

2056

Your ref. RDS 2013 my ref JDI/2056



Development Policy Manager
Warwick District Council

26 July 2013

Dear Sir,

PLANNING – LOCAL PLAN REVISION JULY 2013

INTRODUCTION

The historic towns of Warwick and Royal Leamington Spa should be cherished and treated to the most carefully considered planning procedures. Unfortunately, although town and country planning is the responsibility of the local district council which should base its decisions very much on the local situation, these days it appears that the planning proposals decided at a national level take priority over local needs and wishes leading to a loss of local character from towns and their surroundings.

The proposals in the current local plan revision apparently indicate that any land not specified as green belt should be considered suitable for residential or business development without taking into account the local situation. This would inevitably lead to building for the developer's maximum profit creating vast estates of very ordinary housing.

AREA SOUTH OF WARWICK

The areas proposed for development south of Warwick are simply delineated by the existing road network. Currently this area is mainly open farmland which contrasts with the heavily built up area to its north. It provides a haven for wildlife and is not a source of noise.

If any of this area were to be developed it should be in smaller "parcels" so that strong wildlife corridors are maintained and we avoid the further loss of distinction between the two towns of Warwick and Royal Leamington Spa. The most recent example of this loss of differentiation has been the renaming of The Shires Retail Park as Leamington Shopping Park. This new name is not only most unimaginative but also wrong. The Shires Retail Park is situated on land previously owned by the King Henry VIII Charity which lies within Warwick. The Shires name is in general use locally and by most of the businesses on the retail park. Local people refer to "The Shires" as a familiar name; referring to it as "The Leamington" has no meaning"!

Recently a developer put forward proposals for land west of Europa Way which was to be developed as "Myton Garden Suburb". One of the major drawbacks of this project was the proposal to service part of the development from Myton Crescent and Saumur Way, neither road being able to accommodate construction traffic or – in the case of Myton Crescent – the proposed 50% increase in the number of homes using the Crescent for access to Myton Road.

One of the locations for a wildlife corridor between developments should be along the southern boundary of the existing residential area lying to the south of Myton Road.

The proposals in this plan revision make use of the terms "Garden Suburb" without clearly defining what it really implies. I assume it relates to a development with plenty of trees, grass and other garden-like features to make it more attractive to its residents, visitors and also wildlife. One's concern is that a developer may not carry out all the environmental works intended once the scheme is under construction

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and local folk will find the "garden suburb" they were expecting has not been built to the high standards promised.

The omission of The Asps from development proposals is to be welcomed although I note a caravan site has had a turn right lane and brown direction signs on the Banbury Road for some time although the actual development has not taken place.

URBAN BROWNFIELD SITES

Station Approach

The rail services through Leamington and Warwick provided by Chiltern Railways have improved enormously in recent years. This has inevitably increased the number of passengers using the local stations and lead to the opening of the new Warwick Parkway station. The quality of the Cross Country services has also improved making many places accessible within a day's rail journey.

Many passengers using Leamington station park their cars on land north of the railway previously occupied by a motor agency and now managed by the district council. This demand shows that it is necessary to provide a properly lit and surfaced car park to accommodate an increasing number of cars.

Currently the station forecourt accommodates vehicles belonging to a car hire firm, cars parked short term, mainly to drop and collect passengers, buses, taxis and some long term parking. There is also a small long term car park on the south side of the railway.

To ease the serious congestion on the station forecourt the long term parking should be removed to the small car park on the south side of the railway and the larger site on the north side. This would allow the forecourt to accommodate just the hire company's vehicles, short term parking, the taxis and the buses. The car park to the north of the railway should be properly surfaced and lit. This would reduce the area available for residential development but with the steady improvement in both Chiltern and Cross Country rail services the increased car parking for rail passengers is absolutely necessary.

TRANSPORT AND CONSTRUCTION TRAFFIC

Southern Site : South of Warwick and Whitnash

Main access to this site should be from Europa Way, Gallows Hill and Harbury Lane. It might appear possible to gain access to the site from Saumur Way or Myton Crescent but these are both residential streets where danger would result from the passage of construction traffic or the parking of cars belonging to the building workers. As Myton Crescent is only 16ft wide lorries cannot pass without mounting the kerb making it absolutely unsuitable for use by construction traffic.

Transport mitigation

With the concentration of shops either in the town centres or at The Shires Retail Park the majority of journeys from the proposed new developments would be by car. This would heavily overload the existing road system. I note the comprehensive proposals for improving junctions and widening the major routes but this work is required before the traffic flows increase lest the works create congestion for the increasing traffic which will include construction traffic.

