

From: [REDACTED]
To: [External Email for Local Plans](#)
Subject: Fwd: Objection to local plan
Date: 04 January 2023 19:55:27
Attachments: [image0.jpeg](#)
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[Objection LetterF.oaoes](#)

CAUTION-THIS EMAIL WAS SENT FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNCIL. DONT OPEN LINKS OR ATTACHMENTS UNLESS YOURE SURE YOU CAN TRUST THIS SENDER!

Ross,

Below is the objection I sent on 22/12/22, I will forward the failed delivery notice, please see attached screenshots of when I sent the below and the failed delivery note

John Marsh



Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: john marsh <JMCEAEX-O-FIRST+20ORGANIZATION_OU=EXCHANGE+20ADMINISTRATIVE+20GROUP+28FYDIBOHF23SPDLT+29_CN=RECIPIENTS_CN=000640008F11303@scf-15-20-4755-11-msonline-outlook-91991.templatetenant>
Date: 22 December 2022 at 20:43:34 GMT
To: localplans@southstaffs.gov.uk
Subject: Objection to local plan

Good evening,

please find attached my objection to the local plan. Please ensure that it is passed to the inspector in full, not paraphrased or reformatted.

I am a resident of Wombourne village and am writing to object in the strongest possible terms to The South Staffordshire Local Plan. I had previously strongly objected in writing to the Local Plan at the previous stage of consultation the 'preferred options' stage, under questions 1, 5, and 12, although I note my lengthy objection has been heavily paraphrased. Browsing the objections makes for grim reading. Lots of red 'object' notices from residents. The majority of green 'support' notices are from companies hoping to profit from them.

I make this objection with the strong caveat that the residents of Wombourne are overwhelmingly working people with families, having to do our own research and take the time to make strong objections on behalf of our village in our own time, with no access to any funds, resources, legal representation or guidance in any form. The balance of democratic power in this process is completely skewed and makes a mockery of any notions of basic fairness.

The context and timing of this objection is based upon the meeting of 8th November 2022, which due to work commitments I was unable to attend. I was hopeful that with over 2000 objections to the plan, local councillors would heed the wishes of the residents and vote against the plan. I am proud to say that 100% of the councillors for Wombourne voted against it. Unfortunately, it is with utter disgust that I found out the councillors of other wards voted for, despite the thousands of protestations.

This has highlighted issues to me that were previously not considered.

I have already written reams of evidence as to why Wombourne cannot and should not sustain the amount of building in the locations given. In summary, the roads can't take it, the schools can't take it, the GP's definitely cannot take it, there is no consideration for the effect on drainage, the area floods frequently and subsidence is a threat on most housing searches. The nature and natural beauty of the village, its established boundaries and separation from the urban sprawl are all at enormous risk.

Wombourne under the current plan is set to have a minimum of 525 homes despoiling the landscape. ALL of the Wombourne councillors objected to this.

By contrast, and by way of example, Cllr Chris Benton, who represents the Littleton Ward and lives in Huntington, voted for the plan. His village of Huntington stands to gain just 39 Houses. I challenged him on this and he claimed to 'not know the housing numbers', which begs the question how he was able to vote on the issue. I would argue that the housing numbers are the only clear bit of information contained within the plan.

This is a clear example of democracy being subverted, the councillors voting 'for' have clearly seen that their own wards can be more or less protected from development as it's not their ward taking the brunt of the development. Clearly they think that by voting for the plan in its current form, this ensures that Wombourne takes on upwards of 525 homes, their own only a handful, and this is their 'least worst' option. In short, they're voting for it as it hurts someone else and not them.

Oddly, Cllr Benton has deemed it fit to join the Wombourne Planned Development Opposition Facebook group, despite living in Huntington and having nothing to do with Wombourne. That is just one example.

525 homes as a minimum is the highest number by far. Wombourne is a Tier 2 settlement by your own classification, yet has a target number set higher than any of the Tier 1 settlements.

Clearly the residents and the councillors of Wombourne have rejected this plan in its entirety, only to have it imposed upon them by neighbouring councillors.

Surely the voices of Wombourne must be heard on this. Place those 525 houses in any of the wards that voted for this plan, and not in Wombourne, which voted 100% against it. This will ensure that the councillors are voting FOR the plan and not voting in order to shift the burden from their own wards to Wombourne.

