# Government approves 60 homes near M5 despite pollution concerns from Sandwell Council



Plans to build 60 homes on a green space adjacent to the M5 motorway in Oldbury have been approved by a government inspector despite concerns raised by Sandwell Council about harmful pollution levels. The proposal, initially rejected by the local authority’s planning committee, will see a mix of flats and houses constructed off Wolverhampton Road near the Asda supermarket at junction 2 of the M5.

The decision follows an appeal lodged by Countryside, the housing developer behind the scheme. Sandwell Council had refused the application in February 2024, citing fears that future residents would be exposed to dangerous levels of pollution from the M5, plus the nearby Wolverhampton and Titford Roads. The council’s environmental health department expressed particular concern over fine particulate matter, known as PM2.5, which is recognised for its ability to penetrate deep into the lungs and has been linked to cancer, heart disease, asthma, and low birth weights.

Despite these worries, the government-appointed inspector concluded that the expected pollution levels at the site would be “well within limits.” The inspector’s report referenced an air quality assessment predicting PM2.5 concentrations of 7.41 μg/m³ by 2028, which is below the interim target of 12 μg/m³ set by the Environment Act 2021. This interim goal aims to reduce public exposure to PM2.5 by at least 22 per cent by 2028, progressing towards an ultimate target of 10 μg/m³ by 2040.

The inspector noted that Sandwell Council’s public health department had indicated the new housing development would not significantly exacerbate local pollution concentrations. The inspector's report stated that the predicted pollution impacts would be “negligible” and “within the limit” for acceptable air quality, reflecting a national rather than site-specific benchmark for future housing developments.

During the planning committee meeting in February, councillors voiced their unease about approving the development in an area perceived as “toxic or unsafe.” Councillor Liam Preece expressed being “deeply uncomfortable with asking people to move into a place that is toxic or unsafe and will likely remain that way in the future.” Another local representative, Councillor Bill Gavan, described the traffic situation as a “nightmare” and condemned the air quality as “disgusting.” These voices echoed the concerns of local residents, some of whom applauded the committee’s initial rejection.

Nonetheless, Sandwell Council’s planning officers had recommended granting permission for the houses, characterising the scheme as “an appropriate reuse of brownfield land” that would provide much-needed affordable housing. The council also stated that the site does not meet criteria to be designated as a ‘local importance for nature conservation’ area, assessing its ecological value as “limited.” They acknowledged the green space offers restricted benefits due to a lack of public access. The local authority’s draft Sandwell Local Plan, which is yet to be formally approved, has identified the site as a potential area for new homes, following the collapse of the wider Black Country Plan in 2022.

The site in question is a green corridor behind the Asda supermarket and has been described by residents as a habitat for badgers, foxes, and various birds. They have contended that it serves as a vital buffer zone protecting nearby homes from motorway pollution. Campaigners have previously fought off development attempts on the site, including a notable 2019 victory against a London-based developer, Canmoor, who sought to build industrial units.

The latest government decision effectively overrides Sandwell Council’s opposition, permitting the housing plans to progress despite the ongoing debate about air pollution risks near major roads. The inspector’s determination focussed on projected pollution levels aligning with current legislative targets, while local concern continues over the impact on residents’ health and the value of preserving green space in a heavily trafficked area.

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/> - This article details the initial rejection of the plan to build 60 homes next to the M5 due to fears of toxic pollution causing cancer for future residents, mentioning the location near the Asda supermarket and the M5, and the developer Countryside’s appeal following the council’s refusal.
* <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/local-hubs/sandwell/oldbury/2024/02/22/homes-plan-for-m5-green-buffer-thrown-out-over-cancer-risk-from-pollution/> - This source corroborates the council's concerns about harmful PM2.5 pollution levels linked to serious health conditions, the planning committee’s rejection in February 2024, local councillors’ objections about safety and pollution, and the environmental health department’s warnings.
* <https://cdn-www.expressandstar.mna.arcpublishing.com/news/local-hubs/sandwell/oldbury/2024/02/13/planners-say-homes-move-for-wildlife-corridor-should-go-ahead/> - This article supports the information that Sandwell Council’s planning officers had recommended permission for the development, describing the site as brownfield land and the development as appropriate, despite ecological concerns.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/environment-act-2021-overview> - The Environment Act 2021 overview page confirms the legal air quality targets referenced in the inspector's report, notably the interim PM2.5 concentration target of 12 μg/m³ by 2028 and the ultimate target of 10 μg/m³ by 2040.
* <https://www.sandwell.gov.uk/info/200228/environmental_health/621/air_quality> - Sandwell Council’s environmental health information page details local concerns about air pollution, specifically PM2.5 particulate matter and its health impacts, supporting the council's environmental health department’s warnings in the article.