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BLOXHAM
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Gladman Proposal for Housing in Bloxham

I am writing this letter as a resident of Bloxham and am intending it as a public letter, along with any other representations that the District Council receives in respect of the above Planning Application by Gladman Limited to build 95 houses off the A361 in Bloxham.

My first concerns relate to process.

Gladman has a well-established Business Model.

They look for local Planning Authorities that they consider do not have a defensible 5 Year Housing supply. They then look for larger villages within those districts which they hope they can persuade Inspectors will consider to be "sustainable" within the definition of Planning Law and Planning Guidance. They identify land on the outskirts of those villages which they then enter into options to purchase with the landowner, dependent upon them then obtaining planning permission. They and their Business Model calculate they may need to take the application through to Appeal and they then have a punt – and this is an approach that Gladman at the present moment is pursuing all over the country.

However, their application in Bloxham begs this question.

Why is it that they think that Cherwell District Council does not have a 5 Year Housing supply?

There has probably been more new housing in Cherwell District in the last five years than in the previous twenty, with huge housing expansion in both Banbury and Bicester, and many of the District's larger villages.

Do the District Council consider that they have a 5 Year Housing supply?



Or is this a target that is never achievable in that as the District acquires more housing and grows, so it is expected that the 5 year Housing target will grow?

I find the suggestion that the District Council doesn't have a 5 Year Housing supply all the more strange given that very substantial amounts of land along the Bloxham Road in Banbury are due to have housing.

Secondly, in terms of process, I think that villages like Bloxham are entitled to feel that they have been misled in that at the start of the new Planning system, they were told that if they had a Neighbourhood Plan, which was consistent with the District Council's overall Plan, then their Neighbourhood Plan would be respected and given due weight.

Bloxham went to very considerable time, energy and effort to produce a comprehensive and responsible Neighbourhood Plan where residents were properly and fully consulted. It was a process led by the Parish Council but involving a large number of other people, and produced a Neighbourhood Plan that was adopted under the legislation by the village as a whole.

Bloxham could be forgiven for thinking that that exercise had been a complete waste of time in that the Neighbourhood Plan has been ignored and this present application is completely contrary to the Neighbourhood Plan.

I have two comments on substance.

Bloxham has a single village school, once a Church of England Primary School, originally located, as so many were, near the Parish Church. It was then moved to a new site, but was built by the Local Education Authority for the size of the village at the time. Bloxham has doubled in size in the last ten years or so and although the village Primary School has over a similar period grown with extra classrooms, there comes a point, which I suspect has already arrived, where on its existing site there is no further potential for expansion and Bloxham Primary School is effectively full.

Developers cannot keep on building significant new housing developments in the village and expect that in some miraculous way the local Primary School is simply going to be able to absorb the new pupil numbers.

So if the Planning Authority is going to agree to further housing development in Bloxham, there has to be a viable Plan for a further Primary School for the village – a viable Plan that includes a viable and realistic site, and a clear understanding as to who is going to pay for the construction of such a new school.

My second point of substance is slightly more complex.

Historically, as a village, Bloxham had a small number of shops on the main street running through the village.

This is now a very busy main road, taking traffic from the M40 and Banbury via Chipping Norton to a number of routes to the West and South West. It is a road which now carries a very large number of HGVs. Because much of the new housing in Bloxham has been built on the edge of the village, such as along the Milton road, people there, wanting to use the Bloxham shops and others, tend to drive and so the area around the shops in Bloxham now becomes very congested.

There is no suitable land available to build a village car park for the shops and as a consequence ironically, I think that more and more Bloxham residents are simply giving up shopping in Bloxham and go and shop in Banbury, which slightly perversely is reducing the long-term viability and sustainability of the shops that do exist in Bloxham.

Again, one can't simply keep on putting extra housing on villages such as Bloxham because they are deemed to be "sustainable" because there comes a point when the sheer scale and speed of growth itself makes those villages no longer sustainable.

Rt. Hon. Sir Tony Baldry, DL