

**NORTH WARWICKSHIRE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION**  
**POSITION STATEMENT OF COUNCILLOR JACKY CHAMBERS [**  
**DORDON WARD ]**

**MATTER 9**

**SUITABILITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND DELIVERABILITY OF THE PROPOSED SITE [H7]**

Ref 9.4 , 9.8 and 9.19  
Polesworth with Dordon  
Allocation H7, land to the east of Polesworth and Dordon

**1.1 Introduction**

*“Allocations must be sufficient, suitable and deliverable over an appropriate timescale to meet Local Plan requirements, with an appropriate degree of flexibility to respond to change.”*

The issues of infrastructure and investment needed for improvements to the A5 and local road / travel network in relation to H7, H8 and H2 sites were partially explored at the Inspectors hearings on Matters 7 and 8.

However, at a recent presentation by developers of H7 to Planning Board Members [Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March] it was clear that they do not intend to contribute a significant amount to the road infrastructure needed for the H7 site , namely: -

- the canal bridges along the B5000, road junctions and roundabouts on the A5

Furthermore the “ relief “ road through the site from Byford Drive in Polesworth down to A5 and its links to the B5000 will only be completed towards the end of the development

- so in the interim 5 years there would be major congestion along Long Street, [which essentially operates now as a one way system] and at the Dordon roundabout

And as yet there is no confirmed source of funding [£57.5 million] for third phase of road improvements needed for the development of this site – namely the duelling of the A5 between Grendon and Dordon roundabout and the apparent requirement [as stated by the County Council /Highways Authority at the hearing on Matter 8 ] for these improvements to be delivered and functioning by 2028

These uncertainties about the scale, timing and sources of investment for essential infrastructure, together with the: -

- additional construction costs of building on land classified as high risk due to previous undermining for coal and other minerals [see 1.2]
- requirement for a new two form entry primary form entry school
- need for financial contributions for a secondary school
- need to create a network of green multi-functional footpaths, cycle ways and wildlife corridors, [see 1.3]
- requirement for additional retail and health facilities
- urgent need [under LP9] to provide 40% affordable housing and sheltered

- housing
- need to protect the ancient woodland and provide at least a [100 metre [see 1.4] buffer zone around the ancient woodland.

mean that

- this site is very unlikely to be economically viable
- much of the above infrastructure will never be funded
- the existing communities of Dordon and Polesworth will see a marked deterioration in their quality of life , ability to commute to work , and worsening access to basic services .

Developers have stated that they only expect to pay £ 3million and provide what they describe as a “light relief” road serving the housing estate.

