



LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

For the attention of:

Head of Planning: Mark Andrews

Case Officer: Rebecca Matravers

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council

The Council House, Manor Square

SOLIHULL B91 3QB

11 August 2025

Dear Mr Andrews and Ms Matravers

PL/2025/01182/PPOL

Outline planning application with means of vehicular, pedestrian and cycle access from Broad Lane for consideration and all other matters (layout, appearance, scale, internal access and landscaping) reserved for subsequent approval for residential development (use class C3) of up to 600 units, including 50% affordable housing; a multi-faith burial ground with associated car parking; demolition of existing buildings and structures; sustainable urban drainage systems; car parking; landscaping and all ancillary and enabling works.

Hawkshurst Moor Farm Broad Lane Berkswell Solihull

This letter constitutes formal advice from the Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum. Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council is required, in accordance with section 94(5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to relevant advice from this forum in carrying out its functions.

- *The improvement of public access to land for the enjoyment of the area and as to such other matters as may be prescribed.*
- *The definition of 'land' is not defined in the CROW Act 2000 which means the definition in the Interpretation Act 1978 applies. This stipulates that 'land' includes 'buildings and other structures, land covered with water, and any estate, easement, servitude or right in or over land'.*
- *The needs of land management.*
- *The desirability of conserving the natural beauty of the area for which it is established, including flora, fauna and geological and physiographical features of the area, and*
- *Guidance, given from time to time by the Secretary of State.*
- *Forums may advise local authorities, National Parks and the Planning Inspectorate on recreation and the access implications of individual planning applications.*
- *Public Rights of Way include all highways including lanes and roads, bridleways and public footpaths. Forums advise on functional or utility access issues, which might include using land (or a right of way) to get to work, school, shops or local amenities.*
- *Forums take into account the needs for recreational and non-recreational usage and potential.*

The circa 166 acre productive agricultural Green Belt land in UK food production at Hawkshurst Moor Farm is situated in the protected Meriden Gap which forms a Strategic Gap between Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry. The application site, set within the ever diminishing Arden landscape, straddles the boundary between Solihull and Coventry in an

area of Coventry which has experienced huge and cumulative increases in housing development in recent years. Bannerbrook Park was built on a Brownfield site, the old Massey Ferguson Factory. However, Coventry City's essential infrastructure including, the roads, transport, medical, dental, hospitals, shops and social care facilities have not kept pace and are now seriously compromised.

The application site is situated on the protected eastern agricultural Green Belt boundary between the conservation area of historic Berkswell, in Solihull, with the City of Coventry which ensures Council Tax from residents living in the proposed 600 dwellings will be paid to SMBC. However, application supporting reports unashamedly rely on the already beleaguered facilities and infrastructure of Coventry. The site is totally unsustainable in essential infrastructure terms. Essential facilities within Solihull are already compromised with GP, dental, mental health, hospital appointments, school places - infant, junior and senior places and all forms of social care under extreme pressure.

There is no sustainable transport or safe highways infrastructure within rural Solihull to accommodate exponential increases in traffic from the proposed 600 dwellings and multi-faith burial ground. The only lanes providing access to the proposed site are the narrow Broad Lane, the continuation of Coventry Road, from the conservation area of Berkswell and Back Lane which is a tortuous narrow lane giving access to Meriden Road and Cornets End Lane, also narrow rural lanes and onwards towards Hampton-in-Arden.

The entire Coventry transport and highways infrastructure is under pressure but in the west of the City more so due to the exponential increases in housing development. **The flawed assumption, by the developer, that Coventry can pick up the clearly underestimated numbers of additional traffic movements generated by the proposed estate of an additional 600 dwellings and a multi-faith burial ground is absurd.**

NPPF - Considering development proposals, page 33

115. In assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, *it should be ensured that:*

(a) Sustainable transport modes are prioritised taking account of the vision for the site, the

*(b) **type of development and its location;***

*(c) **Safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;***

(d) any significant impacts from development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree through a vision-led approach.

116. Development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds **if there would be unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the roads network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.**

117. Within this context, applications for development should;

- (a) Give **priority first** to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; the second - so far as possible - **to facilitating access to high quality public transport services, and appropriate facilities that encourage public transport use;**
- (b) Address **the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport;**
- (c) Create places that are safe, secure and attractive - **which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles,** avoid unnecessary street clutter and respond to local character and design standards;
- (d) Allow for efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles.

