

## **Sainsbury's and Tesco expansion on Whiteladies Road**

### **Notes from a public meeting, hosted by Sustainable Redland 26.5.11**

The evening meeting on 26 May 7.30pm to 9.30pm in Redland United Reform Church, was convened to explore ways of supporting our local independent food producers and retailers in the face of expansion by the multiple chains. At the meeting we wanted to find out what residents and local traders feel about the new Sainsbury's coming to the old Woollies store on Blackboy Hill, and the plans for Tesco to build a new shop near the BBC, and we wanted to explore positive ways of responding. Seventy-five people attended the meeting, including reporters from the BBC and the Evening Post. This report records the range of possible actions that were discussed.

#### **Background**

There are many food shops along Whiteladies Road and on the side streets immediately beside it. Greengrocers, butchers, wholefood shops, bakers and delicatessans are still surviving but the number of independents has diminished. The Better Food Company is the only independent local supermarket on Whiteladies Road. There is a Sainsbury's at Clifton Down, and further up the road there is a Co-op and a Tesco. The two new stores will mean four stores controlled by the 'Big Four' on Whiteladies Road. Diversity rather than monopoly is better for creating a strong and sustainable local food system and local economy. There is growing concern in Bristol about loss of market diversity.

There are dilemmas. Good business attracts more good business. Sainsburys and the other supermarkets do a good job in providing a wide range of products in a way that is very convenient for consumers. They are within walking distance of many residents, and their customers are likely to make use of other traders nearby.

However the real worries about the multiples are in what lies behind the scenes. Their business model means that they have in-house warehousing, distribution, processing and supply. Now that the 'Big Four' control 75% of the grocery market this means that the infrastructure to support independent producers is rapidly disappearing. The multiple chains contribute less to the local economy than independent traders do. Local businesses use local accountants, local legal services, local delivery services, local advertising and so on. There is also a high environmental cost from the multiples. The distribution centres mean a massive volume of road traffic as goods are transported from one side of the country to the other to be processed, packed and redistributed. The big supermarkets are also of sufficient size to influence and dictate the way that farming is practiced. This has a significant negative impact on the soil, and on biodiversity. Overall, they represent a seriously unsustainable way of producing and retailing food.

#### **The Process**

The meeting started with factual scene-setting talks from Councilor Neil Harrison about planning and the limitations on local Councils, from Joy Carey on the Who Feeds Bristol? research and from Ciaran Mundy from Transition Bristol on the Bristol Pound. Councilor Harrison distributed a written summary prepared by the Planning Department explaining the relevant planning powers, and apologized on behalf of the planning officers for the fact that because of other commitments it had not been possible for a senior planning officer to attend the meeting. A Question and Answer session then followed. After that the group conducted an Open Space session, and the topics that came up were:

- Supporting local business diversity
- Engaging with students
- Developing an umbrella brand for independent traders, also linked to local currency
- Running a publicity campaign about why we need to support local traders and producers, and busting the myths about affordability and convenience
- Using the Neighbourhood Partnerships to strengthen food diversity and local economy
- Using planning powers to good effect
- Learning lessons from Stokes Croft

### **The Factual Scene Setting**

The Council wants to promote diversity and sustainability. It is powerless to influence what the multiples do so long as they meet planning law. Woolworths already had planning for food retail, so there is nothing stopping any retailer from purchasing or leasing the site and continuing the trade. No powers exist whereby the Council could have refused permission because of threat to independents, or because local residents are opposed to it.

Joy talked about the alarming growth of the big four supermarkets in Bristol (Tesco, Sainsburys, Asda and Morrisons) from 19 in 2004 to 76 by last year, and still growing. Compare this to the 140 businesses that own the city's 180 or so remaining independent food outlets. She highlighted that the multiples seem to be targeting Bristol. For example Greater Manchester with over 2 million population has 37 Tesco stores, Sheffield city region with 640,000 has 16 Tesco stores, Leeds with 761,000 has 20 Tesco stores, whereas Greater Bristol with 587,000 has 35 Tesco stores. A key danger is the threat to the independent wholesale sector. The St. Phillips wholesale fruit and vegetable market in Bristol serves an area stretching from Penzance to Fishguard, and north to Oxford. If St Philip's collapses then producers in the South West would have to send produce to near London, and our independent greengrocers and caterers in Bristol would have no local wholesale market. *See Who Feeds Bristol? Towards a Resilient Food Plan*

Ciaran talked about the Bristol Pound. This is being developed in conjunction with Bristol Credit Union, and it will be electronic using mobile phone technology, as well as being a note-based system. It is a powerful way of reinforcing local business and keeping the economy local. Here are some quotes from the Bristol Pound website at [www.bristolpound.org](http://www.bristolpound.org)

*.....The Bristol Pound is a complementary currency for Bristol aimed at boosting the local economy, supporting local business and providing innovate mobile-based payment method.....*

*.....The aim of the scheme is to include as many independent and locally owned businesses in Bristol and the surrounding region as well as the general public. The Bristol pound will be spent very like pounds sterling and is backed pound for pound by sterling deposits. However it is different to sterling in that the money will typically be accepted only within the region so will continue to be spent in the region. Bristol Pounds are purchased for sterling and then can be spent with other trader members in the region.*

Anyone wanting to pursue it should contact Ciaran through the above web address.

