



Eccleshall Parish Council

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Planning (Development Management)
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17th October 2025

**25/41015/OUT, Outline planning permission with details of access for the development of up to 55 dwellings (use class c3) with associated infrastructure.
Land To The South Of Shaws Lane, Eccleshall, Stafford**

Eccleshall Parish Council have considered the details of the proposed development. **We recommend that the application be refused on the following grounds:**

- Paragraph 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework, December 2024 makes clear that *"The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making."*
- The proposed development is outside of the settlement boundary and does not meet the criteria for rural exception or development in the countryside. The proposed development is encroachment and sets a precedent, leading to further incremental encroachment into the open countryside.
- Acceptance of greenfield development would create further challenges to the viability of vacant brownfield or allocated housing sites within the borough.
- The scheme harms the rural and village character of the area, encroaching into the open countryside.
- There are already infrastructure deficiencies including health, transport, drainage and secondary education. The proposal must be assessed in the context of other applications and allocations; if infrastructure is already under stress, additional development will obviously exacerbate problems.
- **The proposed development** in the open countryside would cause harm to sensitive landscapes as identified in the SBC mapping in the Landscape Sensitivity Study, which identifies this area as having limited capacity for development.
- The proposed form and layout, even with mitigation, would result in intrusive visual impact, owing to the prominent location on a hilltop, flanked by open countryside.

- The scheme would involve the loss of mature established hedgerows and trees, eroding the settlement edge, harming the rural character of the area and leading to the loss of valuable habitats, wildlife corridors and biodiversity. The Arboricultural Assessment confirms that substantial amount of established mature hedgerows are for removal, including the largest stretch at 113m.
- The loss of hedges and widening of the lane would change the character of the rural lane by putting in a footpath and kerbs, 'urbanising' the edge of settlement.
- Development on previously undeveloped land will have a negative impact on surface water drainage and the wider water and flood management of the locality. Surface water flood issues are already a significant problem for Eccleshall, and this will exacerbate these by reducing the capacity for natural surface water management in the catchment area for the River Sow.
- The development of the site would result in the loss of grade 3a 'best and most versatile' agricultural land as demonstrated in the report 'Agricultural Land Classification, December 2024'. 30% of the development is 3a located centrally in the development.
- It is contrary to national, Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plan policies as set out later in the representation.

Our rationale for these reasons for refusal are set out below.

Sustainable Development

Paragraph 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), December 2024 makes clear that:

"The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed."

The lack of 5-year housing supply within the borough is not a material consideration that would enable consent as it conflicts with the growth strategy of the adopted Part 1 Local Plan as set out below.

Furthermore, as the proposed site is entirely outside of the defined settlement boundary, adopted Part 1 Local Plan Policy E2 (Sustainable Rural Development) sets 11 clear criteria where development in these locations will only be supported. The application fails to meet any of these criteria. This is also applicable for adopted Part 1 Local Plan Policy C5 (Residential proposals outside the settlement hierarchy).

Proportionate Growth and Cumulative impacts

The adopted Part 1 Local Plan Spatial Principle 3 sets the sustainable settlement hierarchy. Eccleshall is the third tier, identified as 1 of 11 key service villages.

Part 1 Local Plan Spatial Principle 4, identifies that key service villages will deliver 12% of the borough housing delivery. The adopted Local Plan allocates 537 new dwellings in the Plan period 2011-2031 across the 11 key service villages, noting that some of these settlements may take a higher proportion where there are not green belt constraints.

In context, since the Part 1 Local Plan was adopted Eccleshall has had 340 new dwellings granted permission to the period 31st March 2019. There have also been a further 54 new dwellings granted permission since this published data in the 2020 Options consultation. That takes the total percentage to in excess of 73%.

Clearly the parish of Eccleshall and the 'Key Service Village' has far exceeded a proportionate share of any growth to meet the borough need, even taking account of changes to national policy promoting further growth.

This application must not be considered in isolation. The cumulative impacts of recent and current developments is a material consideration. The submission documents do not take account of the substantial recent growth or propose any mitigation to address clear infrastructure needs within the village.

Local Plan Part 1 Spatial Principle 4 makes clear that in meeting housing delivery targets, development should be supported by necessary infrastructure. Whilst the applicant would be subject to developer contributions as a borough wide strategy, the application does not propose or include any locally specific infrastructure benefits for new or existing residents of the community.

Encroachment into the Open Countryside and Harm to Landscape Character:

Chapter 15 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 198 makes clear that decisions should ensure that any new development is appropriate for the location, taking account of the natural environment as well as the site sensitivities and wider impacts of the development.

Under the **Local Plan Part 2**, settlement boundaries have been clearly defined to manage growth and prevent inappropriate development in the countryside. The application site is not within the defined settlement boundary. Granting permission would undermine the purpose of these boundaries and set a precedent for sporadic development across open countryside.

