

Berkeley Homes / Howard School Development

Notes of a meeting of the Effingham members of the Berkeley Homes / Howard School Liaison Group, held 19th August 2019 in the Parish Room.

Present

EPC – Cllrs Keith Cornwell, Cliff Hackett, Alison Mayell, Arnold Pindar

GBC & EPC – Cllr Liz Hogger

SCC – Cllr Julie Iles

EFFRA – Vivien White, James Brennan, David King, Harry Clarke

EVRT – Michael Agius

Several residents from Effingham Place

Apologies were received from Diane Poole, Philip Davies, Ian Symes, Charles Thorne, Paula Moss, Sue Morris, and Ian Smith

1. New proposals from Berkeley Homes

At the request of Tony Pidgley, the Chairman of Berkeley Homes (BH), a meeting was held on Friday 16 August with Effingham representatives to update us on the latest situation on the BH/HoE development project.

Those present were: Tony Pidgley, Chairman of Berkeley Homes PLC; Harry Lewis, Managing Director of Berkeley Homes (Southern); Liz Hogger, GBC & PC; Ian Symes, EPC; Julie Iles, SCC; Sue Morris, EVRT; Vivien White, EFFRA; Ian Smith, EFFRA; Mike Strong, resident.

The Effingham representatives at that meeting stated they were there only to listen and to ask questions so that they understood the proposal.

BH informed us that:

- a) The cost of the new school has increased from £32 million at the time of the public inquiry to £40 million today. At the same time, house prices are depressed and building costs have increased because of Brexit.
- b) To fill the resultant funding gap, BH propose to change the boundary between the school land and the residential land on Effingham Lodge Farm. Two pieces of land would come out of the new school site, one on the Lower Road frontage and one piece from the west of the playing field land, some 3.3 acres in total. That land would be attached to the original residential site and be used for 55 additional dwellings.
- c) BH told us the additional housing would include 40% affordable (in line with Local Plan requirements) and S106 obligations would be increased proportionately.
- d) Other options for bridging the funding gap have been considered, including reducing the size of the new school to just 1600 pupils as now. However that would not provide sufficient savings to fill the gap.
- e) BH have now submitted the reserved matters application for the new school to GBC (the new site boundary is used) and the reserved matters application for the residential site allowed at appeal will be submitted in a few weeks. The additional housing sites would then be submitted as a separate planning application, for full permission rather than outline.

BH provided layout plans of the new proposals, and suggested a further meeting at the end of September to discuss the reaction of Effingham representatives to the new plans.

The infrastructure associated with the overall development on ELF was briefly discussed, including drainage concerns and traffic, and HL agreed that Berkeley Homes engineers should talk to our local expert Michael Agius about drainage and sewage issues.

2. Initial comments on the new proposals

There was a wide-ranging discussion of the new proposals. It was agreed that:

Technical planning questions

LH will consult with GBC planning officers on technical planning questions, including:

Since ELF remains in the green belt under the adopted Guildford Local Plan, what financial viability evidence would be required for additional housing to provide the very special circumstances to justify the loss of openness of the green belt?

Should there now be an integrated reconsideration of the whole project, with a revised financial viability study encompassing all three sites (ELF, the current school, and Browns Field)? Would this require a new planning application?

School place provision

Jl has consulted with SCC officers and the County has accepted the HofE position that if the Trust achieves funding for the larger size school that will be incorporated in our plans for school place provision in discussion with GBC as the planning authority. There is no route for the County to fund the additional places for basic need provision. The current school was very low down on the list of prioritised refurbishment when this was last considered.

Planning concerns

It was noted that the planning policy context has changed since the appeal decision, and any new planning applications would be determined in the context of an adopted Local Plan. This means that GBC now has a five-year-housing land supply and the Effingham Neighbourhood Plan now carries full weight.

The meeting was concerned that the proposal for additional housing raised several planning concerns, the most obvious being:

There would be a 19% increase in the number of homes to be built (350 compared with the original 295 allowed at appeal), resulting in increased traffic generation.

There would be a greater impact on the openness of the green belt on ELF than from the outline planning agreed.

The loss of open green space on the Lower Road frontage to the new school site diminishes the impression of a green gap between the villages of Effingham and Little Bookham.

3. Way forward

A further meeting of the Effingham side of the Liaison Group will be held following LH's consultation with GBC officers on the technical planning questions.

This report will be submitted to Effingham Parish Council for consideration at their meeting on 27 August, and if agreed will be published on the EPC website.