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25/04/2014

Dear Mr West,

Proposed Mount Farm Development – inclusion in SAM Dev

In December 2013 I registered through The Shropshire Council website my objections to the inclusion of the above proposed development in the SAM Dev. At that stage I received a confirmation from Andrew Williamson, (Senior Policy Officer, Spatial Planning Policy Team, Economic Growth and Prosperity.) He acknowledged receipt of my objection but indicated this would not be considered until the Sam Dev was finalised when a six week consultation period would commence. However he confirmed that by registering my interest he had added my name to the database to ensure I was advised by email when this six week period commenced. A copy of my objection was also sent to yourself as you had been identified as the person specifically dealing with the SAM Dev. and this too received acknowledgement.

Sadly since the release of the SAM Dev no such notification has been sent to me even though I know from others that this six week period has already commenced. As it seems unlikely that I will have been the only person to have been omitted from the list of those wishing to raise objections it would appear your processes have failed at the first hurdle and you could well be faced with others raising concern at the lack of transparency of the procedure. One could be excused for being suspicious as to the reasons behind this. A reason for my exclusion would be appreciated.

Turning now to the more important issue, I list below my objections to the proposed inclusion of the Mount Farm Development of 100 houses.

In view of the fact that a planning application has been submitted, some of my comments also relate to the details contained within the proposals by David Wilson Homes.

a)- Sustainability –

I was present when you addressed the Whitchurch LJC in Tilstock recently. Many of the points raised during that meeting have failed to be met by the SAM Dev. Much of the discussion surrounded the term 'sustainable' development. I fail to see how the proposal to build 100 houses on Mount Farm at this time can be considered sustainable. Surely for a development to be sustainable must mean more than there being sufficient water, electricity and sewage capacity? (although the latter is extremely doubtful according to Welsh Water).

To add 100 family homes will result in children requiring schooling. Whilst there may be spare capacity at Secondary level this is not the case for Primary aged children where there is no spare capacity in Whitchurch. Yes there is a proposal to build a new larger Primary school on the Tilstock Road development but from what I understand of the SAM Dev there is no structure to that plan that ensures such facilities are built as a priority and are available and operational prior to adding further housing development and thereby exacerbating the schooling problem in the short term. Sadly experience has taught us that 'short term' is rarely that and other priorities arise and get elevated particularly when expenditure is being squeezed, as it is now, resulting in Short-term becoming medium to long term.

A similar issue relates to employment in the area. The inclusion of proposals for extensions to Industrial / Commercial units are all very well but again they are not being given priority over housing which is where the Council are aiming their focus. The whole drive is one of 'we do not currently have sufficient housing stock to meet our targets/Government requirements' so get the houses built and we'll sort out the problems later. That is not systematic management; it is simply reacting to central government pressure in the face and fear of sizeable fines if you do not comply.

What has happened to the Local Plan reflecting the local needs rather than adopting the maxim of - build, build, build tomorrow's another day?! I fail to see how adding 100 houses to Mount Farm can be construed 'sustainable'. Many of the points below also impinge on the 'sustainability' aspect.

b) Size and nature of the Development –

When the Wellfield Way development was built some 15 years ago it was seen as a select development of 14 executive style houses aimed at bringing purchasers into the town with higher than average disposable income. Thereby assisting the demographics of the Town's population. Whilst it was always acknowledged by the original and subsequent purchasers of these properties that Haroldgate would eventually be extended to provide access for further housing adjacent to this select development, nobody would in their wildest dreams have expected a 100 property estate to be squeezed in to such a space. This proposal is totally out of keeping with the present adjacent housing stock, a sentiment that was also recently expressed and endorsed by none other than a councillor.

A recent article in the Daily Telegraph referenced changes to the planning guidelines stated that Councils will be forced to make sure there are enough bungalows for pensioners when approving housing schemes. This is in recognition of an aging population and their requirements. Also by so doing it recognised such provision would result in larger houses being released by those looking to downsize.

I confess I do not know what percentage of bungalows you have included within your SAM Dev calculations – maybe you could confirm this nor how you propose ensuring compliance with these new requirements. One thing is clearly evident there are no bungalows included in the David Wilson submission.

