

Friends of Old Woodstock

You were kind enough to give me your card at the Woodstock presentation concerning the planning of the 'Hill Rise' development.

Whilst it was most useful to hear you outline the process and answer questions, there was an element of frustration in that details have still to emerge about the local suggestions we have already submitted, few of which seem yet to be reflected in planning discussions.

Perhaps it is still early in the consultation process, but now that detailed and expert planning is taking place our fear is that discussions behind closed doors may result in fixed and established plans, without our suggestions being fully considered, discussed or answered.

From the outset, we have encouraged all residents of Old Woodstock (262 households) to participate in the survey conducted by Community First Oxfordshire (CFO). We have contacted every household with flyers, on two occasions, a public meeting attended by 71 residents, local meetings and workshops and the use of email and other forms of social media.

I have collated local views and we have worked very hard on making positive suggestions. I have to say that there remains a very strong element of outright opposition to this particular development, and this is being pursued in other ways.

I would like to set out a clear summary of the local perspective on how we see this development working, including the movement of the increased population in times to come.

1. Existing informal paths

There are currently informal paths from a gap in the houses in Hill Rise, along the backs of Nos. 19 – 35 Hill Rise and around the edge of the existing play area to give access to the Barn Piece housing estate (112 houses) and from there into Manor Road and on into the town. This is seen as an essential connection between the Hill Rise community and the Barn Piece community, as well as an access for Hill Rise families to the play area.

In reverse, it provides a connection between the Barn Piece housing estate and Hill Rise, and from there across the A44 to the community woodland path, and from there to connect up to the Oxfordshire Way into Blenheim parkland and other countryside.

What is suggested is a 'green corridor' between the back gardens of the houses in Hill Rise and the new development, to protect and encourage this connectivity as described.

Similarly, there is an informal path between Rosamund Drive and the existing play area, along the backs of the houses Nos. 1- 15 Vanbrugh Close, leading to an ancient path (mentioned in the 1760 Enclosure Act) known locally as Balliol Lane (original Manor House owned by Balliol College, path or driftway used by workers and animals to local fields). This lane leads directly north from the A44 to fields, immediately adjacent to the eastern edge of the new development site and a local 'permissive' path connecting to the public footpath from Woodstock to the next village of Wootton.

Again, we have suggested a 'green corridor' behind the houses in Vanbrugh Close, to provide connectivity for residents of Hill Rise, Barn Piece and other parts of Old Woodstock, as well as residents of the new development, to Balliol Lane and the countryside beyond.

Elsewhere in this note, new off-road routes from the new development to Woodstock schools are discussed, perhaps commencing in the vicinity of this part of the new development.

2. The play area and vehicular access to the new site.

The point has been strongly made locally that the existing play area is the only public facility serving the whole of Old Woodstock, it is greatly valued and well used for many years, and is well supervised, central and ideally located to serve the existing communities of Hill Rise, Barn Piece and the rest of Old Woodstock. If moved elsewhere within the new development, it will be removed from existing communities.

The suggestion has been made by the developers that the play area could be moved and even improved, in order to give vehicular and other access to the new development through Vermont Drive and

Rosamund Drive, passing the junction of Rosamund Drive with Vermont Drive and that with Vanbrugh Close. Local people are very strongly of the opinion that, even if this was not the only access to the new site, these roads and junctions are far too narrow to carry increased traffic from the whole newly developed area, now and for the future.

The developers have already suggested that all construction traffic will enter the site via an entrance from the A44 north of Hill Rise, moving the 30mph limit to include this. We do hope that they keep to this promise, and that the A44 is the **only** access to the new site.

3. **Safety on the A44**

The A44 Manor Road is the **only** pedestrian and vehicular route between Old Woodstock and Woodstock town. All our residents, including the new families occupying the developed site, **have** to use the A44 to get to the schools, doctors, shops, amenities and other parts of the town. This is a strategic route from south to north, and traffic has increased considerably in size and volume over the years and will undoubtedly continue to do so.

This road, particularly its junction with Farm End and at a bend outside the Black Prince public house, is narrow and dangerous, is closely bounded by buildings, and pedestrians are particularly at risk on the narrow pavements there. Lives are in peril here, have been for some time, and the solution is not simply to increase the population using it by half again.

Woodstock Town Council have unanimously passed resolutions to press the developers and County Council about finding mitigation for these specific locations, where they agree there is real and present danger, a catastrophe waiting to happen.

There seem to be very few possible solutions in relation to the road and the pavements themselves, except priority systems, hardly practical in relation to noise, air pollution and congestion caused by delayed traffic, or a bypass.

Two new off-road pedestrian and cycleway paths have long been suggested, one from the east side of the new development across fields, water meadows and a river to Glyme Close, for use by

schoolchildren to get to school. In order that one set of dangers on the A44 is not replaced by another set of dangers on this path (e.g. drowning, perverts), this would have to be well constructed and safe throughout its length, a hard surface, fenced and lit.

If it is not well constructed and seen as safe, parents will not allow their children to use it, and the increased numbers of schoolchildren will continue to use the dangerous A44 until a tragedy occurs. It is acknowledged that design, cost, negotiations with landowners and above all safety are all urgent considerations, none of which have been commenced by the authorities as far as we know.

The other essential off road route suggested would be for shoppers and others needing to reach the town, from Hill Rise across the A44 by way of a new signalled pedestrian crossing, and on via a new opening in the Palace wall to a safe path parallel to the A44 towards the town. Here there would be a choice of exits by way of existing public footpaths, either back to the A44 having avoided the dangerous pinch points mentioned above, or on into the town centre via the Blenheim Town Gate.

Again, this path would have to be well presented and maintained, to include disabled access, in order that shoppers and others can safely reach the shops, doctors and other amenities in the town and be persuaded not to continue to use the dangerous A44 pavements.

Safety on the A44 seems not to have been considered when the Local Plan was finalised, and presents an enormous problem to be solved now.

I hope that the above helps in your deliberations, and will welcome any comments you can make now or later, which I will gladly pass on to all residents of Old Woodstock. I claim to know almost every inch of Old Woodstock, having lived here for 47 years and keen on countryside and community.

Best wishes

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