

Mrs D Bloor
110 Ashbourne
Road
Leek
ST13 5BA



Tel:

8th October, 2016.

Dear Councillor Done, ✓

Application Number: SMD/2016/0534
Applicant's Name: RD (Leek) Ltd.
Location: Land at Pickwood Avenue, Leek.
Proposed Development: Proposed erection of 7no. detached dwellings.

I refer to my recent letter to you on this Planning Application and would inform you that several more matters have since been brought to my attention which give me much concern about the possible impartiality of the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Planning Office in favour of the applicant.

Firstly, as I have mentioned previously, we have seen no Planning Application notices displayed on a lamppost or tree on the corner of Ashbourne Road and Pickwood Avenue, either for the current application or for one for the four houses for which we have been informed RD (Builders) Ltd. have already been given planning permission. In fact for the current application, I am informed by other local residents that the yellow planning application notice was put up on the lamppost on the corner of Ashbourne Road and Pickwood Avenue adjoining the site on the 28th September – **the notice stating that objections were to be received by the Planning Office by 27th September.**

Surely this cannot be legal? I would also like to know when was the Planning Permission given for 4 houses which RD (Builders) Ltd. say they have already been given? When and where were the relevant Planning Notices exhibited? Why was I not notified of that particular Planning Application nor, I understand, any of my neighbours?

Secondly, the Builders have been working on this land now for a quite a few weeks doing preparatory work. If Planning Permission has not yet been granted how is this possible unless there is collusion between the Planning Office and the Builders and the Builders are aware that their application will be granted.

Thirdly, it is now well known locally that the Builders only actually want planning permission for 5 houses but have been told to apply for 7 so that it will look as if the SMDC have cut them down to 5 houses, thus surreptitiously granting the Builders what they have wanted all along. Who told them to apply for 7 houses with the knowledge that 5 would be granted? Was this the Planning Office?

Fourthly, in my formal complaint about the Planning Office made to the Chief Executive of the SMDC on 18th September, 2016, I pointed out that although the letter notifying nearby residents was dated 8th September, it was not posted by the SMDC until 13th September so was not received by potential interested parties until 14th September, thereby reducing the stipulated 21 days to just 14. I knew of several local people who were on holiday for those 14 days and so were denied the opportunity to object. In fact one local couple contacted me on the morning of Monday, 26th September to say that they had actually gone away for 2 weeks on the 12th September and found the Planning Office letter awaiting them on their return late on the evening of Sunday 25th September. They were anxious to make their objections by the expiry date of 27th September which meant that they would have to drive to Buxton to deliver their letter to the address given, namely Box 136 Buxton. I was asked if I could tell them where Box 136 was but I could not so I

telephoned the 0345 number on the letter and asked where the letter was to be delivered as someone was having to drive over to Buxton from Leek for the sole purpose of getting their letter in by the stipulated date. The lady I spoke to told me that the letter should be taken to the Town Hall, Market Place, Buxton and "just left there as there will be no-one there in Planning ". She then asked where the Planning Application was for and when I told her Leek she said to just take the letter direct to Stockwell House instead of Buxton as they just sent any letters they had on to them anyway. What is the point of having letters of objection sent to Buxton and having to pay expensive postage when we can deliver them by hand to Stockwell House? If necessary it should state that correspondence can be sent to either place. I have also since been told by other nearby residents who did not receive any letter that they would have objected if they had seen a Planning Notice on the corner of Ashbourne Road and Pickwood Avenue, adjacent to the relevant site.

Fifthly, I would once again like to point out that Japanese Knotweed is present on this land despite the efforts of the owners to disguise the fact. I understand the law is that building cannot take place where this noxious weed is present without it being totally dug out and all the relevant soil taken to a special place for destruction. The Builders have 'got away with it' for the houses they have recently built on the right hand (north) side of Meadow Drive and are still trying to cover up the ever encroaching Japanese Knotweed by putting yet more bricks and earth to I assume disguise its presence. The trouble is that the weed eventually just grows through its new nutrients and gets bigger and stronger. I hope that the Planning Office, if permission is granted for houses on this site, puts on a condition that all the Japanese Knotweed is to be destroyed and disposed of in accordance with current legislation before any houses can be commenced.

