

Wokingham Borough Council

Gorse Ride Project Residents Steering Group

Wednesday 24th January 2018 - 7pm to 9pm
St Mary's and St John's Parish Centre
Meeting Notes

Residents / Stakeholder Attendees:

Steve Bowers	(SB)	Meeting Chair / Dart Close Resident / Tenant / Finch.Parish Councillor
Claire McEnoy	(CM)	Meeting Vice Chair / Firs Close Resident / Tenant
Chris Wallace	(CW)	Gorse Ride South Resident / Tenant
Annette Lenton	(AL)	Billing Ave Resident / Tenant
Kerry Player	(KP)	Billing Ave Resident / Gorse Ride School
Harry Row	(HR)	Church volunteer, Nine Mile Ride / Gorse Ride School governor
Richard Dolinski	(RD)	Executive Member
Doug Bates	(DB)	Dart Close Resident / Homeowner
Anne Else	(AE)	Dart Close Resident / Homeowner
Jade Morgan-Jones	(JM)	Orbit Close Resident / Tenant
Nicola Bell	(NB)	Dart Close Resident / Homeowner
Angela Waite	(AW)	Dart Close Resident
Dan Marriot Appleyard	(DMA)	Firs Close Resident
Trudy Heron Jason	(THJ)	Dart Close Resident
Steve Bromley	(SBr)	Ratepayers Hall, California Association, 175 Nine Mile Ride
Roland Cundy	(RC)	Finchampstead Parish Councillor
Barbara Wojna	(BW)	Nine Mile Ride School Governor

WBC / WBC representative Attendees / WHL

Louise Strongitharm	(LS)	Category Manager, Economic Prosperity and Place / Senior Manager for the Gorse Ride Project
Zareena Ahmed-Shere	(ZAS)	Gorse Ride Project Manager
Jennie Grieve	(JGr)	Community Development Worker
Jude Whyte	(JW)	Housing Needs Manager

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
1	Welcome and Introductions	
1.1	SB welcomed everyone to the meeting.	
1.2	Meeting attendees briefly introduced themselves as recorded above.	
2	Regeneration Progress Update	
	ZAS provided a brief update since last meeting on 6 th December 2017	
2.1	<u>Phase 1 – Arnett Avenue Site</u>	
2.1.1	At the last meeting Wokingham Housing Limited (WHL) presented draft (pre application planning) proposals for the development of a total of 37 new homes on a cleared site. Feedback was invited.	
2.1.2	These drawings were later submitted for pre application planning advice. Informal advice was received in mid January. Dialogue with the Planning Officers is ongoing. Plans are being updated to reflect the advice being received.	

2.1.3 Community consultation will take place before the Planning Application is formally submitted for to the Planning Department for determination.

2.2 Phase 2+ (wider estate Masterplan Development)

2.2.1 The following draft development options were presented at the last Steering Group for comment / feedback.

- Option A used the existing roads and the utilities within the estate.
- Option B featured east and west green links and changed the position of utilities and road alignment.
- Option C also changed the position of the utilities and road alignment but also had highest number of houses and flats with a huge green space near the middle.

2.2.2 Following the feedback received at the Steering Group and Regeneration Surgeries Option C was the most popular but with modifications. Over 80% of people indicated that they liked Option C but wanted it improved with bungalows and garages and more parking spaces per home.

2.2.3 The design team were asked to develop a Masterplan based on the preferred Option C with the modifications that responded to peoples comments / concerns.

The main revisions to Option C are set out below:

- Introduce More Housing Types: Bungalows, 3 Bedroom/5person House and small rows of Terraced Housing

It was clear from the consultation comments that bungalows are very important to residents. All the houses in Option C were semi-detached. In order to make space for the bungalows the design team have reduced the number of semi-detached houses and arranged some homes in small rows of Terraces. All 3 bed houses in Option C were for 6 people. The design team were instructed to reduce the number of these dwelling types and replace with a number of 3 bed, 5 person houses so that this may help to meet the housing needs of different households. All these measures have helped create space for some bungalows to be incorporated into the Masterplan.

- Balconies in Flats

All flats in Option C had Juliet balconies. The design team have been requested to replace these with usable balconies to provide people living in the flats with some private outdoor space.

- Garages

Garages were not featured Option C. It was also clear from the consultation that these were important to some residents (particularly homeowners) so the Masterplan will include some houses with garages.

- Parking Provision

The design team had applied the Wokingham Parking Policy regulations / standards to Option C. This meant that not all dwellings (particularly 1 bed flats) would necessarily have one parking space each. All dwellings featured in the emerging Masterplan will have a minimum of 1 parking space each (above WBC regulations and standards).