The elephant in the room is that the situation has fundamentally changed, the basis upon which the plan is even written simply doesn't exist any more. The majority of the houses proposed are due to the 'duty to co-operate', the vague and intangible assertion that South Staffs needs to take on an enormous amount of overspill from the Black Country Plan, as the Black Country cannot meet its calculated housing targets.

This now cannot be relied upon as

1. It is acknowledged in the highest levels of government that the calculations are fundamentally wrong.
2. Even with those wrong numbers, the Black Country has abandoned their own plan, and will not be working to it (actually listening to their residents and their objections)
3. Therefore, how can the duty to co-operate exist if the numbers you are working off are no longer quotable, and how can the duty to co-operate amount be calculated if the authority we are co-operating with can no longer give a number of how much overspill we are to take?

As you can see the above points make an absolute nonsense of this plan. It is akin to having major surgery having found out that your illness has been misdiagnosed, but decided to press ahead with the surgery anyway.

Here is what Michael Gove himself said on the subject just last month, taken from an article in 'Property Industry Eye' 31/10/22.

Asked about Truss's past comments on housing targets, Gove continued: "The top-down housing targets that... Liz was referring to are part of a broader and different calculation from the 300,000 in the manifesto."

"My view is that what we do need is a fair way of allocating housing need that takes account of changes in population."

During the interview on Sunday with Laura Kuenssberg, he said new developments should be "more beautiful", have the consent of the local community, be accompanied by the right infrastructure and protect the environment.

Earlier this year, former housing secretary Robert Jenrick said the government would "miss their 300,000-homes-a-year manifesto pledge by a country mile".

In the Conservative leadership campaign over the summer, Truss hinted she would scrap the target, telling the press, "I want to abolish the top-down Whitehall-inspired Stalinist housing targets – I think that's the wrong way to generate economic growth."

During the contest, Sunak's team also said he did not believe in arbitrary or top-down numbers for housing.

In May, Mr Gove himself appeared to cast doubt on the target.

He said the government would do all it could to meet the figure, but added that it would be "no kind of success simply to hit a target if the homes built are shoddy, in the wrong place, don't have the infrastructure and are not contributing to beautiful communities".

Here, it can be seen that the current prime minister is of the same view.

In Mr Sunak's first Prime Ministers Questions, MP for Brownhills, which isn't a million miles away, Wendy Morton, asked the Prime Minister for a commitment that communities would not have housing developments dumped on their green belt land, and that residents would be listened to, and that the government would adopt a 'rigorous brownfields first' policy. Mr Sunak gave her that assurance and said "We must protect our green belt and we are adopting a 'Brownfields First' strategy. I'm pleased that we had a record number of homes built in the last year, but it's important that we build those homes in the right places.

How can the South Staffs planning department claim any credibility here? Not a single site is brownfield, it has barely been considered and 100% of the site allocations in Wombourne are greenbelt. I will not accept the weak argument that it's too difficult to do as South Staffs is overwhelmingly green belt. This is an argument AGAINST development, not for. Why impose such an irreversible blight on our landscape because the planning department aren't competent enough to identify appropriate brownfield sites? There's plenty of them, but it's much easier to just override policies to suit yourselves. This great hypocrisy is evident in the comments made on the Copart site, a brownfield area that could accommodate a good number of homes, which has been deemed unsuitable as it might cause 'traffic' concerns. Yet it is barely 100 metres from the Poolhouse Lane sites, will those vehicles teleport from the area? The greatest insult to our intelligence is the fact that a Lidl has been approved directly opposite Copart. This just highlights the attitude of the planning department towards the local residents, who just shift their arguments and their standards of evidence to suit their own plan, rather than look at the evidence objectively. The consultations on this subject are available to view, it can clearly be seen that South Staffordshire's planning department have arrived at their conclusion, then worked their formula backwards to ensure they arrive at it.

Another thing that has not been addressed, is how many of these houses will be considered 'affordable?' Developers routinely ignore any such targets, but even if they didn't, who is going to be able to afford to live in these houses? The average house price in Wombourne is currently £289,506 (source: Rightmove)

Assuming a household was lent 4 times their salary, a fair industry standard, they would need a salary of at least £70,000. The average household income in Wombourne is currently £40,000 (source: Propertydetective.com) and the most popular form of transport is car.

