

Where does the University of Surrey fit in?

The University owns Blackwell Park Developments Ltd (“BPL”). BPL has an independent Board and is promoting the development. The University has set high standards for the development and maintains a close interest in progress.

When will the Company submit an official planning application for its development?

The current intention is to submit a planning application in the second half of 2024.

When will the Company consult with the public about its development proposals?

Throughout the full Local Plan process, there have been a number of opportunities for local people to examine all proposals on the table, including the Blackwell Park scheme. The first Blackwell specific public exhibition took place on 8 March 2019 and further details of that can be found on our website.

Over the next few months the Company will be ramping up its development planning, working with its team of highly experienced professionals to truly understand the potential of the land within its ownership, and draw conclusions about how best to use the land in the context of the local plan and the needs of society.

Whilst formal public consultations are being factored into the planning process the company and the University want to make sure that there is strong engagement with the local community throughout. That engagement is intended to ensure that well informed opinions help shape the future of Guildford’s new urban village.

How much does the Company expect to make from this development?

This really depends on the final form and amount of development, and it is too early to say. There are considerable upfront and ongoing costs involved and the Company may not see a return for many years. All surplus funds generated from developing Blackwell Farm will be invested back into the University’s charitable purposes - jobs, education and the public good in Guildford.

How much of the site in question will be used for new academic buildings?

It is not presently intended that there would be new academic buildings on Blackwell Park. The University has land available for academic buildings and student residences on its Manor Park site.

What have other universities done in terms of selling off their assets?

Other universities such as Oxford and Cambridge have landholdings that have been used for the development of housing and the creation of mixed use communities which include housing, employment land, and community and recreation facilities. We plan a similar approach to these, and we are examining other examples to see what lessons can be learnt that would benefit the development.

Frequently Asked Questions continued

What are the timescales for this development?

To develop the site in its entirety is likely to take at least fifteen years from now. We are keen to develop this land carefully and considerately with the development occurring in several phases.

What type of housing might be built on the site?

We envisage a full range of house types, sizes and tenures. The market will shift over time but at this stage we see a real need for smaller properties for young families who are unable to buy homes or rent in this area.

Will Blackwell Park be providing affordable housing on the site?

Yes, the Local Plan requires a proportion of affordable housing on the site, which means housing for specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. The University is keen to ensure that key workers are included in the specified eligible households.

Will the company be the landlord for all housing on the site?

The existing plans do not include being the landlord for all housing on the site, although we are keen to see some rental housing retained for staff of the University and other key local institutions (including the Hospital and Research Park).

Do you intend to provide student accommodation on the site?

The housing that would be built on the site would be general purpose housing across a range of sizes and tenures with potential for all members of the local community. The University's primary goal for student accommodation is to build further units on our Manor Park and Stag Hill campuses.

Why can't housing be built on existing car parks on university land?

The University owns just over five hectares of land that is used for parking cars on its campuses. These sites are predominantly located on Stag Hill and include sites designated for future academic expansion. It is not appropriate for these areas to be used for residential market accommodation owing to the relatively inconsequential size, the location and the fact that the land is being used for employment.

What type of houses will be built on the site?

The plans for Blackwell Park include up to 1,800 new homes of all sizes, types, tenure and affordability (1500 to be built within the plan period). This would include affordable rented housing for eligible key workers from local institutions such as the Hospital and the University.

Frequently Asked Questions continued

What type of planning permission was the university granted for its Manor Park campus?

In 2004, The University was given outline planning permission to build, over time, a mixed use development on its land at Manor Park. The Planning and Design Statement gave indications of what was likely to be used for academic purposes, leisure purposes and 145,200 square metres of residential accommodation for students and staff. It was anticipated that the permission would be sufficient to meet the University's longer term academic requirements and allow for approximately 4,171 bed spaces. There are a great number of matters that affect exactly what is built and when and both the statement and permission were clear about this figure being an estimation rather than an obligation or a commitment.

What is the historical background to the University's Green Belt Land?

