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Comment

Document Element: Policy SA3: Housing Allocations

Respondent: Mr John Marsh

Date received: 29/05/2024 via Web

Summary:

Poolhouse fields are an inappropriate site for housing. These are green fields and planners have failed to identify a single brownfield site. They contribute enormously to the semirural character of Wombourne and its village status. Removal of these fields pushes Wombourne into the population of a small town, which is not something anybody here wants, and creates a continuous unbroken line of housing from one end of Wombourne to the next. There is no plan to improve the environment in any way shape or form by bulldozing 3 fields to build houses and add 500+cars

Full text:

I am writing to object in the strongest possible terms to the building of houses on the Poolhouse Fields.

I am a resident of the Poolhouse Estate. My family moved to Wombourne at great personal sacrifice and expense as a way of escaping the urban sprawl that we grew up in. It was our dream to give our daughter the environment to grow up in that we did not have.

The plans to build on these fields are frankly disgusting. How anyone can consider building on our precious green spaces is beyond me. The government have repeatedly said that authorities should adopt a "brownfield first" approach. South Staffordshire Council have done the opposite, having failed to identify a single brownfield site to fulfil a made up figure of housing demand. They have defaulted to a greenfield site as it is the easier option. We, as the residents, who want to keep our green spaces, are being made to suffer for the incompetence of the planning department.

The fields in question are green belt. In 2018, South Staffordshire council removed the fields from the green belt, in what can only be described as a dirty trick. Despite it being 2018, and many methods of communication being open to them, the consultation for this catastrophic decision was hidden in a magazine. No online presence whatsoever, and no one I have spoken to was aware of such a move. The planning department know that if they consulted fairly and openly with the public this diabolical move to steal green belt land for development would never have been allowed. I have challenged them to enter into a democratic process, or to re-consult with the public, to which they have refused.

I was told, in a face to face meeting, that "once a decision has been taken to remove land from the green belt, it can never be reversed, and there is case law to back this up." This demonstrates the hostility South Staffs planning have had in this and the previous failed local plan consultation. No case law was ever presented to me, and it ignores the basic principle in law that case law only applies to valid statute. Statute law changes all the time as new statute laws are brought in, as per basic democracy. The notion that we have to stick with an idiotic or counterproductive decision forever without review is lazy and preposterous.

The planners told me that in order for housing to be approved, the developers would have to demonstrate an uplift in biodiversity. On what planet does bulldozing a literal field, which is agricultural land at present, in any way shape or form protect, maintain or enhance the environment? The fields are the environment that we ought to be protecting!

Throughout this process we have been given assurances that South Staffs council have no wish to add Wombourne to the urban sprawl. Yet, if these plans go ahead, this creates a continuous line of buildings from literally one end of the village on School Road, through Ounsdale Road and Poolhouse Road at the other end of the village, without a single break in the houses for a green space. It is literally the entire line of the existing fields.

Wombourne has a distinct character, it is unlike anywhere else I have ever lived. It is widely said to now be the biggest village in the country and has the population of a small town, but very much has a village mentality and character, something that I think is taken for granted by SS council. This is eroded if the population rises too highly, and none of the architectural characteristics of the existing housing will be respected. This will be an ugly new build estate like the other two that have sprung up on greenfield sites in Wombourne.

There is absolutely no provision in the plan for an uplift in services for the local community. For a population increase of nearly 250 homes, there is not a single consideration for the strain on GP surgeries (good luck getting an appointment with the current population level), traffic management, policing and crime, air quality from hundreds of additional vehicles, anything beyond the building of houses and the collection of more council tax to pay themselves.

Poolhouse road floods with any rainfall at all. What consideration has been given to the effect on drainage in the area? Development of land negatively affects drainage, and the area already floods. This puts the traffic down to one lane at best, and if Gigetty lane floods this makes the road impassible. What effect will 250 houses and their cars (with no alternative route) have when water falls out of the sky? South Staffs council do not care

The road itself is notoriously in poor repair. At the junction of Clap Gate Road, a fissure opens in the road several times a year. South Staffs council would surely have the figures on how many times they've used our road tax to repair it, only for it to reopen shortly after. What effect will 250 houses and their cars have on this?

