

Plan put to the sword

CAMPAIGNERS are celebrating winning the battle but fear they still may face a war after plans to build up to 326 homes on countryside land in Nuneaton were rejected.

There were cheers and rapturous applause from more than 100 people who had packed the public gallery at the Town Hall when they heard that proposals to create the housing development on Church Fields, which is farm land off Weddington Road, had been refused.

But members of the Save Weddington: Oppose the Residential Development (SWORD) fear their victory may be short-lived if developers, Hallam Land Management, decide to appeal against the decision made by the borough council's planning committee.

To stave off the threat of development on the countryside in Weddington, as well as other greenfield sites across the borough, the protesters are now planning a public meeting next Wednesday night at the Old Eds Rugby Club to firm up plans to safeguard precious land.

"We have only won a battle not the war," said a SWORD spokesperson.

"We cannot afford to be complacent. Hallams may well appeal and other parts of the borough are already under threat from other developers. Therefore we are holding a public meeting for everyone across the borough. Please come along to find out what happens next and how we can all work together to safeguard our community for future generations."

People power won the day during the planning meeting, but only narrowly, and many were left breathing a sigh of relief as there was just one vote in it.

Dr Alan Srblijani, who is the chair of SWORD, spoke on behalf of the scores of people who turned up at the meeting on Wednesday night.

"We accept entirely there is need for local housing, for local communities, and that point is worth repeating," he said.

"But we believe that how much housing we need and its location should be determined through consultation and through the Local Plan process."

He added that a 'powerful precedent' would be set if the application was given the green light, adding: "If you approve this application then in a stroke the

by **CLAIRE HARRISON**

applicant will be richer but you will have robbed the people of Nuneaton and Bedworth of the value they place on having open space."

His impassioned pleas were echoed by Colin Burrows, who gave six points why the development should not be built including contravention of planning policy, and the increased traffic.

"We should cherish our green spaces passionately, and we need to think very carefully indeed before giving them up forever," he said.

"If we are to 'Escape to the Country,' to quote the well-known TV programme, there has to be some country left to escape to."

Peter Glazebrook, from Hallam Land Management, stressed that the council's own housing department had supported the application because there was a huge need for more housing in the borough. He added that no other organisation had lodged any formal objections, adding: "It is greenfield urban but then so are many of the houses where people live now and it was alright for them to be built."

Weddington representative, councillor Jeff Clarke told the meeting that in his 12 years as an elected member, he had never been contacted by so many concerned people.

"Concern has not just been expressed in my own ward but also from other areas of the borough," he said.

"People are concerned at this proposal and the knock-on effect for our borough."

Fellow ward Cllr, Gerald Smith said that the open space was used by many residents, not just the old, but also the young, and many were concerned about the loss of the land.

He raised concerns about the Air Quality Management Area, particularly with current traffic problems surrounding the Leicester Road and Old Hinckley Road gyratory system and more potential traffic from MIRA, which has been given an enterprise zone.

"I am so concerned about it chair that I would like to add it as a second reason for refusal," he said.

"As ward councillor, I do have to listen to the concerns of the people that I represent and be their voice on this committee and I intend to speak up for them."



PEOPLE POWER...Members of the Save Weddington: Oppose the Residential Development (SWORD) gather outside the Town Hall prior to the all-important meeting, which saw the planning proposal refused. NNJA sword01

Cllr Kris Wilson said they are 'custodians' of the open space, not just for current residents, but also for the sake of future generations. He added that as the borough has become a 'Heart Town' it is even more important to preserve open space so that people can enjoy exercise.

But while others councillors received applause from the gallery, Cllr Tony Lloyd said he would not be getting cheers and claps.

"I sit on planning and make decisions for the borough that are not political and I won't stand on the steps of the Town Hall to get my photo in the paper," he said.

"I will not apologise for voting for housing as we have so many people on our waiting list, we do need housing, we need it very badly."

He said while he sympathised with those who live near the traffic-clogged gyratory system: "You have got a monster there," he said.

"These are people who have got problems." But he added it was important that areas of the borough share the need for new housing to be built for the sake of the thousands of people in need.

His comments were echoed by Cllr Don Navarro who said that his own Keresley ward had taken its share of new development.

