

140115-3

I am writing in response to the public meeting held on 14th Jan 2015.

May I first express my disappointment that I received no response to my observations sent by email following the previous meeting in October 2013, and that no overall response had been prepared in time for the presentation on 14th January 2015.

During the meeting on 14th Jan, I asked a question about access to Area 19 but was given what I considered to have been a perfunctory and unsatisfactory answer. I had also intended to ask further questions but was put off by a response to another questioner which implied that people living in areas close to proposed developments were likely to raise negative comments. Whilst I accept that NIMBYism is bound to be a factor in any discussion, it is also true to say that people living close to a proposed development will carefully consider the effects of such development and contribute a great deal of local knowledge to the discussion which may otherwise be overlooked.

I have a number of observations and questions that I would like to put to you under the following headings:

- A. Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Assessment (LSCA), 2013
- B. Access
 - i In relation to Herefordshire Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, (SHLAA) 2009
 - ii During the initial stages of developing Area 19
 - iii During the construction period for the proposed 15 houses
 - iv Subsequent effects of intensification of use of Cowl Barn Lane
- C. Land availability
- D. Alternative sites

A. LSCA 2013

At the meeting on Jan 14 2015, it became clear that the LSCA carried out by Carly Tinkler had a very significant effect on subsequent choice of land for additional dwellings contributing to the new housing target in the Neighbourhood Plan. Only areas assessed as Medium to High capacity, or higher, have been allocated a specified number of dwellings. Hence the decision to raise the overall capacity of Area 19 from Medium to High/Medium was crucial to the prospects for development of this area. It is apparent from reading the

report that this was a marginal decision, so in view of the following incorrect and/or contentious statements in the report I believe that this area's LSCA should be reassessed.

Quotations from the LSCA summary for Area 19 and/or Appendices A and B are shown in larger, italic type.

"This is an example of an area which scores poorly in terms of landscape condition due to neglect and lack of management"

Is the neglect of a traditional orchard (even to the extent of refusing to allow the Colwall Orchard Group to assist in its restoration) reasonable grounds for allowing development? If so, it is obvious that other orchard owners will be encouraged to use similar tactics to maximise income from their lands. The report does concede that *"the landscape character and visual amenity could be improved through management/replanting which would in turn increase the value (and GI function) of the area."*

"in landscape terms (Area 19) appears to contribute little apart from at a very local level"

"well used by school and local walkers"

"Has a high local (rather than any wider) value"

In the report there are several references to a Key path (running E – W along the northern boundary of Area 19) linking Brockhill Rd with Mathon Rd. However, the report fails to mention that the path along Cowl Barn Lane links to Colwall Stone and the railway station (avoiding the main road as it passes along Silver St, behind the Chemist shop). This path is extensively used not only by local walkers but by visiting hikers, often in substantial groups, throughout the year. This route is described in several walking guides, including "Walks around Colwall and the Malverns" by Elsie Godsell (prominently displayed in Colwall library) and is clearly marked as a walking route in "Around and About The Malvern Hills" – the most frequently sold map in the Malvern Visitor Centre office in Malvern High Street.

"Not visible from hills apart from occasional glimpse"

"The northern edge of the settlement is drawn around the boundaries of an old orchard, for example, which is hidden view from all but the closest viewpoints"

These statements are totally untrue. Yesterday I walked around the western and northern boundaries of the old orchard in Area 19 where it is proposed to build 15 houses, and have taken photographic evidence that the whole of these boundaries can be clearly seen from the entire ridge walks on Perseverance Hill and Pinnacle Hill. Today I have walked these ridges and obtained further photographic evidence, an example of which is attached (I will take better photographs when the weather is better for photography). When viewing this photograph bear in mind that the fruit trees within the area will have been cleared for development so the land and housing will be more clearly defined.

Not including Jubilee Hill (from where any views of Colwall are obscured by trees high on the hillside) this amounts to more than a 1 km walk on the Malvern Hills from where substantial parts of Area 19 can be continuously seen. The term “*glimpses*” is highly inappropriate and misleading. These observations are of ground levels of Area 19 to the west of the Downs School Sports Hall and the three adjoining houses in Covent Garden. Once the height is raised to the roof tops of the proposed 15 houses, even more of the development will be visible over the sports hall roof, and the view of high trees on the western boundary (bordering Cowl Barn Lane) will be at least partially obscured by the dwellings.

