# Government inspector approves housing development on green space despite air pollution concerns



A government planning inspector has overruled Sandwell Council’s earlier rejection of plans to build 60 homes on green space adjacent to the M5 motorway in Oldbury, allowing the development to proceed despite local concerns about air pollution risks.

The proposed site is located off Wolverhampton Road, next to the Asda supermarket near junction 2 of the M5. The application had been initially refused by Sandwell Council’s planning committee in February 2024, amid fears that pollution from the busy M5, Wolverhampton Road, and nearby Titford Road would expose future residents to harmful levels of toxic air, potentially increasing cancer risk. The council’s environmental health department expressed anxiety over the dangers of particulate matter pollution in the area, commonly known as PM2.5. These microscopic particles, less than 2.5 micrometres in diameter, can penetrate deep into the lungs and have been linked to cancer, heart disease, asthma, and low birth weight.

Despite these concerns, a government inspector responsible for the appeal by developer Countryside Homes reviewed the application and concluded that predicted PM2.5 levels — forecast to be 7.41 micrograms per cubic metre (μg/m³) by 2028 — would be “well within the limit” and in line with national targets. These targets, established under the Environment Act 2021, aim to reduce PM2.5 concentrations to 12μg/m³ by 2028 and 10μg/m³ by December 2040, representing public exposure reductions of at least 22% and 35%, respectively. The inspector’s report noted that the council’s public health department acknowledged the development “would not by itself make existing pollution concentrations significantly worse” and that an air quality assessment deemed the impact “negligible.”

Sandwell councillors had cited the health risk as a major reason to reject the plans and stressed the site’s proximity to heavy traffic as a cause for concern. Councillor Liam Preece commented to the Birmingham Mail that he was “deeply uncomfortable with asking people to move into a place that is toxic or unsafe and will likely remain that way in the future.” Similarly, Langley ward councillor Bill Gavan described local traffic conditions as a “nightmare” and said the air quality was “disgusting.” The committee’s refusal was welcomed by residents who had campaigned against the project.

The green space, described by some campaigners as a “wildlife corridor,” is home to badgers, foxes, and birds, and provides a natural barrier that helps mitigate pollution. The land had previously been the subject of a 2019 campaign by local residents who successfully opposed a separate development proposal by London-based Canmoor, which involved industrial units and service yards. That effort garnered over 20,000 signatures on a petition and resulted in the council rejecting the application.

However, Sandwell Council’s own planners had recommended approval of the Countryside Homes proposal ahead of the committee meeting, arguing the development would represent an “appropriate reuse of brownfield land” and deliver much-needed affordable housing. Officials noted that the site did not meet criteria to be classified as a site of ‘local importance for nature conservation’ and assessed its ecological value as “limited.” The planners also pointed out that there is no public access to the current green space, which restricts its community benefits, and concluded that the land was “highly unlikely to warrant any specific protection.” The location has been identified as a potential housing site in the council’s emerging Local Plan, drawn up after the collapse of the previous Black Country Plan in 2022.

The government inspector’s decision marks a significant development in the ongoing debate over balancing housing needs with environmental and public health considerations in the area. While objections centred on air quality and wildlife preservation, the official ruling prioritised compliance with statutory pollution thresholds and housing supply demands. The development will now move forward on what remains a contested site at the edge of the M5 corridor in Oldbury.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/local-hubs/sandwell/2024/10/08/plan-for-sandwell-homes-next-to-m5-rejected-over-cancer-fears-might-still-go-ahead/> - Confirms Sandwell Council's initial rejection of the plans to build 60 homes near the M5 in Oldbury due to cancer and air pollution fears, and the developer's appeal to government planning inspectors who could overrule the decision.
* <https://sandwell.moderngov.co.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=5377> - Official planning application documents noting the proposed development's proximity to the M5 motorway, concerns about increased air and noise pollution, and local environmental health department's worries about particulate matter pollution.
* <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/local-hubs/sandwell/oldbury/2024/02/13/planners-say-homes-move-for-wildlife-corridor-should-go-ahead/> - Details Sandwell Council planners' recommendation to approve the housing development despite concerns, describing the site as not meeting criteria for local nature conservation importance and the green space’s limited ecological value.
* <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/downloads/file/164/20a-appendix-a-green-spaces-strategy-implementation-and-business-plan-2022-2025> - Sandwell Council's Green Spaces Strategy describing local green corridors, the ecological value of green spaces in Oldbury, and providing context on the landscape and public access which relates to the assessment of the site’s community and ecological importance.
* <https://www.airqualitynews.com/2023/11/15/uk-environment-act-sets-ambitious-air-quality-targets/> - Explains the Environment Act 2021 targets for air pollution reduction, including PM2.5 concentration limits of 12μg/m³ by 2028 and 10μg/m³ by 2040, corroborating the national air quality standards referenced in the inspector’s decision on the development.