

27 June 2025

For the Attention of Lawrence Osborne

Solihull MBC
Council House
Manor Square
Solihull
B91 3QB

By email only

Dear Mr Osborne

PL/2025/00547/MAJF-DW Hybrid planning application for the redevelopment of Mell Square and full application for the redevelopment of Phase 1 (site adjacent to Morrisons Car Park)

The Parish Council wishes to object to this application for the reasons we outline below.

We feel the most appropriate method of detailing our response is by focusing on some of the content of the Council responses currently shown on the planning portal.

However, the first observation we make is that the floor plans for Phase 1 residential accommodation indicate a total of 346 apartments are included in the four blocks. Based on a physical count of the floor plans, we can identify only 325 apartments, accommodating potentially over 890 occupants.

Heritage

The applicant's Heritage Assessment recognises that the proposed scheme causes a degree of harm to the numerous heritage assets. Para. 3.6 of the Heritage Assessment states: "There are 21 listed buildings with potential to be affected by the Development." It accepts that the significance of the heritage assets would be sustained and harmed. Para. 5.45 states:

"While the design guidelines in the Design Code would reduce the level of impact of the Proposed Scheme on the character and appearance of the conservation area, it is acknowledged that there remains the possibility that the Proposed Scheme would harm the significance of the conservation area. It is concluded that the level of harm would be less than substantial and would fall within the low to moderate range."

And para. 5.81 goes on to say:

"The NPPF is also clear that in applying 'great weight' to the conservation of heritage assets, the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be, irrespective of the level of harm."

We feel the impact to be more significant but, in any event, the proposals are therefore contrary to Policy P16 of the Solihull Local Plan (SLP) 2013: *Conservation of Heritage Assets and Local*

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Distinctiveness, and to the NPPF. Policy P2 of SLP 2013 states “that development will maintain... the character and the quality of the town will be protected and enhanced through the promotion and careful control of new development...”

Visual Impact

The Townscape and Visual Impact Appraisal details how the development will have a significant effect on the visual impact and character of the town centre. The wireframe drawings included show the degree of impact of the proposed buildings towering above the existing buildings. One of the drawings, GIS_103, clearly shows that the impact of the proposed buildings will be seen up to 2 km away, which will have a significant negative impact on the character of the town on approach. The buildings and layout seem more appropriate to a city centre development rather than the redevelopment of a historical rural town centre. We support the principle of the town centre redevelopment, but it must be on the basis that it sits comfortably within the Conservation Area, along with the numerous Heritage Assets detailed in the proposals. The current proposals seem to totally disregard these aspects, rather turning the town centre into a development most often associated with revitalisation of a city centre.

Design and Access Document

The proposal illustrates that none of the buildings in the Town Square are over 6–8 storeys; they range from 2–4 storeys. This document states in 2.1.4 Scale:

“The masterplan will be designed to harmonise with this context, avoiding excessive height or density that might disrupt the area’s established character. This careful consideration of building scale will ensure sensitivity whilst accommodating growth and modern needs.” In our view, it is not apparent that this has been achieved in the design proposals before us.

The Planning Statement in para. 3.29 states that the building heights in the previous table at 3.28 reach 175.5m, but do not take into account infrastructure for plant and parapets. A ±3m should be added to the heights for the additional roof structure. Surely “±” should actually read “+” as any additional structures will only increase the heights and the subsequent impact. It is unclear whether text, diagrams, wireframe drawings, etc., throughout the proposal show the heights mentioned in 3.28 (excluding the 3m) or include the extra 3m. This should be made clear throughout the document.

Para. 8 clauses b) and c) state:

“b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being; and c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.”

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We cannot agree that these objectives to ensure a sustainable development have been achieved by the current proposals.

Concerning the proposals for Phase 1

We fully support the statement made on page 6 of the Urban Design response which states: “The roofscape is very monotonous across the phase; whilst there is variation in treatment at the top element of the building, it is limited and will read as a solid mass. The variety is most evident where there is the marker building and this variation relies on scale rather than visual interest.”

As mentioned above, the NPPF states all new developments should foster well-designed, beautiful, safe places. It is not apparent how the appearance of the four residential blocks can be seen as well-designed or beautiful – the view of Phase 1 from Warwick Road is stark, imposing, featureless, and in our view, totally lacking in design and certainly not compatible in character with the historic town that Solihull is.

In failing to meet Policy P16, we believe the development also fails to meet condition 1 of Policy P15 *Securing Design Quality*, which says:

“All development proposals will be expected to achieve good quality, inclusive and sustainable design, which meets the following key principles – 1) Conserves and enhances local character, distinctiveness, quality and ensure that the scale, massing, density, layout, materials and landscape of the development respect the surrounding natural, built and historic environment.”

The design and scale of the buildings will create a large brick structure on the approach into Solihull. I’m not convinced this is creating a positive sense of arrival. As highlighted in the TVIA, the scale of the proposal, including that of plot 1, will have a harmful impact on the character of the town and conservation area. Likewise, the lack of reference to the historic or existing character of the town has created a very urban and city-like built form which is not considered to reflect the local context. We agree.

