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Planning Application P/2022/0461/FUL

The erection of 338 dwellings with associated access, public open space, sustainable urban drainage systems and other infrastructure

Location:

Land opposite 55 – 85 Rookery Lane, Rainford

Case Officer:

Gila Middleton

Rainford Parish Council wish to register the following comments about the above application.

Firstly, in the Public Consultation and Engagement section of the Planning Statement which accompanied the application, the applicant states:

“4.17 Parish Council members asked a range of questions of the Applicant regarding the following topics:

- *Transport and traffic*
- *Housing mix*
- *Affordable housing*
- *Building standards*
- *Open space management*
- *Service charges*
- *Flood risk and drainage*
- *Utility provision*
- *Infrastructure contributions and*
- *Construction management*

4.18 The Applicant provided responses during the meeting and provided further information to members pursuant to it

The highlighted part of the above is untrue. The information that Miller homes stated would be provided to the Parish Council following the meeting, was not forthcoming. Several requests were made for the details requested without success. Eventually the Parish Council was informed that the details and documents requested would form part of the planning application and would be available to the Parish Council at that time.

Reference will be made to:

- the Planning statement and associated documents accompanying the planning application
- the St Helens Local Plan
- the St Helens Council Climate Change Emergency Declaration
- the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- St Helens Council Affordable Housing SPD
- St Helens Council Biodiversity SPD
- St Helens Council Ensuring a choice of Travel SPD
- Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) Climate Change Emergency declaration

The most recent iteration of the NPPF was published in July 2021. Paragraph 218 of this document confirms that the national level guidance within the NPPF is a material consideration which should be taken into account when determining applications for planning permission.

It is the Parish Council's view that this application fails to conform with the NPPF guidance, or policies contained within the St Helens Local Plan. This is mainly due to the size and scope of the development which is inappropriate for the surroundings and does not use appropriate energy technology in the majority of the proposed dwellings. The reports that have been commissioned were undertaken up to 3 years ago which brings in to question their relevance for an application submitted in June 2022.

The Parish Council is not diametrically opposed to housing development in Rainford. However, the impact that this particular development would have on the Village of Rainford must not be underestimated. It would increase the number of properties by around 8% and the population by at least 12%. Notwithstanding that there is no provision in this application for the infrastructure required to sustain such a vast increase in the number of Rainford residents, there is no expansion space in the village for the additional services that would be needed.

Additionally, that the application does not meet the planning needs of Rainford or St Helens Borough as no account has been taken of the existing demographic of Rainford Village and the surrounding area.

The Planning Statement from section 2 onwards will be used, where relevant, to provide context and structure

2.0 The Site Location, Context and Planning History

2.10 This states that the site is approximately 1.2km walking distance from the Village Centre. This measurement is taken from the point on Rookery Lane closest to the linear park. The distance from the far side of the estate to the Village Centre is at least a further 0.68km, making it almost 2km (approximately 1.2 miles) walking distance from the Village Centre.

2.11 This states that the character of the area is generally urban fringe. This is rather disingenuous as Rainford is a semi-rural village and does not have the population density or infrastructure to be referred to as a town or city. The housing on Rookery Lane and Higher Lane bordering the proposed development area are mostly individual, spaced-out detached houses, set back from the road.

2.13

& 2.14 As stated, there are existing bus stops on Rookery Lane and Higher Lane and a train station. However, it is simply not true that there are frequent (definition: occurring many times at short intervals) services by bus or train. The bus service is about to be reduced further so that services will only run, at most, once per hour and only one service runs in the evening. As the bus and train services are not interconnected it is not possible to get a bus to the station in time to catch a train to commute to work in Wigan, Salford, Manchester, Rochdale, Burnley, Blackburn or Liverpool. It would be possible to cycle to the station, but there is no bike shelter for secure cycle parking at Rainford Station. Therefore, the only plausible expectation is that residents will use cars to travel in and out of, and around Rainford Village. This does not

accord with the climate change emergency declarations of St Helens Council and the Liverpool City Region and is not consistent with providing an environment that fosters the health and well-being of the inhabitants. In particular, it does not comply with LPA03: Minimise the need for travel by focusing development in sustainable locations.

2.15

&2.16 The geophysical survey of the site suggests that there “could” be a “later prehistoric” funerary monument on the site. However, there is no further explanation or the view of an accepted expert on the significance such a monument may possess. It is imperative that the scheme of investigation to dig trial trenches is undertaken so that a possible area of historic significance is not lost.

