

conversation^{PR}

June 2023

Statement of Community Involvement

Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire

Lioncourt Strategic Land



Prepared by Conversation PR on behalf of Lioncourt Strategic Land

Executive summary

- The purpose of this report is to:
 - Detail the consultation undertaken by the applicant;
 - Summarise feedback resulting from the consultation;
 - Explain if and how the proposal has been influenced by those comments.
- This consultation follows best practice and has taken into account advice set out in Wychavon District Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (February 2018) as well as national planning policy and guidance.
- Shortly after the May 2023 local elections – once the new ward councillors were in post – the applicant made contact and arranged a briefing which took place in mid-May.
- The applicant also approached North Claines Parish Council, offering to present the scheme and answer any questions, which the parish council declined.
- The applicant held an online consultation, issuing A5 postcards to every address in Fernhill Heath and neighbouring settlements (1576 in total), inviting people to read about the proposals and complete a feedback form on the consultation website <https://fernhillheathconsultation.co.uk/>.
- A freephone number and email address were also provided, with several subsequent conversations with local residents. The consultation also secured local media coverage. <https://www.worcesternews.co.uk/news/23549241.plans-revealed-135-new-homes-fernhill-heath/>.
- 116 responses were received via the website. The applicant invited general feedback, as well as asking specific questions with these results:
 - 100/116 are already homeowners;
 - Only 10 per cent had been impacted by a lack of housing or affordability in the area (or had family or friends who had);
 - 105/116 said Fernhill Heath was not a logical location to meet Wychavon's housing needs;
 - Of those who shared their opinions about what homes were most needed, two/three/four bed houses, bungalows and affordable homes scored quite evenly – though far more said no homes are needed.
- There seemed to be broad consensus against the proposals from those who responded to the consultation. Key concerns were the principle of further development in the village, traffic and a lack of facilities and services.
- The feedback received has been reviewed and considered – as summarised in this Statement of Community Involvement – prior to submission.
- Lioncourt Strategic Land is committed to ongoing engagement with the community through and beyond determination.

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Appendix – promotional postcards, distribution map, website, media coverage

Introduction

The proposal

Land off Dilmore Lane, Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire. Outline planning application for up to 130 dwellings (Use Class C3), including vehicular access from Dilmore Lane, pedestrian and cycle links, public open space, car parking, drainage, landscaping and other associated infrastructure. All matters reserved except for access.

The consultation suggested development of up to 135 homes, but the total number of new homes has now been reduced to up to 130.

The applicant's approach

This consultation follows best practice and has taken into account advice set out in Wychavon District Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) (February 2018) as well as national planning policy and guidance.

Programme of activity

The consultation programme included:

- a. Briefing with ward members
- b. Approaches to North Claines Parish Council
- c. Online community consultation
- d. Statement of Community Involvement.

a. Briefing with ward members

Shortly after the May 2023 local elections – once the new ward councillors were in post – the applicant made contact and arranged a briefing which took place on May 18 with Cllr Nicolas Wright and Cllr Daniel Birch, with subsequent email updates.

b. Approaches to North Claines Parish Council

The applicant also approached the parish council, offering to present the scheme and answer any questions: however, after several unanswered phone calls and emails the applicant was finally told by the clerk that the parish council did not want any form of meeting or dialogue prior to submission. The offer remains open from the applicant to meet and answer questions, should the parish council wish the applicant to do so.

c. Online community consultation

The applicant held an online consultation, issuing A5 postcards to every address in Fernhill Heath and neighbouring settlements via first class Royal Mail (1576 in total). The postcard featured the proposed masterplan, a short summary and a QR code linking to a consultation website.

Local residents and businesses were able to read about the proposals and complete a feedback form on the consultation website. A freephone number and email address were also provided, with several calls received.

The consultation was also given coverage in the local media.

<https://www.worcesternews.co.uk/news/23549241.plans-revealed-135-new-homes-fernhill-heath/> .

An initial deadline for feedback had been set but was extended and the feedback form on the website remained open through to submission.

