

Solihull Local Plan Examination.

Housing Site 21, Cheswick Green.

Additional Representation from Piers Cockroft. (PD 2/7)

1. The primary practical objection to the development of site 21 is that it will increase the risk and incidence of flooding of Mount Brook and of River Blythe, downstream of the site.
2. The amendment sought is the deletion of this proposed site from the local plan.
3. If the site is ever to be developed, it should be considered only after the implementation of a scheme to ensure that the development would reduce the present incidence and risk of flooding of Mount Brook and River Blythe. Such a scheme should be determined in consultation with the Environment Agency, Parish Council, and the owners and occupiers of all land within 100 metres of the site or 100 metres of Mount Brook or River Blythe, within the parishes of Cheswick Green and Dickens Heath.
4. I live at 2 Coppice Close, and have done so for 36 years. The rear garden is bounded by Mount Brook, about 50 metres downstream of site 21, and a similar distance upstream of its confluence with the Blythe.
5. Flooding to both the front and rear of my home used to occur occasionally, but now floods happen with increasing frequency and severity.
6. The most severe so far was in July 2007. Both the front and rear gardens were entirely underwater, with water lapping against either side of the house. It rose to within a few millimetres of the vents in the airbricks – higher than the mortar course below the airbricks. Some neighbours were less fortunate with floodwater entering beneath the house, or even flooding the ground floor. Some lost of electrical power for up to 72 hours.
7. The first flooding of 2012 was 21st November when Mount Brook rose to almost halfway up my garden. I had only seen it higher than this in 2007.
8. Then, in the early hours of 25th November, having been woken by automated Floodline calls, we saw the water come to within 2 metres of the house at the rear, also flooding the whole carriageway of Coppice Close to the front, and variously covering footway and verge, according to the immediate topography. This was the second highest I have witnessed.
9. The flooding affects many other houses, and on both occasions mentioned this year, as on others, it caused the closure of the Creynolds Lane/Watery Lane/Vicarage Road/Ilshaw Heath Road junction.
10. To get a better picture of the extent of flooding, I circulated a questionnaire to households close to the site, or to Mount Brook or the River Blythe. Many residents also spoke to me about these matters. See appendices 1, 2 and 3.

11. From 62 replies, frequency of flooding varied from never, or every few years, to 5-10 times a year, “countless”, or whenever we have heavy rain. 77% of respondents had experienced water covering half or more of their garden, 57% their whole garden. 52% from Coppice Close and Coppice Walk had water coming through air bricks and flooding beneath their floors. Some had their ground floors flooded. Some reported very close shaves – ‘up to the lip of the patio door’, for example. A number of residents now have air brick covers, and some have built walls or other works to divert flood water.
12. Some of the most severe flooding has been due to water ingress at the front of houses. However, for most residents, the most frequent flooding has been at the rear, and thus largely unseen by others.
13. The area is relatively flat. A very small change in water level could have a devastating effect for many people.
14. People reported difficulties getting insured, or in selling their houses.
15. But the point made by many residents of 30 years or more was that it never used to be like this. A flood circa 1978 was a great surprise. Previously Mount Brook had not come out of its defined channel. However, this event followed the completion of the final stages of Cheswick Green and of the houses in the Stretton Road area of Shirley. Frequent flooding really only started in the late 1990s or later. This coincides with the development of Dickens Heath. Now Mount Brook certainly rises faster and higher, and the water seems dirtier, suggesting that the primary cause of this change is the increased impermeable area and faster run-off resulting from development.
16. Appendix 4 shows the local river catchment. Section 2.3 and Fig. 6 of the submitted plan show the developments of the 1970s, and post 2000. These developments coincide with the step change increases in the incidence of flooding that I and many other residents of Cheswick Green have observed.
17. Dickens Heath was built with a surface water drainage system that was meant to ensure that run-off after the development would not exceed that prior to the start of the development. It has clearly failed to achieve this, obvious even before all building is completed.
18. This is why we can attach no weight to the promises or assurances of the Council, landowners or developers that this is a problem that would be resolved by the development of site 21. Our experience is to the contrary; that the development would make matters worse; that the development would not correct the problems caused by Dickens Heath, and that as more work is carried out in Dickens Heath, our plight will get worse.
19. Appendix 5 shows the Environment Agency’s current flood risk and flood warning areas for Cheswick Green. This reinforces the point understood by many residents that flooding to gardens, garages and houses is a reality, and that it is certain to get worse.

