



Finchampstead Baptist Centre (FBC)

**Gorst Road North
Finchampstead
Wokingham
RG40 4ES**

Community Involvement Statement (CIS)

Ref: 432.MP. 30.6.26 CIS v 1.0

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1. Introduction and Overview

This Community Involvement Statement (CIS) has been prepared by OPUS Architecture and Design on behalf of the Applicant, the Finchampstead Baptist Centre (FBC). This CIS forms part of the full planning application for this provision of additional onsite parking at the Centre.

AERIAL OVERVIEW Not to scale

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Finchampstead
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Aerial Overview

The Finchampstead Baptist Centre (FBC) is a vibrant multi-purpose community hub located in the Parish of Finchampstead. It was built in **2009-10**, with the first service held on March 7, 2010. The purpose-built community facility replaced a previous centre in the area that was destroyed by a fire in 2008.

The FBC Centre is owned, built, and managed by **Finchampstead Baptist Church**, which is officially registered with the Charity Commission for England and Wales under **Charity Number 1133789**. Because the church operates as a charitable company limited by guarantee, it manages the community centre as part of its core mission to provide social welfare, recreation, and community facilities to the residents of Finchampstead and Wokingham.

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2. Site Description and Surrounding Area

2.1 Finchampstead

The area immediately surrounding the FBC Centre on **Gorse Ride North in Finchampstead** is a vibrant, family-friendly mix of suburban residential housing, extensive outdoor recreational spaces, and nearby woodlands.

2.2 Outdoor Recreation and FBC Park

Directly behind the centre is a highly popular, large community green space and adventure park managed in partnership with the Wokingham Borough Council:

- **The Playground:** A fully enclosed, extensive play area built on a slight slope featuring wooden bridges, tunnels, a zip line, climbing frames, a trampoline, and multiple slides.
- **Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA):** Located right next to the park, this facility includes a 185-metre flat circuit track specifically marked out for walking, running, scooters, and balance bikes. It also features basketball hoops, mini-football pitches, and outdoor table tennis tables.
- **Woodland Walk & Trails:** A scenic woodland area borders the sports fields. Local walking paths connect the grounds directly through to the nearby California Country Park.

2.3 The Residential Neighbourhood

The FBC Centre sits at the heart of a well-established community hub that is undergoing a major modern transformation:

- **Gorse Ride Estate Regeneration:** The surrounding neighbourhood is the focus of a massive, multi-phase [estate regeneration project](#) led by Wokingham Borough Council and Wates.
- **Modern Design:** Older 1970s structures are being replaced with energy-efficient, eco-friendly social rent and shared-ownership homes centered around a new village green and pocket parks.
- **Local Services:** The area is highly accessible with free on-site parking at the centre and an adjacent Thames Valley Police local base.

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3. Existing usage, Buildings and Parking Pressure

The Centre houses a public library, a children's centre, and the local Parish Council offices. The centre also features a fully accessible cafe and hosts community and spiritual services.

Specific amenities and services offered include:

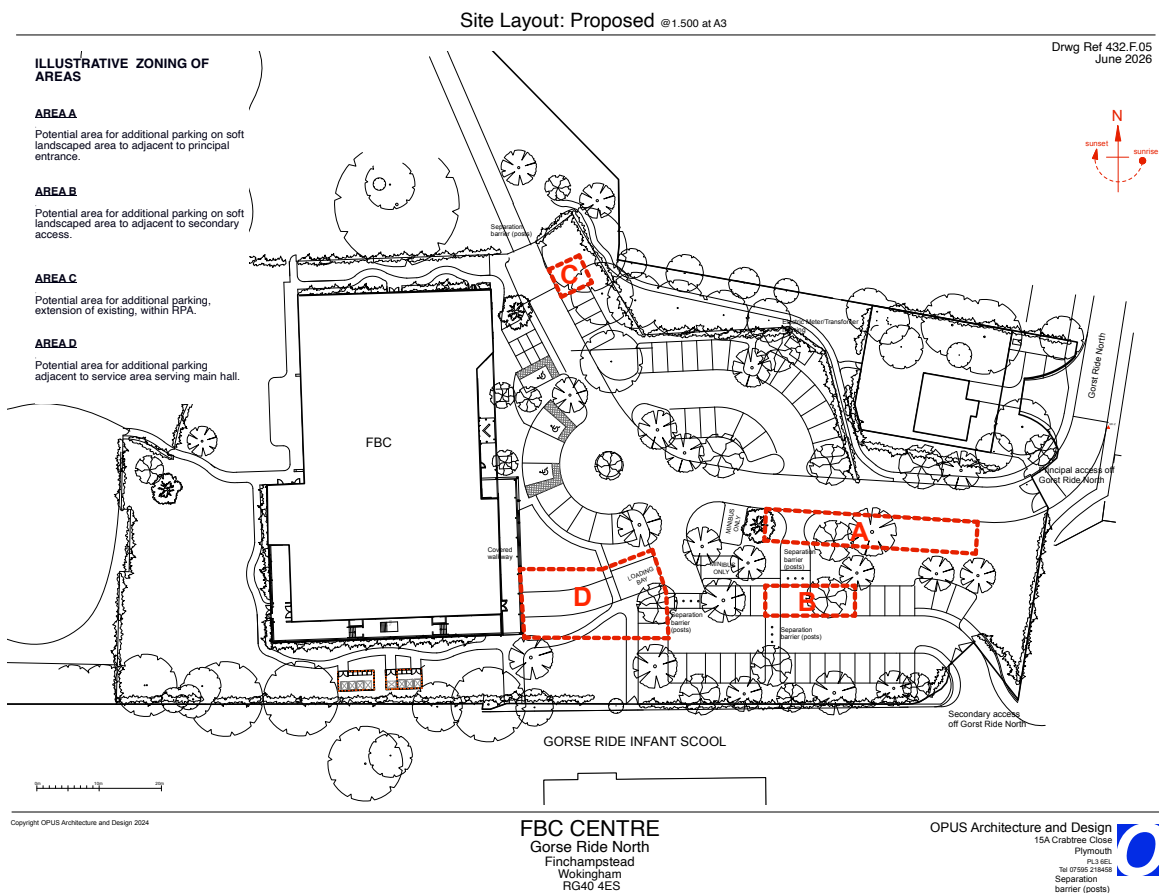
- **Community Support:** Hosts a weekly food share program (Share Wokingham) on Tuesday mornings and offers ad-hoc basic needs support.
- **Family & Children:** Offers a local Children's Centre providing baby play, breastfeeding support, and "Lighthouse" stay-and-play groups for under 5s.
- **Sports & Wellbeing:** Facilities include a sports hall for activities like badminton, Pilates, short mat bowls, and circuits.
- **Groups & Socials:** Weekly art groups, a "Friendship Table" in the cafe, and monthly peer support groups for bereavement and domestic abuse.
- **Faith Gatherings:** Weekly Sunday morning church services are held at the centre.
- **Library Services:** A branch of the Wokingham Library operates from the building.
- **Venue Hire:** Multiple spaces including a main hall, the California Suite, and other rooms are available to book for events, meetings, and parties.

