COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2025

Finchampstead Parish Council Response to WBC CGR Consultation

Contents

Initial Statement and Position of Finchampstead Parish Council 2

Reference to Finchampstead Parish Council's original submission 2

Grounds for Objection 3

Conclusion and Request 3

Appendix 1 4

Initial Statement and Position of Finchampstead Parish Council

Finchampstead Parish Council has considered in detail the draft proposals published by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) for boundary changes as part of the current Community Governance Review (CGR).

The Council resolves to reject and oppose the proposal to alter the parish boundary so that the area of Finchwood Park (Area E in WBC Consultation paper) is transferred from Finchampstead Parish to Barkham Parish.

We therefore recommend that the current boundary (ie; the boundary as it existed prior to this CGR) be retained in this area.

Reference to Finchampstead Parish Council's original submission

We remind the CGR Working Group of Finchampstead Parish Council's formal submission (full text in Appendix 1), which stated:

> *"The question of future Parish Council support to this new community has been posed by the CGR and whether Parish boundaries should be redrawn to assist clear community cohesion in this new area.*
>
> *There may be benefits in the creation of a new Parish for the area, or alternatively to widen the remit of one or more existing Parish Councils to cover the whole area.*
>
> *Finchampstead Parish Council considered this question and confirmed its willingness either to assume responsibility for the whole SDL or to work jointly with neighbouring parishes to develop the new community, including redrawing our boundary to the southern edge of the SDL.*
>
> *In discussions with Barkham Parish as part of the preparation of this response, it was clear that redrawing our northern boundary along Park Lane (to the south of the SDL boundary) would enable a more focused discussion between Barkham and Arborfield & Newland Parishes on the broader governance question.*
>
> *Discussions with representatives from Arborfield & Newland Parish Council also indicated that they believe such a change in the Finchampstead boundary would be helpful in reaching conclusions about future parish representation for the new community.*
>
> *Whether that requires a boundary change for Barkham, Arborfield, or both, is a matter for those parishes and WBC as part of this review. What is clear is that there is a golden opportunity for enhanced community cohesion and support through appropriate parish boundary changes in this area.*
>
> *"If the responsibility for the Arborfield SDL area cannot be settled in this CGR, then the Council considers that the status quo should remain until the community matures and its needs become clearer."*

As is evident from the extract above, our proposal was conditioned on a comprehensive, single-parish solution for the whole of the Arborfield SDL.

Regrettably, and despite constructive initial discussions and indications of support from Arborfield & Newland PC, this solution has not been included in the current CGR proposal.

Grounds for Objection

Under the current draft proposals, the CGR would transfer approximately 947 properties from Finchampstead to Barkham, without any comprehensive solution to the wider question of coherent community governance for the whole area around the Arborfield SDL.

This provides no tangible benefit to residents, either existing or new.

Many residents of Finchwood Park have expressed concern at the proposed changes and the lack of clear governance identity that would result.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that this is not a semantic exercise about boundaries. The proposed change is not simply a line on a map but one that carries real implications for the community, governance, and the financial sustainability of Finchampstead Parish Council.

The proposed alteration to the parish boundaries and the resulting loss of such a significant number of properties from the parish tax base would have a serious and lasting impact on the residents of Finchampstead who would remain within the parish.

Finchampstead Parish Council has been recognised by residents and by WBC as a go ahead and proactive council with a proven record of delivering infrastructure improvements and extensive community investment. The reduction of nearly 1,000 properties from our tax base would restrict our ability to continue serving our community at current levels without a substantial rise in the annual precept. Even with an increase in precept of c20%, we would still face cutting our already very meagre staff numbers. To set a budget for the next financial year is proving beyond challenging, especially with the outcome of the CGR unknown.

The financial impact would not only severely impede our ability to offer grant support to local community groups, (which currently come from our precept receipts) but would also necessitate a very significant reappraisal of how we use CIL receipts, which would have to be re-focused on revenue generation.

We currently seek to support the delivery of major infrastructure both in Finchampstead and in neighbouring parishes, for example, the Arborfield Community Centre. We do not wish this to be compromised.

In our original submission, these potential consequences were fully recognised by FPC, but they were accepted as part of our proposals in the interests of achieving a cohesive and united community in Arborfield and delivering clear governance benefits to the wider area. The proposed CGR does not deliver this.