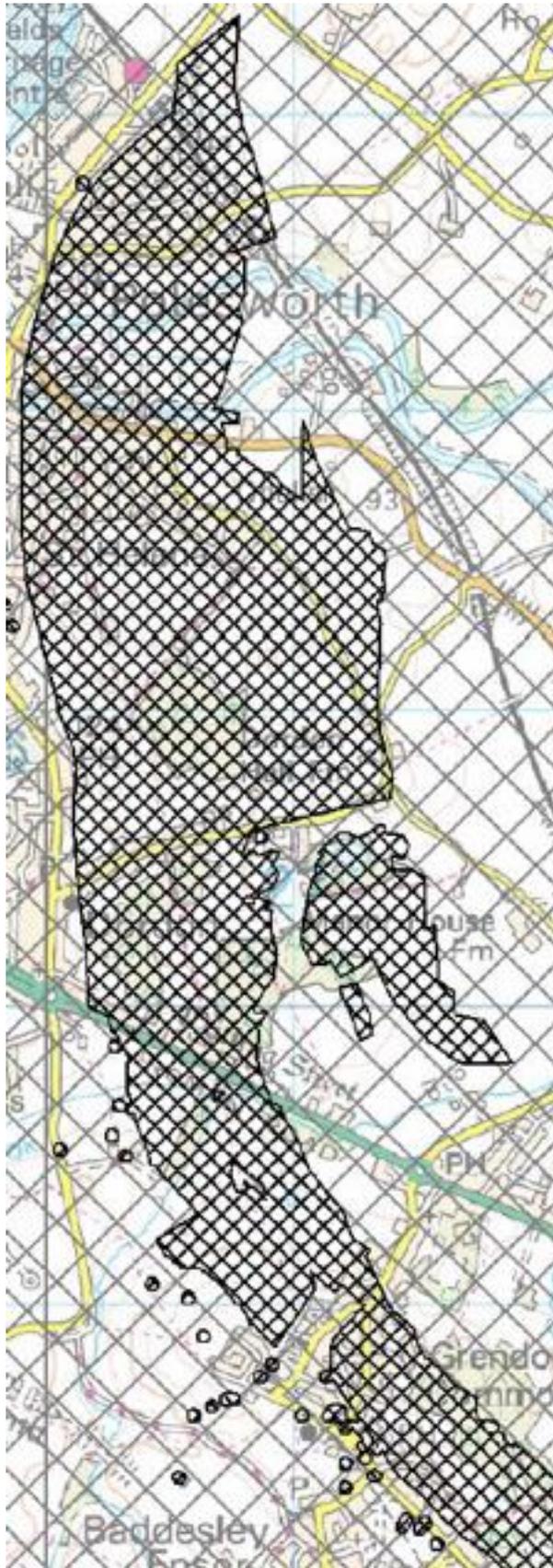
## **1.2 SUITABILITY OF THE SITE**

The site is the only attractive green space and open countryside for people living in Dordon – a settlement that has already been surrounded on the north side by development along Whitehouse Road into Polesworth and on the south side , is overlooked and dominated by the massive Birch Coppice logistics site and locked into the noise, traffic and pollution from the A5 [ from which on the south side there is no right of way access to the surrounding countryside ]

The west side of the village has only one field separating it from the M42 and associated noise. Further development on the east side would completely enclose the village on all sides and destroy any sense of living in a rural village with ready access to open countryside.

This site has varied topography, with many trees and hedgerows, a significant area of ancient woodland in the centre [the Hollies], attractive and historic views from behind the Church across the valley to Merevale Hall, many informal footpaths and several rights of way, as well as an attractive grade 2 listed building, Dordon Hall and Hoo Hill which is a significant feature in the landscape.

### **HIGH RISK LAND – viability and delivery**



Most of the land for this site [ see above map ] is described by the Coal Authority as being a “ high risk “ area for development – please see attached map, and refer to consultation response and technical files with environmental assessments [ref DLP 372 ]

submitted by mining expert and local resident Mr. Brian Clemons .

Whilst it could be argued that these issues are a matter of concern only for the developer and will be addressed at the planning application stage, nonetheless the uncertain history and poor records in relation to previous bell pit, pillar and stall, and open cast workings on this land, represent a high risk for development - including the “high “risk to contractors and future residents from build up of ground gases identified in the Taylor Wimpey Risk assessment [2012]

In summary the land instability, pollution and coal outcrops which lie under this land renders it – from a strategic point of view - a totally unsuitable site upon which to base 27% of the total housing development proposed in the local plan – and as seen at the St Helena and Chapel house sites likely to lead to considerable delay if not abandonment in terms of delivery and higher house prices.

### **1.3 SOCIAL INTEGRATION, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE MASTERPLAN**

With reference to 9.19 a) my concern is that both Polesworth and Dordon have distinct characters and communities with different cultures, histories and governance but since 2006, the planning system has wrongly chosen to treat these two villages as one “ market town “and wrongly placed them in Category 1 in the settlement hierarchy.

Dordon and Polesworth function as totally separate villages with their own Parish councils, village halls, shops, parks, libraries, schools, and social media. The only services they share are the GP surgery [though branch surgery in one ] and a small, over - crowded Leisure Centre.

Polesworth has only a limited range of local services, focused in the historic core around Polesworth Abbey. In particular there are no supermarkets, so residents need to travel elsewhere (Atherstone or Tamworth) for their main food shopping. There is a railway station, but this has only one train a day, so is valueless for most purposes. Bus services provide links to Nuneaton, Tamworth and Atherstone.

