



## TAMWORTH LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION

### EVIDENCE of THE INLAND WATERWAYS ASSOCIATION (LICHFIELD BRANCH)

The Inland Waterways Association (IWA) is a national charity which campaigns for the conservation, use, maintenance, restoration and development of the inland waterways for public benefit. The Lichfield Branch of IWA covers southern Staffordshire, northern Warwickshire and adjoining areas.

### POLICY HG2 SUSTAINABLE URBAN EXTENSIONS - DUNSTALL LANE

#### Soundness

IWA considers this part of the Local Plan is **Not Justified** and **Not Effective**.

#### Summary of Objection

1. The Inland Waterways Association objects to the proposed Dunstall Lane housing allocation. We have consistently opposed plans for extension of built development beyond the existing employment site north of Bonehill Road towards and including Dunstall Farm. Such a linear development along Dunstall Lane lying between the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal and Green Belt to the south and the River Trent flood plain to the north would be highly intrusive into the landscape and very damaging to the historic canal environment, its wildlife, tourism and economy.

#### The Birmingham & Fazeley Canal

2. The Birmingham & Fazeley Canal is nationally valued for its historic structures, as a green corridor for wildlife, and for its amenity and recreational uses, providing leisure boating, walking, angling, cycling and nature conservation benefits to the area. It attracts tens of thousands of visits each year from local people and holidaymakers from home and abroad and is a major component of Staffordshire's tourism industry. The canal towpath is open to the public and provides an accessible footpath and cycle route as part of a long distance network of interconnected waterways now extensively used for leisure boating.
3. However, built development in the countryside adjacent to the canal system damages the rural setting of the canals that contributes to their heritage interest, wildlife, amenity value and recreational use. A striking example of this is the proximity of the large and visually intrusive warehouse building off Bonehill Road. Such badly sited and intrusive development alongside the canals diminishes their tourism potential and economic benefits.
4. Notwithstanding the previous development, the canal beyond Bonehill to Dunstall Farm and Hopwas enjoys a pleasant rural environment that contributes greatly to its attractiveness for recreational use. The local rural environment of the canals plays a vital role in attracting and sustaining the recreational and tourism use of the whole canal system which helps fund its maintenance and contributes to the visitor economy. The income from boating and angling activities helps support local businesses and provides a major part of the funding necessary for the Canal & River Trust to maintain the canals for public use and enjoyment.

5. The length of the Birmingham & Fazeley Canal affected by this allocation includes two original 18<sup>th</sup> century brick arched canal bridges; Dunstall Bridge which carries a minor road and Dunstall Farm Bridge which is an accommodation bridge for field access. Both of these bridges are Grade II Listed Buildings that contribute significantly to the historic character of the canal. Only a minority of canal bridges are Listed, generally those that have been least altered over the centuries, and it is important to protect the historic setting of these valuable heritage assets. The Council has also recognised the potential of the canal to be designated as a Conservation Area.
6. The canal is also an aquatic wildlife corridor with a continuous towpath and hedgeline through farmland that enhances local biodiversity and provides access to nature and green infrastructure links.

### **Development Proposals**

7. There have been several previous proposals to develop this area for employment use. Staffordshire County Council's attempt to direct development to greenfield and Green Belt land West of Tamworth through the Structure Plan was firmly rejected by the EIP Panel Report in 1999, and deleted from the approved plan. The Inquiry Inspector's report in 2005 on the Tamworth Local Plan 2001-2011 concluded that the Dunstall Lane Extension site "would be something of an intrusion into the countryside (with open land to northeast and southwest)" and it was deleted from the plan.
8. Although housing would be preferable to the previously proposed industrial development here, as it is likely to be less visually intrusive than large featureless modern industrial buildings, it would still have a significant impact on the local landscape and countryside and on the heritage and environment of the canal.
9. Policy EC5 Culture and Tourism of the Pre-Submission Local Plan includes protection of the Borough's landscape character and heritage, promotion of existing tourist attractions, and encouraging the regeneration of the Coventry Canal as an important tourism resource. These are commendable aims but they would be undermined by the proposed allocation of green field canalside land for development at Dunstall Lane.
10. There seems to be no logic in the Council continuing to promote this unsuitable site other than the fact that the boundaries of Tamworth are so tightly drawn that, following its considerable growth over recent decades, there is now relatively little developable land within the Borough to provide choices that do not have some adverse impacts. But there are alternative sites, particularly in the northeast of the Borough, which would be less damaging to landscape, heritage and tourism. The Dunstall Lane site is not an urban extension so much as an urban protrusion into the countryside and a direct assault on the setting of the adjacent West Midlands Green Belt.
11. On any independent assessment the site would be considered as both unsuitable and unsustainable. The land on both sides is farmland with an open aspect and attractive appearance. To the north east is the floodplain of the River Tame which is unsuitable for any kind of built development and the land to the southwest, including the canal, is protected Green Belt within Lichfield District. The proposed site would protrude into this sensitive landscape as an incongruous finger of development spreading like an urban tentacle into the heart of attractive and protected countryside.
12. The site is also fundamentally unsustainable because it would destroy farmland and cause permanent loss of food production when the country is already over-dependant on food imports. On a regional scale there are many brownfield sites in the conurbation that can and should be developed before any more large scale greenfield sites are sacrificed. And on a local scale, this site would be isolated from other housing areas and the town centre by industrial and retail sites and would be dependent on car travel for access to all facilities.
13. In the Council's response to IWA's objections (Doc. A15 Consultation Statement, Rep. LP037) they say the site provides the opportunity to create an attractive development "that has a unique

setting”; indeed it does, uniquely inappropriate. No doubt the setting would be attractive for the residents, if somewhat inaccessible, but large scale building in an attractive environment destroys that environment for others.

14. The Council also say that “pedestrian links could be made to the north to Lichfield Road” but any such footpath would need bridges over the River Trent and the Flood Relief Channel as well as an elevated viaduct structure to cross the wide floodplain, which would be both very expensive and visually intrusive. Without plans and costings and an explanation of how this would be funded, it must be regarded as improbable.

### **Modifications Necessary**

15. IWA considers that the Dunstall Lane housing allocation should be deleted from the plan. Furthermore, far from allocating Dunstall Lane for development, it should be protected by addition to the Green Belt of all the land between the Borough boundary and the River Tame from the Bonehill Road industrial estate through to Hopwas.

Philip G. Sharpe,  
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29/5/2015