



Statement of Community Involvement

Prepared for

Ascot House, Wokingham

Klara Homes

October 2021

Executive Summary

This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) summarises the process of public consultation that has been undertaken on behalf of Klara Homes (“the Applicant”) during the planning application for the redevelopment of Ascot House, Wokingham.

JBP Associates was appointed to identify and engage with stakeholders on the plans to redevelop the site. The brief was to ensure the local community were kept involved during the development of the proposals and had the opportunity to engage with the project team to ask any questions they may have had.

The application seeks to build upon the existing consent and expand the building with additional floors to provide a total of 43 new homes across the site along with 38 car parking spaces and 48 cycle parking spaces. The proposals currently being applied for entail the extension of the existing building to create 19 new residential units.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in line with Government and Public Health England advice, a ‘Socially Distanced’ consultation was carried out, ensuring that consultees were able to safely engage with the project team to provide feedback on the proposals.

The consultation was carried out in accordance with central government guidance within the Revised National Planning Policy Framework (2019), which recommends the involvement of the local community in planning matters. It has also been informed by Wokingham’s policy for Statement of Community Involvement (2018) and forms part of the supporting documentation for the planning application.

The objectives of the consultation were to:

- Identify local people and groups and provide them with opportunities to engage with the project team
- Ensure that the consultation process was accessible to all
- Help to develop a scheme that meets the needs and requirements of the people of Wokingham

Over the course of the consultation, the project team engaged with over 50 consultees through a variety of methods, including by newsletter, email and telephone.

Consultees appreciated the efforts of Klara Homes to keep them informed. They have concerns related to design of the extension, the potential loss of light and overlooking, increased numbers of cars using the local roads and the potential for car parking problems to arise in the future.

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As a result of the engagement exercise and the feedback provided, the Applicant has altered the proposals to respond to concerns.

This has led to a reduction in massing on the third floor. This reduces the size of the building when read from Kendrick Close and Finchampstead Road, and reduces the capacity for overlooking on this façade.

The Applicant has also reduced the massing on the southern façade, pulling it away from the boundary.

The Applicant is committed to ongoing engagement with local politicians, residents, and businesses.

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Overview of the site and proposal



The site, Ascot House, is a two-storey former office building that is now vacant, located on Finchampstead Road, Wokingham. Permitted development has previously been granted to convert the existing building into residential use in the form of 24 homes. The building is located in a prominent position on a roundabout near the town centre, with excellent access to public transport links and employment opportunities

The Applicant is proposing to expand the existing building by three storeys to create a development of up to 5 storeys, increasing the total number of homes provided to 43. The proposals will deliver much-needed new homes in a highly sustainable town centre location.

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Summary of consultation activities

The following table outlines all the activities undertaken as part of the consultation on the proposals for the redevelopment of Ascot House



Dispatch of briefing newsletter to 51 homes and businesses to provide update ahead of the beginning of the construction phase on-site



Dispatch of update letter in June to inform stakeholders of new proposals



The provision of a Contact Centre, with telephone number and e-mail for enquiries



Meeting with local councillor and local residents to discuss proposals



Correspondence with Wokingham Councillors



Correspondence with residents

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Ensuring effective consultation

The consultation strategy has been developed to ensure all those who are interested in the proposals have an opportunity to be involved in the design process.

Whilst the concerns about covid-19 meant the project team did not offer in person meetings or host a public exhibition, it was nevertheless important to ensure that consultees had every opportunity to discuss these plans with the team.

The project team therefore carried out a digital consultation promoted by physical newsletters and an online meeting whereby residents could share their views and have questions answered directly by members of the project team.

The project team had two clear aims during the consultation:

- **Inform local people and stakeholders of the ongoing construction process and seek feedback on the new proposals for the site.**

The Applicant is committed to best practice in consulting and informing people of their proposals for the site. The aim is to proactively involve individuals and groups to ensure that feedback could, where appropriate, be taken into account.

- **Ensure the proposals respond to the needs and requirements of Wokingham.**

Through the involvement of local residents, community groups and councillors, ensure that, as far as possible, the scheme fits in well with the local area and makes a positive contribution to the needs of Wokingham.

