

WBC GREEN BELT REVIEW

CURRENT POSITION

From our work on the Pyrford Neighbourhood Development Plan we know that everyone in our community really values the Green Belt that is a key to, and an integral, part of the character of the neighbourhood. Hence it is important to up-date you on the current position of the Green Belt Review (GBR), how Woking Borough Council (WBC) will choose Site Allocations for new housing development, demanded by the Government and what the Forum is doing on your behalf.

WBC is legally bound to review the Green Belt periodically and there is an obligation to facilitate the building of 292 houses per annum in the Borough. Once brown field sites and other land development has been exhausted then it is necessary to turn to the Green Belt to provide sites for housing in the period to 2040

WBC were advised that Green Belt land is required to meet their obligations and commissioned a Green Belt Review, to identify appropriate Green Belt development sites, from consultants, Peter Brett Associates (PBA). PBA reported back to WBC, in late 2013, and copies of the PBA Review were released by WBC, to the public, in the summer of 2014. What has happened since then?

FORUM ACTION

Pyrford Neighbourhood Forum (PNF) has been considering the PBA review since autumn last year. Whilst the planning issues are very complex it is also clear to the layman, that there are several discrepancies and contradictions in the PBA review. As a consequence PNF wrote on two occasions to WBC:

1. 29th December 2014 (see PNF web-site) - identifying discrepancies and detailing our views on the PBA review.
2. 24th March 2015 (see PNF web-site) - detailed our views on a planning application, to Guildford Borough Council, for 2,100 houses at Wisley Airfield and it's impact on our already overstretched road infrastructure, traffic congestion and safety as commuters drive through Pyrford to Woking and West Byfleet stations on their daily commutes to work. We also noted that this application was not mentioned in the PBA review. This development site is just over the southern boundary of WBC, close to Ripley, and on the far side of the A3.

WBC has not responded to either of these letters.

PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE

In April 2015 we were approached by a local resident who offered to sponsor our costs involved in engaging a top team of professional planners and solicitors to help counter the PBA review. We are now represented by LDA Design and they have worked hard in recent weeks to research the issues in greater depth and advise us. As a consequence LDA wrote to WBC, on our behalf, in a letter dated 7th May 2015 querying the Accuracy of the PBA review.

WBC have rejected the LDA offer to meet and discuss the objections, or, place their evidence before the WBC Executive, who are expected to meet and decide development site allocations on 4th June 2015. We will be responding to this WBC refusal to discuss at this time, very soon.

It should be noted that any local person or body is entitled to comment upon WBC actions and published documents and we and our agents have been repulsed or ignored on 3 occasions now.

PROCESS & THE ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE

We are advised it is fundamental that WBC proceed with the Green Belt review and Site Allocations on the basis of sound advice and we question the PBA review. The matter of actual Site Allocations will only be known to the public when the WBC Executive decides to publish the Site Allocation proposals. This is scheduled to be shortly after the WBC Executive meeting on 4th June 2015.

Because our three representations have been repulsed we are concerned that the draft Site Allocations DPD document may be founded on poor and erroneous information. We feel it is essential that the WBC Executive are fully appraised of valid correspondence and approaches from planning specialists on our behalf but this will not be allowed until after the Executive have actually proposed site allocations on 4th June.

Please note that we are not, at present disputing Site Allocations because these are as yet unknown but that we are objecting to the accuracy and construction of the PBA review which is the cornerstone of the process.

Once proposals have been announced on 4th June they will be published locally and all residents and local stakeholders will be invited to contact and discuss with WBC over a period of 6 weeks.

WBC is bound to take all comments during the 6 week consultation period into account prior to submitting a Delivery DPD document to the Secretary of State for examination. This Delivery DPD will be subject to a local public examination by an Independent Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State and everyone supporting or opposing the proposals is entitled to be heard. The Inspector is bound to ensure that delivery of houses down to 2040 is achieved on the basis of data available to him. WBC will receive a report from the Secretary of State and only after taking it into account will the Delivery DPD be adopted and binding.

In the past, Inspectors have heeded valid and persuasive local views and have adjusted Delivery DPD recommendations but times are now different. Land values are much greater as is the need and the pressure to deliver is now much greater. Pyrford has a proud record of putting its case with success but we must not be complacent in the light of the current real threat to our Green Belt.

THE WAY FORWARD

We are continuing to try and get our reasonable proposals discussed prior to 4th June and when the Site Allocation DPD document is published will take whatever reasonable action is necessary to oppose materially adverse proposals. We must all be aware that landowners are entitled to submit proposals also and we are not privy to these details. We are very grateful for all your support to date and to our sponsor who has given us the resources to put up a technically competent argument to WBC and deal with the Site Allocations when they are announced.

We will continue to strive for the best interests of Pyrford and you will realise that as population grows then provision must be made for housing. Many areas of the Borough will be affected by change and our aim will always be to ensure the impact upon Pyrford is contained so that we can maintain the character of our village.