20. No doubt climate change is a factor too, but we are told its worst impacts are yet to come. That makes it even more important not to compound the problems we have already.
21. Challenge F of the plan recognises the increased risk of surface water flooding. Objective (e) is to “Ensure that new development does not increase, and where possible reduces risks such as flooding....” Paragraph 10.6.11, and others, make similar points.
22. There is a fine line between the occasional inundation at the end of the garden, and water flooding into my and neighbours’ properties. The difference is really too close to predict. If there is the smallest chance that the development of site 21 could ever result in a slight increase in the water level of Mount Brook it would make the existing situation very significantly worse. The same applies to sites 17, 18 and 20 in Dickens Heath. The most likely outcome is that development will increase water levels in Mount Brook and River Blythe, contrary to stated plan objectives. Any proposal which would have this effect is unsound.
23. There are 100 or so houses where flooding is a reality, rather than a mere risk. It can make no kind of sense to build 200 new houses if doing so imperils these existing houses.
24. Clearly the soundest solution is not to have any development.
25. Challenge L of the submitted plan recognises the “increasing risk of flooding associated with new development”, and objective (b) “To minimise the risk of flooding by.....ensuring that new development is designed so as to minimise surface water flooding risks.”
26. For site 21, this is too important a matter to be left to a planning condition that may, or may not, be complied with properly. To propose the release of the site for a set area and number of houses is to do things the wrong way round. To resolve the existing and future flooding issue in a way that reduces the present flooding risk should be the first consideration. A scheme needs to be devised to do this. For North Solihull, 5.5.1 last bullet point reads “Ensuring that new housing avoids areas at risk of flooding, or.....that the development is safe from the effects of flooding and does not increase risks elsewhere.” Surely no less a standard is required elsewhere in Solihull.
27. The site is proposed to be released for development after 2023. That gives some time in which to devise an effective scheme that would reduce the current risk of flooding. If such a scheme is not forthcoming, or it is not cost effective, the site must not be developed. There is time to find alternatives.
28. Though not part of my original representation, because I was not aware of them, a number of the ‘omission’ sites are within the Mount Brook/Blythe catchment, and their development would equally tip the current flooding risk from critical to catastrophic. They are Light Hall Farm, Baroda Farm and those in Dickens Heath. None should be considered suitable for development.

29. Development at Dickens Heath is of particular concern, because the high density and hard landscape results in large impermeable areas with high rates of run-off.
30. As long as I have lived in Cheswick Green, green belt policies have applied; initially interim, but more recently as confirmed green belt. This is a major feature and attraction of the area. It appears that site 21 has been removed from the green belt to allow it to be identified in the plan. If it were to remain so after development it would be significantly different from the rest of Cheswick Green and undermine the purpose and value of the green belt in the village and surrounding area. If this site is to be developed, it must be on the basis that it is as a green belt development, and that green belt policies will apply as soon as any element is completed.
31. Any development would be likely to be at the higher part of the site. It would be more visible and detract from the openness of the green belt. It would appear, and be, apart from the existing settlement, rather than complementing it. The Council's own assessment of this site was that "development would erode the narrow gap between Cheswick Green and Dickens Heath".
32. Many residents feel that they have been denied a proper opportunity to learn about or to express their views on this matter. At time of drafting, over 30 households have asked me to speak on their behalf.
33. If sound planning and common sense are to prevail, site 21 should be deleted from this local plan.