At all times, we have considered how to make the material presented accessible, including ensuring language barriers are removed by producing communication material in clear, concise English, with technical terms explained in non-technical language.

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Consultation activities

May 2021 newsletter

In order to inform local residents and businesses of the beginning of the construction process at Ascot House, the Applicant distributed a two-sided newsletter (as shown in Appendix I) to 51 addresses near the site. Entitled “The future of Ascot House”, the newsletter provided a background to the consented scheme, some key points of the development, and the working hours on-site. Contact details for JBP were also provided if recipients wanted to get in touch via email or phone to ask questions or raise any issues they may have had.

June 2021 update letter

The Applicant undertook further communication with stakeholders in June through a letter (as shown in Appendix II) sent to the same recipient list as the first newsletter. This letter updated stakeholders on the progress of the construction on-site and provided details of the Applicant’s intention to bring forward new proposals for the expansion of Ascot House through the addition of three storeys to deliver 43 homes in total. Once again, contact details were provided for recipients to provide feedback or ask any questions.

Engagement with Community Representatives

At the same time as the postal correspondence with neighbours, the same information was sent to local representatives including Wokingham Borough Council ward councillors and Wokingham Town Council ward councillors.

Resident meeting

On 5 July, the Applicant and members of the project team participated in a MS Teams call with several residents and a ward councillor. The Applicant delivered a presentation on the proposals after which residents could ask questions or raise any concerns that they had (addressed in detail in the next section). Members of the project team were on hand to provide clarity on specific aspects of the proposals and answer any questions.

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Consultation responses & feedback

As a result of the consultation activities, feedback has been collected from local stakeholders. The key issues and the project team's responses are detailed below:

Topic	Issue	Response
Quality of new accommodation	Consultees wanted reassurance that the proposed homes would be of a high-quality and conform with minimum space standards.	All the new homes proposed comply with minimum space standards and have good access to quality external amenity space. Homes of a range of sizes will be provided to appeal to a wide spectrum of people looking to own a home in Wokingham, which currently has a significant need for new homes to be built to meet demand.
	Some neighbours are concerned by the potential for the development to impact the amount of daylight and sunlight available to their properties.	A comprehensive daylight and sunlight assessment shows there are no unacceptable losses to the level of daylight and sunlight of surrounding properties and the scheme meets the necessary requirements. The proposal has been designed to ensure acceptable levels of daylight and sunlight will be received by neighbouring properties in Kendrick Close and Carey Road. The design and massing has been influenced by the results of this daylight and sunlight assessment. This provided detailed information about the volume that could be built without causing any unacceptable impacts on neighbours' daylight and sunlight. Specific measures have also been incorporated to ensure there is no impact on daylight and sunlight. The massing of the new extension steps away from neighbouring properties in Carey Road and Kendrick Close at the second floor.

The taller part of the development will be located away from neighbouring properties on the western side of the site.

Potential increase in overlooking Some neighbours are concerned by the risk of overlooking increasing.

In response to feedback, the extension at third floor level has been reduced, removing massing and reducing the number of windows on the eastern façade.

The proposals are also set back from the façade line of the existing building, providing approximately 20 metres separation between the new units and any neighbouring properties.

All proposed windows have been located so as to not have direct views into neighbouring properties and the provision of recessed balconies further helps to protect neighbours from any overlooking.

Height of the building Some consultees felt the proposed height was not sympathetic to the character of the local area.

The location on the corner of Finchampstead Road roundabout has been identified as a site suitable for a taller building. With larger neighbouring developments also coming forward on the roundabout, the area has been a gateway location, and the proposed building's taller element is located here.

The design steps down towards the smaller buildings to the west and south of the site, where lower two and three storey elements are proposed, in keeping with the neighbouring residential buildings.

In response to residents' feedback, the extent of the extension at third floor has been reduced.

