

Statement of Community Involvement
Reading Golf Club Land
Prepared on behalf of Fairfax (Reading) Ltd
and Reading Golf Club

May 2020

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1. Introduction

This Statement of Community Involvement outlines the pre-application engagement undertaken in relation to proposals by Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club for an outline application with all matters reserved except access for the development of land at Reading Golf Club, involving demolition of the existing clubhouse and the erection of a new residential-led scheme, including proposed provision of Community Infrastructure.

Pre-application engagement on the proposals began in April 2019 ahead of the submission of an outline planning application.

Community engagement will, as appropriate, continue following the submission of this application.

2. About Cumpsty Communications

Cumpsty Communications was commissioned by Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club to assist the pre-application public engagement on these proposals, ahead of the submission of an outline planning application.

Cumpsty Communications has extensive experience delivering community and stakeholder engagement campaigns, to ensure that communities have a real chance to participate in discussions around development proposals, before planning applications are submitted.

Our experience involves work with both private and public sector bodies, and has involved communicating around a variety of planning applications.

Cumpsty Communications always aims to not just match, but to exceed the engagement requirements outlined, in statute, government guidance and each Local Planning Authority's (LPA) adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

3. Meeting the requirement to engage

National Planning Policy Framework

Ahead of the submission of this application we believe Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club have complied with the requirements outlined in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which places great emphasis on community engagement within the planning system. The principles of engagement detailed in this report are based on the government's advice in the Decision Taking section of the NPPF. It makes clear the central role in the planning process for engagement and participation:

188. Early engagement has significant potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning application system for all parties. Good quality pre-application discussion enables better coordination between public and private resources and improved outcomes for the community.

189. Local planning authorities have a key role to play in encouraging other parties to take maximum advantage of the pre-application stage. They cannot require that a developer engages with them before submitting a planning application, but they should encourage take-up of any pre-application services they do offer. They should also, where they think this would be beneficial, encourage any applicants who are not already required to do so by law to engage with the local community before submitting their applications.

190. The more issues that can be resolved at pre-application stage, the greater the benefits. For their role in the planning system to be effective and positive, statutory planning consultees will need to take the same early, pro-active approach, and provide advice in a timely manner throughout the development process. This assists local planning authorities in issuing timely decisions, helping to ensure that applicants do not experience unnecessary delays and costs.

Localism Act

The aim of the Localism Act is to increase public participation in the decision making process and has particular emphasis on the planning

process. The Act, for large scale applications, has introduced a statutory requirement for the developer to engage local communities.

The Act under Chapter 4 61W states:

The person must publicise the proposed application in such manner as the person reasonably considers is likely to bring the proposed application to the attention of a majority of the persons who live at, or otherwise occupy, premises in the vicinity of the land.

It goes on to indicate in 61X (Duty to take account of responses to consultation) that the applicant must take in to consideration responses made during the community engagement process:

The person must, when deciding whether the application that the person is actually to make should be in the same terms as the proposed application, have regard to any responses to the consultation that the person has received.

