

**REPORT FROM BURNTWOOD AND HAMMERWICH
ACTION GROUP (BHAG) ON LICHFIELD DISTRICT
COUNCIL'S CORE STRATEGY AND PREFERRED
OPTIONS DOCUMENT**

January 2009

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The submission from the Burntwood and Hammerwich Action Group (BHAG) regarding the preferred options contained in the Council's Core Strategy document for the Local Development Framework (LDF) is written on behalf of over 1000 residents who have sought BHAG's assistance to register their objections and concerns. These concerns relate to the areas described as 'South and South East of Burntwood'.
- 1.2** Your document and Mr Neil Cox, the representative of Lichfield District Council (LDC) who addressed residents of Burntwood and Hammerwich on 29 December 2008 at the Hammerwich Community Centre, invited residents to convey their views on the proposals. In the spirit of LDC's wish to empower local people to participate in local decision making (reference 3.5 of the document), BHAG would like to fully engage in this participation. As part of this process of participation, we would like to record our objections to LDC's preferred options which are referred to below.

2.0 GREENBELT

- 2.1 PPG2 states the purposes of Greenbelt are to 'check the unrestricted spread of large built-up areas to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another' and 'to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment'.**
- 2.2** It is BHAG's view that LDC's proposals will substantially erode the green belt that surrounds the village of Hammerwich and which separates the discrete village of Hammerwich from Burntwood, Brownhills and the West Midlands conurbation. As such the proposals are in total and irreconcilable conflict with the long-standing role of LDC in maintaining and promoting greenbelt land. In addition, the proposals fail to make it clear how the community's character and identity will be enhanced by the proposals.
- 2.3** Our understanding is that in response to previous consultation to the LDF (ref.5.2) LDC has received a number of replies that advocate the use of brown field sites and protection of the green belt. We fully support the protection of the green belt and it is our understanding that LDC's policy has been hitherto to protect the green belt. If the preferred options were implemented, it would be a breach of the Council's current policy.
- 2.4 Spatial Objectives.** The Council's Spatial Objective 11 states its intention to 'protect the quality and character of the countryside, its landscape and villages from inappropriate development'. You acknowledge the need 'to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment'. It is our view that LDC's proposals will damage rural communities and that they contradict the Council's principles and philosophy.
- 2.5 Rural areas.** Part of the initial feedback that the Council received was that the residents of Lichfield DC wanted the protection of rural areas (ref. 5.2). BHAG supports this view and this concurs with LDC's ambition to improve the quality of life in villages. There is no evidence in the document however, that the preferred options

demonstrate either any special consideration to the preservation of the greenbelt or the protection of rural areas. On the contrary, it appears to ignore the prospect of additional traffic flow, potential additional infrastructure and coalescence which will result in significant damage to the quality of village life.

2.6 The proposal states that in order to satisfy its preferred options, they must be supported by robust and credible evidence (ref 4.1). It is our view that the document fails to provide any robust and credible evidence that the erosion of the green belt will contribute to a sustainable form of development.

2.7 Biodiversity. The current green belt is arable agricultural land and if removed, there would be an impact on agricultural production in the locality and a destruction of the biodiversity that it currently supports. Skylarks nest in these fields, the hedgerows provide breeding sites for a number of birds and they attract sparrowhawks, buzzards and kestrels. The research undertaken by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has consistently identified the most significant reduction in bird species are farm land birds and this preferred option would destroy important habitats. The preferred options clearly identify that releasing green belt for development is a disadvantage (12.19).

2.8 Coalescence. The document identifies that it is the Council's desire to restrict the sprawl of large built up areas. It acknowledges that coalescence is not desirable, either with the West Midlands conurbation which begins at Brownhills or between the existing village of Hammerwich and Burntwood, (9.25). These proposals contradict LDC's wish to maintain the distinctive character of particular settlements.

2.9 The Environment. PPS1 suggests that it is good planning to protect and enhance the natural environment and to conserve open spaces. Burntwood lacks adequate parks, gardens and playing pitches. This issue is acknowledged in the Core Strategy. The open countryside of the green belt improves the quality of life of many residents by giving them a sense of well being. It also gives the area a clear and distinctive identity and a particular sense of 'place'. Consequently, it plays a unique and vital role in promoting a more sustainable environment.

