

News update from Friends of Winchcombe

West of Winchcombe – under threat from developers

For a great many years, Tewkesbury Borough Council has considered land at West of Winchcombe to be 'Unsuitable' for development. However earlier this year, the status of the land was changed by TBC to 'Suitable' for development.

This came about because TBC Planning department commissioned a land assessment with a brief to the consultants to 'grade' the land around Winchcombe into high, medium and low 'visual' and 'landscape' sensitivity. West of Winchcombe has always been classed as pure and simple AONB but now it is classed as "low" in both visual and landscape categories whilst remaining as AONB. 'AONB' is a national designation of land which has been identified for conservation due to its significant landscape value. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty enjoy levels of protection from development similar to those of UK National Parks. However locally, this seems to be being undermined.

This has opened the door for landowners and developers to make speculative planning application(s) for development.

Additionally, the inclusion of West of Winchcombe as a site promoted for development in the original draft Neighbourhood Plan will also have given encouragement to landowners and developers.

In the August Winchcombe Town Council meeting, the Council decided to postpone West of Winchcombe as a potential area for development within the draft NP, for approximately five years, while the impact of recent development is better understood on our services and infrastructure. Whilst this might be viewed as a welcome postponement, it will do nothing to discourage prospective developers of West of Winchcombe; at best this would be a delay to the inevitable.

Recently there has been a flurry of activity in the fields behind Delavale Road, Orchard Road and Mercia Road; land that lies within the AONB. A few weeks ago, the field immediately behind Delavale Road was cleared of trees and overgrowth and this has completely destroyed the habitat of a large family of deer that had been living in the area for years. More recently, the land has been surveyed and a surveyor operating in Delavale Road reported "that this was in preparation for a planning application for development of the land". It will be obvious to residents that to gain access to this field, at least one property adjoining the land would have to be demolished. It is a matter of fact that meaningful discussions have already taken place between a developer and a house owner in order to achieve access to the land.

The land has the potential for up to 286 dwellings. Apart from any other considerations, imagine the amount of additional local traffic that this would generate?

It is by no means certain that a planning application would be successful, but given Tewkesbury Borough Council's lamentable track record of defending declined planning applications on appeal, the future for residents of this area and Winchcombe as a whole looks bleak.

However, we are very concerned that developers will push forward with plans and we must be ready to object when they do and help to protect the AONB and our community as a whole.

Now for more bad news. You may have received a letter from Sudeley Castle outlining their plans for Almsbury Fields. The Trustees of the estate have granted an exclusive option to developers to seek planning permission to build on this green field.

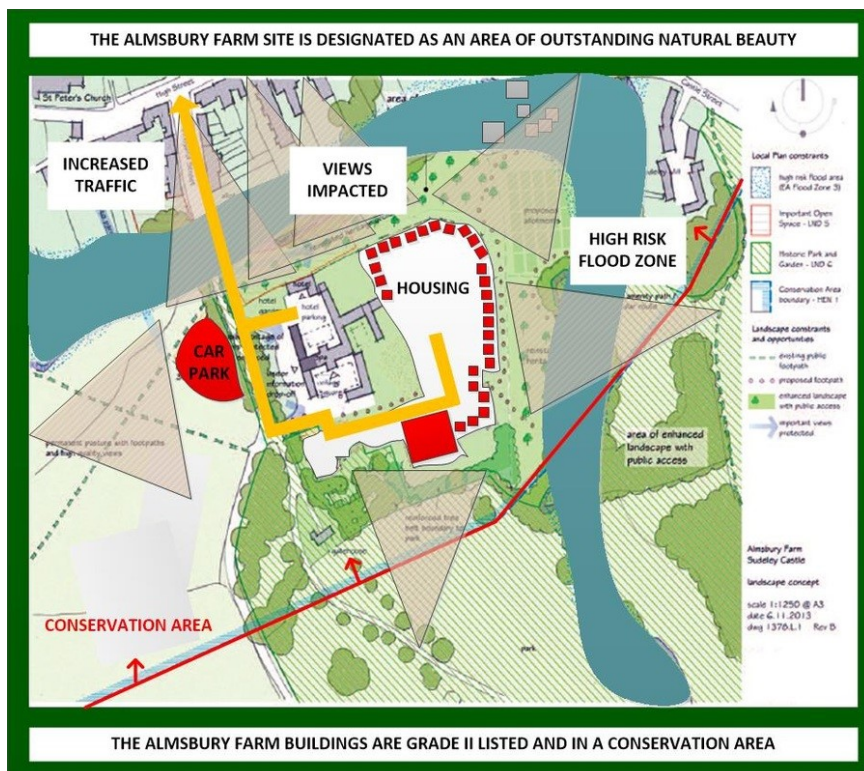
The letter from Sudeley Castle confirms the fears that many local people had when the Winchcombe Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group entered into discussions with landowners and promoted this green field site for development within the emerging draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Almsbury Farm Field- the specific developer's scheme

