

**REPRESENTATIONS TO BROMSGROVE DISTRICT
COUNCIL'S DRAFT CORE STRATEGY 2**

ON BEHALF OF BARNT GREEN PARISH COUNCIL

11TH APRIL 2011



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The preparation of the Core Strategy by Bromsgrove District Council (BDC) is welcomed by Barnt Green Parish Council. The Core Strategy will be a critical policy document in defining a vision for the District and guiding the scale and location of future development. The Parish Council do, however, have specific concerns in respect of the proposed development strategy, and particularly the proposed allocation of the Cherry Hill site (land off Fiery Hill Road).
- 1.2 This document outlines the nature of those concerns, and the Parish Council would welcome further dialogue with BDC to ensure that they are addressed in subsequent revisions of the Core Strategy as it moves towards adoption.

2. DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

2.1 The Scale and Location of Development

- 2.1.1 Core Policy 2 purports to set out a settlement hierarchy to guide the location of future development in the District. Whilst the policy title refers to a “settlement hierarchy” and table 2 categorises the settlements, it is not apparent from the actual policy wording that a hierarchy of preferred locations for development is advocated.
- 2.1.2 The policy refers to four facets of housing delivery. It correctly highlights the importance of utilising previously development sites in existing settlements for residential development. It also refers to expansion sites around Bromsgrove (the “Main Town”), development sites in “Large Settlements”, and rural exception sites. There is, however, no expression of priority in the policy.
- 2.1.3 PPS3 states that the Government’s policy "is to ensure that housing is developed in suitable locations which offer a range of community facilities and with good access to jobs, key services and infrastructure." Therefore, in order to optimise the sustainability of the required growth, future development should be predominantly focused on Bromsgrove, the largest and inherently most sustainable settlement in the District, with the greatest development needs. Moreover, the allocation of strategic urban extensions to larger urban areas are best placed to maximise the sustainability of future development, provide the necessary infrastructure and optimise place making. This approach should be clearly stated within the policy.
- 2.1.4 Indeed, contrary to that it seems that the Core Strategy advocates the dispersal of a substantial amount of development to settlements beyond Bromsgrove. Whilst smaller scale development in other sustainable settlements to meet identified local needs might be appropriate in certain instances, the focus on ensuring sustainability by maximising the future growth at the Main Town of Bromsgrove should be prioritised.
- 2.1.5 Indeed, there is no apparent comparison of the relative merits of the development strategy advocated by the Core Strategy, and a strategy that would result in a higher degree of urban concentration by at Bromsgrove. In that respect the Core Strategy is flawed.
- 2.1.6 Furthermore, the Settlement Hierarchy as set out in Table 2, appears to have been crudely constructed solely on the basis of wide population bands. There does not appear to be any evidence that the specific sustainability, character, needs, and the capacity to accept

development of the “Large Settlements” has been recently considered in a robust assessment. Or indeed that where potential “development sites” in these settlements are identified, the potential impacts of the development on that settlement have been properly tested to ensure that environmental and socio-economic capacity is not exceeded to the ultimate detriment of the communities and settlement character.

2.1.7 The current approach set out in the Core Strategy does not, therefore, accord with the policy intent of PPS3, and has not been appropriately justified in the underlying evidence base.

2.1.8 It is therefore suggested that Core Policy 2 is revised to accord more closely with national and regional policy (as it still applies) by ensuring a higher degree of urban concentration through the allocation of additional sites within and adjacent to Bromsgrove.

2.1.9 Furthermore, it is also suggested that the allocation of the residual development requirements to Large Settlements outside of Bromsgrove is carefully considered in the context of an up-to-date examination of those settlements and specific potential allocation sites against the requirements of PPS3 and other relevant policy documents.

2.2 Barnt Green

2.2.1 Barnt Green is identified as a Large Settlement and the “White Land”, i.e. the Cherry Hill site, is identified as a “development site” which could contribute to meeting the District’s identified development needs outside of Bromsgrove. Paragraph 7.42 highlights that the Local Plan Inspector identified this site as an Area of Development Restraint potentially required to meet long term development needs. That conclusion was not accepted by BDC at that time, but insufficient justification was given for rejecting the Inspectors conclusions, and following a High Court challenge the site was left without a policy designation, i.e. it is neither an ADR or part of the Green Belt.