2.10 The District Council's policy on greenbelt. Residents living in the areas to which the proposals refer bought property knowing that it was located in an area of distinctive character, adjacent to or in the greenbelt, on the understanding that Lichfield District Council had a policy commitment to maintain this 'contract'. We do not accept LDC's statement that the current preferred options reconcile themselves with their own statement, namely, 'whether part of the urban areas, villages or countryside, an environment is more vibrant or, in some cases, more serene will emerge as appropriate... and assets will be protected and enhanced'.

3.0 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The LDF states that "The policies and proposals contained in the LDF must be appraised to ensure that they contribute to the aims of Sustainable Development."

3.2 Employment. LDF's assertion is that an additional 750 dwellings will provide sustainable employment growth in Burntwood (9.22). The statistics however, already identify that approximately 70% of people commute to work from Burntwood (9.1).

If it is assumed that this proposed development produces an additional 1125 (1.5 persons per household) people of working age, there is no robust evidence that there will be the equivalent number of jobs in the locality. In fact the document makes very little reference to the development of employment opportunities and the plans fail to acknowledge that central government's aim is 'the maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and development' which is one of the core principles of the planning process.

- 3.3** In the Preferred Options document, LDC does not match its enthusiasm for housing with any employment strategy and in fact the general tone (9.6) is of a decline in employment with the suggestion of putting existing employment estates to 'alternative uses' and that Burntwood is unable to attract large scale office development.
- 3.4** In the Interim Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal (ICSSA), of the 14 strategic objectives stated, there is one objective that refers to the creation of employment, namely 'To ensure jobs are created within the District that contribute to meeting the identified needs of local people through their type and location'. It is our view that any subsequent development fail to convince us of the viability of this statement.
- 3.5** **Carbon Footprint.** The document is right to highlight the dangers of adding to the carbon footprint (6.5). The statements regarding concerns on increasing the carbon footprint are laudable and we acknowledge the concerns that are expressed in the strategy but the document does not produce any robust evidence that 750 dwellings and that the people who will live in them will avail themselves of public transport in addition to the existing population. LDC's Interim Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal does not offer any robust and credible evidence that jobs will be created. It merely makes reference to 'opportunities for walking/cycling to jobs and services.' To date, none of the documents provide robust evidence that new jobs will be created in the Burntwood area. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that this development will merely increase the road infrastructure and consequent pollution because it will perpetuate the current level of commuting.
- 3.6** If we assume that the level of commuting from Burntwood and Hammerwich to Lichfield and beyond will continue because of the lack of sustainable employment then the level of detail in the preferred options on the need to increase appropriate public transport is lamentable. All known evidence indicates that unless there is a clean, efficient, timely and flexible deployment of public transport, people will not be tempted to get out of their vehicles.
- 3.7** **Public Transport - Rail services.** There is no information within the Scoping Report that enables the question "Do we need more train stations and if so, where?" to be addressed. There is no mention in the ICSSA of the value of the train service from East Lichfield directly into the heart of Birmingham or of Trent Valley and Rugeley Stations on the national network.
- 3.8** In addition, the possibility and potential benefits of a new station at South Lichfield needs to be explored if LDC is serious about sustainable development in practice, as opposed to merely including its theory in policies to make them appear environmentally sound. Section 106 money would help fund shuttle/tram links from new development to the station. This area ranks first in the sustainability appraisal at present and with a new station would have the potential to take further houses.

New stations to serve developments at Armitage, Curborough and Fradley (all sites beyond the green belt) also need to be considered.

