

18th November 2021

James Whiteman, Managing Director
Tom Horwood, Chief Executive Designate
Guildford Borough Council
Millmead House
Millmead
Guildford GU2 4BB

Dear Mr. Whiteman and Mr. Horwood,

Formal Complaint - Guildford Borough Council Planning Committee 14th July & 3rd November 2021

I have been asked by my Council to write to you about matters relating to the handling and decision-making process of two planning applications namely Manor Farm (Ref: 20/P/02067) on 14th July and Oakland Farm (Ref: 21/P/00917) on 3rd November, both of which have concerned my Council greatly and likewise a significant number of residents of West Horsley.

Both these applications are allocated sites within the Local Plan and carry with them a presumption in favour of development. The Council is acutely aware of this. Equally, it is very mindful of the consequences of such large scale developments on the character of the Village, its local infrastructure, flooding and traffic. Its adopted Neighbourhood Plan, and the policies contained within it, is part of the Development Plan for the Borough and therefore is expected to be given due weight in the decision-making process.

The Council's complaint centres on the following points:

- The Parish Council (PC) is a statutory consultee and had submitted a very detailed letter of objection supported by evidence to both applications. The Committee was told that PCs were not and had to be corrected in the meeting on 14th July; again, the Committee appeared similarly unaware on 3rd November of this status. Such absence of understanding of the statutory status of PCs is unacceptable.
- The Neighbourhood Plan adopted in late 2018, and therefore well known to GBC, specifically addresses policies on density, design, character, bio-diversity and infrastructure. They resulted from extensive engagement of residents who remain well aware of them. The Committee, on both occasions, paid scant regard to these policies dismissing them as of little relevance. This is unacceptable. The Committee should give due consideration and weight to such policies not treat them as irrelevant.
- Speakers on behalf of the PC and residents made cogent statements regarding flooding, traffic, density and design, and lack of school placements, raising a number of salient points

requiring answers. At worst these were ignored and at best responded to by an officer who quoted examples in Woking which bore no resemblance to the issues in rural West Horsley. There was no debate within the Committee to consider these points.

- Speakers, particularly in relation to Oakland Farm, drew attention to flooding and sewage overspill. Again, there was neither debate nor recognition of the illustrations demonstrating the enormity of the regular experience of residents in this regard. There is no confidence in the statements that mitigation strategies will alleviate the concerns. The absence of debate adds weight to the belief that it is considered of no consequence.
- The role of the Chairman is to facilitate debate and ensure proper procedure is followed. It is not to stifle debate, rubber stamp without discussion and show bias. Observing the process for these applications, the Chairman's attitude, tone and approach did not permit reasonable consideration rather a push to approve both with the minimum of challenge.

My Council is deeply concerned that fair process has not been displayed in the consideration of these two applications, rather that they must be approved at all costs. The handling of the meeting by the Chairman indicated bias and a distinct unwillingness to allow any challenge to points made including that of expert advice.

The experience of both meetings does not breed confidence in the fairness and robustness of the decision-making process but rather increases the cynicism that applications are a "done deal" irrespective of the very real concerns, supported by evidence, brought by residents and Parish Councillors to the attention of Guildford Borough Council.

We look forward to hearing your response to these matters.

Yours sincerely

Julia McClung
Clerk & RFO to the Council

Copy to:

Cllr Joss Bigmore, Leader Guildford Borough Council
Ian Doyle, Director of Service Design, GBC
Tom Hunt, Lead for Development Management, GBC
Diane Owens, Monitoring Officer, GBC
Cllrs Catherine Young, Christopher Barrass, Tim Anderson, Clandon & Horsley Ward
Cllr Colin Cross, Surrey County Council