

Angela Weate  
Programme Officer  
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

21<sup>st</sup> September 2018

Dear Angela

**Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Examination for land at The Mount DSL2**

Please find enclosed 3 copies of my statement concerning the proposed development at The Mount, Leek, DSL2. This statement has also been forwarded to yourself electronically by email.

Yours Sincerely

Mrs Julia McGraw

## **Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Examination for land at the Mount DSL2**

**The following statement answers the specific questions of relevance:- 3:1, 3:2, 3:3**

As a resident of Leek and the surrounding area I wish to object to the development of the above site with over 300 houses and a new First School on Mount Road as proposed by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council as I do not consider it to be a sound plan that will deliver a positive social, and environmental outcome for Staffordshire Moorlands. These are the reasons I think relevant to your inquiry:-

### **Extension of the Town Boundary into the Natural Zone**

The block of land identified as, proposed suitable housing site, appears to be outside the town boundary on the maps supplied by the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, on the website entitled 'Forward Plans' and the paper versions made available at the consultation road-shows are therefore proposed to be constructed on the Natural Zone land surrounding the town of Leek.

### **Public Amenity**

The small narrow lane known as Mount Road which travels between the A53 Leek/ Buxton road and A523 Leek/ Ashbourne road which is adjacent to the Mount DSL2 is used on a daily basis as a public amenity. The lane is constantly used by locals and visitors to walk, ride and enjoy the views in relative safety at present. If the proposed housing goes ahead, with the number of houses planned on this site, this road will undoubtedly suffer a dramatic increase in the number of vehicles using it, by averaging 2 cars per household, thus reducing its safety and relative quiet enjoyment. The views over the town of Leek and its surrounding countryside will also be affected detrimentally.

I also note that the lane is included as part of the Staffordshire Moorlands Walks, advertised and mapped by the Ordnance Survey as a recreational path but not highlighted as such on the SMDC consultation map. Surely the increase in vehicular traffic would compromise this route.

In these times of austerity and the constant cut backs to local government, areas of free enjoyment and recreational use which also merit health benefits need to be conserved.

### **Wildlife Concerns**

This block of land is frequently used by several bird species, especially



during the winter months, as important feeding grounds. Some of these bird species are afforded special protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (W&CA81) as Schedule 1 protected species, identified by BirdLife International as Globally Threatened species and are listed as Red List species of birds of conservation concern by organisations, the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), the British Ornithologists Union, Natural England and the British Trust of Ornithology, to name a few. The birds in question are;

Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*, Schedule 1 W&CA 81 and Red List species

Redwing *Turdus iliacus*, Schedule 1 W&CA81 and Red List Species

Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Red List species

The small coppice of trees adjacent to the Mount is also important to wildlife in particular bird species. Although this land is not earmarked for development I feel that the disturbance of the development would compromise the species using it. This small wooded block is used during the winter months as an important winter roost for a small number of Raven *Corus corax*, a species again afforded a certain amount of protection. Species using this block to breed include, Little Owl *Athene noctua*, although not afforded any specific protection via acts of Parliament or listed as a concern yet, it is a species showing major decline, UK population estimated to be down by 24%, as highlighted by the RSPB breeding bird data 1995 – 2008. Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*, Nuthatch *Sitta europaea*, are other examples of regular breeding species in this area. Sound planning should include ecology reports taken at different times of the year not the one visit that was shown at the planners road show which concluded that it was not an important wildlife site.

### **Infrastructure**

As mentioned previously the numbers of new houses proposed in the areas of Mount Road, will put an enormous strain on the local infrastructure and road system. We all constantly experience the difficulties whilst travelling through the town of Leek with the current volumes of motor traffic. Both junctions from Mount Road can be difficult to negotiate now with the small amount of traffic using it with the A523 being particularly dangerous in its present form. Problems with access at both these junctions will be severely increased with the increased volume of traffic.

The small amount of employment opportunities identified within the forward plan will not satisfy the number of new residents proposed within the total plan for the Staffordshire Moorlands. Therefore one is to assume that most of the individuals who would be residing in the new development would be commuter based, travelling to nearby cities to seek their employment. Surely if this is the case then the housing development would be better located on the boundaries of the town closest and with a more direct access to these



towns and cities where these employment opportunities are therefore reducing the need for residents having to travel through the town centre as part of their commute. However planning for commuter based residents is contrary to most local government policies that are tasked with reducing this activity to contribute towards climate change and global warming issues.

These planned developments will also have a visual, probably a negative impact from the adjoining Peak District National Park as it will be observed from the iconic Roaches and the boundary road of Morridge.

Again there seems to be little or no mention of the use of brown field sites throughout the proposal. With the relaxation of planning rules for developing these sites should the Council look to these sites first. Removing deteriorating buildings and areas within the town that look unsightly and replacing with new developments would surely enhance the town, and, as they are close to amenities within the town centre, reduce the need for occupants to use their motor vehicles on shopping trips or evening entertainment. There are also a number of old mills and factories within the existing town boundary that could and should be transformed and upgraded into apartment blocks, as they have in other towns and cities in the UK, which would save those buildings from further degradation, provide perfect housing within the town and help to keep the overall feel of the town and its history.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion it is my belief that the proposed development and size of that development will have a serious and negative impact on the market town of Leek and its Natural Zone boundary and is therefore not a sound Local Plan. As a society in general we are losing touch with nature and the great outdoors. There are Government initiatives to reverse and combat this trend. Organisations, funded by the National Lottery, Government, County and Local councils including SMDC, are tasked to promote these initiatives assisting people to re-engage with nature and the outdoors. We are also constantly reminded these days of health, well-being and mental health issues that our society is increasingly subject too due to the pressures of our modern living and the need for places for people to unwind. With this in mind how can we justify increasing the urban zone into our countryside.

We have a duty to protect iconic landscapes, open spaces and the biodiversity such as can be found within the Mount Road area for the future generations of this fantastic town, so that they too, can experience quiet and peaceful recreation as we have enjoyed over the years. The Mount should be afforded the same protection as the Green Belt on other boundaries and the Green Space areas of the town. I suggest the Officer involved in making the final decisions takes an early morning walk along the Mount Road to experience these quiet and peaceful surroundings with the only noise being

provided by the local bird-life with their dawn chorus. Once we loose these areas they are lost forever.