

View from the House – 13 March 2014

Recently a leaflet has been circulated in a part of my constituency supporting the planning application submitted to Walsall MBC for the construction of 59 houses on the Green Belt at Great Barr Park. This leaflet makes untrue and misleading statements about me stating among other things that I have not visited the site.

On 17th January this year, accompanied by local residents, I saw for myself the derelict Great Barr Hall building which is being used as enabling development to justify building a luxury housing estate on the Green Belt. I shall be seeking an apology and other remedies from the publishers and distributors of this attempt to damage my reputation for the sake of commercial gain. As a politician you expect robust debate and disagreement over issues but it is not acceptable for lies to be published in a bid to damage the reputation of elected representatives and in order to sway public opinion in favour of commercially driven planning applications.

The leaflet says the consortium tried to contact MPs and we have not responded. It is not our position as elected Members of Parliament to sit with developers to discuss and agree their building plans. Planning applications are the remit of the local authority. One member of the consortium has even made a complaint to the Labour Party about my involvement in the response to their planning application! I have seen nothing that would constitute the very special circumstances required for development of Green Belt. 59 luxury houses over acres of our scarce Green Belt – no way. There is already adequate land for new homes in Walsall until 2026.

The connection between Great Barr Hall and the Lunar Society is not as clear as the developers like to suggest. At an event in the House of Commons last week information was available on the Lunar Society, listing sites in Birmingham and Smethwick. There was no mention of Great Barr Hall as an important historic site for the Society.

It is clear that many people affected have not been consulted. At the public meeting organised by the Beacon Action Group on 1 February 2014 many residents told me that the first communication they had received about the proposals was from the Beacon Action Group inviting them to the meeting. The Trustees of Merrion's Wood were not consulted. There are still many unanswered questions surrounding this controversial planning application.

Valerie Vaz MP – 10 March 2014

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