

Unapproved Minutes of Planning Committee Meeting

PARISH COUNCIL OF BALSALL

Minutes of the Balsall Planning Committee Meeting held on Monday 15th July 2013 at 7.00pm at the Jubilee Centre, Station Road, Balsall Common

Present

Cllr Judy Lea, Cllr Richard Lloyd and Cllr Lionel King, Cllr Peter Lea, Cllr Raymond Ritchie and 13 members of the public to include David Felthouse (Residents Association)

Headings are those set out on the Agenda

1. Apologies

Cllr Ian Hedley and Cllr Douglas Money

2. Declarations of Interest

None

3. To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the Planning Committee Meeting on 10th June 2013

RESOLVED

The Minutes are approved and Chair signed these as a true record

4. Matters arising from the Minutes

None

5. Public Participation

Dave Felthouse of the Residents Association raised the matter of the presentation given by Waterloo Housing of a proposal to develop a site to the back of the Saracens Head pub to provide affordable housing.

The Parish Council had requested that the Residents Association meets up and to discuss this proposal. A meeting was held and 25 responses were received. Details of the residents comments are attached. This showed that there was no support for this proposed development. Parking and access is a major issue as is the fact that the land is within Green Belt. Waterloo Housing was due to hold a walk in session but this has been postponed.

It was noted that the application was not a formal application but a prior notification. It was agreed that the clerk would check with the planning authority what this actually means.

It was agreed to place this matter on the agenda at the next Planning meeting.

6. Planning Applications

6.1. 2013/900 - 85 Station Road, Balsall Common - Single storey garage to side of property

Comment: No objection

- 6.2. 2013/722 - Dorene Farm, Meer End Road, Honiley - Convert existing barn to a single residential dwelling

Comment: No objection

- 6.3. 2013/936 - 20 Wilton Road, Balsall Common - First Floor side extension

Comment: No objection

- 6.4. 2013/943 - Chadwick Barns, Sparrow Cock Lane, Chadwick End Solihull - Single storey glass bay to rear (within courtyard). Amendment to planning approval 2013/313

Comment: No objection

- 6.5. 2013/1043 - 56 Station Road, Balsall Common - Replace existing ground floor conservatory with kitchen extension

Comment: No objection subject to any comments that the neighbours may have

- 6.6. 2013/1120 – Lea Francis House, Station Road, Balsall Common – Prior notification for change of use from offices to 16 dwellings

Comment: The Parish Council is concerned at the proposal put forward as the plan on the website simply shows a floor plan.

The proposal does not give much detail at all. The suggestion appears to be that the exterior of the building will remain the same. This is not acceptable as the building is in a state of disrepair. The exterior of the building has been subject to regular vandalism and graffiti.

No detail of parking is provided or details of what will happen to the outside space. There is a significant amount of space around the building. We have previously invited the developer to attend a Parish meeting to provide details of their proposal so that the Parish Council may obtain clarification. We would urge you to ask the developer to engage with the community and consult with the Parish Council as this site is located in the Centre of the village and affects the whole community.

The proposal put forward in its present form is not supported by the Parish Council and we strongly object on the grounds set out above.

7. Correspondence

Clerk provided details of correspondence from Warwickshire District Council regarding the Development Plan

8. Date for next meeting– The next Planning Committee Meeting shall take place on Monday 12th August 2013

There being no further business the Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 7.59pm

Signed..... Dated.....

CLlr Peter Lea

Chair

Balsall Planning Committee

RESIDENT 1

Thank you for the communication regarding the proposed development of affordable housing at Magpie Lane.

My comments would be as follows;

- The land concerned is green belt. Would this not set a precedent for future building on green belt land? We already have sites in the village like the PartCo building and the old shops (now demolished) on Station Road awaiting development. Would it not be better to develop these sites rather than encroach on the green built.
- The destruction of established hedgerows and trees required to widen what is a single-track, rural road. This would also be a disruption to local wildlife, which in this area is quite plentiful.
- Would it not be possible to route traffic via the existing development at Saracen's Drive, minimising the need to make major changes to Magpie Lane.
- I would presume that many of the properties might be taken by families, possibly moving into the area. This would put pressure on the primary school which already has extremely large class sizes, some at maximum level. Developments have been proposed on Kenilworth Road and Riddings Hill and now Magpie Lane - the existing primary school could not cope with this extra level of demand.
- On the same point of schools - the development site is far out of the village which would require people travelling to school to use their cars. This would mean an increase of traffic but even more worrying, we're all well aware of the ongoing parking saga's surrounding both the primary and the secondary school. A housing development this distance away would mean more vehicles around the roads surrounding the schools.
- Other candidates for affordable housing are quite often the elderly, who may not have access to vehicles. There is a bus stop on Balsall Street however this would be a fair walk from the proposed development. The siting of the development therefore would not be very accessible.

Thank you.

RESIDENT 2 – Magpie Lane

It seems that we are under siege from all directions.

I understand the developer gave a presentation to Balsall Parish Council earlier this week to inform them about the proposed development at the rear of the Saracens Head, I believe the council sat on the fence (as usual) and gave no opinion about the proposal, instead they asked the residents association to gauge opinion. I would have thought they did not need to gauge opinion and could have said quite clearly that they opposed the development for the following reasons:

1. It is green belt land.
2. The access is terrible, Magpie Lane is a narrow lane (one car wide), it would be a nightmare if 50 extra vehicles used the lane (the development caters for 50+ car parking spaces, 2 per unit plus visitors), the proposed local widening of the lane is not adequate solution.
3. The development is out of keeping with other property in the area.
4. The number and type of units proposed is ridiculous
5. Etc..... etc.....

As you may have guessed, I am totally opposed to this development, I am sure all other residents in Magpie Lane, Saracens Drive and Balsall Street will feel the same. I am not able to attend the RA meeting on 2 July but please inform them of my view.

The next Balsall Council planning meeting is on 15 July (7pm) at the Jubilee Centre, Station Road, I will attend that so that the council is aware of my objection.

