

Representations about the Application for Proposed Development at Mount Farm, Tarporley Road, Whitchurch SY13 1LS

Application Reference Number: 14/01264/FUL

OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT:-

Of prime concern is the fact that the proposed site development is in no way in keeping with the original Core Strategy Plan produced by Shropshire Council.

SAMDev Development Management Policy **MD2 1** and **2** states that for a development proposal to be considered acceptable it is required to ***“achieve local aspirations for design, wherever possible, both in terms of visual appearance and how a place functions, as set out in Community Led Plans, Town or Village Design Statements, Neighbourhood Plans and Place Plans”*** and ***“contribute to and respect locally distinctive or valued character and existing amenity value by responding appropriately to the form and layout of existing development and the way it functions, including mixture of uses, streetscape, building heights and lines, scale, density, plot sizes and local patterns of movement”*** ...and ***“ensure development demonstrates there is sufficient existing infrastructure capacity, in accordance with MD8, and should wherever possible actively seek opportunities to help alleviate infrastructure constraints, as identified with the Place Plans, through appropriate design”***.

Wellfield Way and Tarporley Road are areas of high-end and prestige housing and the proposed site is not in keeping with the character of the area. The proposal is for far too high-density housing on the site and there appears to be no provision for bungalows, although there is a severe shortage of large bungalows which are in high demand in the area. This can be seen by recent sales transactions of good-sized detached bungalows along Tarporley Road and The Grove.

The proposed 3-storey houses are not in keeping with the local character and are simply a cheap way of providing several bedrooms on a small plot. They are solely a means of maximising both developers' and Council profits. They are a 'blot on the landscape' and offensive to any local residents living in traditional 2-storey properties or bungalows. They lower the tone of the area for anyone approaching the town from Cheshire, by creating an initial impression of Whitchurch as being very high-density and lacking any character, although Whitchurch is currently known for and 'proud of' its heritage and character buildings. The proposed site is far too extensive and should be reduced significantly so as to minimise the impact on existing residents and indeed the Greenbelt around the town.

Whitchurch is a dormitory town and there is no employment available locally to sustain the proposed increase in number of residents. Where is the proof that there is a demand for additional housing of this type in Whitchurch?

It is also relevant and important to look back at the Government Inspectors report on his findings after the public inquiry on the North Shropshire Local Plan 2000-2011. His view was:- ***“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 rustic/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”.

To respond effectively to local character and distinctiveness, a development should not have a detrimental impact on existing amenity value, but respond appropriately to the context in which it is set. As such, new developments should respect the existing pattern of development.

Access to the proposed development site via Haroldgate is a very steep gradient both from Tarporley Road and onto the new site, which will cause major problems during inclement weather over the winter months. The existing residents of Haroldgate and Wellfield Way already experience tremendous problems in trying to both enter and leave the area by vehicle, especially during snow and icy conditions and service vehicles such as the refuse collection lorries, Royal Mail and delivery vans are unable to enter Haroldgate or Wellfield Way during these conditions. Residents are often forced to leave their cars on the highest point of Haroldgate, so that they may drive (slide!) out onto Tarporley Road on icy mornings. This in itself would become impossible if the road were to be carrying an additional 100-180 vehicles.

Access via Haroldgate will also be unsuitable for longer vehicles, such as a service bus.

Tarporley Road will already potentially become heavily congested with the proposed residential development adjoining Hill Valley Golf Club.

On sunny days, drivers are blinded by the sunlight (especially in the middle of the day) when turning into Haroldgate from Tarporley Road, causing a dangerous blindspot. Indeed, the same problem occurs when turning right onto Tarporley Road from Haroldgate in the morning. This is of course when most traffic is leaving the site and turning right to go into town.

It will not be viable for Haroldgate to accommodate agricultural machinery and equipment or public service vehicles as well as domestic vehicles - Haroldgate is not wide enough to allow two such vehicles to pass in opposing directions, and surely these agricultural vehicles are not supposed to travel along residential roads on the new development. Heaven help anyone on the cycle track which is also proposed to fit in the same space!