The proposal would have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the countryside, which is inconsistent with Policy N8 (Landscape Character) of the Local Plan. The site forms part of an attractive rural landscape, and the introduction of built form would result in visual intrusion, loss of openness, and degradation of landscape character. The development is not well-related to any existing settlement form and would be prominent from surrounding public rights of way and rural roads and the wider area due to its siting and local topography.

The Stafford Borough Council, Landscape Sensitivity Study, October 2021, identifies the application site in the assessment as ECC09. It concludes the site has High/Medium landscape sensitivity, noting that should development take place the hedges and PRoW should be retained and a landscape buffer included to the south and west of the site. The application proposes removal of some of the establish mature hedgerows and trees.

The supporting landscape strategy submitted as part of the application demonstrates that the site currently predominantly flanked by open countryside to the east, south and west and would be visible from much of the surrounding open countryside owing to the elevated position outside of the settlement. It also concludes that the site would have a substantial adverse impact on landscape character, reducing to moderate adverse after 15 years.

Other Material Considerations

Drainage and Surface Water: Surface water flooding and pluvial flooding on the River Sow are material to this application. Any surface water run-off should be conditioned if granted to ensure the rates remain the same as that as a greenfield site.

All drainage and water management must take account of the recent DEFRA guidance, 'National Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems' July 2025 to ensure that there is no increase in run-off rates or the capacity in the network is not comprised. It is imperative that any upgrades required are delivered as part of any future development rather than at the detriment of new and existing residents.

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal: The 'Ecological Report, May 2025' makes clear the survey of the site was undertaken outside of the optimal period (April to September) on the 11th December 2024. Whilst surveys can be conducted at any time of year this is poor practice.

December could have resulted in missed protected species or valuable habitats that are only visible in other seasons, such as breeding birds. The lack of foliage in December can also make it difficult to assess tree-dwelling species and the presence of certain flora. The PEA report itself did not acknowledge these limitations due to the timing and it should indicate the need for further seasonal survey work.

Therefore, it is unclear on the true extent of the ecological value of the site and any recorded species that may have been missed as a direct result of the time of year for the PEA.

It is strongly recommended that the applicant provide further information to enable an informed decision making in an appropriate season period. This is of particular relevance given the quality of agricultural grade land, proposed extensive mature hedgerow removal and development of a previously undeveloped site in the open countryside.

Biodiversity Net Gain: Given the application is on previously undeveloped greenfield site it is exceptionally disappointing that the proposed BNG is currently 11.37% for Habitat units and 31% for Hedgerow units. It should be noted that indeed these figures may decrease with the PEA undertaken during the optimal seasons. This raises the question of whether the final application will meet the minimum 10% requirements.

Vehicular Access: The proposed vehicular access is onto a narrow carriageway and rural lane. The proposed highway alterations to facilitate the access would have an urbanising impact on the edge of settlement. It is suggested that should Officer's be minded to approve the application the vehicular access is re-considered to either better utilise the Glebe Close access or provide a new direct access to the existing roundabout. This in turn would mitigate against the loss of established mature hedgerow or certainly substantially reduce the amount needed to be removed for pavements and kerbs, which in turn have an urbanising impact on a rural lane and would provide a more convenient access.

The Parish Council shares the concerns of our community that any additional traffic movements taken along Shaws Lane could have a detrimental impact on highway safety. We wish to remind Officers that it is already a busy, narrow rural road at national speed (60mph) which forms part of a circular walk for many residents around the village.

Developer Contributions: Should Officers be minded to support the application against the recommendation as set out by Eccleshall Parish Council, we would recommend that any developer contributions sought were used towards the following local priorities or where appropriate included within the application site in any subsequent reserved matters application. The identified infrastructure priorities include:

On Site:

- Provision within the design of the development of a community car park of approximately 20 spaces, to support a safe place for school drop-off and collections. This community benefit would also address the existing issue of on street parking congestion, ensuring it is not replicated in other housing developments.
- Creation of a safe active travel route (traffic free) from the site to the school.

Off Site:

- Re-surface the community centre, car park with a permeable, durable surface.
- Upgrade and improvements to the PRow 13 that runs between Church Street and Shaws Lane.

Conclusion

The proposal fails to meet the requirements of national policy, local plan policy or the policies of the Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan, as set out in this representation.

Approving this application would create a precedent for further development in the open countryside, undermining the integrity of both the adopted Local Plan and the Borough's long-term spatial strategy. It would weaken the role of settlement boundaries and increase pressure on unallocated sites outside of settlement boundaries, with long-term consequences for the natural environment and local infrastructure.

There is no justification in this application to support departure from national, local plan or neighbourhood plan policy.

In particular, we would emphasise the requirement of Section 38 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, to determine planning applications in accordance with the policies of the statutory development plan, unless material consideration indicate otherwise. The statutory development plan includes the adopted Local Plan (Part 1 and 2) and the Eccleshall Neighbourhood Plan.

Kind Regards,

Stacey Worden
Clerk to the Council.
cc. Borough Councillors Peter Jones and Jeremy Pert.