Land at Walmley Ash Road, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham

Demolition of existing buildings and structures and erection of 14 dwelling houses, associated access, landscaping & car parking

Applicant: Bellway Homes (West Midlands) Limited
c/o Agent
Agent: Barton Willmore
Regent House, Prince's Gate, 4 Homer Road, Solihull, B91 3QQ

Recommendation
Approve Subject To Conditions

1. Proposal

1.1. Proposal is for the demolition of all buildings on the site and the erection of 14, detached dwelling houses, access off Walmley Ash Road, landscaping and car parking.

1.2. The proposed layout has developed in conjunction with advice from officers and comprises a 2 storey dwelling fronting onto Walmley Ash Road with the remainder of the dwellings which would also be 2 storey fronting a private road which terminates with 2 double garages at the head of the cul-de-sac to the rear of Townsend Drive. The dwellings would be of traditional design with hipped roofs, gable roofs to frontages, bay windows, chimneys and constructed of brickwork, render and tiled roofs.

1.3. The proposed dwellings would be a mix of 4 and 5 bedroom dwellings. All bedroom sizes and external private amenity areas would be in excess of minimum guidelines.

1.4. The proposed vehicular access would be off Walmley Ash Road in the approximate position of the existing access and widened. Each dwelling would have a double garage with 2 additional off street car parking spaces.

1.5. The proposed development would not involve the loss of any significant trees and high quality landscape proposals to soften the appearance of the development are proposed. Boundary treatments would include timber fencing and a brick wall to the rear of the site on the boundary with Townsend Drive. Detailed drainage proposals have also been submitted.

1.6. Site Area 0.79 hectares (density 18 dwellings per hectare).

1.7. In support of the application the applicants have submitted a Planning Statement, Design and Access Statement, Statement of Community Engagement, Transport Assessment and Ecological Assessment.
1.8. A screening opinion has been issued concluding an Environmental Impact Assessment is not required.

2. Site & Surroundings

2.1. The application site comprises an area of land of approximately 0.79 hectares. It has a frontage to Walmley Ash Road and is bounded by gardens to properties in Walmley Ash Road to the west and south-east, Townsend Drive to the north and properties in Jones Wood Close and Patterton Drive to the east. The site was formerly Brookhouse Farm and currently comprises mainly open land with a farmhouse. A number of outbuildings on the site have recently been demolished.

2.2. The surrounding area is predominantly residential in character. There are larger more traditional dwellings to the Walmley Ash Road frontage with more modern developments to the rear in Townsend Drive, Jones Wood Close and Patterton Drive.

3. Planning History

3.1. None relevant.

4. Consultation/PP Responses

4.1. Transportation Development – no objections subject to conditions.

4.2. Regulatory Services – no objections subject to conditions.

4.3. Severn Trent Water – no objections subject to conditions.

4.4. West Midlands Fire Service – no objections.

4.5. West Midlands Police – no objections, development should be in accordance with “Secured by Design” standards.

4.6. MP, Councillors, Residents Associations and nearby occupiers notified. 16 letters have been received objecting to the proposal on the following grounds;

- Walmley Ash Road can’t cope with another development that generates more traffic.
- Site could be used for schools as sports facilities.
- Layout done for maximum profit at expense of long standing residents.
- Loss of privacy and overlooking.
- 5 new gardens will overlook the garden of no. 25.
- Double garage to plot 1 blocks out light and view to no.25.
- Buildings have been demolished and trees removed from the site prior to the submission of the planning application reducing ecological value.
- Transport Statement lacks detail, no assessment of the junctions of Walmley Ash Road and Eachelhurst Road or Walmley Ash Road and Webster Way.
- How much higher are the properties than those in Jones Wood Close?
- A brick wall rather than a fence should be used for the boundary treatment with Townsend Drive.
- Noise and disturbance during development.
- Access onto a busy road opposite a day nursery and additional traffic onto Walmley Ash Road.
- Overlooking and loss of privacy to the garden of no.10 Townsend Drive.
- Loss of light and overshadowing.
- What will boundary treatment be and who will be responsible for maintenance of landscaping.
- Photographic record should be made of the farmhouse.

