

# Berkswell Parish Council

Clerk to Berkswell Parish Council – Mr Richard Wilson  
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18 April 2016

Dear Ms Brereton,

## **Berkswell Parish Council's view on the idea of a 'bypass' through the Berkswell Parish**

My Council has asked me to write to you as follows:

At a recent meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2016, between Councillor Courts, yourself and Gary Palmer of SMBC and Councillors Howles and Burrow of Berkswell PC, the view of Berkswell Parish Council was sought concerning a bypass for Balsall Common running from "Gambles Garage" junction on the A452/A4177 to Hallmeadow Road, its line running via Waste Lane and then parallel to the greenway before joining Hallmeadow Road.

**The council has discussed their views on this matter in a public meeting and unanimously agreed its position against such a 'bypass'.** The decision was reached based on, but not limited to, the following points, including impact on the greenbelt, previous clear SMBC decisions against the proposal, lack of need for a bypass along this route, impact on residents of Hallmeadow Road, increasing problems with parking issues along Hallmeadow Road, impact on retailers in Balsall Common village, significant increased impact on commuter journeys in the general area and flooding concerns:

1. Any such bypass would cause significant harm to the remaining greenbelt, the narrow piece of land in the Meriden gap.
2. If a bypass were to be financed by funds from developers, this would inevitably mean there would be significant building of houses on the area between the Greenway and the back of Sunnyside and Meeting House Lane, thus creating even more harm to the remaining greenbelt.
3. The area of greenbelt involved has a very high and long established amenity use to the residents of the area, given the number and routing of footpaths on it which are used very intensively by residents of Balsall Common for dog walking, running and general enjoyment of the countryside.

4. There is not and has never been an objective case for a bypass. Council understands that the Highways agency do not consider that a bypass of Balsall Common can be justified and asked for the route to be removed from the Solihull Local Plan in 2012/13.
  - 4.1. The Solihull Plan and subsequent SMBC planning approval provided for two additional housing sites on the A452 at the south of Balsall Common. Local residents objected to the inclusion of these greenbelt building sites at a time when more suitable sites were available at the north of Balsall Common. Resident's argued that traffic from the two sites would predominately travel north in the morning for work and enter the A452 which was already used in by other commuters travelling north. These arguments were comprehensively rejected by SMBC in their consultations on the Solihull Plan, by the Independent Examiner of the draft Solihull Plan and by the Planning Committee when detailed planning permission was granted only last year. Given that SMBC authorised the additional traffic from these sites onto the A452 it must be SMBC's considered view that the A452 is not significantly congested given that other sites for housing were available and not selected.
  - 4.2. A bypass would require a genuine need in terms of traffic flows and yet even observation demonstrates conclusively that the main A452 through Balsall Common is not congested for any significant proportion of the day. There is light congestion during morning and evening rush hour but this does not compare with the levels and extent of congestion experienced elsewhere on Borough roads or on the M42 nor roads within the City of Coventry area. The traffic through Balsall Common is tidal in that in the morning there is more heavy traffic travelling north towards the employment opportunities in the airport/M42 and Birmingham areas and in the evening the predominance of traffic is southwards as those commuters return home. Outside of the rush hours traffic flows freely with no waiting at the central roundabout.
5. The proposed bypass route would include Hallmeadow Road. This is an 'access' road for the Riddings Hill housing estate. Moving traffic from the existing A452 to Hallmeadow Road is merely moving it from one group of residents to another and as such is neither equitable nor just.
6. A 'bypass' would require a clear and largely unimpeded route for traffic, Council have significant doubt as to whether a bypass surrounded by new housing on Barratt's Lane Farm land would work effectively. Its free flow from a southern junction with the A452 would be disrupted by junctions/roundabouts/traffic lights at Hob Lane, Waste Lane, from one or more junctions to the proposed housing estate on Barratt's Farm, at Station Road, at the junction with Riddings Hill Road, at the junction with Grovefield Crescent, at the junction with Lavender Hall Lane Road and finally at the junction at the George and the Tree. This could be one of the most heavily "junctioned" bypasses in the country and therefore, in truth, more of an access road to housing than a free flowing bypass.
7. The existing Hallmeadow Road area has become a road used for general parking for the station and the medical centre. Making it a real 'bypass' would be unworkable and result in the transfer of parking issues to other areas of the village, already under pressure for parking spaces.

8. To finance a bypass by building more houses will create more unsustainable car traffic by encouraging more car commuters to live in Balsall Common. It is accepted that Balsall Common is an area where there is little in the way of job creation and many residents therefore have to commute by car to work around the West Midlands. This is contrary to planning policy.
9. Residents of the area affected by a potential bypass are already impacted by the impending HS2 activity. The increased uncertainty and 'blight' on house prices and their quality of life of a bypass and subsequently more building is unnecessary and unreasonable.
10. The general area along this potential bypass route, especially in the Barretts Lane Farm area and near the station, is affected by frequent flooding. This is already recognised by SMBC. Adding further pressure to existing flooding by additional building in the form of a bypass and more houses in that area will inevitably have a negative impact on existing homes.
11. Concern has also been raised about the impact of a bypass on the Balsall Common shopping centre which is characterised by convenience stores and specialists rather than large retailers. Many shops in Balsall Common benefit from passing trade. A bypass will have some impact on this and the impact on shop profitability could be significant.
  - 11.1. Even a 5% reduction in sales will have a disproportionate impact on profitability and viability of a shop. The shop will lose the gross margin on these sales but be unable to change its costs at all.
  - 11.2. Passing trade typically features what the trade call "impulse purchases" rather than the family shop. The gross margins on such purchases are very high. Typically, 50% for a soft drink and up to 85% for a take-out coffee. The loss of such high margin items can be devastating to a local retailer.
12. At the meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> February members of the Parish Council demonstrated that a very considerable number of homes could be built elsewhere within Balsall Common and the larger Berkswell Parish which would cause less harm to the function and openness of the greenbelt than heavy building on the Barretts Lane Farm land. Most of these sites could be to the north of Balsall Common centre thereby minimising the impact on the A452 through Balsall Common and it is unanimously felt that this is where the focus of attention should lie.

Following consideration and debate on the general issues and the points detailed above in particular, Council have concluded that there is no justification for the building of a bypass and subsequent building of houses on this stretch of greenbelt land in the Berkswell Parish area. In addition, Council wish to reaffirm its view that any perceived benefits of a bypass would be significantly outweighed by the damage caused to the greenbelt and that the very special circumstances test for building in the greenbelt cannot be met by such a proposal.

Finally, Council do not consider that the provision of a bypass for Balsall Common is a topic covered by the terms of reference of the review of the Solihull Plan. An examination of the concept could of course form part of the work to produce the Neighbourhood Development Plan. Berkswell Parish Council encompasses around 900 houses within Balsall Common and Council would wish to secure the very best for its residents of Balsall Common and indeed for the other 400 or so elsewhere in the Parish.

Yours sincerely

*Richard Wilson*

**Mr Richard Wilson**  
**Clerk to Berkswell Parish Council**

CC Gary Palmer, Councillors Courts and Bell.