

## The Future of Housing around Earlswood

Most of you will be aware of the contents of the Chancellor's Spring Statement on 13 March 2018 which stated that the Government intends to build 300,000 houses per year going forward and has set aside a housing fund of £4.1 billion for this.

He further announced that the West Midlands has agreed to build 215,000 houses between now and 2031, which is to be helped by £100m grant from the Land Remediation Fund.

What does this mean for Earlswood?

Well, the Greater Birmingham HMA (Housing Market Area) includes parts of Warwickshire and one such part is Stratford on Avon District. We are therefore likely to be allocated some of this new housing because there is legal "duty to co-operate" between all the different authorities within the Greater Birmingham HMA.

The Government has issued a White Paper entitled "Fixing our Broken Housing Market". It's not clear whether the section on Green Belt development helps us or not – it seems to be stating that the Green Belt is to be protected and then it offers councils a route into developing the Green Belt. It states at para 1.39:

1.39 Therefore we propose to amend and add to national policy to make clear that:

- authorities should amend Green Belt boundaries only when they can demonstrate that they have examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting their identified development requirements, including:
  - making effective use of suitable brownfield sites and the opportunities offered by estate regeneration;
  - the potential offered by land which is currently underused, including surplus public sector land where appropriate;
  - optimising the proposed density of development; and
  - exploring whether other authorities can help to meet some of the identified development requirement.
  
- **and where land is removed from the Green Belt, local policies should require the impact to be offset by compensatory improvements to the environmental quality or accessibility of remaining Green Belt land. We will also explore whether higher contributions can be collected from development as a consequence of land being released from the Green Belt.** (E&FHRA emphasis)

Birmingham has already commissioned a study called "Greater Birmingham HMA Strategic Growth Strategy". The first finding of the report is that Birmingham and Coventry cities will require 205,000 new houses by 2031 and 255,000 by 2036 but, they will be short of development land for 28,000 houses up to 2031 and 61,000 houses up to 2036. This shortfall will therefore be pushed onto the HMA.

From then on, the report becomes confusing in the extreme. In the report, Tanworth Parish is allocated an identity of S28 i.e. parcel 28 in the southern quadrant of the Greater Birmingham HMA.

It then finds lots of reasons not to develop S28 - but then proposes 2 options:

- "proportionate dispersal" under a scheme called PD5; and
- a "new settlement" under a scheme called NS5.

Neither of these schemes is given any scale at this point but the study later defines:

- "proportionate dispersal" as being a development of between 500 to 2,500 houses, either in small or larger clusters; and
- "new settlements" as being settlements with at least 10,000 houses.

The strategic development model produced by GL Hearn, Birmingham’s consultants for this, shows that Earlswood and Forshaw Heath are classified as follows, using the headings:

- Meeting of Green Belt Needs – **“Safeguarding from encroachment”;**
- Preventing Towns from Merging – **“Green Belt”**
- Safeguarding the Countryside from Encroachment and Protecting the Setting of Historic Towns – **“Safeguarding from encroachment”;**
- Contribution to Green Belt Purposes – **“Safeguarding from encroachment”;**

AND THEN, the final conclusion from the above assessment:

- Overall Contribution to Green Belt Purposes by Principal and Supporting Contribution – **“Supporting contribution...”**

Having established that the parish will have to make a “supporting contribution”, this then leads on to: “Potential Areas of Search by Development Model” which then outlines “proportionate dispersal” scheme PD5; and “new settlement” scheme NS5 within parcel S28 as possibilities going forward.

The document then looks for “Areas of Search for Strategic Development” and recommends (at para 1.85) that the areas that should be taken forward for further assessment are:

