

Local Plan AK initial notes for addressing Inspector on Thursday 13 October 2016

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Ann Kelsey. I am Vice Chair of Old Milverton and Blackdown Parish Council and Representative of its Neighbourhood Plan.

INTRODUCTION

My references to the proposed development, are inclusive of both area H44 and the adjacent block of Safeguarded land. Taylor-Wimpy, the anticipated Developer, has made it clear in its submission that they would wish to see the two blocks of land released for development contemporaneously and without delay.

This statement provides information about Old Milverton, some of which is not found on Maps or within Official Statistics **but which has relevance**, when considering the **Green Belt value to us locally** and for the future of Old Milverton Parish.

Information is drawn from local knowledge and experience, together with research accumulated in the formation of the **Draft Parish Neighbourhood Plan** for Old Milverton and Blackdown which is compliant with the **National Planning Policy Framework** and significantly, the **Localism Act** which allows it to **embrace the wishes of the Parish** and the wider community in planning for the future of the area. Significantly, adoption of the **Neighbourhood Plan** must follow **Local Plan adoption**. Financial help and Training courses were available and attended at the time.

In 2012, Parish Councils and parishioners were encouraged to work together to develop their own Neighbourhood Plan, setting out **their** vision for how they believe the communities should grow and evolve; and detail development they believe appropriate to support and achieve that vision.

On learning that the **2012 Local Plan Preferred Option iteration**, included developing 150 hectares of land in the parishes, the Neighbourhood Plan was delayed. However, this proposed development was not included in the subsequent **2013 Revised Local Plan** as WDC's planners could find **no Exceptional Circumstances** to justify its inclusion for Warwickshire.

So with nothing to hinder progress, the **Draft Neighbourhood Plan was developed**, including **consultations** and an **Exhibition**, but we were instructed not to complete and submit it before the Local Plan was in place.

To **general bewilderment**, the 2016 Revised Local Plan includes **area H44**, in Old Milverton to provide **250 houses for Coventry**, plus 'Safeguarded' Development Land, leaving the Neighbourhood Plan in limbo until 2017 at the earliest. It may need totally reworking.

However, the benefit of having made progress with the Neighbourhood Plan is that the Parish Council is in **no doubt as to the wishes of the parishioners, businesses, neighbours and associates.**

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Following the assimilation of information suggestions and discussion, a mixed group of parishioners and Parish Councillors formulated the following **VISION STATEMENT** :-

The parishes of Old Milverton and Blackdown have a heritage in their own right, as well as providing appropriate settings for the nearby historical towns of Royal Leamington Spa, Warwick and Kenilworth. We want to preserve our own heritage and the setting for these historic towns.

We also support valuable facilities which are used by both local residents and the residents of the neighbouring towns. We want to increase and enhance these facilities and the amenity value of the area for all to enjoy.

We recognise the need for growth but believe it is essential to achieve this whilst maintaining the openness of the Green Belt and the separation of Old Milverton and Blackdown from Leamington, Kenilworth and Warwick.

We want to preserve the character and heritage of Old Milverton and Blackdown for future generations to enjoy.

**We want Old Milverton and Blackdown to continue to be a great place to
LIVE, WORK and VISIT.**

CONSULTATION SURVEY

A questionnaire, based on the Vision Statement was devised by the Residents and Parish Councillors, to establish what was valued about the local environment, how it could be improved and how and where evolution and growth should take place. Both households and businesses were consulted, results tabulated and analysed.

There was a high level of response. 63% of households and 50% of businesses replied. Results of those questions specifically designed to collect views on land use showed that:

Residents (82%) had a strong view that the parishes should not accommodate any further growth. However, this was not so strongly supported by businesses, 50% of which favoured some growth.

66% of residents and 33% of businesses want no further development. However, there was a very strong view (74% of residents and 83% of businesses) that development should comprise infill and extensions, and an overwhelming view (84% residents, 83% businesses) that there should be no increase in the size of the villages.

93% of residents believe that additional work places are unnecessary and although 67% of businesses welcome additional work places, only a third of businesses believe that land should be allocated for commercial development.

81% of residents, 50% of businesses want areas set aside for the development of ecosystems and wildlife corridors.

There was a virtually unanimous view (96% of residents and 83% of businesses) that the joint parishes should remain in the Green Belt.

The proposed 2016 Revised Local Plan, would remove about 50% of the Green Belt in Old Milverton which is contrary to the wishes of Local People.

The areas of land identified for development should not be **considered in isolation** from the remainder of Old Milverton and Blackdown Parishes because together they form part of a wedge of green belt land which provide for many community needs.

Not only does this land fulfil **all 5 reasons for being in the Green Belt**, all three constituent packages in the Green Belt Assessment have high scores (in the teens). They also fulfil other important **reasons for remaining in the Green Belt**.

In our view, **no Exceptional Circumstance** have been found to justify removing these new areas from the Green Belt for either Coventry or Warwickshire, particularly in the absence of a detailed Public Consultation.

