

An update on housing development in Old Woodstock – plans to build 120 houses

House building has already started to the south of Woodstock, near Bladon roundabout. But approval was also given by the Planning Inspectorate for the field in Old Woodstock bounded by Hill Rise and Vanbrugh Close, as suitable for the building of 120 houses. A planning application could be submitted by the end of this year, and building is likely to commence there in 2020 or 2021.

This housebuilding in Old Woodstock will certainly take place, and all opportunities for objection are past. However, there is now a chance to talk to the developers, to influence the way in which this is carried out.

The owners of the site, Blenheim Estates, who also own Pye builders, will soon employ a company of 'facilitators' to conduct during this year a comprehensive review of Woodstock now and in the future. This could include meetings, interviews, questionnaire, workshops and focus groups, and all residents of the town will be able to contribute as they wish. The company will then report to Blenheim towards the end of 2019 and an 'Infrastructure Development Plan' will be formulated and published by them before they submit a planning application.

In effect, infrastructure in the town will be funded by 'section 106' money (paid by developers for the purpose) and perhaps grants and contributions from public authorities, but the money is finite and all wishes are unlikely to be met.

Here, a group of residents are seeking to re-activate 'The Friends of Old Woodstock', a loose association of two way email communication, originally formed when the play area in Rosamund Drive was under threat of closure. This would not be about opposition, but about community planning.

The purpose would be to update all residents, to gather and collate questions and requests for information from residents, and wherever possible make and keep contact with Blenheim, our Town Council and public authorities for answers and to have our voice heard.

In the future, Old Woodstock is likely to become a much busier place than it is now. It seems crucial that all ideas, concerns and suggestions are taken into account in order that the area is a thriving community in the future, for the benefit of those coming to live here as well as existing residents. Of course, there needs to be a free and safe flow of pedestrians and traffic.

At the field site itself, layout of the houses will be important. Ideally an open plan design, open spaces should be left, and existing houses around the field edge will not want to feel crowded by the new ones. The public footpath to Wootton must be preserved, and incorporated into the design. The well used informal paths behind Hill Rise and Vanbrugh Close are important to local residents, to give access to the Barn Piece estate and onwards to the town, and also to link with other footpaths.

The future of the play area and small football field are major concerns. If the developers decide to open the end of Rosamund Drive to the new estate, destroying or relocating the play area, chaos could result with the increased traffic affecting Rosamund Drive at its junctions with Vanbrugh Close and Vermont Drive, as well as disruption to other traffic on the existing Barn Piece housing estate, and the difficulty for traffic from the new estate to mix with .

Blenheim have already said that it is their "intention" to send all construction traffic into the site via an opening off the A44 further north past Hill Rise (although it is difficult imagine the road width

sufficient for a roundabout or other junction), but cannot yet rule out long term access to the new site via Vermont Drive and Rosamund Drive.

Another huge concern is the safety of pedestrians on the narrow pavements of the main road into town. The numbers of pedestrians, perhaps including mothers with push chairs and certainly schoolchildren, is likely to rise sharply with the new housing, and with it the danger from heavy traffic, particularly where the road narrows near Farm End and further on as traffic approaches the sharp bend and the pedestrian crossing on The Causeway.

One solution, and possibly the only solution, might be to build a new path and cycleway from the new development, across the river and water meadows to Lower Brook Hill, and this seems promising. However, funding is an issue – it would have to be well built, well surfaced and well lit – and residents of Vanbrugh Close and Mavor Close must be consulted as it would be close to them.

It is the intention of 'Friends of Old Woodstock' to contact all residents of this part of the town, and invite contact with us, perhaps by email or social media, whereby we can all talk together as the plans and consultation progress. We will, of course, be able to put in our comments about specific aspects of the planning application when it is published, but ideally all concerns will have been expressed and resolved before that stage.