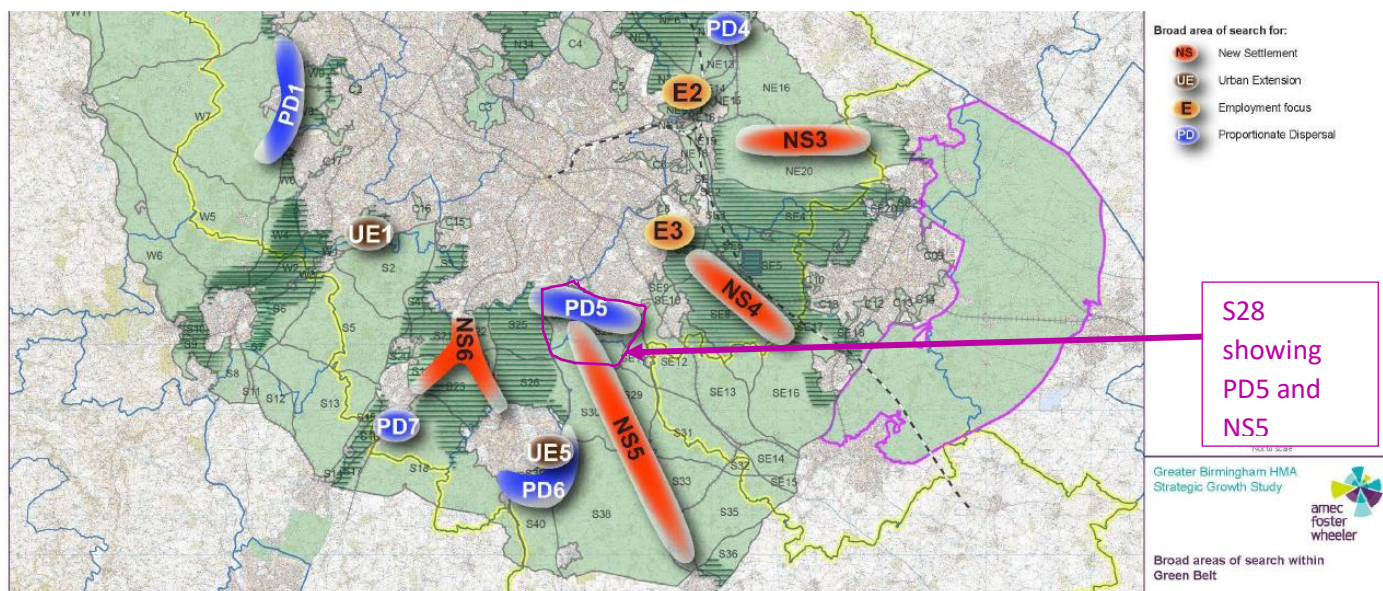
- South of Birmingham (this is primarily parcel S28);
- Between Birmingham and Bromsgrove;
- Around Shenstone;
- Around Balsall Common.

In summary, it states (at para 1.86) that:

“Of these however, the latter three all fall in locations which are identified as making a principal contribution to Green Belt.”

By implication, that just leaves parcel S28 as a potential development area, after having demonstrated a raft of reasons not to develop it further.

It therefore looks like Stratford District will be allocated 15k houses out of this lot. Where they will be allocated is anyone’s guess but, on the basis that all our allocation will be Birmingham overspill, it seems reasonable to assume that it will be along the Birmingham / Stratford rail corridor...and closer to the Greater Birmingham conurbation. This is borne out by the maps in the report. Below is the one showing the parish and the potential development sites proposed:



In conclusion, the findings of this report indicate that it is likely that Stratford District Council will be allocated 15,000 new houses and it appears that Earlswood and surrounds are going to be allocated the majority of them.

It's difficult to see how they have come to this conclusion from the contents of the report.

Of course, Stratford District Council has emphatically denied this – see the Stratford Herald report entitled “New 15,000-home Town Not supported... Reassurances over homes idea” on 1 March 2018.

Just to get this in perspective:

- Solihull has already granted permissions for the building of another 5,000 to 6,000 houses within a mile of the Solihull MBC / Stratford District boundary, which mean that our limited infrastructure will be further compromised;
- The Solihull developments mean that the undeveloped Green Belt separation between Solihull MBC and Stratford District will already be reduced to two fields in places **before** any further development under this new review;
- The Residents' Association delivers newsletters to all 650ish houses in the Earlswood and Forshaw Heath area. An increase of 10,000 to 12,500 houses on a baseline of 650 houses in the Earlswood area is total disproportionate. This scale of increase equates to somewhere between 1,525% and 1,925% and will be the death knell of the Village as we know it; and
- SMBC has been presented with plans produced to create a “Garden Village” between Forshaw Heath and Tidbury Green that has the potential to add a further 3,000 houses on our boundary with Solihull. We have not taken this into consideration in this document. However, the Government seems to be keen on the concept of “garden villages” and Barratt Developments plc has gone to a lot of trouble and expense to produce this report if there's no prospect of it coming to fruition.

### **Can we do anything about this?**

Yes, the draft Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is almost ready for public consultation. Current dates are the 5<sup>th</sup> May at Earlswood Village Hall and the 14<sup>th</sup> May at Tanworth Village Hall. We believe that it is vital that we have a strong NDP in place as soon as possible, as it becomes a legal document when it's adopted by Stratford District Council (SDC) and informs SDC what our planning preferences are for the next 13 years. To that end, it will only be strong if everyone attends these meetings and voices their opinions. Thereafter, we can use the NDP as a tool to pressurise SDC and developers into future planning that is dictated by our preferences. Please attend one or other of these meetings, details of which will be posted on parish council notice boards and the new PC website (coming on line by the end of the month). There will also be an abridged version of the NDP and questionnaire circulated to all parishioners prior to these meetings.

Also, watch the website for updates. The Residents' Association will be holding a meeting in the Village Hall, after the two Parish Council NDP meetings, to review the NDP meeting, in order to discuss issues raised that directly affect Earlswood and Forshaw Heath and put together any representations that we feel necessary.

E&FHRA

17 March 2018