

Dear Dave. (Stephen Hay)

You may be interested in my paper
I wrote to go around our local loop.

Obviously housing developments are divisive
and I wrote this in response to another proposal
which went round the loop and was delivered to
individual houses.

This is just the attachment I am sending
you. On my email, I defined the principles, based
on my own experiences in B.G.

I am returning some of the boxes containing
the Local Plan.

Best Wishes,



HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

I am writing about a number of subjects and I hope they come together to give a clear picture.

The Parish Council

The council has the responsibility for creating a Neighbourhood Plan but it needs to be in harmony with the District's Local Plan. If not, it will be rejected. Councillors have to take great care because they have legal obligations and they are subject to challenge. B.G. Councillors take their responsibilities very seriously and all councillors have been on and continue to attend courses. They are open to communication and consultation.

There has been criticism, sometimes veiled, about our conduct, which has been entirely inappropriate. In retrospect, it was unfortunate that Cala Homes did a presentation immediately after a decision had been reached by the District that the Nursery was the preferred site. For the record, Cala Homes approached the Clerk more than a year ago to give a presentation. The fact that it did take place when it did was purely by chance. Once that presentation had been made, the Council was determined that other presentations would take place and two of these were made at our last meeting.

Burton Green

It has been claimed that B.G. has been treated unfairly in comparison with other villages such as Cubbington. In reality, B.G. has been unduly fortunate to avoid any housing developments in its recent past. Since I came to B.G. in 1975, one of 4 new houses, there have scarcely been any new houses apart from the handful built at the top of Red Lane. The nature of B.G. has hardly changed since post 2nd World War, when a number of temporary dwellings were turned into houses. We have retained our rural character and maintained our separation from Coventry.

Poor Cubbington has had no such luck. There was considerable pre-war building which tended to join up with Leamington and this area is now known as New Cubbington. Just over 20 years ago, a new development of 50 houses was built and now it is intended to build 65 new homes on a new development, perhaps unfortunately on allotments. As a historian, I am extremely suspicious of statistics and percentages.

Cala Homes

Cala Homes have been in existence since 1875 and in recent years have won national awards for the quality of their developments. Last week, we travelled to Peabworth where Cala is building a small development. You could not fail to be impressed by its quality and appearance. It was 33% Affordable and what was striking was the way it avoided a uniformity of style. I would have no qualms whatsoever living in a similar development even if there were 75 homes. I have no doubt that a suitable allocation of parking could be achieved despite the pressure of governments to discard the car and use public transport.

National and Local Pressures

All governments are committed to building more houses with an emphasis on affordable/social houses. The Coalition Government has moved the goalposts in favour of developers who can now

build houses in parts of the Green Belt by appealing to the national interest. Just look at the recent example of a Shropshire water meadow or larger developments in St Albans. The inspectors supported these developments despite the opposition of local communities and Planning Authorities. What is critical is that the Parish and the District Council remain in control of the process. Both in the 2012 Village Hall survey and in the recent Parish Plan survey, many respondents argued that we didn't need to build any houses. Quite frankly, such a course of action in the present political climate would be disastrous and we would be at the mercy of developers.

We are also vulnerable to local pressures. At this moment, the Inspector at Coventry has questioned Coventry's Housing Plan and asked for another 23,000 homes to be built. This sounds worse than it is and it may be that they can accommodate this number within their boundaries as was intended in the previous Spatial Strategy Plan under the Labour Government. **However never forget that B.G. has been and still is (according to my informed source) a target for Coventry.** Our powerful neighbour tried to take us over in the late 1950s only to be rejected in 1961. Just imagine what the Crackley Gap would have looked like with hundreds and hundreds of houses there. Five years ago when I was a councillor at Stoneleigh, Coventry attempted to extend its boundaries into Warwickshire. A number of options were drawn up including land at Westwood Heath but eventually the Kings Hill site was chosen in Stoneleigh, near Finham. For good measure, the farmer at Hurst Farm offered his land for development.

Similar proposals are certain to resurface in the coming years and we need to have a strong case against them. This is not our only concern. Though the Kenilworth Town Councillors support the Crackley Gap and the open spaces in Red Lane, they are coming under pressure from Warwick and Leamington. These areas are under pressure to bear the brunt of housing development as they are not protected by Green Belt. Understandably they want the Green Belt to be relaxed. This debate is ongoing.

Changes to Green Belt.