Statement of Community Involvement

This Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been prepared to accompany the submission of the planning application. In this SCI the team summarises the issues received through the consultation and explains its response.

Consultation findings and response

The team received a total of 116 feedback forms via the consultation website: this information can be made available to officers in a redacted form if required.

The feedback form invited respondents to answer five specific questions, to obtain a more quantifiable measure of local feelings on specific points. It then asked for general, unprompted feedback.

The issues, comments and questions raised have been summarised in the table below, along with the applicant's response.

1. Feedback and response table

Question	Community feedback
Are you a homeowner?	The vast majority of people who responded are homeowners – of 116 respondents just six did not own their own home.
Have you, your family or friends been impacted by a lack of housing or affordability in this area?	Only 12 per cent (14 people) said they – or someone they were close to – had been directly impacted. While a number of respondents said there were plenty of available homes, affordability was cited as an issue with one respondent saying: 'My 25 year old son has had to move out of the area to purchase his first home', and another saying: 'My sister had to move very far away, due to the lack of housing nearby'. Another cited a lack of homes for disabled and less-abled elderly people.
Do you think Fernhill Heath is a logical place to build new homes to meet Wychavon's housing needs?	Again, the vast majority of respondents felt Fernhill Heath is not a logical place to meet the district's housing need. Of 116 respondents only 11 felt this to be the case.
What types of homes are most needed (e.g., two bedroomed houses)?	Not everyone responded to this question. The largest number of respondents said no new homes were needed. In response order: No homes (35), three bed (10), two bed (9), 4 bed (6), affordable (6), bungalows (4), flats (1), 5 beds (1).
Issue	Detail & Lioncourt Strategic's response (in blue italics)
Suitability of Fernhill Heath for further housing	Many respondents strongly felt Fernhill Heath is already 'saturated' with housing, with 255 homes already built/approved in recent years, and more still to come. The village, respondents say, has already grown by 10 per cent. Site in conflict with SWDP. <i>Currently the site isn't allocated for housing. However, there remains a significant shortfall in the delivery of housing which our site could help address. Wychavon – along with neighbouring Worcester City and Malvern Hills councils – has produced the South Worcestershire Development Plan (SWDP), setting out development areas until 2030. This plan is currently being</i>

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	<p><i>reviewed because there remains a shortfall in the number of homes being built; Every local planning authority currently has to demonstrate it has enough new homes in its pipeline – referred to as a housing land supply. Wychavon currently falls below this housing land supply; North Claines Neighbourhood Plan, adopted in 2017, seeks to restrict further development beyond the current village boundaries: but it also recognises that where the housing land supply is below the minimum required, additional housing – even outside village boundaries – can be acceptable; the only other restrictions would be if the site was in the Green Belt, was classified as a Local Green Space, or was at risk of flooding – none of which apply to the site.</i></p>
Traffic	<p>Along with a general objection to the principle of development, traffic caused most concerns, so we are breaking this down into more specific points, below.</p>
	<p>Concern traffic surveys were carried out when a major route was closed due to bridge works, so the data will be inaccurate. Detailed traffic management plan needed to fully understand implications on local network. <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed that the traffic assessments undertaken are acceptable.</i></p>
	<p>Rural roads – including Dilmore Lane – not designed to accommodate volume of traffic; too narrow <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed that the access to the site via Dilmore Lane is acceptable.</i></p>
	<p>Access from Dilmore Lane onto the A38 is very difficult, with tailbacks. <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, and agreed that the A38 / Dilmore Lane junction would be modelled. Modelling indicates that the junction will continue to operate within capacity.</i></p>
	<p>Double yellow lines needed long Dilmore Lane to address existing parking issues that add to delays <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed that the access to the site via Dilmore Lane is acceptable and no parking restrictions have been requested.</i></p>
	<p>Speed measures needed along Dilmore Lane <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, and agreed a speed limit reduction and traffic calming.</i></p>
	<p>Bus services end at 6pm, and are expensive <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed bus services are suitable, whilst we have agreed to provide cycle parking at the A38 bus shelters to reduce travel time to the bus stops from the site.</i></p>
	<p>Main bus stop – on Droitwich Lane – is a 20 minute walk, too far with small children <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed bus services are suitable, whilst we have agreed to provide cycle parking at the A38 bus shelters to reduce travel time to the bus stops from the site. Walking routes to the primary school is via Station Road.</i></p>

