

# APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD AREA

## Balsall and Berkswell Parishes Joint Neighbourhood Plan

	<b>Balsall Parish Council</b>	<b>Berkswell Parish Council</b>
<b>Clerk</b>	<b>Ms Shafim Kauser</b>	<b>Mr Richard Wilson</b>
<b>Parish Office</b>	First Floor 208 Station Road Balsall Common Coventry CV7 7EE	Berkswell Parish Council PO Box 6379 Coventry CV6 9LP
<b>Telephone</b>	01676 535679	
<b>Mobile</b>	07977 588360	07443 644896
<b>Email</b>	shafimk@btinternet.com	clerk@berkswellparishcouncil.org.uk
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.balsallparishcouncil.org/">www.balsallparishcouncil.org/</a>	<a href="http://www.berkswell.org">www.berkswell.org</a>

# Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Landscape Character .....	3
3. Settlements.....	4
Balsall Common	4
Berkswell Village	5
Temple Balsall	5
Fen End, Meer End Oakley and Carol Green	6
4. Objective.....	6
5. Process.....	6
6. Community Engagement .....	7
7. Funding.....	7
8. Outcome .....	7
9. Application .....	7
Appendix 1 Map Balsall and Berkswell Parishes Neighbourhood Application Area ...	8
Appendix 2. Statement to be designated as a neighbourhood area.....	9
Appendix 3 Statement that the body making this application is a relevant body .....	9

## 1. Introduction

The parishes of Balsall and Berkswell are two of the most easterly rural parishes in the Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council area. Between them they cover an area of 39.7 sq km (Balsall parish 16.31 and Berkswell 23.4). They include the villages of Balsall Common and Berkswell and the settlements at Temple Balsall, Fen End, Meer End, Oakley and Carol Green. The boundary between the parishes runs through Balsall Common village. Following the 2013 Community Governance Review the Balsall parish boundary was changed on 1 April 2014 with the west ward becoming a separate parish known as Chadwick End.

The parishes are bounded by the Solihull parishes of Meriden (north), Hampton-in-Arden (north west), Barston and Chadwick End (west). Solihull Town centre is about 8 miles to the south west. To the east is the boundary with Coventry City Council, to the south and east are Kenilworth and the Warwickshire County boundary.

The population at the time of the 2011 census was 8,967 people in 3,750 households (2,364 in Balsall and 1,206 in Berkswell). Just over 24% of the population were aged 10 or under while 20% are over 65, with 55% of working age. There are over 100 Grade II listed buildings and a further 20 local listed buildings in the parishes demonstrating the historical importance of the area.

The parishes have good communications with:

- the A452 passing through the parishes to provide the main road link to the M42/M6 motorway network, the airport, NEC, Birmingham Business park and Birmingham to the west;
- the A452 also connects the parishes east to Kenilworth and Leamington Spa and with its link to the A4177 to Warwick, the M40 and the south;
- the B4101 helps to connect the parishes to Coventry to the east and south and west through to Knowle and Dorridge and Solihull town centre.
- Berkswell station, located at the northern edge of Balsall Common village, is served by London Midland for connections west into Birmingham and the rest of the West Midlands and on to the North West; east to Coventry and on down to London.

## 2. Landscape Character

The Parishes are primarily rural and situated in the regionally important greenbelt known as the Meriden Gap that separates the Solihull/Birmingham conurbation from Coventry. These parishes contribute to the rure part of the Solihull motto “Urbs in Rure” (town in country”).

Outside of the settlements the parishes are made up of a mixture of arable and livestock farmland; a substantial part of which is the Berkswell Estate. There is significant land devoted to horse/pony pasture for recreational purposes. There are extensive sand and gravel workings to the north of the application site, forming part of the Meriden Quarry complex accessed from Cornets End Lane.

