

Sires Hill Planning Appeal: What Happened

(Appeal ref: 6009891; planning application reference: P24/S2764/O)

What Is This About?

A developer, Carter Jones, applied for planning permission to build 200 homes on land beside Sires Hill. South Oxfordshire District Council refused it. Carter Jones disagreed and appealed. An appeal means the decision is looked at again by a Planning Inspector, an independent expert appointed by the government's Planning Inspectorate, who will decide whether the refusal should stand or be overturned.

The appeal hearing began on 13 October and ran for two days.

Day One: The Developer's Case

Carter Jones opened by setting out their main argument. They said the new homes would sit closely alongside existing buildings, so they would not stand out on their own. They also argued that the development would not significantly reduce the open countryside between Long Wittenham and nearby built-up areas. This gap matters because it keeps Long Wittenham a separate village with its own distinct character, rather than merging into a larger town.

Why The District Council Didn't Argue Its Case

At the Parish Council meeting on 24 September, our District Councillor explained that, for several reasons, South Oxfordshire District Council had decided not to defend its refusal at the appeal. This means the District Council did not present any case at the appeal: no opening statement, no evidence and no witnesses.

Local Voices

Members of the public and local groups were given the chance to speak. Six people spoke, and every one of them asked the Inspector to keep the refusal in place.

Cllr Steve Brown spoke on behalf of Long Wittenham Parish Council. He addressed the Inspector, Carter Jones and the District Council's representatives, explaining that the Parish Council still objects to the development and asking for the appeal to be dismissed (rejected).

Planning for the worst case: what the village would ask for

If a development goes ahead, the developer can be required to pay for local improvements to help the community cope with the extra homes and people. This is set out in a legal agreement called a Section 106 agreement (named after the part of the law it comes from).

In case the appeal succeeds, Steve asked for the following to be included:

- Money towards the village hall and the school (either improving the existing buildings or building new ones), as set out in the Long Wittenham Neighbourhood Plan.
- Upgrading the public footpath between the site and the village, (highlighted green in map at end of this update), including widening the bridge over the ditch and

adding gentle slopes so that people of all abilities (including wheelchair and pushchair users) can use it.

- An all-weather surface on the footpath, built to the same standard as the recently improved paths between Didcot and the Earth Trust.

The Developer's Expert Witnesses

The rest of day one was given to two expert witnesses brought by Carter Jones. One spoke about landscape and visual impact, meaning how the development would change the look of the countryside and views. The other spoke about planning law.

Day Two: The "Just in Case" Details

Day two focused on the details of the Section 106 agreement. This was to make sure everything is ready if the Inspector decides to allow the appeal and grant outline planning permission. Outline permission agrees in principle that homes can be built, with the detailed design decided later.

What Happens Next?

The Inspector is expected to issue a decision in the next 2-3 months. We will update the Parish Council website as soon as we hear the outcome.

Figure 1: Public Footpath within S106 Request