The narrow local lanes proposed as access and egress routes, from both the 600 dwelling estate and the multi-faith burial ground, do not have pavements and have no space to provide them. The lane is, therefore, dangerous for pedestrians and far too narrow to be safe for cyclists, especially children. The exponential increases in traffic from the proposed sites during construction, in use and from the Burial Site, will make the narrow lanes dangerous for ALL road users.

No honest appraisal on the unsustainability of the roads and non-existent public transport surrounding the proposed sites has been undertaken.

It is clear that the transport and highways assessments provided by the developer, in support of the applications, are deeply flawed and take no account of the existing Coventry and Solihull road infrastructure, lack of sustainable public transport nor have they taken into account the inherent narrow and dangerous nature of the lane proposed for access and egress into the proposed sites on Broad Lane.

The site is undeniably unsustainable.

The December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework:

Policy 13 Protecting Green Belts:

142. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

143. Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

Proposals affecting the Green Belt:

153. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to harm to the Green Belt including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

154. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the following exceptions applies;

(b)the provision of a burial ground.

It is undeniable that construction of a multi-faith burial ground including internal roads system, associated buildings and car parks on the proposed site precludes maintaining any openness and permanence of the productive agricultural Green Belt site.

The proposed site on productive agricultural Green Belt land in UK food production is at extreme risk. The natural springs, watercourses, marl ponds, serious flooding issues, ancient

Public rights of way and irreplaceable ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity should all be viewed as weighty material planning considerations which confirm the extreme harm, by inappropriateness and other harms, the proposal will cause to the Green Belt and its openness.

Assumption and modelling used, in supporting documents, to downplay the numbers and cumulative negative impact of funeral and private mourners traffic, accessing and egressing the site, in numbers far in excess of those quoted in supporting documents, is deeply concerning and open to serious question. The exceptional numbers of mourners who attend certain ethnic burials and how burial practices vary from faith to faith have not been appropriately researched or accurately represented.

The huge negative impacts on the local congested Coventry roads and narrow Solihull lanes, of which there are only two in the vicinity, Broad Lane which becomes Coventry Road approaching Berkswell and Back Lane which is tortuous and unsuitable for exponential increases in size and weight of private and commercial traffic, make the proposal inherently dangerous and unsound.

All routes to and from the proposed burial ground are clearly unsustainable and unsuitable to accept the numbers of mourners and funeral traffic expected from certain multi-faith burials and confirmed by research data. For instance, some Islamic burials attract 100's of mourners according to the status of the deceased and number of friends and relatives they had.

This application is another financially speculative proposal which lacks openness, transparency and, therefore, veracity. Data from modelling, assumption and desk based study has been manipulated in supporting reports to attempt to aid the preferred outcome.

Each site has to be viewed individually taking into account the type of development and its location. The proposed site, in Broad Lane has inherent and serious irreversible road safety and access issues.

The attempt to demonstrate that very special circumstances exist has failed. No very special circumstances exist which outweigh the inappropriateness and other harms the proposal to build 600 dwellings and construct a multi-faith burial ground on a productive Green Belt agricultural site at Hawkshurst Moor Farm Berkswell Solihull will have. The negative cumulative impacts on the openness of the Green Belt and on ALL local roads, lanes and highways is immense and irreversible. The impact on highway safety and cumulative impacts on the wider road networks and on the non-existent local transport network, precludes effective mitigation. The existing and future cumulative negative safety impacts would be severe and incalculable.

The Climate Emergency and Flood Risk:

The proposed circa 166 acre productive Green Belt agricultural site at Hawkshurst Moor Farm contains watercourses, marl pits, ponds and several springs.

The increase in intensive and prolonged weather events caused by the climate change emergency is now undeniable and well documented. Although the Flood Risk Assessment places the site in Flood Zone 1 we do not believe this an accurate assessment given the increase and intensity of regular disruptive flooding events in the area.

The topography of the site shows a fall of 15.54 metres at the western boundary to 121.37 metres in the north-eastern corner which exacerbates the historic surface water flooding at the junction of Broad Lane with Banner Lane. Disruptive and prolonged flooding events have become a regular feature directly related to the increase in prolonged and intensive weather events due to climate change. The flooding is compounded by natural watercourses and springs on the site which causes serious rainwater runoff pouring off the proposed site at Hawkshurst Moor Farm.

