

West End Action Group (WEAG)

7 April 2021

PLANNING APPEAL FOR 74 HOUSES AT FENNS LANE

Dear WEAG supporters,

I'm writing with an update about the planning appeal against the Council's refusal of 74 houses on Green Belt land in Fenns Lane. The Hearing took place last week. It was conducted online via Teams (an alternative to the more widely used Zoom) which worked smoothly and efficiently.

The Planning Inspector who heard the case was Adrian Hunter. The appellants, Fairfax Acquisitions and the Knowles family, were represented by a QC and a team of four agents/consultants. The Council was represented by the Chief Planning Officer, Duncan Carty. He was supported by myself as Chairman of WEAG, Jeff Llewellyn as Vice-Chairman of WEAG and Chairman of West End Village Society, and Graham Alleway, West End's Borough Councillor. There were a few observers, some or all of whom were Fenns Lane residents.

The procedure was that the Inspector raised topics one by one; for each topic the appellants made their case; Duncan Carty responded; myself and Jeff made additional points; and Graham added any further comments where appropriate. There was further discussion as necessary, before moving to the next topic.

The debate centred on the Green Belt regulations of course. The developer's QC admitted straight away that the proposed 74 houses on this site would be 'inappropriate development in the Green Belt' under the National Planning Policy Framework. The debate was whether the alleged 'exceptional circumstances' were strong enough to over-rule the prohibition on building on Green Belt. The main disagreements concerned the significance of the small shortfall in the five-year supply of land for meeting housing targets; how much of the site was 'previously developed land'; and whether the development would harm the openness of the site and the rural character of the area. The appellants were still arguing that building 74 houses where there are open fields would not create net harm to the rural character and openness of the area!

There were no big surprises. The appellants did not bring up any new points we didn't expect and hadn't prepared for, or which seemed likely to me to lead to overturning the Council's decision to refuse permission. I am

cautiously optimistic but one can't know in advance what will ultimately sway a decision.

The Inspector visited the site a couple of days later. He did not indicate when he would publish a decision, but it will be weeks if not months.

Regards

Guy

Guy Consterdine
Chairman, WEAG
contact@weag.info