Land to rear of 122 Green Acres Road, Kings Norton, Birmingham, B38 8NL

Outline planning application for the erection of 6 no. dwelling houses, access to be considered all other matters reserved

Applicant: Freefield Investments Ltd
c/o The Agent

Agent: Greenwood Planning
Office 6, 14-15 Rother Street, Stratford upon Avon, Warks, CV37 6LU

Recommendation
Approve Subject To Conditions

1. Proposal

1.1. Outline planning permission is sought for the erection of six dwellings on land to the rear of 122 Green Acres Road, Kings Norton. Access is to be considered in detail. Appearance, landscaping, layout and scale are reserved for future determination.

1.2. The proposal consists of an access between 120 and 122 Green Acres Road, to be improved to serve the new dwellings. Currently the access is single width and it is proposed that a single storey side extension at 122 Green Acres Road be demolished to the widen this access to 5m for the first 7m, reducing down to 3m for approximately 12m then widening again to a minimum 5m beyond. This would link the site to Green Acres Road. It is proposed that the road would of a cul-de-sac nature with two parking spaces for each house provided within their curtilages.

1.3. The illustrative layout plan provided indicates four properties to the northern end of the site, in a traditional semi-detached layout, with private rear gardens of sufficient size to the rear. Facing these across the cul-de-sac, two further detached dwellings would be located centrally within the site, again with generous rear amenity space.

1.4. The illustrative drawings indicate two storey properties of a traditional design incorporating kitchen and living rooms on the ground floor, with three bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor.

1.5. Of the 21 trees on the site, 11 (all Oak, Category A, B and C) would be retained including those covered by a Tree Preservation Order. 10 trees (including 3no Hawthorn; 2no Apple; 1no Hazel; 1no Oak; 1no Maple; 1no Cypress and 1no Laburnum) would be removed, all in Category C and U.

1.6. The site area is 0.25ha, density 24 dwellings per hectare.
1.7. In support of the application, the following documents have been submitted; Tree Survey; Planning Statement including a Design and Access Statement and Extended Phase I habitat survey.

Proposed site plan and indicative layout

2. Site & Surroundings

2.1. This site is situated to the rear of Green Acres Road, Redditch Road and Glendene Crescent, Kings Norton. All of which are lined by 1950s style semi-detached houses. There is also commercial development nearby on Redditch Road. A small section of the boundary to the south is with Wast Hills Driving range, which is situated to the south west.

2.2. The site is approximately 0.25 hectares and was left undeveloped when the neighbourhood was built up and has been left vacant for many years. The site widens and slopes down from south to north. It is covered in brambles and other rough vegetation plus a number of mature trees, some of which are subject to a Tree Preservation Order.

2.3. Access to the site is between 120 and 122 Green Acres Road and from Glendene Crescent from the west, linking into tracks currently provide rear access to neighbouring houses which would remain in place.

Location Map
Street view

3. Planning History

3.1. There is no relevant planning history associated with this site.

4. Consultation/PP Responses

4.1. Transportation Development – No objection.

4.2. Regulatory Services – No objection.

4.3. West Midlands Police - No objection. Subject to planning approval, it is recommended that this proposal is developed to enhanced security standards produced by Police Crime Reduction initiative 'Secured by Design'.

4.4. West Midlands Fire Service – Advise that an adequate turning circle or hammer head should be provided in any dead end greater than 20 metres in length.

4.5. Severn Trent - No objection, advise that there may be a public sewer located within the application site.


4.7. Letters of notification have been sent to surrounding occupiers; local residents associations; Kings Norton Ward Councillors; Planning Committee members from the Northfield Constituency and the MP for Northfield.
4.8. Councillor Jevon objects to the application stating that parking and traffic can already be problematic for residents of Green Acres Road, a new development will add to the existing issues. This back-development does not, to her knowledge, appear in any strategic planning documents and is not a brownfield site. The environment of this area should be protected especially as residents have witnessed wild animals in the location.

4.9. 24 letters of objection have been received from surrounding occupiers, objecting to the proposal on the following grounds.

