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18<sup>th</sup> April 2013



Dear Election Candidate

### **Transport Infrastructure & the Local Plan — some important issues our County Councillors could resolve**

The Lichfield Alliance<sup>1</sup> is writing an open letter to all candidates standing for election in County Council divisions which represent Lichfield District. A copy of this letter, and any responses received, will be placed on our website and may be used in press releases. Local accountability is clearly important. We would therefore appreciate a response well before polling day. Please reply to the email address above or post a response to your campaign website and email or tweet the URL to us.

**The Lichfield Alliance has no political affiliation.** We campaign jointly on matters which affect our neighbourhoods such as planning decisions and planning policy e.g. the Lichfield District Local Plan. We presume that you know that the County Council is the local Highway Authority; and that the Lichfield District Local Plan will be subject to an Examination in Public (public inquiry) shortly? You may be less aware that local plans have been falling like ninepins during the inquiry process. A failure of joined-up-government (technically a legal *duty to co-operate* in plan preparation) and a failure to properly assess and provide for local housing needs have been consistent themes. The Lichfield Alliance attended the Tamworth pre-inquiry hearing, where the inspector said he had “*serious concerns*” that Lichfield and Tamworth had not co-operated effectively. The inspector said the duty to prepare a sound plan lay with the local authority and that local councillors were best placed to ensure the local plan met local needs. As prospective councillors, you therefore have a clear responsibility! District councillors also elected as county councillors are in an especially advantageous position to ensure that local infrastructure investment plans and policies join up on a cross boundary basis.

We believe there are some important County Council responsibilities that need resolution. We would therefore be interested in your views regarding a number of areas where we think the public have been let down by local governments inability to bring matters to a satisfactory conclusion. All are planning related but not all affect the Local Plan:

- a) **Darwin Park** – local roads have not been adopted 10+ years after construction. Local road infrastructure is under huge pressure because actual development levels have been substantially above the original master plan;
- b) **City Centre congestion** – the County Council prepared an updated “*Transport Strategy*”, which is a contradiction in terms, because it analyses the problem without presenting an adequate solution. How can we have a Local Plan subject to public inquiry when the highway authority is “*reserving judgment*” on critical elements of the transport strategy?

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<sup>1</sup> The Lichfield Alliance is comprised of: Borrowcop & District Residents' Association (**BADRA**), Beacon Street Area Residents' Association (**BSARA**), Fradley Against Curborough Town (**FACT**), Leomansley Area Residents' Association (**LARA**), Streethay Against Development (**SAD**), South Lichfield Residents' Group (**SLRGP**)



- c) **Local trunk roads (A38 & A5)** – The accident rate on the A38 near Lichfield is five times the national average for this type of road. In ten years (2000-2010) 40 people have died and 140 have been seriously injured on the A38 between the A5 and the A50.
- d) **Bus station improvements are in limbo because of Friarsgate** – According a recent talk at the Lichfield Civic Society, this retail development is "if not dead then on life support". We therefore face a situation where vital transport improvements are on hold while developers' plans for substantial house building nearby are not!
- e) **Lichfield City & Trent Valley Stations** – Michael Fabricant MP said "Disabled access at Lichfield Trent Valley railway station is a disgrace. Apart from access to the line north to Crewe, it is non-existent. If you are wheel chair bound, it is impossible to travel east to Lichfield City and Birmingham or down to London from this station". Increased car parking with level access is essential and the County Council could play a role in securing these and the other improvements needed.
- f) **Cycle lanes, public rights of way & hedgerows** – We see little sign of coordinated action in these areas, which are mostly managed within the County Highways dept. The resources available for this work appear to be under threat because of the financial burden of halting the deterioration in the fabric of our roads.

We are sure you will agree that residents find themselves in an unsatisfactory situation insofar as important highway and transportation issues are unresolved and the Lichfield Local Plan, as submitted for public examination, does not fully address the policy aspects of these matters. We trust that we can look to local government to provide the leadership to deal with these matters?

We hope you appreciate the risks inherent in trying to adopt a Local Plan which lacks a joined up strategy for transportation infrastructure? In the long-term the quality of life of your constituents will be harmed and in the short-term there is a real risk that the District Council's development proposals will be rejected for a second time. With the imminent demise of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands, the Localism Act has devolved this responsibility to local government via the "*duty to cooperate*". This obligation extends to neighbouring local authorities, the County Council, Centro, the Highways Agency, etc. At present there is no joined up, cross-boundary strategy for transport in general and the A38 in particular. In a 2008 study, commissioned by the Government Office of the West Midlands, Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners described the **key infrastructure challenges** for Lichfield District as follows: "Very substantial investment would be needed to resolve highway capacity issues on the A38 and deliver effective public transport alternatives beyond existing services". All indications are that the cost of infrastructure for transport cannot be mainly financed by developer contributions, which is what the District Council suggests.

We hope you have a successful campaign and would encourage you to meet as many potential voters as possible.

Yours sincerely

Bob Smith on behalf of **The Lichfield Alliance**

**Distribution** County Council election candidates for the divisions covering Lichfield District:  
Burntwood North, Burntwood South, Lichfield City North, Lichfield City South, Lichfield Rural East, Lichfield Rural North, Lichfield Rural South, Lichfield Rural West