



23<sup>rd</sup> July 2012

Dear Sir or Madam

**Response to Warwick District Council's New Local Plan Preferred Options consultation document (The Local Plan) published in May 2012**

I am writing to express my concerns and state my objections to the Local Plan recently published for consultation, which are set out below.

**1 Growth assumptions**

I am CEO of a medium sized manufacturing, AIM listed company and I have recently stepped down from chairing the West Midlands CBI. From my experience in these two roles I fully accept that the country and Warwick District need to both have a plan for growth and then plan the growth. The population is increasing, there are already housing shortages particularly in the affordable categories, the structure of our society is changing and driving different housing needs and everyone needs to be focused on economic growth and job creation.

Whilst accepting these growth needs, I do challenge the specific assumptions that are driving the quantum of housing development in The Local Plan. Firstly, the medium term future will be very different economically from the recent past. The Prime minister has talked of 'decades of tough spending choices', economists agree that the growth rates in the next 10 to 20 years in the UK will be low against historic trends and levels of government, business and personal debt have further to fall which in turn will depress disposable incomes and living standards. I do not believe therefore that the housing growth assumptions in the plan are credible and run the risk that the more modest housing development the area needs will not be given the urgent attention required. If the national growth plan assumes similar growth needs this would see a national housing growth in the period of your plan of over 5 million new homes or nearly 300,000 new homes per year. Housing starts and completions have been dramatically reduced since the credit crunch in 2008 but even in the 'boom' years of the 1990s and early 2000s housing starts were typically 180,000 per year. On this basis the growth planned is, frankly, ridiculous and will not happen.

The second point about growth is the need for new housing to follow job creation and I would question the ability of the Warwick District to generate sufficient new jobs to support such large scale housing development. Warwick District is not defined as a development area by UK or European authorities and will not be competitive with other nearby economic areas such as North Warwickshire, parts of Coventry, M42 corridor and East Birmingham. The danger is that over development of housing in Warwick District will encourage more commuting to those areas of faster economic growth thereby adding to the need for further road and public transport investment and expenditure and increasing carbon emissions.

5788

The final point on growth is that whatever the correct assumption is, the new housing in Warwick District should be built adjacent to the most likely areas of job creation. In particular the planned housing developments in North Leamington/Blackdown make no sense as there is limited scope for business growth in North Leamington, the majority of businesses in Leamington and the infrastructure to support them are in the South of the town. Again there is a risk that the proposal increases commuting.

### **Green Belt**

The Warwick District is already heavily developed, albeit sensitively and with a disproportionate array of heritage assets. The remaining green belt is small but vitally important to the character, amenity and biological diversity of the area. The mixed semi urban and rural nature of the District is unique in the Midlands and provides genuine and easier access to 'real' countryside for a higher number of urban dwellers than most other places in the UK. In much of the rest of the UK the countryside is either further away from urban populations or more difficult to access. Quite apart from the preciousness of the green belt to local people and the wildlife that thrives on it, the rural character of the area is also a vital ingredient in the appeal of our many tourist attractions. Tourism is already a wealth creator for the region and has potential to be one of our key growth industries.

The options laid out, particularly in North Leamington and South Kenilworth will increase the coalescence of these two distinctly different towns and the overall plan further increases the risk of the District becoming one sprawling mass of modern, high density development that destroys the essential character of the three historic towns.

### **Infrastructure**

The overall infrastructure development defined in The Local Plan is unaffordable in today's economic reality. Neither Central Government nor developers have the financial resources to finance such schemes. If the infrastructure outlined is essential to The Local Plan, then the plan is not feasible. However, as I don't believe the housing development is credible it may be that a more realistic set of assumptions for housing growth may reduce the infrastructure investment and make another plan feasible.

### **A452 Improvements**

The house we live in is on Hill Wootton Road and less than 100 meters from the A452. The proposal to dual carriageway this road is unacceptable for the following reasons

- In the twelve years we have lived in the Millhouse we have used the A452 every day and at many different times of the day. The road is subject to slight delays during rush hours but the traffic density does not justify such a large scale upgrade.
- The road would benefit from some minor improvements to improve flow, such as lay-bys for bus stops, a foot and cycle bridge at Coventry Road/Chesford Grange junction, improvements to footpaths and cycle ways etc.
- The A452 has Kenilworth town centre at one end of it and Leamington town centre at the other. Developing the A452 into a dual carriageway would merely deliver traffic more quickly to the bottle necks at each end of it and neither improves overall road capacity nor reduces congestion or travel times.

- Upgrading the A452 to a dual carriageway would increase traffic speeds and significantly increase noise levels for us and many other residents near to the road. The dual carriageway would cut us off from access to the other side of the road and make it difficult for residents to use bus services. Presumably Hill Wootton Road would become left turn only onto the A452, increasing travel times for many local residents into Leamington.

I thank you for taking the time to read my comments and objections and would be happy to answer any questions they raise or expand on the points if required.

Yours faithfully

John K Russell

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