

**RESPONSE OF NORTH LEIGH PARISH COUNCIL TO PLANNING
APPLICATION**

REFERENCE NUMBER: 24/03100/OUT

The National Planning Policy Framework tilts the balance in favour of development where a Local Authority is unable to meet its five-year housing land supply. West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) cannot at the present time, meet its five-year housing land supply. As a consequence, this has led to what would normally be regarded as speculative applications for development and North Leigh in particular in recent years, has become a honeypot target for developers.

In recent years in North Leigh, 181 new homes have been built and a further 122 have consented development but have yet to start. The 2021 Census stated that there were a total of 881 properties within the village of North Leigh. This is a very significant increase to a village with limited facilities and this current proposal shows an increase of 10.2% over the 2021 Census figure and the properties built and consented to since that date (another calculation shows that there has been a 40% increase in housing approved in the village in the last 6 years not including this new proposal).

North Leigh itself has very limited facilities. It has two public houses, one of which has been shut for a good part of the time in recent years and changed hands 4 times and the other is only open limited hours, a library which is open eleven hours a week and a post office within a shop which is within the Memorial Hall which is about the size of a decent size living room in a house. There is a small business park on the outskirts of the village.

Whereas the balance in favour of development is tilted by the inability of WODC to meet its five-year housing land supply, it still means that due regard should be had to the planning

policies of WODC and the NPPF. Regard should also be had to the emerging North Leigh Neighbourhood Plan (NLNP) and further detail on this will be set out in this submission. No regard has been had to the pressure on school places, both primary and secondary and other important services, local doctors and dentists are by way of two examples.

This development is a back land development on a greenfield site and its style, design and layout is clearly inconsistent with the ribbon development down Common Road and housing in the remainder of the village. The proposed development is high density, and the applicant seems to want to cram as many houses as possible into a small space.

Policy OS2 requires development to be in the correct place. This development is not and significantly intrudes on the open aspect of the entry to the village from the south.

Policy OS5 requires infrastructure to be supported. The recent developments and the developments upon which permission has been granted have already put considerable pressure on the infrastructure in the village and the recent consented developments are only going to increase this pressure. The application is a clear breach of Policy EW10 which states that development in the rural centres should be of an appropriate scale and development and will be limited to meeting local housing need.

There are significant issues in relation to highways, sewage disposal along with parking which are dealt with in more detail in this submission.

Statement of Community Involvement

We have seen the Statement of Community Involvement made by the Applicants. It is the view of the Parish Council that there has been limited and inadequate public consultation.

The Applicants circulated a letter to residents of North Leigh providing a link to a website. The information contained on the website was very limited and it is the view of the Parish Council that it provided insufficient information for anybody to make an informed decision.

The Parish Council had been contacted by the Applicants requesting a private meeting. This was declined but it was confirmed to the Applicants that they could attend a Parish Council meeting. An Extra-Ordinary Parish Council Meeting was convened, the Applicants were invited, details of the meeting were posted on our website, but the Applicants declined to attend. The meeting was well attended, and the views of the local residents were made quite clear they did not want the proposed development. Minutes of the meeting were taken and have been published on the Parish Council website.

In the design and access statement submitted under the heading “North Leigh Neighbourhood Plan” at Page 13, the Applicants state:-

“The North Leigh Parish Council are currently preparing a Neighbourhood Plan to cover the whole designated Parish area. At the time of writing, there are no draft policies”.

This statement is not in fact correct. No contact has been made by the Applicants with any member of either the Neighbourhood Plan Committee or the Parish Council regarding the status of the Local Neighbourhood Plan. In 2024, there were two public meetings both well attended, and a survey was sent to all North Leigh residents. There were a high number of survey responses. Draft policies have been prepared and a copy of the draft comments to go in the Plan in relation to development are attached to this submission at Annex 1. Whereas it is currently a draft, it has been raised and discussed at the most recent Neighbourhood Plan Committee Meeting at the beginning of December 2024, certainly before this current planning application was submitted.

Grim's Ditch

Grim's Ditch forms part of the extensive iron age boundary ditches of Oxfordshire. We attach Annex 2 to the paper published by Professor Blair on Grim's Ditch. The Visible portion of Grim's Ditch clearly visible on the Ground but it appears that the course of Grim's Ditch possibly continues underground as indicated in Annex 2.