Traffic travelling north from the proposed new Southern Site would need to cross the Rivers Avon or Leam to continue its journey. Although it would be possible to widen major routes such as Banbury Road or Europa Way the river bridges limit further progress for the traffic.

Banbury Road traffic having crossed the Avon at Castle Bridge then has to negotiate Warwick town centre. With present traffic flows the level of pollution is already illegal; any increased traffic must exacerbate the situation.

As the streets are narrow, some stretches not even able to accommodate two-way traffic, flows through the town are slow causing serious congestion at junctions on the town's approaches.

Although the approaches to Ford's foundry roundabout has been widened to accommodate larger traffic flows, the roads running north, east and west from the roundabout could not be widened to accommodate this additional flow. If Europa Way were to become a dual carriageway the additional traffic would cause further congestion on each of the other three routes leaving the roundabout.

Public Transport

Although bus routes G1 and 68 are reasonably frequent route X18 which runs along Myton Road is only hourly; much too infrequent for a town service. If bus services are to provide for the journey to work then a frequent and quick service would be required to the major centres of employment such as Coventry and Stratford-upon-Avon. Currently there is no regular bus service running directly from Warwick to Coventry, they follow long routes via Leamington; and from Warwick to Stratford some are routed via Wellesbourne.

To ensure new residents are attracted to the bus routes serving their developments a good frequent bus service is required serving centres of employment or connecting with routes which do so. Such a service must start as soon as the residents move onto the development.

The rail services provided by Chiltern Railways have greatly improved in recent years making the Leamington to London journey almost acceptable for the daily journey to work. The service from Warwick and Leamington to Birmingham is certainly acceptable for the daily journey to work although the bus connections to the stations are not sufficiently good to avoid the use of cars to reach the stations.

Walking and Cycling

Although there are several good cycle routes in and around Warwick and Leamington too frequently they stop just when they are needed at major road junctions. However this problem has been tackled well at the Ford's foundry roundabout. Any new development would require good cycle routes leading through to the town centres, railway stations and other key locations. Similarly good footpaths and footways are required which provide attractive routes for pedestrians and do not abandon them at busy road junctions.

Education

Currently some pupils travel much too far to school. Although many journeys can use school buses there appears to be an ever growing number of pupils travelling to school by car. This adds traffic to the overloaded road network at peak times. By providing schools within or very close to residential areas such excess car trips may be avoided to benefits of both safety and health.

"Green infrastructure"

Currently the Southern Site is productive farmland with plenty of wild life forming a lung counteracting to a certain extent the polluted air generated in the town centres. Its loss would leave the towns completely encircled by dense suburbs thereby reducing the opportunities to enjoy the countryside without having to travel some distance.

Other requirements

Additional residential areas would require shops, community centres, doctors' surgeries, and other facilities such as sports grounds. Good drainage of both hard and permeable surfaces with ponds to avoid flash flooding would be necessary as would high quality water, gas, electricity and telephone connections.

Warwick Town Centre

The major traffic constraint is the centre of Warwick. Various plans to improve traffic flow have been put forward but have tended to introduce large one way systems which do not take into consideration the requirements of those living in the fine old town. It is apparent fresh thinking is required to achieve an acceptable solution to this difficult problem.

CONCLUSION


The very negative reaction to these proposals for a new draft local plan demonstrate that residents of Warwick District do not wish development to continue without proper consideration of the effect on the existing towns and their residents.

It is not right that because developers have money behind them they should be able to bully the planning authority into allowing development despite its negative effect on the towns and their inhabitants. It is particularly galling that if refused planning permission developers appeal and a decision is made at a remote location to satisfy national criteria rather than local concerns. If the planning authority were to lose the appeal they would be obliged to pay costs and therefore they do not appeal and the developer gets his own way. No wonder the planning system has fallen into disrepute!

The emphasis on building south of Warwick and Leamington is because the area north of the towns was declared Green Belt to avoid the over development of Birmingham and Coventry which would create an unbearably huge conurbation. This was a good idea; similarly the local planning authority has a responsibility to ensure that Warwick District is not over-developed thereby degrading the existing urban fabric, harming the environment surrounding the towns and creating grid-locked town centres.

It must not be forgotten that the planning department, in common with the district council as a whole, receives funding through the council tax levied on local residents and their interests in the planning process must be paramount.

Yours faithfully,



P R Davison