RESIDENT 3 – Balsall Street

To whom it may concern

I write to implore you to object to the proposed development off Magpie Lane. Enough of this village's green belt will be swallowed up if HS2 goes ahead without more being taken up by an ill thought out development. The parish council must object to this development otherwise it sets a precedent for development of our village's green belt.

I would also remind the parish council that the site was not considered suitable for development when the local development plan was drawn up for a number of valid reasons.

The access to the site is not suitable for the number of houses and thus cars proposed. Any changes to Magpie Lane would significantly impact upon the peace and tranquility of this quiet country lane. In addition increase in traffic in the lane would have safety implications, especially as it is single track, there is no pavement and there are a number of public footpaths in the vicinity.

Also, the proposed development is not in keeping with the houses present in this area of the village.

I hope that the parish council will see that this development is not suitable and reject the proposed plans.

RESIDENT 4 - Gipsy Close

Dear Sirs

This development will not visually affect me as I live off Gipsy Lane but I am against it.

In my opinion and experience, having lived in the village since 1986, Balsall Common already has too many residents for the available services – shops, schools, amenities, etc. A particular example is the water supply where those at the end of runs are seeing reduced pressures to the point that eco-efficient combi and condensing boilers are not feasible. More houses from the same water mains equals further pressure reduction. A laughable situation considering the pro-eco initiatives abounding.

I am not against this development in particular but all development until services can be rationalised.

RESIDENT 5 – Saracen Drive

Following your request for residents' comments on the proposed development of affordable housing on the land at the rear of the Saracen's Head I would like to make the following points to be considered in any discussions that take place at your meeting on 2 July:

1. Rationale for release of green belt - The site in question was considered for development by Solihull as they drafted the recent local plan. At this time development was rejected as the site is designated as green belt. Current government policy does not allow sites to be released from the green belt within a local plan period (until 2038 in Solihull's case I believe) unless it is for 100% affordable housing where there is a demonstrable need for such housing within the parish that cannot be met by the existing provision. Given that we are so early in the local plan period and there are a number of, as yet undeveloped, sites that the local plan has allocated to housing within the parish that contain an element of affordable housing, I would like to understand how the developer believes they have demonstrated such a need.

2. Access to the site -

The proposed entrance to the site involves access along a narrow lane. Although the developer has proposed widening the road along the perimeter of the site itself this is in fact in the opposite direction from the site entrance to the way in which the majority of traffic would travel to reach the main road meaning that it does little to improve access. To be effective the widened stretch of road would need to reach Balsall Street. At present the proposal does not provide adequate access to the site for the emergency services in the event of a major incident.

I look forward to hearing how this matter progresses.

RESIDENT 6 – Saracen Drive

Dear Sirs,

I have recently received information via the Communicator of the above proposed development off Magpie Lane and believe you are looking for feedback on the proposals.

I cannot believe that such a development is even being considered by the Parish Council. This is greenbelt land and if the council does not object to the development in the strongest possible terms, a dangerous precedent will have been set for the future. We are being bombarded at the moment with the extension of the runway at Birmingham Airport and HS2 and it is about time the council said enough is enough and protected our greenbelt land.

You only have to read the Solihull Planners' comments to understand why the development must be stopped with immediate effect. Access to the site is dreadful and could be deemed extremely dangerous. If Magpie Lane were to be widened, as proposed, the nature of this peaceful country lane would be changed forever. The road is single track and there is no pavement and there are a number of public footpaths off the lane used frequently by walkers, dog walkers, runners, cyclists, etc. Furthermore, traffic travels at high speed past the turn to Magpie Lane - the road has a speed limit of 40mph leading to 50mph out of the village, but anyone who lives locally can vouch for the fact that traffic is constantly travelling at well about these limits. There is also access to the Saracen's Head within yards of the turn to Magpie Lane thus causing even more danger.

There is obviously an increasing need for social/community housing across the country, but this development in this area would be totally at odds with the local landscape. In addition, as quoted in the document, accessibility to primary schools is beyond the desirable parameters.

I urge the council to act promptly and decisively in this matter and inform the developer in the strongest possible terms that their proposals will be most vehemently objected to.

RESIDENT 7 – Saracen Drive

Dear Residents Association,

I am writing to register my objections to the proposals relating to development behind the Saracen's Head, Balsall Common.

The following are the main reasons for my objections:

1. The proposals for access: Magpie lane is an extremely narrow lane, suitable for infrequent traffic. The lane itself occasionally has farm traffic but generally is a quiet rural lane, affording an opportunity for the residents around Saracen Drive and others in Balsall Common to walk their dogs or to go on rural hikes and for horse riders from the many stables around to ride their horses. Children frequently play around the lane and visit the horses in the field across the lane from the Stables, which lies behind the land that is affected by this proposal. With the proposal in question, there will be a considerable increase in traffic, and this will pose a danger both to residents and their children as well as any walkers that frequent the area.

2. Encroachment of the Green Belt: The land which is affected by the proposal is Green Belt Land. The proposal will change the character of the quiet, rural surroundings and will have a considerable impact on the environment in the setting. I am concerned that allowing this proposal to go ahead will open the floodgates to further development of this rural area around Balsall Common, an area which is important for the residents of Balsall Common for leisure and enrichment purposes. There are already locations identified within the Solihull Development Framework which have better access, and afford better opportunities for potential residents to avail themselves of facilities and amenities.

3. Pressure and/or additional demand for Amenities and Services: Balsall Common is already reeling from the increase in housing that has already occurred. Its infrastructure is creaking under the pressure of additional demand. Development of affordable housing in this location would be inappropriate, since amenities, services and facilities would require transport for any residents as the village centre is not within walking distance of the location. In addition, employment opportunities would require the same, since they would generally only be available 45 minutes or so away in the larger conurbations. Educational opportunities would also require transport, as they are not within walking distance of the location.

