

Barkham Parish Council Press Release

19 September 2017

Barkham Parish Council is very concerned that Wokingham Borough Council suddenly advised that Barkham Square is being assessed as a major development site as part of the Local Plan Update. This would mean extending Arborfield Green (the former garrison site) by at least 58 hectares on open land to the north of Arborfield Green, close to Barkham Street which is designated as an Area of Special Character.

Barkham Square was previously submitted as a possible development site as part of the Wokingham's local plan, Core Strategy adopted in 2010. However this was rejected by the Planning Inspector who considered it would not achieve sustainability benefits, would affect separation from nearby villages and would have an adverse landscape impact.

Barkham residents are already concerned about traffic congestion. This was identified as the main concern in a recent Residents Survey carried out for the NP. Expansion of Arborfield Green will inevitably lead to even more traffic having to use residential roads such as Barkham Road and Bearwood Road.

The Core Strategy allocated 3,500 homes for the garrison redevelopment, including some lands to the south at Hogwood Farm. So far just a few hundred homes have been built. Meanwhile the Hogwood development appears to have stalled completely while the lead developer at Arborfield Green recognises that the build out rate will be slow and consequently has arranged for a film company to use redundant buildings as a studio for up to eight years. In spite of progress being slow, the parish is already being expected to accept further expansion. Barkham Parish Council finds this totally unreasonable. -

Wokingham Borough Council has become a victim of unrealistic government policies. Based on the government's own figures, the number of planning approvals is far outstripping the number of homes being built. This suggests the real problem is not the supply of land but are due to a shortage of skilled workers and the temptation for developers to limit building rates to maximise the returns on their investment. In spite of this, the perceived solution is to grant yet more approvals and to lumber local councils with even higher building targets, over which the councils have no control.

To make matters worse, the targets do not specify what sort of houses are built. Though councils attempt to set targets for affordable housing, in practice developers try to maximise the number of larger 4 bedroom houses, which they find more profitable. As a result there is a desperate shortage of low cost starter homes which younger people can afford to purchase. These homes also need to be close to main employment areas to minimise the time and cost of commuting.

Laurence Heath, Chair of Planning at Barkham Parish Council said "The government's aim is to build more houses to solve housing shortages and to do so as quickly as possible. What they are getting is fewer houses and too many of these are of the wrong type in the wrong place."