**Agenda Item 104 i – PLANNING APPLICATION 23/37587/OUT**

**PROPOSED 36 AFFORDABLE DWELLINGS, OLDCROFT ROAD, WALTON ON THE HILL**

**Background Notes**

The Parish Council has previously objected to two earlier versions of this application. The Developers have amended the description of the application to outline only including access, deleted the four self-build units and changed the housing type to 36 all affordable units. All other details formerly included (landscaping, off-site highway improvements) have now been removed for the submission. The Travel Plan has been amended to suggest there is a strong opportunity for cycling as a means of access to the site; to offer each new household a one-off green travel voucher for £250 on occupation; £20K towards two new bus shelters; and contributions of £50K towards improving the path across the school field to Victoria Way and other sums for carriageway widening in Oldcroft Road.

The fundamental concerns remain. Namely that the site is not allocated for housing development and is thus contrary to planning policy: that there is no demand locally for affordable housing; that the proximity of the site to Stafford town does not qualify it as a “rural exception” (to get round the planning policy objection); that it will create a danger to local highway users and is intrusive in the local environment and setting of Cannock Chase National Landscape.

**It is recommended that the Parish Council maintain its objection to the proposal.**

The following text is the basis of a suggested letter to Stafford Borough Council. It supplements the Council’s two previous letters of objection.

1. The application site lies outside the residential development boundary for Stafford. The principle of development here is contrary to SBC local plan policy.
2. Because of its close proximity to the built-up areas of Stafford and Walton on the Hill the site cannot reasonably be designated a “rural exception” to qualify for development with affordable housing in accordance with approved local plan policies. There is understood to be adequate provision of allocated housing land within Stafford Borough. Any requirement for affordable housing provision can be delivered within an approved Residential Development Boundary (RDB) with no need to breach planning policy.
3. The Parish Council whose members have all lived within the civil or ecclesiastical parish for many years are unaware of any demand now or in the recent past for affordable housing in Berkswich. Neither Touch Developments in their updated Planning Statement (undated but submitted in June 2024) nor Tetlow King in the Updated Affordable Housing Statement (June 2024) have submitted any evidence to the substantiate this claim and are seriously misplaced in asserting at paras 4.5, 4.7 and 4.8 of the PS that there is an unmet local need or at TK para 3.56 that *substantial weight* should be given to approving this application to address (inter alia) need in Berkswich Parish.
4. The site is not an appropriate or sustainable location for housing development. It is not within comfortable walking distance of most local facilities (i.e. shops and medical facilities) implying residents will rely on private cars for access.
5. The site does not enjoy good, close or convenient access to public transport with pedestrian routes being either unreasonably convoluted or unsafe and along narrow, trafficked roads. As the bus timetable extracts in the Rappor Transport Statement (TS) and Residential Travel Plan (RTP, both dated May 2024) demonstrate public transport provision is limited with no evening or Sunday services. The offers (also referred to in the TS) at para 3.28 of the RTP to pay £20,000 towards the costs of two new bus shelters and at para 5.5 of a one-off £250 Green Travel Voucher to every new dwelling on first occupation are laughable. The former is unlikely to influence personal travel behaviour where service provision is so limited: the latter is the equivalent of roughly 60 return bus fares only into Stafford.
6. The site is not served by or close to any dedicated vehicle free cycle routes so it is implausible to accept the RTP’s arguments that cycling could play a major role in accessing the site.
7. Oldcroft Road, as noted in the Parish Council’s previous letters of objection, is a busy highway which narrows in the vicinity of the proposed development. Additional traffic from the development would add to the existing danger to road users here. The developer’s Automatic Traffic Count taken between 9-15 February 2024 from which the traffic figures quoted at paragraph 4.8 and appendix F in the Transport Statement are derived was, contrary to the statement at para 4.8, undertaken in half term week 12-16 February. No reliance can therefore be placed on the Rappor conclusions stemming from this analysis namely that with localised carriageway improvements there will be no highway safety implications from the proposed development.
8. It is unclear in the absence of detailed survey if the suggested carriageway realignment (RTS para 6.20 – 6.26 and appendix M) could be implemented without encroachment on to third party land but, regardless, the proposed works would urbanise this semi-rural road and cause harm to local visual amenity. The developer’s offer of to contribute towards the cost of any highway and footpath improvements seems disproportionately small relative to the probable costs of implementing these works and to any uplift in value of the application site if planning permission were to be granted.
9. The proposed formation of a new access to the site and related “trimming” back of the existing hedge to create a visibility splay (Rappor TS appendix K) will, as commented in previous letters of objection, result in the loss of substantial length of hedgerow to the detriment of local visual amenities.
10. The additional users arising from the development would put increased pressure on already stretched local medical and educational facilities for which the applicants have still not advanced any realistic remedy.
11. The Parish Council’s previously stated concerns about the potential adverse impact development of this site would have on local public footpaths and the setting of Cannock Chase National Landscape remain unchanged.