

Wokingham Borough Council

Gorse Ride Project Residents Steering Group

Wednesday 28th March 2018 - 7pm to 9pm
St Mary's and St John's Parish Centre
Meeting Notes

Residents / Stakeholder Attendees:

Steve Bowers	(SB)	Dart Close Resident / Tenant / Finchampstead Parish Councillor
Claire McEnoy	(CM)	Meeting Vice Chair / Firs Close Resident / Tenant
Chris Wallace	(CW)	Gorse Ride South Resident
Harry Row	(HR)	Church volunteer, Nine Mile Ride / Gorse Ride School governor
Ian Pittock	(IP)	Ward Councillor for Finchampstead South
Doug Bates	(DB)	Dart Close Resident / Homeowner
Mike Jones	(MJ)	Orbit Close Resident / Homeowner
Mandy Gatricks	(MG)	Billing Ave Resident / Tenant
Matt Sales	(MS)	Whittle Close Resident / Homeowner
C Bulpit	(CB)	Whittle Close Resident
Jim Laphorn	(JL)	Whittle Close Resident
Jen Laphorn	(JLe)	Whittle Close Resident
Jade Morgan-Jones	(JMJ)	Orbit Close Resident / Tenant
J Launchbury	(JL)	Orbit Close Resident / Homeowner
Angie Woods	(AG)	Gorse Ride South Resident / Tenant
David Bolam	(DB)	Firs Close Resident / Homeowner
L Bolam	(LB)	Firs Close Resident / Homeowner
Barbara Wojna	(BW)	Nine Mile Ride School Governor
Jim Gallagher	(JG)	FBC Centre

WBC / WBC representative Attendees

Louise Strongitharm	(LS)	Category Manager, Economic Prosperity and Place / Senior Manager for the Gorse Ride Project
Zareena Ahmed-Shere	(ZAS)	Senior Specialist (Estate Regeneration) / Gorse Ride Project Manager
Jennie Grieve	(JGr)	Community Development Worker

Apologies

Richard Dolinski	(RD)	WBC Executive Member for Adult Services
Simon Weeks	(SW)	Borough Ward Councillor
Andy Croy	(AC)	WBC Councillor and Gorse Ride ex resident
Simon Price	(SP)	WBC Housing Operations
Matt Vicars	(MVic)	WBC Housing Officer

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
1	Welcome and Introductions	
1.1	SB welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was acknowledged that this meeting is being held during the Purdah period. Borough Councillors may have decided not to attend in line with the advice issued by WBC Democratic Services.	
1.2	Meeting attendees briefly introduced themselves and gave an overview of their role / contribution to the Group as recorded above.	
2	Actions from the Previous Meeting / Action Tracker	
2.1	ZAS talked through the Action Tracker document providing an update on all	

outstanding or in progress items as set out below:

- Youth Consultation – ZAS met with JG and Jamie Walker on 27.3.18. Agreed that an event will be arranged in Summer where youngsters will be invited to complete a questionnaire giving their opinions on what is needed and on the possible options on what may be provided in the new public open space e.g. Outdoor gym, BMX track etc.
- ZAS is to invite a couple of Phoenix Ave residents to attend the next Steering Group so that they can talk about their experiences of living on the new estate. **ZAS**
- ZAS will be writing to residents providing a copy of the Executive report in early May. **ZAS**

2.2 SB asked if anyone had questions. CW commented that the WBC housing companies chart provided does not show the relationship between these companies to WBC. CW requested a revised chart that explains these relationships and in particular which party is responsible for the building and who is responsible for repairs and maintenance as it is not clear. LS explained that WBC is 100% shareholder to the 3 companies. CW stated that Bill Flood had informed her that these companies were independent and did not have to contract with the Council. They could contract with third parties. ZAS to provide updated structure chart. **ZAS**

3 Phase 1 Update (Arnett Ave)

3.1 The Phase 1 draft Pre-Application Planning drawings (presented to Steering Group in December 2017) were revised to take into account the recent pre application planning advice provided by Planning, Highways and Tree Officers.