- Visitors Parking

There was concerns raised on where the visitors will park. The design team

are responding to this by slightly widening the estate roads in the Masterplan so that visitors can use on-street parking and refuse / emergency vehicles can pass.

- 2.2.4** Steering Group members will be able to view the Masterplan at the next Steering Group meeting on 7th February. The Masterplan is not final. It is a guide on how we would like the estate to be developed. It will be possible to make adjustments to reflect changing circumstances as the project moves to the next stages.
- 2.2.5** CW asked if it would show social / affordable housing? It appears that the “for market” houses have been sited on the outside edge with affordable housing in the centre. LS explained that the architects have just done a provisional drawing but the Masterplan will aim to better integrate the housing tenure types. Each phase will include a mix of different tenures.
- 2.2.6** CW further enquired whether the social / affordable homes would be built to the same standard. LS replied that they would.
- 2.2.7** DB asked if the new homes offered to residents will be “like for like”. LS responded that the standards will be higher than the current properties on the estate but if you have need for a 3 bed house, you’ll be offered a 3 bed house.
- 2.2.8** LS also added by way of an update that they had left it up to the architects to explore whether or not it would be of benefit to include Vicarage Close within the Masterplan. They concluded that they would not be able to use the land more efficiently so have removed the 4 brick built bungalows (Nos 1-4) from the Masterplan development boundary. The Council will be writing to the residents of these properties to let them know that they are excluded from the project therefore will not need to move.
- 2.2.9** KP commented that it was mentioned earlier that some properties would have garages. How will that be provided? Will it be blocks of garages or will they be attached to each house? Also, are they just for homeowners? KP’s husband currently uses their garage for his work but they are tenants and would like a garage. ZAS replied that each house will either have a garage or lockable storage provision e.g. sheds.
- 2.2.10** AL asked at what stage would residents be informed about the different tenancies. LS responded that this information will be provided in the Executive Report. In addition, the Masterplan will show a programme for the phasing of works. Therefore, at the next meeting residents will know the phase their properties will be in and the indicative timeframes.
- 2.2.11** AL stated that residents want to know what they are entitled to. She is currently in a 3 bed home but she did not think she would be entitled to a 3 bed home on the rebuilt estate as she now lives on her own.
- 2.2.12** CM added that everyone had been told previously that they will be getting “like for like”. If this has now changed then people need to know.
- 2.2.13** LS stated that the entitlement is proposed in the tenancy table as per the Council’s Housing Allocation Policy. The new homes will be allocated based on household needs. Therefore, those under-occupying their existing homes will need to downsize.
- 2.2.14** AL said that on this basis she will be allocated a 1 bedroom home so will no longer be able to have grandchildren staying overnight etc. If so, will there be compensation, as my life will change afterwards? After all, she did not want to

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move.

- 2.2.15** SB stated that we would follow up this matter with LS outside the meeting and return with some answers for the Steering Group. LS acknowledged that a number of households are currently living in under-occupied properties while others are overcrowded so there will be winners and losers – a compromise may have to be reached. JW confirmed that WBC will look at considerations of some flexibility for people.
- 2.2.16** DMA enquired whether the design team have started the process of talking to utility companies? He works for BT and from experience, he can advise that it is a long and complicated process to install utilities. If it is not done in a timely manner, there won't be cables, internet etc. when the new homes are completed. There are estates where this has happened. LS replied that a utilities survey has been completed and the design team do have a utilities consultant on their team but this will be checked out.
- 2.2.17** SB asked for an update on the trip to Phoenix Avenue / Grovelands Avenue. ZAS informed the Group that the trip took place on the 18th January and 5 residents took part. The site tours were facilitated by Darren Toes (WHL). We were able to inspect houses on each site to get an idea of size, dimensions and build quality. Overall people found it useful and were invited to feedback their views via a short form. ZAS said she will review and feedback responses received shortly. It appeared that the house at Grovelands was preferred (as it is more traditional with generous room sizes) over the more modern style of Phoenix. JM commented that they were bigger as they had been built for private sale. LS advised that this was not the case. Half of them are affordable and half are social housing. JM said that this was not what they had been told. JM commented that she while on site she looked inside a 2 bed house at Phoenix Avenue that had a far better use of space than the 3 bed. There was a lot of wasted space in the 3 bed.
- 2.2.18** RD observed that it is good to know that this process is transparent and encouraging to see people are coming forward and saying what they feel. He has been involved in the project for 4/5 months and talks regularly with SB. If something needs to be addressed, SB will advise RD so this can be addressed. All residents have different needs and wishes but eventually, there will have to be some sort of compromise. In terms of 'losers' we hope they will still have an enhanced life on the estate. Residents need to keep talking and feeding back their views so the Council can find the right solution for people at Gorse Ride. RB said that people are free to e-mail or ring him directly.
- 2.2.19** CM commented that AL brought up the 'like for like' situation and it will be a shock when residents in the same circumstances will realise that they will not get a same size house. RD stated that what "like for like" really means should be explored. There is obviously a huge change from a 3 to a 2 bed but an even bigger change from 3 to 1 bed. AL pointed out again that residents were all promised that they would be getting "like for like" first time round.
- 2.2.20** JW suggested that perhaps the Council could compromise. Possibly those who have a 3 bed will only be asked to downsize to a 2 bed and not a 1 bed – i.e. only downsize by 1 bedroom overall.
- 2.2.21** SB stated that we consider this and bring this back to the group. CW emphasised that we should decide this before information goes out to the rest of the tenants.
- 2.2.22** NB observed that if you were to build 2 bed houses, you are more likely to get people to downsize. SB stated that we need to talk about a compromise next time and make it an agenda item of a future steering group meeting. NB stressed that

