

Petition “Winslow needs Green Space”

organised by Ms K Mulhearn and Mr T Boyse in response to WNP pre-submission consultation, January-February 2022

Petition read :

“I believe Winslow needs more Green Space than is allocated in the WNP. I support changing the allocation of Site 2b (rugby field) from housing development to Local Green Space for public recreation. This site should be protected as local green space for current and future generations of Winslow to enjoy.”

The petition was received on 28 February 2022. The organisers claim more than 600 signatures but of these less than 200 could be demonstrated to have a connection with Winslow. Nevertheless the Steering Group recognise the issue raised and the local strength of feeling about it.

Response from Steering Group sent to Ms K Mulhearn and Mr T Boyse on 13 March 2022 by the Chairman of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

I confirm safe receipt of your petition, which the Steering Group has now been able to consider.

I find your explanation of the manner in which random postcodes are generated difficult to follow, and have to doubt your claim that as many as 673 Winslow residents have signed the petition. However, I do not intend to argue numbers as I accept that there is a significant body of opinion opposed to the planned development of the rugby field, and your concerns merit proper scrutiny.

As you know, the allocation of 75 homes to be built on the rugby field was contained in the Winslow Neighbourhood Plan of 2014, or WNP2014. The Consultation Statement published in advance of the making of that Plan—that is, the analysis of the responses to the extensive consultation exercise which took place during 2013—records that ‘The community recognises that there must be ongoing development of new housing’ and that ‘The continuation of current development on the west of the town is supported.’ Those views led to the allocation, explained in the Consultation Statement in this way:

A key issue was the preference for new development to be to the west of the town and this has been addressed [in WNP2014] by Policy 3 in paras 4.25 – 4.30 (land east of Furze Lane) and 4.31 - 4.35 (land at Winslow Rugby Club). These two sites will deliver up to 325 dwellings which represents more than 70% of the total proposed for development in the plan period. Development in this area will be a gradual and natural progression from a current development site. The site offers ample green space and good pedestrian links to the new station, proposed medical centre and town centre.’

I realise you will take issue with the statement about green space, and I will return to it. WNP2014 was subjected to a referendum of all Winslow’s registered voters; 60% of all those eligible voted, and of those 98% voted in favour.

Following the referendum WNP2014 was made by Aylesbury Vale District Council, then the local planning authority, and it governs development within Winslow unless it is superseded—by government legislation, changes in national guidance (the National Planning Policy Framework) or by a Local Plan—in our case the recent Vale of Aylesbury Local Plan, or VALP—or it is formally modified.

Modifications can be made only for good reason, for example because a change of circumstance has rendered a Policy incapable of being implemented or followed. A modification cannot be made because one section of the community—even on your own figures a minority of the town's population—dislikes a Policy supported in a referendum. That is all the more the case when third party rights would be adversely affected by the modification proposed. The designation of the rugby field as a site for housing conferred a development value on it which a modified Neighbourhood Plan cannot simply take away again. As you know the realised development value will contribute to funding the proposed Sports Hub. If you are to achieve your objective you will need to persuade the owner of the site, Buckinghamshire Council, to forego that development value, and you will need to satisfy the steering group that a majority of Winslow residents prefer the preservation of the rugby field, and its designation as Local Green Space (which currently it is not), to the creation of the Sports Hub if we are to propose corresponding changes to the Neighbourhood Plan.

I now return to the question of green space. A few days ago I walked, at a steady and moderate pace, from the proposed location of the pedestrian access to the Sports Hub on the north side of Buckingham Road (A on the map which appears below), along George Pass Avenue and the footpath running beside Sir Thomas Fremantle School, onto Furze Lane and then to the junction of Furze Lane and the footpath along the northern boundary of Furze Down School (B on the map) which takes just under 7 minutes. From that point through the Glade and Grange Estates to the junction of Stocks Close and Verney Road (C on the map), using the footpath through the estate where possible, took less than a further 6 minutes. From there to Tomkins Park and Arboretum (D on map) along Verney Road, Vicarage Road and through the Greyhound Lane car park, an additional 5½ minutes. If one assumes that to walk from the centre of the Glade/Grange development to one of the access points I have mentioned requires 3 minutes (ie half the time taken to cross from one side to the other) it follows that either the Sports Hub, when it is in existence, or TPA, can be reached within 10 minutes. In fact, there are shorter routes. For example, it is possible to walk from the bridge where Stocks Lane crosses the stream to Tomkins Park, using Stocks Lane, Walnut Tree Close, Angels Close, Avenue Road, the High Street and Elmfields Gate, or from the junction of Hazelton and Stocks Lane to the Park, via the path which skirts the Winslow Centre site, Avenue Road, the High Street and Elmfields Gate, in a little more than eight minutes. The re-opening of the footpath along the southern embankment of the railway line (shown in red on the map) and the replacement of the footbridge will shorten the distance and time required to reach the Sports Hub for some, though I accept not all.

The closing of footpaths during the railway works has affected us all, but I recognise that those who live on the western side of the town have suffered the most. We are told that the paths will re-open during this year. Before it was closed the continuation of the footpath past the northern boundary of Furze Down School, across Furze Lane, led over the railway bed and then across open fields to Addington. It is a path I have used many times myself. It was unusual to find livestock in the fields, and it was therefore normally possible to let a dog off its lead. When the footpath re-opens there will be ample green space available within much less than 10 minutes' walking time.

You argue that the allocation on the rugby field is not needed to meet Winslow's housing targets, but that is not so. The total requirement during the VALP period, ie between 2013 and 2033, is 870, of which 382 have so far been built (treating those under construction on the Grange as built), leaving 488 to come. The allocations we have are at Station Road (65), the rugby field (55), the Winslow Centre site (20, replacing those which cannot be built on the rugby field, on which the WNP2014 allocation was 75), Granborough Road (30, including a pending planning application) and east of Great Horwood Road (315), making a total of 485, so we are in fact three short of the requirement. The extra-care

homes proposed for the Winslow Centre site are counted separately, and are not included in those figures.

I come, last, to Tomkins Park. It is correct that dogs should not be let off the lead there. That is partly in the interests of those, primarily young children, who dislike exuberant dogs jumping up at them, and partly because a dog on a lead is less likely than one off a lead to defecate out of sight of its owner, an important consideration in a park setting. You have, I fear, repeated the canard that ball games are prohibited in the park: that is not and, to the best of my knowledge, never has been the case. And informal ball games are also permitted on the outfield of the cricket pitch section of the recreation ground when cricket is not being played.

I am not unmindful of the need for green space or of the reasons for that need, so am sympathetic to the motives behind your request. I hope, however, that you will understand from what I have said why it is not possible for the steering group to do as you ask.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Colin Bishopp

Chairman, Winslow Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group

