

Wisley New Settlement

Public Inquiry into the Appeal: APP/Y3615/W/23/3320175

By Taylor Wimpey against the refusal by Guildford Borough Council

Closing by Adrian Wise on behalf of himself and
The Cobham Conservation and Heritage Trust

Introduction

1. We strongly object to this application, the more so after hearing over 30 days of voluminous evidence presented over a three-month period.
2. At the outset, we emphasise that the developer has treated the Inquiry with disdain. The application was not ready when the developer appealed. Many aspects were being designed and the impacts considered, “on the hoof” as the appeal progressed. Even at the end of an unnecessarily protracted process, when all parties were finalising their closing statements, key details were still missing. We really hope the Inspector can find a way to “encourage” developers to stop showing such disrespect of the system. In this case this behaviour has cost the Inspector, the council’s and all the concerned local parties undue and unrecoverable costs. This is quite wrong.

Fatal Flaws

3. This development finds no support in the development or the adopted local plan. While it purports to follow policy A35, as we have heard it fails comprehensively and, on many counts, to do so. This is not plan-led development as required by the NPPF.
4. This is a developer led development, the antithesis of a plan led development, presented as fait-accompli to the community. The grandiose mitigations initially bought begrudging partial acceptance from some parties and statutory authorities - but many of these have shown at this inquiry to be erroneous, inappropriate, unworkable and/or undeliverable.
5. The Local Authority carefully prepared its local plan, and GBC’s full council adopted it after local consultation and inspection. The developer cannot now ignore policy A35 because it finds it to contain inconvenient truths like a) no Burnt common slips, b) no

safe and convenient cycle route to Effingham junction, c) no main access via the Wisley Lane diversion, etc., are faults with the proposal that cannot be forgiven. These are fatal flaws, not just balancing items. (Council officers and/or their consultants cannot on their own waive policy A35 without reference to the public and the councillors, whose policy it is).

6. All parties accept that the site is unsustainable now. The appellant also accepted at the Inquiry that if they cannot make the site sustainable that the inspector should refuse the appeal.
 - a. The appellant claims he will make the site sustainable but only by the end of the development, at least a decade from now. Ipso facto this means that Taylor Wimpey will impose the misery of a ten-year development phase on this rural community for the sake of a site that all through this period will remain unsustainable. It was quite shocking that the appellant had made no plans to accommodate the development traffic – still worse the developer is now determined to access the site with his heavy development vehicles via unsuitable country lanes. The protestation that Taylor Wimpey's lorries can ignore the weight limits for access did not sit well with me - and while lighter vehicles (hundreds every day) are notionally acceptable a caring developer would not suggest this either. The community damage from this development traffic is unthinkable.
 - b. However, even with all the developer's contorted schemes, the site would still be unsustainable at the end of the development as it is now. The Inquiry has found the cycle routes wanting – notably those to Horsely station, West-Byfleet and of course Cobham (along Plough Lane). The bus services only serve the site-residents and include the misrouted service to Cobham (along Plough Lane). The traffic scheme came with traffic modelling to justify it, but this was risible (one way lanes with passing places modelled as two lane urban roads, Ripley high Street shown to be at maximum capacity in peak hours – claimed as a triumph as therefore no extra traffic could pass down it!, Traffic leaving the site supposedly not heading to the A3, Ockham roundabout clearly overloaded and dangerous, etc.), was risible. No on-site Secondary School (finally admitted as offsite but with no safe and convenient cycle route to it), no medical facility, no local supermarkets, train stations miles away, all the employment off site, etc., etc. In short WNS would be a mainly a dormitory facility. Unsustainable.

7. The appellant has not found a way to successfully manage the site in perpetuity. Its community Trust has no guaranteed Trustees, even the council has refused to promise participation. Nobody believes the same group of what will be lay representatives can run the SAN, Busses, Road maintenance, Being a landlord over endowed assets, Shop rentals, etc. AND nobody can understand why when the area has specialist groups doing each of these things, that Taylor Wimpey is not proposing them. The appellant must rethink this whole structure.

Cobham Matters

8. The Inquiry heard that Cobham is one of the communities that the development if most likely to be adversely affected. However, Taylor Wimpey is not proposing any mitigation of any of this impact. Taylor Wimpey have overlooked Cobham & Stoke D'Abernon station - it is by far the cheapest and fastest route to London for commuters and not much farther than Effingham, yet Taylor Wimpey is offering no car park improvements, access, or bike/e-bike provisions, etc. Cobham village is the closest district-centre for shopping, yet Taylor Wimpey is not proposing a cycle route to the shopping area, nr cycle parking or e-bike charging. The Sainsbury supermarket is the closest to the site, yet the bus service route avoids it. Plough lane is suggested as the route for cars, bikes and even busses despite its unsuitability. The Inquiry even heard that even while SCC had completed the proposed engineering analysis and the works suggested by it, which had not fixed the fluvial flooding (how could it), that another study would now solve the problems. This was insulting.

Planning Balance (If this still needs considering)

9. As I set out in my first statement to this Inquiry the appellant claims that several benefits of its proposals should be weighed in its favour. However, the secretary of state weighed all these and disregarded all but one at the previous appeal of a similar scheme. The Inspector should now disregard these too on the same grounds. Affordable houses, etc., are simply requirements of policy A35 not extra benefits, the few jobs at the retail stores of they are rented are not material, etc.
10. The only possible benefit for the Inspector to consider therefore is the provision of houses. The inquiry heard that GBC's local plan is for ~14000 (far more than its OAN of ~10500) so even without WNS GBC would over provide its OAN. We also heard that the real requirement was for far less than 10500 as the ONS have now uncovered an

error to do with students that they are correcting. We also are awaiting publication of a new NPPF that will change the standard method and cease Green Belt boroughs needing to release Green Belt (such as Wisley) to meet housing targets. We have also heard that the Appellant does not intend to deliver any social rented homes. In short, the inspector should apply no weight to the provision of houses at this site. They serve no public need.

11. Against the flimsy benefit the inspector must weigh a panoply of significant harms. These harms are all significant as I set out from the beginning, and no evidence has convinced the inquiry that Taylor Wimpey as dealt with them. Au Contraire. To recap these harms, include a) the development will fundamentally harm the character of the area – as it was last time but this time, we also face 120 traffic calming measures all lit up, b) the SAN will be existentially damaged by marauding cats, dogs running off lead, countless extra visitors... c) Taylor Wimpey will “rehome” the Skylarks (sic), d) Taylor Wimpey will rehome the Badgers, e) we will lose BMV farmland. f) our Heritage assets will be damaged, etc., etc. It is also clear as the council has said so that the emerging local plan revision, due in just a few months, will reinstate the site’s Green Belt status and therefore its protection must be weighed too.
12. Overall, this development would fly in the face of vital protections of national and local policy and even if the inspector does not refuse for these reasons alone, she should anyway refuse because it would only benefit the appellant’s shareholders yet cause many significant planning harms.
13. We have kept the foregoing short - not repeated our opening statement or the two position papers submitted during the Inquiry. The matters have been fully aired by the Inquiry and we think must now be clear.
14. Madam, we therefore request, for the reasons set out above, that you should refuse permission on this occasion.

Adrian Wise

Cobham

18 December 2023