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there is a real need for 2 bed houses/flats as people who live on their own or elderly may need an extra bedroom to allow carers / family members to stay overnight or visiting grandchildren to stay overnight.

3 Counsel Advice – End Landlord / Tenancy Rights

3.1 LS advised that they had asked barristers Cornerstones to give us advice around tenancy issues. When the project started in 2014/15, it was assumed the new rebuilt estate would provide traditional replacement Council Houses that would be funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). However, in 2015 changes in Government plans / funding policy meant that the Council could not deliver the project on this basis. Unfortunately, due to the borrowing cap on HRA a project of this scale cannot be funded as we hoped a few years back. On top of this, a high value voids levy may also be imposed which will add to the funding gap. The Council will take 30 years to buy its Housing Stock for £90m via a loan and we had thought this would be the final commitment. However, in 2015, the Government decided to roll out the right to buy to housing association tenants and now they will be charging a levy for when housing association homes are sold. This legislation has been passed but the detail has not come out yet. The levy is likely to be in the millions. They will use a formula to work it out. The impact of this and the HRA funding changes will have huge impact and make it impossible to deliver the project based on the previous funding model.

3.2 The bottom line is that re-developing the estate in accordance with the 2014/15 business plan is no longer viable. An alternative approach is needed.

3.3 The Council has 3 Housing Companies:

- Loddon homes (registered provider for housing regulated by the Homes and Community Agency). This means that they are regulated by a Government body for rents etc. and have access to public funds for affordable housing.
- Berry Brook Homes (not registered with Homes and Community Agency or regulated by them)
- Wokingham Housing Limited (WHL) – they are developers and do not hold any housing stock. After new homes are built, they are transferred to either Loddon Homes or Berrybrook Homes for ownership and management.

3.4 Chris asked if Berrybrook Homes have affordable and social homes? JW answered they have affordable rents (half of Phoenix is affordable and half is intermediate rents).

3.5 AL commented that there are a lot of 'should be' in the Tenancy Comparison table. LS stated that the Executive report would recommend that the homes are owned and managed by either Loddon or Berry Brook. It is likely to be Loddon Homes as they are Homes and Community Agency registered and therefore it may be easier to access government grants that will help pay for the regeneration. Re-development through an external Housing Association is not an option.

3.6 Tenancy Comparison Chart

Louise talked through the document that compared the rights and provisions within a potential tenancy with an external Housing Association, Loddon Homes and Berry Brook homes with a current Council secure tenancy. The following comments were made:

3.6.1 End Landlord

CW questioned whether these Council housing companies i.e. Berry Brook or Loddon Homes have the infrastructure to cope with the number of tenants on Gorse Ride? At the moment they are already struggling to deal with all management issues and complaints. There seems to be a communication problem. Some of the tenants in Phoenix are saying they do not know who to ask about repairs to the building. Should it be the developers, builders or the Council? Will they be able to deal with a large number of extra tenants? LS answered that these companies have a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Councils Tenant Services and they will be able to handle this. CW stated that there is likely to be fewer Council staff to handle repairs etc., LS advised that both Loddon and Berrybrook pay for services which supports the Council therefore it will be resourced. SB commented that if the new Gorse Ride Housing Stock is transferred to Berry Brook and the SLA is with the Council they are just transferring the work back to the Council. CW raised concerns again that more homes to manage will raise more management problems.

3.6.2 AL asked that if Loddon managed the homes would that mean she could not continue with her role as an involved tenant? JW confirmed that she would be able to stay as an involved tenant.

