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Response to SMBC Draft Local Plan Supplementary Consultation January 2019

Introduction

This is my response to the above document. I have presented my comments in the order of the sections and paragraphs in the Draft. I have restricted my comments to those sections that particularly relate to me.

Section 3 - Housing Requirements & Current Land Supply

The apparent fudge on the required housing numbers clearly shows that SMBC are running scared of demands that will be placed on them from the HMA. Failure to use the latest housing forecast data reveals a state of mind commensurate with fear of being run over by developers again in the courts and the demands of neighbouring councils in the HMA. It looks like a strategy of we must get as many houses into the plan as possible. SMBC clearly has little confidence in its ability to produce a Sustainable plan: No backbone and no clear strategy of how to deal with the doom laden views that currently pervade SMBC councillors and planners. **So it is goodbye to the Meriden Gap and the Green Belt throughout Solihull borough.**

Housing number forecasts

SMBC say that they have used the best data presently available for the present but admit it is very likely that newer data will become available before the plan proper is issued in the summer, so it could be all change. Furthermore the estimate of 2000 dwelling to meet the HMA needs is at best a guess, so all numbers are likely to be revised. **I express concern about the uncertainty and anxiety that the preliminary estimates have introduced into the process of commenting on the draft plan given that revision is all but certain to occur.**

Section 5 Balsall Common

The settlement now

Para.79 – States that BC is in the Meriden Gap and only 2 km from the Coventry boundary, clearly any incursion by development will seriously reduce the gap and effectively destroy its purpose in preventing urban sprawl. **SMBC have a duty to protect the Meriden Gap as they are guardians of the green belt in this critical location, erosion must be resisted.**

Para.80 to 82 agree with facts offered

Para.83 – Station parking - is already a major problem and needs addressing **now** to reduce overspill into nearby streets which will be compounded by any new development. With so much emphasis on the importance of the railway to provide transport for residents significant parking needs to be provided but must blend into the rural aspect of the area. **What about putting the parking under the HS2 viaduct?**

The settlement of the future

Para.84 – agree in the main with this paragraph. But note that the majority of residents do not work in Balsall Common therefore there will be a strong tendency to use cars hence ample provision for car spaces at dwellings is paramount and **in the long term space for charging of electric vehicles.** The belief that railway and public transport is a meaningful alternative is a misconception in this rural area; it flies in the face of human nature.

Para.85 - We have a concern that the through traffic assessment is incomplete. There is a view that at peak times 50% of the traffic in the centre of Balsall Common is locally generated. As measurements are currently underway to assess traffic flows it is too early to comment on the best way forward but traffic west to east must also be evaluated.

Para.86 – accept the comments made

What is required for the Settlement in the Future?

Para.87 – SMBC assumes that Balsall Common is a prime target for development and we feel this can be challenged.

Para.88 – Balsall Common Bypass - An extension of Hall Meadow Road from the A452 north of Balsall Common as a single carriageway through to Meer End Road would encompass 6 roundabouts from start to finish over a distance of approximately 2.6 miles. **This is not a bypass it is merely a feeder collector road and unless the through traffic is removed would effectively move the peak time congestion from the centre of the village to 500 metres to the east.** When additional traffic generated from Barretts Farm and Windmill Lane, and Pheasant Oak Farm feeds into it even more congestion will occur. Removal of the impact of through traffic will only be achieved when a bypass is constructed to the west of the settlement of Balsall Common

Para.88 – An Enhanced Centre - I agree with the working together of SMBC with both parish councils but the task is far greater than their capabilities. There is no meaningful way of expanding the village centre without major demolition of existing businesses and homes plus the need for a much larger car parking provision. This would involve compulsory purchase of properties and could well destroy what we already have; its present welfare is less than prosperous or inviting. Tinkering around the edges will not do. Given that SMBC know the number of homes to be built it is beholden upon the council to provide a concept plan for the centre **NOW**. The village centre is a major concern for residents in both parishes. We fear a piecemeal poorly planned outcome will be the result.

