

Connor Steel finds rapid progress at new £9m retail park

Brockhurst Gate still on rise after three months

M&S, Costa and Lidl lined up for Gosport

Development could see major brands opening at new retail site

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BIG NAME shops M&S, Lidl and Iceland could soon be opening on former military land in Gosport as part of a major development plan.

The scheme, proposed for Brockhurst Gate opposite Gosport Leisure Centre, will also bring with it Home Bargains, McDonald's and Costa - as well as new football pitches and changing rooms.

If approved, the site will create 270 jobs and is projected to bring about £12m of extra spending to Gosport.

Tony Swenney, MD of Millgate, the development company behind the scheme, said: "We've been working on this site for over seven years and are delighted to subject to writing planning consent - that we will soon be able to deliver a high-quality redevelopment of this vacant site.

"We have been able to attract some of the biggest and best retail and restaurant names which has also enabled us to include other benefits such as public open space, much-improved views of Fort Brockhurst and an FA-compliant adult football pitch.

Millgate has rejigged its original plans for the site, to the north of Fort Brockhurst, and is now proposing only retail, accepting its plans for 100 homes.

A public consultation was held in 2014, and after scores of objections and work with Gosport Borough Council, Millgate revealed its revised plans earlier this week.

An application has not yet been submitted to Gosport Borough Council but is expected before Christmas.

Councillor Stephen Philpott, chairman of the economic development board, said: "We are pleased that Millgate has listened and removed any proposals for housing.

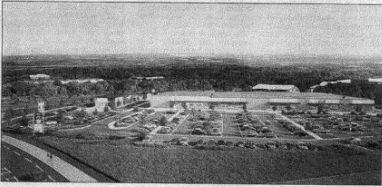
"This area is earmarked in the local plan for job creation and so the news that there could be more than 200 new jobs is to be welcomed.

"Once a formal proposal has been submitted, we will need to robustly test it by examining closely the traffic impact as well as the effect on other retail operations.

"The council remains determined to ensure that whenever developers come forward with ideas, the priority will be to maximise job creation to address the chronic shortage of employment within Gosport that forces so many to commute to work."

If the plans win approval, it could be built and trading before Christmas 2019.

CHANGES An artist's impression of what Brockhurst Gate could look like




PERFECTLY EXECUTED: Initial plan from developers Millgate compared to May. Photographs from Millgate, top, and Aisling Steel, bottom

WHEN JOLLYES Pet Store opened its doors to the public a couple of weeks ago, it completed a development that has cost £9 million and taken years to finalise.

With this in mind, The Globe decided to investigate whether the development is still thriving three months on and if action has been taken on early concerns made by the public earlier in the year.

When over 500 people queued outside Marks & Spencer and Home Bargains on two separate occasions for their grand openings, there was genuine excitement amongst the crowd as something new had been created in our local area.

However, the big question at the time was whether they would come back once the excitement and publicity had faded.

When the latest store of Jolleys Pet Store opened on April 18, there was still a crowd in attendance although not the same size as other ground openings at the retail park in recent times.

Jolleys Pet Store is one of seven brands that have opened at the retail park since November, with the majority being based around food and drink. This was a concern stated by residents but the unchanged plan for the development was always going to be a 'food hall'. Despite this, shoppers are still visiting the stores, with some proving more popular than others.



Although no visitor numbers have been issued, it is clear that McDonalds and Costa have the most each day compared to other stores at the development.

As both brands have a drive-through feature and easy access to food and drink, it is no surprise that neither store is empty and there seems to be a consistent flow of customers throughout the day. They have also had more time to establish themselves than the others, as McDonalds and Costa opened within a two-week period.

It could be argued that the remaining stores are similar to each other in terms of customer popularity. Marks & Spencer, as well as Home Bargains, both have consistent numbers of customers throughout the day but nowhere near the popularity seen at their Grand Openings. In comparison, the remaining food shops of Food Warehouse and Lidl's can appear quiet but get busy at certain times of the day such as in the evening.

No matter their numbers, each store has its own type of customer and range of products, breeding competition throughout the retail park. This is no bad thing as

it has allowed product prices to steadily decrease as they try to get more customers into their stores.

Prices were expensive at the beginning as stores took advantage of their early popularity to maximise profits from the off. However the stabilising prices and range of different products is definitely a pulling point and seems to have paid off in recent weeks, which is good to see.

Another positive aspect of the development involves the jobs for people in the Gosport and Fareham area. It has been speculated that over 200 have been created since the opening of the seven stores, with new posts being advertised three months on. This is a good sign as it shows more staff are needed to help with the flow of customers. And it must be said that everybody working at the development is friendly and helpful when communicating with customers.

The current popularity of the Brockhurst Gate development has, however, unearthed some minor issues that potentially could drive people away in the long run. The car park is arguably small for a retail development where seven major brands all bring in staff and customers, which can lead to queues at particularly busy times when no car parking spaces are available. However these occasions

seem to have reduced as shoppers come at different times rather than in one large rush. When traffic does build up it can be increased by the main roads in the area, which also means a car park extension is unlikely at the moment although this could be great addition in the future.

Another planned move is to landscape the front area of the retail park, allowing developers to remove the steel fencing that is located on the A32 side of the retail park.

This will provide an attractive view of the development and may attract more customers to the stores to continue their popularity.

It is so far so good for the Brockhurst Gate retail park, which has continued its early success with trading consistency over recent months.

The prime location between Gosport and Fareham, as well as introducing new brands and creation of jobs is a very positive start to build on for the future.

Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind that the development has not yet been completed. Minor flaws shouldn't deter the small minority to have stayed away from shopping at Brockhurst Gate.

It is the improvement to shopping outlets that local residents had wanted, so let's just enjoy it while we can.