3.0 Planning Policy context and other material considerations

3.15 LPA02 – Spatial Strategy: The world is a very different place to what it was when the Local Plan was developed. The Coronavirus pandemic and the increasing global food shortage have changed perspectives and priorities. It is entirely possible that the ‘very exceptional circumstances’ that removed grade 1 agricultural land from the green belt would not be thought relevant if they were being considered today, given the need for, and greater emphasis on locally produced food. The war in Ukraine has exacerbated the global grain shortage and this is not a short-term problem. Home grown grain will be needed more than ever to ensure there is no food shortage in the UK. There does not appear to have been any modifications to the St Helens Local Plan or this Planning Application to account for these undeniable and on-going changes in contemporary life.

3.16 LPO3 – Development principles: The key aspirations that are applicable to residential development are:

- Create sustainable communities with a strong sense of place: 85% of the dwellings will be fitted with heating systems that will be obsolete in 18 months’ time. In a meeting with the Parish Council, Miller Homes representatives gave the definition of ‘sustainable’ as “Meeting the needs of the future, today”. There is little evidence of this in the application, particularly in the choice of heating systems and building materials. These cannot be considered sustainable when the Borough Council has declared a Climate Change Emergency. The application does not demonstrate how the architecture and design of the dwellings will create a strong sense of place for the residents. As the estate is on the very edge of the Village, residents are more likely to feel cut off from, and separate from the rest of the Village community. This is exacerbated by the fact that there is no provision for amenities on the site, except for one combined cycle and footpath on to the Linear Park. There is no central open space, which would at least provide a focal point.
- Provide an appropriate mix of house sizes and tenures: This has not been shown in the application. The demographic of Rainford has not been assessed or taken into consideration and therefore the site has the wrong proportions of each type of housing. There should be far more smaller and affordable properties which would provide homes for those wishing to down size, those wishing to move to single storey properties, and for first time buyers.
- Provide and/or contribute to infrastructure where necessary: There is no explanation in the application as to how this would be achieved.
 - Education: Currently, there are only primary school places available at a school with a religious atmosphere, and no secondary school places available. It is not expected that there will be any school places available by 2025. Even if funds were provided to the schools in Rainford, there is little or no space for any of them to expand at the current sites. There are no or very few places available at the nurseries and pre-schools in Rainford and Crank.
 - Health: There are 2 doctors’ surgeries in Rainford, both of which are exceedingly busy. It is not unusual to have to wait up to 3 weeks for an appointment. There is no NHS dentist in Rainford Village.

- Well-being: There is no provision in this application for community space
 - Shops: Depending where the measurement is taken from, the nearest shopping facilities will be 1.2 – 2km from the estate. Given the present prevalence for using motor vehicles, it is a misconception to assume that the majority of residents would walk or cycle along the Linear Park to the shops in the Village centre, particularly if they wish to transport heavy items back again. There is very little parking in the village centre and a problem already exists with cars parking inconsiderately and illegally. The additional number of cars that would want to park in the Village Centre simply cannot be accommodated.
 - Parking: In addition to the comments above, there is already severe congestion around all 4 schools during term time. Furthermore, there are only 18 visitor parking spaces on the plan for 338 dwellings. As provision is made for at least 2 off road parking spaces for each of the houses, (less for the apartments), it can be assumed that this is because it is expected that most of the houses will have 2 cars. This being the case, visitors for the most part, will have to park on the road, causing obstruction and congestion.
- Address the needs of the different demographic profiles present within the Borough including older people, families and children: Very little, if any account of the demographic profile of Rainford and the wider area has been taken into account. There is a higher-than-average proportion of older residents within Rainford. Additionally, there are younger people who wish to live in Rainford, but the lack of suitable housing prevents this. Yet only 6% (18) of the planned dwellings are 1 bedroomed flats and only a further 18% (58) are 2 bedroomed flats or houses. Furthermore, all of the 1 and 2 bedroomed flats are part of the affordable housing cohort. This demonstrates a lack of knowledge and understanding of the population mix in Rainford as many older residents wishing to downsize or move to single storey living would not need affordable housing. Building this number of dwellings in Rainford does not address the need for housing throughout the Borough as there are not good transport links with the rest of the Borough. A development of this size would be better placed where residents could easily access employment, transport, schools, healthcare and shops.
- Secure high-quality design of building and landscape: There is a lack of imagination in the ‘off the peg’ design of the dwellings on the estate and the materials specified are standard rather than high quality. The landscaping is not appropriate for the character of the area as there are not enough trees. Many of the trees that are included have been placed in gardens rather than on the highway. There would be no protection for these trees which could be removed by the owners.
- The landscape buffers at the perimeter of the site are not wide enough, and in many places, they are not suitable for tree planting, because they are too narrow. Additionally, trim trail equipment has been inappropriately sited in these areas, which are too small to provide a dual role of aesthetically pleasing landscaping and play area.
- Minimise the need for travel by focusing development in sustainable locations: The site chosen for this estate by Miller Homes does not minimise the need for travel. It is 1.2 – 2km from the nearest shops, which are village centre shops and include a convenience store Co-op. There is no major supermarket. The shops are too far away for most people to be able to carry heavy shopping from. Most of the amenities within Rainford are clustered around the Village centre. The nearest amenity to the site is a pub, which is not a facility that the majority of residents would wish to use on a regular basis.
- As stated elsewhere, the bus service is limited and not interconnected with the restricted train service, which does not minimise the need for travel. Lack of school places and NHS health services within the village would also increase rather than minimise the need for travel.
- Provide for access to outdoor spaces: The delivery of open spaces within this proposal is very limited. Little functional open space has been included. Dial House wood is not within the