4. The development would significantly affect the value of the current houses in Saracen Drive and the surrounding area. The sale prices of the houses in Saracen Drive over the past few years has been in excess of £440,000 - £450,000 and residents would certainly not be able to realise this sum should affordable housing be placed behind them. Insurance premia would also inevitably be affected. In addition, the character of this intimate, small development would change adversely with the advent of affordable housing in this location.

5. Increase in noise levels: this quiet rural setting would be transformed by the advent of the housing proposed. This would significantly inconvenience the residents surrounding the area, many of whom have small children. In addition, should this proposal go ahead, the additional

danger, inconvenience and noise associated with construction traffic and their personnel would cause me considerable concern, as I have school age children, who frequently play in the area surrounding the proposed location, as do other residents.

I am confident that you will consider my objections with sensitivity and understanding and will agree that this proposal is impractical, inappropriate and could have potentially dangerous consequences. I believe it should be resoundingly rejected.

Additional Comment

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have already written with my objections to this development. However, I would like to state a number of other objections to the proposed development, which should be read in conjunction with my previous email.

Having conducted extensive research in the area, I believe that a proposed development would mean further pressure on an already inadequate draining and sewerage system. There have been examples of raw sewage appearing at the bottom of one resident's garden in the vicinity and there are serious concerns about the viability of the water and sewage infrastructure to cope with additional demand. Should the systems servicing a new development run under Saracen Drive or indeed around Magpie Lane, I am concerned about who would bear the brunt of the costs associated with the malfunctioning of the infrastructure as well as the consequences of such a failure on the residents of Magpie Lane, Balsall Street East and Saracen Drive and beyond. The impact of such an incident could have serious health and safety implications.

In addition, I am also very concerned about the light pollution that would inevitably be the result of such a development. This would affect Magpie Lane and the areas surrounding this together with Saracen Drive residents. The effects of light pollution on the environment and on the lives of individuals subject to such intrusion are well known and this would be not only unwelcome but also could be detrimental to the health of residents in the affected area.

There are a large number of alternative sites in Balsall Common, which have better access to amenities and essential services and which would not have the destructive impact that this proposed development would have. I would urge those proposing this development to think again and to consider the objections put forward carefully, as I do not believe that the proposed location is the optimum or indeed the most sensible or practical to select for affordable housing.

RESIDENT 8 – Saracen Drive

Dear Sir/Madam,

To be honest I am not sure where to start, or why the Parish Council are even considering this potential application.

It is inappropriate on so many levels that it is almost impossible to understand why it has been tabled.

Firstly, this is opportunistic profiteering at a level that probably merits further investigation. My understanding that behind this proposal are former directors of the brewery which previously owned the land, who have persuaded their company to sell them the land without putting it on the open market. This potentially constitutes a breach of fiduciary duty and a conflict of interest that I would urge the Parish Council to examine further before taking any other action. I shall certainly be pursuing this to see whether it is indeed the case.

However, that issue notwithstanding there are some many other points that mitigate against the proposal being taken any further forward. I am concerned though that raising any objections in detail is playing into the hands of the developers who are no doubt keen to learn what objection they need to overcome. So, at this stage I would just point out the most obvious objections.

1. Does Balsall Common actually have a requirement for this type of development?
2. Where is the evidence to support this?
3. If there is evidence of need, what other sites have the Parish Council considered?
4. The plot has already been analysed as being wholly unsuitable by Solihull Council Planning, so why is it being considered at all?
5. Are there other sites in the village that have no, or minimal impact on greenbelt?
6. Why is the Parish Council entertaining the use of greenbelt land, and therefore setting a very dangerous precedent indeed?
7. If the Parish Council are prepared to support the use of greenbelt, why not look at other sites within the village that are less dangerous to humans and animals? This is a critical aspect which merits a more detailed response, but be under no illusion this development would lead to serious injury or indeed fatalities.
8. If the Parish Council are prepared to support the use of greenbelt, why not look at other sites within the village that are closer to the necessary amenities?

Frankly the list goes on. But there can be no justification for considering this type of development more than a mile from the centre of the village, that will potentially cost lives through the complete lack of appropriate infrastructure, that has already been rejected a number of times before, for which there are undoubtedly better solutions.

To return to my original point, the residents of Saracen Drive have asked previously to purchase this land. Now it is clear why a covert deal has been done without giving those residents the opportunity to bid for the land.

It is bad enough that the village should continue to be blighted with major projects such as the airport expansion and HS2, but at least these are 'big picture' initiatives that affect the whole region, and indeed country.

The Parish Council's role should be to serve and protect our community, not to further the financial interests of rogue developers, and where it has the opportunity actually use its powers to do the right thing.

In summary, I object to this proposal in the strongest possible terms and will fight it all the way.

RESIDENT 9 – Kemps Green Road

We wish to object most strongly to the proposed development @ the r/o The Saracens Head/Magpie Lane, Balsall Common.

The basis of the objection is:-

The land is currently agricultural green belt land. There should be no further incursions into green belt to spread the area of urban development. This may create a precedent for future “urban edge” developments to encroach into green belt land.

The access is a narrow country lane in keeping with the surrounding area. It is unsuitable for vehicular access and any widening to accommodate the building would spoil the existing rural landscape.

There are already problems with parking in the vicinity of both local primary and secondary schools which is and has been for many months an on-going issue with local residents. BC Primary School is already populated by 100% more pupils than it was originally intended to teach.i.e. 350 >>>>700+

The houses would be directly under the existing and proposed extended runway for B’ham airport. Under the planned extension of runway 33, aeroplanes will be flying 51 feet lower than now and any increase in noise would be unacceptable at this height. If BHX estimates of a 90% traffic increase by 2022 is accepted, then this problem would be exacerbated by up to 90% for anyone living in this location.

The proposed no. of social houses on a site of 0.54ha of between 7 >>11 would be of insignificant value to the community.

RESIDENT 10 – Magpie Lane

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the proposals.