2.2.2 It is apparent that BDC have sought to identify sufficient development sites in the Core Strategy without recourse to removing additional sites from the Green Belt. Notwithstanding their previous view of this site, the absence of a site-specific designation of any kind has made it an easy choice. This is evident from the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, where it seems because it is not designated as Green Belt it is identified as being (in PPS3 terms) both suitable and immediately available for development. The Parish Council are of the view, however, that the opportunity should now be taken to redesignate the site as Green Belt. The justification for that is presented in Section 2.3 below.

2.2.3 Moreover, in terms of the site's suitability it is clear that the SHLAA does not fairly represent the environmental and heritage constraints that the site is subject to, which potentially precludes it from development, or at least severely limits its capacity for residential development. Further evidence in this respect is presented in Section 3 below.

2.2.4 Notwithstanding that, however, the SHLAA identifies potential housing development sites that could deliver 3,072 dwellings. It also states that, at the time of writing, the District's completions and commitments totalled 1,094 dwellings. Taken together, therefore, the housing requirement of 4,000 dwellings would be exceeded by 166 dwellings. Barnt Green Parish Council, therefore, contend that the Cherry Hill allocation is not required to meet the district's housing needs (particularly given its limited capacity as highlighted below).

2.3 Green Belt

2.3.1 As a result of a High Court challenge referred to above, the part of the Local Plan that applied to the Cherry Hill site was deleted. The site is, therefore, without designation. That is in itself an exceptional circumstance in this context, and BDC should seek to remedy the situation through the preparation of the Development Plan. Whilst the site does not form part of the existing Green Belt, BDC should take the opportunity to properly consider the importance of the site to the wider Green Belt in this area, and redesignate it accordingly.

2.3.2 The site makes a significant contribution to the specific purposes of the Green Belt designation and to maintaining its integrity in the wider area. PPG2 states that the fundamental aim of Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open (para 1.3), and as such its most important attribute is its openness (para 1.4). The 5 stated (para 1.5) purposes of including land in the Green Belt are:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns, and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

2.3.3 The Green Belt around Birmingham clearly has an important role in all of these respects, but in the area around Barnt Green it has a specific role in respect of the second and third purposes

in particular. Contrary to the conclusions of the Local Plan Inspector, the undeveloped nature of the Cherry Hill site makes a critical contribution to the role of the Green Belt in these respects, notably in terms of the potential coalescence with neighbouring settlements to the north.

- 2.3.4 Kendal End lies 500-600m to the north of the site, and Cofton Hackett is located only 200m north of Kendal End. There are also a number of substantial properties that line the eastern side of Kendal End Road between Barnt Green and Kendal End. There is, therefore, very limited entirely open land between Barnt Green and the settlements to the north. Figure 2 identifies the undeveloped land as the Cherry Hill site, and the fields to the immediate south of Kendal End. There is a further limited gap between Kendal End and Cofton Hackett.
- 2.3.5 The attached photographs (see Figure 5) portray the experience of people travelling along Kendal End Road and clearly highlights how these key locations, with open areas both east and west of Kendal End Road, provide critical relief between the built form of the settlements.
- 2.3.6 The development of the Cherry Hill site as envisaged by the Core Strategy would require significant encroachment on the countryside resulting in the removal of one of these open areas.
- 2.3.7 The resulting development form would then extend along the Kendal End Road from Barnt Green to only 200m south of Kendal End, where there would be a single remaining open break in the built development either side of the road. This impact is illustrated in Figure 3.
- 2.3.8 The limited remaining break in development would by itself be insufficient to prevent the perceived coalescence of the two settlements, irreparably eroding their separate identities. and fundamentally harming and undermining the integrity of Green Belt in this area.