Provision of wider benefit	Some consultees asked what wider benefits would the scheme deliver, particularly in relation to funding or contributions for local services.	In addition to the delivery of much needed housing for Wokingham, the Applicant is required to make a contribution to the Council which will be used to fund any necessary improvements to local services like health facilities, schools, or transport infrastructure, as decided by the Council.
Air quality	Some consultees queried whether building homes next to a busy road would be safe for future occupants.	The site does not suffer from poor air quality and it is entirely safe for homes to be built at this location. Many other houses are located in this area and in close proximity to the Finchampstead Road.
Pressure on residents' parking	Neighbours are concerned that the new development would cause an increase in the pressure on available parking spaces close to their homes.	The total number of parking spaces provided by this scheme is 38 (for 43 units). A transport assessment has been undertaken to assess the impact of vehicle movements and parking. This confirms that the development will not have any negative impact on surrounding parking or traffic. In addition to this, the site will promote sustainable modes of transport by providing 48 cycle parking spaces. It is well served by public transport.
Pressure on the local road network	Consultees are concerned the existing congestion on the local road network would be exacerbated by the introduction of new homes.	The new proposals will not result in any significant increases in vehicle movements when compared to the previous commercial use of Ascot House, meaning there will be no detrimental impacts to the local road network. Ascot House is located in a highly sustainable location, within walking distance from local facilities and services, including supermarkets and other retail, Wokingham railway station and the employment opportunities afforded by the town centre. With these excellent public

transport links, and 48 cycle parking spaces, it is anticipated that many new residents will use sustainable means of transport rather than using a car.

Pedestrian access	Neighbours from Kendrick Close requested information about how safe pedestrian access will be maintained.	The new development will maintain and improve the pedestrian access to Kendrick Close. Kendrick Close can be accessed via the pavement alongside the site. This has dropped kerbs where it crosses the road. The Applicant would be open to upgrading the signage and road markings to highlight this crossing point as required by Council Highways officers.
Increase in density	There is some concern that there is no need or demand for new homes at the site.	Wokingham, like many other authorities, is under pressure to build more homes in the coming years. The site at Ascot House offers an excellent opportunity to deliver more homes in a highly sustainable location, within walking distance to local services, facilities, transport links and employment opportunities. By building on this vacant brownfield site, the Applicant can ensure that there is less pressure to develop on local green spaces.

Conclusion

The consultation strategy detailed within this document sought to engage with political and community stakeholders.

By engaging with the community, the Applicant provided an opportunity for local residents and businesses to voice their opinions on the development proposals and to engage with members of the project team. The Applicant has demonstrated that they have proactively fulfilled the requirements set out within Wokingham's policy for Statement of Community Involvement (2018).

As this report sets out, since the start of the consultation programme the Applicant has met with key stakeholders and provided the opportunity for all neighbours to engage with the project team, either via video call, telephone, email or an online meeting. The Applicant has also kept the community informed during construction work associated with the consented permitted development, responding to queries about operational matters.

Neighbours have raised concerns about a number of aspects of the proposed development, requesting additional information, which the Applicant has provided. This includes additional imagery to demonstrate the view of the proposals from specific properties, and further detail on the management of the parking associated with the development.

The Applicant has also confirmed, in response to concerns raised by consultees, that there will be no harmful or unacceptable impacts on their daylight or sunlight, or detrimental increase in the number of vehicle trips to the site when compared to the previous commercial use of the building.

In order to protect the privacy of neighbours and prevent overlooking, the extension has been designed with off-set windows. It is stepped back from the building's facades, creating a gap of approximately 20ms between the site and neighbouring properties.

Whilst the proposals presented to the local community were considered appropriate in planning terms, the Applicant has responded to the concerns of neighbours by reducing the roof extension. The third storey has been reduced along the eastern frontage and the massing on the southern part of the building has been pulled away from the boundary.

The applicant has also committed to work with Highways officers to improve the signage and road markings around the site in response to a request to ensure pedestrian safety was considered.

The Applicant will continue to engage with all stakeholders as the planning application progresses through the planning process.

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Next steps

- **Notification of submission of amendments.** A notice will be distributed to all consultees who took part in the consultation and requested to be kept informed to let them know that the application has been submitted.
- **Continued management of all enquiries through the Contact Centre.** Email address and telephone number will remain in operation following submission of the planning application.

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Appendices

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Appendix I: Future of Ascot House newsletter

MAY 2021

THE FUTURE OF ASCOT HOUSE Finchampstead Road

Welcome to our first community newsletter ahead of the beginning of work at Ascot House, Finchampstead Road.

