



Has Berkeley Homes misled the public on the Howard of Effingham School enabling development?

Is this an over-sized, over-specced project promoted by the Howard Partnership Trust?

The Effingham Residents Association (EFFRA) has today submitted a strong objection to Guildford Borough Council to Berkeley Homes' planning applications 21/P/01306 and 21/P/01283.

In March 2018, Berkeley Homes was granted planning permission by the Secretary of State to build 295 homes to fund a new 2000 pupil school on highly sensitive Green Belt land in Effingham. This followed an appeal in 2017 against the decision of Guildford Borough Council to refuse planning permission. During this appeal, Berkeley Homes presented evidence to demonstrate that a new 2000 pupil school, costed at £38m, was financially viable.

Three years later, Berkeley Homes claims the school will now cost £53.5m - a staggering 41% increase. Berkeley Homes says it needs to build an additional 114 homes on Green Belt land adjacent to Ancient Woodland, to fund the school, even though the scheme still won't be financially viable.

Ian Smith, Deputy Chairman of EFFRA and retired qualified chartered accountant, has reviewed the figures and comments: "If the scheme was financially viable in 2014 when it was submitted it should be even more viable now as house prices have far outstripped the increase in building costs. Berkeley Homes has continually revised its cost estimates upwards by large margins without any evidence and have used varying figures to suit its story at the time. This has led to a planned "over-specced" and over-sized school that also (because of an increase in local secondary school spaces and drop in demand) is no longer justified. The new financial viability report is sparse and has insufficient detail to explain the increase in costs. If the scheme is not financially viable now it raises the question of whether it was ever financially viable and whether Berkeley Homes has misled the public."

Commenting, Vivien White, Chairman of EFFRA said: "The overwhelming majority of Effingham's residents were against this development but with permission granted (in 2018) were prepared to accept it and work with the developers to make the best of a bad situation. If the Howard Partnership Trust had gone for a similar sized school from the outset with a specification meeting DfE standards, the current crop of students would now be enjoying a new school with new facilities. The really sad thing is that because of this unrealistic scheme a generation of local children have been failed and had to endure a lack of investment in the existing school and falling standards. Most 2,000 pupil schools are rightly situated in urban areas and not in rural villages where most students need to be brought in by bus or car leading to traffic congestion and increased pollution. We believe Berkeley Homes has always intended to apply for more enabling homes and we don't think they will stop at 409 homes. It will urbanise the small rural village of Effingham."

Sir Paul Beresford, local MP for Mole Valley has also said he is against the proposal. Effingham Parish Council has also made a strong objection and Guildford Borough Council is currently overwhelmed by the numbers of objections from local residents.

Berkeley Homes has the option to build what was agreed, but EFFRA thinks there is a strong case for reassessing the options for the most appropriate form that a new or renovated school might take. Since new build costs (according to Berkeley Homes) have gone up so substantially this must cast serious doubt about whether this is now the most cost effective solution. Partial renovation, plus a much more limited amount of new school build – all financed through less new homes – might well be a more fitting development for a small rural village situated in the heart of the Green Belt.

Additional Information

EFFRA's objection is available on its website at <https://effinghamresidents.org.uk/effra-reject-plans-from-berkeley-homes-for-more-homes>

For further information contact: chairman@effinghamresidents.org.uk

Closing date for comments is 5th August 2021

Comments on the planning applications can be made quoting applications: 21/P/01306 and 21/P/01283, either by using the Borough Council's public access portal at:

<https://www.guildford.gov.uk/commentonaplanningapplication>

by email to: planningenquiries@guildford.gov.uk

directly through EFFRA's website <https://effinghamresidents.org.uk/objection-to-110-homes>

or by writing to: Planning Department,
For the attention of John Busher
Guildford Borough Council
Millmead House, Millmead,
Guildford, Surrey. GU2 4BB