designated development area allocated in the Local Plan, but the applicant claims the wood “is retained and central to the sites design”. The wood has to be retained as it is protected, but there are no other benefits to the estate. Trim trails have been squeezed in around the edges of the site and the buffer zones are too narrow. There is only provision for one path/cycleway to link the development to the Linear Park. There is no central communal open space.

- Contribute to the lowering of St Helens carbon footprint: Constructing this large housing estate will increase St Helen’s carbon footprint over the course of the 5 years of the development. The use of soon-to-be outdated heating systems in a large majority of the houses will not contribute to the lowering of St Helens Carbon footprint. A real impact could be made if all the houses were built to passive house standards with air source heat pumps and additional insulation etc

3.26 The building regulations stipulation for at least 20% of dwellings as adaptable standard and a minimum of 5% to be designed to accommodate wheelchair users have been met, but again, only to just above the minimum requirement. Given the demographic of Rainford and the LPC01 policy to provide a mix of houses that meet the Borough’s need, the application should provide far more of the dwellings with these adaptations. Little or no account has been taken of the age and health profile of existing Rainford residents who may wish to move to smaller, adapted single storey accommodation. This is the type of accommodation (along with smaller affordable first-time buyer houses) that is needed in Rainford, which if available, would free up family sized units around the village. The properties which will be adapted are not marked separately on the site plan. However, as the disabled parking spaces are clustered around the affordable 1 bed and 2 bed apartments, it is reasonable to assume that this is where the adapted properties will be situated. It is not reasonable of Miller Homes to assume that all those requiring adapted properties will also require affordable housing, and that only people who live in 1 and 2 bedroomed properties need adaptations. There is no indication that there are any adapted 2, 3 or 4 bedroomed houses. Furthermore, the location of the disabled parking bays are at some of the more inaccessible parts of the site. They are not close to the access to either Rookery Lane or Higher Lane. This shows that little, if any thought has gone into the needs of people who require adapted housing and is yet another indication of how Miller Homes cannot substantiate the claim that it has a detailed knowledge of the demographic and character of Rainford Village and the surrounding area. Additionally, it is a missed opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to equality by including a significant amount of varied housing adapted for those with mobility and other issues.

3.28 To conform with LPC02 at least 30% of the site must be Affordable Housing. This is equivalent to 101.4 dwellings. The application shows 18 No1 bedroomed apartments and 33 No2 bedroomed apartments for affordable rent and 25 No2 bedroomed houses and 25 No3 bedroomed houses for affordable ownership. Again, there has been no consideration for the type of housing required in the area and only the minimum number required (101) have been included. Additionally, it is disappointing to note that most of the Affordable Housing will be in the latter part of the development, particularly phases 13 and 16, so none will be available until towards the end of 2025 at the earliest.

In the application, Miller Homes states “The Applicant continues to be committed to working with the Council as the LPA during the application process to determine the most appropriate method of delivering affordable housing on-site as a key material benefit of the scheme”

The above statement leaves the door open for substantial change to the Company’s affordable housing build proposals. The Parish Council hopes that the percentage of affordable homes on the site would increase, not decrease.

The existence of affordable housing within a new development also demands an appropriate infrastructure. There has been no consultation with any Services in the Rainford area. Currently the GP practices serve families and an increasingly aging population in the village where the demand for NHS diagnosis and treatment can only increase. Equally, dental services in the area would need to increase and also offer an NHS Service, which is not currently available.

Transport is covered in another section of this document, but there is clearly a glaring gap in the existing provision for residents, without the addition of 1000 plus new residents in the 338 proposed homes, with at least 10% being residents of affordable housing, who are less likely to have private transport.

Equally there is a strain on the existing retail outlets, especially the Coop in the village centre. This would not be enough to serve the additional residents of the proposed development.