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	<p>Concern existing pavement along Dilmore Lane is poor quality and insufficient <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed that the access to the site via Dilmore Lane is acceptable. We have proposed pedestrian and cycle connections in all directions to ensure that accessibility is prioritised.</i></p>
	<p>Concern about conflict with horse riders and cyclists, including access onto national bike route <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed that the access to the site via Dilmore Lane is acceptable and we have proposed cycling improvements along Dilmore Lane.</i></p>
	<p>One person asked that emergency access should also be directly onto Dilmore Lane; this was partly about concern that increased footfall adjacent to existing homes would exacerbate existing issues (too many people, littering of dog poo bags, where there is no bin) <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed that the proposed access arrangements are suitable, which includes proposed emergency access onto Firlands Close, as per the Suffolk Way development.</i></p>
	<p>Existing emergency bollards at secondary access inadequate, no-one has key; drop bollards needed. <i>We have engaged WCC Highways, who have agreed that the proposed access arrangements are suitable, which proposed emergency access onto Firlands Close, as per the Suffolk Way development.</i></p>
Impact on village character	<p>Concerns the proposal would harm the local village character. SWDP states development should strengthen the distinctive and cultural qualities of towns and villages – and that the proposal is in conflict with this. Some specific concerns about visual impact. <i>The application is only outline so does not cover building design, materials and landscaping details. However we are proposing to retain 40 per cent of the site as green, open space, which will help maintain the village feel. We are also proposing a green buffer adjacent to Dilmore Lane, to maintain distance from the historic farm buildings, and to maintain the rural edge.</i> <i>The Design and Access Statement accompanying the outline planning application sets out the evolution of the proposed scheme. This began with an assessment of the distinctive characteristics of Fernhill Heath, including its built form, streetscape, materials, detailing, heritage and prevailing landscape and visual setting. These distinct attributes were then assessed to inform the scheme design principles, which in turn are embodied in the proposed illustrative masterplan.</i></p>
Loss of green space and agricultural land	<p>Concerns about loss of agricultural land, green spaces, and the green buffer between Worcester and Droitwich <i>The Ecological Appraisal accompanying the planning application identifies the land as being “dominated by arable land and poor semi-improved grassland, both of limited ecological value”; and in addition, Figure 2.3 ‘Fernhill Heath Access and Movement’ of the Design and Access Statement shows there are</i></p>

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	<p><i>no public rights of way crossing the site. Consequently, the proposal will not result in the loss of any publicly accessible green space.</i></p> <p><i>Conversely, the proposal has been detailed and designed to incorporate significant publicly accessible green space, amounting to 40% of the site, including a locally equipped area for play. The illustrative masterplan shows how the new publicly accessible green space will connect to existing roads and footpaths surrounding the site, meaning the proposal will create access to the new green spaces for the wider community.</i></p>
<p>Inadequate infrastructure & amenities</p>	<p>Existing facilities and services already inadequate including no GP, very few shops and only two pubs, insufficient capacity in local schools (new classrooms need building). Two specific requests: the play area must be for all children not just those living on the development; fibre broadband required across village, and can the development help deliver this?</p> <p><i>We would provide financial support towards local community infrastructure as required, including – for example – schools and health care. We are proposing a play area in the eastern open space, which would be open to anyone, not just those living on the development. In addition, spending by the new residents would support existing local businesses. 40 per cent of the site would be publicly-accessible green open space. In terms of broadband, the Applicant has commissioned a Utility Study which demonstrates sufficient capacity in the network to provide broadband infrastructure to accommodate the proposal.</i></p>
<p>Green space within the scheme</p>	<p>Setting aside the wider concern about loss of green space, inclusion of 40 per cent open space was welcomed by one or two people. However there were two requests: can those be located between existing and new homes; and a long-term management plan is required (including funds committed), including cutting of grass in orchard.</p> <p><i>We have carefully considered the proposed scheme layout to balance the requirement for efficient use of land; to maintain residential amenity; and reflect on wider landscape and visual character. Overall we believe the right design response is to ensure the proposed development ‘reads’ as a natural extension to Fernhill Heath, and does not unnecessarily project in the surrounding countryside, whilst creating an appropriate interface with the existing settlement edge. Whilst the illustrative layout plan shows some of the proposed homes / gardens adjoining the southern / eastern site boundary - rather than open space - these new homes would be carefully sited and designed to meet all of the Council’s relevant spacing requirements to ensure the amenities of existing residents is maintained. We would also look to retain and enhance all existing boundary vegetation which would provide a degree of screening. All green infrastructure would be subject to long term management and maintenance. The model for this is unknown at this stage, however, it is likely that the spaces could either be transferred /</i></p>