That means, as any Wombourne resident can tell you every morning when the workers get up to go to work, the vast majority of Wombourne residents afford to live in Wombourne by working elsewhere. We are a village of commuters. That means your 525 extra houses will be populated by yet more commuters. 525 houses with an average of 2 cars per house is over a thousand extra cars driving out of Wombourne every morning and back in every evening (as you well know, we have no rail station, no quick access to a motorway network, and no option to fulfil Grant Shapps MP's ambition of being able to walk to work)

In my previous objection I mentioned school and GP surgery numbers in villages of similar size nationally and noted Wombourne falls well behind. Yet in the consultation online meetings I attended, there was no commitment to additional infrastructure to support such a population increase and the planners were frankly condescending in their response, almost affronted we would ask for such things.

I just cannot understand how in 2022, it can be seen as a democratic process where the Government are saying that this is appalling, the MP's are saying this is appalling, the local residents are saying this is appalling, the local councillors say this is appalling, yet it can still be forced upon our village in such staggering numbers that cannot be justified in any way, by councillors from other wards who have betrayed the population in order to protect their own interests, and by planning officers who are willing and able to simply ignore parts of the existing policies that conflict with their own aims, again none of which have anything to do with the local area they are ruining.

Since beginning to write this objection, a debate was secured within the House of Parliament, entitled Housing Targets: Planning System Volume 722: debated on Tuesday 15 November 2022. A transcript can be viewed at the following link, and should be considered essential reading.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-11-15/debates/56F1F576-719B-406F-8B5E-6F4121F25712/HousingTargetsPlanningSystem>

There are so many comments that echo what we are facing in Wombourne, but I've selected just a few that show that this plan is completely unsound.

1. Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con):

"I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate; he is making some important points. Does he agree that unless local housing targets are set according to local need, it is difficult to adequately provide the necessary infrastructure he referred to earlier—education, health and transport in particular? Will he join me in urging the Minister to consider that there should be a right of appeal for local communities against inappropriate housing applications? There is a right for the developer; there is not currently a right for communities."

This point relates directly to Wombourne. We were told, in a very condescending way, I might add, during the online consultation, that there was no need for additional infrastructure to support the building of such a large amount of homes in the village. I invite you to come and do my commute. I invite you to try and get an appointment at my doctors surgery. I invite you to tour our handful of primary schools and single secondary school. It is worth mentioning that there are at least three new build housing developments already built in recent years. One has only just opened up, and already Wombourne cannot cope.

2. Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con):

Does my hon. Friend agree that the targets should be designed at a local level, and that communities should be empowered to object to unrealistic developments that do not deliver the services that the people living in those communities demand?

Gordon Henderson

I do agree. It is critical that local people have a say and set the targets, because unless there is local support for something, it will never work. Looking at it cynically, we might say that many local authorities are deciding to build houses in inappropriate places because they can blame the Government for the fact that they have to meet housing targets. If it was up to local people, that would not happen. From a purely cynical point of view, it would be better to let local people do that.

I am repeating my points, but the people of Wombourne and our Councillors want to have their say, but we are literally having this imposed on us. Repeatedly we have been told by the planning officers that these numbers come from government and are non-negotiable, and they have no choice but to impose them on us. This is literally played out in Mr Henderson's 'cynical' example above, but although he's added the caveat that this would be a 'cynical' point of view, these are the exact arguments put forward to us by the planning officers. Again, you can watch the recorded online consultation where this was repeatedly the case.

3. Gordon Henderson

It is all very well saying that the infrastructure levy will provide GP surgeries, but there is no point having the surgeries unless there are doctors to put in there. There has to be a recognition that no planning of houses should be allowed unless and until we are provided with the doctors we require.

Dehenna Davison

I thank my hon. Friend for that important point. GP numbers is something we are all concerned about. That is why the Department of Health and Social Care is taking measures to recruit more GPs right across the board. That is part of the answer, but he is right to raise concerns on the specific planning issues, and I will pass those on to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire. My hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) raised the issue of infrastructure and the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill. As part of the Bill, local authorities will be required to prepare an infrastructure delivery strategy, which will make it clearer to communities what infrastructure will be provided and when.

Again, as said above, we are just local people whose area of expertise is around the jobs we do, not the functioning's of government, planning law or any of the things we've had to try and research in our own time to oppose this plan. But it would appear from this that the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill could have material impact on the way these plans are set out. Particularly the last section of Mrs Davison's comments, where is the infrastructure delivery strategy for this plan? Is it right or lawful to just throw 500+ houses onto an area and leave the residents to suffer the consequences, when there is a bill in the pipeline which appears to require a proper strategy? Is this why they are trying to bulldoze this through? To avoid a more rigorous process in the future?