- 3.9** It is incorrect to state that 'Key village developments...have the same level of service provision of public transport as the edge of the urban locations.' The Key Rural Settlements should have been appraised separately as Shenstone and Little Aston both have a station on the direct line into Birmingham.
- 3.10 Roads.** Ref 9:22 notes a 'significant' negative in relation to providing opportunities to reduce trips by car and (in) providing increased opportunities for walking/ cycling and improving transport provision and accessibility. The report gives an incomplete and misleading impression of the road system that would serve the proposed areas of development. These would be totally inadequate to deal with the requirements of residential development on the proposed sites.
- 3.11** Burntwood has very limited employment, no high order shopping centre, no major entertainment facilities, no train service and only limited bus service. According to 'A Sustainable Community Strategy for the District of Lichfield 2006-2021', the West Midlands Spatial Strategy excludes Burntwood as a focus for major retail growth. So car travel is, and will continue to be, the predominant form of transport for access to work, entertainment and shopping outside the area. Additional housing would only add to an already totally unsustainable, large settlement.
- 3.12** Because the proposals focus on the development of Burntwood housing stock 'within the parish of Hammerwich' minimal reference is made to the shortcomings of the Hammerwich roads. In view of the far-reaching effects of the proposals this is a serious omission.
- 3.13 Traffic congestion and risks.** The statement that there has been 'significantly improved access to the south (of Burntwood) making journeys to Walsall and Birmingham easier' is questionable. It is our view that in the past decade, which has seen the permanent closure of one of the four routes in this direction, travel has actually become more restricted. Hospital Road and Highfields Road, which will 'front' the proposed main areas of development, are already the two main 'arteries' taking southbound vehicles from Burntwood, Chasetown, Chase Terrace and Boney Hay. Building in these locations would greatly add to already existing pressure on these roads. Furthermore these existing road problems would be exacerbated by vehicles from similar proposals in the nearby areas of Burntwood Green and Fulfen. It is reported that even after scheduled improvements, key junctions such as that at Pipe Hill (and, presumably others in the Lichfield southern by-pass area) are still likely to be blighted by congestion.
- 3.14** It would be reasonable to assume that junctions in a wider area will also experience increased congestion, particularly as traffic from Hammerwich (and Burntwood) meets increased traffic from new developments in Lichfield and its nearby settlements. The road system through Hammerwich is already under severe strain. The development of the 'St Matthew's Estate' in Burntwood has led to an increase in the number of vehicles traversing the area. We are aware of several minor and one "more serious" accident in the Hall Lane area, which is one of the 'through' routes, fatal accidents in Hanney Hay Road and another fatal accident in the late 1990s on Hammerwich Lane. The major factor in this latter example was the narrowness of the road. In recent years there have been a number of accidents at the junction of Hospital Road and The Ridgeway.

- 3.15** In recognition of the seriousness of the current issues of traffic flow, Hammerwich Parish Council, at a recent meeting (October 2008) agreed to seek advice from Staffordshire County Council in how to address the issues of traffic flow in all areas of the parish.
- 3.16 Primary Schools.** The proposed developments would fall within the 'catchment area' of Ridgeway Primary School and other primary schools in the area, particularly Highfield and Fulfen. The capacity of all of these will be put under considerable pressure and it would be our view that to support the proposed addition of 750 dwellings, the current infrastructure will be insufficient to meet the demand. This is bound to lead to further development. The ICSSA makes no reference to educational requirements.
- 3.17** It is without question that pre-school children already living in the area need greatly improved provision: The most recent Ofsted report for Ridgeway Primary (the school serving the area) states that the skills of pupils as they enter the school are below what is expected. The CSPO review of Burntwood area makes reference to deficiency of parks and gardens, amenity green space and equipped play areas but fails to address how this can be rectified and how the urgent need to address the needs of pre-school children can be achieved.
- 3.18** The Ofsted report describes Ridgeway Primary School as 'improving' and 'satisfactory' but also that it is required to raise its standards and to enhance and support the learning of its pupils. Yet this need is likely to be compounded by proposed housing which does not address existing issues and, because of an increase in the school's number on role, will greatly limit potential for flexible use of the school's accommodation. Parents have the right to challenge this proposal as it calls into question their child's entitlement.
- 3.19** In fact the site of Ridgeway Primary has very limited potential for further development, the school having been extended previously to include an additional two-storey block. Yet the proposals have not identified the site for a new primary school, nor how this would be financed and the timescale for it to be built. Because other features of the school, for example, the hall, toilets, staff facilities and the playground would unlikely to be changed it would be totally unreasonable to employ the use of temporary classrooms as anything other than a very short-term solution to the problem of increased numbers. Again, parents would be likely to very-strongly challenge the continued use of such buildings on the basis that their initiations will limit their child's entitlement.
- 3.20** Because a school's budget is determined primarily by the number of pupils on its roll over a previous period of time, the funding available to a school receiving increasing numbers of pupils will be placed under increased strain. This is likely to be the case for the duration of the period in which the proposed housing is being built and again, parents would be likely to question the effect of this on the aspirations for their children. Fulfen and Highfield Primary Schools will be similarly affected by proposals to build large numbers of new houses within their catchment areas. This will greatly limit opportunities for parents in the area to exercise their right to 'parental preference' of school.
- 3.21** The Ridgeway School is situated within the housing area to the west of Hospital Road. It is not within walking distance of the proposed developments and no cycle

