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BARKHAM PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes** of the meeting of the Barkham Parish Council held on 13th February 2024 in the Studio Hall, Arborfield Green Community Centre at 7.30pm.

**Present**: Mrs Stubbs (in the Chair), Mr Wrobel, Mr Barker, Mr Sheth, Mr Dexter, Mr Edgecombe, Cllr Pittock (Ward Councillor) and the Clerk.

**24/017 To receive and accept any apologies for absence** Local Government Act 1972 Sch12

Mr Heyliger – On holiday

**24/018 To receive any declarations of interest on items on the agenda** (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012/1464)

None

**24/019 Minutes of the Council Meeting** LGA 1972 Sch 12 para 41(1) **–**

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 9th January 2024 were approved and signed as a true record. The minutes were signed by Mrs Stubbs.

**24/020 Public Participation (allotted time 15 minutes)** Public Bodies (admissions to meetings) Act 1960 s.1 extended by the LG Act 1972 s.100

Adjournment of the Meeting will be called if any members of the public wish to address the Council on any matters or concerns relating to Barkham.

1 resident attended to listen to the meeting

**24/021 Planning**:

1. **Planning Applications –** Council discussed and agreed any comments or objections on planning applications received before 13th February 2024. As follows:

**240179** – Land East Of Barkham Manor, Barkham Road, Wokingham, RG41 4TH

**Full application for the proposed erection of 3No detached dwellings with detached double garages and associated access and landscape works.**

Barkham Parish Council strongly opposes this planning application for the following reasons:

PLANNING HISTORY

Barkham is a semi-rural parish where the landscape comprises farmland, wooded areas, ancient woodlands and hedgerows interspersed with discrete residential areas of varying age, scale and styles.

This site is on a hill and dominates a prominent position on Barkham Road which is the main carriageway running through the village to Wokingham. It separates the older part of the village comprising an Area of Special Interest – including Barkham Street and Barkham Manor - from the more modern developments of Coppid Hill and Barkham Hill (Bearwood Road) leading to Elizabeth Park.

There is an extensive planning history where the outcomes have consistently reflected the importance of this green space.

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1. PA 43766 – single dwelling and garage – refused Jan 1995 – appeal dismissed Mar 1995
2. PA 44643 – single dwelling and garage – refused Oct 1995 – appeal dismissed Sep 1996
3. PA 201292 – 4 dwellings and garages – refused Jul 2020 – appeal dismissed Mar 2021

The significance of this site was confirmed by the findings of the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) issued by WBC in Jan 2020 in support of the Local Plan Update. It was concluded that this location was not suitable for development as it ***‘would fail to achieve a satisfactory relationship to the existing settlement and is more related to the open countryside’.***

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The applicant claims in Section 1.08 of the Design and Access Statement that this current application – PA 240179 – differs from the 2020 application - PA 201292 - in that the number of dwellings has been reduced from 4No to 3No and that the earlier application was more urban in appearance.  Neither of these points addresses the main reasons why PA 201292 was refused – a decision that was upheld on appeal – which are still relevant today and succinctly reviewed below:

1. ***Encroachment of countryside and expansion of development away from original buildings.***

The site lies outside the existing settlement area and forms a green space between the above-mentioned settlements. The proposed development would be in contravention of several local planning policies which include: CP1, CP11, CCO2, TB21, IRS1 and IRS2.
2. ***Impact on heritage assets.***

The proposal will impact the inward and outward views at the front and, hence, the setting of Barkham Manor. There is a strong historical connection between the heritage asset and this field as they used to be part of the Barkham Manor estate. Relevant local planning policies include: TB24, TB26 and IRS4.
3. ***Impact on the character of the area which includes an Area of Special Character.***

This development will contribute to an urbanising effect in a conspicuous location of the village which is incompatible with several local policies including: CC03, TB21, TB26 and IRS3.
4. ***Impact on Biodiversity.***

Although a significant clearance of the site and its boundaries was undertaken in advance of this planning application, there is more of a chance that the biodiversity will recover if this proposal does not proceed. Relevant local policies include: CP7, TB23 and ISR3.