There is a misconception that the University's Manor Park site was taken out of the Green Belt in the 2003 Local Plan, having always been subject to Green Belt policy. However the University was actually granted outline planning permission to develop the whole of Manor Park and Stag Hill in 1965 following a public inquiry. The land was beyond the boundary of the Metropolitan Green Belt. However the Green Belt notation was extended to this land by the 1984 Local Plan. At that time, the University and Guildford Borough Council did not see this as prejudicial to the future plans of the University because "institutions standing in extensive grounds" were seen as an appropriate use in the Green Belt. This meant that the University was able to continue its development of Manor Park. In 1995, revisions to national planning guidance removed this concession from Green Belt policy. Guildford Borough Council and Surrey County Council therefore agreed that the Green Belt boundary should be realigned to exclude Manor Farm owing to exceptional circumstances: In 2003, the Local Plan inspector agreed that there was a justification for realigning the Green Belt policy boundary at Manor Farm to accommodate the University's needs for the next 20 years.

Will you be building houses in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)?

We will not be building homes on the AONB but do expect that an access road will cross the AONB land (alongside and following the path of an existing road).

What about the views from the Hogs Back – should these not be protected?

The Hog's Back is a ridge that is part of the North Downs and lies between Farnham in the west and Guildford in the east. We believe that, with careful planning, the impact of the development on views from the Hogs Back can be minimised. A thorough landscape and visual appraisal has been carried out and is being used to inform the development layout.

Can Guildford meet its needs from brownfield sites?

National planning policy required that brownfield sites be developed before the movement of any greenbelt boundaries. Guildford Borough Council has come to the conclusion that there is insufficient brownfield land to accommodate the Borough's housing needs.

Frequently Asked Questions continued

To what extent will you consider the impact on the countryside in planning this development?

Our site has the potential to deliver an attractive neighbourhood for Guildford, retaining existing features of value such as woodlands and land in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and with infrastructure and highways improvements included in the plans. Any development would be built to high environmental standards and would be sympathetic to the locality. The plans will respect the AONB and existing significant landscape and habitat features on the site, such as the woodland and hedges. Maintaining, and where possible increasing biodiversity is key to our aims and objectives.

What does it mean when the University talks about improving the road links?

Parts of the road network in western Guildford suffer congestion at peak times, including the A3 and the roads around the Surrey Research Park, the Royal Surrey County Hospital and Manor Park.

Development of a new neighbourhood at Blackwell Farm offers the opportunity to help alleviate this existing problem in several ways.

Provision of a new access off the Farnham Road, with links into the west of the Research Park and Manor Park is a major feature of the development. Allowing traffic to and from the A31 to access western Guildford via that route in a controlled way will bring a very significant reduction in the use of the A3 from the Hogs Back to the Tesco Junction.

The proposed new housing is well-located next to a part of Guildford where there are thousands of existing jobs at Surrey Research Park, the Royal Surrey County Hospital, the University of Surrey, Surrey Sports Park, the Tesco superstore and other employers. The plans will also provide new employment at an extension to Surrey Research Park, and there will be on-site facilities such as schools and good access to public transport routes.

A network of footpaths and cycleways will integrate Blackwell Park with Guildford. Taken together, these factors will create a well-connected and walkable neighbourhood that reduces the need to travel by private car for most day to day needs. This will help to reduce the amount of traffic generated by the development.

Who will pay for the road improvements to make this development sustainable?

The development itself will be expected to cover the costs of the necessary road improvements.

Is the University's growth responsible for Guildford Borough's housing shortage?

The University's growth is not fuelling the vast majority of the need for housing and infrastructure in Guildford. It is England's population growth and the failure of the UK to plan for it effectively that underpins the need for more housing.

Frequently Asked Questions continued

What do you mean when you say “Framed by nature?”

Blackwell Farm is significantly bigger than the development area. Whilst the development area is lower quality farmland there are areas of the farm where we see significant opportunity for environmental regeneration. This includes pine plantations, which we would like to see restored to British broadleaf species and the slopes of the Hogs Back where we see opportunity for meadows and greenspace including Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGS). By regenerating this land over time, we envisage creating a development surrounded by high quality woodlands and meadows that will frame the nature of the development itself.

Will the development not be reducing the natural environment?

Our intent is to ensure that the greenspace lost through housing and roads is more than compensated for by a net increase of at least 20% in biodiversity. This target will be measurable and reported regularly. Within the development itself there will be parks, streams and lakes that will enhance the beauty of the place and encourage wildlife. The development will be surrounded by regenerated woodlands, meadows and greenspace.

Can you answer a question for me that is not on this list?

We'd love to! Please complete the form on the “contact us”: page on our website. We will review requests and post the appropriate questions and answers on this list.