Berkswell Parish Council

Planning Application PL/2023/01520/PPOL - Land at Station Road, Balsall Common

Please accept this document which updates and supersedes our previous submissions of September 2023 and May 2024.

Summary of Objection:

Berkswell Parish Council objects to this application as it is premature - the proposed timing does not comply with the principles upon which the Draft Solihull Development Plan was produced; is within the current greenbelt; and does not comply with the Berkswell Neighbourhood Development Plan, in particular regarding access proposed off Station Road.

Premature Timing of Application

- The draft Solihull Local Plan paragraph 226 stated that BC1 was scheduled as a phase II and III development.
- The reasons for this are stated within paragraph 541 of the Draft Solihull Local Plan - HS2 construction and associated traffic is currently in the same locality. Whilst we acknowledge the draft Solihull Local Plan has been withdrawn this evidence base and these principles still stand.
- Without the relief road being built from Station Road to Waste Lane, this development cannot take place due to the impact of traffic on existing minor roads within the village.

Within the Green Belt

- The site is within the strategically important Meriden Gap, part of the Green Belt.
- Very Special Circumstances for developing within the Greenbelt have not been convincingly evidenced other than the present absence of a 5-year land supply.

Access off Station Road contravenes the Berkswell Neighbourhood Development Plan

- The proposed access off Station Road is not compliant with the Berkswell Neighbourhood Development Plan policy B1 point 2a which states that vehicle access to new developments should be from main roads, to which due consideration must be given.
- Station Road is a width restricted road, not a main road.
- Access is proposed part way down a hill directly opposite a busy pub, The Brickmakers Arms, and its car park, and close to the Hall Meadow Road roundabout. The front of the pub is used for deliveries and client parking. Having an access road opposite would present a significant hazard.
- The applicant states that 'on street parking does not tend to occur along Station Road' which is not true. Presently cars park on the hill to go to the pub or as overflow parking for Berkswell station and Brickyard Close. (see Station Road Parking Report appendix to previous submission made in May 2024).
- Station Road is already busy and this will only increase should development of BC1 be approved. The traffic data presented is generic and does not appear to tally with census data presented in the Berkswell NDP on local car ownership and usage, thus underestimating the true extent of the traffic flow. The traffic flow calculations also do not appear to consider additional flow when further development sites are completed. Proposed traffic flows would make turning right from the suggested junction hazardous.
- Pavement widths on this section of Station Road is 1.2m, below the recommended measure. Pedestrians journeying at peak times to and from the station, the medical centre, village

facilities and local secondary school (70-90 students per day) along narrow footpaths with a proposed additional access road to navigate presents a further risk to pedestrian safety.

- HS2 have confirmed that the continuous haul road (to be the new relief road) will be available during 2025 as their use for it will have ended. This provides the solution of direct access to the proposed development as a slip road off the haul road negating the need for access from Station Road completely.

Appendix 1: Proposed Planning Conditions

Berkswell Parish Council continues to **object to the application in principle;** should approval be granted **conditions must be applied** which address the objections in full, in particular the access off Station Road and proposed replacement of the roundabout where Hall Meadow Lane and Station Road meet with a traffic light junction, as well as conditions to mitigate the following key issues that development will have on Balsall Common village:

Need for integrated town planning

- **Balsall Common will move from a village to a small town** it is therefore imperative that integration of planned housing developments takes place. BC1 is the first of 6 proposed housing developments within the now withdrawn Draft Solihull Local Plan, assuming all of the previously proposed developments proceed. K**ey infrastructure provision** is required: transport improvements including a relief road, enhanced village centre, station parking, improved public transport, additional primary school, enhancements for secondary education, medical facilities, sports facilities, open space etc.
- Berkswell Parish Council requests that **Solihull MBC continue with the recruitment of a Development Manager** for Balsall Common to ensure a holistic approach to the development is taken for the benefit of the community both existing and new.

Completion of the relief road in full to Meer End

- **BC1 must see part of the relief road built and it is imperative that this is completed to Meer End**, given the scale of the proposed development for Balsall Common overall, to negate the impact of the additional traffic due to new development on the existing roads.

