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Store is disappointed with council decision



Memorial square: An artists' view of how the area around Central Avenue may look

By Suz Elvey

TESCO has admitted it is disappointed not to be recommended as [Swale Council's](#) partner for the regeneration of Sittingbourne town centre.

The council had to choose from three bids, which included one from the supermarket giant, and is expected to rubber-stamp the selection of the Spirit of Sittingbourne consortium at a meeting tonight (Wednesday).

Tesco corporate affairs manager [Jonathan Simpson](#) said: "While we are disappointed not to have been selected as the council's partner, we already have important regeneration plans with the council for consideration.

"Local people have told us through our public consultation events that they welcome the hundreds of jobs, new shops, new homes and more leisure facilities that our plans would create."

A report by [Pete Raine](#), the council's director of regeneration, revealed [Spenhill](#), the regeneration arm of Tesco, wanted to become the development partner on the condition that the council granted planning permission for a Tesco Extra and other retail space north of the railway.

Council leader and cabinet member, Tory Councillor [Andrew Bowles](#), said: "We didn't choose Tesco because it didn't have the best scheme. It was not because we didn't want Sittingbourne to become Tescobourne."

He confirmed that choosing a preferred partner did not mean choosing an exact design for the town, this would come later, but he admitted no timeline had been set out.

The third company short-listed by the council was [St James's Investment Ltd \(SJI\)](#), a London-based developer that is currently working with Tesco on a project in [Bath](#).

SJI submitted two options, the first placing a supermarket where [Swale House](#) is and creating green space around [St Michael's Church](#). The second concentrating civic buildings on the Swale House site and increasing the number of shops in other areas including Central Avenue.

Spirit of Sittingbourne is made up of property consultant [Essential Land](#), London-based property developer [Cathedral Group](#) and financial fund managers [Altyon](#).

Plans put forward by the group include a square in front of the railway station and a civic quarter with a library, health centre, homes and shops based around Central Avenue.

Separate from the town centre plans, Tesco has submitted planning applications for a large superstore, new shops, homes, leisure facilities and a pedestrian bridge linking areas north and south of the railway.

There were more than 550 applicants for the 79 jobs created by the Tesco Metro store in The Forum.

The supermarket revealed more than eight people applied for each position and said it gave the majority of the jobs to people living in Sittingbourne, [Milton Regis](#) and [Sheerness](#).

The Tesco Metro is due to open on Monday, February 21.

