

To:- Mr Ian Kemp
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8th Sept., 2014

Sir,

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2031

I do not believe that the Planners of Birmingham City Council (BCC) have thought the whole thing through properly and neither have they conformed to the precepts of the National Policy Planning Framework.

BCC have got some good looking literature and fairly convincing figures - as far as they go. By the way, why is it that all the literature about this proposal uses images of Birmingham and none of the place most affected by it?

Anyway to my considered objections, though perhaps I should say at this point that I understand the reasons why we need more housing - I have a married son who cannot afford to buy his own home - but the proposals of the BCC require further consideration.

It occurs to me that the "Buzz word" that runs through the Plan is "Sustainable", this according to my Collins dictionary is defined as "(of economic development, energy sources etc), capable of being maintained at a steady level without exhausting natural resources or causing severe ecological damage." Read on.....

These comments are relevant to each of the policy numbers I refer to.

For example: the following is a comment to be placed under the three policy areas TP10, GA5 and GA6.

a) **GREEN BELT TP10,GA5, GA6**

From what I have read, and have been told by BCC's own planners, the

intention is to build upon the Green Belt of Sutton Coldfield before all other possible options of Brown Field sites or the expansion of smaller outlying towns and villages are explored. Many small villages are in danger of dying since their young people can no longer afford to live where they were raised.

Any building on Green Belt **MUST** be considered as a last resort not a first option. Our Green Belt is **finite** and once concreted over cannot be reclaimed. How are we going to feed an ever growing population when productive farmland is concreted over? Where will future generations find their recreation?

Any Brown Field sites that have been already identified must be cleared and built upon prior to desecration of the Green Belt.

According to the National Planning Policy Framework any development of Green Belt is to be because of exceptional circumstances. Expediency is not an exceptional circumstance.

There are a great many areas of inner Birmingham that are in desperate need of regeneration. I would suggest that BCC starts there to put its own house in order before it spoils the Green Belt.

The Planners need only to look at Manchester to see what they have done, and are doing, with their inner city areas. The days of building tower blocks to house the population of these areas is long gone and we need fresh people with fresh ideas to create attractive living spaces that will attract people to the inner city.

I realise that this will be an expensive option but our once proud city of Birmingham is in danger of dying from the inside outwards. Look at Detroit in the USA after the collapse of the motor industry, no resident there wants to live in the inner city and thus both its housing and its citizens have degraded.

Building tracts of housing tacked onto an existing established town leads to isolation of those areas. My question is, would a resident of such an estate feel a part of Sutton Coldfield or even Birmingham?

Look at the effect that recent (and not so recent) developments have had on the surrounding neighbourhoods. Take Castle Vale. When that

was built it swiftly became an estate of gangs and violence. Now although it has been given a face-lift, is it accepted as a part of Sutton Coldfield? Take Harvest Fields and the Garrison Estates. They are just developments of houses without any other facilities and amenities. Where do their young people go to school or socialize? How do young families manage to afford those houses?

Furthermore, has the projected housing need been calculated using the most up-to-date figures? I understand that the new statistics predict that inward immigration will fall and so reduce the pressure on the housing market.

I have been actively campaigning against this plan around my local neighbourhood and have been astounded by the huge number of two and three bedroom properties that are under single occupancy by an infirm and housebound resident. If these properties are Council owned would it not be common sense to relocate such people to a place where they can be cared for in a safe and interesting fashion. I do not mean nursing homes but retirement villages or sheltered accommodation.

If such inappropriately occupied housing was released onto the market I am certain that they would find ready buyers and the money generated would help the overstretched city coffers. Similarly I understand that there are some 12,000 empty houses across the city with a further 17,000 that have full or outline planning approval. Surely we must fill those BEFORE building on Green Belt?

b) EDUCATION TP35, GA5

I read in the plan that there is to be two primary schools and one secondary school built to serve the needs of the development. A development of over 5000 houses represents some 9 to 12,000 children at an average 2.4 children per family.

Realistically is that enough school places?

Additionally, I am informed that there are no plans to construct and staff those schools concurrently with the building of the housing. So where will all those children go to school? The schools of Sutton Coldfield are already over-subscribed and even now local residents are forced to bus their children or via parental transport to a school that

is certainly not in their local vicinity. That leads to fractured friendships and families together with congested roads.