The roundabout junction between Broad Lane and Banner Lane has become a disruptive flooding hotspot with local businesses and properties seriously affected. The loss of permeable productive Green Belt agricultural land will actively increase unwanted flooding in the area. The risk will become greater when impermeable surfaces from 600 dwellings allow rainwater runoff to increase and overwhelm existing drainage systems which are already

under pressure. Attenuation ponds are unlikely to keep up with the flow from the various watercourses, ponds and springs dotted about the site; how many attenuation ponds will be required and where will they drain? Polluted rainwater runoff from driveways containing chemicals and degradation particles from tyres and road surfaces will necessarily be required to settle and the polluted sludge physically removed.

The issue of increased flooding from a development site within Solihull contributing to major disruptive flooding events within Coventry is an unwanted and unwelcome cross-border issue on which we do not believe Coventry or its local affected residents have been appropriately consulted.

An additional and deeply concerning possible human health issue, is constructing a burial ground on a site where known and substantial flooding regularly occurs. How is surface drainage going to be handled to prevent graves from being overwhelmed by flood water and to make individual burial sites safe and non ground polluting and, therefore, safe to human health?

If polluted flood water and rainwater runoff from the burial site find its way into watercourses, ponds and ditches it will pose a substantial environmental risk and also a serious risk to human health.

NPPF Policy 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

187. Planning policy and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by;

(b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - **including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land**, and of trees and woodland.

(f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.

Habitats and biodiversity

192. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

(a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and

(b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species.

195. The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply where the plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on a habitat site (either alone or in combination with other plans and projects).

Ground conditions and pollution.

198.

Planning policies and decisions should also ensure **that new development is appropriate for its location taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development.** In doing so they should:

(a) mitigate and reduce to a minimum potential adverse impacts resulting from noise

from the new development - and avoid noise giving rise to significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life;

(b) identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason; and

(c) limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.

The proposed construction of 600 dwellings and a multi-faith burial ground with associated infrastructure, will have a huge cumulative negative impact on the productive Green Belt agricultural site in UK food production (BMV land).

These are the wrong developments on the wrong site; increases in intensive weather events due to climate change have become regular, disruptive and more prolonged.

The loss of permeable, productive, best and most versatile, agricultural Green Belt land in UK food production will exacerbate the issues described above and below.

The two individual projects associated with this application will produce significant toxic pollution from huge volumes of construction materials, from noise and light pollution and from the burial ground. The negative and unwelcome adverse effects on both existing and future human health and wellbeing are incalculable and should be challenged.

The loss of the valuable irreplaceable Green Belt environment, its ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity which, in this case, directly check the unrestricted urban sprawl and protect the historic towns of Solihull and Coventry from merging is unthinkable.

Heritage:

Preserving Heritage only has a passing mention in supporting documents. There is no doubt surrounding the ancient heritage of Solihull, Berkswell and Coventry and include the following summary in evidence.

The attempt to suggest, in supporting documents, that the site could be designated Grey Belt is absurd. The building on the site is an ecofriendly wood recycling facility and the one at the gate is agricultural. The buildings do not in any way affect the openness and permanence of the Green Belt.

There may NEVER be another site which so completely fulfills ALL the main criteria of NPPF Policy and which absolutely confirms the great importance planning authorities should also attach to protecting Green Belt land and preventing urban sprawl by keeping our irreplaceable Green Belt land permanently open. The essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence and in recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - **including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land in UK food production**, and of trees and woodland the Government is cementing the value it places on Green Belt land.

The proposed Green Belt site which straddles the boundary between the conservation area of Berkswell, in the town of Solihull, clearly fulfills the five purposes as laid down in the NPPF;

- **Checking the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas**
- **Preventing neighbouring towns from merging;**
- **Assists in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;**
and
- **Preserves the setting and special character of historic towns**
- **To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict urban land.**

Solihull dates back to the Anglo Saxon era around the 9th century then believed to be named 'Soily Hill' referring to the red clay found in the area. The Manors of Ulverlei and Longdon were mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 with St. Alphege Church founded in 1220. By 1242 the settlement of Solihull was large enough to be granted a weekly market. The Manor House in the town centre was built in circa 1495.

Berkswell also dates back to Anglo Saxon times; its name Berculs-Well refers to a spring and well still in the centre of Berkswell today. Berkswell was held by a Count in 1086 and it belonged to the Earl of Warwick during the middle ages. The church of St. John the Baptist, a Norman church, has a notable crypt. Berkswell became a civil parish after the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1866 though its roots extend back to the ecclesiastical parishes. The almshouses on the Green were built to replace the parish poor houses with the original charity formed in 1589.