5 YEAR LAND SUPPLY

With respect to the applicant’s comments made in Section 1.4 of the Planning and Heritage Statement re WBC’s Land Supply, it should be noted that the proposal is to build three high specification dwellings - not much needed affordable dwellings - a mere 0.5% of WBC’s current annual target build. Hence, any benefit of this project would NOT outweigh the considerable harm caused and NOT tilt the balance in favour of sustainable development as stated in Section 11 d) ii of the Dec 2023 update of the NPPF.

CONCLUSION

This small development of high specification dwellings is not appropriate for this greenfield and non-sustainable countryside site. Barkham Parish Council urges that is rejected.

In the event that WBC is mindful to recommend acceptance of this application then BPC requests that it should be listed.

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**240129** - Hogwood Meadows, Park Lane, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 4PT

**Application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the use of a converted stables as a residential dwelling.**

Barkham Parish Council had no comments on this application.

**240231** - Land at Rooks Nest Farm, Barkham

**Screening Opinion application for an Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed 2No Special Educational Needs schools.**

Barkham Parish Council had no comments on this application.

**240322** - Land at Biggs Lane and Venning Road, Arborfield, Reading, Berkshire

**APPLICATION FOR WORKS TO PROTECTED TREE(S) TPO 1427/2012, T3 T7, Oak - Remove to ground level. T8, Oak - Remove to ground level. T14, Oak (T3 on TPO) - Remove to ground level.**

Barkham Parish Council had no comments on this application.

1. **Approved and Refused Applications**

**232805** - 1 Church Cottages, Church Lane, Barkham, Wokingham, RG40 4PL

**Application for Listed Building consent for proposed replacement and repairs to fenestration.**

This application has been approved by WBC

7.40pm – Mr Edgecombe arrived at the meeting

1. **Any Other Planning Business**

**Draft Local Transport Plan Consultation**

Council decided not to submit a collaborative council response, but Councillors could respond individually if they so wished.

**Hall Farm Development Letter**

Council agreed the following response to the letter regarding the Hall Farm Development:

Parishes need to work together to suppress large planning applications and over development of the area.

Barkham Parish Council have no comments on the Hall Farm proposals at this time apart from 1 question. If the development doesn’t go on Hall Farm, where will it go.

The Clerk will draft a response to the letter based on the above information and will send it to Council to review before sending the response.

**Local Plan Update**

Council agreed to submitting a question to WBC on the Local Plan Update. Part of the question submitted will be to ask if the excess housing built so far can be considered as an exceptional circumstance under the NPPF. It was agreed that the question would be drafted and put to WBC at the March meeting of the Borough Council, and the question will be raised by Mrs Stubbs.

**Consultation on affordable housing**

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Council decided not to submit a collaborative council response, but Councillors could respond individually if they so wished.

**24/022 Ward Councillor Report –** Council received a report from Cllr Ian Pittock.

BARKHAM PARISH COUNCIL REPORT – 13 February 2024

1. I took up with the Leader of the Council the issue of Barkham PC being sidelined in consultations

and similar matters. Jackie Witney has offered a meeting to discuss. I will take this up but suggest

that a member of the PC accompanies me armed with some examples.

**BPC Comments:** Mr Dexter and Mrs Stubbs are attending a meeting with Jackie on the 14th regarding the community centre, so can speak with her then. If a follow up meeting is required, the Clerk will attend the meeting.

2. Rooks Nest Farm:

A. I have discussed with the Barkham Solar Farm Project Board the possibility of a piece of land

being made available for an extension of the churchyard or to create an area for cremated ashes

and remembrance. The project board is looking on this favourably upon this. The results of the

geophysics survey will need to be known before a commitment is given;

**BPC Comments:** The Water table will need to be considered. Mr Dexter will speak with the Church.

**BPC Comments:** The Liaison group is to be set up in September. BPC feel this is too late, and input into the scheme needs to be given now. Cllr Pittock is to raise this with WBC

B. I also discussed the impact on the heritage properties where the planting of screening

vegetation needs to comply with Historic England. Again, the geophysics survey needs to be

completed before a decision is taken.