Many parents move to Sutton Coldfield because of the reputation of its schools, it will be a long time before the new schools merit any sort of reputation.

c) TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE TP37, GA5,GA6

The Plan states that there will be a "development of a sustainable, high quality, integrated transport system, where the most sustainable mode choices also offer the most convenient means of travel".

It would appear from the Plan that the only new means of transport will be the mis-named Sprinter buses and discredited bus lanes. There will be no new arterial roads, no new rail or tram network. So where will all the increased traffic flow? Should there be hold-ups in Sutton then there will be an increase in other rat-runs into the City.

Uppermost in my mind is "How much will the increase in journey time cost the commuter and in turn the employer, the City and Country?"

Already we have some of the most congested roads in the country. The transport provision as stated in the Plan is not sustainable and is frankly laughable.

The Plan to build over 5000 houses on the edge of the city without a mass transport system will lead to huge traffic problems. Here is a golden opportunity to construct dedicated tramways down the central reservations of the Kingsbury and Tyburn Roads.

Do any of Birmingham's senior planners live in Sutton Coldfield? Do they travel into the city on an overstretched train service or do they take their motor car along the congested streets and then have to find an affordable parking space?

Let me paint a picture of Britain in 20 years time. Petrol is scarce and is beyond the means of most ordinary folk. How are the residents of those isolated outlying housing estates going to travel to the city or anywhere else for that matter?

The only solution is to create an integrated mass transit system, ie a train or tramline together with regular stations, bearing in mind that

people will have to walk or cycle to their nearest station. Presuming that they are active. But what happens to the elderly or the handicapped residents of the estate?

There is no plan that I can see to build another arterial road into the City from the development - merely the proposal to construct yet another roundabout on the A38. Have any of the Planners ever driven from say Tamworth to Birmingham at peak times? Has it not been forcibly impressed upon them that the present road network is incapable of taking more cars?

5000+ houses represents over 10,000 more cars on our roads at peak periods as those residents go to work or take their children to remote schools.

Will the developers fund any new roads? Not a chance, all they want to do is to sell these houses and woe betide anyone foolish enough to buy one.

There is a similar argument regarding the proposed employment site at Peddimore. Just how are workers going to get there? Congestion will put paid to any plans by employers to regulate working hours. As a consequence staggered working hours will be introduced but can only achieve so much. It is a huge site and will attract a massive number of vehicles so congestion is bound to occur.

Such congestion will lead to pollution, steps must be taken to reduce the carbon footprint of any development and the only way I see of doing this is via an integrated mass transit system. This **MUST** be in place before any building work commences.

With the increase in car density there is also the likelihood of an increase in traffic pollution. Due to the efficiency of modern car engines, in particular diesel engines, the particulates of the pollution are smaller and are more likely to affect those, like my wife, who suffers from asthma and breathing problems.

Here is an excerpt taken from a report by the United States Environmental Protection Agency

“The size of particles is directly linked to their potential for causing health problems. EPA is concerned about particles that are 10 micrometers in

diameter or smaller because those are the particles that generally pass through the throat and nose and enter the lungs. Once inhaled, these particles can affect the heart and lungs and cause serious health effects. EPA groups particle pollution into two categories:

- "Inhalable coarse particles," such as those found near roadways and dusty industries, are larger than 2.5 micrometers and smaller than 10 micrometers in diameter.
- "Fine particles," such as those found in smoke and haze, are 2.5 micrometers in diameter and smaller. These particles can be directly emitted from sources such as forest fires, or they can form when gases emitted from power plants, industries and automobiles react in the air. "

d) HOSPITAL PROVISION TP36, GA5, GA6

In Sutton Coldfield there is an already over-stretched Good Hope Hospital, which, as far as I can see, there are no plans to extend this to cope with an additional population. Always bear in mind that the population of Sutton Coldfield is already an aging population and there will be an increasing demand upon its already busy team

All I have seen in the Plan is a vague promise of Health Facilities, more and better particulars are needed before any judgment can be made as to whether or not they will be sufficient. Additionally I assume that the BCC/ Health Service will be at the sharp end to provide funding, will this be available at the start of the house building so that the housing and "health facilities" can be constructed and occupied concurrently?

