

# College wins bid to build new houses

A GOVERNMENT inspector has granted planning permission for 14 homes on the existing Farnham College tennis courts in Firgrove Hill - against the wishes of councillors, residents and the Farnham Society.

Waverley Borough Council rejected a second application by Taylor Wimpey West and the Guildford College Group to build six five-bedroomed, two four-bedroomed and six three-bedroomed homes on a plot described by the applicants as a "wasted asset" in April last year.

However, an inspector appointed by the Secretary of State overturned the council's decision this week following an appeal by the Guildford College Group - meaning the 14 homes with access from Firgrove Hill can now go ahead.

The site, which currently accommodates three tennis courts, a storage building and some scrubland, was purchased in 1957 specifically to provide sporting facilities for students of the former

Farnham Grammar School.

But the Guildford College Group, which now owns the land, claims the tennis courts have fallen into disrepair since the grammar school became a college in 1973 as physical education is no longer part of its curriculum.

This angered residents in Firgrove Hill, Morley Road and Fairholme Gardens, however, who deplored the loss of the sports facilities and warned the cash raised from the new homes would be spread across the college's sites at Merrist Wood and Guildford as well as Farnham.

Waverley's western planning committee shared these reservations at its meeting in April 2014, and refused the application on the grounds that it would result in the loss of sports facilities "for which there is current demand", as well as loss of light, overshadowing, and overbearing for neighbouring residents, and a "cramped layout" for new homeowners.

Planning watchdog the Farnham Society also ob-

jected on the grounds that it represented over-development of the site.

However, in March this year, the college secured planning permission for a new 'multi-use games facility' to the north of the college building to replace the lost tennis courts - and ahead of the subsequent appeal hearing, it proposed this new sporting facility be included as a pre-condition of its appeal scheme.

The appeal inspector, Peter Rose, commended this proposal as "both reasonable and precise" and although acknowledging the new homes would have "some limited impact upon the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers", he concluded these impacts would not be "significantly harmful".

"In summary," added Mr Rose, "the scheme would offer considerable economic and social benefits consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework, and environmental implications in that wider context would be very limited."