Reading Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement

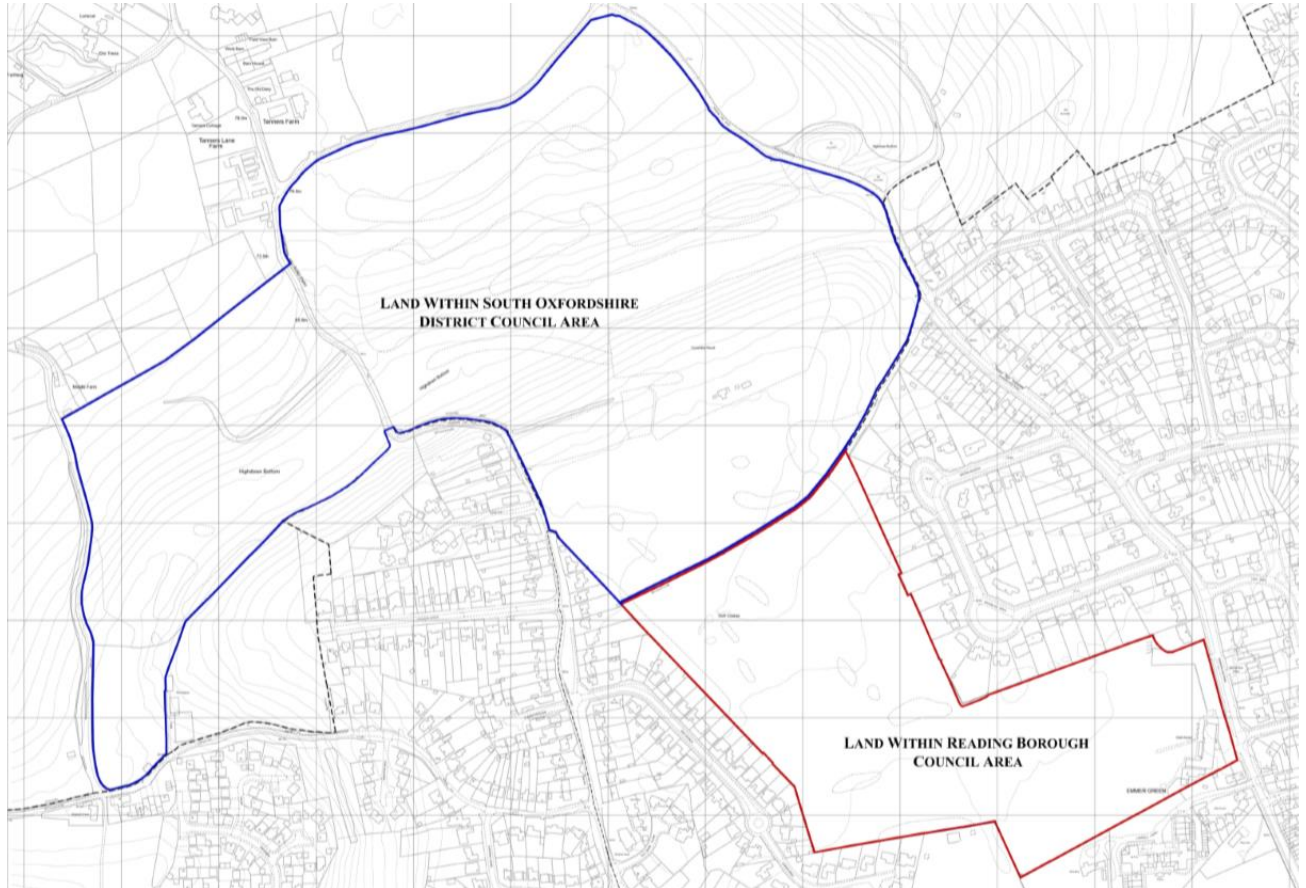
Reading Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was adopted in March 2014. This document outlines how stakeholders and the local community should be involved in the pre-application process.

The SCI states the importance of pre-application engagement, and encourages the use of various community engagement methods, including the following, ahead of any planning submission:

- Direct discussion with key stakeholders
- Drop-in events
- Publication of the policy or plan online

We believe our programme of engagement, which has utilised all of the above community engagement methods, and more, has not just met the requirements of Reading Borough Council's SCI, but exceeded them.

4. The Site



The site sits north of Reading Town Centre within the suburb of Emmer Green and is accessed off Kidmore End Road. Along its southern edge it follows a line north of Lyefield Court, whilst extending north and running broadly parallel with Eric Avenue and Highdown Hill Road along its western edge, and Brooklyn Drive on its eastern edge. Along its northern edge the site extends to the border between Reading Borough Council and South Oxfordshire District Council.

The location plan above identifies the extent of the Golf Club's land ownership within the Reading and South Oxfordshire administrative areas.

5. The Proposals

Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club are proposing to develop around 260 homes on land within the part of the current Reading Golf Club site that is within Reading Borough.

Around 25% of the land in Reading Borough will be designated open or play space, with cycle and footpaths planned to connect the new open spaces to the land in South Oxfordshire that is within the golf club's site. Overall, more than 60% of the land in Reading Borough will be retained as non-developed public and private green spaces.