It is our understanding that we were the only parish to come forward to the review with such a significant offer and it is unfortunate that our sense of altruism has not been matched by others.
As that wider benefit has not been realised, Finchampstead Parish Council now faces the prospect of a very severe financial loss to no corresponding advantage elsewhere.

This outcome is unacceptable to both the Parish Council and the residents of Finchampstead.

Conclusion and Request

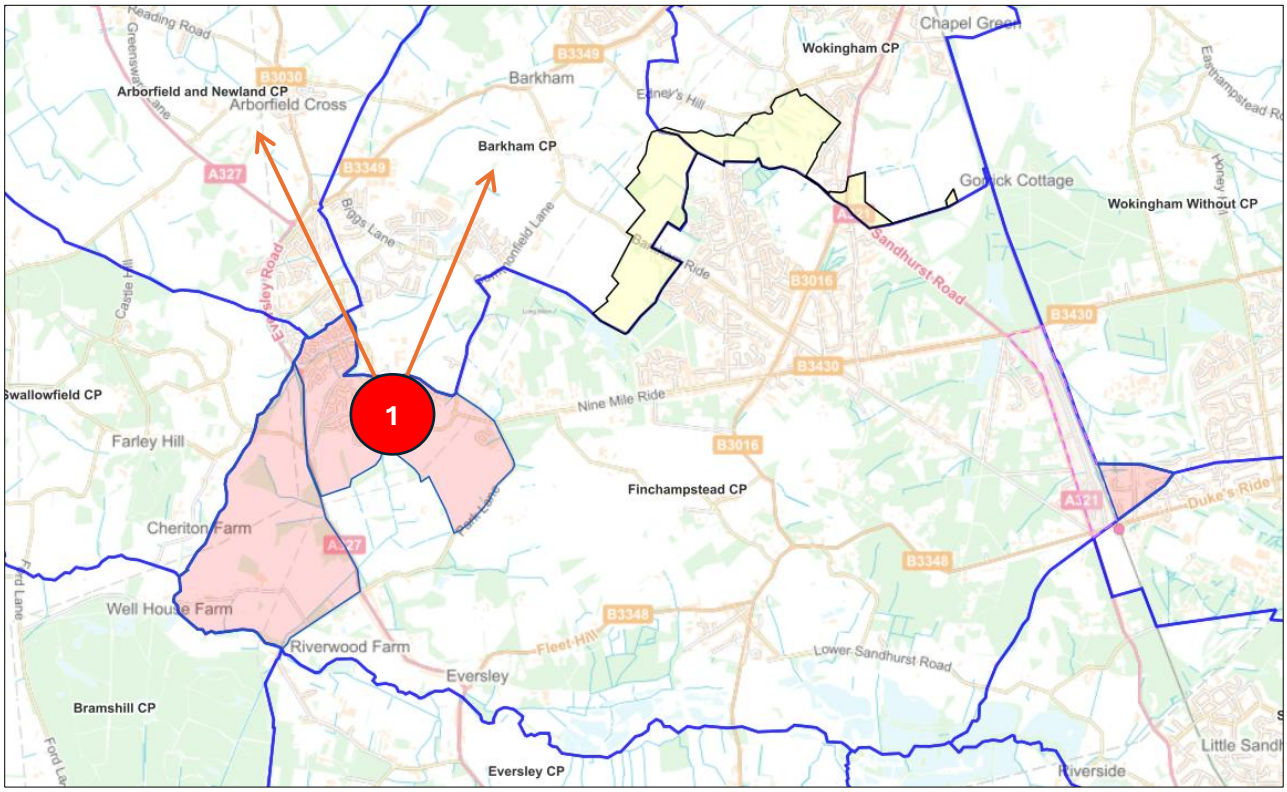
Finchampstead Parish Council strongly urges the CGR Panel to retain the existing parish boundary in the Finchwood Park area pending any future review that might deliver a unified governance solution for the entire Arborfield SDL.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the CGR panel to discuss these concerns before any final recommendations are made.

Our Ward Councillors have been copied into this correspondence, and we ask for their continued support in representing the Parish Council's position.

Appendix 1

The following extract is taken directly from Finchampstead Parish Council's formal submission to the Community Governance Review (submitted on 29th April 2025):



1 Arborfield Strategic Development Location (SDL)

Part of the Arborfield SDL, specifically Finchwood Park, currently lies within the Finchampstead Parish boundary.

