

Fulford Green Vision

By Lord Matthew Taylor

In today's world, greenfield land is rightly treasured for its ecological and psychological value. So, any proposed development on land around Fulford Hall will understandably raise concern, especially as people have become used to poor quality developments with no facilities or value to the wider community. And this is Green Belt. No wonder if people react with fear. That's why I believe development as a matter of principle should only be put forward here where there is a persuasive need, and to deliver the highest environmental, social and economic sustainability.

The need? A combination of people living much longer in the last few decades, and the second post war baby boom taking place over the last three decades, means we are desperately short of homes. As a result, the sons and daughters of local families have been priced out of their own communities. For Solihull, the need for new homes within reach of a range of household incomes, designed in a way sensitive to both local and global environmental concerns and within a place contributing to the economic health of an area, is clear. To do nothing to meet these needs would be wrong. Yet with the whole of Solihull sitting within the Green Belt there is no easy answer to meet local needs of the next generation now growing into adulthood, struggling to find a home.

There are some who consider that the 'onion ring' solution to planning is the only way to accommodate development. Estate by estate development gradually ringing every town and village in never ending and too often poor-quality estates. This leads to a gradual erosion of the qualities that make great historic places to live. Too many of Solihull's villages and towns have seen this year after year, just as have many others across the country. It won't stop unless there is an alternative. Over time, there will be more and more of this unwelcome growth, unless a better option is put forward.

What is needed is a way to fulfil this need that is so much better. That's why I created for Government an alternative – supported by all the main political parties. The Garden Communities approach is a vision of a more sustainable, higher quality of place-making enabled by creating new communities, 21st century garden towns and villages.

What would this look like? Well it would mean creating a 21st century village. What do I mean by a village? It is about local living – a great community, where the things you need day to day are on

your doorstep, not a car drive away. a local school, local shops and cafes run by people in the community forming a village centre, so most day to day needs are there on hand. Creating more public open space, a country park for the whole community to enjoy. Fantastic internet services, for the increasing number of people working or studying from home. Sustainable homes built to be ready for a zero-carbon future, and low cost to run.

It is a concept deeply rooted in locality and delivered in a way that brings benefit to existing communities. That delivers a thriving place to live, with all the facilities people need to hand. After 18 months of coronavirus, we have all learnt the importance of local facilities, accessible open spaces, local shops and high speed reliable broad band.

Our vision for Fulford Green is rooted in this vision and to make it real we are drawing on expertise from the UK's best place designers, planners, architects, sustainability and zero-carbon experts, transport consultants and social impact leaders.

In short, the challenge we have set ourselves is to translate the vision of a 21st century village to local reality.

Of course, people will be sceptical – most developments these days are not like this. But in today's world, we must be prepared to make the case for doing better. Our countryside is treasured, and new development is under increasing levels of scrutiny. Quite rightly so. We can all agree the need to avoid more soulless housing estates with identikit homes and no local services, designed around taking the car for every need. But homes are also desperately needed. The need for sensitively designed new homes in thriving communities, for people with all different incomes, responding to both local and global concerns, is clear.

Rooted in historical context of thriving villages yet designed for the future, our ambition for Fulford Green is instead to make a significant contribution to the area, delivering all the attributes that people want of a great place to live. And for those already living in the area? The chance of a home for your children, or a home designed for older living as life evolves, without having to move away. More local shops and a new school. The chance to gain improved train services. A large new country park, bike trails, walks. And an end to the need for the other option – ever more soulless housing estates added year by year on the edge of existing historic villages