The Kenilworth Greenway runs from near Berkswell Station to Kenilworth in Warwickshire; it is an important local amenity for horse riding, off-road cycling, jogging and walking. There are extensive public footpaths across both parishes with those near Balsall Common and Berkswell extensively used by locals and visitors from the surrounding towns. Two long distance footpaths - the Heart of England Way and Coventry Way run through the parishes.

Much of the area was part of the ancient Forest of Arden. The area known as 'Arden' in modern planning policy documents refers to that part of Warwickshire and north Worcestershire that was anciently covered by the vast Forest of Arden. In existence before the Anglo-Saxon period and continuing into the Middle Ages, an area roughly corresponding to the north-western half of Warwickshire was then heavily forested. At the time of the Domesday Survey (1086) there were over 50 square miles of woodland and wood pasture, or some 35% of north-west Warwickshire, including Coventry and Birmingham.

Though the vast majority of this forest has long since gone, the memory has lingered on in place names like Hampton-in-Arden, Henley-in-Arden, Tanworth-in-Arden and Weston-in-Arden. Several remnants of ancient woodland still exist in this region for example 16 Acre Wood. The Arden landscape we recognize today is essentially a man-made pastoral and arable landscape comprising fields with significant hedging including mature oak and ash trees with occasional woods. The Berkswell Estate has undertaken recent planting of new wooded areas.

The parishes are home to a rich and diverse range of flora and fauna including more than 60 species of bird - the rare and protected barn owls, tawny owls, cuckoos and swallows. Other protected species include bats and the great crested newt. This is reflected within the parishes with the extensive area of designated greenbelt, the Berkswell Marsh SSSI, sections of the River Blythe SSSI and the Lavender Hall Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR) (it is also a Green Flag park), with ancient woodland priority habitats, a number of Local Nature Sites, environmental stewardship schemes and woodland grant schemes<sup>1</sup>.

The Berkswell Windmill is an historic landmark in the parishes and in the Borough of Solihull. It is a four bladed brick tower mill with a hand-winding wheel built in 1826 on the site of a former post mill (wooden windmill); records show there has been a windmill on this site since the 1700s. Last worked by wind in 1933, it used auxiliary power until 1948 and was restored to workable order in 2013. The windmill is a Grade II star listed building and scheduled monument.

### **3. Settlements**

#### **Balsall Common**

Balsall Common is a large village and one of the larger rural settlements in the Solihull Metropolitan Borough area. It is situated 7 miles west of Coventry, 8.5 miles east of Solihull and 14 miles to the southeast of Birmingham. The name "Balsall comes from the Anglo Saxon words "Baelle" meaning corner (or angle) of land, and "Heale" meaning a sheltered place. The village is split between the civil parishes of Balsall and Berkswell. At the 2011 census it had a population of 7,039.

The village is mainly of recent origin; most of the houses and shops were built after World War II. Previously, the village consisted of a couple of hamlets of about six to twelve houses each and a few scattered cottages. In the 1930s there began the development which linked these isolated buildings. The 'centre' of Balsall Common is at the intersection of the A452 Kenilworth Road and Station Road. While the historical development of the village was along Balsall Street (now part of the B4101) it is along the Kenilworth Road and Station Road that more recent development can be traced. Recent growth in Balsall Common includes developments such as, Kemps Green, Riddings Hill and the Grange Estate. To the south of Balsall Common in Windmill Lane are two attractive mobile home sites developed

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

from temporary housing/evacuation sites following World War II. In the last 2 decades there have been numerous in-fill and small scale speculative developments such as Welsh Road. Today it is mainly recognised as a prosperous commuter village.

Balsall Common village has a range of facilities including a library, medical centre, restaurants, a good range of shops, local businesses, 3 churches, 5 public houses and a British Legion Club. It has a number of publicly provided recreational facilities including Lavender Hall Park, Willow Park, Grange Park and Oakley Recreation Grounds, allotments, a Village Hall and the Jubilee Youth and Community Centre. The village has various sports provision with a tennis and cricket club on The Lant grounds, the Hornets Football Club on its grounds has just built a clubhouse and the Berkswell and Balsall Rugby Football Club grounds are nearby at Honiley End. There are a range of voluntary and charitable organisations providing activities for all ages in the village.

