

An alternative vision for Dorking

Submission by Dorking SOS to the Mole Valley Town, District, Local & Village Centres Study

Dorking SOS is a large group of local residents who are opposed to a major new supermarket in the heart of our town. We come from different walks of life and are not affiliated with any organisation, political or otherwise.

There is no doubt that Dorking town centre is near crisis. In fact politicians have expressed the view to us that we have nothing left to lose. Dorking does face entrenched challenges, such as the dominance of a few landlords over the High Street. But our Clone Town Britain survey¹ showed we are a “borderline” market town, with a solid base of independent retailers on which to build. This strength of the challenge makes it the civic duty of the council, and the responsibility of the community to look after our town.

There is no single solution to this challenge. Instead, we believe the answer lies in addressing many individual issues which will enable a vibrant, sustainable economy to flourish whilst retaining and enhancing the character of the town that makes it such a pleasant place in which to live and work – and for visitors to enjoy.

Background – our opposition to a large-scale supermarket

Our opposition is on the basis that a large-scale supermarket would be out of keeping with Dorking: it would be disproportionate to the area’s needs and would be the nail in the coffin of our market town.

We also believe that the tide is turning. In Dorking most people don’t want such a supermarket. Mole Valley's residents' survey of 2005² asked: "If there was a larger supermarket in Dorking would this attract you to shop in the town more often?" The majority (57%) said either probably not, or definitely not.

Policy makers are seriously questioning our skewed retail economy; the All-Party Parliamentary Small Shops Group³ concluded that communities and consumers “stand to be disadvantaged the most [by supermarket dominance] with restricted choice, entrenched social exclusion and a vulnerable supply chain”. Emerging thinking from the Competition Commission⁴ indicates that issues such as "price flexing" (i.e. the practice of varying prices between stores), below-cost selling and suppliers charging higher prices to smaller grocery retailers to compensate for lower prices to larger grocery retailers (the so-called “waterbed” effect) all need further investigation for their adverse impact on consumers.

Internet shopping for food, clothes and other products, together with a slowdown in the antiques market are all having an impact on Dorking.

Our opposition can be divided into three areas:

1. Effect on the local economy

Evidence shows that large supermarkets have a negative impact on the local economy; a net loss of 276 jobs per development; closure of many independents (Warminster lost 75% of its convenience stores following the opening of a superstore⁵) and a knock-on impact on local

¹ Using the criteria from the New Economics Foundation’s report “Clone Town Britain: The survey results on the bland state of the nation”

² Mole Valley District Council Residents Survey June/July 2005

³ <http://www.nfsp.org.uk/uploads/pdfs/High%20Street%20Britain%202015%20report.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/inquiries/ref2006/grocery/index.htm>

⁵ <http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/inquiries/ref2006/grocery/pdf/>

third_party_submissions_other_org_prof_neil_wrigley.pdf

wholesalers and producers. Retail members of our campaign provide local evidence: “I would seriously consider closing our Dorking branch should this [proposed development] happen” said one trader.

This impacts negatively on the community too. There is a common misconception that supermarkets are convenient and cheap, but in fact they contribute to social exclusion by driving out competition and local stores. Our own research with local markets shows a typical shopping basket of fruit and vegetables was almost 22% cheaper than the supermarket (see Appendix A).

2. Problems of increased traffic

A large-scale development, such as was proposed, would lead to an inevitable increase in traffic, including consumer miles, deliveries into Dorking and food miles. This would have an impact on the Mill Lane junction especially, with its listed environment, but also on the whole system. The Dorking Decongestion Study⁶ has already recognised “the need to look beyond engineering solutions and address congestion by encouraging less use of private cars”. Dorking Healthcheck's initial survey⁷ reveals that “respondents are very positive about the centre of Dorking in terms of the living, shopping and surrounding environment” but that “traffic and traffic congestion” top the list of improvement needs. Mole Valley’s Local Plan⁸ has a strategic objective to “encourage measures which reduce demands for travel by car”.

But the problem is not just congestion in an already over-congested town. It is also about local pollution and the impact on climate change.

