

23/00869/OUTM | Outline application for the proposed development of up to 50 no detached dwellings (100% affordable), new medical centre, public open space, and associated infrastructure | Rear Of College Farm Close Westbeech Road Pattingham

Representations of CPRE Staffordshire, the countryside charity.

We **object** to this proposal on the following grounds:

The site is within Green Belt

The National Policy Planning Framework is clear on proposed development within the Green Belt:

140. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period. Where a need for changes to Green Belt boundaries has been established through strategic policies, detailed amendments to those boundaries may be made through non-strategic policies, including neighbourhood plans.

South Staffordshire Council's current Statutory Development Plan (Local Plan) does not propose changes to include this site. The new Draft Local Plan (Regulation 19) does not propose the allocation of this site nor any change to exclude it from the Green Belt. (We recognise that the Regulation 19 document is 'on hold' at present).

NPPF (September 2023 up-date):

Proposals affecting the Green Belt

147. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

148. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

149. A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:
a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;



- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
- c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- e) limited infilling in villages;
- f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites);
- g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would: – not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or – not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

We do not consider that the proposals demonstrate ‘very special circumstances’.

We do not believe that the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

We do not consider that the proposal comprises limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan.

- 50 detached houses and garages cannot be considered to be ‘limited’.
- The proposed development, as indicated in the application, could not be considered as ‘affordable’ in terms of NPPF or SSDC policy, experience elsewhere, or simple common sense.
- No evidence is provided of local community needs.
- No breakdown is given on the proportions of housing for social housing or any other of the tenures included in the definition of ‘affordable housing’.
- No evidence is given of funding and support by providers of affordable housing.

South Staffordshire Local Plan

In South Staffordshire Council’s Statutory Development Plan the Core Strategy includes a policy relating to Affordable Housing:



Policy H3: Affordable Housing – Rural Exception Sites

As an exception to planning policies relating to the location of housing development in the Green Belt and Open Countryside, small rural exceptions sites for 100% affordable housing to meet the identified needs of local people will be supported where the following criteria are met:

- a) the site lies immediately adjacent to the existing village development boundary;
- b) a housing need has been identified in the parish, or in one or more of the adjacent parishes for the type and scale of development proposed;
- c) the proposed development is considered suitable by virtue of its size and scale in relation to an existing village and its services, and its proximity to public transport links and key infrastructure and services;
- d) the initial and subsequent occupancy is controlled through planning conditions and legal agreements as appropriate to ensure that the accommodation remains available in perpetuity to local people in need of affordable housing;
- e) the development is in accordance with design principles set out in the adopted Village Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (or subsequent revisions) or other local design documents, and respects the scale, character and local distinctiveness of its surroundings.

The Council will work with the private sector and Registered Social Landlords to achieve the delivery of affordable housing in South Staffordshire and ensure that affordable housing is provided in perpetuity.

For the purposes of this Policy, the definition of affordable housing is that contained in Annex 2 of the NPPF, which states that affordable housing includes rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.

Explanation

8.25 To enable affordable housing to be provided within other small rural communities to meet local needs, the NPPF allows small sites outside existing village boundaries to be used for affordable housing. These are sites which would not normally be released for housing but in the case of specified rural settlements, housing can be permitted as an exception to normal policies where there is a proven need within the community. Rural Exception Sites should only be used for affordable housing in perpetuity and the local need for affordable housing should be identified through the preparation of a robust Parish Needs Survey.



8.26 South Staffordshire Housing Association has commissioned a Rural Housing Enabler to work with Parish Councils to help identify local need and potentially deliver small rural affordable housing schemes in Parishes. The findings of local surveys accurately assess the level of need specific to a Parish. Where the need has been identified, Parish Councils then have the opportunity to help identify sites for rural affordable housing in their Parish in partnership with the Council, Housing Associations and Rural Housing Enabler.

As far as we can see from the application documents in relation to the application:

- This site cannot sensibly be considered 'small' and therefore would not be within the intentions of Policy H3.
- No local housing need survey appears to have been undertaken.
- No evidence is provided of the local, justified, need for the number and size of the houses proposed.
- No undertakings are given in relation ensuring affordability in perpetuity
- There is no reference to the proportions of social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing, or how they are to be provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market.
- There is no indication of support from reputable local housing associations or other Registered Housing Providers.
- No evidence has been provided of any attempt to understand or meet the genuine needs and resources of the people who would be eligible to occupy the houses.
- There is no indication of realistic prices and affordability to local people in need of housing.
- There is no evidence of discussions with parish councils or advice being sought from the relevant SSDC officers.
- No viability assessment appears to have been made.
- There is no explanation of the justification for 50 detached dwellings and garages (which from the plans seem to be far larger and less varied in size, cost, and density than any affordable housing that has been developed elsewhere in Green Belt on the edge of a village).

Medical centre

We consider the parts of the application relating to the housing and the proposed medical centre should be regarded as distinct; it should not be assumed that they are linked. (In fairness to the applicant, the detail in the application does not suggest that housing is intended to form enabling development for the doctors' surgery - the two are to be 'stand-alone' and separately funded). No assurance is given that the medical centre would be built if permission were granted to the application as submitted.

We do not consider that the claimed community benefit of the two elements overcome the presumption against development set out in the NPPF. In our

view the application does not comprise 'very special circumstances' to outweigh the harm to Green Belt.

Ecological impact

We also object to the application on ecological grounds. As the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Biological Impact Assessment note, the site consists of a range of habitats, including native woodland, native scrub, and native hedgerows, ruderal stands and grassland, the removal of which would lead to a net overall loss of biodiversity. The proposed development would result in the loss of mature trees, established habitats and the species and ecosystems they support. These cannot simply be replicated elsewhere.

As the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal states, the site has excellent bat foraging potential, as it is large, sheltered, covered by native vegetation and has pools of water. The woodland, trees and scrub on site provide suitable nesting habitats for woodland bird species.

Conclusion

We request that South Staffordshire Council **refuse** the application. In the event of an appeal, we will provide support to South Staffordshire Council, Pattingham and Patshull Parish Council, and local objectors, and will appear before the Inspector at any inquiry or hearing.

Other matters

1. CPRE is supportive of schemes for small affordable housing schemes that meet South Staffordshire Council's adopted policy. However, we do not consider that this application is in accordance with your Council's policy.
2. We realise from reading the representations already made that there are a number of other objections which show more detailed local and technical knowledge than CPRE can offer. Our representation should not be construed as implying that we disagree with the validity of the other representations.
3. We have a real concern that if planning permission for this development were permitted then, having established the principle of development, similar proposals would be made elsewhere in the district on the basis that this scheme established a precedent.
4. We also believe that, if consent were to be granted, the promoters might decide that the scheme was not viable for affordable housing and would instead promote a scheme for upmarket private housing using the same, or similar, plans as those included in this application. The argument would be that development of housing on the Green Belt site had previously been permitted and that market housing should be equally acceptable, with only a limited element of affordable housing.



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5. We believe that the inclusion of a medical centre should not favourably bias decision-making in relation to the housing proposal.

6. NPPF (September 2023 up-date):

The updated document does not change the presumptions in previous NPPFs that the application of 'tilted balance' is not applicable to sites in Green Belt (now in footnote 7).