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	<i>managed by the Parish Council or an independent management company established.</i>
Ecological impact	<p>Concerns the land currently provides habitat for various species, including bats, owls, skylarks and butterflies, and this will be damaged or lost. In addition concerns about loss of hedgerows and trees. Light pollution also a concern.</p> <p><i>The vast majority of existing hedgerows will be retained and enhanced; and new hedgerows created along the northern site boundary and within the site. A range of ecology studies have been undertaken to understand the ecological value of the site. Overall it has been concluded that that the site is of relatively limited ecological value and that the proposal will bring about significant biodiversity net gain.</i></p> <p><i>At least 40% of the site will be created as green infrastructure, allowing for the creation of wetland, grassland, hedgerow and scrub habitats, which will benefit a range of species including bats, nesting birds, amphibians and invertebrates. It is anticipated that vast majority of green space will comprise wildflower grassland / meadow with scattered scrub.</i></p> <p><i>Specifically, it provides opportunities for new foraging habitat for bats in the form of new attenuation ponds and hedgerows within the northern part of the site. These features will need to be retained within dark corridors through a sensitive lighting design to maximise their suitability for bats. The proposed development also provides opportunities for the provision bat and bird boxes - within the fabric of the buildings - enhancing the local populations of this species.</i></p>
Drainage overcapacity	<p>Two concerns raised. Capacity of sewage system questioned, with apparent breaches onto Firlands Close already. Site suffers from waterlogging, with existing drainage issues; will SUDs be used to manage run-off?</p> <p><i>We propose to utilise ponds and additional sustainable drainage to manage water onsite. Proposed development surface water run-off will be restricted to existing greenfield run off rates in accordance with Council waste management guidelines. Therefore, the proposed run off will be limited to a low return period (Qbar) for all storms up to and including the 1 in 100yr event with a 40% allowance for climate change, providing a betterment to existing uncontrolled conditions.</i></p> <p><i>Attenuation will be provided within on-site basins with volume for all storm events up to and including the 1 in 100yr with a 40% allowance for climate change. The basins will not only provide water quantity but also water quality benefits, amenity and biodiversity.</i></p> <p><i>Severn Trent have commented that further hydraulic modelling of the foul network will be required to confirm performance and capacity. The network has been added to the Severn Trent modelling tracker.</i></p>
Lack of employment	<p>One respondent was concerned about a lack of local employment.</p> <p><i>The site is well located for employment, given its location is just approximately 4km from both Worcester and Droitwich Spa.</i></p>

