

Green light for hotel and M&S food store proposal

by Michael Alexander

DEMOLITION OF the former St Andrews abattoir buildings could begin within days, after councillors unanimously approved proposals for a £7 million development of a 65-bedroom hotel and a major retail food store.

Ashleigh (St Andrews) Limited, sister company of leading construction firm Ashleigh Scotland, has finally been granted permission to develop the Largo Road site for a Premier Inn and a Marks and Spencer food store. The store — providing just under 1,000 square metres of retail floor space — will primarily concentrate on food.

Premier Inn, owned by Whitbread, is the UK's largest hotel brand, with more than 600 hotels, and, like M&S, operates around the world.

After the application was approved by Fife Council's north-east Fife planning committee in Cupar, Ged Hainey, of Ryden, the firm that prepared the planning application, told The Courier: "We are absolutely delighted that members of this committee were happy with the proposals.

"We feel from a retail and accommodation perspective, our proposals dovetail really well and complement the existing facilities in St Andrews. It will be an asset to the town in the future.

"We will get building warrants done and will start remedial works on the site almost immediately. Demolition will get under way very soon."

Brian Robinson of Ashleigh (St Andrews) said: "We have been very encouraged by the amount of local support for our project. Our pre-application consultation exercise generated approximately 488 responses, of which 82.5% were



An artist's impression of the plan for the former abattoir site, hailed as "good news" for the town.

positive. We would like to thank the people of St Andrews for their support."

The planning application, which was recommended for conditional approval by Fife Council planning officials, had raised concerns from St Andrews Merchants' Association that an extra supermarket near the edge of the town could have a detrimental effect on town centre retail businesses.

Concern had also been expressed about the potential impact on existing bed and breakfast businesses in the town, amid general worries that to approve the development would leave St Andrews with no effective employment land supply.

But Fife Council planner Angus Dodds told councillors the application would be acceptable if the developer agreed to pay a commuted sum of £277,000 to the council to assist in the purchase of alternative appropriate employment land in the town.

He said the assessment to be made was

whether the benefits of the proposals and the proposed compensation for loss of employment land were sufficient to overcome the principle of losing the employment land.

He said analysis of a Retail Impact Assessment showed the M&S Food store would strengthen the food shopping profile of St Andrews as a whole. It could act as a catalyst to bring more people into St Andrews and enhance the footfall of specialist shops in the town centre.

St Andrews councillor Dorothea Morrison backed this view. She said: "I would have thought Premier Inn was a



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different market to the bed and breakfasts. I always see people from St Andrews in Dundee M&S. I think this will bring more people into St Andrews from Cupar and other places."

St Andrews councillor Brian Thomson said: "The proposed hotel and supermarket development is contrary to the local plan but the benefits of the development — the provision of cheaper hotel accommodation, the creation of jobs and the removal of an eyesore — outweigh this. Overall, the approval of this development is good news for St Andrews."

malexander@thecourier.co.uk