These plans will see all Category A trees retained on site, with an overall major increase in the number of trees on site. The applicant is committed to a net gain of least 1,000 trees across the golf club land.

Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club are currently liaising with the local NHS Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and local surgeries to agree the best use for a new health centre, the built form of which is included within these proposals.

These proposals are built around improvements to public transport. The site has been laid out to optimise connections to the existing bus network, whilst new walking and cycle routes through to the golf club land in South Oxfordshire and to link through to Caversham are proposed.

Junction improvements to the Peppard Road junction, together with alterations to the verge to the south of our site on Kidmore End Road to enable two-way traffic, are also contained within the proposals.

Greater detail regarding the full extent of the proposals can be viewed within the Planning Drawings and Design and Access Statement supporting the planning submission.

6. Engagement

Initial Engagement

The applicant has entered into formal pre-application discussions with the Council as part of the engagement process in support of this planning application and a series of pre-application meetings have been held with the Council and its advisors to consider the development proposals at various stages throughout the design process.

Pre-application advice was first sought in 2018, where the principles of development and proposed planning programme was shared with officers and members.

Subsequently, meetings were held with technical officers, politicians, local advisory, interest and business groups to help identify issues of importance to design development, which in turn have influenced the applicant's decision-making process. A brief summary of meetings held is set out below:

- Pre-application planning meetings with Planning, Housing, Landscape, Trees, Highways and Policy Officers, February 2019, May 2019, August 2019, October 2019, January 2020 and March 2020
- A meeting at the Civic Centre with Senior Councillors, Reading Borough Council, January 2019
- A round of meetings on 8th and 9th April 2019 to outline initial thinking on the plans, and secure early stakeholder feedback, with:
 - Caversham and District Residents' Association (CADRA)
 - Caversham Globe (Globe)
 - Reading Civic Society (RCS)
 - Emmer Green Residents' Association (EGRA)
 - Caversham Traders Association (CTA)
- April 2019 meeting with Reading CIC (CIC)
- A meeting with two of the site's ward Councillors, Cllrs Stanford-Beale and Grashoff, on 7 May 2019
- A meeting with Senior Councillors, Reading Borough Council, July 2019
- Meeting with Reading Civic Society, August 2019

- Seven-hour public and stakeholder engagement event held at Reading Golf Club, where 363 residents and stakeholders attended, 11th Feb 2020
- Meetings with Sport England and England Golf, March 2020
- Presentation to Design South East, March 2020
- Online engagement with local stakeholder groups, including CADRA, EGRA, Globe, CTA and CIC, May 2020
- In addition, Matt Rodda MP agreed to meet with Reading Golf Club, April 2020. This meeting is still in the process of being arranged.

The discussions with local stakeholder groups have been of great assistance to the applicant's understanding of relevant issues. Accordingly, and in tandem with comments received from the public engagement process, it is considered that a robust and informed scheme has emerged.

Stakeholder Preview Event

On Tuesday 11 February 2020 between 2pm and 4pm a stakeholder preview event was held at Reading Golf Club's Clubhouse, giving golf club members and selected stakeholders (including previously engaged with community / stakeholder groups and relevant elected members) a preview of the plans. The materials available at this event were identical to those available at the public engagement event outlined below.

Public Engagement Event

Following the programme of individual meetings and stakeholder preview event, a public engagement event was arranged and held. This took place at the same venue as the stakeholder preview event, running between 4pm and 8pm on the same day.

To publicise the event, invitation flyers were distributed to the 2,300 closest properties, as shown overleaf, and a press release was issued.



GPS Map of route walked by leaflet distributors

This press release was covered in the Henley Standard in the week before the engagement event, and was referenced on other media outlets including Thames Tap. On the morning of the event, a Golf Club representative was interviewed on BBC Radio Berkshire to further advertise the engagement exercise. Together with this, the release was distributed to the stakeholders listed under the 'Initial Engagement' heading.

The event was staffed by key members of the project team, including the project architect, town planner, highways consultant, landscape architect and developer.

The proposals were displayed on eight pull up banners alongside six A1 boards, with feedback forms available for attendees to comment and an email address provided, to enable the returning of electronic feedback. Copies of all engagement materials form Appendix 1.