Berkswell and the surrounding area gained conservation status in 1968. The area contains many important historic listed houses and farms including Ram Hall, Hill House Farm and the important, half-timbered, farmhouse and yard in the centre of Berkswell which is grade two listed.*

Coventry's documented history stretches back at least a thousand years but its true beginnings are shrouded in mystery. Coventry's rise as a major city began in the Middle Ages fueled by the cloth and textiles trade. Leofric, Earl of Mercia and his wife Godiva, the birthplace of the Godiva legend, founded a church which was dedicated in 1043. The city's importance was further emphasised by the construction of defensive walls and the granting of a Royal Charter in 1345 which was supposedly the first municipal charter of its kind in England and meant Coventry could now have its own Council and elect a Mayor. The election of John Ward, Coventry's first Mayor took place in 1348. The City also played a vital part in the English Civil War when the city helped to guard Royalist prisoners after which the city fell out of favour with the Stuarts. When Charles II came to the throne he ordered the town wall and defences to be destroyed.

Coventry's industrial heritage is deep rooted in the bicycle and motor industries. Bombing during World War II destroyed the city centre and the old cathedral, the ruins of which were left as a reminder of the devastation. The city now focuses on peace and reconciliation.

Ecology and Conservation:

The ever diminishing Green Belt, within the Arden landscape, assists in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and preserves the setting and special character of our historic towns. The conservation area around Berkswell is served by only two lanes, the narrow Coventry Road which becomes Broad Lane, the other, Back Lane; both are totally unsuitable as access lanes to the proposed site. Berkswell's historic listed buildings and ancient landscape will forever be adversely affected by huge increases in heavy traffic, noise and air pollution from the proposed site should approval be granted. Major increases in commercial and private vehicle movements accessing and egressing the proposed site during construction, together with the negative impact on road safety and road surfaces caused by the increases in weight and size of vehicles, will have an unwanted and unwelcome cumulative adverse effect on all local roads and lanes. In addition the exponential increases in traffic fueled by the huge housing developments being constructed behind Cromwell Lane will also have an increasing cumulative negative effect on all routes around the Tile Hill and Bannerbrook Park areas and onwards into Coventry City Centre and beyond. The congested road and lane infrastructure cannot continue to absorb huge numbers of additional traffic from huge developments without adverse consequences.

The unwanted huge increases in traffic and the small particle airborne pollutants they emit are also dangerous to human health when absorbed into the blood stream through the lungs.

The recent planning applications for commercial BESS sites on irreplaceable productive

Green Belt land at Hill House Farm, a listed building, on Coventry Road and at a dairy farm on Benton Green Lane and the already approved site off Tanners Lane are all in close proximity, 'as the crow flies', to the southern boundary of Hawkshurst Moor Farm. The major cumulative adverse impact on traffic in the local area will be immense. The losses of irreplaceable large parcels of productive Green Belt agricultural land will also have a cumulative negative impact on the natural environment and its irreplaceable ecology and biodiversity.

The compounded losses of Green Belt land in the area will have a devastating effect on endangered and protected species and the ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity it supports. Connections and 'stepping stones' between existing wildlife sites and diverse groups of species, which enables them to thrive and successfully reproduce, will also be lost.

The proposed developments will ALL produce dangerous unwanted pollutants including airborne and groundborne particulate matter, artificial light and unwanted noise. All of the above will take an adverse toll on the proposed site's ability, through its rich and varied habitats, to conserve rare and protected species and place a huge unwelcome pressure on the local natural environment and landscape.

Arbtech admitted their November 2024 ecological appraisal, with snow on the ground, '*does not provide a complete characterisation of the site*' and '*was undertaken during a suboptimal season*'. Desk based study based on historic data is notoriously inaccurate. There is no substitute for an extensive walk-over survey, using one's eyes, a pair of binoculars and tried and tested 'hands on' investigation, at the right time of year. Patience is also a valuable and essential tool. The preliminary Arbtech 'suboptimal' report which, on the surface, appears comprehensive is almost solely based on assumption and historic data produced during desk based study and merely produces a list of what was not seen on a snowy day in November.

The additional **Breeding Bird 27 June 2025** and **Wintering Bird Survey 2 March 2025** prove just how rich the species of bird life are on the site which is entirely due to the varied and rich habitats, arable cropping, foraging and stubble opportunities which are all invertebrate and prey rich. The surveys attempt to suggest only the trees and hedgerows are the reason for the species rich site and although important it is the rich variation of habitats including the ponds, watercourses and the open and permanence of the agricultural Green Belt land and its variation of stubble, grassland, scrub, margin rich vegetation and also its watercourses, ponds and springs (which do not freeze) which have formed rich ecosystems over many years which makes the entire site so species rich.

