The Planning Policy and Economic Development team,
Runnymede Borough Council,
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planningpolicy@runnymede.gov.uk.

Dear Ms Clancy,

As you may be aware the Virginia Water Neighbourhood Plan is now well underway. After RBC’s adoption of the Virginia Water Neighbourhood Forum and Neighbourhood Area back in April last year, the Forum has now spent the past 9 months engaging with the residents of our community, schools, Doctors and business stakeholders. Our initial questionnaire closes on Saturday 29th February. After 2 months of intense consultation where some 4,000 flyers were delivered, along with roadside posters and banners over 650 online questionnaires already have been completed. We now expect to have the first draft of our plan completed by the end of this year it will involve housing and a number of features that we hope will benefit the people of our Village.

The Neighbourhood forum is made up of representatives from the whole community all of whom want to see Virginia Water retain its village atmosphere and separation from metropolitan sprawl, which we face from Egham and Staines to the east, and Longcross to the West. The Forum will stand to uphold Virginia Water’s individuality as a Village and not part of the metropolitan sprawl.

One of the principle reasons that so many people attend our meetings and have bothered to complete the questionnaire is that we have seemingly little voice when it comes to Runnymede Council and development. As individual residents many of us aired concerns to our Councillors and officers that the two greenbelt sites allocated within Virginia Water flawed on grounds of non-deliverability due to title issues; that they were all poorly accessed and on the same side of the village as Longcross thereby causing maximum disruption to our part of the community. We told them there were very deliverable alternatives in the village where the housing numbers could be guaranteed. We further pointed out that these sites were not A320 sensitive and would spread the impact across the village. Perhaps if we had a Parish Council we might have been listened to with more regard, as it was the decision had been taken back in 2016 where these houses were going.

In open committee hearings residents were told by the Councillors and officers alike that Longcross is worth too much financially for the Council to scale it back. It would however, be
self-contained and traffic would be directed away from Virginia Water. Virginia Water South was not an extension of the Longcross Urbanisation as the railway line was a clear buffer.....! I’m afraid that in our opinion the Garden Village concept is for Longcross is flawed, it isn’t a separate settlement but nothing more than “ribbon development” extending Virginia Water... Further evidence of this came from the fact that the NHS have told all 500 residents of Longcross North to register with the single surgery in Virginia Water. The NHS representative told the Longcross steering Group only last Tuesday that they “didn’t consider that Longcross Garden Village justified a medical centre and the 5,000 population should be catered for by practices in Chobham and Virginia Water... Similarly, at the same meeting the representative of Surrey County Council told everyone that they had no money or intension to operate a school at Longcross. “It would have to be a Free School”, we were told.. There is no capacity in Foxhills, Chertsey or Chobham for Middle or Secondary education. Added to all this the main artery A320 is not designed, there’s no funding and we are expected to take the word of Council highway engineers that they will deliver it by 2024. On the back are we really to believe the Local plan is “sound”.....!! As a forum we feel the only thing that is “sound” is our view that the Council will say ANYTHING to get this plan over the line. In an effort to show an example we will produce our own strategic Plan in a fully inclusive and open manor, where residents are respected and listened to without prejudgement.

Perhaps it not surprising that RBC find themselves today embroiled in a major review of their conduct and actions at Hurst Lane in Virginia Water, where a number of our residents are incensed by the years of neglect and negligence in dealing with illegal breaches of planning. If only RBC would respect residents whose objectives are not to disregard the need for more homes but to see the fairer distribution of them across the community. The view of the forum is that RBC’s Local plan would have been better received and would have had less impact on the A320 had they engaged with communities such as ours.

For and on behalf of Virginia Water Neighbourhood Forum.