In total, 363 residents and stakeholders attended the public engagement event. The attendees were a mix of residents, Councillors, golf club members and representatives of stakeholder groups.



Stakeholders and residents discuss plans with the project team at the event

Website

Immediately after the closure of the public engagement event, a website was launched and advertised (www.rgcfuture.com). This replicated exactly the material available at the engagement event, and included a mechanism to electronically submit feedback. This feedback mechanism remained open until 27 March 2020.

7. Feedback

Feedback has been gathered through two mechanisms - a public engagement event and the website www.rgcfuture.com.

The information made available at the event and on the website was identical, to ensure that all public feedback was given on a basis of uniform information.

Overall Feedback

In total, 202 pieces of feedback have been submitted as part of the engagement process. This breaks down as:

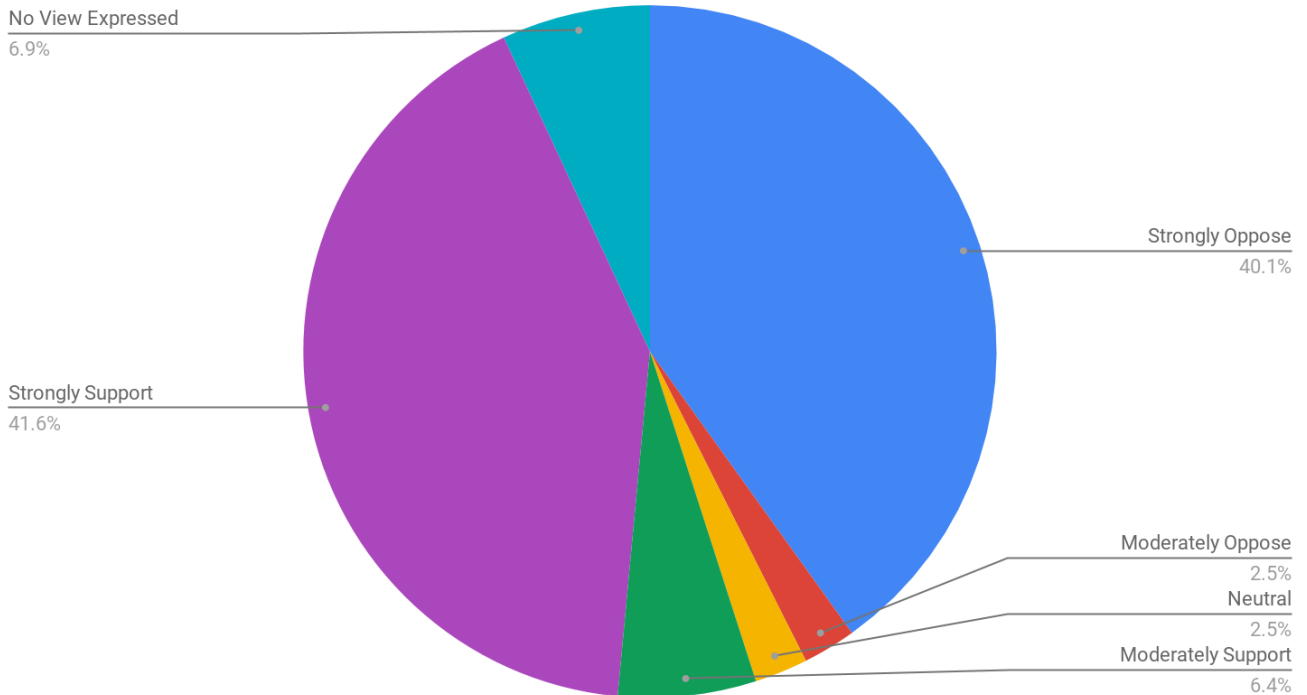
- 89 at the engagement event
- 113 through the website

All respondents were asked to answer, based on a 1 - 5 scale of strongly opposed to strongly support, a question addressing their overall view of the plans.