To make a difficult situation even worse, the Coalition Government is tightening its rules on Green Belt and pressure is being applied on Planning Authorities. In the Parish Plan, residents were asked where housing developments should take place. A number thought it was a good idea to fill the spaces in Red Lane and a few in Westwood Heath thus continuing the ribbon development. A number also thought it was a good idea to build houses in Hodgetts Lane in the open spaces, while a few suggested Hob Lane. The only problem of course was that this land was in Berkswell. However filling in the open spaces would result in a spectacular own goal. In the recent National Planning Framework, (p20-86) it stated that *"If it is necessary to prevent development in a village because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt."* In other words, get rid of our open spaces and then we could lose our Green Belt status.

Spread the Development Around.

In some ways, it may be comforting to believe that we can meet our targets with 2 or 3 houses in different places. Indeed I have seen it argued that 2 or 3 houses could be built on each of the 16 sites identified in the Local Plan. Now just imagine that we decide to put 3 houses behind the Tom and 3 behind Hodgetts Lane. You construct a road and then build 3 houses. Who on earth would accept these proposals and where would you put your social housing? If a developer built just 3 houses he would soon ask permission to extend his development. We would have a Trojan horse which would transform B.G. forever. Also how can it be easier to integrate newcomers into a village when they are dispersed over a wide area? Surely this would be easier if they lived close together near to the school and the village hall.

The Way Forward

From the criteria I have selected, I would be left with 3 sites to choose 2 housing developments, the Nursery, Hodgetts Lane and the Peeping Tom. All the other options would either threaten our openness or the Crackley Gap. So I would then look at the other principles and see which site fulfils them best. For the record, these are the criteria remaining.

- 1) The views of existing residents are not limited.
- 2) The school is secured.
- 3) The community spirit is maintained
- 4) The creation of a focal point and the enhancement of the Peeping Tom.

The Nursery

The nursery comes out top and it is no surprise that the consultant Stephen Hay made this the preferred site. It is perhaps the only site which could absorb a housing development with minimal impact.

It fulfils all my criteria. Because the tall hedge remains in place, the views of the residents remain constant in Red Lane. Indeed if there was no hedge, the public would have complained because it looks like a brown field site and in effect a public eyesore. (Criteria 1)

It obviously helps to strengthen the school. Not only does it have a playing field but it gives the school the option of building another classroom on land they already own while the village hall provides parking space and a possible valuable teaching resource. (Criteria 2)

Hopefully there will be an influx of young parents and it is likely that they and other residents will be absorbed more quickly into the mainstream of community life due to their proximity to the school and the village hall. (Criteria 3)

Finally the development could become a focal point with the school, the village hall and a park.(4)

Hodgetts Lane.

It could be argued that a development here could assist the school since it is likely that young parents will be attracted to the site but where it completely fails is in relation to Criteria 1, which for me was the most important principle. It is absolutely clear from the comments I have received from affected residents that their views from their back gardens will be diminished along with their sense of well being.

The Peeping Tom

On the surface, it would seem that this proposal would be at odds with Criteria 1 but having walked the site, I have found that existing B.G. residents would be relatively unaffected. There is a field separating the gardens and trees and hedges too, so Criteria 1 is not undermined.

It is also probable that the Peeping Tom could be enhanced by this proposal.

Finally from a community point of view, residents will be helped by their closeness to bus routes and the station.

I recognise that my criteria are restrictive in so far as they do not cover such subjects as housing politics or traffic. It is not impossible in future years that housing development at Hodgetts Lane and behind the Peeping Tom could encourage our neighbours to build houses in the same areas. Solihull could be attracted to developing a site in Hodgetts Lane while Coventry could look favourably at a site down Cromwell Lane. Also there are questions to be resolved about traffic flows from the Nursery site but these are outside my remit.

Benefits From Developers and Governments.

When developers build houses, they have to provide funds for the Authorities. Previously it was under Section 106, but this is now being replaced by C.I.L. (Community Infrastructure Levy) The process has not been finalised but when new houses are built, pressure is put on say schools and roads .Consequently developers have to make payments. It seems that Section 106 was more onerous than the Coalition wanted as, if developers had to pay out too much money, they would be discouraged from developing their sites. However the developers will still have to pay a levy which B.G. could spend on such items as the village hall.

There is an additional scheme, a New Homes Bonus, where Planning Authorities (District/County) are given money so as to encourage them to meet their targets and again B.G. would expect some of that money would go to improve our amenities.

In Conclusion, my proposal to build on two sites could enable us to resist any threat from Coventry to extend its boundaries into Burton Green and at the same time we would receive funds to invest in our community from two property developers. We could argue that B.G. has suffered greatly from HS2 yet we have allowed housing development to exceed our target. This strategy could earn us a breathing space and hopefully the parish council could put this subject to bed. However we must recognise that the District cannot undertake binding commitments and elections can change everything but we do have outstanding councillors ready to defend our interests.