

9 March 2019

By email to: khawkins@solihull.gov.uk; jamesbutler@solihull.gov.uk; npage@solihull.gov.uk
Cc: dickensheathpc@hotmail.com and Waterside Residents Association

Dear Cllrs Hawkins and Butler and Mr Page,

This letter relates to the consultation process currently underway with respect to the **Solihull Local Plan Review: Draft Concept Masterplans ('Draft Plans')** (consultation closes 15 March 2019). Unfortunately, the on-line consultation portal being used by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council ('SMBC') is constraining and difficult to use. I would be grateful if you can please confirm by return that the comments in this letter will be passed to those in SMBC who are conducting the consultation?

I am an apartment owner at Dickens Heath (B90 1UD) and hence the comments in this letter are confined to the following items in the Draft Plans:

- The exclusion of 'The Hub' surrounding the HS2 Interchange site ('the Hub')
- Site 4: pgs 38-43 of the Draft Plans
- Sites 11, 12 & 26: pgs 79-88 of the Draft Plans

I object to any development of sites 4, 12 and 26 for the reasons set out in this letter.

A. Exclusion of 'The Hub' from the Draft Plans

While the benefits of reasonable and sensitive development are well understood and SMBC's aspiration to create a steady pipeline of new housing is laudable, it is concerning that any plans in relation to The Hub have been excluded from the Draft Plans. It is not understood how consultees can properly consider, or comment on, the Draft Plans where SMBC's development intentions for The Hub have not been made available. For example, if plans relating to The Hub had been released, it may show that SMBC's new housing aspirations can be met without some of the sites quoted in the Draft Plans being developed (or, at the least, not developed to the density levels set out in the Draft Plans). The failure to disclose the plans for The Hub alongside the Draft Plans is a serious omission that undermines the entire consultation process for the Draft Plans.

B. Traffic Management in Dickens Heath

Under the approved masterplan for the original development of the Dickens Heath village, roads were designed and built narrowly. It is assumed that traffic management studies back then (based on the envisaged population at such time) determined that such roads would be sufficient. However, the entire road system in and around Dickens Heath is completely insufficient and, more importantly, dangerous – even with the existing population. There are numerous stretches where two-way traffic must compete for the use of one lane, with parked cars causing significant visibility issues. The intersection of Tythe Barn Lane and Tilehouse Lane is over-burdened and dangerous. Dickens Heath cannot cope with its current traffic burden, let alone the greater burden that is bound to come with further development/residents.

C. Economic burden of increasing population is falling to a small sub-set of Lessees in Dickens Heath

Under the legal structures put in place for the original development of the Dickens Heath village (in 1997-2007), a small sub-set of around 400 lessees of properties (including myself) are responsible for the maintenance, renewal, operational expenses, etc of a number of communal sites and

facilities in Dickens Heath, including (but not limited to) the Village Green, Nature Reserve, water feature and public way in front of The Customs House, car parks behind Main Street, walkways along Main Street, Town Hall and Library (the '**Common Assets**'). The operational expenses include lighting, electricity, insurances, repairs, etc.

While this burden may have been reasonable when the original masterplan for Dickens Heath was first approved (based on the envisaged population of the Dickens Heath village at such time), the growth since then in the Dickens Heath population (all of whom utilise such Common Assets) AND the increasing age of such Common Assets is putting a significant and escalating strain on the finances of the 400 lessees. SMBC needs to closely consider the legality of adding to the Dickens Heath population (and hence increasing the burden on the Common Assets) in circumstances where the 400 lessees who were given the financial burden for such Common Assets were allocated such burden at a time when the Masterplan for Dickens Heath contemplated a population that was much less than is presently being contemplated by SMBC. Alternatively, if the population in and surrounding Dickens Heath is going to be further increased, then SMBC needs to purchase the Common Assets from the liquidator of Parkridge holdings and Dickens Heath Development Company Ltd and hence become responsible for the ongoing maintenance and renewal of these Common Assets, so as to remove the burden from the 400 owners. The legal structure put in place some 10+years ago for the maintenance, renewal and operation of these Common Assets is simply not tenable with further development around Dickens Heath.

D. Flooding Risk

Back on 27 May 2018, the Stratford-upon-Avon Canal in front of the Waterside buildings in Dickens Heath flooded causing severe damage to a number of ground floor units, the basement car park, common areas accessing the car park and other assets. While an insurance claim has been made, the repairs have taken (and continue to take) a considerable period and owners/residents of the damaged units have had to live elsewhere for nearly a year. In a report prepared by SMBC released in January 2019, SMBC has opined that the flooding was contributed to by the lack of balancing ponds in/around the Dickens Heath village. Specifically, farmland that originally surrounded the village (which has now been developed) no longer assists to curb/absorb the flow of water into the Canal. Any further development of the current farmland/undeveloped land around Dickens Heath can only exacerbate flooding risk and is entirely inconsistent with SMBC's own January 2019 report. Waterside owners are expecting insurance premiums to considerably increase because of the 2018 insurance claim or (worse) that insurance at reasonable cost for flood damage will simply not be available. The 27 May 2018 was not the first time that the ground floor units alongside the Canal had suffered flood damage. It is plain that flood studies submitted by developers to support the developments that have already been built on the outskirts of the Dickens Heath Village were either optimistic or entirely misguided.

In summary, for the reasons set out above, I object to any development of sites 4, 12 and 26. SMBC has a duty of care to owners and residents of Dickens Heath to not exacerbate the significant issues and financial burdens already being faced by such owners and residents.

Yours sincerely

Nicole Geoghegan
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