As you may know, in December 2020, approval was given for Klara Homes to convert the under-utilised existing building from offices to 21 high-quality homes.

Klara Homes is committed to bringing forward the conversion of the vacant site to provide much-needed new homes in a sustainable and central location. We are currently working with Wokingham's

planning officers to ensure we deliver the project in the way that best suits Wokingham's needs.

We intend to commence construction in May. During this time, we want to keep our neighbours up to date. If you have any questions, or want to register to receive updates about the works, please contact our communications advisor, Matthew Roberts.

Further details of the construction process, including important dates, contact details as well as site and traffic management plans can be found overleaf in this newsletter.

DEVELOPMENT AT A GLANCE



21 much-needed new homes for local people



Repurposing rather than demolishing this existing under-utilised office site



A sustainable location in Wokingham town centre



Excellent links to local public transport and regional motorway network



GET INVOLVED

We want to ensure our proposals make the best possible contribution to Wokingham, and that we carry out construction in a considerate and sensitive manner. If you would like to be kept up to date with the plans for the future of Ascot House and our construction activities, **please do get in touch with our communications advisor, Matthew Roberts.**

Call our Freephone number on **0800 130 3270**

Email us at **AscotHouse@JBP.co.uk**



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LOOKING AHEAD

Our contractors, JW Hughes, will be on-site from 14th May and will look to begin investigative and strip-out works from 17th May. These works will take 4-6 weeks and will include the erection of scaffolding on the outside of the building.

JW Hughes will then start structural upgrade works within Ascot House to allow its conversion to new homes. This is likely to last approximately 6-10 weeks and is dependent on the results of the investigative works.

The initial investigative works could potentially include some noisy drilling, which could continue intermittently during the first 4-6 weeks of activity. Following this, it is not expected that the works will be overly disruptive or that noise levels will be above those normally expected.

TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

We are committed to ensuring that traffic disruption during construction is minimised where possible. The primary road to the site is Kendrick Close, part of which is a shared accessway. JW Hughes will ensure that this access is maintained at all times and that there are no obstructions without appropriate traffic management measures put in place.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Site operation hours will be **from 8am to 6pm on Monday to Fridays and 8am to 1pm on Saturdays**. There will be no work on Sundays or Bank Holidays. No noisy work will be undertaken outside these hours.

SITE LOCATION PLAN



SIGN UP FOR UPDATES

Please let us know your preferred contact details to receive news and updates about the project. We will only contact you with relevant updates about construction or planning matters.

Call our Freephone number on **0800 130 3270**

Email us at **AscotHouse@JBP.co.uk**



Appendix II: June update letter



KLARA HOMES
The Townhouse
114-116 Fore Street
Hertford
Hertfordshire
SG14 1AJ

E: info@klarahomes.co.uk
W: www.klahomes.co.uk

10 June 2021

Development proposals for Ascot House, Finchampstead Road, RG40 2NW

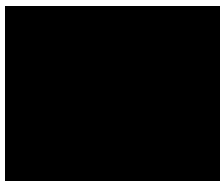
Dear neighbour,

I am writing to you about our plans for the future of Ascot House. You may be aware from our April newsletter that we are currently proceeding with the construction of new homes at the site on Finchampstead Road. The development will see the conversion of this now vacant and formerly underused office building into much-needed new homes in a highly sustainable and central location.

We have now identified an opportunity to provide more homes through the extension of the existing building by a further two floors. This will provide a total of 45 one and two-bed homes across the site, 37 car parking spaces and 66 cycle spaces. We have already held early discussions with council officers to assist in creating a contextual design that is sympathetic to the existing character of the area to ensure that the development fits in with its surroundings.

We want to continue to involve the local community and stakeholders as our plans evolve. We would be happy to share our plans with you and provide an opportunity to discuss them with our project team. If you would like keep up to date with the plans for the future of Ascot House and the ongoing construction phase, please do not hesitate to get in touch with our communications advisor, Matthew Roberts, either by using the freephone number 0800 130 3270 or via email at ascothouse@jbp.co.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Craig Gray
Klara Homes Limited

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JBP Associates is an integrated communications agency which specialises in community engagement and consultation.

For more information about this project, please contact us on:

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E: AscotHouse@jbp.co.uk

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