

Abinger Parish Council

Abinger Common, Abinger Hammer, Forest Green, Oakwood Hill & Walliswood

MODEST EXPANSION OF EXISTING VILLAGES - RESPONSE BY ABINGER PARISH COUNCIL TO PROPOSED VILLAGE BOUNDARIES FOR ABINGER HAMMER & ABINGER COMMON

Background

In August 2018 Mole Valley District Council published 'Modest Expansion of Existing Villages' which proposed boundaries for the first time for Abinger Hammer and Abinger Common. At a meeting on the 13th August Abinger Parish Council was asked by Mole Valley District Council to respond to two questions:

- 1) Was the principle of a village boundary a good idea; and
- 2) Were the boundaries proposed in the right position?

Public meeting

Abinger Parish Council arranged a public meeting for residents on Abinger Hammer and Abinger Common which was held on the 17th September. Residents were notified of the meeting by a notice in the Abinger & Coldharbour Parish News, through 'The Abingers' Facebook page, through the Parish Council's website and in some cases by hand delivery of a notice of the meeting. The meeting was attended by about 80 people, almost entirely from Abinger Hammer and Abinger Common. The Chairman of the Parish Council explained the issues, and those present were able to ask questions and to express their views. At the end of the meeting votes were held as follows:

- 1) Was the principle of a village boundary for Abinger Hammer a good idea? There were 22 votes that the principle was not a good idea, and no votes that it was a good idea
- 2) Was the principle of a village boundary or village boundaries for Abinger Common a good idea? There were 50 votes that the principle was not a good idea, and no votes that it was a good idea.

In view of the result of the voting on the first question no votes were taken on the second question - Were the boundaries proposed in the right position? Those present did not wish to address this question with its implication that boundaries were to be imposed.

Petition by residents

At the end of the meeting a petition was handed to the Chairman of the Parish Council, which says that:

'We the undersigned object to Mole Valley District Council defining a village boundary for Abinger Common and any other steps that might enable the inset (removal) of Abinger Common or the surrounding land from the Green Belt''

The petition was signed by 113 people of whom 103 were said to be residents of Abinger Common, 6 to be residents of Abinger Bottom, and 4 from elsewhere. We understand that a copy of the petition will be sent to you by its sponsors.

Responses by Abinger Parish Council

Abinger Parish Council met on the 24th September to consider its response to the questions posed by Mole Valley District Council. This statement has subsequently been approved by the Parish Council.

The Parish Council's view hitherto has been that there should not be any development in the Parish other than by way of rural exception schemes.

The Parish Council noted that the Mole Valley 2008 Settlement Hierarchy classified the various settlements in Mole Valley by criteria which reflected their social, economic and environmental

factors and which ranked the settlements accordingly. Abinger Hammer and Abinger Common (and the other villages in Abinger Parish) were ranked as 'other rural communities'. Since 2008 there have been a number of changes in Abinger Hammer and Abinger Common as follows:

Abinger Hammer: there is now no school, the pub has closed, and the pub building is now used by a cookery school. As noted in 2008, there is no longer a post office. The bus service is worse.

Abinger Common: The bus service is worse, but otherwise there has been no significant change. The 2008 survey showed a pub and a restaurant separately; then, as now, there is a pub that serves food, and no separate restaurant business.

On the 2008 criteria both communities would now rank still lower in the settlement hierarchy.

The classification criteria used by Mole Valley in 2018 for the purposes of the 'Modest Expansion of Existing Villages' to draw village boundaries were 'compact, substantially developed areas'. The Parish Council considers with respect that these criteria are unduly subjective and, moreover, that they take account only of physical characteristics, and not of the social, economic and environmental factors required by the NPPF.

This consideration applies still more strongly to the two areas in Abinger Common for which boundaries are proposed. The effect of the two proposed boundaries is to isolate pieces of the settlement, defining a "village boundary" for each. This is a mis-definition since neither of the two proposed boundaries for Abinger Common constitutes "a village" or indeed "the village", and it also mis-characterises Abinger Common as "compact" when the reverse is true. Abinger Common was regarded for planning purposes in the 1970s as a 'straggling rural settlement', and there has been no significant change since.

The Parish Council also noted the views of residents as expressed at the meeting on the 17th September and in the petition referred to above.

The Parish Council's response to the question - Was the principle of a village boundary a good idea? – is that this is not a good idea even though the villages are to remain washed through by the Green Belt. The Parish Council is opposed to defined boundaries in Abinger Hammer and Abinger Common, whether two boundaries for Abinger Common as proposed or a single boundary.

In the circumstances the second question - Were the boundaries proposed in the right position? – does not call for an answer.

Response by Mole Valley District Council

The Chairman of the Parish Council has been told by Mole Valley Councillor Dave Mir that Mole Valley District Council will not impose boundaries on villages in the Green Belt against the wishes of their residents. We therefore expect that the next stage of the Local Plan process will not define any boundaries for Abinger Hammer and Abinger Common.

The Parish Council will be glad to have that formally confirmed, and to be told the anticipated timetable for the Local Plan process, and when we may next expect to hear how the District Council has decided to proceed as regards boundaries for Abinger Hammer and Abinger Common.

5th November 2018

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Clerk to Abinger Parish Council



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