This land is irreplaceable and no amount of mitigation can replicate the importance of the site. Its preservation is of vital importance.

The Wintering and Breeding Bird surveys undertaken 2 March 2025 and 27 June 2025, paint a very different picture:

41 species of birds identified,

7 were classified as RED - species of Principal Importance. At least 6 of conservation significance. With 2, the Linnet and Yellowhammer, listed under the Warwickshire Biodiversity Action Plan.

10 were classified as AMBER importance

22 displayed breeding behaviours.

Some of the species identified in the Breeding Survey included:

House Martins, Skylarks, Yellowhammers, Song Thrush, House Sparrow, Starling, Greenfinch, Common Whitethroat, Sedge Warbler, Quail, Greylag Goose, Rook, Tawny Owl, Lesser Black Backed Gull, Herring Gull, Eurasian Wren, Linnet, Robin, Dunnock, Red Legged Partridge and Pheasant.

Redwings and Fieldfares overwinter on open ground and hedgerows.

The open agricultural Green Belt site is also ideal for Barn Owls which, of course, hunt for prey at night.

In addition the **Wintering Survey identified** additional species again;

39 species:

7 species of conservation significance.

6 on the UK RED List.

Buzzard, Coot, Goldcrest, Mallard, Blackbirds, Jack Snipe, Long Tailed Tits, Coal Tits, Blue Tits and Great Tits, Gold Finch, Chaffinch, Nuthatch, Magpie, Canada Goose, Jay, Jackdaw, Black Headed Gull and, last but not least, a Pink Necked Parakeet were identified

The site is already **recognised and classified by the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre (WBRC) as an EcoSite and a site of high ecological value.** The next closest site 'as the crow flies' is Rough Close, another EcoSite and Local Wildlife Site (LWS) only 0.12 km south of the site. The next closest LWS and Local Nature Reserve is Tile Hill Wood, an SSSI. The site also lies within the impact risk zone for both the Tile Hill and Berkswell Marsh SSSIs..

It is inconceivable that protected and endangered mammals and reptiles species do not also inhabit a site with such a varied selection of rich habitats including, streams, springs, hedgerows, vegetation and mature trees.

This will almost certainly include various species of bats, water voles, hazel dormice, otters, great crested newts, badgers and various breeds of deer. All wildlife species commute between habitats to forage for food, to breed, to use latrine areas and to hibernate and rest, etc. Well worn paths through vegetation often confirm these movement patterns. This site provides all the habitats required within an agricultural Green Belt landscape, in abundance.

Some of the ponds, watercourses and marl pits appear to have been intentionally polluted. A metal drum has been found on the site; there is little way of knowing what it contained without forensic analysis.

This makes the results of the **Reptile Survey undertaken 27 May 2025** deeply concerning. Ideal varied habitats, preferred by **Great Crested Newts (GCN)**, exist on the site; they prefer a smallish pond habitat with vegetation and require 1 hectare of grassland and scrub and tree roots for a viable population to thrive and survive. **Adults are mainly nocturnal** and spend most of their lives within 200-500m of their breeding site. The weather, the habitat and intrusive development can influence newt behaviour. The female lays several hundred eggs and folds them inside a leaf as protection from predators. The eggs hatch within 3-4 weeks and remain in the pond for 3-4 months with some overwintering in the pond and emerging the following spring. **Juveniles migrate up to 1 Km away from the pond and do not breed for up to three years of age.** Adults and larvae are voracious predators feeding on small worms, insects and invertebrates and migrate to feeding areas under trees and in open ground. They overwinter under tree roots.

The metal drum seen on site gives concern especially as the 'fears' developers have for the stringent rules surrounding the disturbance and destruction of Great Crested Newts and their habitats which are protected in law, are well known.

Legitimate concerns exist about when the Survey was undertaken, 27 May 2025. Adult GCNs migrate between April and May and spend several months feeding before moving to an overwintering site. At the time of the survey they had already migrated. We, therefore, suggest further surveys for the presence of GCN are

re-scheduled for 2026.

The desk based study names varied species of bats recorded within the area. As bats fly long distances at night to forage for food, it is inconceivable there are not bats breeding and roosting on a site with such rich habitats, ancient hedgerows and mature trees. The assessment reports '*there are no buildings on site*' which is false; there are two, the eco-wood recycling facility and an agricultural building close to the track and also houses, farms and other buildings in close proximity. We, therefore, suggest bat surveys are scheduled, during an optimal season and time, on a still, warm, dry evening for the best chance of identifying bat colonies and individual bats species.

