

A Replacement Tesco for Milngavie

Heritage: opportunities and constraints

Submission to community consultation by Milngavie Heritage Centre Group.

“Ensuring that East Dunbartonshire remains and becomes an even more attractive and distinctive place to live, celebrating the local historic and cultural heritage will help to foster community pride and distinctiveness”. (EDC Guidance Note)

Summary

Redevelopment of the site at Gavin’s Mill Road offers an attractive opportunity to enhance the public experience of major heritage features: the historic mill, the long-distance walk and cycle route: Allander Way, the river itself, the fish pass and the railway station.

Tesco’s previous application, driven by a scale totally disproportionate for the sensitive site, would have entailed major detractions from the heritage and the public realm.

The Heritage Centre group therefore supports the scale and layout principles described in the community’s document "A Store that’s Right for Milngavie".

Introduction

Several features within or adjoining the Tesco site at Gavin's Mill Road are fundamental to Milngavie's sense of place. They are highly regarded by residents of the surrounding communities, and are current or potential visitor attractions.

East Dunbartonshire seeks to foster *civic pride*. Voluntary groups such as ours, Milngavie Civic Trust and outstandingly, Milngavie in Bloom, as well as our Community Council, are key players in embodying this aspiration.

The Local Authority increasingly stresses *tourism* as a key driver of the economy in East Dunbartonshire. It is currently seeking to develop its role as a tourist/day trip destination. The Scottish government continues to “support the conservation and promotion of the historic environment as an irreplaceable resource, a reflection of Scotland’s cultural identity and a key feature of its appeal as a tourist destination”. (National Planning Framework 2).

Re-development on this extremely sensitive site presents a considerable opportunity to enhance the public experience of its heritage features, but re-development certainly must not detract from this. Enhancements would also contribute to the attraction of a visit to Tesco’s Milngavie store.

At the public hearing, the appellant described how the design for the previous application was chosen from a number of alternatives to minimize various negative impacts. That totally unacceptable impacts remained shows that the scale of that proposal was excessive for the site. It attempted to fit a quart into a pint pot.

Below, we address the following elements of the site:

- Gavin's Mill
- The sylvan character (reflecting part parkland origin).
- The Allander Water and Fish Pass
- The Allander Way
- The Railway Station

Gavin's Mill

Significance

The mill's significance is such that were it not for some alterations to the fabric it would be A, rather than B listed. Briefly: it lies at the root of Milngavie's identity, not only through the derivation of "Milngavie" but also because of its place as part of the historic "mill town" It is exceptional to have a mill building surviving close to a town centre, reflecting its historical context. This closeness is a legacy of the way Milngavie developed as a planned village northeast of the mill town (see map) during the eighteenth century (during the industrial/agricultural revolutions). The inhabitants of this village would have included mill workers.



Detail of an 18th Century map.

Vision

When approaching Gavin's Mill over the bridge in Gavin's Mill Road, the mill is seen as the focus of its setting. Despite parked cars, this remains a semi-rural, sylvan setting with wooded areas extending on both sides.



View of Mill from bridge in Gavin's Mill Road



Gavin's Mill falls and Allander Way from bridge in Gavin's Mill Road. (Fish Pass hidden by trees)

The mill should remain the focus from its main approach, and the green setting be preserved or enhanced. Similarly the open aspect from the mill towards the north and east of the townscape must be retained.

The bridge on Gavin's Mill Road also affords fine views of the Gavin's Mill falls (see above) and the fish pass. The railway station is also visible from the bridge, which should clearly remain the main access for the listed mill and ideally also the food store.

In future Gavin's Mill could become a first-rate tourist attraction, bringing substantial benefit to Milngavie. This would require historically-informed restoration of building details and replacement of the water supply of the original lade to re-activate the mill machinery. A part of the premises could acquire a public function. In the meantime it is essential that the access to and fully sylvan setting of the building be preserved.

Previous proposal

The previously proposed store building would have squeezed the historic mill into an insignificant corner. Its scale and mass would have dwarfed the mill building, being approximately 2 storeys higher and around forty times the footprint. It would have obstructed the open aspect from the Conservation Area at the mill towards the east and north east of the town and thus, to quote the Inquiry Reporter, "adversely affect the area's special character".

Gavin's Mill Road bridge, with its unique views, was to be downgraded to nothing more than access to the service yard. Visitors to, and customers of, Gavin's Mill would be diverted around the recycling area and then between the concrete pillars of two understorey car parks before arriving at the mill.

DPEA Reporter

In relation to the previous application, the DPEA Reporter cited as grounds for dismissal of the appeal, impacts both on setting of Gavin's Mill and of the Conservation Area at Gavin's Mill.

