

West End Action Group (WEAG)

15 February 2019

GREEN BELT ISSUES and AGM

Dear WEAG supporters,

This note is to update you about our well-attended public meeting on Monday evening, 11 February, serving as WEAG's AGM and to discuss Green Belt issues which have arisen recently. The latter centre on two current small-scale planning applications for new houses on Green Belt land (at Fairfield Lane and Bagshot Road), and one proposed major development at Fenns Lane.

A new phase: developers turning to the Green Belt

We are entering a new phase in the battle to preserve the open countryside around West End. The previous phase involved building on 'reserve land'. Formally known as 'Countryside Beyond The Green Belt', it did not have the same protection given to Green Belt land, and was identified for potential housing development at some time in the future - but not before 2026. In the event, top-down pressure from the Government to increase house-building led to Planning Inspectors granting permission for developers to build on this 'reserve land', when the developers went to appeal after Surrey Heath Borough Council had refused permission. In effect, development that was likely in the future was brought forward in time.

The new phase is that, with all the 'reserve land' being built on (except for one thin sliver with no ready access), developers are turning to Green Belt land. Our defence is stronger than it was for the 'reserve land', because the constraints on developing on the Green Belt are much tougher. But there are some 'exceptional circumstances' developers will try to exploit.

One is 'Rural Exception Sites', where (as stated in SHBC policy DM5) a development in the Green Belt may be permitted if consists of 100% 'affordable' housing, immediately adjoins an existing settlement, and there is a proven need for affordable housing which cannot be met within the settlement area. Another exception (NPPF 145e) is infilling within the settlement area of villages; that is, those village which are 'washed over' by the Green Belt, such as Chobham (but not West End, though the Fairfield Lane applicant is trying to use this exception). A third exception is redevelopment of previously developed land (NPPF 145g), provided it does not harm the openness of the Green Belt (hardly the case with the proposed Fenns Lane development).

Monday's meeting

During our meeting on Monday evening Paul Nordon and I reviewed three topics: the documents and policies which govern the Green Belt in Surrey Heath; the status of two current planning applications for houses in the Green Belt (in Fairfield Lane and Bagshot Road); and the outline scheme by Fairfax Acquisitions for up to 74 houses on Green Belt land in Fenns Lane.

We revealed the result of the exit poll which WEAG had conducted outside the Fairfax public exhibition on 29 January. We interviewed at least 90% of those who visited the exhibition. Of these, 86% opposed the scheme; only 2% supported it; the rest were undecided.

There was a lively discussion from the floor, mainly about the Fairfax Fenns Lane project. There was no surprise that at the end, on a show of hands, everyone present was opposed to it. We wrote detailed notes of the points made, for use when the Fairfax project is published as a planning application. That will probably be in early summer. At that time WEAG will publicise it very widely within the village to spread awareness, encourage debate, and ensure those who wish to object to the application are well informed about how to do it and what the principal arguments are.

Till then, there are a few further things WEAG will be doing in preparation, including looking deeper into 'paddock law' – the ambiguous set of rules and legal cases governing in what circumstances fields used for horse grazing or certain other purposes can be classified as 'previously developed brownfield' and thus easier to build upon.

AGM

Monday evening's meeting began with WEAG's brief AGM, including a report on the past year's activities.

There were a number of changes to the committee. Beulah Kingston had decided to stand down as Chair of WEAG, after being an inspirational leader during the five years since the rebirth of WEAG in 2014. Fortunately we won't lose her altogether as she remains as a committee member. Ian Allard and Chris Anthony stood down as committee members after five years. All three were thanked for their contributions. The new committee includes two new members, Paul Nordon and Anja Boyce. The committee was elected unanimously:

Chairman:	Guy Consterdine
Vice-Chairman:	Jeff Llewellyn
Secretary:	Paul Nordon
Treasurer:	Paul Bates
Webmaster:	Andrew Hopkins
Committee:	Anja Boyce, Beulah Kingston, Lee Scott

The financial report showed that WEAG's resources amounted to only £80. Although we have limited expenditures (for example, room hire), £80 is uncomfortably low, and we were gratified by the generous voluntary sums put into the donations box at the end of the meeting. Thank you.

Regards

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