Surely this recording error affects the LOW grading of views inwards/outwards in step 3 of the LSCA and also the local scenic value in step 5.

“Could be argued to be a good prospect for development, especially as it backs on to the recently completed houses at Covent Garden”

In view of the evidence that any development in Area 19 will be visible from the hills, the combination of Covent Garden and Area 19 developments will make a combined area of development of 35 dwellings which, together with the Downs school buildings will make a large continuous area of visible development in the northern end of Colwall. Currently the green lung of Area 19 softens the landscape view of this area which is already scarred by the prominent roof of the sports hall when viewed from the hills. Place buildings in Area 19 and the sports hall will look even more like a factory development.

“including an old track along Cowl Barn Lane. Edges and quality eroded due to high level of use, loss of natural vegetation and lack of management”

This statement is a very negative appraisal of the last remaining section of a very old (possibly ancient) track which linked Colwall Stone (and probably Evendine if we go further back in history) and Brockhill/The Purlieu as it exits the village through a green lung to the open countryside beyond. Passing N along Cowl Barn Lane, just beyond the short residential

section, walkers enter a tunnel formed by overhanging branches from trees in the protected sections of woodland to either side of this narrow section of the byway. In a ditch to the E is a stream (tributary of Cradley Brook) running for a short distance alongside the track. Almost immediately, the track passes through a substantial hollow way which extends as far as the entrance to The Cowl Barn. For most of its length it is approximately 1.5m deep* (1.7m at the deepest point) and 0.8 m deep in the section which extends about 10m S of the existing gateway into the eastern section of Area 19 where the 15 dwellings are proposed to be built. The report fails to even mention the hollow way, let alone emphasise its significance in indicating the age and history of the track. Surely the above features should be highly valued as contributors to the Landscape Character and Visual Amenity. Guidance on landscape character published by The Countryside Agency emphasises “internal landscapes *within* the village”, not just views to and from the village.

*measured from the natural ground levels to either side.

Whilst the old orchard in Area 19 clearly has some potentially very important ecosystems, biodiversity and visual amenity value for people walking along the perimeter tracks (and could even be improved in these respects) I am unable to have access to the land so cannot make detailed, informed comment. Hopefully, others who have gained access in the past will be able to make their observations known to the Parish Council. The biggest concern for me is the protection of the tree-arched hollow way section of Cowl Barn Lane and the adjoining woodland areas designated to be under the “Protection of Open Areas and Green Spaces” according to the map distributed on 14th January. In view of the necessity for access through these areas if houses are to be built on Area 19, I conclude that much greater consideration of the potential damage to these features should be included in the overall assessment of Landscape Capacity.

B. Access

i) In relation to Herefordshire LSHAA, 2009

According to

www.herefordshire.gov.uk/media/5445519/schedule_of_sites_rscs_and_hubs_jan12.pdf

and appendix 11 of the Herefordshire Council SHLAA 2009,

site reference O/Col/005 (same 0.84 ha site as Area 19) is “*not achievable*” as a site for potential housing for the period up to 2031. In answer to the question “Is the site suitable and achievable for development”, it is stated “*No. Cowl Barn Lane is too narrow to*

intensify use; limited scope to widen and visibility is very poor at the junction with Old Church Road"

This site was not reviewed in 2012.

So three questions need to be asked:

What, in respect of access to Area 19, has changed since the above decision was made and published in 2009?

Why has the Colwall Parish Council Neighbourhood Planning steering group seen fit to recommend the building of 15 houses on a site already described by Herefordshire Council as not being suitable or achievable for development?

Why was it that at the public meeting of January 14, 2015, the only statement about access to Area 19 was "also access limitations" and despite a specific question about access there was no reference to the highly significant, unequivocal conclusions previously made by the County Council?

ii) During the initial stages of developing Area 19

As we have all seen from the development of the bottling plant site, for a site of 15 houses with no existing roads, there would have to be a great deal of ground works involving heavy machinery, and large lorries carrying materials to the site and taking away soil. In the early stages, before internal roads are created or a proper entrance constructed, where will these large vehicles turn? Is it anticipated that they will back all the way to Old Church Rd and perform the dangerous exit in reverse?

