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Dear Mr Ward

Proposed development at Old Milverton

The Local Plan

It may have been politically expedient for District Councillors then in office, to decide that the pain of development sites should be shared throughout Warwickshire when debated in 2012 but in my opinion it certainly was not a decision based on sustainable and realistic planning policy, based on national guidelines. They failed to take into account that the north of the county is close to West Midlands Conurbation and the green belt is there to maintain separation and identity, whereas open land lies to the south of Warwickshire, without the complication of merging major conurbations.

They failed to acknowledge that money had been allocated and spent on road and rail infrastructure in south Warwickshire in preparation for further commercial and associated relevant domestic development.

This led to unnecessary planning issues when green belt areas in the north were included in the original 2012 Local Plan; whilst appropriate sites in the south were excluded. Old Milverton and Blackdown Green Belt sites were included but after the consultation period, they were removed from the plan; there being no exceptional circumstances to justify inclusion.

The 2016 Revised Local Plan was developed and Old Milverton Green Belt was included to provide housing for Coventry. It is the general opinion that Exceptional Circumstances do not exist and **do not justify** the use of Old Milverton Green Belt land to provide development land for Leamington Spa, rendering its inclusion to provide for Coventry housing absurd.

It was disconcerting to witness District Councillors from the largest political party voting in favour of the Revised Plan in the absence of the existence of exceptional circumstances provided for all the green belt areas included in the plan. They were surely in no position to vote in favour of the revised plan and should have abstained or voted against it.

Stagecoach and Taylor Wimpy

On viewing the Consultation Summaries, I discovered the submissions from both Stagecoach and Taylor-Wimpy. I was surprised to learn that they had been in consultation with the Local Authority regarding their plans for the whole of the development area and the safeguarded land which Taylor Wimpy wish to develop as soon as possible. A Park & Ride was to be included and a colour coded map was drawn up and presented. I had the impression that plans for this area had already been made by parties with a commercial interest, and that public opinion was deemed irrelevant.

Park&Ride

A Park&Ride close to the A46 might be useful but any site along the A 452 Kenilworth Road is unlikely to attract many customers. The businesses in this area have ample free parking (as shown below). The site which appears to have been selected for a Park&Ride is situated next to the tightest section of the A 452. Many people from the surrounding area walk into town and according to conversation, they are unlikely to find the facility beneficial, even on a rainy day.

I was informed, but find it difficult to believe, that the Park&Ride might be approached from Old Milverton Lane on a new road passing behind, sandwiching, and floodlighting houses along the A452; before exiting onto the A452 which will be converted into a dual carriageway for which there cannot be adequate space. I expect this ill-conceived plan which has every chance of being a white elephant, will be financed by public money.

At a time when householders are requested not to apply tarmac to their drives, the Local Authority would be tarmac a new dual carriageway, extended Old Milverton Lane, a length of new road, and a large carpark over land with poor drainage and an abundance of well established wildlife.

It would be totally irresponsible to add to the excess of tarmaced car parks which already exist, in this **immediate vicinity**. They are:- 2 to 3 large car parks at the Nuffield Hospital, one at Priors House Nursing Home, a huge expansive car park at Woodland Grange Conference Centre, a very large one at Jephson House and three in Cranford House complex.

Stagecoach buses are used by students living in Leamington to go to Warwick University in the morning and return in the evening. Small numbers of passengers appear to travel on the buses throughout the remainder of the day which cannot justify buses running as frequently as they do, adding to the fumes and congestion irrespective of how many passengers they carry. More bus stop lay-bys would help the flow of traffic.

There is no evidence of survey work relating to people's journeys, to establish the need for a Park&Ride.

A452 - Kenilworth Road

About 20 years ago, the Local Authority drew up detailed plans to build a dual carriageway, from Chesford Bridge to the junction with Northumberland Road, plus a cycle path and improved roundabout. Funds were made available for the construction. It went to public consultation and the plan was rejected. It was generally perceived that space available was insufficient for the project which would only take vehicles more quickly from one end of the dual carriageway, leading to congestion at its termination and exposing pedestrians and cyclists to greater danger of exposure to inhaling diesel particulate containing fumes.

Since then, effective improvements have been made in the form of :- some lay-bys for buses, controlled entrance to the sports fields, a one way road, an extra roundabout plus a reduced speed limit.

Proposed improvements included in the Revised Local Plan include traffic lights on roundabouts and possibly a dual carriageway with a second bridge next to the existing Grade 2 listed, Chesford Bridge. The previous dual carriageway problems remain relevant and may be worsened. Trees and wildlife habitat will be unnecessarily removed, destroying the attractive rural northern entrance to Leamington Spa.

