

# **Bold Parish Council**

## **Introduction**

Bold Parish Council represents a population of some 3000 people on the southern border of the conurbation of St Helens. In common with the rest of the local area Bold parish has a strong history of coal mining.

The first coal mines were sunk in the area in the 16<sup>th</sup> century on a small scale but became a major industry in the late 17<sup>th</sup> early 18<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of the industrial revolution. The last coal mine in the area ceased operation in 1991. The industry left a scarred landscape of colliery buildings and waste tips

In the intervening years the area has seen remedial work and the development of forest parks linked by bridleways and footpaths. The local population are justly proud and protective of the environmental improvements we have seen in the area. We are grateful that previous local administrations have had the vision and foresight to radically improve a previously ravaged area.

In 2019, as a direct result of the publication of the Draft Local Plan and the failure of St Helens Council to inform the local community eight local people took the decision to stand as independent candidates in the Parish Council Elections. All those candidates standing on a platform of saving the Greenbelt were elected with a large majority, taking 91% of the overall vote. A clear mandate from the local population of their wish to retain the rural nature of the parish and its surrounds.

From studying minutes from previous Parish Council meetings and confirmation from previous Parish Councillors at Parish Council meetings, it is apparent that the Local Plan was never presented to the Parish Council or those who were not Ward Councillors informed about it.

The timing of the deadline for submission of representations, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2019 and the election date 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019, did not provide sufficient time for the newly elected Parish Council to submit a detailed representation. An emergency item was raised at the Parish Council meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2019.

In support of the local community the Parish Council are opposed to the development and concerned about the damage to the landscape and the environment and the impact it will have on the Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan.

## **Local Community and Businesses**

The Parish Council feel the allocations as set out in the Local Plan will have a devastating effect on the local community. It will more than double the current population and lead to issues around access to school places and health facilities. It will remove vast areas of green space,

highly valued and well used. A grave concern where there are some areas of high deprivation and ill health. It will prevent the implementation of the Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan. A plan adopted by St Helens Council in July 2017, and a plan designed to bring vast social, economic and health benefits to the local community.

The plans will lead to the closure of a long-established equestrian business and have a devastating impact on another. The businesses are a significant asset to the local community. Not only from an economic point of view and the plans for the expansion of this sector in the Area Action Plan, but also for the health and wellbeing benefits they bring. We should be encouraging and promoting local rural businesses not destroying them with short-sighted plans.

### **Bold Forest Area Action Plan**

The Parish council are concerned that this development runs counter to the Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan adopted by St Helens Council in July 2017. This plan sets out to protect our rural environment to stimulate the local economy, preserve local heritage sites, encourage leisure pursuits and tourism. The Area Action Plan received wide-spread community support and will bring significant benefits not only to the immediate community but also to the wider region. We believe the removal of significant amounts of Greenbelt land from the Forest Park Area would be in direct conflict with and to the detriment of the Forest Park, significantly reduce its appeal to visitors and potentially lead to its failure. This would reduce the possibility of developing a diverse range of leisure activities boosting the local economy and enhancing healthy lifestyles. This is all the more significant in an area of high deprivation. St Helens Council fail to explain how these plans will benefit the Local Community for the better.

### **Environment and Visual Impact**

The Parish Council are concerned that this proposal will be severely detrimental to the local environment and will have a major visual impact on the area and therefore the Area Action Plan. Recent experience in St Helens Borough would indicate little incentive for developers to replace environmental damage. The local planning authority have no power to enforce this once development has taken place.

It is not clear if the planning authority completed a comprehensive landscape and visual impact assessment. Our concern is the loss of the visual amenity for this local Forest Park.

We have further concerns regarding the effect of light pollution on the local area. In particular, the areas of 1EA and 1ES designated for employment land are expected to contain warehouses. In fact, 1EA has recently been the subject of a planning application, significantly bigger than the land set aside in the Local Plan at 75 Hectares. The presence of anthropogenic and artificial light even carefully controlled is known to alter natural conditions and is blamed for compromising health, disrupting ecosystems and spoiling aesthetic environments. As well as disruption to wildlife, recent studies have indicated links to breast cancer.

## **Greenbelt**

The allocations of 4HA, 5HA, 1EA and 1ES are entirely sited on Greenbelt contrary to the NPPF which attaches significant importance to the protection of Greenbelt Land.