Residents living on Barnnerbrook Park report seeing bats flying during their evening walks on the proposed site.

The ecological survey, 'undertaken at a suboptimal season' during winter and snow when plants lie dormant, precludes accurate plant identification and wildlife surveys. Appendix 6 shows the importance of the proposed Green Belt site in relation to connectivity between other local wildlife sites within a 1km radius.

Connectivity is vital to maintain a healthy biodiverse species. The site contains rich and varied habitats including mature trees, hedgerows, species rich vegetation, pond, marl pits and streams with margins lined with plant life which provides sanctuary and feeding opportunities for a varied species of wildlife.

The financially speculative major application to build 600 dwellings and a burial ground on Hawkshurst Moor Farm on Broad Lane has been some years in the making. The productive Green Belt agricultural land has been less intensively farmed recently which has helped to enrich its ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity.

Approximately 15 entrances to badger setts were identified with well worn paths and spoil mounds. NO latrine areas were identified but that is not surprising as badgers travel some distance to use latrine sites and gather bedding.

The ecological survey provides clear details of the legal requirements for '*non disturbance and destruction*' of wildlife habitats prior to, and during construction. Intensive surveying of Hawkshurst Moor Farm, including all its varied habitats, is a legal requirement prior to development, to satisfy those legal requirements.

- *It draws the developers attention to the risk of a **Red Offence Highly Likely** in respect of **Great Crested Newts**. Environmental DNA testing surveys must be undertaken during mid-April and June of any ponds within 500m of the site in accordance with current guidelines. Depending on the results bottle trapping surveys should be carried out during mid-March to mid-June exclusively.*
- ***Badger** surveys must be undertaken in accordance with current survey guidelines and should be carried out before planning permission is granted - Badgers are protected in law making it **a criminal offence to disturb or destroy them or setts**.*
- ***Water Vole** survey will be required to check their presence within the impacted areas. Two visits will be required, one between April and June and one between July and September in accordance with current survey guidelines. Where ANY impacts are likely, a licence would have to be obtained prior to work on the site beginning.*
- ***Otter** surveys will be required to establish the presence of otters on site and for the presence of holts. Where ANY impacts are likely this work would need a prior to commencement licence.*
- ***Hazel Dormouse** surveys will be required to establish the presence of dormice on site. Deployment and monitoring of nest tubes and boxes as well as honeysuckle*

and opened hazelnut searches, at optimal times, in accordance with current guidelines.

- **Hedgehogs:** due to the type of habitats present on site their presence is highly likely.

Mitigating working methods must, therefore, be implemented during construction including: Covering excavations, avoiding nighttime lighting and use of sensitive lighting design and restricted use, storage and disposal of chemicals and pollutant materials according to COSHH regulations. Any hedgehogs found should be allowed to disperse of their own accord.

- **Bats:** the survey recorded 'no buildings present on site' which is wrong. There are two buildings on site, an eco- wood recycling facility and an agricultural building which could provide roosting opportunities. There are also many mature trees. The hedgerows and tree lines, woodland, areas of scrub and the streams and other watercourses provide foraging and commuting opportunities for bats. Hedgerows and woodland outside the site provide a continuity of linear features and foraging opportunities. These habits also provide conditions which give rich opportunities for foraging. Large bat species prefer open space foraging and feeding which the proposed site also has in abundance.

The species of bats identified in the survey include many of the circa 18 species of UK bats. It is inconceivable that, with so many rich habitats on site, many of those bats are not present either in maternity roosts or for foraging and feeding opportunities.

Artificial lighting on site and the loss of trees, cropland, general vegetation and plants on stream and pond margins or areas of partial removal of trees and hedgerows will negatively affect the presence of foraging and commuting bats. Maintaining linear integrity is vitally important.

Due to the high value habitats present on the site **numerous bat surveys during the 'active' season (April to October), on fine still nights, will be required to gather sufficient information** for a full and accurate assessment to be made.

Even during a November suboptimal survey, in very poor weather conditions, some bird species were observed. Recorded were; Skylarks, Redwings, Wood Pigeon, Chaffinch, Jays, Robin and Starlings. Further surveys have recorded a wide variety of bird species, many of which are protected on either **RED or AMBER conservation** listings.

