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Our Ref: AM/25-01410
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Date: 30 May 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Homes, Spaces, Places Options and Preferences Plan Consultation

We write on behalf of Lidl Great Britain Limited ('Lidl'), in response to the Regulation 18 consultation on the Tameside's Homes, Spaces, Places (HSP) Options and Preferences Plan Consultation.

Introduction

Lidl is a substantial and growing presence in the UK convenience retail market, with over 980 stores currently trading and more than 35,000 employees. The business is investing significantly in the UK, including £500 million this financial year as part of its ongoing expansion programme. Lidl is actively delivering new stores nationwide to meet its objective of operating 1,000 stores across the UK in the near future.

Lidl's stores bring a wide range of benefits to the communities they serve. These include:

- Providing high quality products at the lowest possible prices;
- Delivering a modern and convenient shopping experience for local residents;
- Improving customer choice in the areas where they trade;
- Constructing buildings of sustainable, high-quality design with well-integrated landscaping; and
- Creating around 40 new jobs per store, aligned with the Living Wage Foundation rate for all eligible employees, and without the use of zero-hour contracts.

Lidl has a significant interest in bringing forward new stores within Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council Local Authority Area and on this basis, it wishes to ensure that the emerging HSP Development Plan facilitates sustainable retail investment and aligns with national planning policy.

Lidl welcomes the preparation of the HSP Development Plan and support the Council's intention to provide a sound and effective planning framework. However, they wish to make representations on several key policy matters, which it is considered require further refinement to ensure the Plan is positively prepared, justified, effective, and consistent with national policy as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024).

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Lidl wish to comment on a number of matters covered within the HSP Draft Plan, this includes:

- Retail Impact Threshold (Policy HSP C4);
- Employment Land (Policy HSP J3); and
- Planning for Retail Needs.

Retail Impact Threshold (Policy HSP C4 - Development Involving Retail and Leisure Uses)

As currently drafted, the policy states:

"1. The Council proposes for retail and leisure developments that are planned outside of the borough's designated centres, that an impact assessment be required where development is over the following locally set gross floorspace thresholds:

- a. Ashton-under-Lyne 1,750sqm*
- b. Denton and Hyde 1,250sqm*
- c. Droylsden, Stalybridge and Hattersley 750sqm*
- d. Mossley Local Centre 500sqm"*

The drafted policy proposes a retail impact assessment threshold based on the nature of specific centres. This approach is considered to be overly restrictive and inconsistent with Paragraph 94 of the NPPF, which establishes a default threshold of 2,500 square metres.

Additionally, the thresholds identified in the draft policy appear to apply uniformly across all types of retail development, including convenience retail, comparison retail, food retail and non-food retail. However, the impacts associated with different forms of retail are not equal. It is therefore considered appropriate for the policy to distinguish between food and non-food retail, rather than applying a single blanket threshold across the board.

It is Lidl's view that the national threshold of 2,500 square metres should be adopted for food retail development in any location across Tameside Borough.

Over the past 10 to 20 years, the food retail sector has undergone a significant shift. The majority of food shopping is now undertaken in mid to large format foodstores, many of which are located outside of town centres. These formats are often unsuited to central locations due to their size, parking requirements, and catchment-driven footfall patterns. As a result, the primary impact of new foodstore development tends to fall on existing edge or out-of-centre facilities, rather than on retailers trading within defined town centres.

Given this context, the risk of significant adverse impacts arising from a new foodstore of less than 2,500 square metres in an edge or out-of-centre location is generally considered to be low. The adoption of the 2,500 square metre threshold would still provide an appropriate safeguard against larger format schemes that may have a greater potential to harm town centre vitality, while ensuring that smaller, well-located proposals are not subject to disproportionate policy hurdles.

The practice of adopting differentiated thresholds for food and non-food retail is well established across the country. It is common for local authorities to adopt the national default threshold set out in the NPPF, particularly in the context of food retail. On this basis, Lidl considers the current draft of Policy C4 to be overly cautious and misaligned with both market realities and national guidance.