Sixthly, until the Builders started their preparatory digging and dumping on this site quite some time ago several small pools were in the bottom of the remainder of the once grazed field. These small pools, now totally destroyed, contained smooth and great crested newts, the latter being a protected species. Also the site was home to slow worms. Along with grass snakes, all these species had been common in this area since I first came to live here in 1958, although their habitat had been limited over the last few years since Roger Deaville culverted the brook running down the side of No.120 and, some years later, along the backs of 110 to 120 Ashbourne Road, the brook eventually going down through Ladydale, the Building Society ponds to join the River Churnet. There used to be a very large pond (formerly an old marl hole) in the grounds of Swindlehurst's Nursery, which was also filled in and houses built on it. Here again that pool was a wildlife haven and Philip Swindlehurst would often call my late husband to come up and see all the great crested newts he had in his pond, my late husband being a well known local wildlife expert. It would be interesting to know if the SMDC have ever instructed independent wildlife surveys to be carried out of the area before granting Planning Permission thus destroying the habitats of protected species.

Seventhly, I know there is much concern locally about the fact that of the seven houses applied for five will front Pickwood Avenue close to its junction with Ashbourne Road. As each house is likely to have two cars and no turning place in front, all these cars will be reversing out on to this extremely busy road junction. I do not think that the authorities realise how busy a road Pickwood Avenue is. All the houses on Milltown Way, Mulberry Drive, Meadow Close, Fairview Road, Peak View, Monyash Drive, etc. etc. feed on to Pickwood Avenue as some 98% of these houses are turning west towards Leek. I would estimate that at least 400/500 vehicles a day are coming out on to Ashbourne Road and then returning later. In addition, Pickwood Avenue is also a bus route. The junction itself with Ashbourne Road is very wide and dangerous for pedestrians walking up Ashbourne Road, particularly for the elderly residents of the sheltered housing just above. Before

any Planning Permission is given for yet more houses so very close to this dangerous junction I think there should be a proper traffic survey to properly assess the number of vehicles using this junction every day.

Eighthly, it is a great pity that SMDC did not have the foresight to designate that this small piece of land in a prominent position become Open space, so a small green oasis and lung amongst hundreds of houses approved by the SMDC. In fact such a designated Open Space would have greatly enhanced the A523 Ashbourne Road entrance into the town and provided a small sanctuary for what remains of our local wildlife. In fact, the area of land on the right hand (north) side of Meadow Close was originally designated Open Space until RD (Builders) applied to build 8/9 houses on the site of this designated Open Space and the SMDC willingly granted Planning Permission despite all the objections. Unfortunately, the impression always given is that with SMDC Planning Department money always talks as the Builders have made yet more millions and the public and wildlife always lose out. The bonus would have meant that no houses in that area would have been affected by the ever spreading Japanese Knotweed. It would indeed be interesting to be informed whether the SMDC can be considered liable for damage resulting from them granting Planning Permission when this noxious weed was very close by and evident. Surely Planning Offices make a personal and in-depth inspection of any site for which Planning Permission is applied?

Lastly, if Planning Permission is to be granted for this site the maximum should be for 2 detached or 2 pairs of semi-detached houses with access for all off Meadow Close which is a cul-de-sac and so would negate the road traffic dangers of at least 10 vehicles reversing out onto the busy Pickwood Road junction with Ashbourne Road. In addition the house/s nearest Ashbourne Road should be in line with the same Building Line as Nos. 106 to 120 Ashbourne Road. Likewise, the remaining house/s should face Meadow Close. All the houses should be the normal two stories so as not to impinge on the privacy of existing houses as a line of 7 no three storey houses, all built with their best views and main living accommodation overlooking at a very close range and so looking into others private property is an abomination and an unforgivable intrusion into the privacy of others private property who cannot build a fence some 20 foot high to maintain their privacy. Surely Planning Legislation does not allow new homes to breach the privacy of existing properties to such a great extent?

I sincerely hope that this Planning Application will never be approved by SMDC Planning in its present form and we will be notified of a more appropriate Planning Application much more suitable to the area. In fact if the Builders were to apply for two detached bungalows or two pairs of semi-detached bungalows I am sure they would be well appreciated and snapped up and more in keeping with the needs of people – a fact identified nationally as bungalows enable people to downsize and therefore leave larger homes available for growing families.

Please keep me updated and ensure that the Planning Office responds to all my queries. As you may be aware I have made a formal complaint to the Chief Executive regarding the SMDC Planning so it may be helpful if a copy of this letter is provided to the Planning Officer. I should be grateful if you could let me know whether you think it appropriate that I send a copy of this letter to the Chief Executive and to Councillor Sybil Ralphs, Leader of the Council, to whom I have sent copies of

previous correspondence, as I am so concerned about the actions of the Planning Office and so seek clarification.

As my Councillor for Leek East, may I express my sincere thanks for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs. D. R. BLOOR

Councillor Rebecca Done
SMDC East Ward