Capacity to deal with waste water is also an issue for this proposed development and having lived in Wellfield Way for over 11 years, there are known to be surface water and drainage issues. Currently, sewerage from Wellfield Way is pumped up to the highest point of Tarporley Road, near it's junction with Haroldgate. According to Welsh Water, this pump and pipework may already be at full capacity. Indeed, earlier this year there was a complete loss of water supply to the properties at the bottom of Wellfield Way due to issues with Severn Trent Water whereby the underground sewerage system required flushing. The proposal to build a further 100 houses would require updating the sewage system, prior to any commencement of building work. The proposed site is prone to severe flooding during heavy rainfall and the winter months, as is the current access road to Mount Farm. With existing properties on higher land in Wellfield Way already suffer from poor drainage, this may be worsened by any further development, especially bearing in mind the proposal to remove trees and hedges from the development site.

It would seem far more appropriate that any development be sited on the land to the South and West of the proposed site, as clearly this would enable access from Chester Road and would not incur the problems with the poor drainage at the North end of the site. This area is clearly being earmarked for future development, as signified by the diagram showing vehicular access to the South of Haroldgate. Access to the site from Chester Road would at least alleviate the potential traffic problem, as this would allow access along a level road with a much lower gradient and would mean joining Chester Road with much better visibility in both directions.

SAMDev Policy MD8 states that ***“Development should only take place where there is sufficient existing infrastructure capacity or where the development includes measures to address a specific capacity shortfall which it has created or which is identified in the LDF Implementation Plan or Place Plans”.***

There are proposals for 500 houses at Tilstock Road, together with a school, 86 houses to be built next to the Hill Valley Golf Club, 76 houses to be built on Mile Bank Road brown field site and the 100 houses to be built on Mount farm.

Concern was raised at that time regarding the lack of a primary school in the vicinity of the site, and the lack of proposals to provide one. As a consequence the decision was made to remove the inclusion of Mount Farm land from the Local Plan. Nothing has changed in the area which would alter this opinion. Can the council show that they have allocated sufficient funds to the provision of schools, doctors, dentists, fire and emergency services, policing, public transport and local employment opportunities? If not, then the Plan is unsustainable. There are currently insufficient places available in local junior schools for existing residents in Whitchurch and the doctors surgeries are also full to capacity. A contribution (your proposed Community Infrastructure Levy of £40 per square metre, ie £500,000) to the local authority is totally inadequate to enable them to improve the necessary services which will be required by the new residents. The local Doctors/Dental surgeries are full to capacity. A contribution (the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy of £40 per square metre, ie £500,000) to the local authority is totally inadequate to enable them to improve the necessary services which will be required by the new residents. Who will pay for the increased infrastructure needed to service the extra population eg Doctors, District Nurses, Schools, Police, Fire etc? The commitment and provision of these services needs addressing and has no mention in the Plan, which is totally unacceptable. Local rail services will certainly be inadequate for the increased population of Whitchurch, hugely increasing the use of cars in the area.

SAMDev Para 4.13 also states that **“on very large sites, it may be appropriate to divide the recreational open space into more than one area in order to provide accessible provision across the development. In such instances it is important that each recreational area is of a sufficient size to be functional. The types of open space provided need to be relevant to the development and its locality and should take guidance from the Place Plans”**. The proposed development at Mount Farm by David Wilson Homes has only made provision for a 10 metre wildflower belt to the South and West boundaries which adjoin field anyway! Surely these belts should be extended to incorporate all boundaries, as per the recommendations? The amount of open space will in itself not be sufficient, The proposed amenity area is supposedly for the benefit of existing residents of The Grove, Wellfield Way and Tarporley Road, as well as the new residents of the proposed site and therefore we would request that this amenity/wildlife area, incorporating the pond, be sited at the lowest point of the site immediately behind No.s 14 and 12 Wellfield Way. This would mean that the natural pool of water that lies at the bottom of the field would be utilised and we at least retain some element of privacy and Wellfield Way and The Grove residents are not so heavily impacted visually by the new development.