35. Apart from the sylvan setting framing the Allander Water, referred to above, the setting is not particularly attractive, the building effectively being hemmed in between the retaining wall supporting Allander Way on its west side and the car park in front. *The latter does at least give an open aspect to the frontage*, albeit with the mill being seen beyond parked cars. (MHCG italics. NB reference here to "Allander Way" is an error – the wall is *Woodburn Way* bypass)

42. Drawing these points together, I find the height of the proposed building would dominate Gavin's Mill and, because of this, and the open car park area, would detract significantly from, and be harmful to its setting. The proposals would thus be contrary to policy HE 5.

46. Despite the presence of parked cars the mill's setting still remains relatively open. This would change significantly by the construction of the new building, with its 11 metre or thereby high wall virtually adjacent to the conservation area boundary. This would obviously bring about a dramatic change to the setting of this part of the conservation area. *As it would remove the open setting*, this would adversely affect the area's special character. (MHCG italics)

48. Drawing these points together, because of the adverse impact on the special character of the conservation area at Gavin's Mill the proposals are contrary to policy HE 7.

64. With regard to scale and issues I have found an issue with the *size* and design of the building in relation to the setting of Gavin's Mill, and in that respect it does not meet the requirements of criterion b). (MHCG italics. Criterion b) refers to EDC Local Plan policy RET 2b)

Both visual dominance by virtue of scale, and views from and towards Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas are major issues in national guidance on the assessment of Setting.

The Reporter did not assess the similar impact on views from the southern end of the conservation area (i.e. south of the telephone exchange, including the B listed Corbie Ha' on elevated ground in Ashfield Road). However, these would similarly lose their open aspect across the Allander valley towards the east of Milngavie.



Open aspect from Ashfield Road, southern end of Conservation Area.

We conclude that *any building of or approaching the scale previously proposed*, if located on the present car-park, would both by visual dominance and obstruction of views detract unacceptably from the setting of Gavin's Mill and the southernmost extension of the Town Centre Conservation Area.

This can be avoided by locating a replacement store on the present site south of the river, and providing extra parking, if required, underground below the existing carpark.

Planning Policy

The emerging Local Plan 2 states: "The layout, design, materials, scale, siting and use of any development affecting a Listed Building shall be appropriate to the character and appearance of the listed building and its setting (HE2)".

"Development and demolition within a Conservation Area or affecting its setting shall preserve or enhance its character and be consistent with any relevant Conservation Area Appraisal or management plan that may have been prepared for the area.

The design, materials, scale and siting of any development affecting a Conservation Area shall be appropriate to the character of the Conservation Area and its setting. Trees which are considered by the planning authority to contribute to character and appearance shall be preserved. (HE3A).

The Sylvan Character of the site (reflecting part-parkland origin)

Significance

When the town centre was pedestrianised some 40 years ago, the setting of Gavin's Mill was protected by planting the by-pass embankment with trees. Where the embankment was too steep for planting (behind the mill) it was faced with sandstone, matching the mill. A car park was provided on the south side of the bypass to compensate for closure of the town centre to vehicles.

The parkland south of the river, Lennox Park, was gifted to the people of Milngavie. Following a shopping study in 1988 which concluded that Milngavie needed a larger food-store, the District Council decided to sell part of Lennox Park for this purpose. (The community was assured that the store would sell only food and be no larger than was needed to serve Milngavie). The new store building, cut into the hillside, was required to blend with its setting while the car park was landscaped with trees.

Now mature, the embankment trees are a key feature of the site, completing the green circle that encloses it. They contribute greatly to its character and amenity during the changing seasons, and are crucial to the setting of Gavin's Mill.

Vision

As the car park's original purpose of serving the town centre continues, it is essential that it remains close to the centre.

The sylvan setting of Gavin's Mill should be enhanced, by preserving the embankment trees and providing a softer, greener setting in front of the mill. The avenue trees of the approach to the listed building at Gavin's Mill Road should also be preserved.

The embankment trees also enhance the setting of the conservation area as seen in views towards it from the south and east. Moreover they have an important role in absorbing sound and carbon emissions produced by traffic on Woodburn Way.

Previous application

This entailed the removal of all the embankment trees and virtually all other trees within the site and their replacement with a massive built form completely inappropriate for the mill's setting. There was very little replacement planting and this only in small residual corners.

In complete contrast, the approved development at the Halleys/Homebase site has been *required to provide a new tree belt*, even though in that case there are no listed buildings or conservation areas in the vicinity.