3. SITE SPECIFIC ISSUES

3.1 Site Constraints

3.1.1 Notwithstanding our position that a Green Belt designation should be reintroduced to the Cherry Hill site, if this position is not included within Bromsgrove District Council's adopted Core Strategy we consider the suggested capacity of the site (minimum of 98 units) to be inappropriate and to have ignored a number of important environmental and character related constraints. These are set out below and described in greater detail on the following pages:

- i) Setting of Grade 2 Listed Building (Barnt Green Inn)
- ii) Character requirements of the Conservation Area
- iii) Protection of TPO trees
- iv) Protection of existing hedgerows and woodland and their ecological enhancement
- v) The visual impact of development on the high ground to the rear of Fiery Hill Road

3.2 Setting of Grade 2 Listed Building (Barnt Green Inn)

3.2.1 The Barnt Green Inn lies adjacent to the northern boundary of the Cherry Hill site. This heritage asset is described in its listing as being:

Circa 1602. Large 3 storey house most of which is heavy timber framing but the remainder has been very much restored in fake timber framing and painted brickwork. Right hand side of east elevation has twin gable heads of (restored) geometrical timber framing with projecting heavy moulded bressumers and console brackets. Ground and first storey of heavy close set studding. C18 fielded panel door and facsimile gabled porch. Left hand side of C19 fake timber framing. One stone chimney stack with brick shafts at rear, remainder of chimneys are modern. Good original small jettied gabled projection to stable yard facing south. Modern casements. Well weathered machine tile roof. Interior has some original panelling.

3.2.2 PPS5 identifies, in policy HE10, a number of principles that are applicable to development that affect the setting of a heritage asset, including the preservation of those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset, as defined over the page:

HE10.1

When considering applications for development that affect the setting of a heritage asset, local planning authorities should treat favourably applications that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset. When considering applications that do not do this, local planning authorities should weigh any such harm against the wider benefits of the application. The greater the negative impact on the significance of the heritage asset, the greater the benefits that will be needed to justify approval.

HE10.2

Local planning authorities should identify opportunities for changes in the setting to enhance or better reveal the significance of a heritage asset. Taking such opportunities should be seen as a public benefit and part of the process of placeshaping.

- 3.2.3 PPS5 also defines the setting of a heritage asset (in its Annex 2) as being :

The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.

- 3.2.4 When considering the key features of the Grade 2 Listed Barnt Green Inn, as defined above, it is clear that visibility of the primary frontage of the building and its eastern elevation are particularly important in experiencing the heritage asset externally. In preserving this experience, it is therefore important that any proposed development does not impinge on this visibility of these facades, which would detriment the experience of the heritage asset. Figure 7 indicates how this policy requirement would constrain development of the 'Barnt Green White Land' site.

3.3 The Character Requirements of the Conservation Area

- 3.3.1 The Barnt Green Conservation Area was established in December 2000 and is subdivided into three areas (Shepley, Fiery Hill and Cherry Hill). The Conservation Area was designated to address community concern relating to the impact of higher density development on the character of the area. The Cherry Hill site promoted by BDC for development is located immediately adjacent to the Cherry Hill sub-area of the Conservation Area and is in its setting, as the qualities of the Conservation Area can be experienced from the Fiery Lane Road frontage. Any development is therefore required to *"preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset"*.

- 3.3.2 The Barnt Green Parish Plan (2006) contains guidance on future development within Barnt Green (Planning for Development – Appendix 1) and establishes a series of character areas within the village (see Figure 8). The Cherry Hill site is located immediately north of the Lickey Approach character area, which this document describes as:

This area was in part conceived as, and still is, an approach from the railway station to the Lickey Hills. Detached houses began to be constructed facing towards a practically straight tree lined avenue before the First World War.

- 3.3.3 Planning for Development goes on to describe the part of Fiery Hill Road immediately adjacent to the Cherry Hill site as being:

A mixture of houses and bungalows (Figure 13) largely completed in the inter-war period, though begun earlier.