Great play is made by the Applicants to erect a monument for Grim's Ditch but they would appear to have failed to take into account the probability that the ditch extends underground. Their application proposes to build houses over this area which should not under any circumstances be permitted if Blair's paper is indeed correct in this. Further archaeological investigations should be undertaken to establish the precise location of Grim's Ditch and if it is clear that it extends along the lines as demonstrated in Blair's paper then no development should be permitted above this area as Grim's Ditch is such an important part of our cultural heritage.

Access

The Parish Council has considerable concerns as to the proposed access to and egress from the proposed development. The proposed access is very close to the junction with Common Road and the A4095. The A4095 is a busy road and its junction with Common Road is extremely busy particularly at peak times. There is also a proposal put forward to the draft West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 to move the North Leigh Football Club to a site on the south side of this junction with access at this same junction. In addition there is an application under consideration for 5 more houses at Common Farm and a further 10 already approved at 44 Common Road (and the possibility of a further 15 put forward under WOLP

2041 at 44 Common Road) close to this location. To have traffic accessing Common Road at or close to this location on Common Road would cause very considerable traffic problems.

Inevitably, this development will be an unsustainable car-led development as it is common for most properties to have two cars. This application could potentially add 230 cars to the traffic on Common Road with the other developments mentioned above potentially adding a further 60 cars.

Parking

The submission states that the Master Plan proposes parking spaces in line with local policy and parking standards however, it does not specify how many parking spaces will therefore be allocated. It is the view of the Parish Council that this will provide inadequate parking and there is no information as to where additional parking facilities will be made available. In any event, parking in the village is very limited and an overspill of vehicles parking in Common Road itself would only exacerbate access issues.

The Applicants state that they will meet the required parking standards. Most homes do however have at least two cars, sometimes more and in view of the proposed mixed of dwellings, only a handful will be required to have two parking spaces. This means that the access road and central route through the Estate together with the off shoots would be dominated by parked cars. This would not represent an attractive residential environment and would conflict with the guidance in the West Oxfordshire Design Guide (WODG). This guidance expects that where streets are designed to incorporate on street parking, sufficient trees planting and front garden space should be provided in order to balance the impact of parked cars and to reinforce the spatial enclosure of the street. We therefore take the view that the proposed development would not represent a high quality design as required by

policy OS4 of the Local Plan and the Framework. The proposal would cause harm to the character and appearance of the area in particular. Policy OS4 of the Local Plan, the Framework and the WODG seek to ensure that new development is of a high quality of design that respects the historic architectural and landscape character of the locality, contribute to the local distinctiveness enhances the character and quality of the surrounding and provides a safe, pleasant, convenient and interesting environment and the quality of the public realm is enhanced.

Provision of Clean Water Supply and Sewage Treatment

There have been problems with adequate pressure in the clean water supply in North Leigh especially in the vicinity of Marlborough Gardens which is close to Common Road. Thames Water has stated that the development may lead to no/low water pressure and that they are not able to support the supply of clean water to this development until the network has been upgraded to accommodate the demand from this development. Thames Water has requested a Grampian Clause on the occupation of this development until such time as the clean water supply has been upgraded.

Thames Water has also stated that they do not permit the building over of strategic water mains located at the site until the developer details how they intend to divert the water mains and/or align the development to address this issue.

There have been problems with the sewer network in North Leigh especially close to Common Road. The network is antiquated and in urgent need of upgrading. Pipes in the vicinity of Common Road are made from pitch fibre and date back to the 1950s. There have been many instances of the pipes collapsing in this area causing sewage leaking and requiring urgent repairs. At January 2025 the pipes from 39 – 50 Common Road are undergoing urgent repair and replacement for this reason which is a major construction project with pumps

running 24 hours a day causing considerable disruption and inconvenience to local residents due to noise of the pumping machinery and interrupted supply. Thames Water has proposed a Grampian Condition whereby this development shall not be occupied until such time as the existing foul water network infrastructure has been upgraded to accommodate the needs of this development.

The sewage from this development would need to be pumped across North Leigh to the Church Hanborough Sewage Treatment Works for treatment through a sewer system that is antiquated, and leaking due to the volume and pressure of existing flows. At the moment the Church Hanborough Sewage Treatment Works is running at 88% of its current permitted capacity. A timeline for the Treatment Works to be rectified to even operate at its current permit has not been established and even if this was already running at 100% of the permit the Treatment Works would not be able to service other developments already approved in North Leigh (such as 55 houses at Rectory Rise, 10 at 44 Common Road and 43 at Manor Oak etc) let alone treat additional new capacity at the Common Road site. Thames Water has proposed a Grampian Clause on this development so that the houses cannot be occupied until such time as the treatment capacity is not only restored to 100% of the current permit but additional capacity is provided for the new developments approved as well as this new proposed capacity. According to Windrush Against Sewage Pollution which has been monitoring illegal outflows at Church Hanborough Sewage Treatment Works it is unlikely that this capacity will be provided before 2030.