When Miller Homes met with the Parish Council, they were unable to give any indication of the cost of any of the housing. However, it is not unreasonable to assume, given the location, that the cost of the individual houses would not attract first time buyers and be more likely to attract citizens who will depend more on local services which, in the main, will be unable to meet their needs.

There appear to be only 98 affordable properties marked on the site layout plan. The properties adapted for wheelchair users and other mobility issues are not marked separately on the site layout plan. However, some of the affordable housing appears to also be adapted housing as there are disabled parking spaces near them. This again shows a lack of knowledge of the local demographic making an assumption that all of the people who would need adapted properties would also need affordable homes and that none of those in the market and intermediate housing would.

Policy LPC02 requires developers to 'pepper pot' the affordable housing throughout the development. This application fails to do this. The site plan shows that the affordable housing is clustered as follows:

40 units from plots 230 – 271

34 units from plots 145 – 163 and 180 – 195 which are close to each other

14 units from plots 294 – 298 and 308 – 316 which are close to each other

10 units from plots 30 – 35 and 45 – 48 which are close to each other

The other 3 units do not appear on the site plan.

The affordable housing must be built to the same standard as all the other units so it is perplexing that it has been marked separately on the site plan, when the adapted housing has not. The adapted housing needs to be placed appropriately on the site whereas the affordable housing could be any of the units throughout the site.

There is no indication as to whether any of the affordable housing will have air source heat pumps.

3.30 LPD 02 sets out the requirements for the design and layout of new build residential developments, which includes the following criteria:

- Architecturally high quality: The designs of the dwellings appear to be exactly the same as Miller Homes have built at numerous other sites, and there is little to suggest that these homes will comply with this criterion. The materials specified appear to have been chosen to maximise profit rather than to provide high quality residences and there is nothing inspiring or aesthetically interesting in the architecture. The claim that it is sympathetic to the surrounding residential area has not been substantiated by the given design of the houses and apartment blocks.

Policy LPD01, Ensuring Quality Development 3.24 states: During the design process of any new developments, consideration should be given to the inclusion of renewable and/or other low carbon technologies. In addition, the overall design of any new developments can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. An awareness of the orientation and layout of sites as well

as the proposed use of building materials will be scrutinised during the planning application process to ensure that suitable mitigation and adaptation measures relating to climate change impacts are taken

This application does not comply with the above statement as outmoded energy systems would be installed in the majority of the houses. In addition, the houses are not being built to passive house standards and all the dwellings are masonry rather than renewable timber frame.

- Reflect the good elements of the local character and create a strong sense of place: The existing houses closest to the development are not uniform in style or character, with some being substantially older than others, and a wide variety of building materials used. Although Miller Homes propose to build several different styles of dwelling, there is no explanation as to how the 'off the peg' designs chosen reflect the good elements of the local character, or how they will create a strong sense of place as there is no individuality in the proposal.
- Provide appropriate landscape treatments: No priority has been given to landscaping and the result is an uninspiring, uniform approach which packs as many dwellings on to the site as possible without taking account of the well-being of those who will inhabit them. The buffer areas at the edge of the development are not wide enough and there is no central open space. There is no outdoor communal space for the apartment blocks.
- Design that reduces the levels and fear of crime: There is no explanation of how this criterion is met and Miller Homes representatives who met with members of the Parish Council admitted that Merseyside Police had not been consulted.
- Avoid unjustified harm to heritage assets: It could be argued that completely surrounding Dial House Wood and 2 of the oldest properties in Rainford is unjustified harm to heritage assets. Additionally, there has not been enough investigation into whether the site contains artefacts of prehistoric importance.
- Protect residential amenity: There are no amenities close to the site to protect. The closest is a pub which is 10 -15 minutes' walk away.
- Provide waste storage facilities: There do not appear to be any bin storage areas for the apartment blocks.
- Ensure accessibility for all intended users: Miller Homes representatives informed the Parish Council that to comply with N43, 5% of the dwellings will incorporate facilities for those with mobility issues and be completely wheelchair accessible. This is equivalent to 17 properties. Furthermore, 20% will have some additional features such as wider doors in order to be N42 compliant. This is equivalent to an extra 68 properties. A total of 85 properties. Given that there are only 16 disabled parking spaces, it is difficult to see how this criterion is met.

3.31 The application for 338 houses does not align with the Net Development Area of 75% of the site. Dial House Wood is not included in the site in the Local Plan, yet Miller Homes have included it in the site plan. Therefore, the application does not comply with the Local Plan.

