Dear Jameson

ROYTON – PROPOSED RETAIL LED MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT REQUEST FOR FORMAL SCREENING OPINION

Following discussions between our client Dransfield Properties Ltd (DPL) and Oldham Council over recent months I intend to submit an application on behalf of DPL for planning permission for the retail led mixed use regeneration of land in Royton district centre. The proposals also include public realm improvements.

In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011, Part 2, Regulation 5, I would be grateful for your formal Screening Opinion to confirm whether an Environmental Impact Assessment will be required to accompany the planning application.

In support of this request for a Screening Opinion, I enclose the following:

- a plan of the anticipated application site boundary (SK-01 Revision B)
- an illustrative plan showing an indication of the range and distribution of uses anticipated across the main body of the site (SK-08 Revision L)
- a brief description of the nature and purpose of the development and of its possible effects on the environment (outlined below)

In testing the proposal against the general screening criteria provided at Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations 2011, it is considered that, providing the relevant studies, detailed below, are submitted as part of the planning application and any identified mitigation measures are implemented, the proposed development should not require a formal Environmental Impact Assessment in accordance with the EIA Regulations 2011.

The Site

The site is almost entirely within the defined District Centre. It is bounded by High Street/Croft Head to the west; Radcliffe Street to the north; Middleton Road to the south; and Rochdale Road to the east. It forms an L-shape as it does not include the existing Co-operative foodstore and some existing shop units at the south east corner of the site between Middleton Road and Rochdale Road.
The site extends to approximately 2.71 ha (6.17 acres).

Land to the north and west is largely residential in character, albeit including other uses such as places of worship. Land to the south is occupied by a mixture of residential and commercial activities. Land to the east includes retail and civic uses including the town hall and library.

The Proposal

It is proposed that a full planning application will be made. Drawing Ref. SK-08 Revision L (enclosed) provides an indication of how we anticipate the site will be brought forward. The scheme will form part of the wider regeneration of Royton with development by others of civic land to the east of the site expected to follow in further phases.

The site will accommodate a food store on the area immediately north of the junction between High Street and Milton Road with a service yard fronting and accessed from Middleton Road. It is anticipated that the store will have a net sales area of approximately 2,974 sq m (30,069 sq ft), with a GIA of approximately 5,543 sq m (59,681 sq ft).

It will also include new retail and service units (some of which will accommodate existing uses on the site) and a public house on the Rochdale Road frontage; it is also anticipated that a medical centre will be provided here at first floor level. North of the foodstore a 384 space car park is proposed. This will also be located next to the new retail units. A single point of access to the car park will be provided from Radcliffe Street.

The Policy Context

The majority of the site proposed for built development falls within the district shopping centre, as defined by the existing Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Unitary Development Plan, and within the centre as shown in the submission draft of the Oldham Council Joint Core Strategy and Management Policies Development Plan Document.

Policy at all levels seeks to direct investment, including in retail, towards defined centres, such as Royton. The proposal will bring forward retail development within a defined district centre and is consistent with these important and long held policy objectives.

PPS 4 provides a supportive policy environment for the prospect of a retail led scheme on the site. By bringing retail and other centre uses under the umbrella of economic development broadly defined, and by placing retail and town centre objectives alongside others more generally concerned with promoting sustainable economic development, PPS 4 invites a more rounded and holistic consideration of employment and wealth generating activities. In general terms, the benefits of "economic development", including retail, and the associated investment and job creation, should be given significant weight in planning decisions.

PPS 4 encourages consideration of regeneration, job creation, sustainability, social inclusion, accessibility and good design, and supports choice and competition. The retail led development proposed at Royton will be designed to perform very well in each of these regards.

Importantly, objectives seeking to promote and prioritise investment in town centres remain a key element of PPS4; the proposed development is entirely consistent with these. Equally, PPS 4 is
generally worded positively to encourage economic development and a constructive approach to planning, noting in particular that:

"Local planning authorities should adopt a positive and constructive approach towards planning applications for economic development. Planning applications that secure sustainable economic growth should be treated favourably."