Appendices to Additional Representation by Piers Cockroft (PD2/7)

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Appendix 1 Questionnaire/Survey Form

Dear Resident

We are concerned that proposals for 200 houses on the land behind Tanworth Lane, Coppice Walk, Willow Drive, and Saxonwood Road will increase the flood risk to our homes.

To be able to give a clearer picture of the flood risk to the Inspector at a hearing into the Solihull Local Plan to be held next month, it would be useful to understand what flooding, if any, you have experienced.

Could you please help by completing and returning the questionnaire below? The answers will be put together to give an indication of the overall picture. Your name, address and the information about your house will not be passed on to anyone else, and these questionnaires will be shredded.

Your address

1. How long have you lived here? (years)
2. Does water ever flood into your garden or house? Yes No
- If No, thank you, but please return this form.
3. If Yes, how often?
4. Does water ever cover more than half your garden? Yes No
5. If Yes, how often?
6. Has it ever covered the whole of your garden? Yes No
7. If Yes, how often?
8. Has it ever flooded your garage or outbuildings? Yes No
9. If Yes, how often?
10. Has it ever flooded beneath the floor of your house? Yes No
11. If Yes, how often?
12. Has floodwater ever entered your house? Yes No
13. If Yes, how often?
14. When did this happen?

Please return this form to me as soon as possible and certainly before 14th December. You can email the answers, in the above order, if more convenient for you. I will aggregate the information, and submit a short report for the Inspector. Thank you.

Piers Cockroft, 2 Coppice Close, Cheswick Green

Appendix 2 Survey Distribution

Cheswick Way and Brookside – Houses backing on to River Blythe		5 responses
Coppice Close	2 - 9 sequential	6 responses
Coppice Walk	7 – 101 odds	22 responses
Heron Close	3 – 10 sequential	2 responses
Saxonwood Road	10 – 46 evens	12 responses
Willow Drive	22 – 58 evens	15 responses
TOTAL		62 responses

Additionally, residents sent me detailed letters, photographs and emails, and many spoke to me about their serious concerns and particular flooding problems.

There are other houses in Tanworth Lane that have existing flooding problems that are less likely to exacerbated by Site 21 development, so have not been included here.

Appendix 3 Analysis of Results

Cheswick Way and Brookside

Tenure of responders; 3 – 43 years, average 27 years

All properties experienced flooding, 6 or 'many' times per year, or every time we have heavy rain or melting snow. Some pointed out it was only once or twice a year until about 2000.

All but one had more than half the garden flooded, with similar frequency.

For one the whole garden floods every year or two, once to within 75 mm of coming into the house.

Two reported flooding of outbuildings occasionally.

It was also reported that during heavy rain the storm drain in Creynolds Lane becomes surcharged, lifting the manhole cover and discharging dirty water into private gardens.

Coppice Close

Tenure of respondents; 11 – 42 years, average 33 years

All properties have flooding, all but one now usually once a year or more.

Floods cover at least half of each garden every few years, several times a year, or whenever we have prolonged heavy rain.

All but one garden has been completely covered, and outbuildings and garages flooded, at least once.

Two houses have had flood water under the ground floor once, others to within a few millimetres of doing so.

Long standing residents pointed out that flooding has only become a problem in the last 10 – 15 years, or even more recently.

Coppice Walk

Tenure of respondents; 4 – 36 years, average 23 years

Two of the twenty two respondents reported no flood water, three only once or twice. For seventeen it was 1 – 7 times a year, or whenever we had prolonged/heavy rain.

Eighteen reported it covered at least half the garden, from once or twice, to many times a year.

Fourteen reported the whole garden flooded at least once, some many times, and two said no, but it was close. One mentioned it had come up to the lip of the patio door in 2012.

Eleven had flooded garages and outbuildings, with some mentioning water running through integral garages. The same number reported water beneath their houses. Some went on to describe the awful problems this caused, and how they had to leave their houses whilst the mess beneath was dried and cleared. Many have invested (up to 5-figure sums) in protective works. Some have air-brick covers. This problem affects residents both east and west of Mount Brook.