C. The solar farm constructor, Bouyges, has changed its name to Equanes. Contracts have been

signed with a connection date of August 2026. It will involve a substantial increase in income.

The Solar Farm project is due to be discussed at the Overview and scrutiny Committee on the 29th February. This is to update on the name change of the contractors etc. The contract was under estimated in regards to income generated, and WBC will get more income from the farm.

D. Construction starts in April-July 2025 with highways work by SSEN laying cables to Edney’s

Hill.

E. The Covid Memorial Wood planting and other works will be carried out over November 2024 to

March 2025.

F. The two SEND schools are likely to be built from Feb 2025 to July 2026. We have applied for

WBC to build these rather than DfE which is over stretched. This would allow WBC to better

control highways issues arising from the range of activities around Rooks Nest Farm.

3. It is now confirmed that Mortimers Farm and Brooks Farm are both to be closed with the land being

used as an extension to the Rooks Nest Country Park. Work will commence in early 2025, this will

be internal earth moving, path creation and planting, so all on site. The internal single bar gate inside

the car park off Barkham Ride is to be improved to stop free running dogs from leaving the park and

entering the car park with access to the road.

**BPC Comments:** The last of the stables in being taken away as part of this project, leaving no where for residents to stable their horses. The development has promoted the use of bridleways as connecting the areas,

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and WBC need to consider the impact of removing the stables on this promotion of the area. Cllr Pittock is asked to raise this with WBC

4. The list of Valued Landscapes is still being reviewed, although I have accepted those for Barkham

Ward, which are extensive. The list will be made available as part of publishing the draft Local Plan

Update which is now planned to be discussed at the full Council meeting June 20024. This will a

Reg 19 process so will then go direct to Examination In Public by a government inspector, at which

point it becomes accepted by planning appeal inspectors.

5. The need for Bearwood Road footways to be re-surfaced was raised with Rebecca Brooks at the

quarterly meeting. I have considered the grassed footway on the west side of the highway leading up

to Coombes Lane. From experience, taking into account the Land Registry documentation and their

standard ruling, it is clear to me that this is Highways land. This needs to be pursued further with

Highways and Legal so that the footway can be paved.

**BPC Comments:** The pavement on the other side also needs looking at as it is uneven and difficult to walk along. Cllr Pittock is to raise this with WBC

6. It has long been intended that Commonfield Lane be improved. Consideration has been given to

widening the road to facilitate two-way traffic and allow buses, but there is a lack of land to do this.

Also, making the road one way, but whichever way was chosen would be seen as unsatisfactory by

residents and it would encourage faster speeds. Highways, in consultation with me, has made the

decision to properly surface five unofficial passing places; priority will be indicated by the side on

which passing place is not located. This work will be carried out immediately after the completion of

works at California Crossroads.

7. The issues covering the locations of the various green space facilities in Arborfield Green were

discussed with WBC Planning. These were decided about 10 years ago as part of outline planning

application and permission and cannot now be changed. The recent planning application

unfortunately failed to say that the car parking spaces being provided are in addition to current

spaces. The football pitches in the area that occasionally floods are to be raised. It has been

confirmed the sports facilities are for local residents; a much larger facility for wider football league

use is to be made available at Greys farm in Wokingham Without in 2027.

8. The swimming pool will not now be built at Arborfield Green due to a shortage of capital funds and

lack of land at that location. The pool will probably be built at a nearby location using funds and land

provided by the developer. I have suggested that this be co-located with a commercial data centre to

allow for exchange of heat and cooled water between the pool and data centre reducing energy and

costs for both.