Para.90 – Station Parking - Agree significant parking must be provided. **What about putting the parking under the HS2 viaduct near station?**

Para.91 – Improved Public Transport - generally agree but there seems to be an assumption that local commuters will travel to work on the railway. Unless the places of work are near to stations on the line people will prefer to travel by car. With the best will in the world buses are not a viable alternative in what will hopefully still be a rural location. Buses are best for heavily urbanised conurbations. Existing residents are already travelling substantial distances to employment by car and that is unlikely change.

Para.92 – New Primary School - agree in principle. **SMBC must ensure safe access to the school and ample drop off facilities for parents and children.** It should be designed to reduce the disturbance currently associated with many school to nearby residents. The school must be built ahead of the main development as existing schools are oversubscribed.

Para.93 Secondary School - Agree but hope the projections that the Heart of England will be able to cope are realistic.

Para.94 – CIL - Major concern regarding the apportionment of the CIL monies to the parish councils, given the proximity of the parish boundaries to the centre of the settlement. It will need a significant effort of goodwill to provide benefit to all residents in the settlement of Balsall Common. **I note that SMBC is not duty bound to spend their portion of CIL money in the location where it has been generated. Given their poor record of investing in Balsall Common over many years, and Balsall Common is taking 24% of the new build in the borough, there is a moral obligation SMBC will need to address.**

Para.95 – Concept Master Plans - I agree with the promotion of concept master plans **but have grave misgivings over their long term strength to be remaining in place over the 15 year period of planned developments in Balsall Common.** Pressure from landowners and developers in the past have resulted in significant changes being made, sometimes to the detriment of both existing and new residents.

The emerging Concept Masterplan for Barretts Farm is sketchy at best and fails to address the real concerns of residents especially where the site abuts with existing properties namely in Kelsey Lane, Meeting House Lane, Oxhayes Close, Barretts Lane and Beverley

Close. Development will result in significant loss of easy access to green belt and an established recreation field. The concept plan fails to address this situation.

I contend that the outstanding design of open recreational space for formal and informal use incorporated into the Ridding Hill development some years ago, which has been so successful, should be mirrored on Barretts Farm. A green space capable of accommodating recreational sports and free access park and with scope for wildlife inclusion deserves serious consideration, and would benefit both existing and new residents while retaining a rural sense to the area.

Para.96 – Green Belt Enhancements - we agree with the provisions in the NPPF but the Greenway is presently being decimated by HS2 work and although will be reinstated cannot be returned to its former glory. The link to the station is meaningless it will be a footpath to the car park, linking to what green belt?

Proposed Approach

Para.97 - I strongly disagree with the premise that the green belt in this area has to be used to accommodate the growth of the new settlement. Any growth in Balsall Common will result in a serious incursion into the strategically important Meriden Gap that continues to protect the area between Coventry and Birmingham/ Solihull from urban sprawl. The exceptional circumstances are not fully demonstrated and have failed to take this into account.

Para.98 to 100 - assuming that the plan goes ahead then the additional sites listed will be considered but we are concerned that sites sandwiched between the existing rail lines, HS2 and A452 are not conducive to quality accommodation for residents due to noise, and pollution. The site in Old Waste Lane would represent over intensification in an established rural location.

Para.99 - The take of green belt land south of Hob Lane and east of Windmill Lane using the proposed bypass line is totally unnecessary as there is no planned development listed in this area and is NOT part of this Local Plan review.