Of course developers will never make such inclusions of their own free will as their sole purpose is to maximise their return per hectare of land purchased – similarly with the land owners who's interest is the highest sale price. Neither of which surprises anyone, but the responsibility for control must rest with the Council to ensure such personal gains by the various parties do not gain sway over structured, meaningful and sustainable planning, together with meeting the requirement for the provision of bungalows.

You will no doubt recall the need for bungalows, to be included in future developments, was a common theme from a number of questions that were addressed to you at the LJC meeting. A point you acknowledged would require addressing.

The size and nature of the proposed development with it's three storey houses is totally out of keeping with the surrounding properties. (the style evidently chosen to maximise occupancy for the smallest sized footprint and thereby securing the maximum price per house sold).

The houses backing onto the properties in Wellfield Way (one of which is mine) are planned to be only some 10 metres from the existing properties, with most of them directly overlooking the rear gardens and houses of those in Wellfield Way. Why has no consideration been given to the existing residents when formulating such a proposed design? The Council were very keen to grant permission for the executive houses to be built in Wellfield Way for the benefits its residents would bring to the town but now that is all forgotten in favour of placing an 100 home estate in their rear gardens. Why could a 10m landscaped buffer not be included at the rear of the Wellfield Way properties and then build bungalows along this area? This might then provide some privacy for the existing residents, reduce the impact on their outlook, minimise the 'overlooking' issue and assist the Council in meeting the government requirement for bungalows. A reduced number of 30-40 properties would be more in keeping with the existing adjacent housing and in line with the planning advice of keeping numbers on a new development to smaller values rather than trying to cram as many as possible on the site to the detriment of existing residents and future ones. Even David Cameron supported such views in a Daily Telegraph article on 9 January 2012.

It is essential that the Council be seen to recognise the adverse impact that building a 100 house estate would have on the residents of Haroldgate and Wellfield Way and seek to minimise such impact by authorising a development that is in keeping with the existing adjacent housing and ensuring it does not ruin the landscape of the area. A 100 house estate will be clearly visible when approaching the town on the Tarporley Road and will be a major blot on an otherwise rural landscape.

A reduction in the size of development will not be popular with either developers or landowners due to financial reasons, but such pressures should not result in capitulation by the Council just because it is easier to do so. What is the point of having 'Local Plans' if they do not reflect the local views?

With the volume of housing included within the SAM Dev it is not necessary to build 100 homes on the Mount Farm location.

c) **Vehicle Access** –

This issue has been raised by all the residents who contacted David Wilson homes concerning the proposed estate. It is acknowledged that the width of Haroldgate meets the standards laid down by the Highways Officers but what has been ignored in the responses from David Wilson Homes is –

i) the daily volume of traffic trying to exit onto Tarporley Road - With the vehicles from the new estate plus those from Wellfield Way and Haroldgate, it will result in a traffic flow of some 200 vehicles onto Tarporley Road daily, probably equating to over 500 vehicle movements per day. A large number of which will depart at the same time either for work or for the school run. Where else in Whitchurch is there a comparable situation where there is only one route available for 200 vehicles onto a T junction with a major road? Is this really considered sustainable? The impact has clearly not been thought through. Are you planning to purchase land to change the layout of the junction with Tarporley Road to include a mini roundabout? If not then this should be considered.

ii) the dangerous nature of Haroldgate in icy conditions.

David Wilson Homes has made mention of 'specialist consultants' having assessed this and discussed it with Shropshire Council Highways Officers and confirmed it complies with appropriate safety standards.