tracks exist. The substantial number of 'new' parents negotiating Hospital Road and the estate roads would substantially increase the demands on these roads and the associated dangers.

- 3.22 Shopping.** The proposed sites offer no shopping facilities within easy walking or cycling distance.
- 3.23** Parking at the Swan Island 'Local Centre' is already congested. Car journeys would need to be made to Burntwood Town Centre or shopping facilities in nearby towns. There are no shops in Highfield Road, the nearest ones being in Chasetown, a journey likely to be made by car. There are no shops in Hospital Road, the nearest being a 'convenience mini-market' close to Ridgeway School which again would likely necessitate a car journey. These shops cannot accurately be described as being within walking distance of the proposed development.
- 3.24** The Swan Island local shopping centre will also serve proposed developments at Farewell Lane, Coulter Lane and Fulfen, none of which are within reasonable walking distance. It is hard to see how the existing parking facilities can possibly cope with this increased demand. There is no 'on road' parking and no scope to increase the number of spaces. No other shopping facilities to serve this immediate area have been proposed and no site identified.
- 3.25** Because of its location towards the 'edge' of the town the relevance and attraction of 'Burntwood Town Shopping Centre' (effectively an expansion of the former local centre of Chase Terrace settlement) for many living in the Hammerwich/Burntwood Green area is open to strong question. With the popular 'Swan Island' serving many of their needs it seems highly unlikely that many will prefer to negotiate the road journey to Chase Terrace. Many people travelling 'outwards' from Burntwood Town are likely to make purchases elsewhere, consequently taking trade out of the area.
- 3.26** For the vast majority of Hammerwich and Burntwood (village) residents Burntwood Town Shopping Centre is not on a 'through route'. Furthermore, particularly for older residents, it is not a place they identify with to any great extent or to which they have any sense of ownership, 'belonging' and commitment.
- 3.27 Medical Facilities.** Presently the area is served by GP practices at Salter's Meadow, Chasetown High Street, Churchill's Corner and Hudson Drive. Currently an additional interim medical facility is being erected near Burntwood Leisure Centre. Hospital facilities are at Samuel Johnson Hospital, Lichfield. Appropriate medical facilities are not just an entitlement, they are a basic need of **all** residents. Yet the proposals do not make reference to how this need will be met at the sites identified, funding sources and timescale.
- 3.28** It is our understanding that the existing Health Centres serving the area are working at almost capacity. Objective K in the ICSSA is 'to improve the health of the population' but the additional demands placed on the existing infrastructure would not be sustainable in our view and would be contrary to this objective. It is our contention that the position would be exacerbated by more traffic flow and more off site parking because of the limitations of the current medical centres.
- 3.29 Community Facilities and Other Needs.** The first Government aim for Sustainable Development is 'social progress which recognises the needs of everyone'. Sports Facilities are centred at Burntwood Leisure Centre. There are some other sport and

recreation facilities situated in some of the parks. There are some 'Community Halls'. There is a Library at Burntwood Town Centre, Chase Terrace but the sports facilities in Burntwood are not extensive for its current needs.

