**BENSINGTON SOCIETY – PLANNING REPORT AS AT 28 SEP 2020**

**1. SODC Local Plan**

SODC’s emerging Local Plan was developed under the previous Conservative led council but had never got the inspection stage or been ‘made’. The new Lib Dem/Green Party coalition tried to modify the number of houses proposed for South Oxfordshire in this plan, but the Secretary of State instructed that they were not able to do this. The number of new houses ‘required’ in South Oxfordshire is set by central government and SODC were told to get on with having their plan inspected and passed by the end of this year.

The emerging plan has now been inspected but has requested a number of changes that are now being made by SODC. However, none of these changes are particularly dramatic or worrying, indeed the good news for Benson is that the Inspector recognises that Benson has already taken more than its share of new housing and is suggesting that SODC seek to locate new houses elsewhere.

**2. Site BEN4/5**

The owners of the first house on the left of Braze Lane going towards Rokemarsh (known as The Paddock) has a horse training area to the south of the property where they had applied for permission to build 19 houses some two year ago. This plot of land falls outside of the BEN4/5 site that was approved for development in our Neighbourhood Plan (NP) and which has planning permission for 240 houses. The planning application was not approved by SODC and after a planning appeal the inspector agreed that the site was not suitable because of lack of integration into the village of Benson, and was not a ‘sustainable development’

Land agents acting for the owners of the Paddock approached the PC’s Neighbourhood Plan Delivery Working Group to enquire whether the village might reconsider this proposal as part of a potential update of the NP. The answer was that as it had been rejected just 2 years ago at appeal there was no justification in us reconsidering the application as we already had too many new houses coming to the village.

**3. Skate park and Community Hall**

The new Community Hall is nearing completion, and Cala Homes had hoped to have it ready for hand over to the PC by early December. However, delays due to Covid-19 pose a delivery problem for a variety of materials required for completion, such as the lift, kitchen equipment, flooring material and numerous other items. Hence the completion may not be ready by December. The PC do not see this as a problem, as under current Covid-19 rules, they would not in fact be in a position to hire the hall out to potential users.

Because the building will have a 12-month warranty starting from the data of occupation by the PC, Cala Homes have kindly suggested that perhaps the best option is for them to maintain and insure the building until sometime in early 2021 when it can be officially handed over to the PC and available for renting out. This means that the 12 month warranty period will start only once the hall becomes truly usable.

The skate park located just behind the community building facing Mcdonalds is now essentially completed apart from general tidying up and construction of access paths. It cannot be officially opened until work on the Community Building is completed for health and safety reasons; there continues to be movement of construction vehicles in the surrounding area. Thus the skate park may not be available for use until December or possibly after Christmas.

The PC may have a combined ‘grand opening’ of the two facilities early in 2021 but no firm date has been set at the moment.