3.6.3 CW and AL questioned whether it would be possible for Berrybrook or Loddon to pull the plug on the contract and go elsewhere? LS replied that no guarantees could be given on management arrangements. However, these are both Strategic Council companies with Council representatives on the Board of these companies. Being a Council body, they are accountable and subject to the normal complaints procedures. RD added that the Chair of these 3 companies have to report to the Council on their performances. AL asked if someone was a Phoenix tenant could they complain to the Council about one of these companies. RD replied yes, as they are subject to the same complaint procedure.

3.6.4 JW added to the comment made by CW (that Phoenix Avenue tenants do not know who they should go to) by saying that there has been a huge learning curve and we will have a smoother operation around snagging etc. so that those problems are not replicated in Gorse Ride.

3.6.5 RD asked if a simple flow diagram could be provided to show the relationship of these 3 companies with Wokingham Borough Council. People will be able to see where everyone sits and key names. LS agreed that this would be done.

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Tenancy Lengths

3.6.6 Comments were made that throughout the document there was a lot of "should" instead of "will". LS responded that we are unable to change 'should' to 'will' because these proposals have not been approved by the Executive. CW pointed out that as no one trusts the Council any more it was advisable to make it clear in documents so that all tenants can understand. If it is sent out in its current form, it will be confusing. LS replied that a cover letter would be sent saying that we cannot pre-empt what the Executive would say which is why we are unable to make promises.

3.6.7 JM asked how long do you have to be a tenant to get a lifetime tenancy? JW answered that lifetime tenancies apply to people who already have a secure tenancy. Lifetime tenancies will be ending with Flexible Tenancies (fixed term) taking their place for new tenants. SB explained that tenancies would change from April 2018. LS advised that whatever people's rights were before the 1st April would apply. If you moved in to your home before April 2018, you will not be affected.

Rent Levels

- 3.6.8** Annette commented that market rents are very high around here. JM asked why do people pay more for a new build? LS advised that there a complicated system for working out the rent levels. It is probably a bit higher on new dwellings. Social rent is around 50-60% of market rent. Affordable rent is up to 80% of market rent. LS acknowledged that there is a high element of social rented properties on Gorse Ride therefore our preference is to replicate this in the re-developed estate. CM added that there are likely to be mixed tenures on the new estate.

Tenancies

- 3.6.9** Right to Buy will be the same regardless of which end landlord option we go for. CW mentioned that her tenancy is post 2012 but she has a one year Right to Buy. AL said that you used not to be able to buy bungalows. Bungalows on the estate are disabled bungalows which may affect Right to Buy eligibility.

Eviction

- 3.6.10** This is a Court decision and not a Council decision.

- 3.6.11** DB observed that this is not good because there are many people abusing their tenancies. NB commented that maybe if people are provided with new homes they will take better care of them, however you would only get evicted if you stop paying rent. JW stated that at the end of the day it is ultimately up to the judge and not the Council to make the final decision on an eviction. NB further commented that nothing tends to be done about evicting tenants who are breaching other terms such as anti-social behavior because we are told they have "social" issues. People should respect what they have. JW stated that the Council does act and has acted on these matters.

Size of accommodation

- 3.6.12** LS confirmed that this would be amended to reflect earlier conversations at this meeting.
- 3.6.13** KP enquired whether people over 18 years would be counted as part of the household? My 20 year old child cannot afford to move out. JW answered yes. Children will be part of the household even if they are 40 years old. JW added that we will also put something in there about children/ages still being part of the household.

Compensation

- 3.6.14** People will be entitled to a statutory Homeloss payment that is currently just over £6,000 plus reasonable expenses (moving, redirecting mail, people with disabilities, reconnecting utilities).
- 3.6.15** AL asked if she gave up her tenancy to move in with SB and she broke her utility contracts and had to pay to get out of them, would she be reimbursed? JW observed that she has not come across that situation before but it would be a discretionary payment once you are in decant status.
- 3.3.16** CW asked what would happen to people who move away from the estate? Will they get the statutory Homeloss payment? JW confirmed that they will if a decant status applies.
- 3.6.17** ZAS observed that while in the decanting stage, to get the accommodation of their preference people may have to move temporarily before their final move to their permanent home. In this scenario, will they get payment twice? This would need

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to be clarified.

