

Update on Planning Application to Develop the Pig Farm Site

Following the article in the January of the Watlington Times, it transpires our intention to submit a planning application on the pig farm site at the end of January was optimistic. Archstone Projects and Bloor Homes are spending more time to refine the layout and design and gather the supporting technical reports. This has included a recent design workshop with the Neighbourhood Plan Group on the 30th January. We now anticipate that the application will be ready to submit around the end of March.

Amongst the important considerations are the width and design of the street that will form part of the alternative route. We agree with the Neighbourhood Plan Group that the width should be kept to the minimum possible to help create an appropriate residential character. This will need to be agreed with the County Council. We are aware of comments concerning small scale low rise employment buildings on Britwell Road. This is certainly one of the items on our list that we are reviewing in the round.

Archstone Projects and Bloor Homes

Contact Archstone Projects/Bloor Homes by email watlingtonplanning@gmail.com or by post to: Watlington Consultation, C/O Barton Willmore, Regent House, Prince's Gate, 4 Homer Road, Solihull, B91 3QQ.

From the Neighbourhood Plan Forum*

A Saturday morning in Watlington

As the Neighbourhood Plan gets nearer to the next consultation, it's interesting to reflect on my experiences in meeting Saturday morning shoppers as part of our Saturday morning programme of community engagement.

Our aim is to meet people and spread the word in respect of the progress of our Plan and to find ways of ensuring that everyone has access to the latest information that affects the town and our surrounding communities. Our Plan has to take into account changes taking place in our part of South Oxfordshire as well as the aspirations we have for the benefit of Watlington. It was good to note that many folk feel in touch with the information relayed to them regarding the Plan but we are ramping up our communications to be certain that everyone should know just what's happening, and as the weeks leading to the next consultation tick by.

We have always known that the Town is a hub or service centre for many local communities and the economic and social sustainability revolves around this relationship. Even further it was a pleasure to meet a lady from Caversham who visits Watlington every Saturday and was bemoaning the Post Office move and a gentleman from Wendover who rates Watlington as having the best butcher for miles around. A couple from Roke were very concerned about the extra traffic that will be generated through the numbers of houses around and many people spoke about their concerns as to increased traffic and the fear that visitors might be put off from using the town.

Members of the Forum will be at the Town Hall every Saturday morning for the next few weeks, from about 10.00a.m. to 12 noon. It will be a bit dependent on the weather, but if it is very wet we'll probably be in the Town Hall lobby. Please do chat to us if you see us and make sure that you are on our contact list so that we can keep you up to date by email.

We are also having two drop-in events in March so please join us on Friday afternoons, 3rd and 10th March from 2.00pm to 5.00pm at the Function Room in the Watlington Club in the High Street. The events will be very informal so do come for a chat about the Neighbourhood Plan over tea and biscuits.

Spread the word and follow the Plan.

www.watlingtonnp.org.uk

Peter Richardson

Administrative Assistant of the Neighbourhood Plan Forum

**The Forum is a group of those who live, work or shop in the Parish who have taken the lead in preparing the Neighbourhood Plan*

Watlington's buses and bus stops

In February the Five Parishes Bus Group (Watlington, Cuxham, Chalgrove, Stadhampton and Garsington) met with Edmund Tresham, Commercial Manager for Thames Travel. The T1 service was discussed and the improved punctuality of the service was commended. Mr Tresham said *"The extension of the T1 service to Chinnor has provided new journey opportunities. It allows people in the five parishes to catch a bus to the M40 Bus Link at Lewknor from where coaches to London, Heathrow and Gatwick may be caught. We are aware that parking at Lewknor is a problem and we are glad to be able to provide a public transport alternative. We are pleased to continue to work with the Five Parish Bus Group to develop the T1 service."* The change in the timetable last July had resulted in the loss of some passengers, but this was more than compensated for the reduction in operating costs.

Watlington Parish Council had proposed that an additional stop be added in Brook Street to reduce the congestion caused by the stops in Shirburn Street. Thames Travel welcomed this suggestion. However, as several local residents had objected to the proposal following a casual consultation, the County Council have decided that a formal consultation is necessary. It is hoped that this will take place within a month or two.

Struggling with Debts?

Citizens Advice can help!

More people saddled with unmanageable debts are turning to Citizens Advice, leading the charity to call for people to seek help before they reach crisis point.

Nationally, a rising number of people have resorted to a debt relief order (DRO) since the amount of debt covered by a DRO rose from £15,000 to £20,000 last October.

DROs are a last resort for people who have exhausted all options for repaying their debts and won't be able to pay in the near future. They work by "pausing" most of your debts for a year so that your creditors can't chase you for repayment. At the end of the year, unless your circumstances change, your debts will be written off.

Debt write-offs can have a serious impact on people's credit rating, which makes it more difficult to take out more credit agreements or even open a new bank account.

Citizens Advice is now urging people who are failing to keep on top of their debts to seek advice early, so that they have the best chance of managing their debts and avoiding debt write-offs. An adviser stressed: "We will discuss your individual situation and look at the options available to you, so that you can make an informed decision about the best kind of debt management for you."

For further help, visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk phone 03444 111 444 or drop in to your nearest Citizens Advice. For locations and opening hours see www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/oxfordshire-south-vale



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WATLINGTON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN TAKES A MAJOR STEP FORWARD

The Parish Council has agreed that the Plan will include a proposal to re-align the B4009 around the north and west of Watlington. This proposal has public support, most recently at the Roadshows last summer, and will relieve the town centre of most through traffic. It will not, though, just act as a 'bypass'. It will be part of a strategic plan for development which will identify sites for new housing and other facilities which Watlington needs. HGVs are already restricted from coming through Watlington if they are not collecting or delivering in the town (although this is not very well enforced) and this restriction will continue on the new stretch of road. No-one is thinking that the B4009 should be upgraded as a through route for freight vehicles.

This decision to tie development to an alternative route around the town takes us an important step closer to completion of the Neighbourhood Plan by guiding the choice of development sites towards those that aid provision of an alternative route for the B4009. This implies that it also steers the Plan away from the options to spread new development widely around the town (the pepper-pot option) or to concentrate development in a few larger sites in different areas of the town.

The plan for the town centre is that it will become a much better place to be in because it will no longer be dominated by traffic. Air quality will be much improved, pedestrians will be safer and the environment around the Town Hall and High Street will be much more attractive for local residents and visitors alike. Traffic management strategies for the town centre will be tested to see what works best and this work should be completed in March. It is essential that the town continues to attract customers for our shops and local businesses and improvements to the town centre should encourage more people to visit.

It is still very difficult to know how many new homes will be built in Watlington over the next fifteen years. The Parish Council has agreed that there will be a minimum of 200 and this is in line with the emerging South Oxfordshire Local Plan. Details of the sites which will be put forward in the Neighbourhood Plan will be in the draft which will be published in March.

In the meantime, we want to keep everyone up to date with how the Plan is progressing. We will be delivering information leaflets to everyone in the parish in the next few weeks and are at the Town Hall on Saturday mornings for an informal chat and to answer any questions. Please come and see us and, if you are online, check out the information on our website: www.watlingtonnp.org.uk.

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ALSO IN BENSON

Watlington Neighbourhood Development Plan



Neighbourhood Plan Drop In Sessions

Town Hall Saturdays 10am-12noon

Watlington Club Fri 3rd March 2pm-5pm

Watlington Club Fri 10th March 2pm-5pm