Development of the site would compromise all Greenbelt criteria:

1. It would increase urban sprawl.
2. it would significantly erode separation between St Helens and Warrington.

(Bearing in mind Warrington are planning land allocation towards St Helens)

3. It would encroach into a large area of open countryside.
4. The site is close to a number of buildings of historic interest.
5. It would not assist in urban regeneration.

We do not believe that special circumstances exist to allow development on Green Belt.

## **Traffic**

With the plans for the Parish to accommodate 55% of the housing needs as set out in the Local Plan, The Parish Council seriously question the ability of the local road network to accommodate the significant increase in vehicles. The plans cover approximately 3,500 new homes, which at 2 cars each could potentially lead to over 7,000 more cars on the roads. Clock Face Rd in particular, linking 4HA and 5HA is an old established A Road linking the area via Bold Heath to Warrington and Widnes. It is already a very busy road but is very narrow in parts and lined by well maintained, occupied terraced housing with no off-road parking leaving no options for widening. There are entrance and exits to many local businesses, including a nursery and stables open on to this road as well as smaller roadways to existing housing. It is an established walking route for children travelling to and from school in Sutton and Sutton Manor. The Parish Council believe the safety of these children will be severely compromised with a significant increase in traffic.

Both our own and neighbouring parish councils have expressed grave concerns regarding increased traffic at and around Junction 8 of the M62, which already serves a vast number of commercial outlets and residential areas. Whilst this has been the subject of extensive improvements to deal with long standing traffic blockages at peak times the addition of developments at 1EA and 1ES, the adjoining Gemini retail park and further residential additions to an already well-developed site, give rise to grave concerns regarding its continued ability to deal with anticipated traffic loads.

Additionally, problems on the motorway network are a frequent occurrence in this locality since it is a convergence point for 3 major motorways (M6, M56 and M62) the surrounding roads and infrastructure are not capable of relieving any problems. Much of the remaining roads in the area have changed little in the last 100 years. Most roads are narrow and pass-through residential areas. The nearest village Burtonwood has imposed an HGV ban which is

regularly flaunted and residents regularly express concern at the number of vehicles now passing through the village. Major traffic calming and speed restrictions have been introduced in the village. We have had no evidence of any commitment from the developer to mitigate the impact on the local infrastructure.

### **Air Pollution**

Linked to the increasing traffic density, Warrington air quality close to 1EA and 1ES sites suffers nitrogen oxide levels which exceed National levels.

In 2017, 4.1% of all deaths were attributable to man-made particulate pollution, equivalent to 95 premature deaths locally.

No figures are available for the area on the health impact of nitrogen dioxide exposure but by extrapolating from national figures it is estimated that premature deaths from poor air quality are equivalent to approximately 130 to 145 annually.

The addition of potentially 7,000 extra vehicles from the residential allocations, not to mention the employment allocations, is extremely concerning to the Parish Council. In an area where poor health is a major issue, key issues being respiratory and heart illnesses. The Parish Council also question this impact on the Bold Forest Park and the Area Action Plan. The Area Action Plan is designed increase health and wellbeing in the local community and attract tourists from the surrounding area. It's difficult to see anything but a negative impact given the air quality and traffic noise is key to this being achieved. Local Authorities have a responsibility to ensure good air quality a responsibility strengthened by the Clean air strategy (2019) and the more recent Environment Bill. The continued increase and concentration of road transport logistics and significant housing development in a small geographical area is unlikely to contribute to addressing this issue. Local people particularly our children and those with health conditions will continue to suffer the health impact of poor air quality.

***In conclusion Bold Parish Council feel that the allocations as set out in the Local Plan will lead to the failure of the Bold Forest park Area Action Plan. A plan designed in bring increased economic and health benefits to the local community and the wider region. We believe the allocations will have a severe negative impact on the already existing community and no benefits have been demonstrated. We believe allocating 55% of the housing need to a small geographic area and area of Forest Park, subject to an Area Action Plan, is not balanced and is short-sighted in its approach. The Parish Council feel St Helens Council have failed in their duty to include the Local Community not least by failing to present the Local Plan to the Parish Council or inform those who were not Ward Councillors about it and not providing sufficient time for the newly elected Parish Council to submit representations.***