

Infrastructure needs of Balsall Common

1. Purpose

To define the infrastructure needs for Balsall Common if the settlement is to increase in size in line with the draft SMBC local plan of January 2019. These are the collective views of Balsall and Berkswell Parish Councils and the three ward councillors. They were formulated following significant consultation with the community and local voluntary organisations, who provide much current infrastructure to meet social needs. 17% of the electorate responded to a (largely) online survey plus students in the upper years of the Heart of England School to help set priorities.

2. Infrastructure plans within draft Solihull Plan

- 2.1. **Support is given** to the proposed new bypass, enhanced centre, station parking and a new primary school, contained within the draft plan. The Community has two requests
- 2.2. **Size of the new primary school.** The proposal for a new primary school is supported but it is requested that the proposal is reviewed to establish whether a two-form entry school will be sufficient given the scale of new housing proposed, which with windfall will exceed 2000 homes if all the sites listed in the draft plan are developed.
- 2.3. **Commitment to improved public transport.** The draft Plan states that *“a higher population gives greater potential for improved public transport”*ⁱ. Given that Balsall Common has the highest car dependency for day to day travel of any area in the Boroughⁱⁱ, improved public transport is essential to make an enlarged Balsall Common sustainable. Therefore, the Community seeks a firmer commitment within the Local Plan that SMBC will proactively work with the appropriate authorities to achieve better public transport

3. Additional proposals

Whilst the draft plan proposals go some way to providing appropriate infrastructure, the Community does not consider them sufficient to maintain Balsall Common as a safe, low crime, sustainable and pleasant living environment. The community considers that the following additional measures will be required

3.1. A comprehensive strategy to make Balsall Common a safe location for internal travel by foot, cycle and mobility scooters/wheel chairs

This will require

- 3.2. **The bypass to be constructed early** in the plan period to divert external traffic away from the settlement and allow easy routes out from the settlement to places of employment, shopping and entertainment given that the number of cars will increase in line with the houses i.e. 60%.
- 3.3. **Additional parking** should be provided in the village centre at the beginning of the plan period given that the current parking in the centre is already close to or at capacity because of the housing built since December 2013 with no thought given to the pressure on the village centre. An additional 14 parking places can be provided within the library car park according to Highways Departmentⁱⁱⁱ. This must be increased if possible.
- 3.4. The settlement must be made cycle, mobility scooter and pedestrian friendly to reduce internal car movements by
 - 3.4.1. **Dedicated cycleways** and footpaths to be provided on all new developments as a matter of strategic planning policy that must be implemented during the planning process.
 - 3.4.2. **Safe routes** to be identified for cycles etc for the whole settlement to facilitate access without a car to Balsall Common centre, schools and the station. That to include safe routes

on the (bypassed) Kenilworth Road and Meeting House Lane, investments in crossings, cycle/foot priority zones, ongoing suitable maintenance of road surfaces to be cycle friendly etc and a comprehensive plan to calm traffic. Adequate bike storage at the station, shopping centre and the schools needs to be introduced with deterrents on people using cars for school transport

3.4.3. Links to Coventry and the NEC area by cycle and from Balsall Common to Berkswell village

3.5. Creating a social environment conducive to community cohesion and low crime

The Community calls for two significant additions to the draft plan to meet this need.

3.5.1. Land for a multi-purpose community centre.

The enlarged settlement will require a new multipurpose community centre with a significant emphasis on providing opportunities for young people for sport and recreation given Balsall Common's relative lack of public provision. The precise design/provision does not need to be defined at this stage but will require land allocated, within the geographic centre of the enlarged settlement, to minimise car usage. This land provision needs to be included within the Concept Plan for allocation 1.

3.5.2. Public Greenspace

Solihull has an average of 5 hectares of green space per 1000 residents^{iv}. Berkswell & Balsall Parishes have circa 2.6 hectares per 1000 residents. This is currently compensated for by the extensive footpath network on Barrett's Farm which provide walking and running options. With the development of Barrett's Farm that compensatory countryside will be lost and is not easy to replace given the barrier created by HS2. Two proposals help overcome this and meet the provision for offsetting greenbelt loss required by the NPPF and minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks^v

3.5.3. A central park behind Meeting House Lane in accordance with the SMBC green spaces strategy and Berkswell NDP^{vi} to preserve & develop existing wildlife/ecological areas, sports areas and general recreational areas. Being in the centre of the enlarged Balsall Common this will be readily accessible to most residents and will facilitate the mixing of existing and new residents enhancing social cohesion. All developments, whatever their size, must adhere to the targets in the green space strategy to prevent Balsall Common falling even further behind the Borough green space average. Where the developments are not conducive to logical greenspace provision, compensatory arrangements should be sought to fund the purchase of land for the central park and the Local Plan should make this clear.

