**Wilmcote Parish Council Response to Proposed Development of 6,700 Homes**

**Summary**
Wilmcote Parish Council, representing the majority of our residents, strongly opposes the proposed development of 6,700 homes near Wilmcote. This proposal would effectively create a new town, causing irreversible damage to our historic village, green belt land and local infrastructure. Key concerns include:

* **Loss of Green Belt and Agricultural Land** – Threatening open spaces, food security and violating core planning principles.
* **Severe Infrastructure Strain** – Roads, healthcare and public transport are already at capacity.
* **Flooding and Environmental Damage** – Increased flood risks and harm to air quality and biodiversity.
* **Heritage and Character at Risk** – Threatening Wilmcote’s historic identity, conservation area and tourism appeal.
* **Lack of Sustainable Justification** – Alternative sites exist and this proposal prioritises housing targets over local needs.

We urge Stratford-on-Avon District Council and the South Warwickshire Local Plan authorities to reject this development and seek more appropriate solutions.

**Key Concerns**

**1. Loss of Green Belt and Agricultural Land**

* The development would encroach on protected green belt land, leading to irreversible urban sprawl and the permanent loss of agricultural land vital for food sustainability.
* The Council must provide a clear technical justification proving that no other sustainable locations exist outside the green belt. As of now, this justification has not been produced.
* The Council must first produce a technical justification which demonstrates that there are no other more sustainable locations for this development elsewhere outside of the Green Belt.
* Through our District Councillor, Thom Holmes, we will be requesting the Council may consider requesting involvement in its production or at least sight of the relevant working documents as the work proceeds.
* The original green belt designation aimed to prevent the merging of settlements. Approving this development would result in Wilmcote and Bearley effectively becoming suburbs of Stratford-upon-Avon.
* With the UK already importing 60% of its food, safeguarding agricultural land is critical for national food security.
* Agricultural land classification data must be made available to assess whether this site is suitable for development. Wilmcote Parish Council challenges the Council on this point. There is a classification system for agricultural land which identifies land of the most value, in agricultural terms through to land which is of least value for either arable or livestock farming. Development must be directed towards land of least agricultural value in the first instance. Where is the access to this data for the land proposed for Wilmcote? We challenge the Council on this point.
* The principle reason for the original Green Belt designation is to prevent the coalescence of settlements. Even if a technical argument for the removal of land from the Green Belt, the principle of respecting existing settlement boundaries in identifying locations for new development and avoiding coalescence should still be respected. Under these circumstances Wilmcote and Bearley would not be a suitable location for a new settlement because Wilmcote and Bearley are effectively becoming suburbs of Stratford upon Avon Town.

**2. Severe Strain on Infrastructure and Public Services**

* **Road Network**: The A3400 and surrounding roads are already at capacity, with existing bottlenecks near Stratford, Henley-in-Arden and the A46 at Billesley. Increased traffic will worsen congestion and create safety hazards, particularly in villages where roads are used as rat runs. Villages are already being used as rat runs with motorists ignoring village speeds, especially the 20mph at school times with narrow and in places no pavements where young children walk to school.
* **Healthcare**: GP surgeries and hospitals are already overstretched and large developments often fail to provide sufficient new medical facilities.
* **Public Transport**: Existing services are inadequate, with no detailed proposals to address deficiencies.
* There appear more sustainable areas highlighted in the SWLP, in development terms. The significance of the existing transport and other infrastructure within and near to these communities must be considered in the identification of any new settlements. For these reasons  any new settlement would be better delivered if located near to the motorway, larger carriage ways and larger scale rail networks found at the northern boundary of the District.  These locations are closer to a number of large towns and the City of Birmingham so access to services and employment would be more easily facilitated.
* While proximity to a railway line may seem beneficial, infrastructure constraints mean a more suitable location for a new settlement would be closer to motorway and larger rail networks near the northern boundary of the district of Warwickshire.

**3. Flooding and Environmental Impact**

* Residents have raised concerns about flood risks in areas such as Featherbed and Pathlow. Increased development will only worsen drainage issues, heightening flood risks.
* There is already a sewage problem on Featherbed Lane and increased groundwater will only make the problem of sewerage worse.
* Dispensing of wastewater and sewage is already over running sewage facilities and the River Avon is highly polluted.
* Additional traffic and construction activities will harm air quality and biodiversity in this rural setting.

**4. Impact on Wilmcote’s Heritage and Character**

* Wilmcote is of historical significance, particularly due to its connection with William Shakespeare. Large-scale development threatens its unique identity and tourism appeal.
* These are assets of the highest significance and local planning authorities should not permit the loss of the whole or part of a heritage asset without taking all reasonable steps to ensure the new development will impact the asset and heritage of an historically important village as Wilmcote.
* Increased traffic and pollution will impact Mary Arden’s Farm and many listed buildings, some over 400 years old.
* Much of Wilmcote falls within a Conservation Area, where new developments must be carefully managed to protect historical assets.
* The scale of the proposal risks transforming Wilmcote and surrounding villages into an urban extension, fundamentally altering their character and identity.

**Resident Concerns and Consultation Feedback**

At a well-attended public meeting on 8th February, where the South Warwickshire Local Plan (SWLP) was presented, residents expressed strong opposition. Key concerns included:

* The proposal is driven by government housing targets rather than local needs.
* Profits from land sales should be reinvested into rural communities rather than benefiting a small number of landowners.
* A more balanced approach should be considered, with smaller, distributed developments rather than one massive settlement.
* If one massive settlement is the plan then other sites nearer larger scale rail networks found at the northern boundary of the District should be top of the list.
* Green belt once lost is lost forever!

**Conclusion**

Wilmcote Parish Council urges decision-makers to reject this development, as it would cause irreparable harm to our local community, environment and infrastructure. While we acknowledge the need for housing, this proposal is neither sustainable nor responsible.

We call on Stratford-on-Avon District Council and South Warwickshire Local Plan authorities to:

* Prioritise existing communities.
* Protect the green belt from unnecessary development.
* Explore alternative, more sustainable and stainable housing solutions.

If this site is allocated in the Local Plan, local councillors and parish councils must have a role in shaping the design, infrastructure and phasing of the development to minimise harm and secure necessary facilities for residents.

**Wilmcote Parish Council**