

West End Action Group (WEAG)

May 2017

Dear WEAG supporters,

There are several things to report in this newsletter: WEAG's meeting with County and Borough officials and Councillors on infrastructure; a follow-up meeting with our MP; a new planning application for an estate off Kings Road; and work starting on the first of the approved estates.

Meeting with SCC and SHBC

WEAG has been very concerned that the infrastructure that West End needs which arises from the approved housing estates should be considered across the village as a whole, and not merely on an estate by estate basis.

We therefore led a meeting in the Council Offices in Camberley on 19 May with representatives from Surrey County Council (SCC), Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC), and several elected SCC, SHBC and Parish Councillors.

Included among the participants were County officials and elected Cabinet members responsible for education, traffic and infrastructure. West End's Borough and County Councillors were also present. WEAG was represented by Beulah Kingston (Chair), Jeff Llewellyn (Vice Chair) and Guy Consterdine (Secretary). Graham Alleway, a West End Parish Councillor, led one of the discussion topics.

WEAG had drawn up the meeting's Agenda. It included the need to take a holistic view of infrastructure in the village; co-ordination between developers of the different sites; the finance available to deal with infrastructure through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); roads and traffic management; education (where will West End children go to school when the houses are built?); how will medical facilities cope; and recreation facilities.

What we achieved by the meeting was modest, but at least there were some benefits, and we were able to get some clarification on a number of points.

We had in front of us some key individuals at county level in charge of transport and education, and county councillors representing all fields. We briefed them fully on West End's concerns, and this should influence their thinking in future. They are at least very aware of our problems.

Moreover our appeal that infrastructure be considered across the village as a whole was accepted.

We learned more about how the CIL and decision-making system operates. It's evident that it is hidebound by rules, regulations and budgetary constraints.

For example, the county's education team attempt to forecast demand for school places, including assessing requirements generated by new housing estates. They assess existing capacity in the

district – the district being defined as all schools within about five miles radius. Because of the way budgets are structured, the education planners do not add buildings for a new class at a primary or secondary school unless the classrooms will be filled close to capacity (by which they mean 30 children per class); it is not considered economic at lower levels of occupancy. It was stated that “300 new houses are not enough to yield a new class of 30”! (This seems to us something that can be challenged after further research.) They claimed that there is capacity elsewhere in the district (i.e. classes with less than 30 pupils), and therefore there are no plans to add classrooms to Holy Trinity, West End. Consequently we envisage that in practice the catchment area of Holy Trinity will be drawn in as a result of the new estates, and children left outside the revised catchment area will have to travel outside the village. We expressed our frustration at this. There is a strong possibility that some West End primary-age children will have to go to Valley End, Windlesham, Lightwater or Chobham.

There are equivalent regulations, restraints and hurdles concerning roads and traffic management. There is however a plan to modify the Fellow Green roundabout by adding sliproads for left-turning vehicles travelling north and south on the A322. This can be funded from the CIL and may provide slightly more capacity in the short term, but it is unlikely to amount to a solution in the long run as traffic increases. There is also a plan to modify the Gordons roundabout when the Deepcut development of 1200 houses is complete and generating large volumes of traffic; however these plans are already out of date because they were drawn up four years ago before any of West End’s new developments were applied for and approved. It may be possible to tap into some national Government money to pay for A322 improvements since that is a strategic road.

We believe the TRICS computer modelling of traffic volumes on which SCC, the transport industry and developers rely, is too optimistic; it uses values which – for West End - underestimate the traffic problems which will be caused by another 323 houses generating 640+ additional resident cars. These under-estimates (as we believe them to be) enable SCC to declare that the new housing will not create any traffic problems that they need to do anything about (except Fellow Green roundabout).

The provision of medical facilities are beyond the powers of SCC and SHBC, since GP practices are independent. At Deepcut, for example, there is a brand new surgery constructed and waiting, but no GPs available to work there.

West End Parish Council will have about £500,000 available to it from the CIL levies on the West End developers, to spend on infrastructure as it thinks fit – such as traffic management, enhanced recreation facilities, and so on.

SHBC did agree to implement a degree of co-ordination between the developers, as WEAG had asked. SHBC will examine the documents setting out each developer’s construction methods and phasing, to make the construction periods as smooth as possible for residents, and to minimise chaos on West End roads.

The meeting reinforced what the planning application and appeal process for the West End sites had already shown: that although there are fine words in the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Plans, political party manifestos, etc about providing infrastructure before developments are completed, and stating that if there’s no infrastructure there should be no developments, these

words count for little in practice when there is such a powerful demand for large volumes of new houses to be built at speed.

There is no contingency plan for dealing with the situation should the County or Borough Councils' traffic, education or other modelling prove wrong. We took away the impression that however sympathetic to our arguments the Councillors and officials may be, they are highly constrained by the bureaucratic process in what they can do.

Meeting with Michael Gove

Immediately after the SCC/SHBC meeting, the WEAG three (Beulah, Jeff & Guy) met Michael Gove on his own in Camberley. He was of course in the middle of his election campaign. We briefed him about the SCC/SHBC meeting, and sought his support in pursuing the issues we'd raised. He wrote two pages of notes, and promised to chase up some of the points for us. The practical outcome remains to be seen.

A further planning application for land off Kings Road

An application for another 24 homes off Kings Road has recently been lodged with SHBC. Shanly Homes proposes to demolish no. 42 Kings Road to make space for a short roadway leading to land widening out to accommodate the new houses. These will border the houses on the already-approved William Lacey/Shanly site for 84 dwellings. The planning application number is 17/0399 and details can be found on the SHBC website:

<http://www.surreyheath.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-applications-search>

This would take the total of new houses on five estates to 323.

Malthouse Farm development

Construction of the 95 homes on the three fields around Malthouse Farm, Benner Lane, has overtaken the several developments off Kings Road and Beldam Bridge Road, in terms of getting started. This is because the Malthouse Farm planning application was a full application whereas the others were for outline permission with many details still to be agreed.

Construction at Malthouse Farm is expected to begin in August. Prior to that, an archaeological survey is to be carried out in June, and fencing for security and tree protection is to be erected. A gateway to give access to the site has just been constructed off Benner Lane by the school.

WEAG is in discussion with the developer Martin Grant Homes about how residents can best be kept informed about the work - describing the plans and phasing of construction, and answering residents' questions. One possibility is a public meeting in June or July, i.e. before construction starts.

Regards

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