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**Wickwar Residents Action Group  
submission of community letter**

**9th December 2023**

## **John Cross - Wickwar Resident**

The development of housing estates by Belway (commencing in 2019) and Linden (commencing in 2021) has increased the size of the village of Wickwar by ~30% to a total of ~800 dwellings, housing a population of ~2000 residents. The proposed development by Bloor Homes would add a further 180 homes and increase the population size by a further +550 – another 25% increase in residents.

Residents of Wickwar cannot even buy a bottle of milk or a loaf of bread in their village. There is no shop, no doctor, no pharmacy, no filling station, no takeaway and now, no bus service. Villagers have no option but to drive to larger settlements such as Yate, Chipping Sodbury, Wotton-under-Edge or Thornbury to shop or to avail themselves of local services. Neither Belway nor Linden has added facilities which improve the infrastructure of the village.

### **Wickwar village simply cannot sustain further major housing and population growth.**

Both Belway and Linden promised the provision of 35% affordable homes yet, once planning permission had been granted, reduced this target with no sanction from the planning authorities. Wickwar villagers are understandably and justifiably sceptical to see the same promise in the proposal being made by Bloor Homes.

The road infrastructure into and out of the village is poor and at busy times of the day, can become gridlocked at the one-way traffic light controlled section. There is a weight restriction for vehicles travelling through the village which has been in place since 1987 when a gas pipe exploded, caused by heavily-laden lorry traffic from local quarries.

A further major increase in road traffic on the already busy B4060 will result in even greater traffic queues and delays at the busier times of each day. Allowing further additional housing to be built in Wickwar will significantly increase road traffic in both directions through the village and on surrounding roads with resulting adverse effects for existing residents and through travellers.

Due to the presence of an arched railway bridge on the B4060 between Wickwar and Kingswood, there is a height restriction upon traffic using this road which permits only single-decker public transport vehicles. The railway station closed in 1965. There are no cycle lanes in Wickwar; there are no pedestrian pavements extending beyond the village boundaries.

The proposed Bloor Homes development would be built on a green field site and offers neither economic nor social benefits to Wickwar. Rather, there are extremely significant disadvantages which will adversely affect existing residents and those in surrounding areas. Pressure upon the local infrastructure will be severely increased.

It is easy to see how prospective property developers will benefit by building in the green belt of this so very pleasant, ancient village of South Gloucestershire however, it is extremely unlikely, despite the promises they make only to curry favour with the planning authorities and residents, that they will ever invest in addressing the considerable inadequacies of the infrastructures in Wickwar and its surrounds, which scarcely cope with the needs of the current population. That burden of investment will invariably fall upon the South Gloucestershire Council and its residents. We all know it!

South Gloucestershire Council made absolutely the right call in rejecting the original proposal from Bloor Homes. Their appeal is groundless, but they continue with it because the cost to them is negligible compared to the considerable profit they stand to make if they are successful. For them it's simple risk and reward. However, nothing has changed; their appeal is every bit as unworthy now as

## **Wickwar Community letter**

The Wickwar Residents Action group was formed 3 years ago to fight inappropriate development in Wickwar. In recent years Wickwar has been inundated with speculative planning applications as developers have been taking advantage of the fact that the South Gloucestershire Council had no current local plan in place. They feel they can build their inappropriate developments in Wickwar because no one has the power to say no, but the residents of Wickwar are saying No, and we are saying it loud and clear.

We could go into great depth about why Wickwar is not the right place for this speculative planning application or indeed any future speculative planning applications. South Glos council knows it and that is why Wickwar is not mentioned in their new local plan which has just been published. The new local plan will take effect from 2025 and so it seems will still have to fight off these inappropriate speculative planning applications until then. However, this Inquiry has gone into great depth as to why the planning application is not right for Wickwar. Any development that happens now is irreversible and whilst the decision can be made within a relatively short time, the repercussions of that decision will be felt in Wickwar for many years to come.

Instead we would like to share with you 2 statements from residents from Wickwar that have been written from the heart and please know that the sentiment in both of these statements is the sentiment felt by all the 801 residents who came to sign the petition, the 350 active members of the Wickwar Residents Action Group and many more residents who were unable to sign the petition that day but wanted to object non the less.

These statements have been written by John and Sharon Cross, Wickwar.

Hard copies of the statements that have been read out by various residents since the start of the Inquiry are also attached.

Thank you for reading

Wickwar Residents Action Group

was their original application in 2021. I urge you to once again make the correct decision and reject the appeal by Bloor Homes.