I am told that the fields themselves were formerly landfill. A few hundred meters away, Wombourne Tip has been closed for months due to subsidence, itself being a landfill site on an old quarry. Further to this, explosive devices from WW2 have recently been discovered and required the services of a bomb disposal unit. Could the Poolhouse fields have such issues? They don't know or care, as long as they get their plans through.

A website has been set up by Lovells poolhouseroad.com showing the most generic new build plans, a disgrace considering how beautiful the fields are in their current state. These are clearly going to be £350K+ new builds, any vague promises of social housing, affordable housing, first time buyer homes etc is clearly just lip service with no substance behind it.

I have no idea if any previous objection to the failed local plan is considered at any stage in this process? Thousands of people objected to the previous draft of this plan, which SS council insisted was robust and necessary only to fold on it when other authorities realized the mistake they were making. Working people only have so much time and energy to put into these constant attacks on our village, surely objections that were valid then are valid now? In the previous consultation I found that SS council had enormously misrepresented statistics on approval for the plan. Many of the comments in opposition to the plans had been erroneously marked "support," and a great many of the remaining "support" comments were from developers, some of whom I did not believe were real companies. I found only a handful of remarks from actual local people in support of any building in the village whatsoever. This led to a council member misleading the council by stating that the majority of comments were in support of the planners (I believe a figure of over 70% was quoted). Misrepresentation of the wishes and thoughts of the local population, when combined with the deliberately onerous, clumsy and one-sided way these consultations take place show me that SS council are not acting in good faith.

Consultations should take into account the views and wishes of the local population, and then create a plan based on that. What SS council do is come to a conclusion about that they are going to do and then do their working out backwards to get to the result they want.

In a face to face meeting I proposed an alternative brownfield site, the now closed down sewage works on Bridgnorth Road, a few hundred meters from the proposed sites, screened from the road by trees and already a developed piece of land. They wouldn't even consider it because they've already made their minds up that it's easier to build on green fields.

I have contacted my MP several times about this issue and he assures me that any building on this site would be completely against the instructions of the government and the wishes of the local population, and would receive his strongest objection, yet SS council speak and act as if it is a done deal.

There is one planner in particular, who speaks to people as if they are dirt on her boot. She cannot hide the contempt she clearly feels for anyone who disagrees with her precious plans. I would encourage any planning inspector to prevent this individual from having any further involvement in these plans, as she is clearly not acting in an objective manner and appears to take a personal enjoyment in upsetting people over these plans. It would demonstrate good faith if the handling of the local plan was not overseen by someone who has caused so much upset in the village. I would recommend an independent review into these plans to restore faith that they are being done for the people and not to the people.

The revelation that these plans had returned and were directly targeting the fields which we value so much has caused my wife and I to discuss moving, despite the fact that we had intended this to be our final move. We have worked so hard to move somewhere where we can finally relax, only to have this constant stress caused by SS council planning that the second we move anywhere with any green space to enjoy, the greed of developers and the producer of farming more council tax takes over and we have to suffer more building when we are meant to be protecting the environment, not tarmacing it.

Please consider that the wishes of local people should be at the forefront of any irreversible decision like this, not an afterthought. I implore anyone reviewing these plans to please, drive to Wombourne, see these fields in the context of the rest of the village. Understand that this is a commuter village, there are no jobs here to support the purchase of literally any property in the village, everyone is either retired or a commuter. There is no train station, barely any public transport links, we all get up, get into our cars, and start our commute into whatever place we need to work in order to live somewhere a bit more pleasant. Any new residents in these new houses will have to do the same, unless SS council thinks you can get a mortgage for a £350,000 new build on a part time job in a coffee shop. This is an aspirational area, please do not allow it to become just another part of the West Midlands Sprawl. Please do not allow them to destroy the place we love living simply because it's too hard for them to find a single brownfield site worth exploring on anything more than a superficial levels. Their bleats that "South Staffordshire has no brownfield" is no excuse for making the residents suffer.

Change suggested by respondent:

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Legally compliant: Not specified

Sound: Not specified

Comply with duty: Not specified

Attachments: None