It was also noted the site contains **ample foraging for Barn Owls** due to the open expanses of cropland and woodland which attract higher densities of prey particularly along hedgerows and the field margins.

The large site and rich habitats recorded also provide a suitable habitat to support **overwintering protected and other notable bird species.**

Several breeds of **Deer** are also often observed or heard on the site including the non-native Muntjak with its distinctive 'bark'.

Desk based study fails to provide sound evidence on the huge negative and cumulative

impact the proposed developments will have on the local natural environment and the irreplaceable ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity. A loss of connectivity to diverse groups of species will threaten diversity and the ability to breed successfully and thrive; the long-term health of irreplaceable protected species will be put at significant risk.

The various assessments were, however, **positive** when describing the **richness and variety of the habitats** on the proposed site which confirms the adverse major and cumulative impact any loss would cause to the fragility of the often rare and protected

wildlife we believe it supports. The proposed destructive developments on productive Green Belt agricultural land at Hawkshurst Moor Farm and the valuable opportunities it provides for the natural environment and irreplaceable diversity of wildlife it supports, cannot be successfully mitigated.

Public Rights of Way

The benefits to both mental and general health obtained from, free, recreational access to the countryside with its wealth of ecology and biodiversity, are well known and documented. There are at least three, probably four, major Public Rights of Way that cross the proposed site:

M212 running from East to West across the site

M 213 running North to South along the Eastern Edge of the site and

M 209 which runs along the entire Southern Edge of the site.

There is also another footpath marked, on some maps, which shows it crossing the middle of the site from South to North along the track used by the eco-friendly wood recycling site located at the centre of the proposed site.

The local ancient Public Right of Way network including **the Coventry Way and Millennium Way** provide essential connections to other ancient footpaths in and around Berkswell that, in turn, connect onwards to communities within the wider PRoW networks.

Public Footpaths and the countryside landscape they traverse provide, **free at the point of access**, recreational health benefits that immersion in the natural landscape surrounded by the ecology and biodiversity it supports affords. The proven incalculable benefits provided, for both mental and general health, are well-documented.. They also act as both functional and utility public rights of way for accessing local facilities and the wider community.

Public Rights of Way cannot be blocked, closed or diverted without a legal order. Their benefits are incalculable and must be preserved and maintained at all costs.

The proposed development of a 600 dwelling development and adjacent multi-faith burial ground on the actual boundary between Coventry and the eastern boundary of Solihull, could not be a more alien development proposal on a productive Green Belt site in UK food production. The site fulfills EVERY ONE of the five purposes NPPF Policy lays down for the protection of the Green Belt and its openness and permanence.

No very special circumstances have been demonstrated which outweigh the harm this proposal causes to the Green Belt and its ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity.

No amount of 106 payments, or other incentives, will mitigate against the exponential adverse impacts the proposal will cause to the already hugely compromised local essential services and infrastructure in both Coventry and Solihull. The strength of feeling of local Coventry residents who cannot get a GP or dental appointment or who are on a long waiting list for life changing surgery or cannot obtain places for their children at a local school, is high. They do not believe they, or Coventry CC have been appropriately consulted on a proposal which, if approved, will have a massive negative impact on their day to day lives.

Similarly, Solihull residents, living in communities in the east of the Borough who have no viable bus services cannot access GP appointments (in areas such as Balsall Common, Meriden, Knowle and Dorridge), have no access to NHS dental services or appropriate social care or have to wait years for operations to relieve pain from debilitating conditions such as knee and hip replacements and for families with young children who cannot find affordable child care or school places, all ask how major house building projects can continue to be approved without the essential facilities in place to sustain them. 106

payments are rarely ring-fenced for the purposes intended and are often hijacked by financially compromised local authorities for other purposes.

The promise of affordable housing is also often used as a planning 'carrot' to attempt to gain approval for a development which is then not built by the 'original applicant' but sold on to a third party who then sets about varying conditions which change the nature of the original proposal with the proposed 'affordable' homes no longer affordable or will not exist.

This proposal is the wrong development on the wrong site. It is clearly UNSUSTAINABLE.

The proposed multi-faith burial ground on Broad Lane, which becomes Coventry Road, will dangerously increase vehicular movements on an already narrow, unsafe lane; there is no public transport, no pavements and no cycle ways and no room to construct them. The site will be almost entirely reliant on private transport.

We respectfully remind Solihull, as the Planning Authority, of the following:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of keeping the best and most versatile agricultural land in UK food production.

