr Potts, had considered every viable option, but that the closure was felt necessary. Fiona stated that, apparently, whilst the shop was heavily used and well supported, particularly by older residents, shoppers were often only buying a few items and not using the shop for their weekly trolley shop. The lease is also due to expire. There is a bus stop outside the store and free parking for the first hour of shopping, on presentation of a receipt, if spending at least £10.

Ruth Brown (NHDC) supported Fiona Hill's statement by saying that although she uses Morrisons for her weekly shopping, most customers are only buying a few items or even single items and that the decision to close was commercial. Ruth Brown also advised the resident that the Royston Mayor Rob Inwood was very heavily involved in promoting the shops of the town and that petitions had been made trying to save the store from closure.

Mike Harrison (Town) said it was a great shame for the town that Morrisons was closing but that the Number 16 bus is available to take shoppers to Aldi, M&S and Tesco.