Two respondents' houses have been flooded out once.

A ditch or small culvert runs to the rear of houses to the west of Mount Brook. This takes run-off or ground water to Mount Brook, and flows even in very dry weather. However during heavy rain this is inadequate. The run-off from the land is too great and/or rising water levels in Mount Brook prevent water flowing towards it, but the result is that additional water floods into and through the rear of many of these properties, rather than into the brook.

Heron Close

Tenure of respondents; average 14 years

One reports limited flooding twice a year.

The other experiences flooding to almost the whole garden whenever there are long periods of rainfall.

Saxonwood Road

Tenure of respondents; less than 1 to over 40 years – average 16 years

All but one experienced flooding; frequently, 3-6 times a year, but for one, twice only.

Six report water floods at least half the garden between 1 and 6 times a year.

In three cases, the whole garden floods, from once ever, to at least twice per year.

Two residents report flooded outbuildings occasionally.

Willow Drive

Tenure of respondents; 6 – 42 years – average 33 years

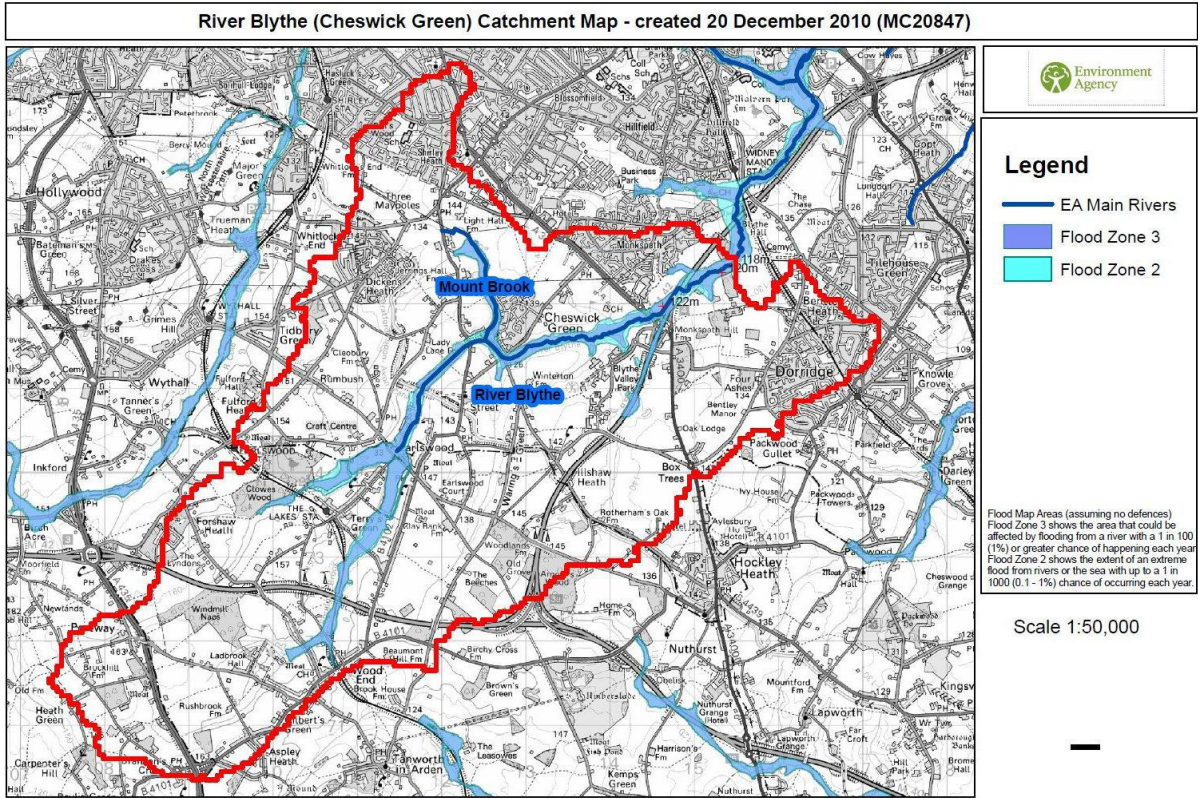
All experience flooding 1 -10 times a year.