- 3.3.4 Fiery Hill Road is at present predominantly 2 storey in height, reducing to 1.5 storey for a small number of properties immediately south of the Cherry Hill site (see Figure 9). This reduction of height reads as part of the transition from Fiery Hill Road to the open countryside as you move northwards and therefore any development to the north of existing properties fronting on to Fiery Hill Road should be restricted to 1.5 storeys in height. The area is generally of a low density (between 15 and 20 dwellings per hectare) with large front and rear gardens, frequently containing mature trees. These features have a significant influence on the character of the immediate area and must be reflected in the form of any new development. Similarly, the large set back of buildings from Fiery Hill Road is a key feature and must be reflected by any new development that front onto this road (see Figure 7).

3.4 The Protection of TPO Trees

- 3.4.1 Bromsgrove District Council made a Tree Preservation Order on 23rd March 2011 under section 198 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in respect of trees within the Cherry Hill site. The Order covers an area including the Cherry Hill site, the existing cricket pitch east of Cherry Hill and the grounds of the Barnt Green Inn and protects all trees, coppice and understorey shrubs within this area on grounds of amenity. This creates a significant constraint to the development of the site (see Figure 7).

3.5 The protection of hedgerows and woodland for habitat purposes

3.5.1 The site contains a number of mature hedgerows and lies adjacent to mature (potentially semi-ancient) woodland. Both of these features are likely to have an ecological value and should be retained with adequate buffer zones, which will restrict the developable area (see Figure 7). An ecology survey and strategy communicating the sustaining (and improving) of the natural habitat would be required, in accordance with PPS9.

3.6 The Visual Impact of Development on the High Ground to the Rear of Fiery Hill Road

3.6.1 The western half of the site lies between approximately 5 and 12 metres higher than the land directly adjacent to Fiery Hill Road. If built development was located on this higher part of the site it would harm the sense of openness on this key approach to the village, and locate development in a position that would be visible from footpath routes to the north of the village, and as a result detrimental to the views of the Lickey Hills and the wooded backdrop to the Cheery Hill site.

3.7 Residual Capacity of the Site

3.7.1 The environmental and built character constraints described above will have a significant impact on the potential developable area of the site. Our initial studies suggest the site has reduced in size from 5 hectares to 1.32 hectares, which will need to be tested through more detailed baseline studies. However, when considering the likely protection requirements of the hedgerows and the TPO trees within the site, development is not expected to successfully integrate into the field parcel immediately east of the Barnt Green Inn (in addition to the setting of Grade 2 Listed Building requirements) and therefore a more likely development area of 0.91 is assumed (see Figure 7). When applying a density that more closely reflects the character of the area (15-20 dwellings per hectare), a site capacity of 14-18 dwellings is calculated.

3.7.2 It is noted that the proposed development site is shown incorrectly in the Draft Core Strategy Map 3 insofar that it includes:

- the cricket ground east of Cherry Hill Road;
- mature native woodland to the south of the cricket ground, and;
- the grounds of the Grade 2 listed Barnt Green Inn within the 5.5 hectare promoted development site.

3.7.3 It is our understanding that the 5 hectare area stated in the Core Strategy actually relates to the area shown within the Core Strategy Map 3 minus the areas described above. This area has been measured accurately as being 4.79 hectares (see Figure 1).

4. CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 Barnt Green Parish Council do not agree that the development of a minimum of 98 residential units on land identified as 'Barnt Green white land' (referred herein as the 'Cherry Hill site') is suitable or appropriate. Planning and urban design evidence contained within this representation and its appendices support this position and conclude that the Cherry Hill site should be re-designated as part of the Green Belt and remain undeveloped.
- 4.2 However, should Bromsgrove District Council not agree with the Parish Council's position, the appropriate capacity of the site is significantly less than that identified by BDC (a minimum of 98 units). Any subsequent development would need to respond appropriately to site constraints and local character, which we consider would limit the site capacity to between 14 and 18 units.
- 4.3 The Parish Council's position as set out in this document reflects the views of many of the local residents. A petition with 487 signatures will be submitted to the District Council.