



Dear Sir

I write to register my strong objection to the proposed selection of the land at Frog lane and the rear of Balsall Street East, an area of Green Belt land, to be developed for housing.

I fully accept the need for additional housing within the borough and the country in general. It is the selection of this site that I find difficult to understand. It is inconsistent with the feedback provided by residents during the “developer consultations” undertaken.

The overwhelming message from this consultation was that 600 residents wanted to preserve green belt wherever possible and to give priority to developing brownfield options. Something that strongly accords with government guidance. There are brownfield options, including an area to the rear of the George in the Tree (site 240), that has not been pursued whilst the Frog Lane greenbelt site has been put forward.

I understand the need for a system by which individual sites can be assessed and evaluated for comparative purposes as Atkins have attempted to do in this case. I have looked closely at the SHELAA local plan evidence base and it is obvious, and easily demonstrated, that scores allocated to the accessibility and checking of urban sprawl created a distorted picture.

Accessibility

For instance, accessibility scores relating to bus routes are set at a figure of 50 with a figure of 40 allocated to the accessibility of rail services. I suggest that this must have been a “guess” made by someone totally unfamiliar with the site and level of service provided. Reviewing the isochrones provided, the 50 rating is entirely based on edges of the site meeting a 600m walking distance to a 30-minute daytime service. I am surprised that the service available could be validly described as meeting a half hourly service definition. The isochrones rightly conclude that there is no adequate evening or weekend service. Against that backdrop a 50% rating on bus accessibility is unsupportable, and certainly as a matter of reality this site could never be described as well or even averagely served by buses.

The lack of weighting between bus and train services also distorts the scoring in Balsall Common. The bus service is concentrated through the centre of the village and the station is a 25-30 min walk to the north. Despite the significantly better rail service over the bus service, in terms of travel times, reliability and frequency, access to each is treated as equivalent, vastly underplaying the relative accessibility of site in the north of the village.

This demonstrates the overall accessibility assessment does not meet the Council's own criteria.

Checking Urban Sprawl

Similarly, the subjective assessment given to this small section of Balsall Street East (site 75) is different from the score allocated to the adjoining sites which are a continuation of the same road, Balsall Street and Balsall Street East.

I can only assume the rationale to be that Holly Lane creates a defensible boundary. In fact, I have seen quoted that Holly Lane creates a permanent boundary.

This is not as clear cut as you would have us believe. Anyone looking objectively at a local map can clearly see that premise does not bear scrutiny. The boundary of Balsall Street East and Balsall Street is clearly the line of defensible boundary with only a few isolated farms, converted barns and individual buildings spasmodically set into miles of green belt land. Whilst it is true that one of the factors in the NPPF guidance relates to boundaries being defined clearly (which I believe adds to the argument of Balsall Street east/Balsall Street being the boundary), this does not necessarily mean a road. The field boundaries around the area of site 75, and certainly to the immediate rear of Balsall Street East remains virtually unchanged since the 16th century and adds weight to BSE/Bs being the boundary of concentrated urban development. You have chosen to use the Holly lane as the defensible boundary as opposed to the natural boundary that has always protected the green belt in this area. This feels a little expedient as in doing this you include a piece of land that the owner wishes to sell, and a developer has expressed an interest in developing. This does not justify shifting the "green belt" boundaries because it makes life easy.

The existence of Frog lane and Holly Lane does not create a significant reason for treating RP59 differently from other parcels south of Balsall Street East over and above existing long-term features, simply by virtue of being roads. Breaching the longstanding boundary of Balsall Street East and Balsall Street in one location would in fact make the line less defensible for future development south of the road in other locations. Release of RP59 from the green belt would actively threaten adjoining parts and generate pressure for urban sprawl contrary to the green belt purposes.

The Frog Lane site is in the south of the village which is already the most congested part in terms of traffic (see Solihull Connected). This has become significantly worse with the development of JLR's customisation site at Honiley. This is projected to employ 3000 staff many of whom will travel through the south of the village and invariably along Balsall Street East, Frog Lane, Holly lane and Kenilworth Road (which is already one of the most

heavily congested stretches of road in the borough). This increased traffic flow is likely to coincide with the school run of coaches, parents in cars as well as pedestrian traffic.

This school overload already causes havoc with traffic congestion in a morning and afternoon. The team should come along and see the absolute traffic chaos at school drop off and pick-up times.

I have looked at other areas within the borough that are obviously able to help meet the need for housing and there are a series of anomalies.

- 1) The neighbouring village of Dorridge where some 32 possible sites were put forward and non-appear to be being pursued. Even though in terms of accessibility Dorridge scores significantly higher than Balsall Common.
- 2) The brownfield site of Chelmsley Wood Town Centre
- 3) The HS2 interchange site for Housing
- 4) Bringing forward the Solihull Town Centre masterplan

Finally, people need to feel that they are being dealt with fairly and this does not appear to be the case. From a Balsall Common resident's perspective it feels as though we are being bombarded with HS2 and the associated construction traffic, increased disturbance from overflying aircraft, additional loading on infrastructure, parking, doctors' surgery capacity, village parking, school congestion and now on top of the destruction of our greenbelt and wildlife. To add to this "stress" in a small urban community you are proposing to put over 30% of the new housing development in the borough into an already overloaded small urban community that has only 3.5% of the Solihull Population. How can this be justified taking into account the reasonable alternatives.

From an external perspective, these issues may be viewed as separate and have different statutory accountabilities. From the perspective of the resident these issues all combine to affect the enjoyment of people's quality of life. Solihull Council is where many of these common threads come together and residents believe that you have the duty to take a holistic view when drawing up a Strategic Local Plan. Residents look to have our concerns represented and fairly addressed.

The cumulative environmental and social effect have a strategic significance and the lack of weighting given to this effect on the village community makes this proposal fundamentally unsound.

This representation is about my objections to the choice of the Frog Lane site for the development of 110 homes which I believe is fundamentally flawed and unsound in its own right. In addition, it must be seen in the

context of the overall pressures on the village which add additional weight to the argument.

Regards
Howard Farrand