Joint Parishes Committee of Stoulton, Drakes Broughton, Wadborough with Pirton, Whittington, Norton-Juxta-Kempsey and White Ladies Aston for the SWDP Worcestershire Parkway Garden Town proposal.

Rt Hon Nigel Huddleston MP House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Nigel

I wrote to you last year on behalf of our local parishes relating to the proposed development of Worcester Parkway Garden Town.

Since then, we have formed the Joint Parishes Committee - Stoulton, Drakes Broughton, Wadborough with Pirton, Whittington, Norton-Juxta-Kempsey and White Ladies Aston - that seeks to represent the Parishioners with respect to the proposed development. We have raised a number of concerns and issues and these, along with the replies from Wychavon District Council, can be found in links on the Stoulton Parish Council website.

You said in your previous response that you do not have jurisdiction over local council matters, but we would suggest that there are concerns of a broader nature that relate to the proposed development.

The government has paused its review of Planning Policy as a result of pressure from Conservative backbenchers representing the concerns of their constituents. The Prime Minister in his conference speech stated that we should be focussing on developing brownfield sites rather than greenfield.

COVID and the resulting shift to online shopping and hybrid working has brought into sharp focus the need to change the balance of our existing town centres with respect to retail, business, leisure and housing space. COVID has brought about significant and potentially long term changes to the way people live their lives with respect to both work and leisure.

Developing brownfield sites and rebalancing existing town space usage has a lower Carbon cost than developing on greenfield. COP26 and subsequent UN reports on the need to accelerate our progress on reducing our Carbon emissions demands that we should look much more seriously at proposals such as the Worcestershire Parkway Garden Town, particularly when considering the amount of the land under the scheme currently given over to arable crop production that can only be replaced by more food imports and the associated carbon costs.

In connection with the point on arable farmland, food security has to be a key consideration for the government when it reviews its Planning Policy. The Ukraine and Russia export a significant percentage of arable products including 30% of the world's wheat. Extreme weather events resulting from the global warming that is already unavoidable also threatens food supplies and imports to the UK. Continuing to lose land for UK production will seriously undermine efforts to be more self-sufficient in primary food production, a key requirement for increasing our national food security

The Worcester City Master Plan adopted in July 2019 suggested that there was the potential for 3500 dwellings. The SWDP review document published September 2019 suggested that there was a

potential for 800 dwellings in Worcester City and was fairly dismissive of opportunities to develop other South Worcestershire Towns. It is our contention that SWDP has not taken sufficient notice of developing on brownfield sites and refactoring space in our existing towns in order to provide more housing and revitalise our existing towns.

'Locking in' such a development as Worcestershire Parkway Garden Town for the next 40 years, noting the intention to build the town centre and major road infrastructure first, would seem extremely unwise considering the national and indeed global uncertainties that currently prevail.

We have made all of these points in our engagements with SWDP and Wychavon Council in particular but whilst responding to our concerns politely their position as been to defend their plans. Nothing substantive has changed with regards to the original proposals other than a suggestion at the last liaison meeting that they may not need to build a solar farm which has always been part of the Concept Plan and something we have never objected to.

After considerable delays to the SWDP, the Consultation Period was planned for July and August 2022. We have argued unsuccessfully that given the scale of the development this was insufficient and timed for when people will be going away on holiday having possibly not done so for 2 years due to COVID. In the last week we have learnt that there is now to be a further delay, the length yet to be specified, to the SWDP timetable as there have not been able to complete their evidence for submission to the Planning Inspector. We welcome the delay but note it was not in response to our requests.

We will be making our submission to the Planning Inspector during the revised consultation period and in May will still be going ahead with presenting our update for WP Garden Town at our annual Parish meetings, though with less detail than we had originally planned

Inevitably we will be asked as to the position of our local MP on these proposals and as to whether they should write to you. How should we answer those questions?

We look forward to your response

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Morris
Chair of the Joint Parishes Committee