Lidl therefore, requests that the policy be amended to introduce a specific threshold for food retail development, set at 2,500 square metres, in line with the NPPF. This would ensure the policy is both proportionate and effective, supporting sustainable growth while continuing to protect the function and viability of defined centres.

Employment Land (Policy HSP J3 – Assessing the Loss of Employment Land or Accommodation)

The draft HSP Development Plan proposes that developments which seek to bring forward non-traditional employment uses on designated employment land will need to be supported by a marketing exercise.

The marketing exercise would need to clearly set out:

*“a. why the land or premises are no longer suitable for employment use,
b. why it’s not possible to retain or replace existing business occupiers,
c. detailed consideration of the potential for refurbishment or redevelopment,
d. a thorough marketing exercise for employment use for a period of not less than 12 months,
and e. a detailed assessment of the impact of the proposed loss on the economic health of the wider employment area.”*

For the purposes of this policy, it is outlined within the justification that non-employment uses are considered to be any use other than the following:

*“Egi (Office),
Egii (Research and Development),
Egiii (Light Industrial),
B2 (General Industrial),
B8 (Storage or distribution)
Sui Generis commercial uses, assessed on a case by case basis, with similar characteristics to industrial and warehousing uses”*

In terms of the use classes, the approach adopted must be consistent with the Government’s intention to allow greater flexibility in land use planning, particularly following the introduction of Class E to the Use Class Order.

Further to Use Class E (Commercial, Business and Service) being introduced in September 2020, it is clear that the Government regards Class E uses as employment generating economic uses. In many cases, Class E uses have the propensity to create more jobs and bring greater economic benefits than a Class B use of comparable size. There is therefore, sense and logic in grouping Class E uses with Class B uses.

As set out above, Lidl creates around 40 new jobs per store, aligned with the Living Wage Foundation rate for all eligible employees, and without the use of zero-hour contracts. Henceforth, it is evident Lidl stores can create a significant contribution to job creation across Tameside borough.

On this basis, Lidl suggests that all Class E uses should be explicitly supported within Strategic Employment Areas and on employment sites, alongside B2 and B8 uses, as they are widely acknowledged to be employment-generating.

It is also considered that any requirement for marketing evidence should be removed where the proposed use contributes positively to economic development.

The requirement for marketing evidence in itself, is also considered to be overly onerous and unnecessary. It is Lidl’s view that the requirement for marketing evidence should be removed, or as a minimum reduced to a 6 month period, and that a better and more effective approach would be to require viability evidence to be submitted.

It is Lidl’s view that the policy should be amended on this basis.

Planning for Retail Needs

Paragraph 124 of the NPPF requires that:

“Planning policies and decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions.”

This includes meeting the need for additional retail development in areas where there is currently a deficiency.

It is noted that at present, the Tameside Retail Study, which forms the evidence base to the HSP Development Plan Consultation Document, was prepared by HollisVincent in July 2017. This document is now 8 years old and is considered to be out of date, given that the retail market has moved on significantly since it was prepared.

Evidence supporting a Local Plan should be up to date and is crucial in creating a sound Plan.

Before any new Development Plan is adopted, a new Retail Study should be prepared. Once this document is prepared, it is necessary to consider whether additional retail sites need to be allocated to meet any additional retail need that is identified.

This must be approached in the same way as new housing or new employment space would be planned for through the Plan process.

Unless this is done, the Plan cannot be considered sound.

Summary

Lidl very much support the progression of the HSP Development Plan for Tameside. However, it is important to ensure that the Plan adopts a pro-active approach to development, acts as an enabler to development and does not overly burden developers. The policies within the HSP Development Plan must also be considered ‘sound’ so that it can pass through the Plan examination process.

The comments set out within this letter of representation have been framed in this context. Lidl hope that these comments can be considered on an appropriate basis and are useful to the Council in progressing its new Plan.

Please could written receipt of these representations be provided. In addition, our client would like to be kept informed and notified about the on-going Plan process.

Yours sincerely,

Rapleys LLP