### **Sharon Cross - Wickwar Resident**

My husband and I moved from Bristol to Wickwar in October 1990. Moving to the countryside was a big decision for us confirmed city dwellers, travelling further to work, away from a vast choice of amenities we enjoyed on our doorstep, to a place where running out of milk after 8pm meant a long car journey to find something open (if you were lucky) and every part of life aside from having a pint in our village pub or social club, meant at least a 10 minute car journey. Back then, we had a Post office and small general store, very useful to villagers during the day, but when you're both getting in from work at 7 at night, useless as it was shut.

We decided that starting a family in this lovely quiet village, being part of the village community, would give our family a safe place to play, enjoy the countryside, and walking safely to toddler, pre-school groups and primary school - far outweighing the worry over running out of milk or bread - we'd just have to make sure we didn't! We felt very lucky to have happened upon Wickwar and felt privileged to be joining this village community.

We involved ourselves in events and organisations around the village and felt whilst we were starting our 1<sup>st</sup> generation of Wickwarian's, against a backdrop of villagers counting back many many generations, we had started to become 'villagers'. Until a few years later, I was reminded I was still new, in the Post Office queue. I was given the cold shoulder by an older villager, who was happy to chat to me until she realised, I lived in the 'new builds' on the old Heron/Crest Nicolson estate. I began to realise what Wickwar had given up; the green fields between the old cottages filled in with modern housing, a change to the entrance to the village as you enter it from Chipping Sodbury, loss of hedges and trees 100's of years old, cottage views and outlooks obliterated, it's pub and social club invaded by newcomers, like it had lost a little bit of itself.

I looked through the views from my house and garden with very different eyes and thanks to that villager, got an old-fashioned lesson in appreciating what you have around you, whilst you've got it. I didn't own the views and fields near our house, I expected we may lose them at some point, so I would appreciate every day the beauty and peace they gave me and my family.

Roll forward 33 years, we're very much part of and protective of our village; with adult children who absolutely love returning and rekindling their love of the quiet, the Roman Bridge, Lower Woods, the playing fields and pitches, the many footpaths in between, the pub and social, but more especially the villagers. Bumping into 'old faces' whilst mowing the grass, in the pub/Social or on a walk, makes them feel like they're home.

The Linden and Belway estates added 30% new housing to Wickwar, I think a lot of Wickwarians thought these developments were inevitable, new housing is needed everywhere, we shouldn't be NIMBYs and play fair.

Hundreds of new villagers were tacked onto the side of Wickwar, out on a limb, on the edge. I want them to feel a part of our village, feel welcomed. I don't want them to feel like I did in the Post Office that day, it's not their fault green fields were carved up for their houses. They have excitedly bought those houses and want to feel a belonging too. It can't be very welcoming for these new villagers, seeing 'No More Houses' plastered everywhere, but it's hard to protest against more houses without offending.

Wickwar needs years to assimilate these new villagers, to weave them into the tapestry of Wickwar and its surroundings, make them feel like they belong to our village and that only comes with the passage of time. Whilst speculative planning applications like Bloor exist, they will always be a threat to the fine balance of our village and the countryside it nestles in.

I implore you to reject this application, I believe that this will have a significant negative, disjoining impact upon the village from which it may never recover.

The following is an abstract of the points made by Cllr Houghton on behalf of Wickwar Parish Council at the inquiry relating to **APP/P0119/W/23/3323836** on Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023

The Parish Council reiterates its concern over the rate of development in the village and the failure of infrastructure and services to keep pace. Specifically, the Parish Council notes that the addition of new housing at the Saxon Gate and Tyndale Reach developments has already increased the number of dwellings in the village from 310 (pre-2018) to 490. This represents a 58% increase and a further 180 dwellings under the Bloor proposals will effectively double the size of the village vs the 2018 position. The Parish Council is of the opinion that it cannot be reasonable to suppose such an expansion without a commensurate increase of services and infrastructure is sustainable.

The Parish Council would further highlight the following factors that demonstrate a real deficit in provision of service and infrastructure.

#### Education

Cllr Houghton stated from personal experience that he was not able to get his son into Alexander Hosea primary school and instead is required to drive to and from St Andrews Primary School in Cromhall twice a day and that he is not the only Wickwar resident in this position. The Parish Council is not aware of any plans to increase the size of the school.

Regarding High School education the Parish Council is aware that the LEA has designated Chipping Sodbury and Brimsham Green as the appropriate High Schools for the new housing but that residents continue to prefer Katherine Lady Berkeley's (KLB) School as is the long-term custom and practise within the village. This is both a point of contention for residents of the new housing and an issue in that the LEA does not provide transport to KLB for children living in the new housing and therefore parents must make their own arrangements generally based around car travel. The Parish Council further notes there is no requirement for the LEA to provide transport to 6<sup>th</sup> form students and this will drive travel by car regardless of the educational establishment chosen.