THE PARISHES

Location - The parishes are situated to the north of Leamington where Warwickshire is close to the **West Midlands conurbation**, and for which reason its Green Belt is increasingly more important now, than when first established in 1940/50. It **fulfils all 5 reasons** for being in the Green Belt and for which in our view no **Exceptional Circumstances** to justify its removal have been found.

Old Milverton and Blackdown are complimentary neighbouring parishes to the north of Leamington. They form the northern gateway to the historic regency town of **Royal Leamington Spa** and the southern gateway to **Kenilworth**, famous for its castle with its Elizabethan connections. The medieval **Castle of Warwick** is only 3 miles away.

Blackdown parish comprises approximately **118 hectares, of which 81% is green space**, whereas the parish of Old Milverton comprises approximately **302 hectares of which 90% is green space**. Old Milverton has been occupied by various settlements and intensively farmed since Stone Age. Milverton is recorded in the **Doomsday Book as Milvertone**.

The River Avon establishes the Western and part Northern boundary of the parishes. It includes an **extensive Flood Plain** which cannot be farmed but provides **valuable Habitat for diverse wild Flora and Fauna**, is a **Reservoir for**; and feeds tributaries,

hedges and ditch Wildlife Corridors throughout the parishes, to include long established domestic gardens and rough areas of uncultivated land. **THE WILDLIFE & ENVIRONMENTAL WATERSHED**

Development in the Parishes

A multiplicity of Leamington's housing estates extend to the south boundaries of the Green Belt, whilst development in the parishes has been restricted to existing farms, outbuildings, stables, and farm worker's cottages. Also, large Victorian and Edwardian houses have been converted into Apartments, a Nursing home, a Conference Centre, a Hospital, Design Studios and Office accommodation. Recently, a new modern Care Home was granted planning consent, built and is fully operational .

OLD MILVERTON

Historically, vast parcels of land passed from one wealthy landowner to another. In the 19th Century, the **Heber-Percy family** occupied **Guy's Cliffe House** by the River Avon, and managed their estates of land including Old Milverton Parish.

Development in Old Milverton was substantially completed by 1880 and comprised a hamlet around the site of a medieval settlement, together with a few large houses, and 9 small mixed farms, with brick barns and outbuildings. A Village pound was provided for straying farm animals.

The Heber-Percy family were respected by their servants, farm and estate workers, whom by the standard of the day, were looked after well. Old Milverton, with its small village green and solid stone bench celebrating Queen Victoria's rein, became a **red brick Victorian farming village** containing small cottages for the workers, a smithy, a carpenter's shed and a water well with hand pump. (Piped running water was not connected to the village until 1963.) The Estate also rebuilt the (Saxon/Norman) Church of St. James and provided the small Village Hall, originally known as the Reading Room and used for a class room. The Saxon Mill became the local pub.

The village remains a prime example of a Victorian Farming Village, set around a field, (the site of an earlier medieval settlement), now with grazing shire horses and sheep. The

ever popular church, two farm houses and an ancient barn in the village are Grade 11 listed buildings. The barn displays an old sign threatening intruders with **man traps and spring-guns.**

Only one modern established farming business remains. The COMBINATION of this WORKING FARM with its wide range of crops and modern farming equipment working the fields, together with the VICTORIAN FARMING VILLAGE, is a significant educational and recreational ASSET for the population at large and particularly for schools.

**THESE ASSETS ARE ON THE DOORSTOP OF
LEAMINGTON, WARWICK AND KENILWORTH
AT NO COST TO THE PUBLIC PURSE**

The proposed development would render the Farming Business unviable and high grade farming land will have been squandered with catastrophic consequences for Old Milverton the farming family concerned. The established wildlife watershed and fertile ecosystem and associated wildlife across the whole area will be destroyed and the communities will be at a great **Environmental and Recreational Disadvantage.**

It would be the beginning of the end of the assets and facilities experienced and valued by so many residents of the villages, towns and indeed, tourist visitors, literally from all over the world, and at a time when increasing numbers of people have need of these facilities.

**OLD MILVERTON'S LOSS WOULD BE SO MUCH GREATER THAN
COVENTRY'S GAIN**

Further reasons for Old Milverton remaining in the Green Belt are :-

A high Green Belt Assessment value,.

Has much open space and an established wildlife watershed.

There is a rich heritage.

Hedges are present, assessed to be from pre-enclosure times.

Fulfils many varied uses by parishioners and those from without the Parish.

It is the wish of the local community to retain this **high value** Green Belt area.

Having taken the Neighbourhood Plan thus far, the Parish Council is in no doubt what local people want for the future of the area. We are also in no doubt about how our neighbours and many others from the towns feel about the proposed destruction of this vital Green Belt.

Some, are present here today, in support and others, some of whom we do not know, have spontaneously volunteered to speak on behalf of retaining the Green Belt.

We are the current '**stewards**' of this area. It is our duty to look after it, and so I would like to conclude by referring back to just one sentence in the Neighbourhood Plan **Vision Statement**

WE WANT TO PRESERVE THE CHARACTER AND HERITAGE OF OLD MILVERTON AND BACKDOWN FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS TO ENJOY.

Thank you

Ann Kelsey

Vice Chair of Old Milverton and Blackdown Parish Council

Neighbourhood Plan Representative