

10 reasons for NOT building 4,500 houses at Hall Farm.

1) Flood risk

- i) The flood plain along the Loddon not only protects large parts of Wokingham, it also protects areas down stream by allowing the flood water to be slowly absorbed naturally. To build here not only damages Wokingham but also Basingstoke.
- ii) Climate change means flood risk will increase over the proposed build time of 30 years. The scale of increased flood risk cannot be predicted with any certainty. Who will be liable if or when the new houses are flooded?
- iii) The flood plain here cannot be built on so the Loddon Valley Garden Village (LVGV) requires the purchase of land from local farmers. This not only changes the rural nature of the area but also takes farmland out of productive use.
- iv) Houses will increase the flood risk further by preventing water absorption and adding to run off from hard surfaces.

2) Growing food

- i) As local M.P. Sir John Redwood asked of Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in November 2022: "What steps the Department is taking to encourage more domestic food growth to help reduce the level of importation of food and the consequent impact on the environment?" Answer: "Action in these areas is essential to ensuring sustainable food production for a growing population, whilst building resilience for farmers and a just transition to reduce emissions and reverse harmful impacts on biodiversity".
- ii) The University of Reading (UoR) has already sold much farmland in the area to housing developers. It will do the same again if it can. This speculation in the property market detracts from the research and education the University engages in and fuels the market in the types of houses that are most profitable, not the most needed. This is harming the long term sustainability of the Borough and should not be encouraged.
- iii) Growing food locally has the potential to not only provide food, but also to provide useful community activity that could counter anti-social behaviour.

3) Infrastructure

- i) The Strategic Development Location (SDL) model is a failed model for delivering good quality houses with the necessary support infrastructure. Notably it is not within the remit of developers to deliver such essential services as Medical Services. All they can do is make promises to provide space, as at Arborfield Green.
- ii) Hall Farm is extremely lacking in existing infrastructure. Adding the required roads will be particularly problematic because of the amount of existing congestion in the area. The cost of the infrastructure required necessitates a lot of houses to be built, which will take a long time to build, increasing the negative impact on the community and the environment.
- iii) The move towards lower CO2 emissions will not be served by building at Hall Farm as there are no public transport links here.

4) Biodiversity

- i) The Loddon Valley at Hall Farm has good natural biodiversity, well supported by areas of ancient woodland and extensive wetland. There will be a net loss of this biodiversity if houses are built here, at a time when we really need to be working

towards net gain. So called “mitigation” measures will not compensate for the loss of wildlife habitat.

- ii) This area, between two major towns and surrounded by many smaller villages has the potential to form an important green corridor. Other important areas of natural habitat, such as the Coombes and Bearwood Lake are close by and the opportunities for extensive rewilding could make this area a significant contributor to increasing, rather than decreasing biodiversity.

5) Need

- i) The amount of housing required has been predicated on a now largely discredited formula from National Government. The efforts of local politicians to have the numbers imposed on us reduced are starting to show results and the actions of politicians in other areas have also worked to change this number from a requirement to advisory. It was never a number we recognised as based on local need for local people. Rather, it has been aimed at bringing in more people from outside the area. Some Authorities are setting their own targets based on local need.
- ii) It is not just the numbers of houses proposed at Hall Farm that go beyond local need. It is also the type of housing being proposed that does not fit local requirements. We have a disproportionately elderly population that would be better served by smaller homes allowing them to “downsize”, thereby freeing up more of the larger homes they currently occupy. Supported living accommodation for those with disabilities and infirmities and affordable flats for key workers would be more useful to Wokingham residents going forward than more 4 or 5 bedroom detached houses.
- iii) The identified need here seems to be more for large profits for land bankers and developers than for solving Wokingham’s housing needs. Is this really in the best interest of Wokingham rate payers?
- iv) It is noted in other parts of Berkshire they are making much more use of Brownfield sites. Is the attraction of building a single large SDL at LVGV largely determined by the ease of dealing with a greenfield site and predominantly one large, highly compliant landowner?