Planning Policy

The Reporter for the Local Plan 2 examination has recommended strengthening the wording of the policy for trees to better protect existing trees and actively promote the planting of new ones. This reflects National Planning Framework 2, as also does the proposed Strategic Development Plan.

Trees are a key component of the latter, which states: "New areas of woodland will be planted and *where existing*, will be managed around and within the urban areas, becoming integral to their green infrastructure planning. It will address a range of key objectives, including economic competitiveness, health programmes, energy development and climate change mitigation in particular."

The Allander Water

Significance

Historically, Milngavie has been called the “child of the Allander” reflecting its medieval growth via industries along the river’s banks. The first was the corn mill (Gavin’s Mill) which remained in use until the 1950s, powered by water taken via a lade from upstream.

Biologically, the course of the Allander Water is a wildlife corridor of high significance since it is a major arterial corridor. It is part of the Central Scotland Green Network, a national priority under the National Planning Framework 2. The Report on Green Networks for the proposed Strategic Development Plan states that a key role for the planning system should be to “promote the Green Network as a key contributor to place-making and the enhancement of local distinctiveness”.

The map below is taken from the new Local Plan guidance notes. It shows the wildlife corridor hatched in green. The guidance also states “prior to preparing a development proposal, applicants should consult these maps to ascertain if the proposal can make a contribution towards helping realise the Green Network”.

A century ago construction of a 3m high weir prevented fish moving upstream, however a project to install a fish ladder completed in 1999 has allowed the return of the salmon.



Vision

Construction of the Wm Low store had a negative impact on the river, which is confined to a narrow channel in front of the store where its southern side is covered by walkways. There is still a bank on the northern side, continuing the corridor for wildlife. The trees here help to blend the store with the parkland on which it was built. Unfortunately customers arriving by car are barely aware of the river as it is hidden by parking along the banks.

The Heritage Centre Group’s vision would be to restore much of the pre-store riverside ambience, providing an enhanced setting for Gavin’s Mill and strengthening Milngavie’s sense of place.

As described to We Like Milngavie by Land Use Consultants, there is a significant opportunity for a landscape corridor along the course of the river within the site. The river should not be further canalized, but instead opened out to promote wildlife, and should form a positive feature not obscured by cars. Outwith the site, the fish ladder is in need of repair.

The present store, like Gavin's Mill, is at riverside level. Any redevelopment should have the main floor at the same level and opening directly onto this, thus making the most of the attractive setting.

The previous application

A+DS' brief comments referred to the "attractive park and riverside setting" but they considered that "the full potential of this location does not seem to have been realised".

The previous proposals made one improvement – to remove parking from the riverside nearest the mill – but apart from that the effects on the river would have been extremely negative:

The river would have been further constrained within the site, removing much of the remaining wildlife corridor. A hard surface walkway would have covered a large slice of the east bank, and another the north bank in front of the proposed Atrium (so that there would have been no vegetation between the new car park and store). Moreover at the bend in the river much of the inner bank, and walkway would have been under the store itself. (Only the latter was considered in the Ecological Report).

The main store floor would have been raised almost to the level of Woodburn Way. Consequently, the river would be scarcely seen. Shoppers would have looked out instead over the upper deck of a large car park.

The Allander Way

Significance

Milngavie is the "Gateway to the West Highland Way". The Allander Way and the Railway bring walkers to this gateway.

The Allander Way is a component of the **Kelvin Way**, which connects with the Clyde Way running through Glasgow. It connects with the West Highland Way at its north end (the obelisk) in Douglas Street. It is thus part of a strategic walking/cycling network of national importance, contributing to the aims of the Central Scotland Green Network. In the map above, the route through Milngavie Town Centre is shown by the red line.

National Planning Framework 2 states "The development of footpath and cycleway networks and other facilities and attractions will contribute to a more sustainable transport network and expand the range of recreational opportunities close to major centres of population, helping to encourage active travel and healthier lifestyles".

There is a high amenity section of the Way adjacent to the fish pass, with seats for observing the fish and other wildlife. This location therefore has the potential to provide significant benefits in terms of tourism and education. Milngavie in Bloom is further enhancing the area with planting. There is an access from here into the site, with direct views of Gavin's Mill. (See two following images).



Allander Way at Fish Pass with team from Milngavie in Bloom



Gavin's Mill from Allander Way at the Fish Pass

Vision

Any development should have particular regard for the amenity of the fish ladder section of the Way, and should certainly not overshadow it. The route within the site itself should run alongside enhanced river banks without having to cross vehicular traffic. Trees in the banks would help blend any development with the parkland setting. A tourism-oriented “Town Trail” is currently being developed. An enhanced Allander Way would provide an ideal route for the segment between the mill and the fish pass and railway station.