- 1) I think Solihull Council’s report states all the reasons for not allowing any development on the proposed site.
- 2) Traffic, in addition to turning right out of the proposed development a number of vehicles will undoubtedly turn left, Magpie Lane gets narrower and Longbrook Lane is not at all suitable for any increase in traffic.
- 3) The existing vehicular exit (Magpie lane) on to Balsall Street is very close to the entrance to The Saracens Head, any increase in traffic will result in more confusion with the traffic exiting The Saracens Head and a accident will surely happen.

RESIDENT 11 – Saracen Drive

NO OBJECTION TO DEVELOPMENT OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING ,HOWEVER, NOT ON GREENBELTLAND RUNNING THE LENGTH OF SARACEN DRIVE !!

EXCEPTIONALLY STRONG OBJECTION TO THIS AND TO ANY PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT ON GREENBELT LAND IN AND AROUND BALSALL COMMON OR SURROUNDING AREAS.

RESIDENT 12 – Saracen Drive

Dear Sirs,

Living adjacent to the proposed location we would not welcome such a development on greenbelt land. Aside from the personal inconvenience of such a development taking place so close to our home we question the wisdom in terms of vehicle access from what is currently a single track lane.

As for the concept of affordable housing in this location we question the sincerity of this initial proposal and can but wonder whether it is a pre-cursor for a wholly different development.

RESIDENT 13 – Saracen Drive

To whom it may concern

I live [in] Saracen Drive and have looked at this proposal and it seems ridiculous to build 20 - 25 houses on a site with such poor access. The only access is along Magpie lane which is a single track lane. Looking at the plan you cannot walk or cycle safely from the site as the widening is only for the portion of the road along the development. What about the rest of the lane from the site to Balsall Street. There surely has to be a better site around the village to build on than this one.

RESIDENT 14 – Saracen Drive

As a resident of Balsall Common in particular Saracen Drive I strongly object to the above proposal. In my opinion the village is struggling to accommodate the number of people already living here I,e schools, shops social amenities for teenagers etc.

RESIDENT 15 - Saracen Drive

To Whom It May Concern

I would strongly object to the above proposed development on the following grounds:

Development within the Green Belt.

Any relaxation of the Green Belt on this site could lead to further erosion of the Green Belt in this area.

Need for the development unproven, particularly in this location.

Traffic issues on increased vehicular access onto Balsall Street.

I have further objections on both planning and other grounds which I will formally raise should the application be made.

RESIDENT 16 – Magpie Lane

Dear David

The widening of Magpie Lane to provide access to the proposed new housing development to the rear of the Saracen's Head would destroy the character of a lane with the greatest concentration of ancient buildings in Balsall Common.; all dating from the 1500 and 1600s. The majority of the properties on Magpie Lane are Grade II listed and their historic importance was already recognised over 65 years ago (see below). In view of this, the widening of Magpie Lane would be tantamount to cultural vandalism.

Kind regards

Here is an extract from 'Parishes: Balsall', - A History of the County of Warwick:
Volume 4: Hemlingford Hundred, L. F. Salzman (editor), 1947

<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42661>

*Another group [of ancient buildings in the parish of Balsall] is about ½ mile west of the village on the main road and in a loop-road south of it. **The Saracen's Head Inn**, facing north-west, is of two bays of square framing and has an end chimney. Two detached houses, both divided into tenements, to the north-west are of similar framing. **Balsall Farm**, on the west side of the loop road, is of c. 1690 and is built of red brick with rusticated stone angle-dressings and moulded cornice. It has rectangular windows with stone key blocks and wood casements and transoms: the middle entrance has a stone architrave and key block. There is also a timber-framed barn. Farther south at the bend of the loop-road is **Magpie Farm** (formerly Churchfields Farm), which has a two-storied north wing dating from c. 1560. This is of rectangular plan, about 42 ft. by 18 ft., with a central chimney-stack. The walls are of close-set studding to both stories except in the upper story of the gabled west front where there is rather more elaboration. Below the windows are rectangular panels with herring-bone struts, except the central which have quadrant struts. The gable-head projects on a moulded bressummer supported on shaped brackets, and are of square framing in small panels. The upper story has a restored oriel window on the original shaped brackets and with dwarf wing-lights with moulded mullions. The lower oriel window has been abolished, but the original wing lights remain. The east end, except for the more simple post-work, is similar, the oriel and its wing-lights being ancient: the gable-head also projects on brackets. The story-posts in the north side divide it into seven alternate narrow and wide bays (in the proportion of 3 to 5). The middle wide bay has an original three-light window in each story with moulded mullions, lighting the cupboards next the central chimney-stack. The other wide bays had originally oriel windows, but they have been altered to flat windows. The rooms have plastered ceilings with stop-chamfered beams. The lower fire-places have heavy four-centred stone arches, but the jambs are of brick, with chimney-corners. The upper fire-places are later. A modern wing extends southwards, but some of the original close studding of the south wall is exposed inside. The lobby on the first floor south of the chimney-stack has three ancient doors hung with strap-hinges with flowered ends. **'The Old Farm'**, a little farther north on the east side of the loop, has a north wall of framing and a central chimney-stack of 17th-century bricks with two diagonal shafts. There is also a **timber-framed barn [now Longbrook Barn]**.*

RESIDENT 17 – Saracen Drive

Hi,

I wish to raise my concerns in relation to the proposed development of the field behind the Saracen's Head Pub. This was first brought to my attention by the Balsall Common Residents Association Newsflash.

- I would like to understand if the Residents Association and Parish Council are seeing significant demand for Social Housing within Balsall Common? To my mind, we already have a proportion of affordable homes, such as those on Needlers End Lane and I have

not seen the inclusion of Social Housing in recent developments granted. I cite the recent developments on Waste Lane and Kenilworth Road as examples.