3. Effect on the character of the town

Finally, we believe the character of Dorking would be destroyed, both architecturally and culturally. Some campaign registrations demonstrate the strength of opinion:

“I have memories of Dorking going back about 60 years and it really has not changed very much. I think a large supermarket anywhere in Dorking will ruin it for ever.”

“I am a local hairdresser and the general consensus amongst my clients is that nobody wants a superstore.”

“This superstore will cripple Dorking and change it in to yet another clone town.”

Alternatives to supermarkets

We believe there is a place for supermarkets in Dorking. Their prime benefit is convenience. Their other supposed benefits of choice and low prices are more doubtful and come at a high cost both to the local community and the environment. Our existing supermarkets should be encouraged to improve the quality and infrastructure of their stores.

We want to make Dorking a town where it is convenient to buy good quality, well-priced local food and products, without a negative impact on our community and the environment.

The changing face of the town

The St Martins Walk shopping centre has never become the focal point that it was intended to be. Stores at the bottom end struggle to survive. Business rates could perhaps be reduced for stores in poorer locations. Grants and other incentives may be needed to encourage stores, together with some remodelling.

⁶ Surrey County Council Local Committee for Mole Valley, 26 May 2004, Item 11

⁷ http://www.dorkingdna.org/survey_results.asp

⁸ Mole Valley Local Plan, Section 11.2

The eastern end of the town has always suffered. Perhaps it is time to consider a more compact High Street and replace some of the shops with a zero-energy housing development along the lines of BedZED in south London?⁹

These changes could open up the town centre to improvements for pedestrians and cyclists.

Promoting local producers

There are a surprising number of local producers who need better promotion.

As part of our activities for Dorking's Gala Night last December we produced a Christmas Menu entirely from food produced and sold locally (see Appendix B). More people need to be made aware that there are these local producers.

Attract a "key player" to put the town on the map. There are breweries in Reigate¹⁰, Shere¹¹ and Tongham¹². Dorking is rightly famous for its many pubs. Why not attract a micro brewery to the town to enhance that reputation?

The case is frequently made that high rents make the business model for independent greengrocers (a key target for our alternative vision) unviable – let's explore a permanent fruit-and-veg stall in the centre of Dorking.

A large part of Dorking's charm comes from the mix of independent shops. When we surveyed the town earlier this year we found well over 150 independent traders. We spoke personally to 102, of whom 59 said they opposed a large-scale supermarket, 10 were in favour and 35 did not express an opinion.

Specific ideas to promote local producers include:

- Develop a "goods shed" which could be a permanent home for local producers, similar to the one in Canterbury which opened in 2003.¹³
- Encourage a Farmers' City Market¹⁴ similar to the one recently opened in Hampton Hill which offers stallholders a covered area and shoppers the simplicity of paying at one checkout.
- Introduce a loyalty card for customers at our independent stores – Haslemere has successfully run a loyalty card scheme¹⁵ for three years and is happy to share learning and technology.

Changing buying habits

More and more people are becoming interested in the quality of their food, how it is produced and how far it has travelled.

An extensive study¹⁶ of London's street markets and farmers' markets concluded that "farmers' markets are also more price competitive than is often presumed and...can compete effectively with supermarkets".

Dorking is now a Fairtrade Town¹⁷ (one of only three in Surrey). There are a growing number of people who are prepared to use their power as consumers to influence the way food is produced and sold.

⁹ <http://www.arup.com/DOWNLOADBANK/download68.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.pilgrim.co.uk/>

¹¹ <http://www.surreyhills.co.uk/>

¹² <http://www.hogsback.co.uk/>

¹³ <http://www.made-in-kent.co.uk/producers/the-goods-shed.shtml>

¹⁴ <http://www.farmerscitymarket.com/>

¹⁵ <http://www.haslemere.com/news/item.php?id=74>

¹⁶ <http://www.lda.gov.uk/upload/pdf/tradingplaces.pdf>

Become a “food destination”