#### Public Transport

The Parish Council has been very concerned about the potential loss of bus services in Wickwar and welcomes the investment of £190k by South Glos. Council to extend the bus service, by approximately 8 months, in August 2023 albeit on a very reduced service of 3 services per day in each direction. The Parish Council is sceptical of Bloor's proposal for a new bus service and supports the South Glos rebuttal for the reasons stated therein. The Parish Council believes the costs tested with providers through the extension awarded to the Big Lemon at a rate of around £24k per month are a more reasonable assumption and we remain concerned that the bus service is in significant jeopardy given the pressures on WECA and South Glos. Councils budgets regardless of any S106 contribution.

### Road Infrastructure

The Parish Council is aware of significant issues on the local road network including subsidence and other defects on the B4060 and repeated flooding at several locations on The Downs. Wickwar High Street also suffers from a rapidly deteriorating road surface and HGVs have been regularly observed breaking the weight restrictions through the narrow road section to the north at a rate of around 100 to 160 vehicles per month. Local authorities are struggling to manage this situation and added traffic from a new development will only worsen the situation.

### The Proposed Shop

Having witnessed previous difficulties in sustaining a shop within the village the Parish Council remains sceptical around the viability of the proposed shop within the Bloor plans especially given its location away from the village centre.

### Community Impact and Village Character

Finally, the Parish Council shares residents concerns over the changes to the character of the village that would inevitably result from its doubling in size and acknowledges the strength of feeling as evidenced by the petition arranged by the Wickwar Residents Action Group.

### Conclusion

In conclusion the Parish Council remains opposed to Bloor's application because

1. Wickwar has already rapidly grown in size taking services and infrastructure beyond breaking point with no feasible mitigation plans in place.
2. The village and wider area needs time to adapt to the recent Saxon Gate and Tyndale Reach developments both in terms of community integration and development of services and infrastructure.

## **Annette Ganesh - Wickwar Resident**

### **Statement read 3rd December 2023**

I have lived in Wickwar for 6 years and in that time have grown to love the village. There is a real sense of community here and belonging and this is something that I have not often felt. I have lived in many places but in Wickwar I feel I have grown roots and I hope that my daughters can feel the same until the point they feel they want to move on. We moved here because my husband and I wanted to live in a small community, surrounded by the beautiful countryside, away from the hustle and bustle of the city and in a safe environment in which to raise our children. A few months after we moved to Wickwar the first housing development started being built by Bellway, adding an extra 80 houses onto the village, not long after this development the Linden development was approved and building began of another 90 houses. This has meant that the village has grown in size by roughly 30% in the last 6 years. By adding yet another 180 houses as proposed by Bloor a whopping 350 new houses would have been built in the village in recent years. There were 550 houses 6 years ago, now there could potentially be 900. No village can cope with that huge increase in new houses and new families so quickly.

In each new house there is a family, most likely with children who need to go to school, new mums with toddlers who want to go to the village toddler group, adolescents that want to meet up with friends in the evenings, parents who need wrap around care for their children so they can go to work every day. Wickwar simply does not have the facilities to be able to absorb this number of extra families so quickly. The toddler group held in the village hall each Tuesday and Friday has limited space for toddlers to run around, it has already seen mums and babies coming to the group from surrounding areas as there are not enough baby & toddler groups. There is limited availability for the out of school club in the village and they do not run all of the time meaning parents are struggling to find care for their children whilst they are at work. There is no pre-school in the village, the one we did have closed 5 years ago and so parents have to drive to another area to take their children to preschool. That's if they can find a space, as it is increasingly difficult to do so. Indeed, when my youngest daughter started preschool I was having to drop my oldest daughter to school at Alexander Hosea and then drive into Charfield to drop my youngest at Pre-school as that was the closest one. That's not very sustainable, but there were no other options. We have already seen an increase in anti-social behaviour at the youth club which has never been seen before in Wickwar. There are families in Wickwar that have to drive their children to other villages to school every day because they have been unable to get a place at Alexander Hosea. Meaning that these children who live in the village but cannot attend the village school are not being given the opportunity to live in the same village as their classmates, they cannot easily call for their friends after school as they live in another village or town.

