

# West End Action Group (WEAG)

18 November 2019

## **74 HOUSES PROPOSED IN GREEN BELT IN FENNS LANE: 24 NEW DOCUMENTS**

Dear WEAG supporters,

### ***The story so far***

You will recall that in January a planning application for 74 houses in Fenns Lane, on Green Belt land, was published by Fairfax Acquisitions, under reference number 19/0154. During February-April well over 100 objections (including a 15-page analysis from WEAG) were submitted, along with further documents from a variety of others including official bodies which have to be consulted. There were no letters from residents supporting the application. The Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC) website, where all the documents are published, then went silent from May until now.

Our enquiries during the autumn established that the planning application would not come before SHBC's Planning Applications Committee until 2020. It transpires that SHBC was waiting for further documents from the developer.

### ***What's new***

Last week, on 11 & 12 November, 24 new documents were released. They can be accessed via: [www.surreyheath.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-applications-search](http://www.surreyheath.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-applications-search) then follow the Search Applications link, and insert 19/0154 in the reference number box.

The key point is that these new documents do not fundamentally alter the situation. They deal with queries that have arisen, but they do not alter the very powerful arguments against giving planning permission for the development, including the fact that it would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

There is no need for anyone who sent in objections during February-April to send in the same objections again, because the newly released files are part of the original application, with the same reference number of 19/0154. All the 100+ objections are still on the website (under the 'Documents' tab) and still in play. However any new objections would be well worth sending in.

Nevertheless there are some points in the new documents to which WEAG will be responding, and while we're about it we will also take the opportunity to summarise our original objections in order to underline them.

This newsletter summarises the contents of the new material. If there are any comments you'd like to make to us, please let us know by next Sunday, 24 November, so that WEAG's submission can be sent in by the stated deadline of 3 December.

### ***The 24 new documents, by topic***

The new documents are either amendments to the developer's originals in order to respond to criticisms received, or demonstrations that official requirements will be satisfied by the planning application. The brief comments below are mine:

- **Utilities:** There would be no insurmountable problem in linking the site to all utilities.
- **Biodiversity report:** The proposal, with its SANG land, would actually increase biodiversity.
- **Ecology report:** It found no protected species on the land.
- **Habitat regulations:** These would be met.
- **Air quality standards:** These would be met.
- **Tree report:** 17 trees are proposed to be cut down, all described as "low quality and value" (which might be questioned). There will be extensive new planting of trees and hedgerows, so there would be a net gain.
- **Noise assessment:** Noise levels on the site will be within regulatory requirements.
- **Energy statement:** The houses will be designed to be energy-efficient. The use of solar panels on south-facing roofs is projected to provide about 14% of energy requirements.
- **Amended illustrative designs:** There are several updated designs of the proposed site layout and landscaping.

There are five principal topics on which WEAG will comment in detail in our submission to SHBC:

- **Transport and traffic:** Some of the report's benign calculations of traffic effects will be challenged. Among other things, they assert that traffic volumes on the A322 have gone down in the last five years – which every resident knows is untrue, but it's based on comparing surveys in 2013 and 2018, which clearly were not comparable. But having made that assertion, the report alleges that the new estate's traffic would not add significantly to future traffic levels or to waiting times at the A322 junctions.
- **Drainage and flood risk assessment:** There are calculations of the effects of accelerating climate change. These suggest that there is negligible flood risk, and that's only to three houses. Yet practical experience on the ground suffered by local residents indicates otherwise. Moreover the danger is not only to houses on the proposed site, but also to flooding on the roads and houses outside the site, which the hard surfaces of the development would accentuate. If any residents have photographs of deep flooding from the past, it would be useful to submit them to SHBC and/or send them to us for attaching to WEAG's submission.
- **Landscape visual assessment report:** This whitewash makes repeated claims that building 74 houses would not harm the openness of the Green Belt, that there would be "no significant effect" on views from neighbouring properties, that the local character and distinctiveness of the area would not be damaged, and so on. This will be challenged.

- **Land contamination:** While the purely desk-based study concluded that there was low risk of contamination on the land, a physical examination of the ground around the builders yard should be carried out. It's amazing that it wasn't done.
- **Heritage/archaeological report:** The report concluded that "There is a generally low potential for archaeological deposits" but it was ignorant of the Iron Age settlement in West End discovered in 2017, in the fields east of Benner Lane where The Maltings now stands. The Celts were living in this area, and an exploratory excavation should be considered, to check if the new houses would destroy valuable Iron Age remains, especially as the riverside by the Trulley Brook is the type of location where Celts often settled.

(Incidentally, anyone interested in old maps of West End and the Fenns Lane area, going back to John Roque's map of 1762, might look at the appendices in the 'Amended Heritage Statement' report. There is also a modern map with the supposed course of the Roman road between Bagshot and Farley Heath superimposed on it, cutting through West End on a line from today's Scout & Guide Centre to the east end of Kings Road (though some other sources have it half a mile to the west). Regarding names, in 1845 the owner of most of the land on Fenns Lane was George Fenn.)

### ***Planning policy***

None of the 24 documents are intended to address the central issue about this planning application: the planning policy that states that this would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

There is a new factor in our favour. The developer's original planning application stated that Surrey Heath did not have a sufficient five-year supply of land for building, as national policy requires, and that therefore the 74 houses were needed to help fill the gap. That is no longer tenable. In August 2019 SHBC published 'Interim 5 Year Housing Land Supply' which proved that the Council can now demonstrate 5.32 years supply of housing land. It removes one of the arguments for granting planning permission for Fenns Lane. WEAG will remind SHBC of this in our submission.

Regards

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