

NCPC Objection

North Claines Parish Council (NCPC) Object to the planning application **W/26/01367/OUT** on the following basis.

1. Principle of Development

The proposal is contrary to the recently adopted SWDPR. A point acknowledged by the Applicant (see para 6.3 being contrary to Policy SWDPR 03). The site is unallocated in a highly visible location beyond the settlement boundary of Fernhill Heath. Simply put the proposal does not conform with the whole development plan strategy of a recently adopted Plan and should be refused.

The Applicants reference to these policy breaches being 'Minor' at paragraph 7.5 of the Planning Statement represent at best a misreading of how planning applications under S54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 should be determined when they are not in accordance with an up-to-date development plan.

It is noted the Applicant seeks to prey-in-aid of the other limited benefits of the scheme, which merely relate to more housing and related financial and construction benefits. These benefits, however, would apply to any scheme wherever it was located and in no way tilt the balance of the development in its favour, particularly when weighed against the inconsistency with the SWDPR and other harms generated by the development.

The Council's 5YHLS Position.

The Council's position is that it can demonstrate a 5YHLS. However, we note the Applicant's position (Planning Statement para 6.9) disputes this fact, claiming the Council, as of July this year and the additional 20% buffer requirement is unable to demonstrate a 5YHLS. We are aware of other developers claiming the same position.

Given the importance of the Council's land supply to the determination of this application and particularly on whether the Tilted Balance of the NPPF is engaged, the PC requests the LPA seek advice from Senior Counsel on the robustness of its claimed 5YHLS. Should the Council be able to demonstrate a 5YHLS, then in reality that should be the end of this application, given the up-to-date nature of the SWDPR.

2. Poorly Located and Inaccessible Location

The Applicant indicates in its opinion (paragraph 7.7) that the site is in a sustainable location. Put simply the PC believes this is completely the wrong location for 140 dwellings at Fernhill Heath and there is no evidence submitted with the application pack to justify the Applicant's accessibility claims.

This is not just the PC's opinion, but also those of the LPA when it rejected the proposal previously through its SHELAA process in 2022.

The site is inaccessible to the limited range of services and facilities the village has to offer. The principal services in the village (2 shops / 2 pubs / Hindlip 1st school etc) are along the A38 at the other end of the village, noting the location of Dilmore Stores and Claines Primary School. These facilities are up-hill from the site and completely beyond any reasonable walking distances. Similarly, whilst any benefit of the 144 bus services along the A38 to the site is again diminished by the up-hill walk and distance and whilst within a cycle ride, new residents from the site are not going to cycle to the A38 to then put their bike on the bus.

We note the Applicants Transport Assessment (TA) is unsurprisingly quiet on pedestrian accessibility other than suggesting new residents could walk a questionable 19 minutes from the site to Dilmore Stores. We do question these 19 minute walk times and for example whether it factors in walk distances from the whole site and not just the site entrance. No distances are given to the schools / post offices / pubs etc in the main area of the village along the A38. This requires rectification.

Local accessibility reasonable walking distances benchmark standards deemed to be acceptable are as follows:

- Local Convenience Shop 4-800m (5-10 mins walk)
- Bus Stop 400m (5 mins walk)
- Primary School 800-1,200m (10-15 mins)
- Village Hall 800m
- GP's 1,200-2,000m

By any measurements, this development is way beyond these distances highlighting its unsustainable location. New residents would simply have little choice other than using the private car. The site is simply in an unsustainable location without access other than the private car for day-to-day services and facilities and should be rejected on this basis.

3. Highway Access and Pedestrian Safety

The PC awaits the Local Highway Authority final comments. We note their current objection (17 July) on the grounds of insufficient information. We note within this they raise concerns regarding pedestrian accessibility. For the reasons stated above, we believe the LHA should maintain an objection on this issue given the inaccessible location of the site and limited ability for future residents to sustainably access local services and facilities.

The PC does, however, raise two specific points below on highway access and pedestrian safety.