3.2 The revised designs were sent to the Steering Group members for comment on 13th March 2018. The new proposal seeks to provide a total of 46 new dwellings comprising:

- Nos 10 – 3 bedroom / 5 person houses with gardens
- Nos 19 – 2 bedroom / 4 person flats each with a patio garden at Ground level or a balcony / terrace on upper floors
- Nos 17 – 1 bedroom / 2 person flats each with a patio garden at Ground level or a balcony / terrace on upper floors

3.3 The buildings will be up to 2 and a half storeys. A total of 56 car parking spaces is provided which meets WBC parking standards / requirements.

3.4 A public consultation (drop in event) took place on 23rd March where residents / stakeholders were invited to view the plans, speak to WBC / WHL officers and the design team and give their views. The event was well attended with over 40 people dropping in over the course of the afternoon / evening. Overall, positive comments were received regarding the revised design. Some attendees raised concerns over inadequate parking provision. A couple of Barkham Ride and Finchampstead Road residents were uneasy that about being overlooked by the proposed 2.5 storey flats on the existing Cockayne Court footprint.

3.5 It was not advisable to hold the Public Consultation event during the Purdah period from 26th March to 4th May. SB explained that the Steering Group members were e-mailed the plans on 13th March to allow the Public Consultation to take place on Friday 23rd March before Purdah. He apologized for the rush but on this occasion it was necessary otherwise, there would have been 6 weeks slippage to the project timeline.

- 3.6** Architects will be making minor changes to the plans to take into account the community feedback collected. They aim to formally submit the Planning Application during May.
- 3.7** WHL have invited tenders for demolition contractors by the end of March. Following evaluation of tenders received, they will appoint a contractor in April and start demolition work during May once the Planning Department have approved the Prior Notification of Demolition Notice. Two tenants are waiting for their preferred properties that are due to be available shortly. Once they have been rehoused, demolition could start in Late May.
- 3.8** Some questions followed regarding the revised scheme. MS asked if the footpaths lead to the crossings. LS replied that the new footpath will lead to the pedestrian crossing at Barham Ride.
- 3.9** JG asked if there were plans to increase the number of parking spaces. ZAS replied that as people had highlighted this in the feedback, the architects would try to achieve this on the scheme, but it is a constrained site. JL said that it would be good to have clarification of where overflow parking is and location of the bins stores and spaces that need to be kept clear in case of fire hazards so that vehicles do not to block them.
- 3.10** MJ observed that the new scheme has about 30% more dwellings than the previous scheme. JL asked what was feature near the front doors shown in the elevation plans. LS replied that they are likely to be porches/first floor overhangs.
- 3.11** MJ commented that the house at Phoenix Avenue had storage. Would storage be provided here? LS responded that we are not sure as that level of detail is in the other plans. CM asked if the floorplans and other details could be sent to the Group.
- 3.12** DB asked if it is definitely the flats that are 2 or 2.5 storeys. LS confirmed that this was correct and houses were 2 storey.
- 3.13** JGr asked how the flats are 2.5 storey. LS explained that they have slightly steeper rooflines to enable rooms within the roof space.
- 3.14** JG asked about the timeline. LS responded that the Planning Application once submitted in May will take 13 weeks to be determined. Then WHL will commence the process of tendering for a development contractor so realistically a start on site is likely to be Spring 2019. The build period would from 12-18 months. The phase 1 programme was broadly on track.

ZAS

4 Phase 2 + Position

- 4.1** A Masterplan for 243 new replacement homes with a large village green area was presented to the Steering Group on the 7th February.
- 4.2** At an Extra Special Gorse Ride Meeting on 16th May, the Executive will decide on whether to take the Masterplan forward to the Planning Stages and if so commit the required funds to implement the project.
- 4.3** It was mentioned that the Masterplan was not set in stone and revisions could be made to respond to change in circumstances over the project's lifetime. E.g. There have already been interesting discussions about trade-offs between garages to

accommodate more bungalows.