There are market towns around the country which are making a success of independence; Bridport in Dorset is a “beacon town” because of the quality and diversity of its local food¹⁸ – like Dorking it is a gateway to beautiful local countryside. Saxmundham in Suffolk is the centre of a “food destination” that has seen local suppliers expand from 300 to 370 because of the far-sighted planning by the District Council in refusing planning permission for a superstore development and supporting local food economies.¹⁹

Despite promoting tourism and agriculture as key strands in economic development, Surrey towns have been reactive in their response to food and retail issues. Reigate has benefited from a free car park provided by Morrisons, but has become a socially exclusive town centre, with the economy based around lifestyle shops and upmarket chains. Leatherhead now has a pedestrianised centre and three large supermarkets – and was voted the *fifth worst* street in the UK by CABE’s “Streets of Shame” report.²⁰

We believe Dorking can provide a lead in the county both economically and politically. The Local Government White Paper on Strong and Prosperous Communities²¹ will be tasking authorities with putting the community at the centre of their thinking. Together, the active community in Dorking and a forward-thinking council could exemplify good practice.

Ideas we would like to explore include putting the market back in our market town. We should review our existing markets so that they are conveniently situated and timed – ideally on the High Street and at the weekend and/or evenings.

We should consider a narrowing of the road outside the High Street entrance to St Martins Walk and an expanded pedestrianised area which could be used for a market. St Martins Walk itself could be slightly remodelled to accommodate a market.

Food co-ops and local food groups

Many individuals have been involved in food co-ops for years, so they can buy good quality food, often wholefoods from a supplier they trust, as locally as possible and reasonably priced. In Stroud for example, they have extended this idea to become a local food club.²² This builds on another project they have too, which is a community market.

The local food club works by linking the consumers with local producers. There is a regular commitment to buying and supplying in-season produce. Consumers pay a monthly membership fee and suppliers pay a percentage of the turnover they put through the club.

The suppliers will deliver to the local primary school, where parents who are in the club pick up their local food and drink on a weekly basis. As highlighted in the Local Government White Paper, this is about communities taking a lead. It also makes more effective use of schools, which the government's long-term vision for delivering extended services in and around schools in partnership with local providers is driving forward.²³

¹⁷ <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/>

¹⁸ http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/action_guides/localfirst_case_studies.pdf

¹⁹ <http://www.cpre.org.uk/filegrab/the-real-choice.pdf?ref=1659>

²⁰ <http://www.streetsofshame.org.uk/case-study-bad-5.htm>

²¹ <https://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1503999>

²² <http://www.localfood.org.uk/>

²³ http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/C05E124E3B3519D07D9B1BB9CD24D88C.pdf

Local Money Multiplier

Capturing spending in the local economy by using the New Economics Foundation's Local Money Multiplier²⁴ to influence policy and procurement by the local authorities, as well as local consumer spending.

Developing a niche focus – rather than competing with larger nearby towns – with annual awards for excellent retailers, festivals and celebrations, and strategies to develop civic pride and the planning to support it.

A food focus to local tourism, attracting London day trippers to our Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and sustainable agricultural landscape. Work with restaurants, visitor attractions and suppliers to promote local food – become part of the “slow food movement” which has recently moved into Britain.²⁵

Shared open spaces

Making the shared open spaces more attractive and inviting should be treated as a priority. The Local Plan²⁶ envisages continuing street enhancement works in West Street and South Street and records a “growing public awareness of the amenity and ecological value of trees in urban areas”. It is time to implement some of these ideas.

The *Manual for Streets*²⁷ commissioned by the Department for Communities and Local Government is a major new piece of government guidance on urban design which gives priority to environmental quality and to promoting sustainable communities.

Remove unnecessary signage and street furniture and improve what remains.

Consider selective pedestrianisation of side roads, which could be opened up for outdoor cafes and thus encourage a “food culture”. A recent example where this has been successfully achieved is Castle Street in Kingston.²⁸

Civil pride, and the resultant benefits could be enhanced by improving the general appeal of the town centre, such as improved traditional shop signage, cleaning of paths, repairing broken paving, maintaining roads properly, and repairing broken shop fascias. Much of this has been lacking over recent years.