- There is no road access to this land.
- Increase in traffic will cause a hazard.
- Parking problems on the road will increase with additional properties.
- How will emergency services access the site?
- Access is over a private right of way.
- There are Tree Preservation Orders, Trees cannot be protected during construction and will be killed.
- Increased noise and disturbance during construction.
- Privacy will be lost at the rear.
- Devaluation of existing property.
- Loss of wildlife.
- Security of existing properties at risk.
- Questions raised at how all services i.e. Gas, Water, Electric would be provided to these properties.
- Questions about drainage are raised, there will be flooding.
- Concern raised about the lack of consultation to some residents.

4.10. A petition containing 9 signatures from residents of Glendene Crescent has been received; objecting on the following grounds;

- The access to the site from Glendene Crescent may become a thoroughfare to gain access to the new development and a shortcut to Green Acres Drive.
- Impact to local wildlife and trees.
- Concerns about construction traffic
- No information about the design of properties.

4.11. A further petition has been received containing 90 signatures, objecting to the development due to impact on local ecology and substandard access.

5. **Policy Context**

5.1. The following local policies are relevant.

- The Birmingham Unitary Development Plan (2005)
- Draft Birmingham Development Plan (2013)
- SPG: Places for Living (2001)

5.2. The following national policy is relevant.
6. **Planning Considerations**

6.1. The main considerations in the determination of this application are the impact of the proposal on residential character and visual amenity, highway safety and parking and whether the principle is in accordance with policies of the Development Plan.

**POLICY**

6.2. The NPPF seeks to ensure the provision of sustainable development, of good quality, in appropriate locations and sets out principles for developing sustainable communities. The NPPF promotes high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings. It encourages the effective use of land by utilising brown-field sites and focusing development in locations that are sustainable and can make the fullest use of public transport, walking and cycling. The NPPF seeks to boost housing supply and supports the delivery of a wide choice of high quality homes, with a mix of housing (particularly in terms of type/tenure) to create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities.

6.3. The UDP similarly supports a more sustainable pattern of development by re-using brown field sites in suitable locations with good access to jobs, shops and services by modes other than the car.

6.4. The UDP emphasises the importance of the City’s housing policies in contributing to the strategy for urban regeneration and economic revitalisation, and states that one of the ways this will be achieved is through a variety of housing to meet the full range of needs throughout the City.

6.5. The UDP requires that new housing developments should provide an appropriate environment (paragraphs 5.20-5.20A), a suitable housing density and mix (paragraph 5.40) and encourages a full range of housing types and sizes including those for people with disabilities and other specific needs (5.35 and 5.37). Paragraph 5.38 identifies that densities of at least 50 dwellings per hectare will be expected in local centres and corridors well served by public transport, with 40 dwellings per hectare elsewhere.

6.6. Paragraphs 3.14D and 3.14E of the UDP identify that new housing development should be designed in accordance with good urban design principles, with the key principles.

6.7. In addition, ‘Places for Living’ SPG encourages good quality accommodation in attractive environments. It contains a series of urban design principles and makes reference to minimum design and amenity standards. Particular emphasis is given to assessing context and responding positively to local character.

6.8. ‘Places for All’ SPG also emphasises the importance of good design, high quality environments, again with an emphasis on context.

6.9. Mature Suburbs SPD provides advice in respect of infill plots and backland areas. It acknowledges that such development can have very positive benefits through increasing housing stock and making more efficient use of land. However, it also emphasises that such developments should be appropriate in terms of design and in all other respects such that they make a positive contribution to the environment and not erode the character of the area.
6.10. Policy TP27 of the draft Birmingham Development Plan sets out the proposed future policy for housing location in the city. It does not include any restriction on development of Greenfield sites.

**PRINCIPLE**

6.11. Although the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) targets most residential development to previously developed land, greenfield sites are not ruled out. There is no in-principle presumption that development on greenfield land should be refused. Equally, there is no presumption that land that is previously developed is necessary suitable for housing development. The over-riding consideration is that any proposal should be considered on its merits against the policies of the Unitary Development Plan and development plan documents including Places for Living SPG. If a proposal is deemed to be in accordance with the development plan, there is a presumption in favour of development irrespective of whether it is previously developed land or not.