Due to the Grampian Clauses proposed by Thames Water on clean water provision, sewer network upgrade, and sewage treatment capacity this application, if approved, could not be occupied until 2030 at the earliest, and therefore this planning application is unlikely to contribute to the current 5 year housing land supply for West Oxfordshire.

CONCLUSION

The submission prepared by Savills and submitted in support of this application sets out what he regards as the planning balance. Whereas it has to be conceded that WODC not being able to meet its five-year housing land supply—does tilt the balance, still due regard must also be given to the local plan and the emerging NLNP.

Firstly, planning policies emphasise that development in a rural area will be limited to that which is required and is appropriate for rural locations. This development clearly does not pass this test.

Policy H2 sets out that new dwellings within an area categorised in the settlement hierarchy as open countryside will be limited to certain types of development, none of which apply to the proposed development. The application site is not envisaged as a site in the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 and national policies relating to the development within the countryside. Further, significant weight should be given to the effect of the application on the character and appearance of the area and on Grim's Ditch and its setting.

The current application would have an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the area. It conflicts with policies OS2 and EH2 which amongst other things seek to ensure that development should form a logical compliment to the existing pattern of development and conserve, and where possible, enhance the areas intrinsic character with quality and distinctness of the local landscape. Furthermore, the application does not accord with the NPPF which seeks to ensure development is sympathetic to local character.

In setting out the benefits in Savills' report, at best the benefits should be given moderate as opposed to significant weight.

For the reasons set out above, the adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies of the NPPF as a whole. The development does not represent sustainable development within the meaning of Paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF and this weighs substantially against the application

Finally, significant weight should be afforded to the emerging NLNP. Whilst it is accepted that this plan has yet to be adopted, as set out in this submission, the views of the local community have been extensively researched with two well attended Parish meetings and a survey, the results of which have been posted on the Parish Council website. The residents do not want any further large scale development and this should be afforded significant weight.

North Leigh Parish Council accordingly ask that this Planning Application is refused.

Annex 1

HOUSING AND DEVELOPMENT – NORTH LEIGH

Draft Policy of the Emerging North Leigh Neighbourhood Plan

There has been a full consultation with the residents of North Leigh including two public meetings both of which were well attended and a survey sent to all residents with 362 replies - a very significant response and higher than average.

Of the responses received 85% would not favour further development which for this plan is not realistic. However on further questions as to what residents would prefer if development was to take place 79% was for 3 bedroom homes or less. Concern was expressed about parking in the village and so any new development should have adequate parking.

The 2021 Census stated that there was a total of 881 properties within the village of North Leigh, comprising 478 detached, 265 semi-detached, 108 terraced and 30 flats. Since the census, 181 new homes have been built and a further 122 consented, but yet to start.

This shows a significant increase in the size of North Leigh and quite simply, the infrastructure is struggling to cope and there are only limited facilities within North Leigh itself. Considerable concern was expressed about water pressure and sewage disposal. Inevitably, anybody looking for employment in North Leigh needs to look outside the village which adds to the current traffic issues which was another area of significant concern to residents.

Moving forward, the Neighbourhood Plan wants to ensure that the present character of the village is preserved which will benefit existing and future residents.

Consultation and public meetings as demonstrated in the base line evidence clearly demonstrate that residents do not want either any further development or limited development. It is accepted

that to have an objective of no development is not realistic, but given the boundaries of the village, infill development or small-scale development would be considered. The housing mix as shown in the Census along with the recent developments shows a considerable number of detached and semi-detached dwellings and base line evidence indicates that there is support for housing for young families who want open market starter homes and people who have been brought up within the village community and wish to remain here. In this context, the need for single bedroom homes which can include apartments, should be included.

Any new development should be visually attractive and in harmony with its immediate setting and character.

Any new development should bring together all aspects of design, connectivity and natural environment in keeping with the landscape and existing homes closely linking the village and countryside.

New developments should be sustainable and should be of a standard compatible with ensuring the environment is not harmed and undue strain is not put on services eg, solar panels.