Car parking

If the Controlled Parking Zone²⁹ is introduced it must be accompanied by better bus and train services, and improved cycle lanes to offer people practical alternatives to driving.

The Mole Valley Local Plan talks about one of its key goals on transport is to reduce traffic congestion, and the Dorking Decongestion Study was set up to address the problem.

It may be the time to introduce a Park-and-Ride scheme. The “Ride Pegasus” bus scheme recently introduced at St Martin's C of E Primary School shows what can be achieved.

The villages

We need to think about community-owned shops and partnerships between town and village stores. Shared usage, such as “deli pubs” like the Jolly Farmers in Buckland³⁰ that incorporate a delicatessen may be a way forward.

²⁴ <http://www.pluggingtheleaks.org/>

²⁵ <http://www.slowfoodludlow.org.uk/>

²⁶ Mole Valley Local Plan, Section 9.39 and Policy DTC11

²⁷ <http://www.manualforstreets.org.uk/>

²⁸ http://www.kingston.gov.uk/browse/transport_and_streets/highways/castle_street_pedestrianisation.htm

²⁹ <http://www.molevalley.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3470>

Local food clubs provide a model and could have hubs (school drop-off points?) in several villages. Every village has a school, pub or church which could function as part of this network.

Improving cycle facilities. This has been achieved in other areas, such as in Cambridge where excellent cycle routes to all the surrounding villages make it a practical choice to cycle to the city centre.

Sustainability

The Government's primary objective outlined in its Planning Policy for Town Centres³¹ states that "sustainable development is the core principle underpinning planning."

This means addressing issues such as food miles, energy consumption and unnecessary packaging.

A Defra study published last year³² found food miles had risen by 15 per cent in the decade to 2002 and 4 per cent between 2002 and 2004.

Government studies³³ show that retail shops use far more electricity than any other area of the economy. Most of the supermarkets' energy consumption is used in refrigeration. Every open freezer costs £15,000 per year in electricity.³⁴

The Independent's Campaign Against Waste has shown how excessive packaging is disliked by shoppers and harms the environment. In Britain, 3.3 million tonnes of food is thrown away every year, according to a recent study.³⁵ Most goes to landfill sites, where it causes methane emissions that add to global warming.

Mole Valley's own recently adopted Sustainability Development Strategy³⁶ calls for far-reaching changes that ensure we live within our means, which in the words of the document is achieved through a "flourishing and diverse local economy".

Key ingredients of a successful market town

The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) recognises that many of our small towns are losing their most valuable asset – their character and distinctiveness. It carried out a "health check" survey in 2004 of over 100 market towns³⁷ and found that many were threatened by bland and uniform new development.

The report's authors identified the following ingredients for a successful market town:

- Community spirit
- Civic pride
- Local markets
- Events and festivals
- Good planning

Town centre management and trader support could be widened, with more proactive engagement. A town map and web site listing all the different traders and services/products offered would be advantageous.

³⁰ <http://food-emporium.co.uk/>

³¹ Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres

³² The Validity of Food Miles as an Indicator of Sustainable Development

³³ Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, "Biomass as a renewable energy source" 2004

³⁴ "Heat: How to Stop the Planet Burning" by George Monbiot

³⁵ <http://www.igd.com/cir.asp?menuid=20&cirid=2113>

³⁶ http://www.molevalley.gov.uk/media/pdf/f/6/100407Sustainability_Strategy.pdf

³⁷ <http://www.cpre.org.uk/news/view/128>

Conclusion

There *are* alternatives to simply increasing supermarket provision that can meet the needs of the town and that retain and enhance the character of the town, keeping it an attractive destination for residents and visitors alike while addressing the problems of sustainable living which we are all having to face up to as we enter the 21st century.

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DORKING SOS

www.dorkingsos.org.uk

Appendix A – Price comparison study

The following price comparison study was undertaken in Dorking in 2006. Buying from local markets resulted in a cost saving of almost 22% against buying from the supermarket.