An improvement in the functioning of the major roads linking the town may help by directing vehicles away from the A452 Kenilworth Road which is fed by minor roads until it meets the A46.

Old Milverton and Blackdown Parishes

Old Milverton parish and the adjacent Blackdown parish form a small, joint Parish Council with 3 councillors representing Old Milverton and 2 representing Blackdown. The parishes which work well together, are situated on the remaining small area of green belt land between Leamington Spa and Kenilworth with the attractive rural A452 Kenilworth Road running between them. There is a fear that if this road is developed into a dual carriageway, it will create a physical barrier between the two parishes and their combined activities.

The information below is not immediately obvious to those who are not familiar with the parishes, what they have to offer, and why so many people from outside the parishes are frequent visitors, and their passion for the area and its heritage such, that even strangers, support the parish in many ways.

There is a common enjoyment of the open spaces, and for some, the solitude and spirituality it offers. For many others, it is the sporting activities available, whilst others delight in the history and range of Heritage sites; others the farming, fields of crops and tractors, and yet others, the views, the winding, flowing river, the trees, plants and birds and wild life. Then there is the opportunity to enjoy a drink and a meal at the Saxon Mill.

This small area has a wealth of Heritage sites and Listed Buildings. There are three very different old mills along this stretch of the River Avon. They are Blackdown Mill, the Saxon Mill and Rock Mill, all being easily accessible on walks and are Grade II Listed Buildings. Guy's Cliffe House private garden on the banks of the river, is a site of Special Scientific Interest. The house is a large derelict building set among trees, can be seen from many view points and never ceases to fascinate, particularly at night.

The popular, small stone church of St James the Great, is a Grade II Listed building, which attracts many visitors but its interesting old grave yard probably attracts more, who seek the graves of well known people, or those from a distance, who failed to benefit from their visit to the Spa Waters. The church, with its beautiful setting is popular for weddings and the guests frequently return.

Several houses in Old Milverton are Grade II Listed buildings. as is an historic barn which draws much attention. The houses include, Manor Farm House, Cottage Farm and Parkhouse Farm which is the only remaining one functioning as a farm house. Blackdown Manor, large stone house in Blackdown is similarly listed, as is Chesford Bridge.

Other items of interest which contribute to the local Heritage, include a large stone seat on the village green to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and in front of it, a stone-mounted plaque celebrating both the Gold and Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elisabeth II. On the roadside nearby is the one remaining old communal village pump. Piped water was not brought into the village until 1963. The village has its own sewage system. The site of the old village Pound for stray animals is nearby. The War Memorial is sited just inside the church Lych Gate.

The Avon Valley Viaduct was constructed in the 19th Century to carry the railway line over the extensive flood plane. The views from the two railway bridges together with the very straight rail line disappearing in the distance, always attracts attention.

The Village Hall with its car park and grassed area is small, which makes it a popular venue for activities such as family parties, meetings, the local WI, fencing, keep fit and fund raising events.

People enjoy viewing the range of different houses which are mostly Victorian and include large and small farm houses, farm workers' cottages, converted stables, barns, and outbuildings. The houses are set around a field, which grazes horses and sheep, adding interest particularly to children out walking. Part of this field is identified as one of the Mediaeval Settlement Sites in the area.

The original Smithy and Carpenters wooden sheds are still standing and yet another attractive village feature is its many stone capped Victorian red brick walls, some of which extend over the two railway bridges high above the railway line.

Old Milverton has two large allotments which are so popular, that they have waiting lists of people wishing to acquire one.

Blackdown has a range of accommodation including apartments in converted very large Edwardian houses. Most of Blackdown's family housing is 20th Century and is situated along Stoneleigh Road with some on Kenilworth Road. Other houses are individual and dispersed throughout the parish.

The two parishes are complimentary and create a unique rural unit, which has evolved over the years adapting from the changing needs of a small community of self-sufficient farmers and farm estate workers, to recreational provision for a larger community including those living in the local estates and towns of Leamington, Warwick and Kenilworth. The total area is considered by many to be their Country Park in contrast to Jephson Gardens, the Town Park in Leamington Spa.

The wide range of rural recreational activities is the outcome of a combination of factors :-

1. The location of the parishes - close proximity to 3 towns and several housing estates.
2. Quick and easy access from all directions by roads, footpaths and rights-of-way.
3. The River Avon with its 3 old water mills, bridges, fish and thriving aquatic wildlife.
4. The variety of interesting landscapes appropriate for differing sporting activities.
5. Distant views from elevated areas.
6. A sense of being deep in the country in lower areas.
7. Many intersecting walks on ancient rights-of-way and footpaths.
8. A vast array of trees, hedges, wild flowers birds and wild animals.
9. Fields of crops and contemporary farming practices.
10. A rich Heritage with Listed Buildings, a beautiful church, large Victorian, Regency and Edwardian houses and a Victorian farming estate village.