- I would ask the Residents Association to look into the Ethics of the business practices behind the approach from Touch Properties Limited. The field was previously owned by Thwaites brewery. They made several applications to Solihull Council to try and develop the land in question. All applications were denied. They even engaged a planning consultancy firm to advise on how best to get an application granted. They were advised to get the site bought into the long term development plan for the village. Having used the considerable resources and finances of Thwaites Breweries to explore many options, the site was sold by Thwaites internally to two directors of the company. Who in turn have engaged Touch Properties to represent them. Thwaites had been approached by local residents of Saracens Drive who wished to purchase the site to preserve it as Greenbelt. Though they decided to sell the site, it was not offered to those who had approached them previously. Rather keep the asset and the investments made to date within the Thwaites organisation.
- The site is designated as Green Belt. I have approached the Solihull planners on a number of occasions and always been assured that it would remain as greenbelt. The field attracts a great deal of wild life. Redwings, Woodpeckers, including a regular Green Woodpecker that feeds on the ants, Hawks, rabbits to name just a very minor subset. The field should retain its greenbelt status in order to protect local wild life. I would also ask the Residents Association to determine which site in Balsall Common will be changed to 'Greenbelt' status should this field be developed? As I understand the Prime Ministers speech on questioning in the commons just last week, Greenbelt that is developed has to be offset with additional Greenbelt being created elsewhere.
- I would like to understand the perspective of our local Tree Preservation Officer also. To widen the lane, make the access to the site, and maximise the acreage available for development, some historic Oak Tree's will have to be removed. I would like to think that many of these trees are already covered by Tree Preservation Orders, if they are not, we as residents should remedy this.
- If more social housing is required in Balsall Common, is this the best site to consider? The site is on the extreme edge of the village, furthest away from any local amenities. Would it be right to put a social group with limited access to funds for housing on travel, at the most remote part of the village? The site is over a mile away from the local primary school, further from the secondary school. Over a mile away from local shops and services such as the Library. The only local amenity is the pub. I would suggest that if we require more social housing, it should be placed with greater access to local services such as bus routes, shops and other local amenities. Why is the developer not considering existing Brown Field sites, such as the one behind the Co-Op in the centre of the village? Having such an eye saw converted would certainly add to the character of the village and provide great access to new residents.
- Access. I note the proposal to widen Magpie Lane, but this is not giving due consideration to the current use and residents of Magpie Lane. This is a green lane that is used by local Equestrians for exercising their horses and accessing the fields that they keep their animals in. It is used by children to play and learn to ride their bikes. It is used frequently by dog walkers to exercise there animals but also access the multiple walks across fields in accessed of Magpie Lane. Given that the site is so remote from the village, it is reasonable to assume a very large increase in the traffic on the lane. Taking 30 homes, assuming 2 cars per home in line with national average, assuming 2 movements per day for a working partner, and 8 movements per day for the collection and dropping of children, results in an additional 300 car movements per day. The lane currently does not see that many movements in a month.

- Safety. The majority of car movements above will be turning right towards the village. So turning right almost immediately across the car park entrance to the Saracens head. This amount of increased activity across the front of the Saracens head, on to an already busy road increases risks to road users, pedestrians and horses.
- Saracen Drive was created when an old transportation facility was closed. The site was contaminated with heavy oils and needed cleaning up. Though surrounded by green belt I understand why a decision was made to develop the site in order to clean up the land and make good a site that was being left to. True brown field development. Trying to encroach on the green belt that surrounds the development is clearly commercial opportunism. This can be proved by the number of failed applications that Thwaites made on the site, and why Thwaites retained the site when they sold the Saracens head on to Wolverhampton and Dudley brewery. Their estate manager admitted in a phone call that he retained the site as he felt in time he could profit from developing the site. He has now passed that opportunity on internally to two directors of the business.
- In keeping. Finally I would question whether the proposed development is in line with the properties have been established in this area of the village by previous planners. Previous planning applications have always been for houses of similar size and value. Given that these have all been rejected, I remain suspicious of the developers motives behind proposing a 'Social' development. It seems like a last resort latching on to a current drive from Central Government. Rather than a scheme that has been given due consideration with the needs of local residents and the village as a whole.

I appreciate the business need of developers to develop. I also appreciate the macro push we are getting from Central Government to increase building and stimulate associated demands. This should not be done however regardless of the impact on local communities. With the questions I raise in this email still outstanding, I can only see that this is a blatantly commercial request of the Resident Association and the Council with profit the only motive for Touch Properties and the two directors from Thwaites who have made an opportunistic investment. If the scheme brought benefits to the village, such as a new playing field, or training field for local football, rugby or cricket enthusiasts it should be looked at in a positive light. Even a all weather facility that is there to encourage our youngest to become and remain active. There is no element of benefit that I can see, just a set of people trying to argue 'logical infill' in order to make a profit.

If the Residents Association were to agree with all or part of my perspectives, I would welcome an opportunity to work with them to lobby the Parish Council and Solihull Council to push back on this application.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Additional comment

Further to my note below, I would also ask the RA to consider if placing yet more housing underneath the airport flight path is the right thing for the village and for the people that will eventually live there. Please bear in mind that planes will be 50ft lower creating more noise and pollution. If we are not successful in re-routing the take offs when the new runway is opened, this impact on people and the area will double. Given we as residents are having to accommodate this airport expansion it is difficult to accept further disruption from the development of our surrounding green belt.

Discussing impacts, would the RA also consider the impact to the value of our houses of the proposed development. Taking the advice of a local estate agent, during the period of proposed

development our houses would become almost unsalable, due to building impacts, and would drop by an expected 10% £50,000, should the field be developed. I would urge the RA, Parish Council and County Council to give heavy consideration to this financial cost as it would place those of us who bought 2006 - 2009 in negative equity.

RESIDENT 18 – Saracen Drive

To whom it may concern,

Please note our objection to the proposal for development of affordable housing at the green belt site Saracen Drive/Magpie Lane. The site has a direct impact on our property, being located in Saracen Drive, and those of our neighbours.

We wish to pursue the matter in line with the formal objection process and would be grateful for the support from the residents association.

We look forward to discussing the matter at the meeting on 2nd July.

