

I want to submit my comments regarding planning applications 2021/1089 & 2021/1090, which will be spread under several headers and covering a variety of areas – some of which are still present from my first submission in 2021.

Presentation and Transparency

Much like my first comments in 2021, I have serious concerns about the presentation of this development and the hands of both Strata and Barnsley Council in handling these. With no word of hyperbole, these documents are longer than most novels. Excluding previous comments, consultee responses, and superseded documents, there are 281 PDF files.

This is on application 2021/1090 alone.

The harsh reality is that even though the comments timeline was extended slightly, the amount of time allowed was insufficient, yet another example of stifling the public. There is no way possible that any regular resident would have the time or know-how to absorb the relevant information in such a short time. As mentioned in my previous comments, this is a simple tactic of drowning people in paperwork.

This is a belief substantiated by residents and their concerns given to me and other councillors that they are not given the right amount of time to offer such a comment, and it is the same thing that over 100 people responded to myself and Cllr Peter Fielding (at the time) – and is something the council has refused to take on board at this second coming of the application.

Residential Plan – The first Plot

First and foremost, this is something I have taken issue with, and it is a severe concern for residents of Higham: privacy.

I will repeat a concern and repeat my annoyance of assurances broken. Councillors and BMBC were assured that no three-story houses would be backing up to the bungalows on the western side. As specifically seen in the Phase One residential development plan, this is still false.

Semantics could be used that these are “2.5 stories”, but the harsh reality is that this is a third story, and houses, as seen in the residential plot, meet this. Specifically, these are houses 117, 118, 119, 185, 189, 190, 196, 197 and 200. My residents want their privacy respected, and this plan blatantly opposes that.

Furthermore, residents of the Darton West ward on St. Johns Avenue will also see their privacy breached with house 32. This could be the case with houses 95 to 108, though the garden lengths seem adequate to supply the distance.

While not perfect, I have already indicated that this could have been prevented by a buffer zone of trees between the houses. That this – and previous assurances – have been ignored, and the privacy of residents in bungalows is being blatantly ignored, is deeply concerning.

The Site, the Link Road, and Future Uncertainty

First and foremost, this application is deeply flawed as it leaves a huge chunk of open green space used by hundreds of residents permanently unusable – with absolutely zero guarantees of even being developed.

The reality is that this application does one thing: it approves a singular road to nowhere and 216 dwellings. The harsh reality is that should the dwellings not prove successful; there will be a large amount of land made desolate and unusable, with no link road in place to relieve the strain on Higham Common Road, which is in no way capable of handling the traffic required for this level of development, and a general eyesore and embarrassment for both the locals and the council.

Such a development as proposed, even with the later parts being “reserve matters,” will require excessive machinery and workforce, dramatically increasing traffic on the surrounding roads. Vehicles from Junction 37 to the proposed singular entrance of the site on Barugh Green Road will require them to take the shorter route on Higham Common Road or via Pogmoor and Gawber.

Regardless, the blockage this is going to cause is irrefutable. The included transport assessment already predicts a 27% increase, which I would argue is on the low end. One primary concern the residents of Higham Common Road already face is the congestion of that road, the speed at which people travel, the lack of visibility at points, and the positioning of a school, which will inevitably lead to an RTA. Near misses have already occurred, and this will considerably increase this risk.

As such, the link road should most certainly be developed first to enable access via both the site's top and bottom and avoid the certainty of an incident occurring. It is also concerning that Strata have included the link road, affordable housing and “open space” to discuss around S106 money. The link road is essential for the development, affordable housing is currently at its bare minimum planned, and the open space is actively being removed from residents.

Transport

The transport strategy and the link road are linked to the above. Highways England has already placed a 6-month hold on the application, and for good reason. There is zero evidence to support the transport assessment's conclusions, which invariably promises a far more appealing picture than the reality. Indeed, some aspects appear to be flawed beyond comprehension.

One such example is the estimation of traffic. A figure north of 29,000 is given for the 2026 (with development) additional traffic on A628 Dodworth Road alone. This same assessment assumes a 2033 (with development) assessment of the same road with a figure slightly north of 32,500. It appears illogical when 2026 would have an additional 216 homes, with 2033 at a predicted 1500 homes plus industrial units. Even working on the industrial units included in the 2026 assessment, an additional 1300 homes would invariably generate more than the traffic allotted here.

Which brings us to the link road again. The traffic on Dodworth Road would have to go somewhere. The assessment going down Dodworth Road does not look at the impact of chokepoints within Barnsley, which leads to these locations. One such point is the crossroads of Gawber Road, Pogmoor Road and Greenfoot Lane (Barnsley Hospital). This is a serious issue and arguably the worst area within Barnsley at peak times, and difficult even in moderate times. To get to the site from the proposed sole initial access on the A635, traffic must travel via that location or Higham Common Road, which is already far beyond capacity.

The traffic assessment lacks evidence to support the rosy claims of almost no negligible impact. Beyond that, the idea that the link road is still ethereal at best is a serious failing. This link road must be developed first for the safety of surrounding residents and the correct traffic flow around the wider area.

Official statistics show the average number of vehicles per household at 1.3 (outside of London). Even at the lower number of 1500 homes, this gives an extra 1950 cars within the immediate vicinity of the application, and there are further effects from that. Add to this the lack of public transport accessibility – which the application quickly glosses over – and you have a commuter hub where 99.9% of trips to and from the area are made by car, with absolutely zero mitigation measures in place, and even worse – the lack of the link road – actively making things more dangerous is.