5 Update on Extra Special Homeowners Meeting

- 5.1** This meeting took place on 5th March and was well attended. The Leader of the Council, RD and a SW also attended. The Gorse Ride South Owners Action Group (GRSOAG) represented by MJ put forward 22 questions, which were answered on the day.
- 5.2** DB asked whether the rehousing options for homeowners would be open outside the Borough. LS replied that no decision has been made yet on whether or not the equity share scheme may be used to purchase a new home outside the Borough. Under the current proposals, it would be possible for some homeowners to sell to the Council and move outside the Borough.
- 5.3** LS stated that people were not happy that while the tenants would be paid 100% of their Homeloss Payment, the Homeowners would be required to put 100% of this compensation into the equity of their new replacement home. This would leave them without funds to fit out and personalize their new homes. The Council is listening and looking to offer more flexibility to homeowners on this matter.
- 5.4** ZAS mentioned that it was also clear that conservatories as well as garages were widespread over the estate and equally valued by residents. It would be worth exploring at later stages whether it can be added to the build specifications of some new homes.
- 5.5** MJ asked what was the proportion of affordable homes provided in the new design. The price of the new homes appears to be the standard market value and we are moving from an affordable home. LS advised that the Government definition of affordable housing is that you own up to 80% of the home only. If you own your home outright then it is not classed as affordable housing. If you move into your new home on a shared equity basis, and your share is less than 80%, then it may be deemed affordable housing.
- 5.6** JMJ asked whether it would be possible for tenants to have the choice of using some of their Homeloss Payment towards a gold, silver, bronze standard of fitting specifications. JG agreed that it would be a good idea to give tenants the same options to upgrade as Homeowners. LS stated that they would be considering this.
- 5.7** MG asked what would happen in circumstances where a bespoke home would be needed due to a disability. LS responded that through individual meetings, we would have an understanding of what people need so that the new homes can be adapted prior to occupancy.

6 Tenants Survey Results

- 6.1** The Council wrote to all tenants living on the estate to seek their views about the potential regeneration plans. Tenants were given information on how their existing rights / tenancy arrangements may be affected with different landlord options and asked for their views on the proposals.
- 6.2** There was an 18% response rate. Comments were made that the usual response rates for surveys is between 15-20%. It is a bit disappointing as the Council had expected a higher participation rate in this case as the proposals will directly affect people. CW observed that some people feel that there is no point in attending meetings or expressing their views because things will be done, no matter what they say. LS replied that we do listen to people. For example, we have responded

to their comments about providing bungalows on the re-built estate.

- 6.3 The results of the tenants' consultation were split. The findings showed that about one-third wished to remain Council tenants, one-third preferred Loddon Homes as the end landlord and one third did not have a preference.
- 6.4 Nearly 70% of respondents were supportive of a new tenancy that broadly matched their current terms and conditions (i.e. lifetime assured tenancies, social rent levels and a preserved right to buy).
- 6.5 87% of respondents supported the proposal for the Council to offer some flexibility (i.e. allowing one extra bedroom, financial incentive etc.) to tenants that are required to downsize.
- 6.6 There were also split views on the regeneration proposals. 48% of respondents indicated that they were very supportive or positive about the re-development but wished to know more about how it affected them and 48% favoured refurbishment of existing homes instead of re-development.
- 6.7 IP asked what were the rules around bedroom tax and flexibility for when adult children who come home from University or on leave from armed forces. Do you have to pay bedroom tax if they are away? SB answered that if they return from University you need to notify the council and they adjust the rent. LS informed the Group that it would be up to individuals to top up their rent if they wanted this option.