The high street has become increasingly busy, there is a constant flow of traffic through the village. This became more evident as we stood at the town hall on the High Street last Sunday collecting signatures for the petition for No More Houses. The traffic never stopped and we were frequently having to stop mid conversation as we couldn't hear each other over the lorries, trucks and motorbikes passing through. There was a gas explosion in the high street back in the 80s which was caused by large lorries passing through the high street, damaging the gas pipes underneath it, hence the weight restriction placed at the traffic



lights. Unfortunately, large lorries still pass through the high street. A lot of them going to and from the new housing developments but the gas pipes haven't been updated or changed as far as I'm aware. This is a huge concern for residents that live on the high street, especially those that lived there the night of the gas explosion and they still remember it well.

Wickwar is an historical village, a very beautiful and important village with lots of history and stories. I love to hear about the stories of the Duchess that used to live on the hill and drive her porsche rather erratically down the high street. The old school building that is now a private residence but apparently the most haunted building in Wickwar. I know that places change and have to grow, but they have to be allowed to do that at a pace that it can adapt at. We have already had 170 new houses built and with it 170 new families have moved into the village. The village has to be given time to adapt and welcome these new families, let the school have time to catch up with the new recruits. The toddler group to try and find new premises if it finds it needs to expand. The youngsters have to be given time to all get to know each other and to keep building the community. Adding another 180 houses will change the character of the village too much, Wickwar cannot cope.

I would also like to add that behind each of the 801 signatures collected for the petition, is a person who is living in Wickwar with the constant threat of building. Building that has already been ongoing for 5-6 years with the Bellway and Linden estates. The current Bloor planning application is not the only one we are currently contending with. We also have the threat of Crest Nicholson who want to build 130 houses in the field next to the primary school and Cotswold Homes who we believe have bought the land behind the Buthay and will be planning to build even more homes there.

I really hope that you will listen to the residents of Wickwar, regardless of whether a technical detail is or isn't quite right, there are lots of people saying this is simply not the right place to be building these houses. The Wickwar parish council, Yate town council, the ward councillors, South Glos council and 801 residents of Wickwar are all saying the same thing, this is not the right place for this housing development, so I implore you to please listen, make the only right decision and not accept this planning application.

Annette Ganesh  
Wickwar Resident

## **Inquiry Speech**

My Name is Joe Ganesh, and my family and I have lived in Wickwar for 6 years.

We moved here from Chipping Sodbury, to enjoy village life. When we moved in, the Belway and Linden developments (170 houses in total), had already been approved and the Belway development started soon after we arrived.

At that time, Wickwar had a small Spar newsagent, and the well known Wickwar Brewery was still open, offering some local employment. We had seven buses a day. The new developments offered no new benefits to the community, apart from a promised bus stop which ironically was built just after funding for the local bus was pulled. I'll come to that in a moment.

The Spar is no more, shut in 2018 and not replaced. Wickwar Brewery has closed. There are no retail shops on the High Street apart from a hairdressers, and a coffee shop. If you want to purchase anything, you have to get in your car. Cycling is not realistically an option, as Sodbury Road is simply too dangerous to cycle down, especially with children as there are no footpaths beyond the Linden estate going South, and none North of the High Street.

My biggest concern with the Bloor development is traffic and transport. Each of those 180 houses will have at least one or two cars, and there is no alternative for those families other than travelling by car. Either North to the M5 or Wotton, which means going through the already busy Wickwar High Street, or into Bristol via Yate and the B4059 which is already a mess every morning at the Yate Road roundabout.

The traffic heading north through the High Street, has already noticeably increased since the 4000 dwellings of the Ladden Garden development in Yate, which travels up Sodbury Road to access the M5. As we have no pedestrian crossing in Wickwar, you can imagine how difficult it is to cross the road, especially amongst the parked cars of the High Street.

Regarding the 180 households in the planned Bloor development- the great majority of these houses will have children. Those who need to attend school will need to have a car journey out of Wickwar, as the local school, Alexander Hosea, is at capacity. Already, many of the children in Wickwar are being driven to surrounding primary schools. Conversely, many children from Yate and Chipping Sodbury are driven in to attend Alexander Hosea as most of the schools in Yate and Sodbury are over subscribed. We already have serious traffic and parking issues during the two daily school runs. Adding to this, which I observe from personal experience, many families who live in the Belway & Linden estates drive their children to Alexander Hosea rather than walk, largely due to the distance and safety issues around traversing a very busy road. It is highly likely that any residents of the Bloor Development would do the same, if their children attended Alexander Hosea (exacerbated by the fact that unlike Belway/Linden, they would have to actually cross Sodbury Road).