This positive approach was recently (23 March 2011) strongly endorsed in a written Ministerial Statement ("Planning for Growth", issued by the Minister of State for Decentralisation). This confirms, for example, that the Secretary of State will, "attach significant weight to the need to secure economic growth and employment."

The retail and general planning issues raised by the proposal will be dealt with comprehensively through the submission of a Planning Statement as part of the application.

EIA Development

With reference to Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations 2011, it is our view that the proposed development is not an 'EIA development' for the purposes of the EIA Regulations.

The development proposals do not fall under Schedule 1 of the EIA Regulations. However, in accordance with the thresholds and criteria set out in Schedule 2 of the Regulations the proposals do constitute a Schedule 2 development; they can be characterised as an "Infrastructure Project (b)" where the area of development exceeds 0.5 hectares.

EIA is not mandatory for all Schedule 2 developments. Schedule 3 to the Regulations sets out the selection criteria for the screening of Schedule 2 development such as this. These criteria include the following:

Characteristics of development

1. The characteristics of development must be considered having regard to:

(a) the size of the development – the scheme anticipates the modest intensification of built development on a previously developed site, including the relocation of existing uses and the provision of a foodstore of a scale in keeping with the district centre function of Royton and tailored to this particular site.

(b) the cumulation with other development – the proposals will contribute to the regeneration of Royton district centre and will provide the community with an appropriate level of shops, services and facilities, and as such it is not considered that the cumulative effects will be significant.

(c) the use of natural resources – the development will use sustainable construction techniques and materials, and appropriate sustainability measures will be included in the design for the operational phase, to ensure that the use of natural resources is minimised at every stage.

(d) the production of waste – it is anticipated that construction waste will be recycled where possible, and that the development will be subject to a site waste management plan to ensure the production of waste is limited, and then managed appropriately.
(e) pollution and nuisances – the highways improvements and reduction in the need to travel to be delivered as part of the scheme offer the opportunity to relieve congestion and hence pollution, whilst the application will be supported by a full noise assessment and will provide mitigation measures as required.

(f) the risk of accidents, having regard in particular to substances or technologies used – given the nature of development proposed it is not considered that there will be any notable risks in this regard.

**Location of development**

2. The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by development must be considered, having regard to:

(a) the existing land use – the site is previously developed with commercial and community uses plus car parking, i.e. of the type that will be re-provided by the development, and as such there is no sensitivity in this regard.

(b) the relative abundance, quality and regenerative capacity of natural resources in the area – the development will have no implications for natural resources in the area.

(c) the absorption capacity of the natural environment, paying particular attention to sensitive areas – the development will have no implications for sensitive areas of the type listed under this criterion.

**Characteristics of the potential impact**

3. The potential significant effects of development must be considered in relation to criteria set out under items 1 and 2 above, and having regard in particular to the following criteria. At the outset, however, it is considered that the development will have no potential significant harmful effects.

(a) the extent of the impact (geographical area and size of the affected population) – the extent of impact will be very limited, i.e. local to Royton and its natural catchment.

(b) the transfrontier nature of the impact – there will be no implications in this regard.

(c) the magnitude and complexity of the impact – the impact will be very limited in its magnitude, as well as being routine, straightforward and easily understood.

(d) the probability of the impact – a good deal of certainty will be attached to the limited nature and extent of impacts.

(e) the duration, frequency and reversibility of the impact – impact during the construction phase will be relatively short lived and temporary, whilst the limited negative impact and significant positive impact associated with the operational phase will be long lasting.

