

Mr Nigel Tabberno (722932)

Matter F: Duty to co-operate

I believe that Birmingham City Council has failed utterly in its duty to co-operate, with respect to residents of Walmley and Sutton Coldfield who would be impacted by the proposals for construction on the Green Belt in 'Area C' and 'Area D'.

I live opposite 'Area C', and it is visible from my house; my experience is as follows:

- I was not made aware of the first stage of the BDP Consultation Plan at all;
- At the second stage of Consultation, where the Green Belt areas were shortlisted, I only became aware through reading the local Press. Because of the proximity of the proposed sites, and the impact they would have on me, the Council should have provided sufficient information and notification through the post. Instead, they did nothing.
- At the third stage, when 'Area C' had been selected, the only information from BCC was a small article in their newspaper saying that the BDP Consultation process was under way. Again, there was nothing regarding what the plans were. I consider this lack of information to be unacceptable, given the scale of the proposals and the extent of the potential impact on people's lives and environment.
- Public Meeting, Walmley, 03/12/13: The two representatives from BCC Planning Department were unable to answer questions on the provision of infrastructure that would be necessary to support their proposals.
- 'Meet the Planners', Walmley Library, 22/02/14. The Planners who attended this session professed no knowledge of transport issues; my name was taken for a contact but I heard nothing in response to my questions.
- Telephone contact with the Planning Office, during the Consultation period, was met with a request to submit questions by email. My email questions received a bland, holding response and my follow up email met with no reply.

It is impossible to conduct a meaningful Consultation unless sufficient information is provided to those affected by the proposals. Anyone who uses the roads around Minworth, Walmley and Sutton Coldfield, as well as the A38 into Birmingham, knows there are serious problems with road traffic already. These districts have high levels of car ownership and use, so it is reasonable to expect any adjacent housing schemes would generate significant extra road traffic – especially given the stated aim of providing family dwellings. People have a right to know how they will be able to conduct their lives and businesses if any of the proposals materialises, but it can be seen from the Evidence Base that the required work is not sufficiently advanced – and much of the data that has now been published came out after the end of the Consultation.

Whilst a lot of necessary information was not provided at all, the Evidence Base does contain a number of documents which are of a highly technical nature and thus incomprehensible to the general public. The selection of the preferred area for development should have been accompanied by outline plans of how the proposed scheme would look, and what infrastructure would be provided, so that those affected could be adequately informed for the Consultation.

With the A452 improvement scheme, which was intended to benefit road users, the Council erected signs to inform drivers of the relevant consultation. No such information was provided to users of the A38, A4097 and other roads around Walmley and Minworth regarding the BDP, so it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Council would rather people not know and thus not raise objections.

I have joined the Walmley Residents' Association, in order to gain a better understanding of this process. Despite being a long-established group, the WRA has complained repeatedly about not being consulted on the BDP, while the Council has occasionally spoken to other bodies with much less relevance to the plans.

The documents supporting the BDP (Green Belt Movement Infrastructure Plan, sections 3.3.5, 3.3.6) state that Centro, as the Passenger Transport Authority, was consulted, but not the bus operators. As commercial organisations, I would expect the bus companies to have been better placed to advise on what types and levels of provision would be viable, so that the Consultation would have been better informed as to the bus services that would be likely to feature in any completed scheme. Remember that the environmental credentials of the "SUE" depend on bus usage.

Note that the AECOM reports into Minworth Island and Tyburn Island contain, in Section 2.3 of each report, the rider "it is unclear whether the queue survey data represents typical conditions on the network.", and the Tyburn report is based on 2009 data. I suspect that if the Council had bothered properly to consult with local residents, it would have obtained much more complete and up-to-date information than has been provided by the consultants. It would appear that recommendations are being made based on a snapshot of what was happening over 5 years ago!

I understand that the Consultation on the BDP attracted 5,863 comments, each of which could have included one or many individual issues, remarks or discussion points. The fact that only a few minor changes were made to the document suggests that the Council did not enter into the process as it should have done, both in spirit and letter. I cannot believe that all this effort, much of which was done by people with extensive local knowledge, added virtually nothing to the Plan.