- 3.30** LDC has failed to recognise and assess the potential of a flexible, innovative, community driven facility for the expression and development of arts, culture and heritage, and the potential this may have for creating a vibrant town centre community in the centre of Burntwood. Recent proposals have concentrated on the provision of more shops but such a centre may offer far greater scope for creating a sense of vibrancy which could set the tone for its immediate area.
- 3.31 Sustainable Development – Contradictions.** Appendix (i) of the Interim Core Strategy Sustainability Appraisal (ICSSA), South East Burntwood scores minus 7, placing it with Key and Dispersed Rural Settlements as the least sustainable option. Indeed, North, South and South East Burntwood all score lower than all the sites around Lichfield, West Tamworth, East Rugeley, Fradley and Curborough New Settlement. Yet the Summary of Results of Directions of Growth Appraisal states 'Lichfield and Burntwood are the two largest settlements within the District and hold the best opportunities for the most sustainable locations for development.'
- 3.32** The proposal of 750 houses for Burntwood is in complete contradiction to the aims of the LDF and the findings of the ICSSA. It is our view that LDC cannot 'champion the principles of sustainable development throughout the District' if it pursues the Preferred Option for Burntwood.
- 3.33** The West Midlands Regional Assembly recognises that a small local adjustment of green belt boundaries may be required if this allows for the most sustainable form of development. LDC's current proposals exceed these guidelines and promote more far reaching implications. It is natural that many have concluded that Burntwood is a Preferred Option in the Core Strategy, not because it is the best site for a sustainable development but due to pressure on LDC from landowners, their agents and developers whose alacrity in putting forward their assets has impaired the judgement of the Council.

4.0 FLOOD PLAIN

- 4.1 9:22 notes a 'significant negative 'on the potential to reduce flood risk'.**
- 4.2** LDC's strategy identifies the risk of flooding (ref.6.5). From the consultation to date, it identifies that there is an existing flood plain in this area and it would be inadvisable to build on it. There is however, neither a robust assessment of the current risk nor a convincing risk assessment on the dangers of flooding following a proposed development of this scale. It would be negligent of the Council if it failed to take this into account in a time when all available evidence identifies the increase in flooding as a result of global climate change. As a result of continuing wide variations to climate that have existed in recent decades we would question whether land adjacent to the flood plain has already/will shortly become unstable and unsuitable for building.
- 4.3** Given that it is acknowledged that a flood plain bisects the area, it is obvious that this is not suitable for use as building land. In recent years there has been significant and documented flooding in Coppy Nook and Burntwood roads. In recent

months there was an occasion in which three local roads were blocked by flooding. This apparently 'new' flood risk is clearly on-going and likely to be exacerbated by the amount of impermeable surfaces.

5.0 THE DISTRICT COUNCIL'S CONSULTATION/INFORMATION PROCESS

5.1 Consultation/information process. Mechanisms employed by LDC failed to reach whole communities and sections within communities who will be directly affected by the proposals. Over-reliance was placed on one particular local "free" newspaper that is not distributed to all in the district. Similarly the council's 'In Touch' magazine, containing summaries of key points of the proposals, was distributed only to certain sections of the community. No apparent use was made of press-releases to regional newspapers and local radio stations. There was no direct communication to every household that would be affected by these proposals.

5.2 Local exhibitions:

- (i) We consider that the local exhibitions were of limited value. They comprised little more than enlarged versions of material available elsewhere.
- (ii) Not all Council representatives staffing the exhibitions had sufficient expertise to answer questions.
- (iii) At certain exhibitions members of the public had to wait an unreasonable amount of time to speak to a representative.
- (iv) The optional 'Answer Sheet' (sic) provided at the exhibition focused primarily on 'district' issues rather than local priorities.
- (v) No evaluation sheet was provided to enable the Council to gauge the extent to which the exhibition met the expectations and requirements of those who attended.

5.3 Language. The proposals and other material are written in complex sentences containing technical language. As such they could be described as being discriminatory against those who do not have sufficiently developed language skills to assimilate them. The Council appears to have greatly underestimated the essential need for material to be presented in sufficiently accessible terminology, even in its 'In Touch' summary.

5.4 On line consultation. Members of the public have been encouraged to access material and respond to it 'on-line'. Whereas for many this is convenient and practical, the emphasis placed on this method assumes residents *wish* to use it and find the site easily navigable. Most importantly however, this approach could be construed to be discriminatory against a substantial percentage of the population who do not have easy access to the Internet and consequently have to make special efforts to access material by other means. As a result these people may be less likely to respond. In fact it has been reported to us that IT literate individuals have experienced frustration and failure when attempting to navigate the site. In addition,

there is no reference to LDC's efforts to monitor how residents are accessing information and the extent to which this relates to socio-economic groups.