3.5.4. A Country Park to protect and enhance the setting of the windmill and provide ecological and provide an area for country pursuits such as horse riding and running. This case has already been made to officers and has tourist potential

3.5.5. Synergy of uses for new facilities

Detailed development of the use of community greenspace and other new facilities is best undertaken in partnership/consultation with schools and community organisations to ensure best usage of limited resources and ease of optimising ongoing use and maintenance e.g. AstroTurf. The parish councils are committed to this approach.

Appendix 1

Housing numbers in draft plan for Balsall Common and the two parishes

Site number	Site name	Housing numbers	Draft plan page number
2	Frog Lane	110	25
3	Windmill Lane	220	25
1	Barratt's Farm	900	25
21	Pheasant Oak Farm	100	26
22	Trevellion Stud	300	26
23	Lavender Hall Farm	60	26
1	Springhill	21	88
36	Oakwood House	7	88
43	Old Lodge Farm	40	88
101	Old Waste lane	40	88
333	2 Lavender Hall Lane	1	88
19	Hallmeadow Road	65	85
298	107 Kelsey Lane	5	87
	Windfall development ^{vii}	150	Assumes 10 per year over 15 years. This could well be a low estimate given historical trends. Borough assumptions on windfall are shown as 2250 on page 13
Total		2019	

An estimate of future windfall development has been included in the projection of infrastructure needs. The Solihull plan will rely on windfall development to meet projected need based on a historical delivery of windfall sites. Such delivery has been significant in the parishes of Berkswell and Balsall Common since the publication of the last plan both infilling and building homes in the greenbelt.

Appendix 2

Some key numbers from residents' survey upon which recommendations are based^{viii}

Two strategic questions	Yes	Not sure	No
Do you agree that we should be planning a new community centre for entertainment, meeting rooms and sporting facilities	63%	18%	19%
Do you think that Balsall Common and its surrounds should be designed to make it safe and easy to travel around without cars by using mobility scooters, wheelchairs, cycles or by foot and with children in push chairs	63%	27%	10%
Priority given to certain infrastructure			% rating it a high or medium priority
Sports and Leisure facilities			
Multi-purpose sports hall (gym, 5-a-side football, handball, dance, badminton etc			86%
Youth provision, snooker table, tennis etc			88%
Central park broadly behind Meeting House lane & roughly in centre of expanded settlement			82%
Country Park between windmill Lane and Kenilworth Road			80%
Wild areas for the protection of ecology, nature reserves			89%
Wildlife corridors linking to the countryside			89%
Children's traditional play area swings etc			85%
Adventure playground for children			86%
Astro turf pitch for soccer and hockey etc			66%
Making the Balsall Common area less car dependent			
All new housing developments to have a safe and comprehensive network of cycle /footpaths etc linking them to local facilities			96%
Implement the link promised by HS2 Ltd to provide a cycle path from Berkswell Station to the greenway			93%
Implement a cycle commuter route into Coventry			78%
Implement a cycle commuter route to the NEC/airport			59%
Create a cycle/foot/mobility scooter connection from Balsall Common to Berkswell village and its school/pub/church			81%
Create a cycle route along Kenilworth Road from Kelsey Lane to Hallmeadow Rd i.e. the length of Balsall Common			78%
Ensure there is marked separation of cycleways from footpaths as per Hallmeadow Road and best European practice			86%
Give priority to cycle paths across side roads joining major roads as in Denmark and Holland			66%
Ensure that the existing pleasure cycle routes within Berkswell and Balsall parishes re marked and upgraded to be truly cycle friendly			82%
Grow bushes where possible to separate cycleways from motor vehicles to reduce airborne pollution for cycleway users			81%
Improving public transport			Frequent free text comment
Balsall Common Centre			
Add as many car parking spaces as possible (unlikely to exceed 20)			83%
Radically change the public space in Balsall Common centre to update the centre and improve its visual appeal			74%

ⁱ Paragraph 91 of draft Local Plan

ⁱⁱ Solihull Connected Transport Strategy 2016

ⁱⁱⁱ Quotation to Balsall PC by D Keaney 21st August 2019

^{iv} Green Space Strategy Review - Executive Summary

^v Paragraph 96 of the draft local plan, paragraphs 138 & 170d of the NPPF

^{vi} Policy B1 of Berkswell NDP

^{vii} Balsall and Berkswell parishes have seen windfall development planning approvals at about 20 units per year since the last plan was published in December 2013

^{viii} For comparison purposes the two questions with the lowest rating of high and medium support were for the provision of squash courts and public toilets in Balsall Common centre. Those both rated 31% support. Squash court provision was rated as high priority by under 6% of residents.