As previously mentioned my wife is a sufferer of chronic lung disease and even the current inadequate hospital situation is a major worry to me. The fact that the Planners did not consult with Good Hope Hospital prior to publishing their Plan shows how out of touch they really are.

According to information I have received there are no plans by either Good Hope or Heartlands Hospitals for any major expansion of their facilities, particularly A&E departments.

e) ENVIRONMENT TP12, TP6, GA5, GA6.

Sustainability? The Green Belt land that this development is planned for is viable agricultural farmland and produces regular crops with

satisfactory yields. Once that is built upon it will be lost as farmland forever - where will future generations produce their food when we are living on a concrete island?

Flooding? There are currently huge concerns about surface water drainage from hard paved surfaces. Locally we are worried about the destination of the run-off from this development. I believe that further work/information is needed for local residents to make some sort of judgment.

I see no proposals for the expansion of any rivers/streams through the estate, where will all the water go to? What is the plan for the drainage along Springfield Road? That has been seriously affected by flooded road gutters this winter.

It has been high-lighted by campaigners regarding a neighbouring development (Planning application ref. 2014/00399/PA) that "the Ground Investigation Report..... refers to existing shallow ponding within the fields - so the development will make matters worse." The Report goes on to say that "there are arsenic hot-spots which exceed guideline values for residential development." Arsenic contamination of ground water is a hazard that has yet to be fully explored by the BCC in relation to this new development.

Will disturbance of the soil by the house builders stir up this contamination and make matters worse?

Historic Houses and Sites? What sympathetic landscaping/development is going to be in-situ around Langley Hall and Peddimore Hall?

Around Sutton Coldfield we are richly blessed with a great many English oak trees, some of which are within the development area. What protection is afforded to them? Unless they are vigorously protected I can see them being flattened by the developer. Additionally what about the miles of mature hedgerows that are threatened? Isn't there some official protection available to them?

f) CONSULTATION WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY.

I would like information of how the vision of the Planners was taken to

and shared with the Leaders of local community and what feed-back they received from them? None of our Local Councillors are in favour of this development so I am certain that harsh words have been said and yet BCC is still pushing ahead (methinks "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark")

Certainly the shared vision for this development has never been promulgated amongst those most affected. We live only 100 meters away from the fields concerned and we have never had any correspondence from the Council. I found out about the proposal by sheer accident and none of my neighbours knew of it at all. Surely Birmingham City Council has a duty to inform and consult with us?

I feel very strongly that the BCC has been rather underhand in its dealings with the residents of Sutton Coldfield.

What consultation was done with local Head Teachers or Doctors or Hospital Trusts?

What consultation was done with the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police and the Chiefs of the Fire and Ambulance Services?

So what can I suggest as an alternative?

Firstly, BCC must actively consult with local people on, if and how they want regeneration of their tired inner-city neighbourhoods. Then North of Birmingham there are great swathes of ex mining land that needs regeneration, the small communities there are desperate for an injection of energy.

That area is well served by the motorways, is not reliant upon the already over-crowded arterial routes into and out of the City Centres.

Secondly, All Brown Field sites must be fully used before any Green Belt is used.

Thirdly, The responsible LEP should be consulting with neighbouring towns and outlying villages to see if some of Birmingham's overspill can be housed within their borders.

I have read that Birmingham is ambitious (to quote Albert Bore) but at the expense of the quality of life among its inhabitants? So very wrong.

Fourthly, before Peddimore is considered the BCC must show that there is a desperate need for such a large site. It will concentrate a huge amount of industry in one place rather like Trafford Park in Manchester was in its heyday. Surely it would make better sense to share it among the poorer parts of the city that need employment?

I understand that there is a housing shortfall of some 40,000 homes in the Plan that has not been addressed surely that must be sorted long before the Developers despoil a huge proportion of our already minimal Green Belt?

Lastly, Are the figures that are being worked around by the planning people as up-to-date as can be? Do we need all the houses that are planned?

I trust that the full content of this missive will be considered by you for the Planners have surely missed many valid points.

Yours faithfully,

Ian Thompson