Item	Quantity	Local markets	Sainsbury's	Saving
Bananas	per kg	£1.00	£0.64	£0.36
Apples	per kg	£1.50	£1.59	-£0.09
Oranges	per 5	£1.00	£0.90	£0.10
Pink grapefruit	per 2	£1.00	£0.78	£0.22
Grapes	per kg	£3.00	£2.98	£0.02
Pineapple	each	£1.50	£2.29	-£0.79
Pears	per kg	£1.50	£1.49	£0.01
Melon	each	£0.90	£1.49	-£0.59
Lemons	each	£0.20	£0.15	£0.05
Limes	each	£0.20	£0.15	£0.05
New potatoes	per kg	£1.00	£1.49	-£0.49
Vine tomatoes	per kg	£2.00	£3.78	-£1.78
Romain lettuce	per 2	£0.80	£0.99	-£0.19
Broccoli	per kg	£2.00	£1.38	£0.62
Courgettes	per kg	£1.50	£2.07	-£0.57
Aubergine	each	£0.90	£0.99	-£0.09
Cucumber	each	£0.60	£0.68	-£0.08
Salad onions	bunch	£0.50	£0.49	£0.01
Spanish onions	per kg	£0.70	£0.50	£0.20
Cabbage	per kg	£0.90	£0.97	-£0.07
Spinach	per bag	£1.00	£0.99	£0.01
Peppers	each	£0.60	£0.68	-£0.08
Garlic	each	£0.20	£0.20	£0.00
Strawberries	500g/454g punnet	£1.25	£1.69	-£0.44
Peaches	each	£0.20	£0.59	-£0.39
Cherries	per kg	£4.00	£7.93	-£3.93
Avocados	each	£0.40	£0.78	-£0.38
Mango	each	£1.00	£1.39	-£0.39
Satsumas	per kg	£1.50	£1.99	-£0.49
Total		£32.85	£42.04	-£9.19

Appendix B – Christmas menu

For Dorking's Gala Night Dorking SOS produced a Christmas menu with ingredients sourced entirely from local producers and suppliers.

Dorking Local Christmas Fare

Will we still have all this in five years' time?



Breakfast

Fresh bread from Surrey Gourmet | **Honey** from the Box Hill bees
of E.T.L. Webster, Redhill (Farmers' Market) | **Butter** from Kingfisher Farm Shop, Abinger Hammer
Milk from Ashford Farm, Leigh (Kingfisher Farm Shop)

Lunch Drinks Party

Smoked Salmon from Bob the fish man at the Friday Market | **Mince Pies** from Chef's Pantry
Cranberry Wine from Osney Lodge Farm Shop (or the Farmers' Market)
White wine: Surrey Gold or Flint Valley from Denbies Wine Estate
Red Wine: Yew Tree Pinot Noir from Denbies | **Beers** from the Hog's Back Brewery

Christmas Dinner

Turkey from Bramble Farm, Milford or Etherley Farm (The Surrey Gourmet)
Bacon and Chipolatas from Stuart Pearce the Butcher, Dorking
Roast Potatoes, Sprouts, Parsnips, Carrots, Onions, all from
Perry Court Farm Shop (at the Farmers' Market) or the Friday Market
Sage and onion stuffing made with sage plants from Kingfisher Food
Cranberry Sauce from Surrey Gourmet
Christmas pudding from the Kingfisher Farm Shop
Fresh cream from Leigh (at the Kingfisher Farm Shop)

Drinks

Wine from Denbies as above
English Mead From Lurgashall Winery, nr Petworth from Osney Lodge Farm (at the Farmers' Market)
Apple juice from Greenway Fruit Farm, Herstmonceaux (at the Farmers' Market)
Elderflower cordial from Thorncroft Vineyard, Leatherhead



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SAY NO TO SAINSBURY'S

Appendix B – Christmas menu (cont.)

Dorking Local Christmas Fare

Will we still have all this in five years' time?