Para.101 – The acceptance that the Barretts Farm site has multiple and complex land assembly issues is understood, The Draft document states that it “does not preclude a phased approach”, **but I am very concerned that development could take place in a piecemeal fashion. SMBC are clearly very apprehensive over the difficulties of delivering a cohesive development on the Barretts Farm site and the form of words in the text do not give sufficient guarantees to residents abutting the site that this will be achieved. The existing emerging concept plan gives little clear indication of what is likely to occur, particularly in respect of access to land abutting the existing dwellings located round the periphery of the site.**

I contend that vehicle access to the whole of the site should be from the proposed bypass/feeder road right up to and abutting the existing properties in Waste Lane, Kelsey

Lane, MHL, Oxhayes Close, Barretts Lane and Beverley Close/Sunnyside Lane. This should be the only vehicle access route. Incursion into existing roads and cul-de-sacs will result in increased traffic through into the village centre. Footpaths and cycle ways could follow present public rights of way providing easy routes to the village centre and to other parts of Balsall Common.

Para.102 – Mix of market and affordable houses is a laudable premise but affordable housing is only affordable at the first point of sale (and in the case of Balsall Common it is not ever affordable to many young people). The provision for older people is welcome especially bungalows for existing residents wishing to downsize while staying local. No commercial properties or ventures should be entertained as this is not commensurate with the surrounding residential location.

Para.103 - The impact of HS2 and possible phasing of the Barretts Farm development is understood, **but phasing could lead to non coordinated development of discreet parcels of land that would not be part of the concept, to the detriment of the whole site and nearby residents. It is essential that the bypass/feeder road to provide access to the whole of the Barretts Farm site is put in place first. This would enable a fully coordinated concept plan to be adopted that would work for all.**

Existing Allocation

Para.104 Site 19 Ridding Hill– Why the delay in bringing this forward?

Proposed Allocations

Para.105 to 106 – Site 1 Barretts farm, this is a major intrusion into the green belt/Meriden Gap and is not welcome and demonstrates that SMBC have no regard for Green belt or the urbanisation of the Meriden Gap. One can only assume that SMBC are so scared of not being able to meet its housing quota that anywhere will do. I also contend the selection of Barretts Farm on the grounds it does not perform well on green belt assessment is flawed.

Para.107-108 – Frog Lane Ideal site for small development close to bus routes, schools and within meaningful distance to the centre with a good rural outlook.

Para.109 to 112 – Windmill Lane area has already suffered development and does not have a high green belt rating, it is difficult to defend but at its extremity it is getting remote from the centre of the village. It could nevertheless be attractive to potential residents because of its rural outlook. However Windmill Lane has no pavements and is a busy cut through used by cars and commercial vehicles.

Para.113to 114 Pheasant Oak Farm is starting to get remote from the centre but as it is poor green belt quality it ranks along with Windmill Lane. But it would bring more traffic on to Windmill lane which is always busy especially at peak times. Consideration of traffic flows need to be reviewed in this area. Development of brownfield sites is preferred to green belt.

Para.115 to 116 Trevallion Stud - concerns about ease of access on to the Kenilworth Road but would fit in well with a bypass to the west of Balsall Common.

Para.117- Lavender Hall Farm- Sandwiching houses between two railways lines and close to a major road which likely to become the main A452 - What would be the quality of the environment for residents in this location, though it is brownfield land.

Section 17

Any other matters

Neighbourhood Development Plans

The draft rightly states that only one NDP in the borough has been completed and approved, that is for Hampton in Arden. However the draft happily mentions that for Meriden which is not as far forward as that of Berkswell Parish Council. This is a major omission of evidence that is available to the planners and would provide SMBC with a significant input of up to date valuable data and direct comments/concerns from residents of Berkswell parish. **This significant omission MUST to be addressed.**

Aspiration of local communities

In the introduction to the draft plan (page 4 - 1 Introduction first paragraph) it states:

“Having a local plan is key to delivering sustainable development that reflects the vision and aspirations of local communities”

To the community in Balsall Common that means a real vision and not a compromise of blanket coverage of standard off the shelf housing developments and estates that have little or no relationship to the existing rural aspects of this location without due consideration. Many fear the slow urbanisation of this village, as it creeps across the surrounding green belt over the next 15 years.

W J Cairns

11.3.19