

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN FINCHAMPSTEAD – DECEMBER 2017

The Parish Council is aware that there is some anxiety in the local area with regards to the level of housing development we see locally and around the borough, and the number of planning proposals and applications coming forward. The purpose of this document is to try and inform residents on the current position as well as some of the more contentious issues.

Central Government sets targets for the level of housing to be provided throughout England and Wales. Locally Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) is responsible for ensuring that these targets are met.

Strategic Development Locations and the 5 year housing land supply requirement

You will be aware that the Borough Council's preferred approach to residential development is to concentrate this in 4 strategic development locations or SDLs, including the Arborfield SDL part of which lies in Finchampstead Parish. By approaching development in this way it ensures that the required infrastructure, such as roads, schools and open spaces, is provided along with the housing. The downside is that the infrastructure can take a while to provide, so the actual housing development can be slow.

This is the issue being faced at the moment – Wokingham Borough Council has given permission for 13,000 new homes across the borough, but developers are not building the homes quickly enough. This in turn means that WBC cannot always prove that it is meeting the 5 year housing land supply required by Central Government. Developers are using this to their advantage, submitting applications for development on unsustainable and inappropriate sites, riding roughshod over Local Plans and endorsed planning policies. When planning permission is refused locally these applications go to appeal, and the Government appointed Planning Inspectors may rule that the Borough does not have enough land on which housing is either being built or where it will be built in the next 5 years, and so grant permission.

WBC is currently lobbying central Government to recognise that the slow rate of house building in Wokingham is down to the developers not the Council. It is inappropriate to penalise Wokingham for not building enough houses when in fact the permissions granted for 13,000 homes will give a 12 year supply of homes – far more than the 5 year supply required. Finchampstead Parish Council is also lobbying the Government over this, as are Arborfield and Newland Parish Council and Barkham Parish Council.

The current position in Finchampstead

The **Arborfield SDL** is progressing, most of the homes built so far are within Barkham but work has started on parcels which will provide 179 homes in Finchampstead Parish.

Following recent developments we are also expecting to see progress with the southern part of the SDL next year – this has outline planning permission for up to 1500 homes, all within Finchampstead Parish. The development will also include community facilities, a school, parks and sports facilities.

WBC is currently updating its **Local Plan** for the period 2026-2036. Central Government has increased the targets for house building and WBC has therefore undertaken a '**call for sites**' to identify additional land for development. 260 sites were put forward across the Borough including 42 in Finchampstead. These are currently being assessed by WBC, and the Parish Council has given its opinion on the suitability of the local sites put forward. There will be a public consultation in 2018 on the sites which WBC identifies as potentially suitable for development.

You may have seen **Barkham Square** mentioned in local media. This site is within Barkham Parish but is adjacent to Finchampstead Parish. It has been put forward through the 'call for sites' as being potentially suitable for 1000 dwellings. This site is being assessed by WBC along with the others put forward as noted above.

The **Reading Football Club Training Ground** on Park Lane is another site in Barkham Parish but close to Finchampstead Parish which has been put forward through the 'call for sites'. A public exhibition on proposals for the site was held in 2016 and an outline planning application 163547 for up to 140 homes was submitted in January 2017. This has not been determined by WBC to date.

In the interim a number of speculative development proposals have come forward for sites in the Parish. None of these sites have previously been identified with potential for development nor have they come forward through the 'call for sites'.

- **Land north of Nine Mile Ride**, adjacent to the California Country Park - proposals by Welbeck Land to build up to 150 homes and create new public open space.
Current position: Public exhibition held May 2017. No planning application submitted to date.
- **Land adjacent to Sand Martins Golf Club** west of Finchampstead Road – proposals from Gladman to build up to 80 homes, with public open space (SANGS) on the east of the Finchampstead Road. Residents have started a 'Keep it Green' campaign. Contact Neil Wilby on neil@wilby.co.uk or visit the Facebook Group www.facebook.com/groups/1256255861078922/
Current position: First planning applications submitted April 2017. Revised applications 170970 and 170971 submitted for comments by December 2017. No date proposed for WBC to determine applications.

- **Land South of Woodmoor** – proposals by Catesby for 40 homes. Residents have started a ‘Finchampstead Against Village Expansion (FAVE)’ campaign. Contact fave2017@yahoo.com or visit the Facebook Group www.facebook.com/group/FAVE2017
Current position – planning application 171993 submitted August 2017. Not determined by WBC to date.
- **Land rear of 6 Johnson Drive** – proposals to build 25 homes.
Current position – planning application 172230 submitted November 2017– not determined by WBC to date.

As well as identifying the four SDL’s and other sites for development, the WBC Core Strategy and Local Plan identified a number of **reserve sites** for up to 500 dwellings for development post 2026. The Policy stated that these could be released earlier if there was a need to meet the 5 year land supply requirement – and due to the current issues over this WBC has recently released 7 of the reserve sites to help boost the supply of homes. One of these reserve sites is **land behind 216 to 242B Nine Mile Ride** which could provide 40 homes. If and when development proposals come forward for this site the application will be subject to the same scrutiny as any planning application.

The next stage

We will do our best to keep you informed on how these planning matters and proposals progress.

Finchampstead Parish Council is notified of every planning application submitted within the Parish, but is not the decision maker. The decision maker is the Planning Authority, for Finchampstead this is Wokingham Borough Council (WBC).

The Parish Council’s Planning Committee meets monthly when it considers applications for development within Finchampstead Parish, and then submits comments to WBC. These meetings are open to the public so residents can attend to comment on any applications. Details of the meetings can be found at www.finchampstead-pc.gov.uk or by telephoning 0118 9088164.

The Committee takes into account the views of local residents when formulating its opinion. The Committee can also send representatives to WBC’s Planning Committee meetings to speak on applications and provide a local perspective.

It is really important that when any planning applications come forward which are of interest you submit your comments to WBC, copying these to the Parish Council. You can also contact your Borough Councillor and Member of Parliament if you wish.

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