This represents the first phase of a much larger project likely to be spread over a 10-year period with as yet no building trajectory. Phase 1 is so out of character with the current area that, should some or all of the remaining phases not go ahead as envisaged, there is a real risk — by way of its cityscape appearance — of it being a ‘white elephant’ destroying the total character of the whole area.

We have real concerns over the car parking strategy and the facilities that are being proposed. Whilst we accept that town centre living means access to public transport and other facilities are available, we cannot accept that the provision of 60 car parking spaces for a potential 890+ occupants is in any way reasonable. Many will work out of Solihull and will want to enjoy facilities in other areas of the Borough and West Midlands.

Where do residents’ visitors park?

It is unclear from the proposal what the capacity is for the other proposed car parks, but looking at the 2.3.2 Car Parking Strategy document, most, if not all, of the other five car parks are at best

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similar, but many appear smaller, and the remaining phases are proposed to consist of 1200+ apartments, with probably approaching 2500 occupants. Adding the facilities in Phase 1 to this, it would appear that an estimated 360 car parking spaces will cater for approaching 3500 residents. The current proposals will, we believe, result in significant parking issues in the neighbouring areas with the associated congestion issues. The proposal for one disabled car parking space and only three motorcycle spaces is totally inadequate.

Solihull's Supplementary Planning Document – *Vehicle Parking Standards and Green Travel* clearly states in the last paragraph under the heading *Town Centres* that: "The Council will consider allowing additional vehicle parking over the relevant maximum standard provided the parking will genuinely serve the centre as a whole ... that the additional parking is needed to support the vitality and viability of the centre (taking into account existing provision)."

This proposal, when specifically related to Phase 1, includes the removal of Mell Square Car Park on Warwick Road, which has 630 spaces and 20 disabled spaces (no residential accommodation), being replaced with 346 (325?) apartments capable of housing 890+ occupants with 60 car parking spaces and 1 disabled space. Based on the current car park being used at 50% capacity, approximately 300 vehicles bringing visitors to the Town Centre will need to find car parking which will not be available. Many of those visitors might choose not to access the Town Centre using public transport, and not being able to park could well result in them not coming at all, potentially affecting the viability in the long term of the town and achieving exactly the opposite of what the development is designed to achieve.

In failing to meet Policy P16 as outlined above, we believe the development as a whole fails to meet condition 1 of Policy P15 *Securing Design Quality*, which says:

"All development proposals will be expected to achieve good quality, inclusive and sustainable design, which meets the following key principles – 1) Conserves and enhances local character, distinctiveness, quality and ensure that the scale, massing, density, layout, materials and landscape of the development respect the surrounding natural, built and historic environment." The design of the Phase 1 development fails in this regard.

Viability of the Proposal

The applicant states in the Planning Statement at paragraph 7.10 that:

"It should be noted that the FVA submitted with the application (produced by Savills) recommends that no affordable housing or other S106 financial contributions should be offered by the applicant based on their conclusions relating to the viability of the proposals. It is noted that significant costs will be incurred by the Applicant in providing the extensive and high-quality areas of new and upgraded public realm within the Site and that these costs, alongside others as set out in the FVA, directly and significantly affect the viability of the proposals."

As raised in a number of responses on the planning portal (e.g. Affordable Housing, Education, Public Health and West Midlands Police), S106 contributions and affordable housing quotas are

essential in ensuring the development is sustainable in all respects. The Masterplan document 2, section 2.2.6 is entitled *A Place for All*. This is clearly not the case if there is no Affordable Homes provision.

The lack of Affordable Housing provision would result in the application failing to accord with SLP 2013 Policy P4a – *Meeting Housing Need* and should be refused.

Policy P2 of the SLP 2013 clearly states:

“All new development will be expected to make a reasonable and proportionate contribution to the cost of providing and maintaining necessary town centre infrastructure, especially for walking and cycling access, public transport...”.

Should the applicant not make S106 contributions, this condition of Policy P2 would not be met.

As mentioned in the Affordable Homes response, the Financial Viability of the proposals should be independently assessed, and if the development cannot be delivered on a viable basis, it needs to be totally reappraised, and this application should be withdrawn.

Under no circumstances should this development be allowed to proceed without making the demonstrated S106 contributions and a contribution to the affordable housing requirements of Policy 4a – *Meeting Housing Needs* of SLP 2013. Without these contributions, the development is not sustainable.

In conclusion, the Parish Council supports the response of SMBC Urban Design and wishes to be associated with the responses of Education, West Midlands Police, NHS and SMBC Health in terms of their comments relating to the necessity for the various S106 contributions required to achieve sustainability if this proposal was to go ahead.

This application as proposed should be refused.

Yours sincerely



JULIE BARNES

Clerk to Hampton in Arden Parish Council