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Section 4.1.7 below relates to the Agricultural Land Quality of Great Barr
Parkland

Peter W. R. W. W.

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TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1971

WEST MIDLANDS COUNTY COUNCIL

ALDRIDGE/BROWNHILLS LOCAL PLAN

REPORT OF PUBLIC LOCAL INQUIRY
INTO OBJECTIONS

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS
DOCUMENT IS A TRUE AND
ACCURATE COPY OF THE ORIGINAL

P. D. WILLIAMS

County Secretary

County Council of West Midlands

Dated 29th July 1985

Inspector: C S McDonald MA DMA LMRTPI Solicitor

Date of Inquiry: 23 October to 23 November 1984



4.1.6 This main access from Chapel Lane is called Sutton's Drive. Served by it, opposite the Church, is a pair of semi-detached houses. Then along its other side are first the relatively isolated hospital home called "Woodlands", under high power tension cables and now vacant and vandalised; and then the site of another separate home, "Sanders", recently demolished. Further to the north-east of the Drive is the hospital's main open recreation area and sports ground. Beyond and slightly above that is a north-south line of seven 50 to 60 year old brick-built male homes. Stepping up the valley side to the east of these are 4 more of similar appearance although built post-war. A single-storey workshop and medical centre stand at the northern end of the older line.

MAT.
4.1.7 The Estate north-east of the M6 is shown as a hospital in large grounds on the Town Map approved in 1972. It is also in the full Green Belt designated by the 1975 Amendment to the County Development Plan. A policy diagram in the Explanatory Memorandum to the Structure Plan approved in 1982 shows it to be in the strategic Sandwell Wedge: and it is within the overlapping area of the Barr Beacon and Sandwell Valley Subject Plan, which, however, only has specific proposals for the severed part of the grounds.

MPOT.
4.1.8 The hearing of the objection was rather impaired by a failure to clarify beforehand the outstanding, basic issues. For instance, the Health Authority was pressing for, as second best, a special policy in the Local Plan which recognises the unusual planning problems in the Hospital grounds. It was only in closing their cases that the 2 Councils acceded in principle to this suggestion. On the other hand, the Health Authority submitted in its objection and advance proofs of evidence that its western farmland is of poor quality and has been damaged by gravel extraction for building the M6: yet, after informal discussions with MAFF, it acquiesced to the Ministry's report to the inquiry that the Hospital's 49 ha (120 acre) block of agricultural land is 28% Grade 2 and 52% Grade 3a, with only 6% Grade 4.

4.1.9 The 1981 consultation draft of the Local Plan contained no proposals affecting the Hospital. The 1983 Revision included a proposal for a housing site R6, for about 150 dwellings on 5.5 ha (13.6 acres) at Chapel Lane. Most of this would have been on the sites of social and recreational facilities behind the Motel, but its north-eastern end was an under-used corner of the Hospital's farm. The proposal aroused considerable local opposition, and was omitted from the deposited draft on the grounds that it would have taken away valuable social and community facilities. The Health Authority in turn objected to this omission, but withdrew this part of its objection at the inquiry. A small piece of the Hospital grounds is also subject to Proposal HSl:R12, considered in Chapter 5.10 of this report.

OBJECTOR'S CASE

4.1.10 Health Service policy is for the future use of St Margaret's for the mentally handicapped to be concentrated in the "horseshoe area". In 1957 the capacity of the Hospital was 1,466 patients: at the moment it provides 728 in-patient beds plus some out-patient services: over the next 10 years it is to be reduced to a 200-bed base hospital. This redevelopment is a high regional priority, but generally the flow of capital investment is being reduced and revenue growth is being curbed. The policy of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Security is to find alternative planning uses for redundant property; dispose of it at best possible market value; and apply the proceeds to further development of the Health Service. Accordingly an estate development plan needs to be agreed with the planning authorities to provide public access to amenity land and generate capital to be invested in St Margaret's rationalisation and in community care.