It is both disrespectful and disingenuous to dismiss the 'local knowledge' of the residents who have experienced first-hand the issues which result in icy conditions. The specialist consultants and Highways Officers do not live here and will not have had the opportunity to experience the situation personally. The mild winter of 2014 did not provide us with the opportunity to demonstrate why the residents have made such an issue over this access road. Admittedly the local residents would rather not have this development, but recognising that some development of the land will happen they have tried to make people aware of the dangers of trying to stop on Haroldgate when approaching Tarporley Road in icy conditions. Also the very real problem that all non-4 wheel drive vehicles experience when attempting to drive up Haroldgate from Tarporley Road. I personally have much experience of driving in all weather conditions but found it impossible to get my car to grip sufficiently when turning from Tarporley Road into Haroldgate. This resulted in having to roll backwards onto Tarporley Road and leave the car parked there and walk home. This answer to the problem may be okay for a few Wellfield Way residents as their cars may not prove a major obstruction on Tarporley Road, but if you add a further 180 cars to this potential then chaos will reign! I seriously request that full consideration is given to the knowledge of those who have lived and experienced the wintery conditions, rather than listening to the desk-based experts who say there should be no safety problem! If you choose to ignore this advice there will be consequences when the first hard winter arrives. One can only hope none of them will be fatal. There will be no joy then in telling you 'I told you so'.

d) Previous Planning Submission

Prior to our ownership of No. 4 it is understood that some 8 years ago a planning application was made and rejected. Would you please advise what has changed in relation to the previous objections that resulted in the development being turned down and yet now enabled the site to be included in the SAMDEV as a preferred site?

The Government Inspector appointed for the public enquiry at that time stated his concern at the lack of a primary school in the vicinity of the site, and no proposals to provide one.

He also had a firm view that ***‘the site is elevated and development would be prominent in views from the north and north-west. Viewed from the direction of Tarporley Road the development would occupy open ground above the level of The Grove, extending southwards from Wellfield Way. Much of this land has an undeveloped appearance and is of high visual amenity value.***

The character of the landscape in this area at present displays an attractive pastoral quality of relatively small scale fields, with a network of hedgerows and trees. The landscape generally falls from the higher ground by Haroldgate towards the northwest. I consider that it would constitute a substantial area of new development in a relatively sensitive landscape, occupying an elevated position. This is a relatively unspoilt approach to Whitchurch which in my judgement contributes strongly to its character and setting as a rural market town. The impact of existing development on the skyline is limited and the predominant characteristic is of a well maintained rural landscape ‘.

Those same issues are still as relevant today as they were then. The Mount Farm land was deleted from the Local Plan following the inquiry. The question is why has it been allowed back in? – the landscape has certainly not changed and the high density proposal is totally out of keeping with the housing in adjacent developments.

For your information I have attached a copy of my submitted objection to the current Planning application submitted by David Wilson Homes.

e) Drainage, Sewerage and Groundwater concerns -

The sewers, both foul and surface water, were, I understand, at capacity when Seddon Homes built the Wellfield Way development. The concern is that the proposed upgrading of the pumping station will not be sufficient unless the outgoing pipework is also enlarged to cope with the vastly increased flow. Welsh Water have responded to representations indicating they will not accept the responsibility for such costs - which could be considerable. The response from David Wilson Homes is this

would be resolved following the granting of planning permission. Surely this cannot be correct? If so, as a policy it requires reviewing!

The proposed site is very prone to severe flooding during heavy rainfall and the inclusion of a balancing pond seems to be a cheap-fix by David Wilson Homes to the inherent flooding of the field - this pond was not included in their initial plans. Their reference to a 1 in 100 year rainfall event is presumably meant to be a reassurance for those people living in The Grove. Recent experiences with flooding across our country have shown that 100 years appears to be coming around far more often than predictions indicated! The more properties built on this site the greater the risk.

There are also health & safety issues surrounding the provision of the pond adjacent to an amenity area where children will be encouraged to play. What proposals are being offered to minimise this risk?

I understand the need to increase the level of housing stock for Whitchurch but this must be achieved in a structured and sustainable manner, taking due account of the need and balancing this with the infrastructure required to support it. Also plans for additional housing should be in keeping and sympathetic to the existing adjoining properties. A small development of bungalows on Mount Farm would meet both the need and also take due account of limiting the impact on the undeveloped appearance of this visual amenity.

I look forward to receipt of your comments.

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Rather than my wife Christine submitting her own objection to proposals to include Mount Farm within the Sam Dev she has requested that you consider this submission as also representing her views and therefore constitutes two separate objections.