3.32 The following are requirements for development:

- Safe highway access to be provided from Rookery Lane and Higher Lane: Modifications to the Higher Lane site access provide an additional access lane which is needed due to the bend in the road just before the site access and the speed limit being 40mph at that point. While this may create safe access into the site, it does not demonstrate that there is safe access out of the site at this point. Traffic wishing to ingress and egress the site to travel to and from Windle, will use Mill Lane to access the A570. Over the past 5 years there have been a number of incidents at this dangerous junction, including a fatality.

On Rookery Lane, the speed limit is 30mph. There are no plans for an access Road at this point. Rookery Lane is a busy thoroughfare and it is unusual for there not to be cars parked outside most of the houses from 55 to 85 and further down the road. Indeed, the site layout

plan shows 2 cars parked opposite where the access would be. Adding into the mix the junctions with Derby Drive and Rookery Drive, a bus stop with no pull in, and a main crossing point for the Linear Park, it is impossible to see how safe Highway access has been provided at either location.

- A permeable internal layout for walking and cycling offering links to the adopted highway, Linear Park, and public right of way 831: The plans do not show this. For the number of dwellings proposed, there are not enough large open spaces providing multiuser routes through the development that link up with the Linear Park, public right of way, and the adopted highway.
- Accessible bus stops adjacent to the site: There are bus stops. Unfortunately, there is not a comprehensive bus service.
- Appropriate noise attenuation: The applicant commissioned a Noise Impact Assessment, but did not alter the submitted plan to take account of the findings that enhanced glazing would be required in some of the properties. Therefore, the current application is non-compliant.
- Flood attenuation to be provided along the south western boundary with the linear park: This has been included in the application. However, those with local knowledge and experience are aware that the site becomes waterlogged following heavy rainfall, the occurrence of which is becoming more frequent. The Parish Council also has concerns that while the measures proposed would ensure no flooding occurs on the site, the problem would be passed further downstream, causing difficulties elsewhere in the Borough. There is nothing in the application that contradicts this.
- Protect existing protected trees: The fact that the applicant has stated that they will do something that they are required by law to do, is disconcerting. The trees have to be protected. There is no plan for the management of the protected trees.

3.33 The following policies are also relevant in terms of assessing the suitability of the proposals in design and environmental impact terms:

- LPA07 - Transport and Travel: The application includes a table showing facilities within 2km. All of the distances shown are assumed to be from the nearest possible point on the site. If the distances are calculated from plots 122 and 234, for example, all the distances must be extended by a minimum of 850m. Therefore, all the schools are over the 2km recommended distance. Also, the nearest play facility with activity equipment is 2.7m from the site. The footpath opposite the site on Higher Lane is extremely narrow and reduces to 0.68m after Fire Clay Farm. There is no footpath at all on the site side of the road from the cottages going towards Crank. In the other direction, there is no footpath from Dial House woods until the cart track on Rookery Lane. If, as stated on the application, 2m footpaths are to be provided on Higher Lane, the carriageway would be reduced to approximately 4m, not the specified 6.1m. A road of this width would certainly not be able to take the current heavy agricultural traffic of up to 30 tonnes and HGVs up to 40 tonnes. This is already a frightening stretch of road to walk or cycle along, especially when vehicles have to mount the narrow footpaths to pass each other. The plans do not show how the 2m footpath will be achieved along the edge of Dial House wood. As the wood is protected, none of the trees can be removed to create a footpath. Even if the 30mph speed limit is moved, as suggested, this is not a safe highway access.

The Parish Council have concerns about the road safety aspects of the volume of traffic that would be leaving the estate in the mornings and returning in the evenings, especially those wishing to turn right on to Higher Lane. There is limited road vision due to the bend in the road less than 150m from the access road and there have been a significant number of incidents at the junction with Mill Lane.

Table 5.2 shows a Bus service analysis, but the times are incorrect.

Service 38A times: 19.53/21.53/23.58. This is a 2 hourly service, not hourly as shown on the table.

Service 152 times: 07.33/09.56 then approximately 2 hourly with the last bus at 16.01 not 17.28 as shown on the table.

Service 157 times: 08.31 then hourly with the last bus at 17.42

Due to the location and size of the site, the travel plan will not reduce the reliance on private cars because it is too far away from local shops and other amenities and the train station. Additionally, there is no frequent, integrated public transport system in Rainford.

- LPA08 - Infrastructure delivery and funding: There is nothing in the planning application to improve or extend the infrastructure within Rainford Village so that it could absorb a property increase of 8% and a population increase of at least 12%. The local facilities do not have the capacity, or the room for expansion, to cope with such a huge increase in residents.