Chronology of infrastructure provision delivery

- The proposed Balsall Common Town Plan must address the **phasing of new developments and infrastructure** including;-
    - early completion of the relief road
    - building of a new primary school and additional secondary school capacity
    - delivery of the village centre masterplan
    - appropriate traffic calming measures introduced onto the Kenilworth Road to encourage use of the relief road.

Lack of Collaboration between landowners/developers

- BC1 alone lists multiple landowners who own property on the site and the reduction in the footprint is evidence of a **lack of joint working** between them all. We are extremely concerned about the impact on the village and new infrastructure requirements given the absence of a joined- up approach on BC1 let alone any other future developments.

- Berkswell Parish Council therefore insists that **sites are considered in a comprehensive manner** to avoid piecemeal developments occurring. **This must include joint responsibility for the provision of infrastructure**.

Public open space

- Balsall Common is poorly served with public open space, having less than half the average throughout Solihull. We **require confirmation** that with the reduction in the footprint of BC1 which included a larger amount of public open space, the **remaining allocations of public open space meets policy guidelines in terms of area and quality**.
- A **proportion of the remaining proposed public open space is liable to flooding** and it also includes several SUDS reducing its benefit to the community. Section 103 of the NPPF states that there should be access to a network of high quality open space, including SUDS as open space contradicts this statement.
- A further proportion of the **open space is alongside HS2 and access is restricted** due to the relief road.
- The proposed sports pitches are not easily accessible other than by foot or cycle and lack changing facilities and infrastructure and would not support the principal of a sports hub for the village. The **location proposed for formal sports pitches is not considered ideal but would suit an informal area to play and / or a park**.
- Assuming confirmation is obtained that the public open space proposed meets quality and quantity meets policy guidelines, the open space shown within the land use parameters proposal should become a condition of approval.

Need for collaboration with HS2 on their Balsall Common Masterplan

- **Collaboration with HS2** on the future use of the land next to the rail line once construction is complete **is essential to ensure this compliments and flows into amenities on BC1**. This must be a required planning condition ideally with oversight by the proposed Balsall Common Development Manager.

New Development Layout

- Berkswell NDP Policy B1 6b, states layout should support open access for wildlife corridors, it is unclear as to whether such wildlife corridors consistently exist around the edge of this site. Several of the previously proposed development sites BC1-6 are of environmental significance, **wildlife corridors should exist to link these sites**.
- Outline plan does not appear to comply with Solihull Planning Guidelines SPG7 in places for the required **distance between old and new developments of 30m**, as detailed within the Berkswell Neighbourhood Development Plan Policy B1 point e.
- Traffic lights are now proposed at the junction of Station Road, Hall Meadow Road and the relief road which was previously a roundabout. We are concerned about the impact of the traffic lights on traffic backing up on Station Road impeding access to the station car park and causing congestion up towards the village. Residents driving to the Medical Centre from the village will also be affected by the proposed lights. The access to the station car park is already controlled by three-way traffic lights, these in conjunction with the proposed four way traffic lights will create additional difficulties and delays. The Railway Inn, immediately before the existing traffic lights is currently closed, however a licence application is in course for this to be re-opened which will add to the traffic. **A roundabout at the junction with Station Road, the relief road and Hall Meadow Road is therefore required**.
- A potential **4 storey primary school is inappropriate** given the age of the children attending.

- It is unclear why the primary street from the proposed access off station road shows a gap with facing arrows and not a continuous line. This was not explained in the key.

Secondary school provision

- **The applicant's statement does not account for Solihull Students** for example from Meriden, Hampton and further afield who do not live as close to Heart of England School as Coventry students and therefore would not be guaranteed a place on the distance rule. To address this issue SMBC have planned for at least a **1 form entry expansion to be funded by new development contributions.**

Access to Medical Facilities

- The Independent Health Board has raised an objection stating that the existing medical centre and healthcare facilities for Balsall Common will be unable to cope with the increase in population as a result of the new development.

Greenbelt Mitigation

- Whilst the mitigation for the greenbelt has been assessed based on a proposed list provided by Berkswell Council, the items chosen are considered **insufficient to offset the scale of greenbelt being lost.**
- A couple of the proposals have been discounted due to land ownership difficulties but no evidence has been provided of conversations taking place to try to overcome these issues.
- **Additional mitigation measures are therefore required**.

Signed on behalf of Berkswell Parish Council

Richard Wilson

Clerk to Berkswell Parish Council