- 3.6.18** Members also asked what would happen if people had to move away from the estate but their children are still attending the local schools. How will this work? LS said that when allocating the new homes the Council will do its best to match people's needs. Where it is not possible temporary accommodation will need to be arranged and people would need to move twice. We had an early discussion with schools and they can arrange home to school transport for people moving away.
- 3.6.19** JM asked if more consideration would be given to disabled people? JW said yes, when we get the green light for this project we will have a single point of contact. JM asked if there would be regular meetings like the ones Simon Price held. JW confirmed that there will be.
- 3.6.20** KP commented that a bungalow resident moved off the estate because of stress. JW commented that we are not aware of their circumstances.

4 Consultation on Tenancy Issues

- 4.1** In terms of consultation, the Council will send a letter next week with the updated Tenancy Comparison document and ask for tenants' views. Feedback can be provided by email, online or through Jennie at the Community House. **ZAS / LS**
- 4.2** RD asked that if people have not engaged how will you get those missed views? So many people say that they do not know what is going on. RC commented that the survey would be anonymous so that will not tell us who has or has not replied. If we ask for people's names then it will not be anonymous.
- 4.3** NB asked if the letters could also go to the homeowners as they feel they are being sidelined. NB said that it is our estate too so we would like to have an input. I have not had any information so far. KP said it is down to the Steering Group to share information.
- 4.4** SB stressed that this meeting tonight is for everyone, as we want everyone living here to be engaged. We need to work together otherwise, this will not work. Usually steering group meetings are for steering group members only.
- 4.5** DB stated that we must make it clear that Phase 2 will be broken down into several phases as many people think that everyone has to move out in one go.
- 4.6** SB emphasised that the onus is on the steering group to feed the correct information to our neighbours. We have to be open and transparent.
- 4.7** LS said she is happy to hold a separate meeting with homeowners. Homeowners have different requirements and probably need a more personalised meeting whereas makes sense to have a group tenants meeting. Do homeowners want a separate meeting? DB responded that they wanted to meet together so we know what each other wants.
- 4.8** JM asked whether everyone who expressed an interest was now on the Steering Group. LS said yes. NB commented that she would have liked to have been part of the Steering Group but thought all meetings were taking place during the day and she works. JG advised that the Steering group meetings are held in the evening, apart from the first meeting. Fortnightly Regeneration Surgeries take place during the day at the Community House.
- 4.9** SB commented that we have about 42 people in the group already and it is hard to

manage numbers so we do not want things to change now.

- 4.10 CM highlighted that we have representation from most roads within the estate so please talk to them to pass your message on.

5 Next Steps

- 5.1 ZAS said that the architect ACG would like to take some photos of people looking at the plans at the next Steering Group meeting to use for their marketing. Please inform Zareena if you do not wish to be photographed.
- 5.2 The next Steering Group will take place on 7th February where the Masterplan and an indicative phasing plan will be presented.

6 Any other business

- 6.1 CW suggested we share the names of everyone who is on the Steering Group. Someone answered that we can give the names of the Chair and Vice Chair who can then direct people to their street reps for information.
- 6.2 SB asked if NB could be co-opted onto the Steering Group. Everyone agreed she could join. NB to provide ZAS with her contact details. **NB**
- 6.3 HR commented that the Parish Councillors came to this evening's meeting but had also been invited to other parish council meetings that clashed.
- 6.4 NB asked why the fallen trees were still in Dart Close? JG informed the Group that there had been a communication error with Balfour Beatty, which is why there was a delay, but it is in hand now and they are dealing with it.
- 6.5 LS advised that the Council is looking to hold a meeting ahead of the 29th March Executive meeting (where the Executive will be deciding about the future of the estate). At this meeting, we will tell you personally about the recommendations prior to the decision being made. We are looking at venues for the 19th, 20th and 21st of March. We want to avoid the situation where we were not fully able to manage the mass of people came to the meeting at Gorse Ride School last year. Therefore we want to hold it over several hours rather than one fixed time in order to stagger attendance. SB said that the idea is for people to walk in, have a talk and leave. The invitation will go to everyone on the estate. CM asked why it is going to be done like that and not like before.
- 6.6 JM said why bother meeting before the Executive make their decision. Why not meet afterwards when they have come to a decision so there is more certainty? CM maintained that people were fed up of being told that there is an update but there is no real update! SB stated that the reason for having the meeting beforehand is so that people do not get information second hand. LS said in light of these feelings, instead of holding the meeting before the Executive decision, we will instead write to residents in advance sending them a copy of the Executive report and the date it is to be considered. This will give people an opportunity to come to the meeting if they wish to observe or air their views. **LS / ZAS**
- 6.7 SB asked whether the Regeneration Surgeries are still happening? ZAS replied that they will continue until the Executive decision is made. After this, we will review.

Next Meeting of the regular Steering Group will be on Wednesday 7th February 2018 at the same venue.