**BPC Comments:** The swimming pool was promised, as was the medical centre. Residents were sold properties on this promise. We were told there was land and money ringfenced for the provision of these. Where has the money gone?

Cllr Pittock said the case needs to be made again and the provision of the swimming pool should be located in the southern parishes.

The medical centre is being prohibited by the CCG. It is hoped that the provision of the forthcoming developments, that the CCG will reconsider the provision.

9. Finally, I will be standing down at the local election in May this year in order to complete some

family plans thrown into chaos by Covid. I would be unable to commit to serve for the necessary

minimum of 2 years and potentially up to 4 years should I be re-elected.

**BPC Comments:** Sorry to hear you are stepping down, we wish you well.

**Other comments and questions from BPC:**

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Mr Dexter: As part of the extended SANG at Rooks nest, will there be more parking provision? Yes, it is planned to put a larger car park at the opposite end of the SANG. I asked this question to determine whether this would be an expansion of the current car park on Barkham Ride or an additional car park in the vicinity of Edneys Hill.

Mr Wrobel: In previous discussions for the barns at the Rooks Nest farm SEND School Sites, it was mentioned that Men with Sheds may be interested in one. Mr Wrobel confirmed this was not the case.

Ian Pittock

Borough Councillor for Barkham Ward

12th February 2024

**24/023 Delegated Authority Report December 2023**

The below decisions were made under delegated authority between January and February 2024.

**Finance**

**Tablet for speed watch sessions**

The laptop that was being used in conjunction with the new speed watch equipment was too slow and needed a replacement to be able to conduct speed watch sessions effectively. An appropriate and reasonable priced tablet was sought as a replacement. As it was needed before the committee could meet, it was agreed to be purchased under delegated authority to the Clerk and chairman of the committee and council.

The cost of the tablet was £169.00

**This expenditure was agreed in conjunction with the Chairman of the Committee and Chairman of the Council**

**Planks for The Coombes**

A request was made to the CWC for planks to cross small stream in the Coombes. It was suggested purchasing 2 scaffolding planks to be installed at the stream

The cost of the tablet was £50.00

**This expenditure was agreed by majority of The Coombes Woodland Committee and the Chairman of The Council**

**Internal Transfer of monies to Savings Account**

As there was a large sum of money in the current account which was not earning interest, it was recommended to transfer the money into the savings account, so that it can earn interest. A sum of the money will be transferred into the CCLS investment fund, once this has been set up. It was proposed to move £675,000 from the current account to the savings account.

**This internal transfer of sums was agreed by majority The Council**

**24/024 Clerks Report -** Council received a report from the Clerk

**Crossing the stream at The Coombes**

Planks were purchased to be installed at a stream in The Coombes. After installation, it was flagged as a health and safety issue, in which the Council’s would be liable for any incident. Due to this the planks have been removed and a project to install a proper crossing is being considered. The Planks are currently being stored pending any other uses for them.

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**Item Closed**

**Change over to BT Phoneline and Broadband**

The change of supplier to BT is still in progress. There have been further issues with the latest oreder to transfer, and these are being dealt with again.

BT have taken two payments from the council that total £206.12 and the Clerk has arranged a refund of this money, as BT should not have taken it. To prevent monies being taken again the direct debit has been cancelled until the transfer has taken place.

**Items ongoing**

**Communications**

The Clerk is looking into ways to further communications with residents

**Items ongoing**

**Bus Shelter at Barkham Road / Barkham Ride roundabout**

The Clerk has had permission from the land owner to site the bus shelter at the new location, and it is on the agenda to be progressed.

**Item closed**

**Enforcement Issues**

The Coombes – No update received

**Items ongoing**

**School Road / Langley Common Road Junction**

This has been agreed, but the work has not yet been completed.

**Item Ongoing**

**Meeting with WBC Executive Officers**

No further update at this time

**Item ongoing**

**Insight Strategy and Inclusion meeting with WBC**

The slides of the outcome of the meeting have been received. A further meeting is planned for March.