Mentioning bus travel again- as funding was cut recently by the council, we have just three buses a day now (each way). I heard statistics at this inquiry last week, mentioning 150 bus journeys per person per year. That may be true for people in London, but absolutely not the case for Wickwar. It simply isn't practical, let alone convenient, to rely solely on the buses. I feel desperately sorry for anyone who moves into the new developments who may not be able to afford a car as we are all heavily reliant on them.

To summarise. Wickwar had approximately 550 houses prior to Belway and Linden estates being built. These added 170 houses, an increase of 31%. While residents of Wickwar completely understand the national need for more houses, the village has already done it's bit. There simply isn't adequate infrastructure or services to support further growth. Wickwar is the wrong place for the Bloor or any other development unless this situation is alleviated. 600 plus people objected to the planning application and 801 signed a petition submitted to this inquiry. I feel that speaks volumes. Thankyou.

# Bloor Homes Public Enquiry

*Wickwar Environmental Action Group representation - 8/11/23*

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Good morning

I am here to object to the Bloor homes development and to show how the government's own scientific advice is highlighting the unsuitability of any development in this area.

My name is David Graham and I'm here today representing Wickwar's community environmental group called 'Wickwar Environmental Action Group', known as WEAG.

Our group has existed since 2020, have the support of 443 residents in the community who follow us on Facebook and we run regular community-wide planting, conservation and nature related activities.

WEAG's primary goal is to identify, enhance and protect the natural areas in our parish. Put simply, our 10 square miles of the planet.

I'm not here today to bleat on about the demise of our hedgehogs.....or...the sad state of our hedgerows and its impact on declining bird populations..... or the continuing decline in the quality of water in our waterways. All of us only have to turn on our TV's or read a newspaper to know that nature is in trouble.

Wickwar is almost unique in that it adjoins 5 SSSI' sites all of which are critically important nature biodiversity areas.

This morning, I'm here to communicate two things, both of which are scientific UK government led conclusions.

## **1) West of England Nature Partnership**

Firstly, I would like to bring to your attention the '**West of England Nature Partnership'/Forest of Avon Trust' nature plan**. This government led document has been shaped by South Glos Council, The Woodland Trust, The Wildlife Trust, The West of England Authority and other private and public land management organisations.

Very simply, it highlights the priorities across the West of England and, importantly, the priority to join up certain critical habitats.

It lists just 22 priority nature areas across the West of England....Just 22 across the whole of the West of England.....one of those 22 is the Wickwar Ridge & Vale. The key

priority in this plan for our area is to spread biodiversity outwards through green corridors across the Wickwar Ridge & Vale.

In the context of this housing application, Page 109, point c, highlights the need to make sure semi-improved meadow is not adversely affected. The proposed Bloor Homes site falls into this zone.

## **2) SSSI Impact Zones**

The second point I would like to make is in relation to SSSI's.

As you hopefully know by now, Wickwar adjoins 5 SSSI's. These are sites which the **UK government** consider best represent our natural heritage in terms of their flora and fauna. The government have recognised these sites are to be protected, where necessary, at high cost. In the context of this enquiry, SSSI's act as an oasis for wildlife in their local vicinity, from which the nature contained within them, can easily spread.

**MAP** - I would like to ask the panel to view exhibit 1 – This map shows Wickwar Vale. It's produced by DEFRA and freely available on their UK-wide mapping tool called MAGIC. (<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>).

The Green hashed areas are Wickwar's 5 adjoining SSSI's, the closest of which is Bishops Hill Wood which is less than ½ mile from the proposed building site.

More importantly, are the purple lines, all part of this DEFRA mapping site. They show the areas which have the greatest importance in the spread of biodiversity from Wickwar's SSSI's. Conversely, any potential interruption in this biodiversity spread is of high risk.

The red dot marks the proposed construction site. As you will see it is directly in the line of key bio-diversity spread risk.

Put another way, the UK government's own work highlights the proposed build site is bang slap in the middle of the biodiversity risk area.

## **Summary**

So in summary, my representation today isn't a personal view or moan. It's simply a presentation of the UK's own scientific work and biodiversity priorities.

I think it begs the question.....do we rely on what our extensive tax payer funded scientific experts tell us.....that SSSI's are essential and the biodiversity corridors emanating from them, are critical....or do we dismiss it all...ignore it all, in the pursuance of a speculative housing development in a village that has already seen its housing grow by [40]% over the last 5 years?



**WICKWAR SAYS**

**NO**

**TO MORE  
HOUSES**

**WE CAN ONLY SAFEGUARD OUR VILLAGE  
FROM OVERDEVELOPMENT WITH **YOUR** HELP!**

**[wickwardevelopment.com](http://wickwardevelopment.com)**