For these reasons, having taken all of the criteria into account, it is considered that the scheme should be characterised as a straightforward urban development project of limited scale and impact which should not constitute ‘EIA development’. It will not have significant effects on the environment by virtue of its nature, size or location.
Application Content

In assessing the potential impacts from the development a suite of supporting documents will be prepared as part of the application. This will include consideration of the following key issues to ensure any impacts on the environment are minimised if not avoided:

- **Biodiversity and ecology** – our initial assessment of the site suggests it has very little intrinsic value in terms of biodiversity or ecology, given its location and the nature and extent of development that has previously taken place there. The proposal offers the opportunity to make some improvements in this regard. An Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and desk study will be undertaken in the first instance to identify habitats and constraints, and the need (if any) for further survey work. A full tree survey in accordance with the current British Standard will also be undertaken.

- **Flooding and drainage** – an assessment will be undertaken in this regard. Whilst the Environment Agency flood map indicates the site is not at risk of flooding. It is not within or near any floodplain or potential source of flooding and it is therefore anticipated that the site is not at any risk of flooding. Therefore no major protection measures should be required, although there might be a need for some nominal attenuation. The risk of flooding from all other sources, including reservoirs, overland flow, groundwater and sewers to the site is also expected to be low. An indicative drainage solution will also be designed to show that the scheme can connect satisfactorily with the existing local network. These issues will be explained fully as part of the application submission.

- **Transportation and traffic** – the site is well related to the rest of the district centre, would be very well provided for in terms of public transport, and similarly accessible on foot, by bicycle and of course to those arriving by car. It offers the potential to promote sustainable patterns of transport, and reduce the need to travel, and these benefits will be assessed as part of a Transport Assessment (with draft Travel Plan) that will be submitted as part of the application. Access arrangements and the highway implications will also be carefully considered.

- **Design** – a full Design and Access Statement will be provided, to demonstrate how the proposal has evolved in the context of its local setting, and will be fully integrated with the rest of the district centre and adjoining sites. Given the largely unappealing appearance of the site there is a clear opportunity to enhance it significantly and the contribution it makes to the urban environment, and this will be reflected in the Statement. Sustainability measures and improvements will also be addressed in this document.

- **Landscape** – the landscaping of the development will be important, in seeking to achieve improvements to the appearance of the site and again elevate the contribution it makes to the local environment. Landscape architects will be engaged to prepare soft and hard landscaping plans for submission as part of the application.

- **Contamination** – given the current and previous uses on the site there is only a limited possibility of some contamination. It is considered that a desk based Geo-environmental study will be sufficient to address these issues as part of the planning application. This will be prepared following consultation with the relevant Environmental Health Officer.
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- Amenity – the urban form is such that noise sensitive uses such as residential are in relatively close proximity to the site (albeit noting that there is already background noise associated with the normal functioning of the district centre). A Noise Assessment will be carried out, with mitigation measures designed in to the scheme if required.

- Statement of Community Involvement – it is Dransfield Properties Ltd’s standard practice to undertake extensive consultation in the build up to any planning application, including public open days where appropriate. This approach would be followed at Royton, with feedback from consultees taken into account in the design process, and this exercise would be reported on as part of the planning application.

- Planning – the policy issues surrounding the proposals will be assessed as part of the application and commentary will be provided on regeneration, economic and employment matters. A summary of the key points arising from the other assessments listed above will also be provided. As noted above, the Planning Statement will be prepared in the context of the encouragement for positive planning for economic development embodied in national policy and Ministerial statements. The proposal should be understood as a response to the clear encouragement provided at the national level, and the local status of the site as an important development opportunity. Due to the district centre location of the site the sequential test and matters of retail impact do not need to be considered in the same depth as for an off-centre proposal and as a result a Retail Impact Assessment will not be provided. Retail policy issues will be dealt with in more general terms.

Whilst this schedule of proposed supporting material is extensive, I would be grateful if any requirement for additional studies could be identified at the earliest possible stage.

I look forward to hearing from you with your Screening Opinion within 21 days. In the meantime, if you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Robert Barnes – MRTPi, Director
Planning Prospects Ltd

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