6) Heritage

- i) It is not at all clear how the valuable local heritage will be protected with a housing development all around it. The Grade II listed ancient monument which is the remains of the 14th Century Church and Churchyard is not only consecrated ground, it is part of a much valued local heritage, including an avenue of chestnut trees that is seems would be bisected by the LVGV main access road.
- ii) The Iron Age village of “Aeberfeld” that is presumed to be between the two rivers here has not yet been properly mapped or excavated.
- iii) This is also the site of the old paper mill and was once the site of Arborfield Hall. Sadly these are now lost, largely due to neglect by the owners: UoR. Other buildings at the site such as the old workers recreation hall are now also showing signs of neglect. It is clear that the UoR are not responsible custodians and it is not at all clear how heritage at the site will be preserved and protected.
- iv) There are many important listed houses in the vicinity. Carters Hill House and Mole Bridge Farm are both listed. This development will significantly detract from the historic landscape setting of these and other surrounding buildings.

7) Community

- i) Groups such as the “Fields Neighbourhood Action Group” consistently identify the following local issues as problematic: Anti-social behaviour, Traffic congestion, Lack of parking, Flooding and poor infrastructure provision. As community groups such as this constantly point out, 4,500 more houses in an already overcrowded area are only going to exacerbate these issues. They will make a bad problem even worse.
- ii) The rural character of what is left of the villages in this area is being steadily eroded. Meanwhile the large SDL’s being built only increase the breakdown of community cohesion by creating ghettos with no social spaces, particularly for young people.
- iii) We were asked for our opinion on the proposals and overwhelmingly the people who are being asked to put up with the consequences of 30 years of house building rejected them. The people in favour of building at Hall Farm do not live in this area. These proposals are dividing the wider community of Wokingham on the basis of who can afford to live in the “Green Belt” and those that are to be left without access to green fields.
- iv) The Officers of the Planning Department are not qualified to judge what makes a “community” and have not been voted for by the community. This is a political decision and as such must be the responsibility of our local Politicians. Preferably a clear indication should be given of what our community can expect from our representatives before the Local Elections in May 2023, or are we to be denied the opportunity to express our opinion on where the housing needs of Wokingham will be met at the ballot box?

8) Equity

- i) A much quoted statistic regarding houses in Wokingham is that 97% of development has been in the South of the Borough and only 3% in the North. Clearly this is dependant on many factors such as where you draw the line between North and South and how you count your “development” but it is undeniably true that areas South of Wokingham have borne the brunt of housing built in the last 10 years.
- ii) Regardless of planning regulation, land classification and target numbers imposed from above it is simply not fair to expect the same areas to accept all the housing while other areas employ expensive lawyers and accept none.

9) Climate Emergency

- i) Wokingham have declared a Climate Emergency and are engaged in a number of measures to combat Global Warming at a local level. Foremost among these are to plant 25,000 trees. It makes no sense therefore to cut down mature trees as can be found at Hall Farm. It would make much more sense to persuade UoR to allow the land here to be planted with more trees, thereby making more of the potential for trees to capture and store carbon.
- ii) Building the houses that really are needing to be built near existing public transport will encourage more people out of their cars. The LVGV proposal is another example of planning for increased car dependency.

10) Local democracy

- i) The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood plan has many clear arguments against this kind of development in this area. Are we expected to be bought off with millions of pounds in CIL money?
- ii) The Shinfield Neighbourhood Plan has already been largely ignored with, I suspect, considerable “Buyers remorse”. A Multi million pound community centre will not replace the woods, fields and clean air lost.

- iii) The consultation that took place between November 2021 and February 2022 and the views expressed by the people who live in this area have still not been properly analysed and presented. Stop hiding behind obfuscation and present the results in full.
- iv) The interfering by M.P.'s from neighbouring Authorities, such as Theresa May offering her approval of the LVGV, presumably because it takes a bit of pressure off her voters, is not only unwelcome, it is undemocratic. Without putting her name to her comments and hiding behind anonymity she has sought to unduly influence our consultation.
- v) The delay in getting a decision on the LPU is leading to increased speculative development proposals. These are affecting property prices and in some cases preventing people from selling their houses. The people blighted by this proposal are suffering undue pressure because of a lack of a decision. The prevarication on making a decision for what are clearly political, not planning related reasons.