

PLANNING REF : 241567
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 18 Cricket Hill
: Finchampstead, Berkshire
: RG40 3TN
SUBMITTED BY : Mr James Chalfont
DATE SUBMITTED : 26/07/2024

COMMENTS:

I strongly object to the proposed development for a large number of fundamental reasons:

It is not in adherence with wider planning commitments/strategies: The site was not included in the Finchampstead Neighborhood Plan (FNP) which was approved by the local residents and adopted by the Council last year. Given this plan was only adopted in 2023 it is the relevant plan available within the borough and approving a development outside that plan less than 12 months later totally undermines the democratic process to substantiate the plan in the first place.

The development lies outside of the accepted settlement boundary of Finchampstead. The proposed site would further reduce the buffer zone between Eversley and Finchampstead and set a dangerous precedent for further expansion of the village boundaries.

When the site was put originally forward as SHLAA land, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) determined that 'The site is located adjacent to the village of Finchampstead. Development would fail to achieve a satisfactory relationship to the existing settlement, greatly expanding the built-up area of the village. The site is also more strongly related to the open countryside.' Nothing has changed that should make the council adopt a different view.

Whilst there is an accepted need for affordable housing, facilitating such a predominantly affordable scheme (70% is indicated to be affordable - only 30% private sale) is excessive. Affordable dwellings should be spread through a parish and schemes focusing on affordable dwellings as a means to obtain planning on constrained sites (in other words to try and appease and appeal the planners) should be avoided.

Affordable housing quotas in the area are being met through the large development in Arborfield/Barkham/Finchampstead and so a further 28 in this location will not have a material impact on the ability to hit these targets.

In the week commencing the 22nd of July, there has been a provisional approval of 1,500 houses to be developed in South Wokingham. This will further alleviate any concerns around affordable housing in the area as well as meeting the borough's housing supply targets, removing any need for this development going forwards.

The location is not suitable or practical:
The recent restoration of the land owned by Cemex adjacent to the proposed development has not been adequately assessed for the risk of flooding. No work has been done to prove the ground is back to

it's original level following the work done by Cemex. Day to day evidence of significant flooding on either side of the Blackwater river, boggy ground in the surrounding fields (noticed when dog walking) and stuck tractors that were completing the restoration work all point to there being a significant and unquantified flood risk to any new development.

There is a distinct lack of public transport for the development and the FNP clearly states it's ambition to reduce car usage. Any proposed bus service is not sustainable in the long run and so would result in an increase in car traffic in the area. This in itself poses multiple issues:

- Nearly all local services (secondary schools, nurseries, doctors surgeries, dentists, post offices etc.) are only accessible by car.
- The Finchampstead War Memorial junction is a dangerous junction with numerous accidents a year, the likelihood for further accidents here will increase with more cars on the local roads
- The proposed site is also located at a speed transition point between a national speed limit and a 40mph zone. Further traffic turning here would be unsafe as an entrance both during potential construction for large vehicles turning as well as upon completion.
- The FNP states sets it's ambition to 'Respect the rural lane network and their historic character. These include Barkham Ride, Commonfield Road, Park Lane, Whitehorse Lane, Dell Road and Lower Sandhurst Road/Ambarrow Lane.' This is put at great jeopardy with more housing in such close proximity to these roads.

The local sewerage treatment plant is already overwhelmed with the current number of properties that are connected to it. This development will cause unarguable increased pressure on the sewage system which needs to be addressed prior to the approval of sites which have no accepted principle of development.

The FNP also states it's ambition to 'Protect, maintain and enhance Footpaths, Bridleways, Byways and Permitted paths within the parish'. The proposed development would remove a much loved footpath in the parish and would reduce it to become an alleyway between two sets of housing.

Under the WBC's Core Strategy paper on housing, CP9 states 'The scale of development proposals in Wokingham borough must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility.' All village facilities within Finchampstead have been lost in recent years including a post office and petrol station. The shop attached to the local pub is not a sustainable source of groceries given it's high prices and would not likely support those seeking affordable housing.

Local services such as nurseries, schools (both primary and secondary) and GP services are at or close to capacity, additional residents in the area would only increase pressure on these. I myself am worried about the ability to send my 11 month old daughter to the local primary school in Finchampstead given the likely increase in young children that comes with a new development - especially one so focused on affordable housing.

It will have a significant impact on the environment:

The proposed site is immediately adjacent to the Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve, soon to become a Country Park - making the site totally out of place and putting risk on the very habitats and wildlife it is there to encourage and protect. Protected Barn Owls are often seen hunting in the field which I have provided video evidence of. It is noted the extent of hedgerow that will be removed (and mostly already removed prematurely) as a result of the planning application. The environmental surveys identifying multiple species of slow worms, lizards and bats that will be displaced as a result of the build.

It is not in line with the look and feel of Finchampstead Village: Catesby's development prospectus talks about Cricket Hill Road urbanising the neighbouring Country Park - this in itself is illogic as the new development will be directly adjacent to the development and create further urbanisation.

As alluded to above, the field proposed for development is considered by many as a beautiful spot for dog walking, hiking etc. Any housing here will require a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment due to the loss the countryside setting that is there currently.

It is also very uncharacteristic for a village to have street lighting in the way being proposed in the plans. Any such lighting would cause a significant change in character for the village and create light pollution for residents and wildlife - particularly

Adaptations to any approved plans will be needed: The council when evaluating the SHLAA site considered that if the site became developable it should be capable of delivering a maximum of 34 homes. The proposals are for 40 dwellings in an unnecessarily high density with a disproportionate share of affordable housing.

The layout of the site has clearly been designed to facilitate future development off the proposed adoptable turnhead to the far East of the site. To prevent future development which would encroach further onto the Nature reserve, any proposed development should proven to be enclosed in it's design whether with tree planting, walkways around the boundary of the site or a redesign of the road layout to prevent future phased plans from being submitted and approved.

There is specific concern for the houses towards the back of the development overlooking properties such as 18 Cricket Hill, Nanridge (19 Cricket Hill) and Broadlands (20 Cricket Hill).

The impact of any construction on the local residents needs to be considered. The increased construction traffic with noise pollution for the foreseeable future would certainly disturb village life for neighbours (small children and the elderly) as well having a lasting impact on the environment.

In conclusion, it is for all these reasons above that I oppose the development of houses in this field in the strongest terms possible. There are many better suited locations already identified within the borough that would provide the necessary housing (including affordable housing) that would not have such an impact on the community and the environment of Finchampstead.