Overall View	Number of responses	Percentage
Strongly Support	84	42%
Moderately Support	13	6%
Neutral	5	2%
Moderately Oppose	5	3%
Strongly Oppose	81	40%
No View Expressed	14	7%

In summary, **48% of respondents expressed support** for the overall plans, with **43% expressing opposition**, 2% remaining neutral and 7% expressing no preference.

Overall Feedback



Issues Raised

Through the engagement process a number of themes recurred.
Positive comments concentrated on the below issues:

- Need for the golf club to move to survive
- Number of houses proposed being fewer than expected
- Lack of crossing of the SODC boundary
- Relatively low density of houses proposed
- Net gain of 1,000 trees
- Investment in a new health centre
- Potential new allotments

Non-supportive comments focussed the following:

- The justifiability of the divergence from the local plan, particularly in terms of housing numbers and the loss of the 9-hole golf course on the SODC land
- Maintenance of the SODC land following the golf club's move
- Negative impact on health infrastructure - Doctors surgeries being currently oversubscribed
- Lack of school places / opportunities for schools to expand
- Impact on highways, especially Kidmore End Road, and the road network not being able to cope with hundreds of additional cars

- Concern about potential road widening impacting on Emmer Green playing fields
- A scepticism about the long-term future of the SODC land as open space
- The quality of the proposed replacement trees, with the replacement of mature trees with saplings
- Questions about whether the health centre, open space and infrastructure improvements would actually be delivered
- Impact on wildlife

8. Changes Made

In recognition of feedback received during the course of the pre-application engagement process, the following changes were made to the plans:

1. Relocation of the Health Centre to the Kidmore End Road frontage
2. Provision of a rear entrance to Emmer Green Primary School
3. Reinforcement of the Policy EN12 Green Link from north to south
4. Relocation of some green spaces to provide more open space through the centre of the site and to enable a linear route through to the SODC land to link through to proposed paths and cycleways
5. Legal agreement to commit to progressing the open spaces and leisure uses within the SODC land
6. Move to provide back to back housing along the boundaries with Eric Avenue and Lyefield Court

Section 3 of the DAS provides further detail regarding how the design and layout has evolved during the pre-application phase.

9. Conclusion

As part of Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club's commitment to pre-application engagement, the development have been subject to a lengthy period of formal and informal discussions with Council Officers and Members, members of the wider local community and local stakeholder groups.

This engagement exercise has both met and exceeded the requirements laid out as part of the NPPF, the Localism Act and Reading Borough Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement.

Comments, ideas and concerns have been gathered and assessed, and wherever possible have been fed into the design process so that the proposals submitted with the planning application meet as many local aspirations for the development and its environs as possible, and also seeks to mitigate concerns and likely objections.

Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club have sought to be very open about the proposals and has been keen to involve the local community. Fairfax (Reading) Ltd, Reading Golf Club and their representatives have held a lengthy public engagement process, first discussing issues with Council Officers prior to refining plans and engaging all stakeholders on a well-considered scheme at the public engagement event.

The engagement activities have been well publicised, with the proposals outlined in various publications and displayed at an event attended by 363 people. Local residents and stakeholders have all had a chance to engage with the project team, to discuss the proposals and make comments.

Dialogue with stakeholders including the Council, Emmer Green Residents' Association, Caversham and District Residents' Association, Caversham Globe and Reading Civic Society and feedback from the engagement process has been crucial to the further development of the scheme.

The primary purpose of the public engagement was to explain the context of the development proposals, to clearly illustrate the rationale behind the proposals and to gather attendees' comments and ideas as part of the design process, prior to the team refining proposals to inform the planning application. Members of the project team were in attendance to listen to concerns and expectations for the development

and to answer any technical questions arising from the exhibition information.

The results of the engagement exercise highlighted a plurality in favour of the proposals, although ongoing discussions will take place with the minority who opposed the plans, to provide re-assurance about the future.

Discussions with the Council and other key stakeholders will continue during the planning application process and it is Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club's intention to continue discussing relevant matters with key stakeholders in the weeks ahead.

Fairfax (Reading) Ltd and Reading Golf Club look forward to being kept informed of the Council's own engagement on the application proposals in due course and are committed to considering the responses received.