

West End Action Group (WEAG)

5 January 2021

- **PROPOSED HOUSING ON WEST END'S GREEN BELT**
- **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

Dear WEAG supporters,

I hope you all had a good, if different, Christmas, and have kept clear of Covid.

After a quiet period for WEAG we may be about to have an active time ahead of us. Surrey Heath Borough Council published an updated report in August 2020 on the land available in the Borough to meet the mandatory housing targets for the five years to 2025. The conclusion was that the targets required 1743 dwellings to be built in the five years but the available land could only provide 1692. That's a shortfall of 51 homes.

There is now a re-submitted application to build four houses on Green Belt land in Fairfield Lane (application 20/1005), the exact same proposal as 18/0863 which the Borough turned down in 2019 and on appeal the Planning Inspector rejected in November 2019. The most troubling thing about the new application is not that it was submitted only eleven months after the Inspector's refusal (though that is troubling) but that the applicants state in writing that Jenny Rickard, the head of the Borough's development and planning department, suggested to them that they re-apply.

Taken with the shortage of housing land, this implies that the Borough may be considering altering the village Green Belt boundaries, to include Fairfield Lane and, perhaps, Fenns Lane where there was another recent planning application that was turned down. As the latter was for 74 houses, this would solve the Borough's housing land shortage on its own.

While West End has welcomed many new residents in the several housing estates recently built, the 'defined settlement area' of the village is now full. West End is tightly surrounded by protected Green Belt land, and it is vital that this is not breached.

Although the new application, 20/1005, is only for four houses, it is the principle of invading the Green Belt that is at stake. If application 20/1005 is granted it would open the way for approval of the Fenns Lane proposal, and for further schemes that would be bound to emerge for other land surrounding West End.

The report which calculated the shortage of land for homes was completed before the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was apparent. It is now clear that the virus has greatly accelerated the trend towards online shopping and home-working. It is bound to leave some bricks and mortar shops and offices without occupants, which

is disastrous for those involved, but presents a new solution for the housing targets. Converting empty premises to apartments would solve the housing numbers and at the same time help revive Camberley town centre through more people living right there. Camberley is already converting a large BHS HQ office block to apartments. Covid means that more such spaces will become available than the report allowed for.

WEAG, West End Village Society and the Fairfield Lane Residents Association have quickly submitted objections to application 20/1005 but it would add pressure to have a large number of objections from individual residents as well. A note on how to object is at the foot of this newsletter.

The reasons the Planning Inspector refused this application a year ago were (my condensed summary):

- The site is in the Green Belt and outside the defined settlement area of West End, and does not constitute limited infilling. Therefore the proposal is “inappropriate development in the Green Belt” and thus breaks the National Planning Policy Framework rules.
- The proposal would lead to a significant loss of Green Belt openness.
- It would significantly harm the character and appearance of the lane – not only its openness but also because the sameness of the four identical houses and hard driveways would be discordant against the more varied and irregular pattern of the existing houses on the northern side of the lane.
- The known problems of drainage and flooding have not been solved.
- Previous appeal decisions cited as precedents were not comparable or relevant.

Meanwhile, Happy New Year!

Regards

Guy

*Guy Consterdine
Chairman, WEAG*

How to see and object to Fairfield Lane planning application 20/1005:

You can find full details of the planning application on the Surrey Heath Borough Council (SHBC) website:

www.surreyheath.gov.uk/residents/planning/planning-applications

Click on the green Search heading, then in the dialogue box enter the application number 20/1005.

Objections may be made in several ways:

- On SHBC website. The link above has a heading ‘Comment or object to a planning application’; clicking on that explains how to do it. When it asks for the location of the planning application use *LAND EAST OF SHANGRI-LA, FAIRFIELD LANE, WEST END, WOKING, GU24 9QX*
- By email: development.control@surreyheath.gov.uk

- By letter to: Regulatory Services, Surrey Heath Borough Council, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, Camberley GU15 3HD