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Dorking’s Green Gap narrowing

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Homes will be built on the former green belt gateway into Dorking – forever changing the character of the picturesque town.

Plans to turn more than eight hectares on the edge of the Surrey Hills into housing were approved on appeal in 2023 but details of what it would look like were only given the go-ahead last week. The decision was made despite many at the Wednesday, March 5, meeting airing concerns over traffic on the “poor” A25 and the impact of school coaches being pushed into the town’s one-way system. Councillors were hamstrung in their efforts to mitigate against the impact of the added traffic following the appeal ruling and could only vote on the plan’s layout.

Developers Taylor Wimpey, however, said the scheme, which would include 72 affordable homes, was an “exciting scheme for Dorking.” Speaking on behalf of the application was James Newton. He said the proposals bring “much-needed homes for the district” with “77 per cent of the mix being one to three-bedroom properties.” He added: “The affordable tenures include social and affordable rent, shared ownership and first homes and the mix has been agreed with the housing services team. The design has been amended over time with input from heritage officers… and takes cues from the Dorking vernacular and the wider area.” Homes, he said, will be sustainable with air source pumps and solar panels while the project as a whole would bring in more than £3million into Mole Valley District Council through community infrastructure payments. He finished: “This will be an exciting scheme for Dorking.”

The L-shaped site will take up two fields west of Dorking. The land was originally in the green belt when the decision to allow the homes was granted on appeal. Since then, it has been put into Mole Valley District Council’s local plan as a site designated for development. As well as the 144 homes, there will also be parking for The Priory Secondary School, including staff and coaches. Officers told the meeting they were happy with the project and that it would not harm the character of the area – with red tiling used to help it blend in with existing homes in the town.

Speaking against the plan was Nicholas Tinker, who highlighted the 60 letters of objection. He said: “144 dwellings will create, at least, 144 additional vehicles. More realistically, double that figure, most people leave for work at the same time every morning. The congestion on the Westcott Road and around town will be totally unacceptable.” Air quality, he said, would degenerate and reach dangerous levels for schoolchildren, with the coach drop-off point creating a particular problem and forcing them to use the one-way system. He said: “It’s going to be absolute chaos.”

Cllr Abhiram Magesh (Liberal Democrat; Mickleham, Westcott and Okewood) said: “I’m generally pro-affordable housing. Housing means more people, more people means more council tax for front-line services, more customers for local business, however, I’m quite torn on this particular development because I do feel it’s lacking in a number of ways. We’ve discussed quite adequately in the past that the highways assessment is quite lacking. We all know the trouble on the A25 – especially at peak time. I’m frankly torn about this because its layout is effectively a cul-de-sac which I think is generally quite poor planning strategy. So while I laud the affordable housing commitment, I’m extremely worried for a lot of my constituents in Westcott and Abinger who have to essentially travel every single day to get any form of amenity in Dorking. The A25 is of a poor quality as it is right now, so I’m not sure how at minimum 144 extra cars – how the road is going to be able to handle that.”

The designs and layout were approved by eight votes in favour, with two against and three abstentions.

Taylor Wimpey plans for 144 homes outside Dorking (image Taylor Wimpey/ Mole Valley Planning Portal)

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