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The Parish Clerk
Shinfield Parish Council
Shinfield Parish Hall
School Green
Shinfield
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www.bellway.co.uk

7th March 2019

Dear Councillors,

In light of various rumours and speculation being circulated in recent weeks regarding Bellway's current Planning Application for Land South of Cutbush Lane, Shinfield for 249 dwellings, it has been considered appropriate to provide an update to the Parish Council in order to provide an accurate record of the current circumstances in respect of Planning and various works being undertaken on site.

Planning Application

As Councillors of the Parish Council will be aware, the Planning Application for 249 dwellings was placed on Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Committee Agenda on the 13th February 2019 with an Officer recommendation for approval. However following the refusal of the preceding planning application for an extension to the existing Langley Mead Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), the planning application by Bellway for the residential development South of Cutbush Lane was withdrawn from the Planning Committee Agenda, not the Planning System. The planning application is therefore currently still live.

The reasoning behind the withdrawal from planning committee was that the residential application had been unnecessarily linked solely to the extension of the SANG at Langley Mead and following the application being refused, Members of the Planning Committee would not have had sufficient information or opportunity to properly consider the alternative SANG provision which already exists within the local area. The proposed development South of Cutbush Lane generates a SANG requirement of 1.03 hectares.

Despite the Langley Mead extension being the original option for the sites SANG provision, after further investigation the University of Reading already has existing SANG capacity within Shinfield which benefits from a Reserved Matters approval, and can be allocated to the development at Cutbush Lane, Shinfield. This will satisfy the requirements of both Regional and Local Planning Policy in terms of limiting the impact of Bellway's proposed residential development upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. On the basis this SANG solution is acceptable to Wokingham, which we strongly believe it will be, the application will therefore be presented back to the Planning Committee in the near future.

Whilst the Parish Council will be aware of the planning context for the site, given some of the comments currently being circulated online, there is obviously a significant level of misunderstanding within the local community and therefore it is considered worth noting that the site is formally allocated for housing within the Wokingham Borough Core

Strategy (2010) and it also forms part of the wider South of M4 Strategic Development Area as demonstrated through the South of the M4 SDL Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (October 2011).

Notwithstanding the above, through the planning permission for development at Shinfield West, an agreement was entered into by the University of Reading, which prevented the Cutbush Lane site being brought forward until 2026, unless required earlier.

Following this, in July 2017, Wokingham Borough Council's Executive Committee, took the decision to lift this restriction and invited a planning application for the current application site and the land to the south (north of Arborfield Road) to come forward to boost housing supply and to limit various speculative planning applications in the Borough. It is only following this invitation that Bellway and the University of Reading jointly submitted the current planning application.

The site, which falls within the Development Limits of Shinfield is also supported by Policy 1 of the made Shinfield Neighbourhood Development Plan, which was supported by Local Residents through referendum by 87% of those who voted.

Current Works on Site

Whilst the planning application awaits determination, Bellway, as we have done for the previous 24 months, will continue to carry out various site investigations, maintenance and utility works. To note, the works outlined below do not require planning permission in their own right and are not contrary to any planning law or legislation.

Works that have been/are proposed to be undertaken over the current months include:

Works to Historic Sewage Pipes

It has been noted that various comments have been made in respect to diggers and tankers appearing on site on Wednesday 27th February. The equipment was required on site in order to facilitate the capping off of an historic disused sewage pipe by Thames Water which runs across the land.

This work involved the breaking of the pipe at either end of the northern field to cap the pipe in order to prevent waste leaching into the ground and the pumping out of sewage that had been sat in the pipe for many decades.

Tree, Scrub and Vegetation Clearance

The site, which is privately owned by the University of Reading, has not received any meaningful site maintenance for the last few years. As a result much of this is now starting to become unkempt and overgrown, and as such Bellway, with approval of the University of Reading are undertaking maintenance works to these areas prior to the spring/summer growing and bird nesting season.

The works are being undertaken with supervision of professional ecologists, arboriculture and forestry consultants to ensure that the works are carried out in accordance with the relevant legislation and do not need Planning Permission to carry out. For the avoidance of doubt, no mature or protected trees within the northern and southern tree belts will be removed.

General grass cutting and the cutting back of hedges will also be undertaken, where required.

Archaeology

Through the planning application, Wokingham Borough Council's Archaeological consultants have required that intrusive ground investigations be undertaken across the site to assess the potential for underlying archaeology.

The investigative works will involve the excavation of 39 trenches, which will involve the use of mechanical plant for approximately 4 weeks. This work may commence in mid to late March subject to the completion of the appointed Archaeologists current dig.

Grounding of Overhead Cables

Overhead Low Voltage Electricity cables currently run along the northern boundary of the site adjacent to Cutbush Lane, which are intended to be removed with the cables put into the grass verge adjacent to the main carriage way. This work will be undertaken during the week commencing 18th March 2019 by the electricity board. Again, this work does not require any form of Planning Permission.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the above provides a useful update of the various works which will be occurring over the coming months and also in clarifying the position in respect of Bellway's current planning application for 249 dwellings.

We remain committed to delivering this site and when Wokingham Borough Council are ready to have the site reconsidered in front of the planning committee, it will go before members with an Officers recommendation for approval which we hope will be agreed with on the night.

If you could distribute this letter to all of the Parish Councillors and also publicly via your mailing list or social media channels it would be very much appreciated.

Yours Sincerely