Boxing Day



Brunch

Yoghurt from Kingfisher Farm Shop | **Eggs** from Collaroy Farm in Newdigate (Farmers' Market)
Home-made desserts S & S patisserie (Farmers Market)
Pasta and cheese from Bookham Cheese (Farmers' Market)
Lamb and Pork from Allingham Farm in Rusper (Farmers' Market)
Fruit from the Friday Market | **Norbury Blue Cheese** from Mickleham (Farmers Market)

Supper

Cold Turkey and Breaded Ham from Pearce's butcher, Pump Corner
Home-made chutney from The Grange Centre, Leatherhead
Baked potatoes (Friday market)
Pears from Greenway Fruit Farm, Sussex (Farmer's Market)



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Appendix C – Quotes from supporters

Here are some quotes from people who registered their support on our web site:

“We are residents of ten years’ standing, having moved here from Croydon because the market town ambience was so appealing. We do not want to see it spoilt with more traffic, fewer individual shops and major building operations.”

“Working in retail for over 20 years I can clearly see that [Sainsbury’s] could of easily used the space [of their existing store] better, thus discounting the need for a superstore in Dorking. Dorking is a town with a heart and they need to understand this, not rip it out!”

“I think a superstore in the proposed location is completely inappropriate for the size, character and traffic considerations of Dorking. The current provisions are more than adequate.”

“There are also wider questions about Dorking, which relate to the issues addressed in the Dorking SOS campaign: too much traffic on the High Street, too few local stores selling decent fruits and vegetables (as opposed to the usual tasteless ones found in most supermarkets). I suggest an event where the High Street is blocked for a day, with a large market similar to the one found in Guildford, but without the traffic! They manage to block or disturb the traffic with huge motor bikes every now and then, why couldn’t we do something as visible, but far less noisy! That would show that a different lifestyle, supportive of local farmers, etc. is possible!”

“The whole idea of building a second Sainsbury’s supermarket goes very much against everyone’s concerns about the global environment we are so casually destroying, as much as everything else – uglifying a beautiful market town and sucking dry the small shops of nearby villages etc. How much money does Sainsbury’s want?”

“I have memories of Dorking going back about 60 years and it really has not changed very much. I think a large supermarket anywhere in Dorking will ruin it for ever. It is not necessary and the traffic and upheaval would be horrendous.”

“As a fairly frequent visitor to Dorking I find it hard to believe that a superstore is really required. There are already enough supermarkets and grocers to cater for a town of this size. Also the volume of traffic would become unsustainable without horrific destruction of what is a very pretty town.”

“After hearing about the plans for the new Sainsbury’s store to be built in Dorking I feel strongly opposed to this. The town’s current supermarkets (Sainsbury’s and Waitrose) provide ample food shopping to its residents. There are already problems with traffic and congestion during peak periods through the town and I feel this will only be exacerbated by the building of a new supermarket in the middle of the High Street. Part of Dorking’s appeal is that it is a small market town, and having a major supermarket in the centre will detract from this.”

“I am totally opposed to a superstore in Dorking. We have a good selection of shops in Dorking and plenty of superstores within easy reach. It will ruin the character of Dorking and create more traffic problems. I’ve lived near Dorking for over forty years and like it as it is.”

“This superstore will cripple Dorking and change it into yet another clone town.”

“I am totally opposed to the development which will see the end of our town centre and turn Dorking into another bland shopping centre. The traffic congestion will be terrible and this will for the most part benefit ‘out of towners’ and of course increase the profits for Sainsbury’s. I cannot believe the local council is even considering the scheme.”

“We are extremely concerned about the devastating effect this proposed development would have on Dorking. We moved here as we loved the market town and small shops.”

“I am an opponent of the proposed superstore as I believe there is no need for such a development within Dorking, given the excellent local shops and the many superstores in nearby towns.”

“If MVDC want better food provision they should pedestrianise the High Street one day per week and have a fantastic market.”

“If we can hold out a bit longer, we can catch a new trend for a revival of market town shopping. Dorking is remarkable to have avoided the big supermarkets so far and could be a beacon town as the trend changes.”