

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR YEAR TO 31 DECEMBER 2021

This year's AGM is again being held on Zoom. Although Covid restrictions have eased, the EFFRA Committee felt it prudent not to hold an indoor meeting of residents.

Planning

Much of EFFRA Committee's work was in considering planning applications. We always seek to liaise with the Parish Council (EPC) but whereas EPC makes its own recommendations to Guildford Borough Council on local planning matters, our role is solely to represent the views of residents. We only comment on behalf of residents regarding applications that the Committee believes affect the village as a whole or affect the Effingham Neighbourhood Plan, the Guildford Local Plan, the Effingham Conservation Area, the Surrey Hills Area of National Beauty (AONB) or the Green Belt.

In 2021 EFFRA submitted fourteen comments on planning applications to Guildford Borough Council (GBC), all of which were objections apart from one which was a withdrawal of a previous objection for the Douglas Haig to be renamed The Queen Stage. Four of the planning applications have been refused, two have been agreed following modifications and the remaining eight are still pending. The high number of pending cases reflects the increased workload of the GBC Planning Department caused by Covid and an increase in the number of planning applications, together with an ongoing problem with resources in the department.

Church Street former school playing fields Appeal Refused

EFFRA made a submission in respect of the Appeal by the owners of the former school playing field in Church Street against GBC's decision to refuse their planning application. EFFRA believed the 17 homes proposed on the site were excessive. The proposal was also contrary to policies in the Local Plan and the Effingham Neighbourhood Plan and EFFRA believed the proposed density and design would damage the Effingham Conservation Area and the setting of the nearby nationally listed buildings. The Inspector agreed with EFFRA's views and refused the Appeal on 29 November.

Berkeley Homes & Howard of Effingham School Development

Despite the approval by the Secretary of State on 31st March 2018 of the new Howard School and 295 enabling homes, work has still not started on the new school. EFFRA was extremely concerned that in June 2021, Berkeley applied for a further 110 enabling homes on a piece of Green Belt land next to Ancient Woodland. This land was not in the original approved area. EFFRA believes there is no financial or other justification for this additional application; it is just a clear example of "developer creep." Around 1,000 local people are believed to have objected to each of the two planning applications involved, (around 500 for each application being made through the EFFRA website). At the time of writing this report, the GBC website has only registered 438 objections for one application and 551 for the other with only a handful of supports. GBC has said all will be registered before a decision is made. EFFRA will check that the number submitted through its site are all registered.

EFFRA has also made objections to two planning applications Berkeley Homes has submitted on the existing school site. When the Inspector agreed the scheme in 2018 only outline applications were agreed for the existing school site and the Effingham Lodge Farm site. The Inspector imposed parameter plans to which the detailed applications had to adhere. EFFRA identified important areas which did not comply with the parameter plans. We believe Berkeley Homes has sought to maximise the profit on the 99 homes instead of submitting a design which is suitable for our village. EFFRA is dismayed that Berkeley Homes is not keeping to the parameter plans.

EFFRA has also objected to a Berkeley Homes planning application submitted to Mole Valley District Council for a development within Mole Valley as being inappropriate and premature.

Following complaints from residents, EFFRA (along with Effingham Parish Council) made a formal complaint to GBC about Berkeley Homes' use of the Lower Road entrance to Effingham Lodge Farm for construction vehicles contrary to the agreed Construction Methods Statement. We believe using this access for construction vehicles is very dangerous. The construction traffic appears now to be using the agreed route from the north to the entrance in Effingham Common Road, but we will continue to monitor the situation.

Mole Valley Local Plan

EFFRA also made a submission under Regulation 19 of the Mole Valley Local Plan about the proposals to build 200 homes on Preston Farm close to the Effingham border on beautiful Green Belt land. The draft Local Plan has now gone to the Inspector for review and we hope that he will listen to the large number of objections and remove this site allocation.

Other Initiatives Pending at GBC and Surrey County Council

Junction at St Lawrence Primary School

In 2018 EFFRA helped a local school mother put together a petition to the Joint Committee of Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council to improve safe access to St Lawrence Primary School. As a result, road tables were to be built on Effingham Common Road and Lower Road to slow down approaching vehicles and this construction was made a priority for the 2021 Financial Year. Currently, it is unclear whether and when both will be installed. In the meantime, the situation has got worse at the mini roundabouts because the surfaces have been flattened by heavy lorries and cars now regularly speed through without slowing down. EFFRA has asked the next GBC Joint Committee meeting in March to prioritise the road tables and review the safety of the mini roundabouts.

Effingham Common

In 2014 EFFRA requested that Effingham Common be designated a Local Nature Reserve to give it further protection and in 2020 this was supported by the Parish Council. With resource problems at GBC we are still awaiting for the designation to happen.

Conservation Area Appraisal

EFFRA contributed to a Conservation Area Appraisal Consultation which was carried out in January 2020. A draft is still awaiting approval by GBC. Approval is important because developers will need to comply with its findings.

Litter Pick

After Covid dominated the first half of 2021 it was good to do a village litter pick together with the church in June and fantastic that we had 33 residents come to help. We know many residents litter pick in their own roads, but it is the village through roads that get the most litter. We aim to do a further litter pick before the spring and the vegetation regrows.

EFFRA Website

The EFFRA website continues to be the main source of news for the village and continues to grow in popularity. Its editor, Harry Clarke does a great job in posting current news affecting residents in the blog, apart from keeping the other pages on the village up to date. The number of subscribers to the blog has grown to 845 from 539 a year ago; followers on the associated Facebook page have grown from 495 to 683 and likes have grown from 397 to 529. Harry can be emailed at: editor@effinghamresidents.org.uk

EFFRA Noticeboard

Whilst the website is EFFRA's main tool of communication together with occasional Newsletters, during the lockdowns EFFRA also used the old Community Noticeboard at the shops to keep residents informed of vital information. We were told this was very helpful and therefore EFFRA requested the Parish Council to apply for a grant from GBC's Concurrent Functions Grant Aid Scheme to replace the old notice boards. A new noticeboard designated for EFFRA will be erected soon together with one for other community organisations.

Heritage Open Day

Because of Covid it was not possible to hold Heritage Open Day in 2020 but we were able to hold it in 2021. Eight properties in Effingham and Little Bookham opened on Saturday 11th September and were well supported by visits from local and other residents.

Tradesmen's Register

The third edition of the Effingham Tradesmen's Register will be printed in a few months. Tradesmen wishing to join should email register@effinghamresidents.org.uk

It continues to be a privilege to chair EFFRA and I thank the committee and road wardens for their contributions over the last year.

I look forward to seeing residents at our virtual AGM on Monday, 21st February.
Keep safe and well.

Vivien White
Chairman