"It is an opportunity that we should seize, I believe that, in time, people will be able to enjoy it and become part of the environment," he added.

"The borough needs affordable housing and I will always champion it." These sentiments were echoed by Cllr Ian Lloyd, who reiterated the message that all areas of the borough should take a share of housing.

Cllr Bob Copland said: "It is about balance, I don't care if it is one or one thousand people objecting, I will look at it in the same way."

"I can sympathise that people do enjoy the open space, but that is a privilege and we have got to get the balance right."

Angry Cllr Clive Stringer said: "If you vote against the officers' recommendations, then you are saying that our policies are worthless, and every developer within 100 miles will be rushing here to build houses on our greenfield."

"We are going to blow the floodgates wide open if this is development is accepted."

Cllr Neil Phillips said he had followed the application closely since day one, and said that Weddington did need to take its share of housing but questioned whether the development was too big, and would the houses be needed as part of the five year plan.

Following further debate, which stretched to almost an hour in total, a vote was taken and members voted 6-5 to approve the officers' recommendations to reject the development.

Precious countryside must be saved

A NEW plan is needed to safeguard precious countryside land across Nuneaton and Bedworth from the threat of developers.

That is according to Nuneaton MP Marcus Jones who told the News that he has written to councillor Dennis Harvey, the leader of Nuneaton and

Bedworth Borough Council.

Mr Jones is keen for the council to devise a new local plan for the town following what he described as a 'close' vote which led to the rejection of the plan to build 300 homes on countryside land in

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News Says

Well done to all

TEARS of joy, relief and even some sadness were shed by students who received their A-Level results yesterday.

While not quite a record-breaker, learners at King Edward VI College and North Warwickshire and Hinckley College maintained the extremely high standard set in the borough for the amount of A-Level passes.

Over in KECs, it was revealed that 25 out of the 39 subjects offered achieved a pass rates of 100 per cent, 32 students got A* grades and 33 students gained an A* or A in their subjects. A little piece of history was also literally made by history student Ruth Jesson who became the first ever student at the college to get an A* in the subject.

At North Warwickshire and Hinckley College, there was a pass rate of 100 per cent, with 39 per cent of students achieving A* to C grades.

Critics say that A-Levels are getting easier and exams are 'not like they were in the old days' and students simply have to turn up to pass.

Try telling that to the parents and guardians who have to live with teenagers studying for these exams, let alone the teens themselves, many of whom put themselves under immense pressure to achieve.

You only have to look at the expression etched on the faces of the students picking up their all-important results yesterday to know how much hard work and dedication is needed to pass.

In fact, with competition more fierce than ever for university places, students have probably pushed themselves even harder to achieve the best grades that they can.

Next year, we will see even more learners picking-up A-Level results as several secondary schools are preparing to open their own sixth form colleges.

But, before then, next week we have GCSE results day, where thousands of secondary school pupils will receive the results which could help map out the rest of their lives.

Very often, society can be quick to pick on the younger generation and blame them for all the wrongs, so when they do something that is worth praising, it is especially important that they get the credit they deserve.

So congratulations to all the A-Level students, and good luck to all the GCSE students for next Thursday.



FANCY THAT... family and friends of Paisley Stubbs, who had the life-threatening disease Meningococcal Septicaemia, as they take part in a fundraising pub crawl for the Caterina Ward at the George Eliot Hospital and the Meningitis Research foundation. NNNNA

Against all the odds

A TOUGH little toddler defied the odds given by doctors to beat a deadly disease that threatened to take his life.

Paisley Stubbs was given just a 15 per cent chance of surviving by medical staff when he was diagnosed with Meningococcal Septicaemia.

But the battling two-and-a-half-year-old from Mancetter bravely fought against the illness, which can have side effects and complications such as amputation of limbs and behavioural difficulties.

That was back in June of this year, but now the youngster's health is improving every day and his parents, Karen and Dean, are extremely grateful that he is getting better.

Karen said: "If you saw Paisley now you wouldn't believe that there was anything wrong with him, but at the time it was very very scary."

"The doctors gave him a 15 per cent chance to live and said there could be problems such as amputation or behavioural problems, but the doctors have said that all he will suffer with is arthritis, which is something we can cope with."