RESIDENT 19 – Balsall Street

I see that the RA were asked to circulate the initial plans for this development to the local residents. We live on Balsall Street and we certainly received no notification but we have to object in the strongest possible terms. The proposed site is totally unsuitable for this development. The density is far too great and it is in the green belt. If this were allowed it would set a precedent for further encroachment into the countryside. Access via Magpie Lane is just not acceptable. This lane is used by walkers (there is a footpath off it), horse riders, cyclists and it is one of the very few local lanes left for people to enjoy without jumping out of the way of traffic. This development should certainly not be allowed.

RESIDENT 20 – Magpie Lane

Re: Proposal for development of greenfield site to the rear of the Saracen's Head with access from Magpie Lane

At the outset we wish to register our objection to this development proposal, which is entirely inappropriate for the identified site. Before presenting the reasons for our objection, some initial questions require clarification in respect of policy and communications:

Policy and communications

- Residents have only been made aware of this proposal via the Balsall Common Village Residents Association 'e-newsflash', sent by email on 21/06/13, yet the newsflash makes reference to the proposal having been put before both Solihull Planners and Balsall Common Parish Council on previous occasions. Is it correct practice that the views of residents are sought only in the later stages, and in what manner would residents have been notified and consulted at the present stage of the process, had they not been in a position to receive this email?
- The attachments to the email of 21/06/13 do not make it clear what the response of Solihull Council was to the proposal. If the response is contained within the 2-page extract from the 'Balsall Common – SHLAA Site Assessments, September 2012' document, then the conclusion of this states clearly that Solihull Council is against this

development, and that it is not to be considered a site to be allocated for future development. In this context, why is this proposal again being presented within less than 12 months of this decision?

- With reference to the above it is not apparent from the information received whether or not a formal planning application has been submitted by the developer to Solihull MBC for the proposed development.
- What precisely is the role of Balsall Common Parish Council in respect of this proposal? Having been briefed directly by the developer, do we not have a record of the Parish Council response to this proposal, or are they awaiting views of the community via the Residents Association before formulating an official response?
- What are the next stages in the process once residents have given their views?

Objections to the proposal

- **Safeguarding of the Green Belt** – the green belt policy is specifically designed to prevent the unchecked growth of development into the countryside, to preserve our fragile tracts of undeveloped land for future agricultural need, as valuable refuges from habitat loss for wildlife, and as breathing space for future generations. The Solihull Unitary Development Plan clearly demarcates the position of green belt in its encirclement of Balsall Common, and the proposed development site is located firmly within this green belt zone. Moreover the 2011 Balsall Common Local Plan clearly shows the agreed development strategy of Solihull MBC to 2028, identifying those sites where development will be permitted to meet regional housing needs, including greenfield sites where necessary. The proposed site forms no part of this allocation and is contrary to the core purpose of Green Belt policy, which considers not just high density urban sprawl, but also the gradual, yet permanent encroachment of smaller developments into the countryside, for which this proposal would set an unacceptable and damaging precedent
- **Sustainability of development** – the proposed development identifies social/community housing as the main focus of its resident profile and occupancy level yet ignores the fact that this development is sited at some distance from the amenities and main public transport hubs of the village centre, which will necessitate car use by residents and actively encourage an unsustainable transport policy in this location. There has been ample opportunity in recent years to provide large scale community housing development in many of the infill/’windfall’ sites that have been approved for development, yet on each occasion the priority has been given – and permitted – for exclusive 4/5 bedroom properties, simply meeting a housing preference and not a housing need. Rather than the permanent sacrifice of green belt sites, if such a development need exists then entirely suitable brownfield sites already exist within the village, including the former Partco office site, and the abandoned supermarket development site in Station Road, which already have ideal conditions for accessing the highway and local amenities.
- **Safeguarding the historic integrity of Magpie Lane** – the development proposal has a direct and permanent impact on the historic integrity of Magpie Lane and its environs, both through the proposal to alter the lane to provide access to the site, and by the sheer scale of the development proposal in close proximity to the lane. When comparing the raised level of the proposed development to that of the lane below, it is clear that Magpie Lane is a route of some considerable antiquity, and represents one of the few true ‘Warwickshire lanes’ in the area. Furthermore, PPG15 asserts that the historic environment is considered as much as individual buildings in planning decisions, and in this very small area, either side of the development site, exist no less than 3 buildings of considerable historic interest including the Saracens Head pub (Grade II ref. 1075978),

Old Farm (Grade II ref. 1075991) and Magpie Farm (Grade II* ref. 1187132). Altering of the lane itself, together with development alongside its route would permanently destroy the historic context of this route and the interrelationship between the lane and its historic buildings.

- **Safeguarding the amenity of Magpie Lane** - the lane itself is a valued local amenity for horse riders, dog walkers and families, drawn to its rural tranquillity, and the safety of its relatively infrequent traffic movements, and quite simply the route does not have the capacity to absorb the inevitable increases in traffic that would accompany this development, not just from the residents of its 25 properties, but from the added vehicular pressures from visitors, traders and deliveries to this site.

RESIDENT 21 – Balsall Street

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in objection to the proposed housing development off Magpie Lane, Balsall Common.

I believe this proposed development is not in keeping with the surrounding country area, and will encroach onto the precious greenbelt land surrounding Balsall Common which should be strongly protected against development. Magpie Lane is currently a peaceful, quiet country lane with little traffic and hence provides a valuable resource to walkers, dog walkers and families. By sandwiching in a housing development in this narrow lane, Magpie Lane will be subject to excessive traffic and the quiet, safe nature of the road will be lost.

