

Mr and Mrs R England
8 Hodgson Close
Fritwell, Bicester
OX27 7QB

25th November 2019

Fritwell Parish Council
Vicky Hibberd
Clerk to Fritwell Parish Council

Dear Vicky,

Thank you for the Parish Council's response to my submission in the Public Participation section at the Parish Council meeting of 11th November, however I note that it does not address all the concerns I raised during that meeting and so I write to request that these are answered adequately.

In the Parish Council's response, it is stated *"This debate is happening at a time of increasing pressure for homes to be built in this area and within constraints and opportunities defined by the many layers of planning legislation, including government directives, OCC, CDC Local Plans, Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan and other legal frameworks and regulations. The final decision about the Cala application will be taken by the District Council."*

I do accept that at the current time there is a significant opportunity for house builders to pressurise local communities and even the District Council, into taking large scale new developments in unsustainable locations, despite the huge developments which have been made and are still in progress throughout the Cherwell District.

I also appreciate that the ultimate decision on this application will be made by the District Council, but I also suspect that, as an official Consultee to the application, the Parish Council's formal response to any planning application of this scale shall be considered by the Planning Committee to be representative of the views of the local community.

Indeed it is my expectation that the Parish Council *should* represent the views of the local community, but, given that I see no evidence of majority support for *any* greenfield development within Fritwell when discussing this issue with residents from different parts of the village, I firmly believe this not to be the case.

It is my opinion and also those of others in Fritwell (and not only those who neighbour the CALA-Wrighton site), that the Parish Council have taken a very relaxed stance with the CALA Homes application. This is in light of the fact that the application is for outline planning permission only (i.e. sought by the applicant with the minimum of commitment), involves a greenfield site, is located outside the existing settlement boundary of our small village with its very limited amenities, no public transport, poor road access and the quite considerable ongoing infill and brownfield residential developments already in progress.

A stance that is completely at odds even with the District Council's own Planning Officer, who has stated that this particular site is unsustainable for development to this scale and a stance that is also at odds with the PC's previous stated position on greenfield development within Fritwell and its repeated warnings that we [the village] need to protect ourselves against "speculative development".

So that I and other residents may better understand the thought-processes behind the Parish Council's decision to support the CALA application, I would be most grateful if the Parish Council would please take the opportunity to provide answers to the following :-

- 1) Regarding the CALA-Wrighton site, the Parish Council states *"The land is recognised as low-grade and the SHLAA and HELAA assessments have shown it to be the best option for further development."* Assessment of greenfield sites in Fritwell under SHLAA and HELAA in 2014 actually identified more than one site that was *technically* suitable for development, but somewhere along the line the Parish Council appears to have reached the decision that only the CALA-Wrighton site is suitable. There was no opportunity for residents to voice their opinions on the selection of a site to be supported by the Parish Council.
 - a) On what grounds did the Parish Council reach this decision and when and by whom was this decision reached? Are any minutes of discussions or supporting documents available for public review that explain the reasoning behind this decision?
 - b) Does the Parish Council accept that this decision must have been flawed, in the light of the fact that Lagan Homes have recently purchased outright one of the other greenfield sites assessed and dismissed at the same time as the CALA-Wrighton site was assessed and selected? *It is clear from their presentation at the last PC meeting, Lagan Homes are in very little doubt that their land is viable for development and that they will obtain planning permission in due course.*

- 2) An unmet or "desired" housing need figure of 25 houses for Fritwell has been cited repeatedly by the Parish Council Chair and other Parish Councillors. In fact it is stated by the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan that *"MCNP Forum supported Fritwell Parish Council in its view that about 25 new dwellings were needed to make existing village facilities sustainable."* However, it is clear from documents submitted to the CALA application and from statements made during PC meetings by District Councillors, that no such figure exists nor in fact is there any requirement for Fritwell to accept such a large scale development at this time. Indeed, at the time of writing only 4 homes of the 750 allocated to Category A villages remain to be found in the District within the plan period up to the year 2031.
 - a) Please can the Parish Council explain exactly where this figure has come from and how it has been calculated?
 - b) Can the Parish Council provide any reasoning as to why it supports the immediate development of 28 houses on a greenfield site in preference to a controlled and staged development plan, which could instead be produced with support from the whole village?