Balsall Common has two schools, a secondary school – the Heart of England Academy and Sixth Form and the Balsall Common Primary School which is the second largest in Solihull Borough. Both are seen as good schools and cater for children and young people from a wide area.

There are 2 bus services providing access to Solihull Town Centre and Coventry and eligible residents have access to the "ring and ride" service. Berkswell train station, at the northern edge of the village provides connections to Birmingham and Coventry and beyond and has a free car park which is usually oversubscribed.

The Balsall Common Village Plan, published in 2009, identified key issues and services and set out a future vision for the village. The new Localism Act now provides an opportunity to build on the Village Plan, extending coverage to include the whole of both parishes working with the local community and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council officers in developing a Neighbourhood Plan.

### **Berkswell Village**

Berkswell village dates from Saxon times and was the site for the original Manor house. It still retains a full village character with a primary school, pub, the Parish Church, village hall and village shop. It no longer has any public transport links and its connecting road to the facilities in Balsall Common is problematical for walking due to the lack of a footpath although a few robust souls do undertake the walk.

The village has a business park renowned for the quality of its buildings which are converted from farm/equestrian buildings. It is the "HQ" for the Berkswell Estate, a significant landowner with several farms that provides agricultural employment.

Berkswell Village is a designated Conservation Area, which was expanded in 2012 to include surrounding farmland which gives the village its context. The Conservation Area now includes the historic Ram Hall farm and the landscape surrounding Berkswell Hall.

### **Temple Balsall**

Temple Balsall is a small hamlet in Balsall parish on the B4101 to Knowle and is a designated Conservation Area. The Balsall parish cemetery is located here.

The Manor of Balsall, part of the Forest of Arden, was donated to the Knights Templar in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and it is from this that Temple Balsall gets its name. The Templars' Preceptory is now known as the Old Hall. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century their property was transferred to the Knights of St John (the Hospitallers) who's church, dedicated to St Mary the Virgin, still remains and is the mother church to St Peter's in Balsall Common.

Temple Balsall has royal associations with the Manor being given to Katherine Parr and later to Robert Dudley. It was his daughter Lady Katherine Leveson, who left a legacy in her will for the erection of 'an hospitale or almshouse'. The work she endowed continues to this day in the form of the Lady Katherine Housing and Care, the Lady Katherine Leveson Church of England Primary School and the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin.

### **Fen End, Meer End Oakley and Carol Green**

These are small historically important hamlets within the parishes. Fen End and Oakley have some buildings dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century but also have houses built to support the RAF when they operated out of the adjacent Honiley airfield site; which is currently being developed as the home of the JLR vehicle operations team.

## **4. Objective**

The development of a joint Neighbourhood Plan for Balsall and Berkswell parishes is being facilitated by both Parish Councils with help from volunteers across the community. The Parish Councils believe that this is a real opportunity for the community to have some ownership on future planning policy for the parishes. Through the creation of the Plan, local people will have the opportunity to help shape future policies for land use and the scale of development and what it should look like.

The Neighbourhood Plan will cover the whole of Balsall and Berkswell parishes and, subject to passing the formal tests, including independent Examination and a local referendum; it will become part of the local planning framework. Its policies will apply until 2030.

## **5. Process**

Balsall Parish Council and Berkswell Parish Councils agreed at their meetings in July 2015 to support the preparation and submission of a Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with the Localism Act 2011. The plan process is to be managed by a joint council Steering Committee with Terms of Reference agreed by both parish councils. It will have representatives from both Parish Councils plus representatives of the residents, businesses and community groups. Solihull Council officers and Councillors will also be invited to meetings. As a sub-committee of the councils it will operate by consensus making recommendations to the two councils for decisions.