I could list every single comment in that debate and how it pertains to our plight, however most of it speaks for itself. There are numerous comments about the Green belt, brownfield first approaches, the right houses in the right place with the right infrastructure, but this is all just lip service if the planning officers, sat outside of the democratic process, can just sidestep all of these considerations and inflict irreparable damage on our village with a shrug of their shoulders and a mumbled dogmatic mantra about government imposed housing targets.

Finally, a personal plea. My wife and I sacrificed heavily to move to Wombourne. We are in the position where we lived in the Black Country and objected to that plan, but moved to Wombourne only to find a worse plan in South Staffs. Amazingly, our objection was heeded in the Black Country and wantonly ignored here.

We moved here, again with great sacrifice and personal expense, in order to give our daughter the kind of upbringing that neither of us had, in a semi-rural environment with green spaces, a sense of community and aspiration, amongst other people who value the act of getting up and going to work, striving, living within their means, and being rewarded for the hard work they do. We moved here with the hope that we could live here till we retired, and I am pleased to say that the difference to our life in Wombourne has been profound. It is a wonderful place to live, and my greatest hope is that it will remain that way. Yet within a year these immoral plans threaten to swell the village to an unsustainable size and connect it to the West Midlands urban sprawl, so there will be literally no difference between the area we moved from to the area we moved to.

Every day I commute anywhere between 2 and 3 hours, but the best bit of my day is when I cross the island from Wodehouse Lane and see the fields around the village. It relaxes me, it lets me know I'm home. When I get to the fields at Poolhouse Lane, I feel rewarded for my day at work, that the difficult decisions we make as a family result in my family being able to walk from our front door to real green spaces. Please, please consider that these plans are not legally sound, in that they violate every tenet of the consent of local people, they are based on numbers that simply don't exist, they completely fly in the face of the Governments clear stated aims and against the Brownfield first policy, and don't add any infrastructure to support their unsustainable size.

This is not a race to the bottom. You should not be spoiling aspirational areas to feed the wants of the unaspirational and the entitled.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. The South Staffordshire plan is completely unsound and should not proceed.

Addendum 09/12/22.

On 07/12/22 I met with the planners for South Staffordshire Local Plan, who did not introduce themselves but I have since found out were Kelly Harris, Ed Fox, Alex Evans and Patrick Walker. I wish to add the following points to my objections to the soundness of the local plan:

1. The planners admitted that no air quality assessment has taken place in respect of any of the sites, therefore how can the plan be sound if they have no idea on the environmental impact of 1000 new cars in the village with no additional infrastructure
2. The planners admitted that no noise or light pollution assessment has taken place in respect of any of the sites, therefore how can the plan be sound if they have no idea on the environmental impact of 1000 new cars and 500 new houses in the village with no additional infrastructure
3. The planners admitted that they have no idea where the waste water from the houses proposed on Poolhouse Road will go. I suggested that it will probably go to the waste processing site near to Heath Mill Road, which in the summer kicks out an unbearable stench, and what effect would this have onto the existing houses? They had no answer. This suggests to me that this is not so much a plan as wishlist of unplanned housing, the only consideration being how many houses can they build, and how much council tax can they yield from them
4. The planners, particularly Kelly Harris, who is especially condescending and at times rude, asserted that the Poolhouse Lane sites are not green belt as they had been removed from the green belt by the planners in 2018. I challenged this, as I believe it is perverse that the planners can get around their own rules by simply declaring a patch of green belt to be 'not green belt' to get around the requirement to not build on Green Belt (which they then ignore entirely anyway). I was told by Kelly Harris that 'it had been consulted on', I asked where and in what form, she said "It was in a magazine." How, in 2018, can it be considered to be a proper public consultation, if something as serious as irreversible as building on Green Belt land, can be hidden away in a magazine in the hope that no one will see it. The amount of people who are completely surprised by this in the local community is significant and very telling. This is a further example of the disingenuous nature of this planning department.
5. I highlighted a letter from Michael Gove to all MP's, which I have attached to this. In it, Mr Gove lays out in specific details the amendments to the Levelling Up bill, which promises to empower local communities to decide for themselves what development is appropriate and inappropriate, and specifically makes references to local plans, arbitrary housing targets, the duty to co operate.