6.12. As a small backland, cul-de-sac site it would not closely follow the broad local pattern of development, but I am not persuaded that it is so different as to be deemed harmful in principle. I also note that Paragraph 5.30 of the UDP encourages the development of small sites scattered throughout the city. The site offers some wider amenity value (as green outlook) for surrounding residents, but some of that amenity would be maintained as the most important trees would be retained, and new ones planted. The site is not designated as open space, nor identified for any other use. This is a sustainably located small site within a suburban residential area, near to services, employment opportunities and public transport and would contribute towards the Council’s broad and important objective of securing new residential development. It is therefore considered that the principle of the proposal is acceptable.

**IMPACT ON SURROUNDING AREA AND OCCUPIERS**

6.13. The surrounding area is predominantly residential in character and consists of 1950's semi-detached properties with a strong, uniform character; this is evident from Green Acres Road to the east, Redditch Road to the north and Glendene Crescent to the west. The indicative layout proposed shows a potential development that would not fundamentally clash with surrounding character, notwithstanding the access route between two frontage houses. It is noted that there are a variety of plot sizes in the area and again this would be followed with the proposed new development. In terms of their overall footprint, size and scale, the indicative plans also show house that would be comparable to dwellings in the vicinity. In addition whilst a density of 24 dwellings per hectare is below the 40 dwellings per hectare recommended within the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan, this density reflects the overall character and pattern of development in the area and I consider it acceptable in this instance and the constraints imposed by the size/shape of the site and existing trees.

6.14. Although only indicative at this stage, the plans indicate that six dwellings and gardens of an appropriate size would respect the separation distance and other space requirements set out in “Places for Living” and could be accommodated on this site. The final appearance and siting of the dwellings is to be dealt with by reserved matters. The plans demonstrate sufficient distance between building faces, particular to those existing residential properties along Redditch Road where a rear
to rear distance of 29m is provided. Given the above, I do not consider that the proposal would be contrary to policy and guidance that helps to safeguard the amenities of existing occupiers and in this instance there is no reason to refuse the application based on impact to surrounding residents in terms of possible effects on privacy, outlook or amenity.

ACCESS

6.15. There is an existing shared access located between properties 120 & 122 Green Acres Drive, serving rear gardens and garages, which is to be improved to serve this new development. Currently the access is only single width. However, the works would widen this to 5m for the first 7m, reducing down to 3m for approximately 12m then widening again to a minimum 5m beyond. The indicative layout suggests provision of 200% parking. My Transportation Development Officer raises no objection to this.

6.16. The widened access would ensure vehicles are able to pass when entering/exiting the site, without the need for waiting on public highway along Green Acres Road. Given the access position on the outside of a bend, a good level of vehicular visibility is also achieved. Adequate pedestrian visibility of 3.3m x 3.3m x 600mm high would need to be incorporated and can be secured by condition. While the widening of the access removes frontage driveway parking associated with the property at no.122 it is acknowledged replacement parking is provided to the rear, off the access road.

6.17. In developing the detailed reserved matters proposal, the applicant would need to consider the servicing of the site as it would seem unlikely a refuse vehicle would enter, therefore bin stores would need to be detailed within 25m carry distance of the public highway. The requirements of West Midlands Fire Service will similarly need to be met.

6.18. It is noted that there have been a number of objections received relating to the anticipated increase in traffic, additional parking demand on Green Acres Road and concerns of disruption during construction. However, the development of 6 dwellings which benefit from 200% parking provision would not be expected to result in a significant increase in traffic and parking demand on Green Acres Road. A Construction Management Plan can be conditioned to address concerns over the impact during the construction period.

6.19. In order to encourage alternative modes of travel to the private car it is suggested consideration is given to cycle storage provision within the curtilage of each dwelling.

TREES AND LANDSCAPING

6.20. Landscaping is a matter reserved for future determination, however indicative plans show new landscaping across the site, which would provide good quality private amenity for future occupiers. It is noted that the site at present contains a number of trees and bramble bushes which are overgrown, with some amenity value for existing residents. The loss of some of this is unfortunate, however, of the existing trees (21 in total) eleven on the site would be retained, this includes all those statutorily protected and are located centrally and to the south of the site.