In July 2015 a Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group comprising members of the Parish Councils, the Balsall Common Village Residents Association, the Berkswell Society, residents and business was established as a precursor to the formal establishment of the joint Council Committee to undertake preliminary work. With the formal acceptance of the Committee Terms of Reference in September 2015 the Steering Group became transformed into the Joint Steering Committee. A prime role of the Steering Committee will be to engage with the community and ensure that the views of the community are central to the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

The Steering Committee will meet regularly, meetings will be open to the public and their agendas and minutes together with other useful information will be made available on a dedicated website and via the normal Parish Council communications mechanisms.

## **6. Community Engagement**

The Steering Group, as part of its preparatory work, commenced obtaining community views and support at the combined Balsall Parish Annual Assembly and Balsall Common Village Residents Association AGM in May 2015. There has also been some survey work of car parking in Balsall Common centre over the summer of 2015 and residents views sought at the Balsall Common Festival in September 2015. This preparatory work was designed to identify themes for further more detailed consultation. Theme identification will also draw upon the findings of the 2009 Balsall Common Village Plan.

To fulfil its commitment to openness, transparency and community involvement, the Steering Committee will undertake both formal and informal surveys of residents, community organisations and businesses in the parishes to gather local views on the needs of the community and their aspirations for development. The results of these will inform the proposed meetings and events by which the community will help draft the content of the Plan.

## **7. Funding**

The Parish Councils are aware that Solihull MBC has limited funds available for assisting with the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan and that this is restricted:

- to officer time supporting and advising the community in taking forward the Plan;
- to cover costs for the examination; and
- any other further steps including organising the referendum.

It is understood that other costs such as printing, surveys, public meetings etc, are a matter for the Parish Councils and possible sources of grants towards these costs are being explored. In the meantime the initial costs of preparing the Plan will be met by the Parish Councils equally; financial arrangements are the subject of a formal agreement between the two Parishes.