### **Discussions**

#### **Supporting local business diversity**

- Education is a key concept. We need to publicise and explain the bigger picture of the consequences of the monopoly of the multiples. Good health should be part of this.
- There is a possibility of producing a film illustrating the Who Feeds Bristol story
- We need a big push to encourage local independent traders

- We should introduce a loyalty card system
- Business rates should be weighted to favour start up for independent traders
- More honest labeling should be in place so that customers have a clear picture of how far products have travelled, and what's gone in to making them
- The Green Capital Fund could be used for a support project for independent traders
- The Bristol Pound has the potential to be very powerful.

### **Engaging with students**

- Tesco Express has captured much of the student custom from Sainsburys Clifton Down. This is a key reason why Sainsburys have an interest in opening on Blackboy Hill.
- Through our links with the University and the Bristol University Sustainability Team (BUST) team we need to engage the university in understanding and acting to support sustainable food systems serving the City. The Who Feeds Bristol research could be used within the curriculum for business, economics, geography, earth sciences, etc.
- Students could have a special Loyalty card
- With the Students' Union and BUST it should be possible to influence the sourcing of food, and the whole food culture, for key catering outlets – cafes, restaurants, canteens, halls of residence etc.
- Freshers week should be used to encourage students to use independent traders. Special incentives and vouchers could be organised.
- We should work with the University administration.
- Students could be encouraged and supported to set up their own buying co-ops.

### **Developing an umbrella brand for independent traders**

- The Bristol Pound could be a powerful way of supporting local traders
- We should encourage the sense that it's the community that owns the streets and decides what it wants on them
- Big funds could be raised to purchase empty buildings through organisations like the Community Land Trust and the Asset Transfer Programme
- Favourable business rates should be used to help new start ups
- We should use shorter term solutions for bigger term problems

### **Running a publicity campaign**

- Commission Drama/Art showing the strengths of trading local using Buzz Bank funding.
- Use guerilla viral campaigns to make these points about values, not price:
  - fashion trends – independents are sexier, aimed at students in particular
  - price – organic box schemes are not expensive. For example the Community Farm (Chew Magna) £8 organic box would cost you £7.97 to get same produce non-organic from Sainsburys, and £11 to get organic from Sainsburys, plus the £8 for the box includes delivery to your door.
  - indignation – supermarkets control 75% of our food outlets – are we happy with that!
  - fair price of food – farmers are losing out (milk, sausages), mail out pricing information to local shops, develop succinct, transparent messages (yes our meat is dearer but this is what it isn't....)
  - campaign to support independents on health issues
  - lobby – planning anti Tesco/campaigns, use of film
  - it is essential to publicize quality and price comparisons all the time.
  - show that good quality food does not have to be expensive.
- Celebrate food diversity through a city wide movement.

- Highlight the knock on effects of low price marketing techniques used by the big 4
- Using food festivals eg Love Food, the Bristol Pound, loyalty cards, and a Whiteladies Umbrella brand?

### **Using Neighbourhood Partnerships**

- We need to draw attention to the ways NPs could be used to help further diversity throughout the city
- People are unaware of the potential of using NPs
- They have funds that could be used to support traders' needs
- We need to fully research what they could offer and how we could make use of them
- Everyone needs to make sure they are on the mailing list for their local NP, find out about it use it to good effect

### **Using planning powers to good effect**

The following issues were highlighted as considerations that residents are seriously concerned about:

- Noise, from air conditioning freezers and delivery services
- Transport chaos from deliveries lorries occupying narrow bottle necks – this is a particular concern on Blackboy Hill, and the GBBN bus route changes could make the feasibility of deliveries even more problematic
- Alcohol licensing related to alcohol related antisocial behaviour
- Servicing and waste collection
- Opening hours which can be shown to undermine other independent shops

### **Lessons from Stokes Croft**

- Any protest we might undertake must follow the law
- We should use licensing issues
- We need to gather support from the police, media, and Neighbourhood Partnership
- We need to show that we're as strong as Stokes Croft

### **Summary**

These topics can be broken down into the following:

- Education - drama/arts
  - pricing information
  - environmental/health costs
  - producing a film
  - PR/media campaign
  - community engagement
- A business approach
  - loyalty cards
  - weighting business rates
  - the Bristol Pound
  - using supermarket techniques
- Engaging with students
- Fund raising
- Networking
- Use of licensing/anti social laws

A wealth of ideas was expressed, some of which, such as acting on the licensing laws, need prompt action. To capture and develop as many of the actions as possible, further groupings

of people will meet to take things forward. Everyone who has left an email address and indication that they want to be added to Bristol Food Network mailing, and/or Neighbourhood Partnership mailing, will be added. These routes of communication, and the susred Yahoo group, and enewsletters from local Councillors, are all good ways of staying informed. It may be appropriate to convene a follow up public meeting in a few weeks time. There are also local residents groups that could not attend the meeting, but that are also concerned about the Big Four uncontrolled expansion.

NB It is important that everyone who is concerned sends in their own individual objections to the planners on issues of noise, licensing, opening hours, traffic chaos from deliveries etc.

It is also essential that Bristol residents write to central government, on the back of the Stokes Croft and the Whiteladies Road issues, about the threat to the St Philips Wholesale market, and to local producers and local traders, and about the lack of power to safeguard all this. Central Government needs to wake up to the damage being caused by the out-of-control expansion of the Big Four multiple chains.

### **References**

*Who Feeds Bristol? Towards a Resilient Food Plan* by Joy Carey, is available on the web – just put 'Who Feeds Bristol' into google

[www.bristolpound.org](http://www.bristolpound.org)