The response from the planners, particularly Kelly Harris, was disgusting. She stated that "We don't have to ask local people whether they want houses or not, by law we have to provide houses" or words to that effect. When asked about Mr Gove's letter, she said it wasn't law yet so would not be changing South Staffordshire's approach.

This raises serious questions about democracy. I, as a resident, can vote an MP to represent me in parliament. That MP can be voted into government. That government can create laws and policies, and if I don't like them I can vote them out, in theory. Yet, Kelly Harris at South Staffordshire council was keen to point out to me that "We're not elected officials, we're employed to do a job", which appears to consist of deciding which government instructions and policies to follow and which ones to ignore.

I now move on to further issues around the soundness of this plan, particularly where it pertains to proper democratic processes. During the Council Meeting on 08/11/22 where a majority of councillors betrayed the wishes of their constituents and voted to approve the Local Plan, Councillor Steele said this (the video of the meeting can be viewed on SS councils YouTube page)

38.24 Cllr Steele: Thank you, chairman. Just before I do say...start, I promise not to mention Essington, or the Bovis estate, even what...although I've just done it...I will accept...but I will not mention it again.

We keep hearing about the duty to co operate as the reason for having to give up large parts of our green belt for the needs of the Black Country and Birmingham, so let's be absolutely clear on this, the government haven't said that we need to contribute 4000 dwellings to the wider HMA, that's a decision that's been an internal decision of this council, officers and members taken in 2018. We are told that we don't have a choice, we have all had emails over the last couple of days pressurising members to accept this approach, this evening. I'm not going to go into detail but my colleague references Solihull's plan, back in May last year we agreed a statement of common ground with them, and in that it states, South Staffs council acknowledged the position set out by Solihull, but do not agree with the approach proposed. But it goes on to say South Staffs council

consider that deferring the strategic issue of unmet needs is a significant soundness issue for Solihull's local plan review. It then finishes with 'Souths Staffs Council do not agree that the Solihull Local Plan review can be considered sound without effectively addressing this matter.' Well, we now know what the inspectors view of Solihull's plan was, it was published on Solihull's website in September this year, and it says, the inspectors have agreed that the councils identified housing requirements are appropriate and have accepted the councils approach to support the unmet housing needs from the wider housing market area and in doing so it means that the council has passed the planning test known as the duty to co operate with neighbouring councils. So despite now having egg on our faces, this just shows that there are other options, this council thought their approach to contribute a modest 2000 dwellings would make our plan unworkable, but as we see in Solihull's case, that has now been proven to not be the case. So before we rush into sticking with this publication plan, that has been stuck in the same lane since 2018, with very little change, lets take some time to reconsider, as Dudley and the Black Country are. Our own housing need will continue to rise, as will the wider HMA, so in the next plan we will again have to release yet more green belt for our own needs, let alone any other... further unmet need from Birmingham and the black country. Therefore, we should not be so quick to develop our own Green Spaces for others at this stage, so reluctantly I can't support this approach, and therefore, in its present form, I will have to be voting against this plan.

I am deeply concerned that the councillor says that emails were circulating pressurising councillors into adopting the plan. I have made a freedom of information request to SS Council for these emails, from which it was very clear that the councillors were pressured into voting FOR this plan.

Further, and even more concerning, I believe that Cllr Terry Mason, who summed up prior to the vote taking place, has misled the council in a material way, and this could have caused councillors to vote in a way contrary to their own wishes based on his misrepresentations.

1hr 10mins Cllr Dr M Ewart invites Cllr Mason to 'wind up'

