

ARAG Presentation Sandbach Road North Appeal

My name is Charles Howard and I am chairman of the Alsager Residents Action Group ARAG. ARAG is a campaigning organisation. We represent in excess of 1,500 Alsager residents and we are focussed on protecting our Greenfields and encouraging appropriate development on Alsager's Brownfield sites.

This proposal should be rejected for a wide range of reasons and that technical detail has been ably presented through objections from the Alsager Community, the Cheshire East Team and other people here.

However, I would like to focus on the questions which we regularly receive from our members.

Sometimes, when arguing these complex planning points, it is easy to forget the damaging impact which decisions of this nature can have on Communities. Residents often express the concern that too much building in inappropriate places will ruin the "village and community feel" of Alsager.

Alsager Residents believe they have made their wishes clear through their adopted Town Plan and feel very strongly that our plan for the next 20 years should be implemented, as opposed to an alternative piecemeal approach which could emerge to suite developer interests. The adopted Town plan will meet Alsager's 20 year housing quota through appropriate building on our Brownfield sites and it will maintain Alsager's "Settlement Boundary".

In Alsager, Planning permission has already been granted on the Twyfords Brownfield site and a site on Crewe Road, and this represents permission for at least 400 (possibly 550) houses in the first two years of the 20 year plan. Permission for building on the MMU site is anticipated in 2014 and this will bring the housing total to at least 700 (possibly 850) in the first 3 years of the plan. That is 70% (possibly 85%) of the total within 15% of the plan period.

The Congleton Borough Inspector's Report on Objections - September 2003 concludes that this site should neither be allocated for residential purposes nor identified as a reserve housing site (point 10, 9.8.5 page 262)..... We agree.

The adopted Alsager Town plan, the Cheshire East emerging plan, the Town council and Cheshire East's Strategic Planning Board have all said 'no' to this site. It would be an intrusion into open countryside and against a number of NPPF and Cheshire East policies. These facts have been ably presented in a number of objections. Another way to express this is that our elected representatives and our decision making body have said "no". We believe their correct decision should stand.

The application claims that Cheshire East is unable to demonstrate a 5 year supply of housing and that a development here would be sustainable and appropriate. We clearly do not accept that position.

Alsager itself could be regarded as unsustainable because of the low level of employment opportunity and the poor infrastructure.

In this case, as well as contributing to the overload of the road system in the Town Centre and elsewhere, this narrow country Lane is already extremely dangerous. Unplanned and uncontrolled development of this nature would only exacerbate these problems.

So onto the questions:

The first point is:

Following a long and involved consultation process, an Alsager Town plan was produced and adopted by Alsager and Cheshire East. A lot of hard work and commitment went into producing the Town Plan from residents and Cheshire East.

Alsager Residents consider the adopted Town Plan to be Alsager's statement of how the Community should be shaped and to be clear, the adopted Town Plan does not include any consideration of previous draft plans developed during consultation. It stands by itself.

This gives rise to the first regularly asked question which is:

- 1. Why would a speculative building proposal in an inappropriate place override the formally expressed wishes of the Alsager Community?**

The Next Point is:

Cheshire East **can** demonstrate a 5 year housing supply, but even if it couldn't, policies of the NPPF and the emerging Cheshire East Local plan still stand. If something intrudes into open countryside, if the site is deemed inappropriate in the plan, if the infrastructure is inadequate or if the country lane is dangerous, these facts do not change because of a perceived County Level procedural problem.

This gives rise to the question:

- 2. Why would the community of Alsager be punished with obviously inappropriate building just because developers claim a County Level inability to deliver a 5 year housing supply for the whole of Cheshire East?**

The Next Point is:

Alsager knows where its quota of housing will come from and at least 70% of that total will get planning permission in the first 3 years. Any unwanted Greenfield developments will be additional to the Alsager total and would strongly influence the outcome over the next 20 years. Furthermore, Alsager is an area of housing restraint because of the re-generation plans in the Potteries. Stoke on Trent and Newcastle Under Lyme Boroughs have objected to excessive building in Alsager and according to the NPPF they must be consulted on any decisions being made in the area. Irrespective of the Cheshire East Plan, Alsager can take no more than its planned allocation and this proposal does not conform with the plan.