Annex 2

Grims Ditch – part of the extensive Iron Age boundary ditches of Oxfordshire

Ref: Oxoniensia - Article on Grims Ditch by Blair

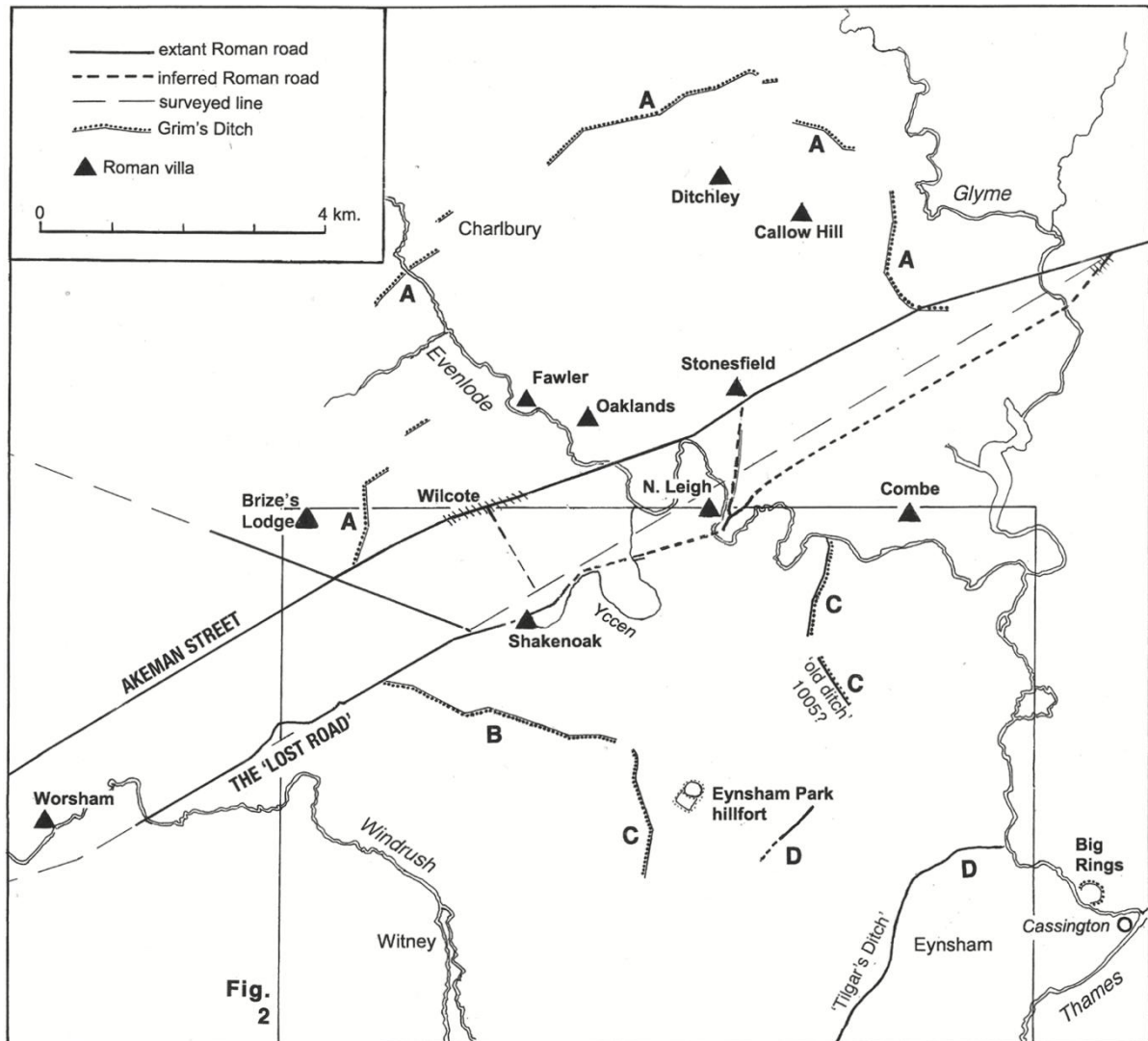


Fig. 1. The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch, in relation to rivers, Roman roads and Roman villas. A = established sections of the circuit, not reinterpreted here. B = an established section of the circuit, reinterpreted here. C = other linear earthworks, newly ascribed here to the Grim's Ditch circuit. D = other linear earthworks, potentially having some association with the Grim's Ditch complex.

In this diagram from Blair's paper, the visible portions of Grims Ditch running to the south east of North Leigh is labelled "B", and the portion of the ditch visible on the ground as a ditch and bank alongside Wood Lane is labelled "C". It appears that the course of Grim's Ditch possibly continues between B and C in an area that shows today only as a faint crop mark, indicated by the dashed line in the following aerial photograph.