LPA09 – Green infrastructure: *Policy LPA09, Green Infrastructure 3.10 states: It is increasing recognised that the provision of green infrastructure is vital.....This Policy seeks to protect and enhance the Borough's green infrastructure, whilst also increasing the accessibility of such infrastructure. St Helens Council will continue to work with partnership organisations to establish green infrastructure throughout the Borough that will benefit both residents and the environment.*

The green infrastructure in the application is both unimaginative and poorly thought out. There are too many dwellings on the site to provide good green infrastructure. There is no central open space, no park or playing field or play area and whilst most of the units have gardens, there is no communal green outdoor space for the apartment blocks. The number and spacing of the trees on the footpaths is inadequate and trees should not be planted in gardens where they could be removed by occupiers. The lack of green infrastructure means that there are no areas for wildlife habitats.

- LPA11 – Health & Wellbeing: The health and well-being of the inhabitants of the proposed 338 properties have not been considered. There are no communal green spaces and no facilities on or near the site. New residents may not be able to register with a GP and if they can, may have to wait 1 – 3 weeks for an appointment. They will not be able to register with an NHS dentist within the Village. Their children may not be able to go to school in the village. They would not be able use public transport to commute to and from work from the village. There are no on-site shopping facilities. There are no on-site communal or community facilities. This is not a recipe for the promotion of health and well-being and calls into question the quality of life this estate would provide for its residents. Additionally, they may be living in a house with an obsolete heating system which may affect the resale value of the property.
- LPC05 – Open Space: *Policy LPC05, States: 3.14 Open spaces have many functions, one of which is helping to improve environmental quality through the reduction of co2 emissions, reducing flood risk and enabling supporting biodiversity. The importance of open space provision is outlined within this Policy as it seeks to maintain, protect and enhance the open space situated within the Borough. Therefore, open spaces will continue to have a positive contribution towards mitigating the impacts of climate change. In addition, the provision of additional open spaces within new developments will further contribute positively to mitigating climate change impacts.*

The site does not incorporate open space within it, but relies on the presence of Dial House wood and the Linear Park which are adjacent to the site and not part of it. The Parish Council endorses the report from the Countryside Development & Woodlands Officer and the Trees & Woodlands officer, and is in agreement with them that the Open Space provision is extremely poor in this proposal.

- LPC06 – Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: This promotes a *Green Infrastructure Plan addressing biodiversity, geodiversity, greenways, ecological network, landscape character, trees, woodland and water storage in a holistic and integrated way*. There is no evidence in the application that this has been achieved. As it stands there is no green, well-designed layout appropriate to the character of the area and no demonstration that there would not be a net loss of biodiversity on the site.
- LPC08 – Ecological Network: Given the lack of open space and green infrastructure, little or no consideration has been given to ensuring wildlife habitats and pathways which are essential for preserving the natural environment. There are no plans for areas of wild flowers to encourage bees and other pollinators.
- LPC09 – Landscape Protection and Enhancement: The application protects Dial House wood because it has to be due to a TPO. Hedgerows are maintained, but there is no evidence to suggest that the landscape will be enhanced by this development. The site lies within the Rainford Slopes Landscape Character Area as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment for St Helens 2006. This identifies the area as having a moderate to strong landscape sensitivity and medium to high visual sensitivity with low to medium mitigation potential. The site is predominantly visible to residents and users along both Higher Lane and Rookery Lane and the view of the estate would be a marked contrast to the present one.
- LPC10 – Trees and Woodland: The applicant has used the existence of Dial House wood and the trees at the perimeter of the site to offset the need for trees within the development. The submission does not give an adequate explanation as to how the existing trees on and around the site will be maintained. Trees assist with the mitigation of climate change and enhance the aesthetic of the built environment and appropriate trees should be incorporated into new streets. Suitable schemes should be incorporated to ensure the long-term maintenance of newly planted trees, but this is not achieved by planting them in individual plot gardens.
- LPC11 – Historic Environment: The possibility of the site containing physical evidence of past human activity has been dismissed by the applicant without proper and thorough investigation.
- LPC12 – Flood Risk and Water Management: The site lies entirely within Flood Zone 1. The higher risk element is that of surface water. A drainage strategy has been included in the application which States that run off rates will remain at greenfield levels. The Parish Council's concern is that the result of this will be greater difficulties downstream, in other parts of the Borough.
- LPD01 – Ensuring Quality Development: The Energy Statement was completed by Energy and Design Ltd to 'support' the planning application by Miller homes. The use of the word support suggests that this is not an independent or impartial report.
The St Helens Borough Local Plan Climate Change Background Paper (October 2020) states: *The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 sets out the Government's planning polices for England and how these are expected to be applied. 2.3 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF states that an environmental objective to delivering sustainable developments is to address impacts of climate change through a range of mitigation and adaption measures. A collective approach to achieving other environmental objectives included in the NNPF, such as the effective use of land, use of renewable energy sources, reducing the use of natural resources, reducing levels of waste and establishing low carbon economies will also help to address climate change impacts.*

Also,

Planning Practice Guidance, Climate Change (March 2019) 2.12 The Planning Practices Guidance (PPG) indicates that the delivery of sustainable developments is heavily interlinked with the ability to address climate change impacts. Climate change must be a fundamental

consideration throughout the planning process from planning policy through to decision-making of planning applications.