Paisley was taken to the University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire after paramedics were called to the family home and they recognised the symptoms for Meningococcal Septicaemia.

The youngster was on life support for 22 hours and doctors gave him all the medicines that they could but nothing was working.

Dean continued: "The doctors said that it was up to Paisley to fight as his body was not responding to any of the drugs that they gave him."

"He was on life support for 22

by RYAN MERRIMAN

hours and then doctors took him off to see if he could breathe on his own and they couldn't believe it when he did.

"He went all over the place to be cared for from the University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire, to Stoke and then finally in the Caterina Ward in the George Eliot Hospital and the staff were absolutely fantastic there."

Family and friends of the little one have now took it upon themselves to raise as much cash for the Meningitis Research Foundation and the Caterina Ward at the Nuneaton-based Trust.

A group of fundraisers took part in a pub crawl around Atherstone, donned fancy dress and asked people to dig deep into their pockets as well as organising a raffle.

They have already raised a massive £787, but they are not resting on their laurels and are planning more and more events.

A Charity Night will be taking place at The Old Skool in Atherstone, formerly the British Legion Club, on October 8 and everyone is welcome to go along.

Entrance is free for the night, but buckets will be shaking during the event. A football tournament is also in the works with a date to be confirmed.

Karen added: "The staff in the Caterina Ward at the George Eliot were absolutely fantastic and we also chose the Meningitis Research Foundation so that we could help fund research."

"We'd like to see as many people as possible come along to the charity night and help to raise money and add it to the fundraising pot."



DEFIED THE ODDS... two-and-a-half-year-old Paisley who battled against Meningococcal Septicaemia and won. NNNNA

Nuneaton NEWS in Brief

'Development has to be right for all'

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Weddington.

He helped members of the Save Weddington: Oppose the Residential Development (SWORD) to fight the plans but believes that the 6-5 vote highlights the importance of a new local plan.

"The confusion in the council chamber with several Labour councillors voting against their own local plan is hard to work out," he said.

"If councillors cannot support the current local plan which they agreed in 2006 and several of them reaffirmed this June we are really putting the people of Nuneaton at the mercy of developers, who could challenge local planning decisions at appeal."

The town's voice in Parliament stressed that he understands that the ageing population, combined with young people needing to get on the housing ladder proves the need for new development, but he stressed that it has to be right for local communities.

"Although I am not anti-development I am concerned that developers seem to want to develop sites in Nuneaton that form part of the countryside before we have used other, more suitable, brownfield sites that exist in Nuneaton. I also have concerns that this type of speculative application is not an isolated issue as we have seen a very similar application to develop countryside land at St Nicolas Park."

He concluded: "I am calling on the local council to engage with the public to set a clear direction over how many new homes we need to build, what types of land we use first and how we resource the necessary infrastructure. I am alarmed that I hear from councillors that at a recent council scrutiny committee, senior officers explained that the new local plan would take two years."

Drink and drug dangers

FESTIVAL-goers are being urged to have a good time this weekend - but not at the expense of their safety.

Ahead of the 2011 V Festival at Weston Park in Staffordshire, bosses at West Midlands Ambulance Service are urging people from Nuneaton, Bedworth and North Warwickshire planning to attend to enjoy themselves by not taking risks.

Each year, the service and volunteers from St John Ambulance have to deal with hundreds of patients who miss out on some of the top acts because they had too much to drink or had a bad reaction to other substances.

Trust medical director Dr Andy Carson, said: "The last thing we want to do is stop people having a good time. Almost everyone enjoys a drink, but please make sure you stay safe by pacing the amount you consume."

"In past years we have had people who have come round in our medical centre after getting really drunk and been distraught at having missed the band they came to see."

"By all means enjoy a few drinks but know what your limits are. Drinking too much makes you vulnerable, it impairs your judgement and can make you more susceptible to crime."

"V Festival has a zero tolerance approach to drugs and our colleagues in the police will be carrying out random searches. Mixing alcohol and drugs will also make the effects of both far more unpredictable and can be lethal."

"The festival provides hours of entertainment so pace yourself and drink plenty of water in between alcoholic drinks. Have a brilliant time but please enjoy it safely."