Highway Access. The developers TA does not take into account the reality of journeys currently and following the build out of committed developments. WCC Highways assessment of the TA highlights the insufficient traffic levels and queue sizes used in the assessment. The impacts on Station road/A38 and A38/Hurst lane junctions are insufficiently addressed to support any approval.

Pedestrian Safety. The development location does not have connection to existing footpath network along Station Road. Applicant refers to a footpath within development but only for the West side. WCC Highways assessment has highlighted footpath access, crossing location from east to west developments across Station road and development access road sizes and splays as safety issues. NCPC considers these critical items are not sufficiently addressed to allow an approval on this matter.

5. Landscape Impact

The PC raises an object to the proposals landscape impact and calls into question the robustness of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). The LVIA states as follows:

11.4 In visual terms, visibility of the Site is limited and largely constrained to locations directly adjacent to the Site's boundaries. Further afield, views of the Site are precluded by intervening vegetation and landform.

The PC believe this is wholly inconsistent with the Applicants own ZTV assessment which indicates the development being highly visible within the wider landscape and not just harmful adjacent to the site as the LVIA would have one believe. Unfortunately, the ZTV only extends to a 3KM distance and that indicates the development being highly visible at that distance to the north of the site and looking in a southeastern direction would indicate the development with having no built development beyond and potentially breaking the skyline. The ZTV indicates the same when viewed from a westerly direction looking eastwards the development is visible 2km out and again without the backdrop of existing development.

The Parish Council would therefore call into question the robustness and validity of the LVIA and its general conclusions indicating the development is largely only visible from immediate site environs only, being unsympathetic to the local landscape character. The development clearly has a significant effect on the wider landscape. The Parish Council request the LPA appoint a suitable qualified landscape architect to assess the robustness of the LVIA.

Based on our assessment the development will appear as an alien and harmful feature in the wider landscape contrary to SWDP Policy SWDPR 34 – Landscape Character which requires developments to integrate with the landscape character and setting along with NPPF paragraph 135 which requires developments to be sympathetic to the landscape character and setting.

6. Inappropriate Scale and Social Cohesion

The proposal represents simply another ‘bolt-on’ housing development without any thought given to how the development may be able to assist the village through the provision of any on-site community facilities or how its future residents may appropriately integrate with community life.

Fernhill Heath is a village located within a Parish which has proactively engaged with the development sector and successfully delivered a Neighbourhood Plan which has allocated sites for development. Whilst the PC fully acknowledges the national housing crisis, the scale of existing commitments, including those sites which have been allocated and the significant levels of additional housing growth that have come through within the SWDPR Plan period to-date through the 5YHLS route, is well beyond what was envisaged through the plan led system for Fernhill Heath. The Parish Council is rightly concerned that this large increase in such a short period of time combined with this site’s accessibility issues will lead to issues of social cohesion, where new residents will simply fail to integrate and take part in day-to-day community life of the village and the development simply become another car borne suburban style housing site.

Given the comparatively isolated location and nature of the scheme, its lack of any facilities on site, the development will not support the vitality of rural communities contrary to NPPF chapter 9 in relation to access to services and facilities and paragraph 83 in relation to supporting rural communities.

7. S.106 Obligation

Fernhill Heath is category 1 village but actually in comparison with the scale of housing at the village, has a limited number of facilities. This proposal will do little to alter that deficiency. It has for example no GP’s or public village hall, something that PC has been seeking for some time and has been actively looking at how this could be addressed.

We note, the WDC Emergency Planning and Projects consultation identifies the development as sufficient size to trigger a S106 request. However it is suggested by WDC the identified funds be put towards improvements at Droitwich Leisure centre and Sacred Heart Community Hall. If WDC were to approve this planning application (which based on the above the PC does not recommend) then NCPC request that the funding is allocated to proposed facilities in the directly affected area of the Parish.

The cumulative effect of recent and current developments has not been addressed with any local facility funding. The PC simply fail to see how providing funds for existing buildings in Droitwich Town meets the CIL requirements of being related to the development in scale and kind or meets the requirements of SWDPR Policy SWDPR 47 – Criterion E which requires housing developments over 10 units:

.....to make a financial contribution to the off-site provision or enhancement of community centres and village halls.