2.13 Indeed, the PPG states that as a statutory duty, Local Authorities should work proactively and work cooperatively with a variety of organisations to address climate change impacts through enabling mitigation and adaptation strategies. The inclusion of policies within a Local Plan is one means by which local authorities should ensure new developments and the regeneration of existing land use developments address a variety of climate change issues.

And,

2.15 The Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) declared a Climate Change Emergency in May 2019 The LCRCA has also developed several policies that will support the region efforts to address climate change. These policies include a zero-carbon target for the region by 2040, creation of a Clean Air taskforce, commissioning of the Mersey Tidal project, formation of a £10million Green Investment Fund, delivery of improvements to public transport by investing in low emission bus fleets, future-proofing the Mersey Rail network and ST HELENS BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN 2020-2035 CLIMATE CHANGE BACKGROUND PAPER (OCTOBER 2020) Page | 6 developing the cycling and walking network across the region and lastly to utilise a "Brownfield first approach to development".

Clearly, this development on prime grade 1 agricultural land does not conform to a Brown Field First approach to development. Even though the site has been removed from the green belt for the purposes of the Local Plan, it could be designated as one of the last places that development takes place, so that it can continue to be used for agricultural purposes for as long as possible. Alternatively, given the worldwide changes that have occurred since 2019, it would be judicious to reconsider the removal of this land from protected status. There are numerous brown field sites within St Helens Borough which would greatly benefit from this development as, if undertaken carefully, it would help to revitalize, re-energize and rejuvenate parts of the borough and St Helens that are currently rundown and derelict. These brown field sites are viable; the profit just won't be as big for the developer. People should be the priority, not profit. Rainford does not need rejuvenating, but other areas in the Borough are in dire need of this investment.

The site will comply with the LPC13 (planning policy) section 14 from the updated building regs from November 2021.

To achieve this the site has been split the site into 3 sections:

Section 1- 31 plots, designed to comply to L1a2013 building regulations (1 to 31 on site plan)

The 31 dwellings on these plots (9% of the number of dwellings on the estate) would be built to absolute minimum standards. The Baxi Assure range of boilers would be used, but unfortunately there is no indication if these are electric or gas boilers. However, since reference is made to flue gas heat recovery, it would be realistic to assume that the majority of the units will be fitted with gas central heating. If so, there is no future proofing of these dwellings, as the lifespan of the dwelling will far exceed the lifetime of the boiler and when it needs to be replaced, an alternate form of heating will need to be installed, due to the new regulations which come into force in 2025. There is no indication that Miller Homes have given any thought to the overall long term environmental effect of these houses or to the future difficulties that will be created for the purchasers, or the resale value of the properties.

Section 2 – 50 plots, designed to comply with SAP10 L12021 (289 to 338 on site plan) The 50 (14.8% of the number of plots on the estate) dwellings on these plots are designed to comply with SAP10 L12021 by the installation of Air Source Heat Pumps.

The government's Future Home Standard was announced in October 2019 stating that gas boilers would be banned from new builds from 2025 and replaced by renewable heating systems, as part of a wider strategy to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

Only 50 houses (14.8%) out of 338 would have Air Source Heat Pumps. According to the application, these are the last houses to be built. Miller Homes indicated to the Parish Council that the houses would be built in blocks of 50 over 5 years, and that the anticipated start time would be Spring 2023. This would mean that there would be 6 blocks of 50 dwellings and 1 block of 38 over the course of the 5 years, so 1.4 blocks would be built each year. Therefore approximately 50 dwellings would be built in 2023 and a maximum of 70 in 2024. This still leaves 218 dwellings to be built from the beginning of 2025, but the planning application only allows for 50 houses with air source heat pumps.