1hr 11 mins- "Thank you chairman, I could take exception with quite a few of the things that have been said by various people, I'm aware of the Wombourne situation but unfortunately I've only been aware of it for about 6 weeks, had I been aware of it before maybe we could have gone somewhere, but having said that surely if you believe that one particular site is not sound then surely the regulation 19 consultation for soundness is the ideal time to put up an alternative site to the inspector and argue why you're not against the development but you are against that particular site and the grounds of coalescence, as I say, until literally 6 weeks ago I'd never heard that argument before. As regards councillor Fisher's comments about ostensibly seeming to pluck 4000 out of the sky as opposed to 1500, that may have been there earlier, I'd like to say that the actual duty to co operate numbers have been opposed by roughly 75% of the people who have responded, unfortunately the majority of the 75% who have opposed it are from the development industry and they think we should be talking about not four but seven, ten, twelve, fifteen, all (inaudible) different methodologies to get it, so over a period from now until 2039, compared to a national requirement of 300,000 houses per year, I think ours is relatively modest when you take it across the whole district. As regards to the point of, um, why aren't Solihull doing any more, in fact if you actually go back and look at the report in more detail you'll find that the inspector has actually imposed an additional 1700 houses on Solihull, on top of the 7800 they've already got proposed for their green belt, which is more than ours, so, as I say, we could go on ad finitum trying to dispute one thing or another and going backwards and forwards, but, we've had approximately 40 member sessions since the date this started. We've had 3 or 4 consultations since the date this started the local plan is not going to suit everybody, it is never ever going to satisfy everybody's requirements, what we have tried to do is to put something that is practical and workable and safeguards the district overall, and therefore I am afraid I return to the comment that I made before, I am proposing that the council approves the recommendations that are at items 2.1-2.4 chairman"

Pt 1- That Councillor Mason only knew about Wombourne's site issues 6 weeks prior, that is complete nonsense. The previous phase of consultation ended in December 2021 and the objections have been on the SS website for any to see (although the website is deliberately difficult to navigate), and the councillors themselves from Wombourne will tell you when they raised these objections which are now years old.

Pt 2- That 75% of those opposing are from the development industry. This is demonstrably untrue, and so misleading that it has materially misled the council.

Question 5 on the consultation portal deals with the duty to co operate, this is the data Cllr Mason is referring to. I have checked his assertions. There are 53 'support' entries, of which 50 are from organisations rather than residents. There are 11 entries marked as 'support', which either contain no comment, or the comments actually indicate that the respondent objects. I have attached these as evidence of this blatant misrepresentation of figures. There are 350 'object' entries, of which 109 are from organisations rather than residents. A great many of these are from the same 3 or 4 developers (Bloor Homes, Richborough Estates, Pegasus Group etc), but even being generous and allowing them to be counted 8-10 times each, this is still only 31% of the objections. The 75% Cllr Mason has quoted is a complete fabrication and misrepresentation of the figures. A better way of framing these figures would be that only three people support the duty to co operate portion of the plan. Hundreds of residents oppose it. These are the figures the elected officials should have been reminded of.

This really needs to be seen in its proper context. These are the final summing up comments before the councillors vote. The councillors have already said they feel their hands are tied, that they have no choice. Their decision will surely have been influenced by Cllr Masons summing up in a way that does not hold up to scrutiny. Therefore the plan cannot be sound if the process by which it was put forward to consultation has been compromised.

While I accept that the Levelling Up Bill is not yet law, surely it is perverse for the planners to quote that 'the government has set housing targets that we have to meet', but then ignore the impending amendments to the levelling up bill, which clearly demonstrate government policy going forward. Some excerpts from Mr Gove's letter dated 05/12/22 that apply-

the plan-making process for housing has to start with a number. This number should, however, be an advisory starting point, a guide that is not mandatory. It will be up to local authorities, working with their communities, to determine how many homes can actually be built, taking into account what should be protected in each area - be that our precious Green Belt or national parks, the character or an area, or heritage assets.-

Green Belt: further clarifying our approach to date in the National Planning Policy Framework and the Localism Act, we will be clear that local planning authorities are not expected to review the Green Belt to deliver housing. This is in line with commitments made by the Prime Minister in the Summer.

The effect of these changes will be to make absolutely clear that Local Housing Need should always be a starting point - but no more than that - and importantly, that areas will not be expected to meet this need where they are subject to genuine constraints. Inspectors will therefore be required to take a more reasonable approach to authorities that have come forward with plans that take account of the concerns of the local community, by taking a more pragmatic approach at examination which fully reflects this updated policy

Where authorities are well-advanced in producing a new plan, but the constraints which I have outlined mean that the amount of land to be released needs to be reassessed, I will give those places a two year period to revise their plan against the changes we propose and to get it adopted

BROWNFIELD FIRST The Government is investing to incentivise and enable brownfield development. Homes England, our housing delivery arm, is spending millions on acquiring sites in urban areas to regenerate for new housing. We are also allocating over £800m to mayoral and local authorities to unlock over 60,000 new homes on brownfield land, as part of our wider brownfield and infrastructure funding package.

This is clear and unambiguous. Local people should have a say in where and how much building takes place. Green belt is not expected to be used.