Loss of Greenspace Access

With the plans set forward, this land will be inaccessible and unusable to residents for up to and potentially over a decade. Plans or “reserve matters” will only be brought forward at the most profitable moment for Strata, leaving residents in a state of limbo and having lost access to – for some – the only green space they have access to.

The documentation clearly states that much of the housing stock, so much of the land in question, will not be used for over half a decade. The market will further impact this, with the aim to earn as much profit as possible from the land. Houses will not be built if the developer believes that waiting a year will generate a further 5% profit.

This means that residents of the surrounding area will not only be taunted by a large green space that they did have access to but will now be off limits. They will also see this land being undeveloped, following groundworks having turned it into a wasteland. There must be plans to give residents access to the land around the development, as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for access to green space.

Environmental and Ecological Impacts

Continuing the “extra money” claim. Both the Environmental Statement – Non-Technical Summary and Environmental Statement Vol 2 Chapter 10 Appendix 10.4 (A.K.A. Coal Mining Assessment) make a clear indication that Strata will be on a keen lookout for any coal within the ground of this development site and that with all coal found “the economic value will need to be assessed” and extraction of this coal will be attempted if agreement with the Coal Authority is gained. If this is the case, the already estimated astronomical impact of this development – 101,770 tonnes of CO₂ emissions (48,034 construction emissions, 53,736 embodied carbon emissions) – will be compounded by the extracting of this coal, the added machinery required for this, the subsequent burning of this coal and for what? To increase the profit margins of the site developer at the expense of the environment.

Furthermore, the extraction of this coal will bring coal dust on top of the already high amounts of dust that will be raised. The residents of Barnsley are aware of the issues coal dust can cause; even small amounts can result in damage and lung disease. Dust alone needs practicable measures without the added concern of coal dust. I would also be remiss if I didn’t mention that allowing the extraction and burning of coal to profit the developers is opposed to Barnsley’s net-zero plan.

On the east of the development will be areas where wildlife can live, but the inevitable development will remove close to 80% of real-term green space where wildlife can thrive. There are claims that the eight or so metres of grass alongside the link road are “green corridors”, but that is nonsensical at best and dangerous to drivers and wildlife at worst.

The reality in the case of this application is that Chapter 7 (Ecology) notes a serious number of aspects that will be negatively impacted in the short and long term. Chapter 7.1 (Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report) attempts to paint a rosier picture, saying several areas will have no to very little adverse effect. Still, little evidence supports the overall claim of a biodiversity net gain, even in the Biodiversity Offsetting Assessment, with the removal of grassland as a determining factor as the only means of claiming a net-gain.

The developer must provide a 10% biodiversity net gain. The reality is that over a decade of development will drive all wildlife away, as seen in all large developments. The considerably smaller remnants of green space will not be able to hold as much wildlife and, in some cases, will be positioned in a potentially hazardous way to wildlife and humans alike.

This site will already cause an extensive carbon footprint, both from the development and embodied carbon, and the added output of the houses and industries built on this site. Factor into this the loss of green space, which absorbs carbon, and the significant overall loss of trees and hedgerows, and the impact is significant, and no real measures are being taken to mitigate this, with the plans being comical in the claims that it will be positive by the end.

Further Concerns

- Who will oversee the maintenance of this land after development? Will this be the council, paid for by millions of £ in predicted rates gained from the development, or will it be an added expense for the residents and business upon MU1? This is not made clear anywhere.
- What mitigation is put in place for downstream flooding issues? This land absorbs a lot of water, and with climate change seeing Britain becoming ever wetter, the reduction of green space creates issues on this land (with water areas dug for it) and then downstream.
- I echo a point made in the past that the business units here are not conducive to high-quality employment. They are mammoth units that only logistics, major storage or retail companies can logically use. Jobs from these are low-paid work, which cannot pay for the seeming cost of the houses on MU1.
- What mitigation will be put in place for noise for surrounding residents? Following the plan of 2020/0028 and the lack of care or consideration for residents on Higham Common Road next to the southern roundabout because of the omission of noise barriers, it must be questioned what will be put in place for the surrounding residences during both the earthworks and during development.
- Have any discussions with businesses occurred for the employment properties? The last thing Barnsley needs is another huge empty “shed” mimicking the former B&Q site. This is particularly true as even more are being built on the south-eastern side of the borough.
- There is a disappointing lack of bungalows in this plan. As the population of the UK increases in age, and general fitness and mobility levels deteriorate, an accessibility plan is needed. That is before even considering disability access, which is essential. The properties of these new estates rarely – if ever – account for this, which seems sorely lacking.

- Regarding the PROW – previous comments have already indicated the unacceptability of the closure of PROWs for a decade or more because of the earthworks and the piecemeal approach of the rest of the site – due to the sheer size and lack of time to read the documentation, I’ve been unable to locate the alternate PROW’s put in place – have these been made?
- For the same reasons as above, I cannot locate information on street lighting, as requested by South Yorkshire Police.
- Recently, the council adopted plans around greener development, such as green roofs and so on. As far as I can find, the industrial part of these developments mentions nothing about such development; this must be accounted for before any approval is given following the accent of this in Full Council.

Sadly, the only positive change for this application in almost two years is that the housing number has been reduced from circa 1700 to 1500. There is still a considerable number of unsubstantiated claims. A lot of the impact of traffic, pollution, and biodiversity around the site and further afield is not accounted for. Concerns and requests from statutory bodies and stakeholders are unanswered, and residents are yet again left feeling ignored and actively kept out of the loop as much as possible.

While I completely appreciate, and even agree, that there is a need for housing – this cannot come at the expense and huge detriment of the people already living within an area, not to mention the sad reality that these houses will be outside of the price range of the people working within the local area, and that there is nothing in forthcoming on social housing.