As far as I can judge, the first possible point of entry to Area 19 beyond the protected area to the east of Cowl Barn Lane is at about the position of an existing farm gate which is part way along the hollow way, and will need widening to create access. The stream will also need to be avoided, so long vehicles turning into the site will first need to swing to the west of the track before being able to turn into the field on the east side of the track.

Clearly it will be impossible to prevent considerable damage to the protected areas either side of the single track byway.

iii) During the construction period, very large numbers of heavy/long vehicles will need to drive down Cowl Barn Lane, in places negotiating a roadway between houses that is only 2.7m wide (3.6m between garden walls). High vehicles, including removal vans, will need to pass through the previously described tunnel of trees, thus ensuring the final destruction of the landscape character and visual amenity value. Currently, refuse vehicles stop before entering this section of Cowl Barn Lane.

iv) Subsequent effects of intensification of use of Cowl Barn Lane. Again, Hereford Council have already published their assessment of this situation. It deserves to be reiterated:

“Cowl Barn lane is too narrow to intensify use; limited scope to widen and visibility is poor at the junction with Old Church Rd”

It seems reasonable to suggest that an additional 15 dwellings would triple the vehicular use of Cowl Barn Lane.

C. Land availability

It is well known to local residents that the owner of Area 19 has, for years, been seeking to sell the land for development. Presumably the Parish Council is also aware that the land is likely to be available. However, has the Council checked whether any covenant barring sale of the land for development was signed by the current owner when the land was purchased?

D. Alternative sites

I would like to clarify that this section of the submission is ONLY my personal view on alternatives. Other sections of my submission have been seen and discussed with some neighbours who have indicated that they may contact you to concur with my findings . The Alternative Sites section has not been seen by all others who may well have different views.

I appreciate that the Parish council has a difficult job to do in preparing a Parish Settlement Plan. Whilst not wishing to divert attention from my observations on Area 19, I feel that I should contribute my views on where I have preference for development sites. I gave a lot of thought to this as I walked the hills today. Looking down on Colwall it struck me that the landscape is characterised by dense but tree screened developments in the northern end, dense but less hidden developments around Colwall Stone, and less extensive (but equally visible) developments in Colwall Green and in the Village Hall areas.

In terms of visual sensitivity, opening up more exposed areas of housing amongst the trees in the northern section would alter its semi-rural characteristics, whereas adding extra areas of housing alongside already visible settlements would, from a distance, mostly affect the overall shape of the village in the central and southern sections. With this in mind I would like to see less infill development and maybe two or three larger developments to accommodate the required housing.

Possible candidate areas are:

- i. To the west of Colwall Green (Areas 7A and B) where two or even three rows of housing could balance the shape of housing development on each side of the Green and create a more complete community centred around the Green. Access would be

straight forward and effects of the period of construction would be minimal for the local community. At the meeting on 14th January there was concern expressed about the lime trees alongside the road and (if I remember correctly) the number of driveways exiting onto the road. You may wish to consider the possibility that if two lines of houses were to be developed, then access to them could be from a new access road running parallel to the main road. Houses next to the main road could still face outwards onto the green but have garden paths leading to the front door with vehicular access from the road behind, thereby circumventing the potential problems of damage to the lime trees and too many vehicular exits onto the main road.

ii. Area 9A, extending more into Area 9 than currently proposed. Again, access would be straight forward. An advantage of substantial developments in Areas 9 and 7 would be the proximity to the Primary School and Village Hall amenities for younger families.

iii. Area 12 could be partially developed in the eastern half of the land with a new road entering from the straight section of Old Church Road to the east of Grovesend Farm. This could accommodate a substantial amount of housing without affecting the popular walking route down the track leading to the old ice factory. The housing to the east and south of this area is already exposed to views from the hills and development of area 12 would not radically alter the village shape when viewed from the hills. Creating a short-cut walking access to Colwall Stone might, however, be a problem.

In Summary

I am making a case for the LSCA for Area 19 to be reviewed and reassessed in view of what I consider to be several important defects in the assessment process for this area.

I have asked several questions regarding access to Area 19 via Cowl Barn Lane for which I would be grateful to receive answers.

Please Note:

I am sending this submission by email and also by post so that I can include annotated photographs

Response to the Public meeting held on 14 January 2015