The original strategic vision for the SDL was to create a high-quality new village and a sustainable community, including:

- Up to 3,500 new homes
- Schools and sports pitches
- A district centre with a food store, shops, community centre, and leisure centre
- Restaurants, cafés, and other typical district centre uses
- Children's play parks, including a skate park
- Community gardens and allotments
- Nature parks
- New roads, footpaths, and cycle and bridleways

Finchampstead Parish Council is one of the four Parish Councils that, for historical reasons, intersect in the SDL area, and we have all been fully engaged in discussions about the development since its inception.

However, concerns have been raised that liaison meetings between the Parish Councils covering the area and the developers have diminished as construction progresses. There are also concerns that elements of the development may now differ from the original vision.

The wider Finchampstead Parish community has benefited significantly from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) payments as a result of the housing development in this area in recent years. This has enabled us to fund infrastructure improvements across established Finchampstead communities, which have been affected by increased traffic, pressure on local services, and general disruption resulting from the SDL. Our ongoing investment programme is designed to address these effects, with notable examples including:

- Contributions to the remodelling of California Crossroads
- Improvements to footpaths and bridleways
- Enhancements to California Country Park
- Grants to schools, voluntary organisations, and community groups
- Remodelling of the "war memorial" Junction on Jubilee Road
- Rooks nest woods access improvements (In Barkham but extensively used by Finchampstead residents)
- Provision of playground equipment at Waverly Way open space (In Wokingham Town but almost exclusively used by Finchampstead residents)

The Community Governance Review has posed the question of whether future parish council support for this new community would be best served by redrawing parish boundaries to promote clearer community cohesion in the SDL area. There may be merit in creating a new parish for the area to support this objective. Finchampstead Parish Council believes that the Arborfield SDL, including Finchwood Park, should form a cohesive community represented by a single parish, ensuring effective governance and encouraging a strong sense of community identity and enabling future investment in the maintenance of facilities and infrastructure.

Alternatively, expanding the remit of one or more existing Parish Councils to encompass the entire SDL could achieve the same result. This is ultimately a matter for Wokingham Borough Council to determine through the CGR process. Finchampstead Parish Council has considered this question and is open to either assuming responsibility for the entire SDL or working in partnership with neighbouring parishes to support the development of the new community. We are also open to redrawing our parish boundary to follow the southern edge of the housing development minus the SANG, along Park Lane. It should be noted that while the proposed allotment site off Park Lane currently lies within Finchampstead Parish, it may fall within the Arborfield SDL if the parish boundaries are altered. In the event of such a change, Finchampstead Parish Council may continue to manage the site, or may consider transferring responsibility to the parish in which the site will then be located. This is not a matter for the governance review or a specific recommendation on boundary changes, but it is important that the review team is aware and that arrangements with WBC regarding this allotment site are already well advanced.

In our discussions with Barkham Parish Council during the preparation of this response, it was clear that if Finchampstead were to recommend moving its northern boundary south to Park Lane, this would allow a more focused discussion to take place between Barkham and Arborfield Parish Councils on the broader governance arrangements for the SDL.

Our discussions with representatives from Arborfield and Newlands Parish also indicated that they believe such a change to the Finchampstead boundary would be helpful in reaching a resolution on future parish representation in the SDL. Whether that results in a boundary change for Barkham, Arborfield, or both is a matter for those parishes and Wokingham Borough Council to decide through this review. What is clear is that there is now a golden opportunity to strengthen community cohesion and support through parish boundary adjustments in this area.

An adjustment to the Finchampstead boundary would also allow for a revision to the Swallowfield boundary, which could then include some existing Finchampstead properties where residents (we believe), would more naturally identify with Swallowfield as their community. (See the Swallowfield section for more details.)

However, it is recognised that such changes may be unpopular with current residents in the affected areas, particularly due to differences in precept charges. It is worth noting that Finchampstead Parish currently has the second lowest precept in the borough.

Existing Parish Boundary

To support Parish Council discussions and promote community cohesion in relation to the Arborfield SDL, Finchampstead Parish Council would be willing to cede the area north of Park Lane (Finchwood Park), with the exception of the West Court SANG, which is extensively used by Finchampstead residents and which the Council wishes to retain and promote within its area. The proposed boundary would therefore be redrawn along Park Lane, extending westward to Reading Road.

If a decision on the future governance of the Arborfield SDL is not made during this CGR, then Finchampstead Parish Council recommends maintaining the current boundaries. This would allow time for the SDL community to mature and its needs to become clearer, particularly as other large-scale developments emerge in Wokingham and as the role, function, and resources of parish councils evolve in response to wider local government restructuring.