Section 3 – 257 plots with reduction rate of 31% (32 to 288 on site plan) These 257 plots represent 76% of the site. They meet current building regulations, but only at the minimum standards. Some of the technology allocated to the plots in Section 2 could be used on all of the plots, not just 50. The plots where there are Air Source Heat pumps will give a 42% carbon reduction but the rest will only achieve between 19% and 31%. Moreover, all of the houses will be Masonry built, whereas timber frame is renewable and could be used. The application gives no specifications regarding any household appliances, if they are to be energy efficient, then electric would be more suitable.

Local Policy 2.30 Similarly to the LCRCA, St Helens Borough Council declared a Climate Change Emergency in July 2019. The report contains the following statements:

The Council is aware of the vital importance of taking a proactive approach to address issues of climate change as a Borough wide issue The Council has outlined several priorities to help achieve the above aim, outlined below:

- Increase level of recycling and reduce waste.
- Encourage use of alternative modes of transport, rather than travelling by private car.
- Provide infrastructure for electric vehicles.
- Improve efficiency of Council assets and enable 100% clean energy across all Council functions by 2040.
- Encourage net-carbon developments and communities.

The only one of these that the application complies with is the provision for electric vehicles, although the Parish Council would have wished for more public provision.

The LCR Climate Change Emergency Declaration report also emphasises a requirement for all LCR authorities to work collaboratively with each other and stakeholders including utility providers to achieve successful renewable energy projects and deliver integrated project outcomes. This application would only be compatible with this declaration if all the dwellings were built to passive house standard with renewable energy sources. As there has been no engagement with St Helens Council Planning department since the pre-application discussions in 2019, the Parish Council's view is that the application should not be considered because it takes no account of the universal life changes there have been in the intervening 3 years.

The St Helens Climate Change Emergency Declaration report states that:

3.1 For the Borough of St Helens, key planning issues relating to climate change can be categorised into three broad categories; • Supporting the creation of a low carbon economy; • Reduce the use of fossil fuels and emissions from greenhouse gases; and • Mitigating and adapting to flood risk. 3.2 Within these overarching categories, other planning issues are evident, for examples the need to increase the use of sustainable travel, provision of green spaces within new developments, provision of energy efficient developments and therefore a collective approach must be taken to achieve the Borough aspirations, outlined in section 2. 3.3 The importance of addressing climate change is emphasised within the Local Plan, as a strategic objective of the Plan is "To mitigate the effects and minimise the impacts of land use changes on climate change by requiring well-designed developments in suitable locations".

Policies included within the SHBLP will support the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change and it is anticipated that a collective approach during the development management process of a planning application will be taken so that new development will assist St Helens Council to achieve their targets in relation to climate change.

And concludes

It is evident that climate change is a key planning issues that requires consideration not only in the near future but long-term as well. Impacts of climate change are becoming increasing prominent and the awareness and acceptance that changes must be adopted is understood. There is national, regional and local policy which supports climate change impacts to be addressed through the planning system.

There is no conceivable way that the Miller Homes application meets these declared policy aspirations of St Helens Council.

The plans may meet the current minimum standards, but in failing to future proof the vast majority (85%) of the dwellings, they do not comply with the ethos of the St Helens Local Plan or the LCRC Climate Change Emergency Declaration or the St Helens Council Climate Change Emergency Declaration. This is such a missed opportunity by the developer to create an estate that meets its own definition of sustainable; “Meeting the needs of the future, today”. This application does not meet the needs of the future, despite the urgency of the necessity to do so. All the dwellings should have renewable energy sources and be built to passive house standards. Further improvements could be made through the additional use of ground source heat pumps. Alternatively, Biomass Boilers could have been used or a Combined Heat and Power system to power the whole scheme. This would have had a dramatic impact on the scheme as a whole. These were mentioned as considerations but dismissed without reasonable explanation. If the schemes are viable on the site but rejected on cost grounds, it may be pertinent to consider that the true cost to the environment may be much higher if outmoded energy technology is used in the vast majority of the dwellings.

- LPD09 – Air Quality: As the applicant has failed to show that travel in private transport would be minimised, the Air Quality Assessment submitted is invalid.

To summarise and conclude:

Rainford Parish Council do not consider that this planning application complies with the St Helens Local Plan or the Climate Change Emergency declarations made by the Liverpool City Region and St Helens Council.

The Parish Council is not opposed to housing development in Rainford, but has come to the conclusion that this estate is out of place and out of time, using out dated energy technology and with no account taken of the changes in the world that have taken place since 2019, when most of the supporting documents were commissioned. Miller homes had the opportunity to create a state-of-the-art eco estate, future-proofing the homes built for many years to come, and making a significant contribution to St Helens Council’s climate change policies. This opportunity has not been taken and the result is a lack lustre, old-fashioned development with characterless off-the-peg design, poor landscaping and non-existent infrastructure which does not conform to planning policy.