7 Homeowners Survey Results

- 7.1 The Council also wrote to all homeowners living on the estate to seek their views on the potential regeneration plans and on the three rehousing options put forward for consideration; equity share, outright purchase or sell to the Council or housing provider.
- 7.2 32% of homeowners responded to the survey. Approximately 40% felt that one of the suggested options would suit them (with the equity share option being the most popular). 30% of respondents did not express a preference for any of the three options and wanted more information, while 23% indicated that none of the possible options would suit their personal circumstances.
- 7.3 Some homeowners wanted the flexibility to use part or all of their statutory home loss payment to personalise their homes (instead of putting 100% towards equity as proposed in the consultation).
- 7.4 There were also suggestions for the Council to widen re-housing options for homeowners by extending the equity share scheme to allow purchase of suitable homes off-site.
- 7.5 Opinions about the potential regeneration of the estate was also divided with 33% indicating that they were positive about the re-development but wanted to know more about how it affected them, 33% indicating that they favoured no action and were happy with the estate as it is, 33% either did not mind either way or did not know.
- 7.6 MS asked if SP had clarified what he meant by his "Like for Like" comment at former meetings. IP pointed out this comment was made before the change in Government policy and housing finance regime. LS added that things have moved on since then, although we have not specifically asked SP this is not relevant now.

- 7.7 DB commented that homeowners will not be able to find an equivalent sized home anywhere around this area. MJ observed that the average house prices for 3 beds are between £350k and £450k. LS and SB advised that prices change overtime and the value can go up or down in the next few years – it is difficult to predict. LS observed that from a homeowner’s perspective, it might be better if there was a downturn in the market (as this typically benefits movers who are moving to a more valuable home).
- 7.8 JL commented that the questionnaire did not state where the completed forms should be returned (it was only in the covering letter) so in future please put return addresses on the forms.
- 7.9 DB asked why homeowners have to sell their homes back to the Council as stated in the paperwork. LS responded that you could sell privately but you would not get the 10% Homeloss payment. DB continued that many people want to buy these homes. LS responded that it is probably because they are aware of the regeneration plans and that as a homeowner they would be eligible to receive a Homeloss Payment in future.

8 Executive Decision/Next Steps

- 8.1 The Executive Report will be considered at an Extra Special Meeting on 16th May. The report will be sent to all residents by first class post after the Purdah period (4th May).
- 8.2 CW asked when is the latest date for questions to be submitted. It is usually a week before but LS / ZAS will find out and let the Group know. This will be included in the letters.

LS / ZAS

9. Public Meeting 23rd May – 4pm – 7:30pm drop in session

- 9.1 A public meeting (open to the wider community) has been planned on 23rd May at this venue from 4pm to 7:30pm. As the hall is not very large, it will take the form of a drop in session where people can talk more on a one to one basis with Council Officers.
- 9.2 A Special Regeneration Surgery will also be set up during the day.
- 9.3 Individual meetings will be set up with residents from early June to understand their requirements and inform the phasing process. JMJ observed that the first homes to be decanted would be in Firs Close. LS replied that this is what the indicative phasing plan shows but it is not set in stone and may change when we the project moves to the delivery phase.
- 9.4 SB invited people’s views on having the meeting here. DB suggested we do not lay out tables – just chairs.
- 9.5 HR asked what would happen next if the Executive made a decision not to proceed with the regeneration proposals. IP answered that there would need to be a rethink of options. LS stated that if the proposal were not supported then everyone would be informed. JL asked when this would happen. LS advised that residents could come to the meeting on 16 May or follow on twitter but an e-mail will be sent out to the Group the next day to inform them about what was decided.

ZAS

10. Any other Business

10.1 A date has not been set for the next meeting, as there is nothing new to discuss until after the decision on 16th May. LS asked if the Group wanted to meet in early June. Everyone agreed with this.

10.2 JG observed that as we are increasing homes from 178 to 243 homes, has anyone done any work on how that will impact on schools? BW stated the estate currently is made up of a large proportion of older families who do not have school age children. A comment was made that local school rolls have been either steady or slowly falling, so would be able to cope with increasing local demand. LS/ZAS to pick up with school planning team.

LS/ZAS

10.3 IP pointed out that the Council has a new primary school strategy so that will be referenced.

Date of Next Meeting – Wednesday 6th June 2018 7pm at St Mary’s and St John’s Parish Centre.