6.21. The development would necessitate the removal of 10no. trees, all of which are Category C or U, along the north eastern boundary and to the north. Whilst these have some amenity value, their removal along with the low value group on the
northern boundary is on balance considered acceptable. It is unfortunate that trees would be lost as part of the development, but I believe the retention of the protected Oak Trees and the proposal to include new tree planting within the overall landscaping of the new development would be sufficient and it would be unreasonable to refuse development based on the loss of amenity value in this particular instance. New tree planting is shown to the site boundaries, which would assist in providing a buffer to existing properties. Conditions to ensure the protection of the retained trees during construction are recommended.

6.22. Concern was raised by the Council’s Tree Officer about the indicative layout, particularly given that it shows the protected trees within the south facing gardens of Plots 1 and 2, and the potential conflict that the trees may have with the enjoyment of the garden as they may overshadow. The indicative layout has been amended in response to these comments to move the houses further away from the trees, which demonstrates that a suitable layout can be provided, at reserved matters stage.

ECOLOGY

6.23. There has been objection received from surrounding occupiers regarding the potential ecological impact. The Council’s Ecologist notes that the site does has the potential to be a site of interest for wildlife as it links the urban garden habitats with the wider environment. However, the Phase I habitat survey submitted concludes the site to be of low wildlife value. The dense scrub and tall vegetation consists of common and widespread species, and would provide limited interest to invertebrates, small mammals, and foraging bats. The scattered trees, although mature, are mostly too smooth barked and in good condition, with no features suitable for roosting and/or hibernating bats noted. The survey showed no signs of any Badger activity on the site, and the presence of reptiles and amphibians was considered unlikely.

6.24. The recommendations that have been made in the submitted Phase I habitat survey with regards to the clearance of the site during the winter months should be adhered to and it is recommended that an Ecological Enhancement Strategy based on the recommendations contained in the survey is submitted along with further details of the provision of bird/bat boxes. Both can be secured through an appropriate conditions.

6.25. Natural England have raised no objection to the proposal.

OTHER MATTERS

6.26. I note the concerns of local residents about the drainage of the site and the potential for the proposals to cause flooding problems in the area. In this instance Severn Trent have not objected to the application and it is recommended that a condition of any approval be that a suitable drainage scheme be provided. Through this condition, consideration can be given to Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems, which are designed to reduce the potential impact of new and existing developments with respect to surface water drainage discharges.

6.27. Local residents have expressed concern that the development would put their properties at risk due to a lower level of security in the area. I consider this unlikely, as new dwellings would offer surveillance, compared to an overgrown backland site. West Midlands Police have no objection to the proposal and it is recommended that the site is developed to the enhanced security standards produced by Police Crime Reduction initiative ‘Secured by Design’.

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Concern has been expressed by local residents about the impact on property values. However, this is not material planning consideration. Some residents have expressed concern at not being written to about the proposed development. I can confirm that the correct notification procedure has been followed in accordance with the City Council’s adopted criteria. In this instance, some 60 neighbouring properties were notified by post. Objections about the right of access to the site is a private matter, but I am seeking further details from the applicant. The provision of services (eg gas, electricity) is not a planning matter.

7. **Conclusion**

7.1. I consider that the proposed layout builds on local character, whilst not detrimentally impacting on the character and quality of the residential environment to existing residents in the area or prospective residents of the site itself. Additionally, the proposals would redevelop a vacant site, contribute to the City’s housing stock, yet maintain important trees and accommodate any existing wildlife. The proposals constitute sustainable development. I also consider that the application, subject to approval of reserved matters, would be acceptable in terms of residential amenity and highway safety.

8. **Recommendation**

8.1. Approve subject to conditions.

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Case Officer: James Mead
Photo(s)

Figure 1: South-Eastern Boundary of site, looking north

Figure 2: Rear of 122 Green Acres Road, looking north
Location Plan

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