The site as a productive Green Belt agricultural site in UK food production so fulfills all of the above planning policies referenced above.

The site is right on the boundary between Solihull and Coventry within the ever diminishing, protected Meriden Gap and Arden landscape and unquestionably meets every one of the five purposes within NPPF Policy for protecting and conserving Green Belt land and its openness and permanence.

The site is undeniably **unsustainable in both highway and public transport respects**. The use of the only two narrow, unsuitable and dangerous access routes using Coventry Road which becomes Broad Lane and Back Lane (now subject to restrictions) is an indisputable danger to road safety due to the inherently poor road conditions and the numbers and types of vehicles which will access and egress the two adjacent sites both during construction and after completion.

The proposal also compromises the already negatively affected congested local Coventry roads caused by the huge explosion of housing development in nearby Coventry communities. The close proximity to continuing development on Banner Lane without the provision of essential facilities will further and cumulatively affect the existing and future residents of Bannerbrook Park and the wider Coventry area.

The proposal unashamedly relies on **ALL** the severely compromised essential local Coventry facilities. The reliance on seriously overstretched essential local facilities is morally and financially unacceptable.

The site is **unsustainable in flood terms and risk** and does not satisfy **EITHER** of the exception tests;

NPPF:

178:

- The development would provide wider sustainability benefit to the community that outweigh the flood risk; and
- The development will be safe for its lifetime taking account of the vulnerability of its users, without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce the flood risk overall.

179: Both elements of the exception should be satisfied for the development to be allocated or permitted.

181: When determining any planning applications, local planning authorities should ensure that flood risk is NOT increased elsewhere.

Local Coventry roads are already being negatively impacted by unacceptable local flooding caused primarily by cumulative drainage issues caused by the climate change emergency and increasingly frequent intensive and prolonged weather events.

We find SMBCs report on Drainage dated 22 July 2025 disappointing and ask if the officer made a site visit. Banner Brook is an historic watercourse and a tributary of the River Blythe which flows through the area. It is intertwined with Berkswell's history and development and is mentioned in historic records, including the Domesday Book (1086), with the presence of the Brook contributing to the suitability of the area for early settlement.

The Brook is not, as indicated, failing to contribute to the landscape character or ecological habitat of the site. It is one of the many rich and varied habitats on the site which contributes to the rich biodiversity. We understand the Environment Agency, Coventry City Council and others are aware of local flooding issues.

The Environment Agency's **OBJECTION** on the suitability of the land for the construction of a multi-faith burial ground on Green Belt productive agricultural land at Hawkshurst Moor Farm, is sound. Land which is prone to flooding and where toxic pollution of the land, its watercourses, ponds and surrounding ditches could be contaminated with human decomposition material and the chemicals used in embalming, poses a serious risk to human health and the natural environment. Climate Change and the increasingly intensive and prolonged weather events indicate productive Green Belt agricultural land prone to flooding should not be used for housing development. The loss of permeable land and vegetation makes flooding more likely and exacerbates the issues of pollution from toxic construction materials. In addition, if local authorities cannot ensure development won't increase flooding elsewhere, development should be refused.

The proposed site, very clearly, does not meet either flood risk exception test.

'When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations'.

No Very Special Circumstances Have Been Demonstrated which outweigh the cumulative harm the two proposals will have on the Green Belt site and its irreplaceable ecosystems, ecology and biodiversity.

We believe we have demonstrated and cross referenced irrefutable NPPF Policy and several Weighty Material Planning Considerations which give substantial weight to **REFUSAL** of application: **PL/2025/01182/PPOL**.

The Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access Forum strongly **OBJECT** to the above planning application for 600 dwellings on a Green Belt site at Hawkshurst Moor Farm Berkswell CV4 9US, together with construction of a Multi-Faith Burial Ground adjacent to the housing development, for all of the reasons as stated above.

We ask the Solihull Planning Committee to **REFUSE** the **ENTIRE** application for all of the compelling reasons referenced above.

We request an acknowledgement of receipt of our **OBJECTION** and ask to be kept informed of the application's passage through the planning process.

We request that determination of such a **MAJOR** application, **which is attracting negative public and media interest**, is carried out on the public platform of a Planning Committee Meeting at which we intend to apply to speak.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheila Cooper". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the right.

Sheila Cooper

Acting Chair the Warwickshire Solihull and Coventry Local Access
Forum Please Respond Directly to: sheila.ann.cooper41@gmail.com
Copy to LAF Secretary: charlesbarlow@warwickshire.gov.uk