**Item ongoing**

**District and Community Centres**

The first meeting of the liaison group with crest was held on 31st January 2024. In attendance were representatives from Crest, WBC, CALA Homes, Pinnacle and other stakeholders such as the Parish Councils, Ward Councillors and Residents representatives.

The working group for the Community Centre is scheduled to meet on 14th February 2024.

**Item ongoing**

**Solar Farm**

No further update since the last meeting

**Item ongoing**

**California Country Park Improvement Scheme**

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No further update since the last meeting.

**Item ongoing**

**BVRA/BPC Survey**

The CIL advisory committee need to meet to discuss the CIL projects suggested by the residents to see if they are feasible to take forward. It was not possible to arrange a meeting prior to this meeting, but a date is due to be set.

**Item ongoing**

**Purchase of Litter Bins**

This project is ongoing.

**Item ongoing**

**Closure of Langley Common Road Underpass**

No further update since the last meeting.

**Item ongoing**

**Closed Items:**

**Treatment of the Bracken at The Junipers**

Treatment was undertaken in November

**Item closed**

**24/025 The Coombes Woodlands**

* 1. Council received and noted the draft minutes from The Coombes Woodland Committee
	2. Council received an update from the Coombes Woodland Committee on their meeting and any actions being undertaken:

The Coombes Woodland Committee (CWC) held its meeting on the 22nd January 2024.

At the meeting the following actions were taken or agreed.

Actions taken at the meeting:

* A management plan for the woodlands is in the process of being created.
* The works identified in the tree survey report are being undertaken in line with the timescales identified in the report.

The Timescales within the report are as follows: Priority 1 – to be rectified within 3 months; Priority 2 – to be completed within 6 months; Priority 3 – to be completed withing a year.

It was recognised that these works will need to work around the bird nesting season (1st March to August).

* It was agreed that a website will be set up for The Coombes Woodlands as a source of information to residents.
* It was agreed that the Committee would look into setting up a volunteer group to help manage the woodlands. Investigation of how best to do this has commenced.
* It was agreed that the first project that the committee would look to undertake is to improve the crossings of the streams in the woodlands with a bridge or boardwalk or similar.

**Other items arising after the meeting considered by the committee:**

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The Committee has been contacted by an ecology/arboriculture/landscape architecture company who wishes to use The Coombes for training their new recruits on different habitats. This is currently being looked into before a decision can be made.

**24/026 Finance**

1. **Accounts** – Council agreed the following payments for January to February 2024 LGA 1972 s150 (5)

|  |
| --- |
| Payments for January to February 2024 authorised at Council meeting on 13th February 2024 |
| S/O | Staff Wages | £1270.95 | February 2024 salary – LGA 1972 s111  |
| DD | Nest | £130.43 | Pension Contribution Employer & Employee – February – LGA 1972 s111 |
| DD | Plusnet | £32.14 | Internet and phone charges – February 2024 LGA 1972 s111  |
| DD | Lloyds Bank (Credit Card) | £227.88 | Credit Card bill – January Payments – LGA 1972 s111£3.00 – monthly fee£5.88 – Microsoft – MS Office Subscription£50.00 – Homebase – wooden planks for The Coombes£169.00 – Argos – Tablet for Speed Watch. |
| BACS | Tivoli | £71.78 | Bin emptying – February 2024 LGA 1972 s111 |
| DD  | Unity Trust | £18.00 | Account Charges (Paid in January) LGA 1972 s111 |
| DD | BT | £171.70 | Internet & Phone bill LGA 1972 s111 – **Taken in error, being refunded.**  |
| BACS | Amazon | £25.93 | Speed Watch accessories and office stationary LGA 1972 s111 |
| BACS | Arborfield PC | £6042.94 | Share of legal fees received so far for purchase of the Coombes Woodlands LGA 1972 s124 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010 (as amended) |

All payments were approved for payment.