As a civil engineer I am also deeply concerned about the suitability of Magpie Lane as an access road for such a housing development for the following reasons:

- Access Roads to housing developments up to 50 houses are generally advised to be minimum 4.8m wide. The proposed development plans show a localised widening of Magpie Lane, but as this is only for the stretch of Magpie Lane adjacent the development it would serve very little purpose as traffic would still need be funnelled through the existing narrow road. To widen Magpie Lane to minimum 4.8m for the entire width would encroach on other properties, would require existing well established trees and hedges to be removed, and would totally change the character of the lane.
- A housing development of this size should also be connected to the footpath network. Magpie lane does not currently have a designated footpath (which is fine at the moment due to the very low volume of traffic) but with the additional traffic the housing would generate, a designated footpath should be provided to allow safe passage of pedestrians to and from the development, as well as for walkers passing by the area.
- Visibility splays emerging from the development itself onto Magpie Lane as drawn on the Preliminary Site Layout are entirely not sufficient. Visibility splays should provide a clear line of sight for drivers. The visibility splay shown is very ambitious and shows the visibility line passing through or very close to the trunk of existing trees. For this visibility splay to work, the existing trees and hedges would need to be trimmed back excessively far, or else removed altogether - which would have huge impacts on the ecology of the lane, and totally changing its character. As the visibility splays are right on the limit (assuming the hedges etc could actually be trimmed back far enough), the trees and hedges would need to be maintained frequently to ensure branches did not grow and block the sight lines, and create a dangerous turning.

- The principal access route to the development would be from Balsall Street, onto Magpie Lane, and into the development. The junction of Magpie Lane and Balsall Street is again not suitable for the proposed development and volume of traffic it would create. Design guidance on junctions for many councils, and in Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) advise that road junctions on the same side of a road should be spaced so that a vehicle waiting to exit from one side road does not interfere with visibility for a vehicle waiting at another.

The junction of Magpie Lane and Balsall Street is very very close to the entrance/ exit to Saracens Head pub. Any vehicle coming out of the pub car park onto Balsall Street would block the sight line of a vehicle coming out of Magpie Lane onto Balsall Street and vice-versa. This would create a dangerous circumstance whereby both drivers would be unable to see approaching traffic along Balsall Street and one of them would therefore be forced to pull out onto Balsall Street unable to see approaching traffic (which is often travelling in excess of the speed limit). The occurrence of such a dangerous event would increase significantly with an increase in traffic from the development.

- I would also be concerned about the additional large vehicular traffic along Magpie Lane that the development would create in terms of construction, and ongoing for refuse collection, deliveries etc etc. The narrow Magpie Lane is not suitable for frequent use by large vehicles.

- The passage of emergency vehicle needs also be considered. For a housing development of this size to be accessed solely by a narrow country road would not be advisable as emergency vehicles would struggle to gain access, especially in the event of fire where numerous fire engines, police vehicles, ambulances may need to all gain access along the section of existing narrow lane.

- For a safe junction onto Magpie Lane I would also envisage street lighting may be required to provide suitable visibility. This street lighting again would totally change the character of a quiet country lane and greenbelt land.

The planning application also mentions the removal of an existing pond on the land. Ponds such as these often serve a drainage function in reducing flood risk, all be it at a small scale, and also serve as valuable wildlife habitat which should be protected and retained.

The character of Balsall Common, and the surrounding villages intermingled with open green countryside will be at risk over the coming years. Proposed developments of HS2 and expansion of Birmingham airport will make this area attractive to commuters and developers will be pushing to build on any plots of land they can. I would encourage the residents association and council to protect this valuable area of greenbelt land. Allowing this proposed development to go ahead will set precedence for similar unsuitable greenbelt developments to take place.

I am very much in favour of well thought out and designed development for the region, but unfortunately in this instance the proposed development is not in keeping with the area, would set precedence for development of future greenbelt land, has inappropriate vehicular access, and would remove valuable ecological habitat (both existing trees/ hedges and pond)

RESIDENT 22 – Saracen Drive

To Saracen Drive Residents Association

We are writing to lodge our objection to the proposed redevelopment of the field adjoining houses in Saracen Drive and the Saracens Head Pub.

We are surprised at the proposals for 30 council houses on Green belt land as all previous submissions for redevelopment have been turned down and we cannot see how an out of village site for social housing without the supporting infrastructure of transport (bus and rail) and local shops has any greater claim over previous attempts to destroy this community site.

Our objections are in the main based on the following:-

Valuations – The houses on Saracen drive were built on a brown field site (ex transport yard) and commanded premium prices for their outlook onto fields. The proposals will destroy the view for all adjoining properties resulting in loss of value for residents. No doubt the developer will set aside the increase in land value to compensate residents for their loss.

Enjoyment – The proposals will significantly deteriorate the enjoyment residents get from the field - Peace and quiet, not over looked, wildlife, the presence of ponies.

Greenbelt– A community asset that once lost is lost forever. The land supports frogs and newts amongst other animals and a survey of water drainage and other environmental impacts will be needed as well as the political will to further erode the countryside.

Access – Access to this site from Magpie lane has been turned down before. Magpie lane is not suitable for traffic. There are tractors on the lane, no passing points and no footpath.

Security – There is an increased security risk to all local houses from residents/visitors in social housing. Locating such a site between a Pub and expensive properties is brainless. Please feed our objections through the system and keep us informed.

RESIDENT 23 – Saracen Drive

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of myself and my husband I wish to object in the strongest possible terms to the proposed development of affordable housing in Magpie Lane, Balsall Common.

I fail to see the need for this type of housing in this area. The plans are not in keeping with the type of housing currently in this location and there are no facilities to support it. The access via Magpie Lane would not be suitable nor acceptable. This is a rural part of the village used frequently by walkers. When many of us in Saracen Drive bought our houses originally it was because we were surrounded by Green Belt land which added to the value of the property and we paid for this accordingly. I feel that Balsall Common is now completely under siege by the HS2 development, the airport development and now this proposal.

I have always enjoyed living in Balsall Common but the level of development of all types of homes in this area has been such that the village is creaking at the seams. There is not enough room at the schools, there is not enough parking or facilities to cope with the influx of new people and it is about time this rampant development stopped.

Myself and my husband have worked hard all our lives to afford a nice home and were about to spend money on improvements but are now rethinking in light of the above. It is unfair that the value of our homes will be so dramatically reduced by this proposal. We all believed that we would be safe from such development but now live in fear of the effect this will have on our community at this end of the village.

RESIDENT 24 – Saracen Drive

Dear Mr Felthouse

In your newsletter of 21st June you asked for feedback regarding the proposed development of affordable housing off Magpie Lane in Balsall Common.

