

Application 241567 – Land East of Longwater Road.

- 1 The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan (FNDP) was made in the autumn of 2023 following a referendum on its acceptability on September 7th in which 89.6% of the Finchampstead residents that voted were in favour. Given its recent adoption, the FNDP is currently the prime planning document to which all planning applications in Finchampstead should adhere.

This application is inconsistent with the FNDP for the following reasons:

- **Policy GA1 - Improve environment and health from traffic pollution.**

Increased car usage would add pressure to the old war memorial junction (B3016 Jubilee Hill and B3348 the Ridges), a pinch point on all routes north and East from this site. This was already identified by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) as a junction under pressure from developments around the Arborfield SDL, but no mitigations have been undertaken. An alternative route east from this development would be along the country lanes of Lower Sandhurst Road and Dell Road.

Policy GA1 states that:

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:

1. *Demonstrate plans to integrate with arterial routes in a way that does not impede traffic flow, make pinch-points worse or create additional pinch- points leading to unacceptable congestion.*
2. *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.***
3. *Support safe active travel connections and routes between settlements, schools, green spaces and support services such as doctors and dentists and local retail outlets.*

This application does not meet the needs of this policy.

- **Policy IRS2 - Protection of Outstanding Views**

The Application acknowledges that the site lies well within the view 'cone' of Outstanding View B specifically mentioned in the FNDP, which '*Looks South over the Manor Farms to the Blackwater Valley and on to distant Blackbush and Hogs Back upland areas*'.

The meadow land around the Blackwater valley is an integral part of this view and this development would be a clear intrusion into this view.

Policy IRS2 states that:

Development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on the outstanding views will not be supported.

This application conflicts with this policy.

- **Policy IRS4 - Implement strategy to preserve the identity of Finchampstead Parish through informal green spaces.**

The Application states that the housing to the north of the proposed development site 'has an urbanising effect'. If so, then the same must be true of any land to the south of the development site once the development has taken place. In this instance, the land to the south of the proposed development is designated become a Country Park area and the development will therefore have a harmful urbanising effect on what is intended to be an area of natural green space and tranquillity.

This development will also considerably reduce the green space area between the settlements of Finchampstead and Eversley Cross to the south.

Policy IRS4 states that:

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:

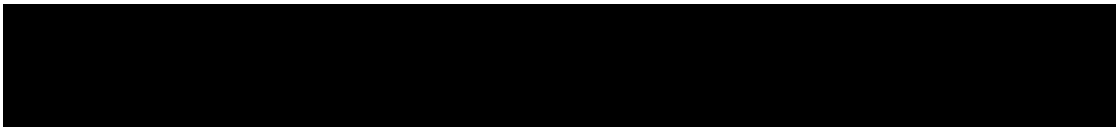
- 1. Preserve the semi-rural look and feel of the Parish with its surrounding natural open environment.*
- 2. Preserve the distinctive character and appearance of the Parish countryside with varied landscapes and outstanding views.*

3. Preserve the topological features of the landscape that distinguish it as part of the Blackwater Valley and Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Areas.

4. Protect and where possible, enhance the green spaces of the Parish, both general and specific, through protected special areas, green gaps between settlements, green corridors, diverse flora and community spaces.

This application conflicts with this policy.

- **Policy IRS5 - Ecologically important areas and Biodiversity.**



In addition, the street lighting required by this development would damage the habitat of nocturnal creatures.

Policy IRS5 states that:

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should demonstrate that:

- *They will not have an unacceptable impact on local biodiversity or the network of sites designated as of importance for nature conservation , as evidenced through a robust specialist independent survey report, which is supported by the Borough's Ecological Adviser. The assessment should consider impacts on the site and on connections between sites important for biodiversity.*
- *They provide a net gain of at least 10% over base value using a robust metric. Where a loss of biodiversity on site is demonstrably unavoidable, development will only be acceptable if off site compensation measures are secured to ensure the creation of like-for-like or better distinctiveness habitats so a minimum 10% gain of biodiversity overall is achieved.*
- *They take any opportunities to protect, enhance and extend wildlife corridors between existing open spaces and habitats as a means of mitigating the impacts of development on biodiversity.*
- *They conserve the environment for nocturnal species, through the avoidance of lighting and mitigating the impact of external lighting likely to increase night-time human presence.*

It is not clear how this Application conforms to this policy.

- **Policy GA2 - Reduction in car usage with safe personal mobility options.**

The proposed development will have considerable impact on at least two public rights of way and the visual amenities currently enjoyed by users of those paths. FP 13 runs along the north of the proposed development and users currently enjoy extensive views south over the pastureland towards the river Blackwater. This development would totally eclipse those views and reduce FP 13 to the status of an urban alleyway running between two sets of houses. FP 54 runs along the Blackwater River valley and is part of the longer Blackwater Valley Path hiking trail. The views north from this path currently do have the settlement of Finchampstead in the distance, but this development would reduce that space by approximately half, with an urbanising impact on an acknowledged valuable and well-known, well-used country walk.