4.7. As part of the pre-application consultation process, the applicants undertook community engagement through consultation with local Councillors, the Walmley Residents Association and distributing a leaflet to local residents. The conclusions of the consultation exercise were that while there was support for the proposal, there were concerns over traffic and residential amenity which the applicants have attempted to address through their Transport Statement and ensuring that the proposed layout complies with Birmingham City Council's spatial guidelines for new residential development.

5. **Policy Context**

5.1. UDP (Adopted 2005), Mature Suburbs SPD, Places for Living SPG, Car Parking Guidelines SPD, Draft Birmingham Development Plan, NPPF.

6. **Planning Considerations**

6.1. Policy

6.2. UDP saved policies encourage the provision of new housing on previously developed sites with densities in the region of 40 dwellings per hectare in order to provide and maintain good quality housing development incorporating accommodation of all sizes and types.

6.3. UDP also recognises the need for high standard design in new development to enhance the City's environment and secure sustainable development. It also encourages the retention of mature trees, hedgerows and natural features in new development as well as new planting where appropriate.

6.4. UDP requires adequate car parking provision to be made in new developments to meet all needs, taking into account such factors as availability of public transport and public parking facilities.

6.5. Places for Living SPG includes numerical guidelines for bedroom sizes, garden sizes and separation distances in new developments. Mature Suburbs SPD sets out key design issues for new housing development in the City's mature suburbs and residential areas.

6.6. Car Parking Guidelines SPD requires a maximum of 2 car parking spaces per dwelling. Appropriate levels of car parking provision for any individual proposal will be assessed in the light of maximum standards and the circumstances of the particular scheme.
6.7. Draft Birmingham Development Plan seeks to provide for as much of the City’s growing population within the urban area as possible with a focus on brown field or other available sites within the existing built up area.

6.8. NPPF requires that applications for new housing should be considered in context of a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Good design is identified as a key aspect of sustainable development and new developments should take the opportunity to build on local character.

6.9. Use

6.10. I consider the principle of the residential development of the site is acceptable. The site was previously a small farm in a residential area and is bounded by Residential uses on all sides. The proposed development which would constitute a small windfall site would provide new homes in a sustainable location close to existing local facilities and public transport links and contribute towards the housing target to meet the housing needs identified in the draft Birmingham Development Plan within the urban area. I note the request for a photographic record of the farmhouse to be submitted. I do not think this can be justified as the building has been significantly altered over time and is of minimal historic interest.

6.12. Urban Design/Character of the area

6.13. The proposed residential layout has been developed in conjunction with advice from Officers and I consider the layout is acceptable in urban design terms. Plot 1 fronting onto Walmley Ash Road would reinforce the building line and also effectively turn the corner in to the estate road with interest in the side elevation. It would have been desirable to link the proposed development through to Townsend Drive, but this was not possible due to land ownership issues.

6.14. The proposed layout would contain dwelling houses fronting the estate road and the view to the end of the cul-de-sac would be terminated by 2 double garages. The applicants have attempted to soften the frontage appearance of the development and the turning head by the use of hard and soft landscaping which would reflect the character of surrounding properties. Suitable boundary treatment has been proposed including a brick wall to the rear of the site facing Townsend Drive.

6.15. I consider the proposal complies with criteria within Mature Suburbs SPD. It would be a relatively low density development which is characteristic of the area and contain dwellings of a scale, massing and plot sizes which are similar to those in the area, in particular the newer residential area to the north and east of the application site. The traditional design of the dwellings and the proposed materials is acceptable and the public realm and landscaping would blend in with the wider area.

6.16. Residential amenity

6.17. The applicants have amended the proposed layout of the development at the request of officers All proposed dwellings would have adequate separation distances to existing dwellings to prevent overlooking, loss of light and loss of privacy. The proposed double garage to plot 1 has been brought forward and plot 2 re-sited so it would now have an 11 metre back garden, specifically to reduce the impact on the amenities of the occupiers of No. 25 Walmley Ash Road.

6.18. There is a change of levels to Jones Wood Close to the north-east of the site where
the properties are lower and plot 12 has been re-sited to achieve the increased window to window separation with the existing dwelling at no. 6 Jones Wood Close of 23 metres. I am satisfied that separation distances within the proposed development and in respect of existing dwellings complies with minimum guidelines contained in Places for Living SPG.