In the case of Wombourne, the plan imposes 500 houses on an already swollen population with no additional infrastructure. The first four sites are green belt, at the entrance to the village, and will ruin the local landscape and character of the village entrance. The second batch of four sites (Pool House) are also green belt, but South Staffs planners have surreptitiously 'removed' these fields from the Green Belt via a consultation they state that they published in a magazine in 2018- which is frankly so laughable as to be bordering on corruption. In 2018 to have no online consultation, no letter drop, no leaflet drop, no public awareness whatsoever, is just removing the sites by stealth. These are clearly at odds with Mr Gove's letter.

Finally I wish to state why I have requested to deliver my objections directly to the inspector. Such is the bad faith in which the planning team at South Staffordshire council have operated, that there is a complete breakdown in trust between residents and the council because of it. They have been disingenuous, manipulative, cynical and individuals have reacted to the very real and distressing concerns of residents with smugness and condescension. I have been told that it is not possible for me to deliver my objections directly to the inspector, which speaks to an absolutely broken system where the planning department, who are incentivised to get this plan through, are in complete control of the consultation process. Some examples are:

-Hiding a consultation about removing the Poolhouse fields from the Green Belt 'in a magazine' and pretending that this constitutes a fair and accessible consultation

-Holding consultations in December 2021 and December 2022, knowing this is a busy time of year for people to dedicate an enormous amount of their free time to oppose this plan

-Creating what is possibly the worst consultation website I have ever seen, abysmal to navigate, not clear where your objections are supposed to go, an enormous effort to even find your own objections. Jargon heavy, clunky and not for purpose in 2022 for those of us who are tech-savvy. Absolutely impossible for most of Wombourne's ageing population

-Stating that objections must be 'in writing' but failing to mention that this must be on a form, which is buried 3-4 menus deep on the website, and must reference policies on a large pdf document which itself is buried elsewhere on the website, 2 menus deep. I got this information after a morning of back and forth e-mails with the planners.

-Having a single day of face to face meetings in the worst affected locality (Wombourne), mainly in office hours knowing it would be a struggle for working people with a commute (i.e. most of Wombourne's working age population). This session was rushed and I personally did not have enough time to even scratch the surface of my concerns, before they wanted to close up and go home.

-Retaining control of the objection process. I submitted pages of objections in the first consultation. The planning department, whose reputation relies on forcing this plan through against the will of the residents, then doctor and select parts of my objection and copy and paste a line or two onto their terrible website. How is this transparent and fair? I have already shown evidence where they have marked objections as supports. They now want to retain control of objections to the Inspector, which again smacks of bias and unfairness.

In my meeting with the planners on 7th December 2022, I asked the question "Have you even bothered to ask the residents if they want all these houses built," to which the planner Kelly Harris said (not verbatim, as there was no time to take detailed notes). "We don't have to ask if people want houses built, we have to build them by law." I cannot convey in writing her manner when she delivered this response, but I was disgusted by it. I felt that she genuinely relished how upsetting this plan is for the residents of Wombourne.

I personally have found this entire process to be extremely stressful and upsetting. I have lived my whole life in the urban sprawl. I have worked and sacrificed so that we could raise our daughter in a semi-rural environment, and that we could balance the enjoyment of the area that we lived against a longer commute and higher costs. What was the point in all of that sacrifice if South Staffordshire Council are just going to absorb what I believe to be a very special village into that same sprawl. We may as well just go back to where we started. As a result of the biased and unfair nature of this process, I am considering abandoning our plan to live in our house until retirement, and potentially sell it. If all I can look forward to seeing is more and more houses, we may as well move closer to work and save a load of money in the process. I absolutely resent every penny of the inflated council tax contributions I make to South Staffs council, I receive no better service than I did elsewhere yet their planning department seems determined to brick up the green belt. This whole process has had a detrimental effect on my own wellbeing, I feel constantly worried that my decision to move my family to Wombourne will turn out to have been a crippling mistake if this plan goes ahead, and has completely eroded my trust in the local council.

I return to this very simple message from Mr Gove's letter "further clarifying our approach to date in the National Planning Policy Framework and the Localism Act, we will be clear that local planning authorities are not expected to review the Green Belt to deliver housing"

To me this is cut and dry. Building on green belt to satisfy a housing need that doesn't really exist is absolutely criminal and is not a sound plan.

Thank you for taking the time to read

John Marsh

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