5.5 It appears material has been /is available in large print, Braille, cassette form and as a translation for those whom English is their second language. However, this does not seem to have been publicised prominently and it is our assertion that because of this, whole sections of the community have been excluded from being involved in fully in the consultation process.

5.6 Communication and content of the material. The material published by LDC designed to inform the community of proposals could be described as misleading given:

- (i) The Council's timescale for the conclusion of the consultation process, (9 January 2009) as detailed in an introductory leaflet was still being distributed at local exhibitions in late 2008, when the period had been extended without either it being publicised or the rationale provided.
- (ii) Some of the maps provided were opaque at best and incorrect at worst. We recognize the strategic nature of the document but the fact that the maps produced in the document were not to scale was misleading and created significant anxiety amongst residents.
- (iii) Insufficient attention seems to have been given to the extent to which some of the material is truly informative. For example, the 'Direction of Housing Growth' arrows were used on maps both in the 'In Touch' magazine and at exhibitions. These were confusing and in addition, they did not highlight the fact that the existing precious green belt is especially narrow. In its duty to consult properly, it is our contention that LDC failed to inform members of the community in an appropriate and effective way.
- (iv) In its consultation process the Council failed to define what was meant by Burntwood. There was confusion in relation to whether reference was being made to Burntwood town centre, Burntwood former village, Burntwood Green or the parish of Hammerwich.

5.7 Community communication and consultation. The process by which the Council sought responses from residents, has in our view, clear and serious shortcomings. During the initial stages of consultation little prominence appears to have been given to meaningful involvement and feedback.

5.8 At one of the exhibitions, one of LDC's officers described the number of initial respondents as "A bit disappointing". Section 12.3 of the CSPO makes reference to 'Some 140 respondents'. It is our view that the Council cannot draw far reaching conclusions based on such a tiny response.

5.9 The time-scale for communication and response, straddling the busy Christmas period, was ill-judged, being particularly inconvenient for many people. A significant number of people considered that undertaking the consultation during this period was cynical. It has done the Council a disservice and has undermined confidence in the Council and its process.

6.0 TEST OF SOUNDNESS

6.1 At this stage it is our view that the Council has to make considerable progress on convincing BHAG, members of the community and potentially the independent inspector that it has met the criteria on the test of soundness. The critical issues for BHAG include:

- (i) The Interim Sustainability Appraisal has not adequately addressed the key issues stated above.
- (ii) The Spatial Plan does not appear to conform to the national guidance given that outcome will be coalescence, which the Council recognizes as not desirable.
- (iii) The consultation has been ragged. We have encountered considerable ignorance in the community about these proposals and the fact that more detailed proposals were offered for consultation for a limited period over the Christmas holiday would appear to have breached a reasonable and fair process. As stated above, the delivery of information has been patchy at best, the techniques of consultation have been inadequate and the methods to communicate with the Council may have inhibited a considerable number of residents.
- (iv) The Council's current policy on greenbelt will not be adhered to if it implements these proposals and there is insufficient evidence of it undertaking an appraisal of the various brown field options in Chasetown and Chase Terrace (sites alongside Chasetown FC/By-Pass and Eastgate Street Abattoir being examples)

7.0 CONCLUSION

In relation to some of the questions which are posed in the document our answers are as follows:

Question 10. 'Do we consider that the proposed residential development levels are appropriate for Burntwood?' The answer is "no". There is no robust and credible evidence that this proposal will achieve sustainability. We have made our views clear that we believe that the current infrastructure is inadequate and that in order to meet the demands of an additional 750 households, there will need to be substantial development to meet the employment, health, education, social and transport needs of this 'new' population.

Question 11. 'Do we agree with the preferred, broad directions of growth for Burntwood?' Our answer is an unequivocal "no". The growth proposed breaches the Council's policy on greenbelt, promotes coalescence, fails to achieve an appropriate spatial strategy (especially for the village of Hammerwich) and potentially destroys the rural character of this area.

Question 12. 'Do we consider that any other broad locations for housing should be included?' Our view is that that there has been insufficient appraisal of brown field sites in the area and an overly responsive approach to landowners who are willing to sell their land irrespective of the consequences.

Paul Chapman

Chairman – BHAG

January 27th 2009