8 Meerhill Avenue
Monkspath
SOLIHULL
West Midlands B90 4TU

7 March 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

Objection to the allocation of site 3, Windmill Lane, Balsall Common

I wish to register my objection to the on-going proposal, in the Draft Local Plan, to build 220 housing units on the greenbelt, greenfield land between Windmill Lane and the Kenilworth Road in Balsall Common known as Site 3.

I understand that the council has recently decided, in line with government policy, to develop three brownfield sites in Balsall Common at Wootton Green Lane, Lavender Hall Farm and Pheasant Oak farm. These sites were suggested by residents to the council as alternatives to site 3 (and also site 2, Frog Lane) in the last consultation in 2017. However, rather than developing these sites instead of the greenfield sites, they are to be developed in addition. Our village of circa 3900 homes is now expected to grow by a further 1755, 460 coming from the brownfield sites. In contrast, other settlements within the borough are seeing a big reduction in the proposed housing numbers (South Shirley and Dickins Heath) and Dorridge has not been allocated any housing sites at all. This does not seem to be a fair distribution, particularly with our village also having to deal with the disruption of HS2. The council would appear to be paying lip service to residents' concerns and efforts to assist in finding alternative sites to build on.

To manage any significant expansion of the village needs careful planning, in terms of schooling, traffic, housing sites and amenities, alongside HS2. There is no timing plan within the Draft Local Plan to give residents the confidence that any growth will be managed. The primary school is already full at 4 form-entry. There is no capacity to take any more children until a new school is built. Public transport is inadequate with infrequent bus services and there are only 2 trains every hour during peak times, so people depend on their cars. As yet, there has been no assessment done of the Highways to ensure the road network can cope, at least until such time that the bypass is built. The Kenilworth Road, in particular, has long queues of traffic at peak times. All this affects the air quality in our village and the health of the residents. Given that many of the proposed sites are in open countryside, it is also worrying that no Ecological Assessments have been made available to the public. I understand that there is a proposal to build a new settlement to the north of Balsall Common and I would urge the council to seriously look at that as an alternative to imposing any significant level of new housing on Balsall Common, a village which is already clearly "bursting at the seams".

Turning to site 3 itself, this is a greenfield, greenbelt site in the Meriden Gap. Mayor Andy Street and Leader of the Council, Bob Sleigh, have both pledged to protect this precious area. The development of site 3 would create the narrowest gap yet so, as residents, we do not understand why the site is being included. The council has also assessed the sustainability of the site and it scores very poorly (9

negatives and only 2 positives), not least because it stretches so far out from the village boundary that you would need to drive to the village shops, the medical centre, the train station and the primary school. Just because there are two housing estates now built in the vicinity should not provide a “shoo- in” to build on the rest. The area is rich in wildlife – owls, red kites, woodpeckers, deer, hawks, numerous insects, bats, amphibians and the protected Great Crested Newts, to name but a few. As there are no plans to include nature reserves, unlike the other two greenfield sites at Frog Lane and Barrett’s Farm, the habitat and feeding grounds for these creatures will be destroyed. There is also the danger of light pollution from street lights having a detrimental effect on nocturnal creatures. Although there are areas protected for the newts, these are to be crossed over by roads, clearly putting the lives of the newts at risk.

Furthermore, the only additional access point onto the road network will be onto Windmill Lane opposite Hob Lane. Otherwise new residents will be expected to access their homes through the Meer Stones Road estate. This means that drivers from 280 dwellings (including Meer Stones Road residents) will be trying to access the road network from two points, one of which is the busy Kenilworth Road and the other Windmill Lane. This lane is already turning into a fast “rat run” as drivers try to avoid the congestion in the village. This is not sustainable.

Last, but by no means least, there is the harm that development in this area would have on the magnificent Grade 2* Listed Berkswell Windmill opposite. This is an historic monument of local, regional, national and international significance and is part of our heritage which attracts many visitors into the area. Not only will building houses nearby harm the setting of this unique tower mill, but also the wind flow will be interfered with, which will stop the sails from turning. Given that this is one of the few remaining functional mills in the country, this would be an absolute travesty. This is a magnificent and iconic landmark, the heritage of which must be respected and preserved for generations to come.

All these are reasons to remove site 3 from the plan, but there is also the impact this site would have on current residents to consider. Although low density housing is proposed in some areas next to current properties, in other parts medium density housing is proposed with no “green buffer” to preserve any of the visual amenity currently enjoyed by residents. This is not respecting the local character of housing in this locality nor the people who currently live there.

Moreover, based on the recent housing estates, the ground conditions are such that these new homes would require pile driving. The impact of the relentless noise and vibrations from this building process on residents is indescribable. It is impossible to work from home, which many of us do and not always out of choice. Such invasive work in the vicinity of the Berkswell Windmill also risks causing long-term damage to this historic monument as well as disrupting the numerous species of local wildlife. This, in itself, should be justification for not developing site 3, or indeed any site with similar ground conditions. Balsall Common residents will be under significant stress from the impact of HS2 construction as well as housing development, not least with the never-ending temporary traffic lights and road closures. We should not be expected to have to deal with this noise as well.

In summary, I would urge that the council take note of this response and remove Site 3 from the Draft Local Plan. There is no doubt, based on SMBC's criteria, that the site is neither sustainable nor accessible. Given the number of housing units available on the brownfield sites, it is unnecessary and incomprehensible as to why the site has not been taken out already. There is no need to build here.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Yours faithfully

Tony and Katarine Mann