The Heritage Group would also like to see a more welcoming start to this important riverside route, from the obelisk to the fish pass. An information board could be provided, the gradient reduced, railings replaced (with thistle motif railings as elsewhere in the town centre) and laurel removed to give views of the river.

Previous application

The location of the service area was as insensitive as it could possibly be, immediately adjacent to the fish ladder section of the Way. Here the wall, already high, was raised a further 2m with an additional 3.5m screen on top, and behind that the 4-storey high building. Moreover there would be the noise and vibration from the service area and combined heat and power unit. The high structures and overshadowing would make the route so forbidding that people would not want to use it, negating the aims of the green network in improving health and reducing carbon, as well as those described above.

(The previous proposal labelled a small leftover space off the by-pass as a “Viewing Area” for the fish pass. Unfortunately this viewed the falls from the wrong direction, and few people walk along the bypass. Moreover the screen on its south and west sides would have blocked the splendid open aspect over to Lennox Park and Gavin’s Mill that currently exists at this location).

So large was the proposed store building that it actually covered the Allander Way, which had to pass through the understore car park and cross vehicular routes. Between the two understorey car parks the ambience would have been of an urban city centre rather than parkland – overdevelopment in the extreme.

DPEA Reporter

From his own text (81 below), the Reporter clearly misunderstood the route of Allander Way, so that his assessment must be discounted.

81. Other criticisms concern footpath layout, and particularly the route of the Allander Way, which runs through the appeal site. It is claimed this would be partly in shade because of its location close the walls of the high sided building. *In fact the Allander Way follows the line of the existing access road, and then the path alongside the station.* There may be some overshadowing, but in reality the present route is not particularly attractive, *passing the service entrance to the existing store.* For the reasons given above relating to the arrival of railway passengers, the walkway under the proposed scheme could arguably be an improvement to that existing. (MHCG italics).

Planning Policy

The emerging Local Plan 2 states “The Council will support the development and enhancement of the following tourism and visitor attractions:

iii) Other Longer Distance Paths - Through partnership with adjoining Councils and other key stakeholders East Dunbartonshire Council will seek to enhance the tourism development potential of longer distance paths such as the Forth and Clyde canal towpath, the Strathkelvin Railway Path and the *Kelvin Way.* (MHCG italics)”.

Railway Station

Significance

Milngavie Railway Station, a category B listed building, is one of very few to emerge comparatively unscathed from modernisation programmes. The east and west sides of the railway station represent clear phases in the development of Milngavie and its infrastructure, and as such are equally important (and of great interest). There is a wealth of preserved and restored architectural features. It is an attractive gateway for commuters, visitors and tourists, particularly those starting and finishing the West Highland Way.

The station forms part of a linear sequence of local features of historic and cultural importance, between the Town Hall and Lillie Art Gallery at one end, and Gavin's Mill at the other.

Vision

The Heritage Centre Group's vision is that for travellers approaching Milngavie by train, the sweep of Milngavie's distinctive conservation area should remain visible to the west and northwest. This would be achieved by the development layout described in "A Store that's Right for Milngavie". Screening (preferably green) could conceal the service and recycling areas in the foreground.

This layout would also have the significant advantage of allowing the visual connection between the heritage and cultural assets described above to be retained.

Conclusion

We have presented our vision for five key elements of the site, and described how the previous application would have severely detracted from them. It would have overwhelmed the mill by its sheer mass, diverted its access and closed off the open aspect from this part of the Conservation Area. It would have removed virtually all the trees and much of the wildlife corridor. It would have shown complete disregard for the safety and amenity of the Allander Way, and would have severed the visual connection between the railway and historic parts of the town.

We do not believe Tesco's design team were insensitive to these features – rather that constraints of scale and the decision to build on the present car park made these multiple negative impacts inevitable. Covering almost every square metre of this heritage-surrounded site with multi-layered development would have been a disaster for Milngavie's sense of place, its civic pride and the character which makes it such an attractive place to live.

There are many very pertinent questions in Architecture and Design Scotland's "Notes on Issues in Retail Development" which should inform any future proposal, and from which we quote a few examples:

- Do the proposals relate positively to their surroundings and the features of the site?
- Is the building design, size and massing appropriate for the location, contributing to the qualities of the surrounding spaces?
- Is the vision a result of consideration of all important aspects of the development, or has it been dominated by economic drivers?

Our consideration of heritage features of the site leads the Heritage Centre Group fully to support the community consensus view of how Tesco should modernize its store, described in "A Store that's Right for Milngavie".