Drivers of the Parking Pressure

The parking strain is a direct consequence of how successfully the building integrates various community services into one singular location:

- **The "All-In-One" Hub Effect:** On any given weekday morning, visitors using the FBC Cafe, the Finchampstead Library, and the multi-use sports hall compete for the exact same pool of parking spaces.
- **Destination Play Area:** Because the adjacent FBC play area and MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area) are considered premier adventure parks in Wokingham, families travel from outside the immediate parish to use them, adding heavy daytime vehicle volume.
- **Base for Nature Walkers:** Many visitors utilize the FBC car park as a free, convenient staging ground to leave their cars and embark on the popular woodland trails leading toward California Country Park.
- **Peak Event Spikes:** Large-scale community gatherings, support groups, and Sunday church services regularly cause the car park to reach maximum capacity, leading to heavy overspill onto nearby residential streets like Whittle Close and Gorse Ride South.

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Additional parking areas identified

Recognition and Local Action

This issue is a formally recognized infrastructure constraint within the community. The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan explicitly targets working with Wokingham Borough Council to identify and secure **"additional parking" for the Finchampstead Baptist Church Centre** to alleviate the local road congestion.

Furthermore, community groups and event organizers explicitly issue public advisories warning visitors that the car park is often full, formally asking attendees to **allow extra travel time to locate legal street parking** on the surrounding estate.

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4.0 Community involvement

This section discusses the community involvement undertaken prior to submission of the planning Application.

The FBC has a close relationship with the Finchampstead Parish Council (FPC) and Gorse Ride Infant School (GRIS): many of the parents and children attending the school are frequent visitors to the FBC and regularly use the existing facilities, especially the Café and Council run Library.

1. Members of the Centre met with the Head Teacher of the GRIF and members of the FPC to discuss the proposals. They are supportive of the application.
2. Informal discussions with visitor's to the Centre, users of the Café and the Centre Staff have also welcomed the proposal.

Indeed, the widespread popularity and multi-use nature of the FBC Centre have made it a victim of its own success, creating this ongoing pressure on the site's car parking provision.

While the centre provides a dedicated free parking lot on Gorse Ride North, its concurrent popularity across multiple distinct groups frequently pushes the facility past its physical parking limits.

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5. Summary and Conclusion

In summary, this proposal to expand the on-site car parking provision at the FBC Centre delivers a vital infrastructure upgrade to a highly successful community asset.

- The FBC Centre plays a pivotal role in the social, physical, and mental well-being of Wokingham Borough residents, operating concurrently as a place of worship, a sports facility, a regional destination playground, and a vital community hub.
- However, its exceptional popularity has outpaced its current infrastructure. By optimizing the existing site footprint to provide additional parking spaces, this application directly aligns with the strategic objectives of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan to improve parish infrastructure.
- The proposed layout ensures that local parking demand can be absorbed entirely within the site boundary, removing hazardous overspill congestion from surrounding roads, improving pedestrian safety, and securing the long-term operational sustainability of the centre.

Crucially, the expansion is achieved through sensitive design that protects the integrity of the adjoining FBC Park, preserves local mature woodland trees, and ensures zero loss of recreational amenity space. Where some small/medium trees will require removal these will be replaced, along with new native hedging.

The applicant respectfully requests that planning permission be granted for this sustainable, community-backed development, which unlocks the full potential of a cherished local asset and delivers immediate safety and infrastructure benefits to the residents of Finchampstead.