- 3) In May and in response to this application, the Parish Council stated *"A development of this size in Fritwell must include significant mitigation and upgrading of services, facilities and amenities in the village, needed for the current population, as well as additional growth. For many years we have been without a pub and a public bus service and our hopes for a new village hall have recently fallen by the wayside. Small developments like the George & Dragon site and new homes at Covert Farm have not resulted in any improvements to the village infrastructure and facilities."* **More specifically, the Parish Council stated that the following points of mitigation must be addressed by any development:-**
 - Support for local transport options
 - Charging points for electric vehicles
 - Traffic calming measures
 - New speed signs linked to mains electricity
 - Enhance children's play area on playing field
 - Provide more recreational and sports facilities within Fritwell for all ages
 - Enhance biodiversity within the proposed development
 - Support for the existing Village Hall, including additional storage, repairs and improved car park
 - Developer funding directed to works in the village to benefit Fritwell residents

- a) I have checked Parish Council minutes and also the documents publicly available for this application but I cannot identify how the Parish Council is assured that the Applicant or the District Council will address each of these points should the CALA application be successful. Please can the Parish Council explain?
- 4) In May, the Parish Council stated *"The greatest opposition to the proposal, as expected, was from residents who live in homes adjacent to the site. Other residents have been more supportive, expressing the desire to have a new development in the village, particularly one with a significant number of smaller and more affordable homes. Many residents thought 38 homes, a 12% increase in the size of the village, was too many and cited the recent adoption of the Mid-Cherwell Neighbourhood Plan with an "indicative" number of 25 new homes for Fritwell (MCNP PD1) (8% increase). Concerns about overload on infrastructure were also widely expressed. However, it was pointed out that Hodgson Close (the small development next to this proposal built around 20 years ago) is 34 homes and, despite opposition at the time, has been absorbed successfully into the village. If the number of homes was reduced to nearer 30, it would make the development more acceptable to residents and more compliant with the NP."*
- a) The Parish Council's response in this regard might suggest that accurate numbers of those who were openly supportive of, or were openly against the proposed development were recorded at the time of the meeting. However, although the number of people attending was apparently recorded as "42", the Parish Council's statement is quite ambiguous when it comes to the actual number of those who supported or objected, where the terms "many" and "others" are used. I note that the Parish Council alleges to have successfully identified the addresses of the majority it identified as objecting at the time as those who *"live in homes adjacent to the site"*. In light of this, please can the Parish Council provide (anonymised) details to explain of those attending who expressed an opinion, how many were supportive, how many objected and any recorded comments made by each of these respondents? I have checked Parish Council minutes but cannot find this information.
- b) The Parish Council's response implies that those who live next to a proposed development site are "expected" to object. This also in turn implies that the views of those who neighbour a proposed development site should be ignored or given less importance than those who do not. **In light of the fact that the views of every resident within the village should be respected equally and regardless of where they live, I formally request that the Parish Council withdraw this and the other similar statements they have made in this regard.**
- c) If it is indeed true that the majority of residents in Fritwell are supportive, please can the Parish Council explain why public objections on the Cherwell District Council's planning website very significantly outweigh those who have expressed their support?
- 5) What is the Parish Council's official position on the proposed development by Lagan Homes of the land behind Forge Place? Although Lagan Homes have not yet submitted a planning application, they have already provided a significant level of detail of their plans.
- a) I am interested to know whether the Parish Council are generally in support of the Lagan Homes proposal and if not, why not.
- b) I would be grateful if the Parish Council could explain whether it believes that development of other greenfield sites, such as the site owned by Lagan Homes, is less likely to obtain approval if the CALA Homes application succeeds.

I believe that the Parish Council's support for the CALA Homes application is unjustified and is NOT representative of the majority view within the village. I request once again that the Parish Council immediately withdraw its support for this application.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Robin England
8 Hodgson Close, Fritwell.