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<p>Negative impact on property prices</p>	<p>One respondent raised a concern that new homes may have a negative impact on property values</p> <p><i>Impact on property prices is not a planning consideration. However, there is significant unmet demand which is the key driver for maintaining and increasing house prices, which – in itself – is part of the affordability problem.</i></p>
<p>Consultation</p>	<p>Criticisms were made of the short period for feedback.</p> <p><i>While typically responses tend to be submitted within the first few days of a consultation being launched, when these concerns were raised we decided to leave the feedback form open and add a brief explanation that the form would remain open until submission with all comments considered. This was also communicated to ward members. To date, 116 responses to the community consultation have been received, showing the community consultation provided an opportunity for the residents to comment on the proposal.</i></p> <p>Desire for us to attend a public parish council meeting</p> <p><i>We tried several times over the period of about a week to get hold of the parish council. When we finally did we were told the parish council did not wish to meet, so we have been unable to present to the parish council and answer its questions in a public forum.</i></p>
<p>Construction disruption</p>	<p>Quite a few points raised about this, partly in response to the apparent experience with the Taylor Wimpey scheme. Inappropriate parking of contractor vans; generators left on outside working hours; restrictions to PRowS during construction; HGVs turning off A38 onto Dilmore Lane.</p> <p><i>We cannot comment on the experience of residents in relation to the Taylor Wimpey scheme. We would manage the site to meet the stringent requirements of the Considerate Constructor’s Scheme. A Construction Management Plan would be agreed with the council – setting out all routes, working hours, parking arrangements etc – prior to starting onsite.</i></p>

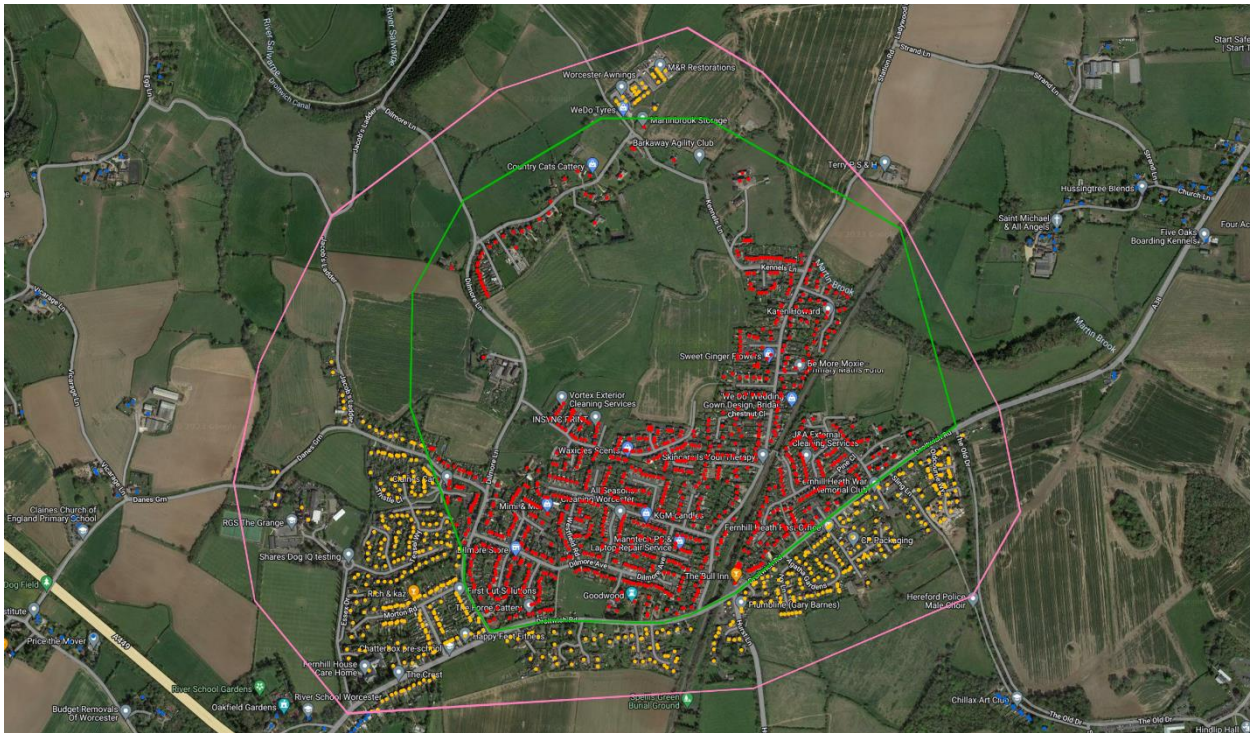
Conclusion

The applicant’s team has sought to engage effectively with ward councillors, the parish council, local businesses and residents in line with best practice.