Old Milverton and Blackdown recreational facilities include :-

On the flat fields of Blackdown :- rugby, football, netball, and hockey pitches, and club houses, plus space for regular car boot sales.

Other recreational facilities :- two large allotments serving local residents, but from without the parish and a disc golf course.

Activities include :- bird watching, fishing, walking, running, cycling, archery, site seeing, horse riding, photography, dog walking and training.

Other important uses of the area include :- The areas are favoured by Guide Dogs for the Blind for dog training, School educational walks, Bee keeping, the largest/oldest annual Horticultural Show in the vicinity.

Old Milverton

The district around Old Milverton consisted of open countryside plus a golf course around the parish, until over the years, development of several housing estates extended up to the parish boundaries reducing the openness. Permitted development and new buildings claiming 'special circumstances' have eroded the openness of this green belt land already, despite the Parish Council's efforts to prevent it.

It is now expected that Thickthorne, one of Kenilworth's green belt areas situated adjacent to Old Milverton and Blackdown green belt, will be developed mostly for commercial use as shown in the Revised Local Plan, significantly reducing the total green belt space between Kenilworth and Leamington Spa.

Old Milverton was a country area within an estate of land owned by wealthy people, and where several settlements for workers are recorded locally. The last big land owner whose family estate still own much of the land today, used Guy's Cliffe House for the family home and developed Old Milverton Village into a Victorian Farming Village for his farm and estate workers to live, and carry out their trades to support his farms of which 9 were originally recorded locally.

Following the industrial revolution, modern farm practices and the financial benefits of land development has resulted in only one remaining functional, viable farm unit. This working farm, together with the excellent example of a Victorian Farming Village, set around a central field, is a huge attractive asset to all residents of Leamington Spa and Warwick who use it for recreational purposes. Although Old Milverton is referred to as a village, it is really only a hamlet.

Old Milverton and Blackdown's Neighbourhood Plan

After attending the guidance meetings, residents worked with enthusiasm to produce a realistic plan to suit the future needs of the parishes and surrounding areas. Information was sought, questionnaires completed, analysed and used to prepare policies. A comprehensive display was presented advertised and responses summarised for guidance in the completion stages.

The Neighbourhood Plan could be taken no further as rules dictate it had to follow the Local Plan, which under the circumstances looks as though it will be a long time after the initiation and help was given. We note that a few areas in Leamington Spa have been allowed to complete their Neighbourhood Plans despite the ruling.

We consulted with residents and businesses, learned that **nobody** wanted large development, and so one of the proposed policies was to make the best of existing building footprints, develop redundant barns and windfall sites to their full potential whether for domestic or commercial use.

In our Vision for the Parishes of Old Milverton and Blackbdown, we stated that we wish to preserve our own heritage and remain an appropriate setting for the nearby historical towns of Leamington Spa, Warwick and Kenilworth.

Also we stated that we wished to increase and enhance the facilities and amenity value of the area for all to enjoy.

Whilst we recognise the need for growth, we believe that it is essential to achieve this, whilst maintaining the openness of the green belt, and the separation of Old Milverton and Blackbdown from Leamington, Kenilworth and Warwick and preserve the character and heritage for future generations to enjoy.

Summary

I am aware that you have received many impassioned submissions and letters concerning the development of Green Belt land in Old Milverton. (More would have been submitted, had WDC's computer system not created disincentives and problems. Also, the response forms proved a daunting prospect and were counterproductive). These letters will have come from residents, neighbours and townspeople who value this open space so near to their homes. It offers them unrestricted access and enjoyment at **no cost to themselves or the Local Authority.**

This small, unique area, not only fulfils all the requirements of the Green Belt but it offers more than this, as shown above. It is an educational resource with one functional farm and a largely unspoiled Victorian Farming Village, heritage sites, wildlife, water plains, high land vantage views and is a valuable source of many and varied recreational activities throughout the year.

This area has suffered large developments locally from outside the parish and a creeping erosion within from permitted developments and 'special circumstance' buildings over which the Parish Council have had no control. This development will be the final straw which destroys the farm and inevitably any remaining parcels of land not on flood planes, will be developed. **The loss to Old Milverton and its extended community, will be far greater than Coventry could possibly gain.**

The Parish Council have worked hard over the years to preserve our parish and its association with Blackbdown. We hope you find planning law protects Old Milverton, as we believe it does, and allows you to remove this extensively used and valued area of Green Belt land from the Revised Plan, for the benefit of locals, visitors and future generations.

Yours sincerely
Ann Kelsey

Old Milverton Parish Council Vice Chairman
and Neighbourhood Plan Representative

31 August 2016