Polesworth is in effect a large village rather than a market town like Atherstone or Coleshill. Historic patterns of growth have led it to merge with the separate village of Dordon which has even fewer local facilities. Both Polesworth and Dordon have a distinct character and strong local communities

The proposed development on H7 will dramatically increase the population of these villages and so that in scale they become a “small town” but the scale of development, topography, and constraints of the land on which these houses will be developed will inevitably result in three very separate communities living alongside each other - without the scale of local facilities or transport infrastructure needed for a population of this size and with little prospect that these will be provided

I would submit that a considerable area on H7 land would need to be designated to create a “ town centre” with the range of facilities normally expected in a town which in population terms would be even bigger than Atherstone as well as common public spaces and infrastructure connecting old and newly built settlements. I submit it will not

be possible to develop and deliver a Masterplan which “ *ensures physical and social integration to the benefit of the existing settlement by securing mixed and sustainable development* “ as recommended Inspectors Report 2006 by relying on developer contributions, Section 106 or CIL agreements

#### **1.4 SUSTAINABILITY**

The site’s proximity to employment on the Birch Coppice site does not mean it represents a sustainable development. The previous Inspectors report [2006] over ruled the wishes of the Council to maintain the separate identity and integrity of each village in their plan and erroneously, in my view, chose to describe the combined settlements as a “ market town “ and allocated an additional 400 houses on the Orchard site.[ now part of H7 ] on the grounds that Birch Coppice site could provide local employment . In fact the Birch Coppice site currently relies for much of its labour on workers recruited in large numbers from Eastern Europe.

This site will not provide homes for local people who work in Birch Coppice. Most of the people who could afford to buy the 60 – 80% of private houses [circa £ 185 – 230 K] built on this site will not work in the low skill, poorly paid warehousing and distribution jobs available at the Birch Coppice site.

The additional houses proposed for this much larger development [which is 6 X the size of the site proposed in 2006 ] are intended to meet housing needs and employment opportunities arising in Birmingham, Coventry and Tamworth . There are no direct links by public transport. These homes will generate a significant increase in commuter car journeys.

#### **1.5 IMPACT ON LANDSCAPE, HERITAGE AND WILDLIFE**

With reference to 9.19 [ f ] the site is attractive in landscape terms – currently built development runs along the Dordon ridge and is then enclosed in the Anker Valley in Polesworth . The proposal will result in built development flowing down the ridge from Dordon and extending out into open countryside. The eastern parts of the site are exposed and visible from some distance, the eastern boundary is weak so that subsequent pressure for even more expansion is likely. The setting of Dordon Hall will be compromised and the impact on the landscape will be significant.

The site contains two Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation, one of which is an area of ancient woodland. The proposal to have a 50 metre bout is not clear what measures will be taken to protect these. The woodland will be surrounded by the housing development, and it is hard to see how its current value could be maintained. There is therefore likely to be an adverse impact on the biodiversity of the area.

#### **1.6 ANCIENT WOODLAND**

Governments Standing Advice on ecology instructs LPAs to use the Assessment Guide<sup>13</sup>, published by Natural England and the Forestry Commission. The first question planning authorities are asked to consider is:

*“Is the site of the ancient woodland the only possible place for this proposal? Does it have to be on the ancient woodland site (i.e. is it location dependent) or can it go anywhere else?”*

In my view, proper consideration has not been given to answering this question. The fact that Table 5.3 of the 2017 Sustainability Assessment showed there are significant sustainability issues with this site, that it performed negatively against 5 of the 20 sustainability objectives and only one of the other 23 assessed sites had more negative scores illustrates this point

Finally it is clear, given the potential disturbance as a result of major construction on this “high risk” land, that this development will have a major adverse impact on the ancient woodland and all the wildlife which it supports.

The proposed buffer of 50 metres is not enough

Account should be taken of the following guidance

*CIEEM. (2016). Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland.*

namely that *“A larger buffer may be required for particularly significant engineering operations, or for after-uses that generate significant disturbance.”*

If development of this site goes ahead, then the local plan should require a 100-meter buffer between ancient woodland and built development [see Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015]