

WPC NEWS

Some New Information on Borough Green Gardens (BGG)- 3,000 new dwellings across Wrotham, Platt, Borough Green & N Ightham

Wrotham School has been selected by Department for Education (DfE) and KCC to be significantly extended to accommodate 265 extra pupils. The DfE, who will be managing the project, will provide £27.5 million, and KCC Education Committee approved a further £6.8 million on March 8. This might be considered good news by anyone not trying to drive down Borough Green Road at the start or end of the school day but why this sudden change of policy? KCC were adamant during the first TMBC Local Plan that developer funds from BGG would contribute to a new school at Kings Hill.



I have been reading a report to the TMBC Planning & Transportation Advisory Board dated 29 June 2021 and available to download here <https://wrothampc.org/> and the following facts emerged.

- In Nov 2019 BGG was granted £150,000 by Homes England Garden Communities to develop a brief, that once finalised “*will inform the determination of future planning applications. This funding is paying for officer time spent on the project and for engaging key stakeholders including KCC Highways and Natural England in technical discussions about aspects of the site.*”
- A Project Working Group was set up in early 2020 comprising TMBC, Homes England, Landowners Planning Agent, KCC, Natural England, Design Southeast and the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership. Terms of Reference have been established for the Board and Working Group, that include maintaining confidentiality about the project. **WHY IS THIS CONFIDENTIAL?**

- In 2020 multi-disciplinary consultants Arcadis were appointed with the aim of having a draft Development Brief “*to further inform the required masterplan and subsequent planning applications*”.
- In June 2021, after the failure of the first Local Plan, Homes England granted a further £100,000 for BGG Project Group and the report stated. “*It is not considered prudent to halt work on the development brief at this time, notwithstanding the current Local Plan position, as this could weaken the case for the council’s commitment to the allocation going forwards and its continued inclusion in the Garden Communities Programme*”.
- “*Homes England have indicated a willingness to consider whether funding for the Relief Road could be secured through their forthcoming Strategic Housing Infrastructure Fund (SHIF)*”.
- “*In due course the lead development partner is expected to replace the landowners on the Board as the delivery body for the project.*”

IN CONCLUSION - while TMBC Leadership were briefing Wrotham residents in the Village Hall that the green belt was safe in their hands, they had established a ‘confidential’ Working Group who were busy spending the latest £100K on a design brief and Masterplan in readiness for future planning applications. In addition, they have persuaded Homes England to consider funding the Relief Road. The KCC Education Committee have now played their part by switching school funding from Kings Hill to Wrotham.

I have been told that my statement in last months Mag that BGG was a ‘saved policy’, was incorrect. It is clear to me that BGG is an active and rapidly developing policy for TMBC, so just saved seems rather tame.

KCC Kent Highways have advised us that the only thing outstanding on the soft landscaping of the ex Nepicar Layby was the sowing of wild flower meadow seeds next month. Unfortunately, there was no budget left for the indigenous hedgerow along the bund. Fortunately, Cllr Harry Rayner has stepped in and offered to fund the purchase of whips, canes and guards from his KCC Members Fund and WPC’s Grounds Team will plant around 1,000 tree whips over the coming weeks.

Local elections on May 4th where you can vote for your Parish and Borough Council representatives, don’t forget you now need photo ID.
Cllr Pete Gillin