The consultation was executed in a proactive way, using a range of communication methods to reach the community, and offering multiple ways for the community and its representatives to provide feedback.

The applicant remains committed to an ongoing open dialogue.

Appendix





LIONCOURT
STRATEGIC LAND

*Please tell us
what you think*

We are proposing to build up to 135 new homes, including 54 affordable homes for rent and sale, in Fernhill Heath. More than 40 per cent of the site would be retained as green, public open space.

As a Worcestershire company, employing local people, we take our role as a member of the community seriously, and wish to work with you to refine our proposals, so please share your comments. You can do so by scanning the QR code or by visiting www.fernhillheathconsultation.co.uk



Our consultation closes on 28th May 2023.

If you would like to speak with our team, please call **0800 193 9403** or email hello@fernhillheathconsultation.co.uk



About our scheme

- Up to 135 new homes
- 40 per cent affordable (54 homes) both for sale and rent
- Five per cent self-build
- Retaining 40 per cent of the site as green, open space
- Extensive planting including new hedgerow, community orchard and play area
- Green buffers and significant distances between existing and new homes
- Main vehicle access via Dillmore Lane, with connection to the pedestrian, cycle and emergency vehicle access linking Suffolk Way and Firlands Close
- Ample parking spaces for each property and for visitors
- Investment in walking, cycling and public transport
- Financial support for local community infrastructure – for example, schools and health care – as required



For more information visit www.fernhillheathconsultation.co.uk



Plans revealed for 135 new homes in Fernhill Heath

27th May

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT WORCESTER

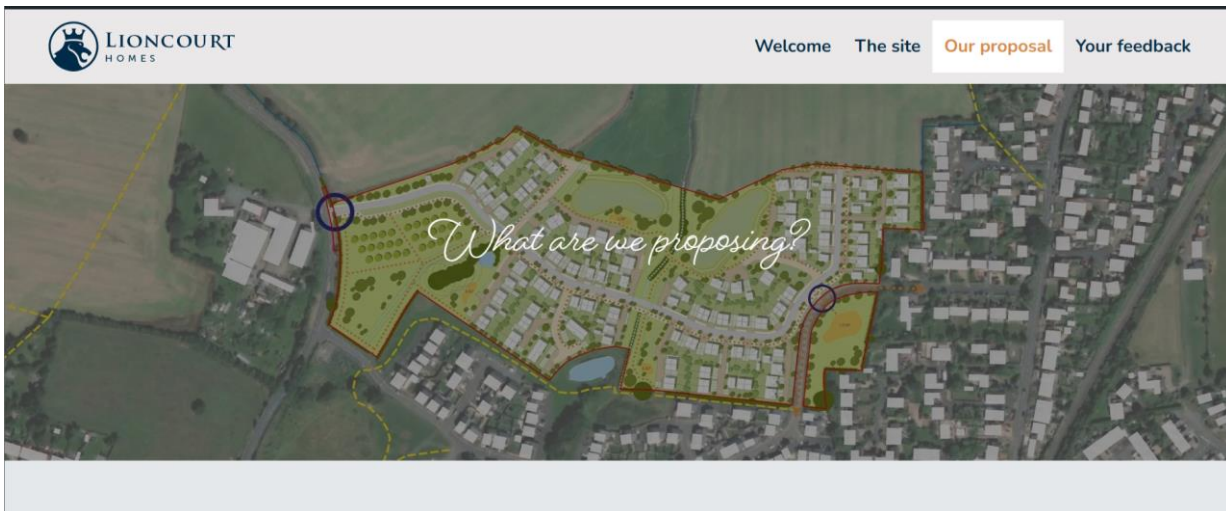


NEW: 135 homes could be built in Fernhill Heath. (Image: NQ)



Resolving host...

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