

Firstly, the group would like to thank the secretary of state for calling in the application. The group were disappointed by the lack of meaningful, democratic debate at St Helens councils planning meeting regarding the application and are pleased that all of our evidence and statements will now be fully taken into account.

Secondly, I would like to apologise for the groups lack of procedural knowledge of a public examination. This has been a steep learning curve for the group as it is our first inquiry so if we have stepped outside of any procedural boundaries, we apologise sincerely to all parties involved.

Thirdly, we would like to congratulate Mr Morris on the success of his business. From the small acorn in Old Swan has grown the mighty oak of Home Bargains, a multi-billion-pound retail business. We wish Mr Morris continues success but believe that this success should not be to the detriment of the environment or the people of St. Helens.

In 2018 a small group of local residents became aware of the publication Draft Local Plan from complaints published on Social Media by other action groups in St Helens. When we started to look into this, it became apparent that the Local Council had failed to notify the community of Bold and Clock Face. We also learnt that a significant amount of Greenbelt land, over 12%, had been earmarked for both housing and employment development within an area in Bold subject to the adopted Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan. Residents attended Parish Council meetings, fully controlled by the local Labour Group at the time and tried to engage with Local Councillors and Council Employees in an attempt to gather information and express our concerns. Unfortunately, we were met with a very negative response. The people we spoke to did not want to listen to our concerns and told us 'it is too late to change local plan' with one councillor freely admitting he had no idea what he was voting on when the plan was passed at a full council meeting.

Bold and Clock Face Action Group have formed in response to what it perceives as the exclusion of the community from the Local Plan process and the total disregard by the Local Authority of the Bold Forest Park Area Action Plan, adopted by the Local Council, as a statutory document in 2017. The Forest Park Action Plan has significant community support. Not only from residents in Bold

and Clock Face, but also from neighbouring communities and boroughs. It is an opportunity for the Local Council to implement a real plan for change, providing real long term health benefits whilst developing the sustainable rural economy. As you will see from our submitted evidence, there is a hunger from the people of Bold and the wider area for the implementation of the Bold Forest Area action plan. The area has seen a huge increase in footfall on our existing green spaces with people coming from all over the north west to use the walking routes.

In 2019 eight local residents, disgruntled by the lack of cooperation from parish and ward councillors and the borough council, stood as independent candidates in the parish council election. All eight were elected along with a green party member who also won a Bold ward councillor seat in turnout by voters unseen for years. These councillors were elected with a clear mandate from the people of Bold, the planned destruction of the greenbelt is not welcomed. The group accept that some small development may be required within the forest park but this must not negatively impact the successful implantation of the action plan and its aims and objectives.

The action group now has 1500 members, all members must request to join the group and are fully aware of our goals when applying for membership. Engagement with the community has been key to the success of the group, we have large numbers of people volunteering their time each week to help improve the area by litter picking, running community groups and helping with evidence gathering for the Omega and local plan inquiries.

There is no force for change greater than a community finding out what they believe in and the people of Bold believe in the benefits of the Bold forest area action plan, not the destruction of our precious green spaces.

Thank you.