Haroldgate, the proposed access road, is also unsuitable for any increased traffic flow. Despite conforming to general transport regulations of width, a closer and more detailed inspection will show from where the hazards arise. Having used this road throughout all weather conditions for 14 years, the local residents are acquainted with the problems, but the proposed huge increase in traffic movement will provide far worse conditions for all road users. The road has very tight bends as it goes down to Tarporley Road, and slopes sideways as it turns. The gradient is very steep - at the maximum allowed of 1 in 12. This means that during icy conditions it is very difficult and often impossible to access Haroldgate from Tarporley Road as one cannot gain sufficient traction before wheel spin takes over. When descending Haroldgate in frosty weather it is very easy to slide sideways out of control often resulting in one sliding across Tarporley Road. All residents have experienced numerous incidents as it only takes icy conditions to set it off. The bends are so tight it is hard for 2 vehicles to pass at all and only made more perilous during bad weather as we have to resort to parking in Haroldgate as Wellfield Way is too steep to traverse. It is totally unusable for longer vehicles such as a service bus, or emergency vehicles or cars with a trailer or caravan.

If the road is intended to service 100 extra houses, it will result in an additional 200+ cars exiting Haroldgate. Given the current unexpectedly high level of usage already recorded in the Transport

Statement prepared by David Tucker Associates, it will undoubtedly become a bottleneck at peak times - the morning and afternoon school run for example. Cars will be used as there are no schools currently within what parents will consider a safe walking distance from the proposed site, with the majority of traffic turning right across Tarporley Road. This will result in excess pollution whilst engines are still cold, increased noise and extended journey times at peak periods while vehicles queue to exit Haroldgate and pose an accident risk given there is a blind summit to the left on Tarporley Road.

The risks associated with using Haroldgate during bad weather will be exacerbated by the massive increase in the volume of traffic. Vehicles leaving the proposed Mount Farm development will also need to negotiate the considerable gradient to reach the apex of Haroldgate.

It is stated in SAMDev Policy document that ***“New employment provision is central to the town’s settlement strategy and will enable the rebalancing of the town’s higher than average levels of out-commuting”.***

Whitchurch is a dormitory town without much employment available locally to sustain the proposed increase in the number of residents. Where is the evidence that there is a demand for additional housing of this type in Whitchurch and, given the poor bus and rail services, how will this alleviate the higher levels of out-commuting? It is not just employment, but what facilities will be provided for the children and teenagers to keep them occupied and grow up responsibly? Youth clubs, swimming pools, etc.. will have to be provided, but by whom and when?

In policy H2 Housing land and Phasing the District Council state that they will keep the supply of housing land under review with the aim of ensuring that at any time sufficient land is available to meet the planned needs of the District Council for the next 5 years. The Council will require the phased development of sites listed under policies H4 and H5. This is to assure that the total planned provision is not exhausted in the early years; that an excessive amount of land is not made available at the outset; that a settlement is not swamped by over development and ensure the availability of infrastructure or adequacy of other services in a particular area. There are other sites which would present greater opportunities to include the necessary provision of infrastructure resources to support increased housing provision in Whitchurch. All in all our concern is that this is a Housing estate which is not needed in Whitchurch at the present time. As there are over 150 homes currently for sale in Whitchurch, will all these houses sell, and where are the jobs to sustain the influx population? There are no substantive proposals for how this population increase might be sensibly sustained. We understand that other proposed development sites have already been approved and therefore it would seem prudent to develop them before proceeding to construct another 100 homes which may be surplus to requirements at the time of their completion.

The proposed development plan for Mount Farm gives rise to a large number of issues. Not only does it cover a large area of green field land, but its’ design will undoubtedly detract from the current local environment and spoil the layout of the market town. Whilst I appreciate the requirement for increased housing is inevitable, I believe that this should be managed and phased so that infrastructure and employment considerations can also be effectively planned for and achieved.

It can only be hoped that the Council will take the time and care to visit the proposed site and consider the value of the open rural landscape and the visual appeal of the town when currently approaching it from the north and west.