While few people have objected to the sensitive redevelopment of the unused agricultural buildings close to this location (in fact FOW would be in favour of a sympathetic and sensitive redevelopment of the farm yard, buildings and barns and modest development) however this scheme is to actually build on the adjacent farm field. Approximately 70 houses and apartments plus a Care Home are being suggested along with an additional car park for 40 vehicles on the opposite field (to the right of Vineyard Street as you walk from the town towards the castle).

While we are sympathetic to the needs of the Sudeley Estate to raise money from the sale of land, applying for planning on this field when seen in the context of Winchcombe as a whole is not suitable.

The proposed scheme at Almsbury Farm is entirely inappropriate with respect to the natural settlement boundaries of the Town, let alone its classifications as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, A Conservation Area, proximity to Grade II listed barns and Registered Historic Parkland.



We do not yet know exactly what the plans are for the scheme.

The developers will be presenting these on the 23rd Sept 15:00 -19:00
And 26th Sept 10:00-12.00.

However, this sketch highlights a few of the significant impacts.

FOW oppose this development for the following key reasons;

1. Destruction of an historic Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
2. Heavy volumes of Traffic in Vineyard Street and loss of safe walking access between the town and Castle.
3. Pressure on local infrastructure; (traffic, drainage & doctor's surgery)
4. Increase flood risk to homes downstream.

Further detail on these concerns include:

- Vineyard Street is not suitable for the increase in traffic movements.
- Considerable increase of traffic in Vineyard Street by residents of the new homes, deliveries, employees and visitors to the houses and care homes will create extensive vehicle movements in this historic street and over the bridge.
- With the increase of traffic, walking in Vineyard Street will become hazardous. Many, many locals and visitors walk along Vineyard Street every day, to and from the Castle grounds, it is known for its beauty and historic link between the town and the Castle.
- Removal of around 30 parking spaces in Vineyard Street to accommodate the additional traffic and site access, alongside additional demand from visitors and employees of the new development, are likely to lead to a net loss of parking spaces – not an addition as suggested.
- The free parking spaces that are already available in Vineyard Street encourage slow traffic movement and traffic calming, making it safer for walkers.
- Car Park on the opposite field will be an ugly addition and removal of further green fields.
- Due to the steepness of Castle Street and Vineyard Street, older residents will find it difficult to walk to the shops and services particular in winter. The location of the new Budgen's food store opening on Greet Rd and the location of our Doctors Surgery means that older residents will make more frequent car journeys not less.
- The field is situated between the two rivers which have limited capacity under the culvert and bridge;- water runoff from roofs and paved areas will significantly increase flood risk to properties in Castle Street, Silk Mill Lane and homes downstream.
- Housing in the borough should be considered as a whole and suitable brown field sites should be located first before accepting development in the AONB

In the Love Winchcombe campaign, 95% of over 400 people said it was very important to preserve the Winchcombe Area of Outstanding Beauty, (AONB)

In the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group Consultation more people thought this was not the best location for this type of scheme.

The provision of sheltered accommodation is in principle not a bad idea; however, in the Borough Council's 2012 housing needs survey of Winchcombe, only 5 households out of 811 respondents indicated a need to move to physically adapted or more secure accommodation - this is despite more than half of the respondents being over the age of 65. Sheltered housing is available locally with spaces at Blenheim Court usually available.

With homes in this type of development usually around £350,000-500,000 (see note 1 below) and care home places around £1000.00 per week **this is clearly not a scheme that is designed to meet any mass local need.**

We would encourage residents to visit the developer's presentation and also be aware that comments and feedback can be taken out of context. If you are not in favour of any aspect (see note 2 below) of the scheme we would advise you to make this clear in your comments to Tewksbury Borough Council at the appropriate time.

Currently we don't have sufficient available committee resources over the bank holiday to speedily hand deliver this communication to the whole of Winchcombe and Greet. We would ask therefore that if you have friends or neighbours in your address book who you think may not receive our email, please forward this to them. (Winchcombe and Greet residents only please). It's better to receive 2 copies than none at all!

Note 1 Figures from the developers website for properties being sold in Chipping Norton.

Note 2. When making comments on a planning application to TBC it is recommended that if you are not in favour of any aspect of an application being made then you should object fully and then make your comments known. It is then for the developer to resubmit revised plans if it chooses too.

For more information, please see www.lovewinchcombe.uk