Unfortunately we are unable to attend the consultation meeting with the developers arranged for Tuesday 30th July due to holiday commitments, so would be very grateful if you could pass on our objection this proposal or indeed any form of development on the Magpie Lane site.

Our objection is based on the following points:-

- The SHLAA notes that this is a green belt site and as such should not be developed. This is supported by Planning Permission 2: Green Belt (PPG2) which states that land designated as green belt should only be developed by exception and should be maintained as such as far as can be seen ahead.
- The assessment undertaken by SMBC notes that the site is off a “very narrow lane”. This is of course entirely true and the development proposal would demand radical changes to the characteristics of Magpie Lane, not just for the portion of the lane relating directly to the proposed site but to its entire length. This we believe would lead to potential encouragement of further development leading to further encroachment of green belt land.
- As acknowledged within the planning assessment, the site and indeed this area of Balsall Common in general may become subject to greater air flight path noise. Whilst this in itself it not necessarily a reason not to develop any particular land area, the rationale of placing more homes directly below a flight path is irrational. We of course have already made known our objections to the proposal to change the flight path to Birmingham Airport.
- We understand that both Balsall Common primary and secondary schools are already heavily subscribed, the development of additional housing would seem contrary to good sense until the capacity of these schools is appropriately increased. We similarly understand that there is currently no plan to do this.
- Public transport serving the immediate facility is poor. Whilst there is a regular bus service from Balsall Street to Solihull and the centre of Balsall Common centre, it is at best infrequent and would need to be significantly modified to meet the needs of the residents of affordable housing. Again the SMBC’s own assessment of this site notes that job access within “30 minutes” is low. We understand this criteria is based upon public transport utilisation. Therefore if this development were to proceed it is rational to deduce that increased use of private transport would be essential and this is generally an undesirable situation.
- Recent media reports stipulate the need for greater and greater numbers of housing at all levels of the housing spectrum. If it is appropriate to make the assumption that Balsall Common as a semi-rural environment should take a share of this housing need, it would seem more appropriate as has been universally acknowledged, to develop brown field sites as a priority. To our knowledge, there are two sites within Balsall Common which could be developed for housing and perhaps wider social gain, these are the sites known as the Chattaway site and the closely associated former Arval site, both in the centre of the village. We understand that planning permission exists for the creation of additional shops with housing units above on the Chattaway site but have no knowledge of the future of the Arval site, which whilst providing informal parking relief for the village centre, is in fact semi-derelict and eye-sore. It would therefore seem entirely appropriate to robustly investigate these two sites to meet

social housing need prior to eroding green belt. The development of these alternative sites would place social housing at the hub of infrastructure of schooling, shops, public transport and health care.

- Facilities and infrastructure for Balsall Common have already been acknowledged as being restricted. The development of a further 25+ dwellings may not in itself place an intolerable strain upon existing infrastructure but it is likely that the development of Magpie Lane would act as a catalyst for further development and erosion of the green belt within the vicinity leading to a significant decrease in the quality of facilities due to overuse.
- In line with the above point, further planned increases to the population of Balsall Common would further erode its “village” characteristics and one can only assume that this will lead eventually to the closure of the green belt “gap” between Solihull and Balsall Common.
- Based upon SMBC’s draft local plan, we understand that the Magpie Lane site has not been identified in any case for development, however, land within Balsall Common has been identified for further development post 2018 and this land (Draft Local Plan Site Assessment Reference 19) is noted for development post 2018. Therefore, we are not aware of any need for affordable housing or any form of further development on the south western fringes of Balsall Common or indeed any part of Balsall Common until 2018 at the earliest.

On a more personal note, whilst it is true that the accusation of “not in my backyard” is easily applied to this proposal, as a long standing resident of Saracen Drive, we truly believe that development of this nature in this area would act as a general detraction to Balsall Common as a whole and would destroy rural environments that are highly valued by residents of the immediate vicinity and indeed the wider community who enjoy the network of footpaths that spring from Magpie Lane and indeed Magpie Lane itself which can currently be perceived as a “green lane”.

The residents of Saracen Drive and the immediate area are fortunate not to be under direct threat from HS2, however, should the plan to build the railway progress and it seems ever likely that it will, “village” life in Balsall Common during the construction period of the rail link and thereafter will be irrevocably changed for the worse. The most recent proposals by Birmingham Airport to change the flight path pose a more direct and real threat to the quality in life in this area of Balsall Common and this latest proposal to develop Magpie Lane can be seen as yet another infringement to our quality of life.

Thank you for taking our views into consideration.

RESIDENT 25 – Balsall Street

Thank you for providing information on this proposal for 'affordable'/social housing off Magpie Lane. I note that the site was earlier considered by the district plan and felt to be unsuitable for a variety of reasons - I concur with all of those and would add a few more of my own.

While I accept that 'social housing' is at a premium and required in the village, this is not the right place to put it - access to public transport and employment opportunities is poor - the bus service is particularly weak at this end of the village, as it is too far to walk easily to the railway station (so generating additional traffic if people drive, in contradiction to the green transport agenda as well as raising costs of working). Previous proposals for 'social housing' or affordable housing nearer the centre of the village have been declined for less good reasons.

There was a good reason why the original development of the former Transport Yard (Capells?) into Saracens Drive did not build on this field! I think in general, few people like living next to a pub carpark if it can be avoided.

The field is probably ecologically sensitive or at least fragile: I have observed that this lane/ area tends to be full of springs and has at least one badger holt.

Widening and upgrading the road (Magpie Lane) would blow the greenbelt edge wide open and create traffic in an area very poorly suited to it - the continuation along Longbrook Lane would attract more traffic as a result and I suspect that the developers would not be willing to shoulder the additional cost of making that traffic-fit again? At present it is rapidly deteriorating into a 'green road'! Making it all flow like a suburban route would be disastrous for the envelope policy, I feel.

I hope these thoughts will be helpful and add to the general catalogue of objections in a planning-appropriate way.