Adding unplanned housing in totally inappropriate places, where infrastructure is inadequate, there is no employment and especially in an area of restraint makes no sense. *It isn't houses that are needed, it's employment.*

This gives rise to the question:

- 3. Why would anyone impose higher building levels on Alsager when the infrastructure is inadequate, it is an area of restraint and housing levels have been agreed?**

The Next Point is:

Residents expect their elected representatives and the Cheshire East and government officers for which they pay, to protect the Communities they serve. The problem of the Cheshire East Local Plan, the SHLAA and 5 year supply has been created by a combination of Central Government demanding unwanted re-organisation, Cheshire East not yet having a completed Local Plan, the wording and interpretation of the NPPF and Central Government's unwillingness or inability to protect the Communities they are elected to serve. There is no ambiguity or lack of clarity in this. If Cheshire East's correct decision to reject this proposal is overturned for the spurious reasons suggested by the developer, it will be considered a breach of trust by the Community. It is to be hoped that the Planning Inspectorate will support the expressed wishes of the Community.

This gives rise to the question:

- 4. Why are we not being protected from speculative building proposals driven by developer self-interest?**

The Next Point is:

A final point and probably the most obvious, is that Alsager doesn't need any more houses anyhow. There is no employment in Alsager. Twyfords, ICL, GEC, MMU all major employers, have all gone and we have an ageing and static population. Bearing in mind the area of restraint agreement with the Potteries conurbation, additional housing makes no sense at all, other than to achieve some artificial central number.

Adding housing in totally inappropriate places to an area of restraint, because of a perceived shortfall from an arbitrary County Level housing target is a poor substitute to planning. It isn't houses that are needed, it's employment.

The most regularly asked and final question is:

- 5. Why are we building these houses, where are all these people coming from and where are the jobs?**

Put another way, If Alsager is going to have 1,000 more houses, where are the 2,000 jobs coming from?

In Summary then, the regularly asked questions are:

- 1. Why would a speculative building proposal in an inappropriate place override the formally expressed wishes of the Alsager Community?**
- 2. Why would the community of Alsager be punished with obviously inappropriate building just because developers claim a County Level inability to deliver a 5 year housing supply for the whole of Cheshire East?**
- 3. Why would anyone impose higher building levels on Alsager when the infrastructure is inadequate, it is an area of restraint and housing levels have been agreed?**
- 4. Why are we not being protected from speculative building proposals driven by developer self-interest?**
- 5. Why are we building these houses, where are all these people coming from and where are the jobs?**

In this presentation, I have tried to express some of the views we have received from the Alsager community.

I hope that the wishes of the Community do carry 'some weight' in this appeal and that this proposal is firmly rejected.

**C.Howard
ARAG - Chairman**

Extract from inspector's report.

9.85 DP2 (New) SANDBACH ROAD NORTH, ALSAGER

REPRESENTATIONS:

OBJECTION: 5034 (MESSRS BROOKES & REDSTONE)

ISSUE:

Whether land at Sandbach Road North, Alsager should be allocated for housing purposes.

CONCLUSIONS:

1. The objection relates to an area of around 7.3 hectares of land used mainly for equestrian purposes outside the proposed SZL for Alsager. Whilst the land is largely grassed it contains buildings in connection with its equestrian use. To the south it is bounded by the rear of existing dwellings, to the west and north by agricultural land and to the east by Sandbach Road North. A footpath crosses the western end of the site leading to the Salt Line Linear Walkway which follows a disused railway line.
2. As well as seeking the allocation of the land for housing the objection refers to possible open space provision, linking with that at the nearby Borrow Pit, footpath improvement and the provision of improved landscaping.
3. The proposed housing provision for the Alsager sub-division takes account of the fact that the area is subject to restraint in order to ensure that development is focussed on the Potteries conurbation. It is concluded elsewhere that the sub-division's share of the residual structure plan housing requirement can be met through the redevelopment of the Manchester Metropolitan University site for mixed use purposes including residential. As planning policy at all levels makes clear that priority will be given to the use of previously developed sites and buildings there is no need to identify greenfield sites that involve an expansion of the built up area at this stage.
4. Given the size of the site, if only half was actually developed this would be capable of accommodating around 100 dwellings. This would lead to a significant over provision Boroughwide and in the Alsager sub-division in particular.
5. In the event of there being a requirement to identify further housing land in Alsager prior to the end of the plan period the site does not perform well in relation to possible alternatives. The site is clearly part of the open countryside, which national policy indicates should be protected for its own sake, and it is prominent both from Sandbach Road North and from the footpaths in the vicinity. Furthermore although the site is close to a public house and primary school there are other sites better related to the facilities of the town centre. It would consequently be inappropriate to identify the area as a reserve housing site.
6. It is concluded that the site should neither be allocated for residential purposes nor identified as a reserve housing site.

RECOMMENDATION:

That no modification be made to the plan in respect of this objection.