6.19. All bedroom sizes and private amenity areas comply with minimum guidelines in Places for Living SPG. Plot 7 would have a large tree/bush in the rear garden, however the tree officer confirmed the tree is not covered by a TPO and foliage within the applicants ownership can be adequately cut back to give sufficient light to the rear of that property.

6.20. Transport

6.21. The applicants have submitted a Transport Assessment in support of the application. It states that there have been no records of personal injury accidents and no recent accidents in the vicinity of the site access and there is no evidence of any road safety related issues on the highway network immediately adjacent to the site.

6.22. The Transport Statement confirms that the proposed development would have a negligible effect on traffic conditions on the highway network and that satisfactory vehicular access to the site can be achieved. Transportation Development agree with the conclusions of the Transport Statement and raise no objections subject to conditions and minor alterations to the layout which have been included in the amended plans. West Midlands Fire Service have confirmed the access and turning head would accommodate a fire appliance.

6.23. As well as the above, it should be noted that the site is located within easy walking distance of a number of local bus services which are accessible from Walmley Ash Road.

6.24. Environmental

6.25. No specific environmental issues have been identified. Regulatory Services have requested a condition requiring a site investigation as there is evidence that part of the site has in the past been used as scrap yard and may be affected by land contamination.

6.26. A Flood Risk Assessment is not required as the site is below a hectare.

6.27. Trees and Ecology

6.28. I note concerns raised by objectors that trees and outbuildings have already been removed from the site with a subsequent loss of habitats. Although this was done in advance of the current application being submitted, none of the trees were covered by a TPO and none of the buildings were protected, therefore, the applicants have not contravened any planning regulations.

6.29. The Tree Officer has confirmed that no protected trees are affected by the proposed development although the third party tree adjacent to plot 7 will need to be pruned so the dwelling is not overshadowed. She recommends all necessary tree work is carried out to British Standard and a condition is attached.

6.30. An Ecological Assessment Report was submitted in support of the application which
concluded that there are no significant ecological constraints to the development as the site does not contain any statutory or non statutory ecological designations. The habitats were found to be of low ecological value and protected species do not represent a constraint to development. The buildings are not considered to have potential to support bat roosts.

6.31. The Planning Ecologist recommends a condition that a single dusk emergence survey should be completed prior to demolition of the farmhouse and if the presence of roosting bats is confirmed, details of mitigation and compensation measures should also be submitted. She confirms that apart from the boundary hedges, which could be used as foraging/commuting corridors, the site currently has limited potential for foraging bats. Retention of existing hedgerows and new landscape planting, particularly around site boundaries and focusing on native trees and shrubs, would enhance the value of site for foraging bats.

6.32. I note residents’ comments about loss of wildlife habitats, including trees and possible bat roosts in the now demolished farm buildings, prior to the recent ecological assessment. The Planning Ecologist confirms she has no records of bat roosts at this site, but lack of formal records does not provide conclusive evidence of the absence of bats. Review of aerial photos from 2007 show the site to contain significantly more trees and more farm buildings; the complex of buildings immediately to the north-west of the main house was still present in 2012 (shown on aerial photo). However without definitive evidence of the destruction of a bat roost, no action could be taken in this respect, as earlier tree clearance and building demolitions did not require planning consent.

7. **Conclusion**

7.1. I consider the proposal is in accordance with relevant local and national planning policies and is acceptable.

8. **Recommendation**

8.1. Approve Subject To Conditions.

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9  Removes PD rights for extensions

10  Requires the prior submission of details of obscure glazing for specific areas of the approved building

11  Prevents the erection of gates at the site entrance

12  Requires vehicular visibility splays to be provided

13  Requires pedestrian visibility splays to be provided

14  Requires the prior submission and completion of works for the S278/TRO Agreement

15  Requires the prior submission of an additional bat survey

16  Requires the prior submission of a scheme for ecological/biodiversity/enhancement measures

17  Tree works to be carried out in accordance with British Standards

18  Requires the scheme to be in accordance with the listed approved plans

19  Limits the approval to 3 years (Full)

Reason for Approval

1  Birmingham City Council grants Planning Permission subject to the condition(s) listed below (if appropriate). The reason for granting permission is because the development is in accordance with: Policies 5.7 - 5.40 of the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan 2005; Places for Living (2001), which has been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance; and the National Planning Policy Framework.

Case Officer: John Davies