1. **Error in January’s approved salary payments**

Due to the changes made by central government to National Insurance from the 6th January, the staff salary was reported incorrectly, as it had not taken the change into account. The salary paid was £1262.92 and with the change made it should have been £1270.95, so the salary paid was £8.03 short. Council agreed this shortfall being added to the February Salary and paid along with the other salary payment.

1. **Report on Monies received**

£137.95 – Arborfield PC – Payment for share of insurance for The Coombes

1. **Bus Shelter at Barkham Manor** – After the bus shelter by The Bull was destroyed,permission has been granted by Barkham Manor Ltd to site the bus shelter by the bus stop, near to their wall. The Council has already agreed to the terms of siting the bus stop at this location.
	* 1. Council agreed to moving the bus stop to the new location following the permission being granted.
		2. Council approved the Clerk to seek quotes for the new shelter in the new location, which include the clearing of the old shelter site, to be agreed at the next meeting of the Council. The funding for this is to be from the EMR for bus shelters, which contains the insurance payment and a reserve for replacement shelters.

Planning permission needs to be considered and looked into. Traffic management is likely to be required. The Clerk will see if the companies that provide quotes will apply for the necessary permissions, or whether it will be down to BPC to apply for them.

1. **CIL Projects**
	* + 1. **New Bins**

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Council considered purchasing 3 new bins to be sited at the junction of Sandy Lane & Barkham Road and at either end of the Sandy Lane footpath.

The Council agreed to use Gladson to purchase the bins. Council opted for the 50lt lidded waste bin being purchased for the 3 sites at a cost of £699.30 plus £76.83 for the mounting kits. Total cost 773.16

Council agreed to increasing the contract with Tivoli to get the bins emptied. The cost of emptying the bins by Tivoli is currently £29.90 per bin per empty per month.

Mr Wrobel raised that a further bin is required to replace the bin at the Coombes, which has been broken. This needs to be considered.

* + - 1. **Fly Tipping**

Council agreed to a trial of Fly Tipping cameras with WBC at the Commonfield Lane Location as previously discussed.

Council agreed to the trial consisting of 1 set of camareas with replacement batteries in the locations identified on Commonfield Lane as reviewed in the scoping of the project. The cost of the trial for 1 year is £2890. This money will be spent out of CIL.

* + - 1. **Pedestrian Crossings**

Council considered looking at CIL projects to install pedestrian crossings by Hazebroucke Meadows and by Farley Hill School.

Council agreed that these 2 projects should be looked into by the CIL Advisory Committee and the costs that would be involved, so that the Council can then make a decision on whether it can fund the projects through CIL.

9.30 – Vote to continue – All agreed

9.34 – The resident in attendance left the meeting

**24/027 Parish Office Operations**

**Parish Meeting**

Council considered what it wished to do in relation to the Parish assembly which is scheduled to be held in April. The Clerk is away on holiday, but as it is a meeting of the parish, the Clerk is not required to be in attendance.

Council agreed to hold the meeting in the clerks absence on the scheduled date in April.

**April meeting of the Council**

Council is considering what it wishes to do in relation to the Parish Council meeting scheduled for April. The Clerk is away on holiday, and dependent on whether the council has managed to successfully recruit a deputy, it may be necessary to cancel the meeting. Council will make a final a final decision at the March meeting

**Meeting venue for coming year**

The booking of the studio hall is up for renewal at the end of March. Council agreed to move a smaller meeting room for the meetings. The cost of the meeting room is £20 per hour.

**24/028 Councillor Forum**

Mr Dexter informed that there is a meeting on the 14th February to discuss the new community centre, and he and Mr Stubbs are due to attend.

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**24/029 Exclusion of public and press** Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 S1 (2)

Council agreed that, in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, the meeting was closed to the public.

The resident had already left the meeting, so the meeting was closed at 9.45pm, and Part 2 discussions began.

Part 1 of the meeting closed at 9.45pm

**Part 2**

**24/030 Minutes of previous part 2 meeting**

**24/031 The Coombes**