For all except two, more than half the garden has flooded, from once ever, up to several times a year, or "countless after heavy rain". It seems this has been more frequent since 2005

Nine reported flooding of the whole garden once or twice, sometimes to within a few inches of the air bricks.

Six reported flooding of outbuildings, from once ever, to twice a year.

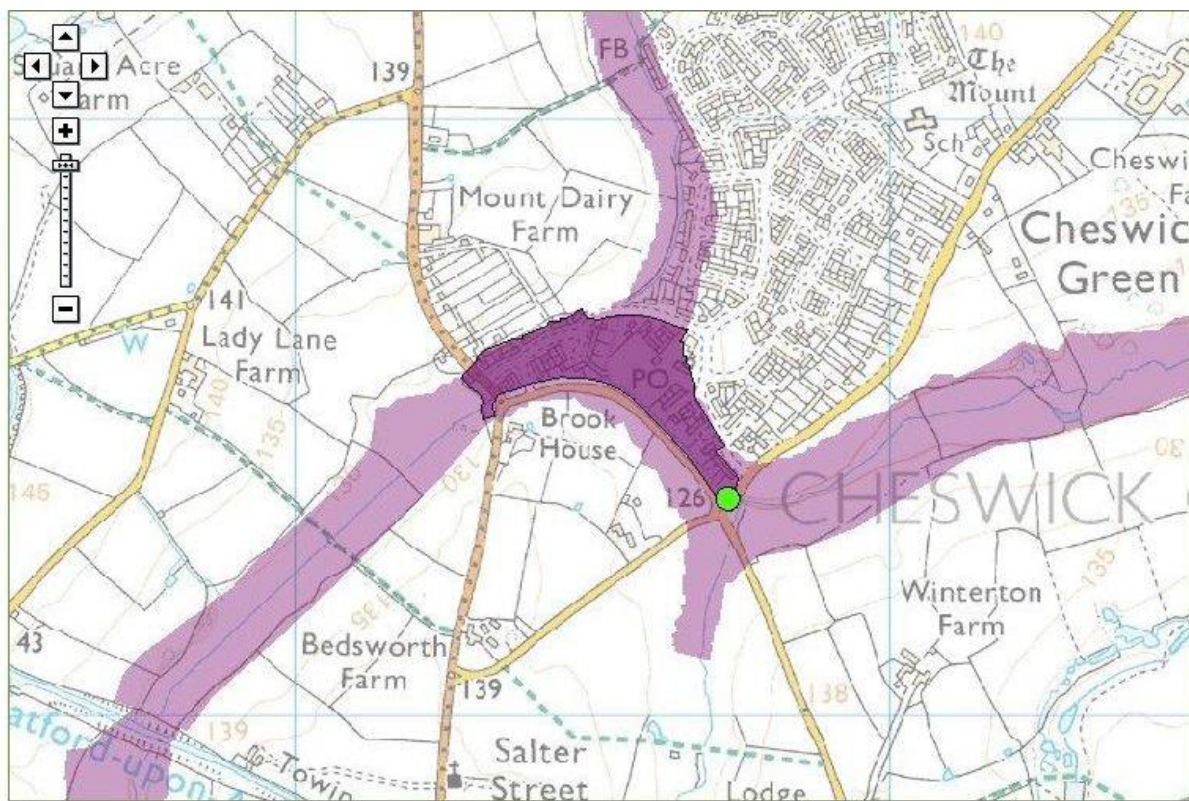
Appendix 4 River Blythe and Mount Brook Catchment Map



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Appendix 5 Flood Alert and Flood Warning Areas Map

The darker colour shows the area at greater risk



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