

Compton PC Local Plan Sub-Committee Report (May, 2019)

Borough Election

Just the week before the borough elections, the former Guildford Borough Council chose to adopt the draft Local Plan, with the proposal to build 70% of all new homes on the green belt. This is despite election pledges by the Conservative party in 2015 that green belt would be protected. Furthermore, the plan is to build a buffer of 37% more homes than the objectively assessed need. The Local Plan was the major campaign issue for all parties in the build up to the Election.

At the Election, the number of Conservative councillors went down from 35 seats (won in 2015 out of the total of 48) to just 9. Deputy Leader Matt Furniss was voted out, along with other members of the Executive: Geoff Davies, David Wright (AONB Board Chairman), and Nikki Nelson-Smith.

The Lib Dems won most seats (17), and Labour 2.

The newly formed Residents for Guildford and Villages (R4GV) won 15 (out of 17) seats, and GGG, which was campaigning alongside them, won a further 4 seats. Compton Parish Councillor Ramsey Nagaty was among the GGG candidates elected.

We are now waiting to see what political alliances are made and who will be the new Council Leader. The vote for Leader takes place on Wednesday, May 15, 2019.

Review of the Local Plan

The prospects of stopping the Blackwell Farm development are potentially better under this new Council. Whilst the Lib Dems are split on the Local Plan, R4GV and GGG both pledged to try to review it.

Unfortunately, the Lib Dem Leader Cllr Caroline Reeve is claiming that her hands are now tied by Planning Law following the adoption of Local Plan (just days before the election). This may not be strictly true as it has been reported that it is possible for a local authority to ask the Secretary of State to revoke its local plan at anytime and it is written into legislation under *The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004*. (See <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/25>). It is also possible for a local authority to outline amendments (such as removing Blackwell Farm and “outside settlement boundaries of villages”) and to agree to simultaneously re-adopt the Plan.

We recommend that Compton PC writes to the new regime at GBC (and seek support from Anne Milton, MP) inviting it to urgently revoke the Local Plan under *The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004*, and to re-adopt the Plan with the Blackwell Farm site allocation removed and with the policy permitting infill development “outside settlement boundaries of villages” removed. The PC should point out that such a step would avoid the costs of a potential judicial review either by parish councils or by the Borough Council.

Judicial Review

Richard Kimblin QC has been formally instructed to assess the merits of mounting a legal challenge against the Blackwell Farm site allocation. The instruction was made via Richard Buxton Solicitors, who acted for Compton and Worplesdon PCs pro-bono. We are expecting Dr Kimblin's assessment of the case any day. If Dr Kimblin considers that there are good grounds for a JR and the High Court gives permission for the hearing, we may be better able to persuade the new Council to approach the SoS with a request to revoke the Plan and remove the BF site. Of course, the new Council may not do this, especially if Caroline Reeve (Lib Dem) is voted Council Leader. Cllr Reeve has been a stalwart ally of former leader Paul Spooner over the years, consistently voting in favour of the Local Plan, as she did at the adoption meeting on April 25th.

The groups defending the site known as Three Farms Meadows, the former Wisley Airfield, have agreed to apply for a JR on a number of grounds. If the groups win, Guildford Borough Council will be asked to review the housing number and could take out the Wisley site. If Compton PC doesn't do likewise, it risks Blackwell Farm being left in the Plan.

WAG meeting

On April 26, the Local Plan Sub-Committee met with Helen Jefferies (who leads the Wisley Airfield Group) to discuss opportunities for collaboration between the Wisley groups and Compton PCs in challenging the Local Plan through the courts. It was agreed that, should Compton PC decide to pursue a legal challenge, this would be as a separate claim to Wisley's, but that the two PCs would work together to avoid duplication of work carried out by their respective QCs and thereby reduce costs (for example we would not ask Richard Kimblin to look in detail at the housing number, as this area would be covered by the QC representing Wisley). It was also suggested that we use the same solicitor to file our respective claims, as there may be cost savings in doing so. Ockham PC will be represented by Richard Buxton Solicitors who will instruct Richard Harwood QC. Richard Buxton Solicitors has quoted £3,000 per PC for the work involved in filing a potential claim.

Puttenham PC AGM

On April 29, the Local Plan Sub-Committee attended Puttenham PC's AGM and gave a talk outlining the impact of the Blackwell Farm scheme on traffic through Puttenham. Around 40 residents attended the meeting, and the mood in the room was one of support for all Compton PC has been doing to oppose the site allocation. Our request for a financial contribution towards a potential legal challenge was met with a positive response by both the councillors and the residents, who almost unanimously raised their hands in a show of support.

The Local Plan Sub-Committee will notify Puttenham PC with regard to potential grounds for a JR.

Binscombe appeal

An appeal has been lodged against Waverley BC's decision not to build on the small field which borders New Pond Road and Binscombe Lane. Compton PC has previously objected to the planned development due to the impact on the village and on the nearby conservation area. Stephen Clarke (resident of Binscombe Farmhouse) has sent the attached letter, outlining grounds for upholding Waverley BC's original decision.

We recommend that Compton PC comments on this appeal and voices its support for the protection of this sensitive area.