Policy GA2 states that:

As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:

2. Protect, maintain and enhance Footpaths, Bridleways, Byways and Permitted paths within the parish.

6. Work with adjoining Parishes to retain and, where practical, improve the Rights of Way network.

This application conflicts with this policy.

- **Policy AHD1 - Development within Development Limits.**

This Application is for a site outside of existing Development Locations and the nearest of those is listed as suitable for only 'Limited Development'.

The FNDP supports the delivery of c 1,500 new dwellings in the local SDL area of Finchwood Park and an additional 200 houses at three other locations across the parish. This provision was acknowledged in the FNDP as demonstrably in excess of any local housing need within the parish of Finchampstead.

Other potential locations, including this Application's site were evaluated and dismissed as unsuitable as part of the FNDP process. In addition to reasons set out above, it was found that the remote location of this site, on the extreme edge

of the borough of Wokingham, would be of no value in meeting any housing need from other parts of the borough.

This site does not comply with WBC Core Policies cp1, cp3, cp4, cp6 or cp9.

In particular, the proposal cites CP9 as an exception allowing development of affordable housing outside of development limits. This is a Rural Exception provision, to support rural communities. However, as there is almost no source of local employment at this location, no local facilities and as there are no options other than to travel by car, this Application will not provide housing options for rural communities but will instead constitute a location for commuting into larger nearby settlements.

Policy AHD1 states that:

Development proposals outside the Development Locations will only be supported where they are in accordance with national and Borough planning policies.

This application conflicts with this policy.

2 Unsuitable location.

Following a 'borough-wide' assessment for proposed development sites, this location was rejected by Wokingham Borough Council in 2019 as being unsuitable for c40 houses for the following reasons:

- a. Development would fail to achieve satisfactory relationship to the existing settlements, greatly expanding the built-up area.
- b. The site is more strongly related to open countryside./
- c. This level of development around the village is inappropriate and would result in a strain to limited existing facilities.
- d. The site is not considered to be a sustainable location.

Since then, the village shop and post office and the village garage have closed, and the above rationale is even more accurate today.

3 Non-sustainable location.

There are no practical local bus services, no buses shops or secondary schools and the local primary school does not have capacity to cope with an influx of children commensurate with a development of this size.

Although cycle routes exist around Finchampstead, there are none in this location, and cycling on Jubilee Hill or Fleet Hill is both arduous and hazardous.

The sewage plant adjacent to the proposed site is at full capacity

There are no continuous footways towards California Crossroads or Crowthorne.

The nearest railway station is 3 miles away, with no bus service and hence can only be accessed by car.

There is no doctor's surgery within the village and surgeries further away are at full capacity.

.Residents of this location would be wholly dependent upon car usage for all of life's basic necessities.

4 Outside of the Settlement Boundary

The site is in the countryside and outside of the settlement boundary as recorded in the WBC Local Plan. This site does not comply with policies cp1, cp3, cp4, cp6 and cp9 of that plan.

5 Street Lighting

Due to the density of the proposed development it is probable that, unlike most of the rest of the village, street lighting would be proposed which would have an urbanising effect and be to the detriment of wildlife on the adjoining nature reserve.

6 Affordable Housing

With the development of Gorse Ride and 35% affordable housing at Arborfield Strategic Development Location, Finchampstead will have a significant number of social/affordable houses, all located in much more sustainable locations.

7 Thames Basin Heath

The site is within 5km of the Thames Basin Heath (TBH) Special Protection Area but no mitigation measures e.g. Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) are proposed.

8 Cemex Quarry

The largely restored Cemex quarry to the immediate south of the site has not been restored in accordance with the original planning permission. Cemex submitted a retrospective planning application in 2019 (193354) which WBC has failed to approve after four years. Since the actual restored levels are unclear and not confirmed, how can the applicant or the Environmental Agency be certain that the Cemex site, which is in Flood Zone 3, does not (because of the restoration levels) now extend into the adjacent field.

9 Safe Footpaths

There is no safe walking route to the limited facilities at California Crossroads 1.6 miles away. For 0.6 miles there is no footway or verge, obliging pedestrians to walk in a narrow unlit carriageway, on a busy B road, which is wholly contained by steep banks on both sides of the road. No local pedestrians walk on this road, as it totally unsafe.

10 Traffic and Speed Limits

At the proposed point of access, Longwater Road (B3016) changes from a 30 mph limit to a 60 mph limit. The 30 mph limit section is notorious for having a speeding problem. The Thames Valley Police approved Community Speedwatch Group checks speeds here every 6 weeks. Additionally, the proposed point of access is directly opposite the existing access to the long established Finchampstead allotments. This leads to a significant potential access conflict between the 100 allotment holders and the probable 80 cars entering Longwater Road from the proposed application site. Additionally, the well-used Public Footpath 13 crosses Longwater Road at this point but the application makes no mention of how pedestrian safety will be managed.