## **8. Outcome**

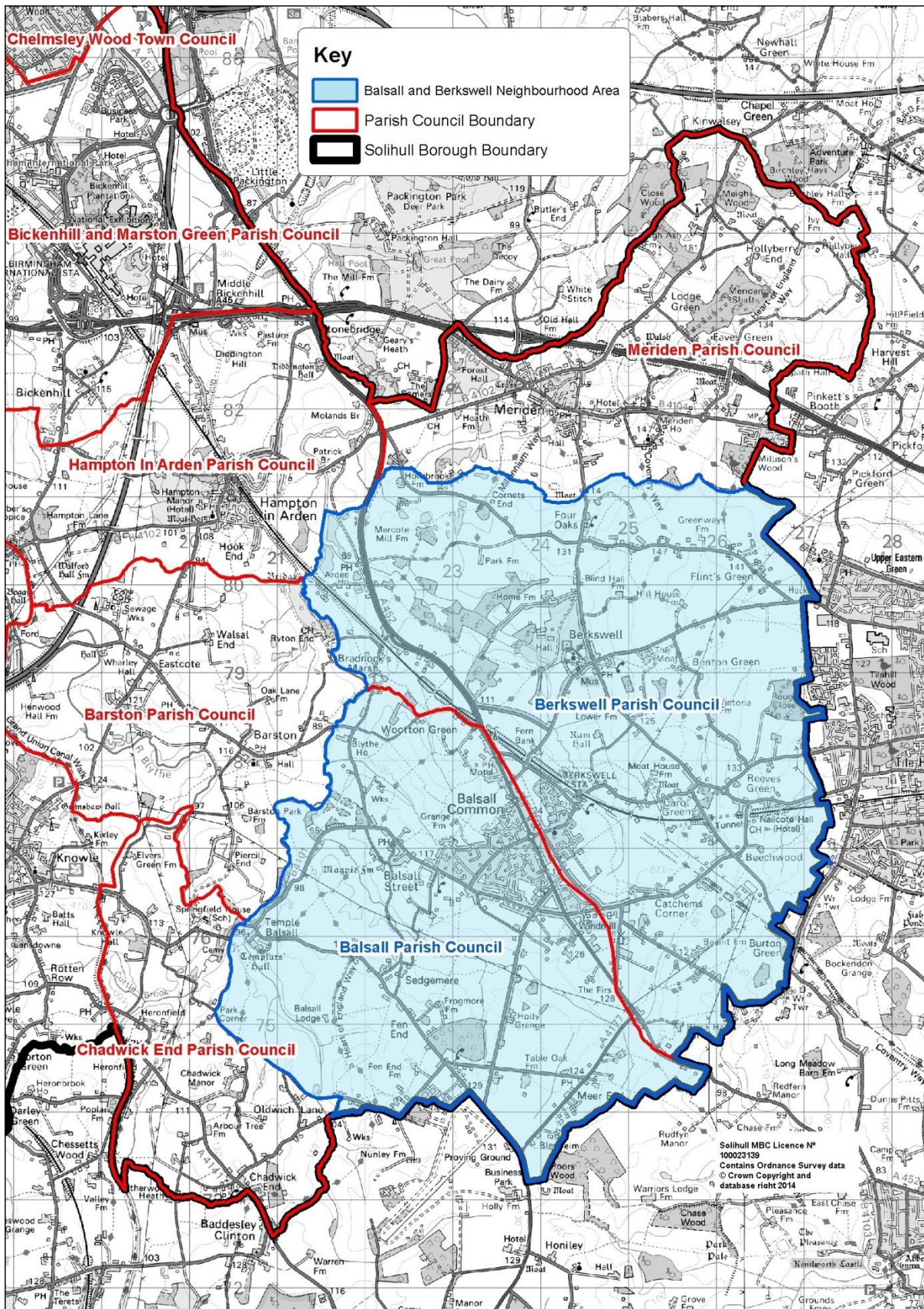
The intention is that the Neighbourhood Plan will be substantially drafted by the end of 2016, subject to resources and detailed project planning. Prior to formal submission of the Plan to Solihull Council, a period of pre-submission consultation and publicity will be undertaken for a minimum of six weeks. The plan will then be formally submitted to the Council to ensure that all the necessary regulations have been met. A further six week period of consultation will then be held, after which the Neighbourhood Plan will be submitted for independent examination. Solihull Council will then arrange a referendum and, if the Neighbourhood Plan is supported by 50% or more of those voting, Solihull MBC will 'make' the plan for Balsall and Berkswell Parishes to bring it into force.

## **9. Application**

The following are included with Balsall and Berkswell's application for designation as a neighbourhood area:

- i. Appendix 1 – a map which identifies the area to which the area application relates.
- ii. Appendix 2 - a statement explaining why this area is considered appropriate to be designated as a neighbourhood area.
- iii. Appendix 3 -a statement that the body making the area application is a relevant body for the purposes of 61G of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act.

# Appendix 1 Map Balsall and Berkswell Parishes Neighbourhood Application Area





## **Appendix 2 Statement to be designated as a neighbourhood area**

The parishes of Balsall and Berkswell are considered appropriate to be designated as a neighbourhood area for the following reasons:

- The Balsall and Berkswell Neighbourhood Plan is being developed to help deliver the local community's ambitions and needs for the plan period 2017 to 2030.
- The Plan will provide a vehicle to guide, promote and enable balanced and sustainable change and growth within the designated area.
- The designated area includes the whole of the civil Parishes of Balsall and Berkswell. which provides a manageable planning area sharing very similar characteristics and needs.

## **Appendix 3 Statement that the body making this application is a relevant body**

In accordance with Section 61G of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the bodies making the application to designate Balsall and Berkswell as a neighbourhood area are Balsall Parish Council and Berkswell Parish Council, each being a Parish Council established in pursuance of the Local Government Act 1972.

The application for designation includes all of the area covered by the respective Parish Councils.