

Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036



Annex IX Recreation and Open Spaces June 2017

A plan for the community by the community

Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Recreation and Open Spaces

1. Introduction

As a starting point some of the existing strategies, policies and planning proposals that will impact upon the open spaces contained within the Parishes of Arborfield and Barkham were reviewed.

Initial public consultation was through Social Media, including Nextdoor and Facebook. This helped to identify the key issues for local people and get some idea of who was using our open spaces and for what activities. This was followed up by an email requesting further information regarding specific concerns and needs. Contact was established with a range of groups, including sports teams, horse riders, rambblers, cyclists and youth groups. Proposals for policies were then discussed and agreed within the sustainability working group.

2. Policy Framework

Wokingham Core Strategy

Identified within the Core Strategy is the Council's commitment to 'making the Borough a great place to live with a good quality of life for all residents'. (Wokingham Borough Core Strategy 2.50) Key to this aim is the delivery and access to suitable sport, leisure and cultural facilities. This includes the supply of open spaces, country parks and public rights of way.

National Planning Policy Framework

Under the promoting healthy communities theme, it is set out that planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision.

73. Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required.

Specific needs and quantitative and qualitative deficiencies and surpluses in local areas should also be identified. This information should be used to inform what provision is required in an area.

74. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements
- the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location
- the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.

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Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2014

Well-managed and appropriately placed open spaces and sports facilities can serve as a delivery mechanism for themes within the draft Health and Being Strategy. Most obviously open spaces and sports facilities contribute to improving people's quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. They can also influence perceptions of community safety, deprivation and poverty levels and the local economy.

WBC Health and wellbeing strategy states "the environment in which residents live, work and play greatly impacts on the health of the community. This is even more so important in Wokingham due to the extent of the redevelopment and new developments taking place throughout the Borough".

3. Key Themes of the Recreation and Open Spaces Review

The key themes set out in the 2017 strategy are;

- i. Promoting good health throughout life
- ii. Building health and wellbeing into new communities
- iii. Improving life chance
- iv. Emotional health and wellbeing
- v. Older people and those with long-term conditions

4. Existing Public Open Spaces

Arborfield and Barkham benefit from a range of open spaces with public access:

- i. The Coombes: An extensive area of woodland. It is privately owned but with an extensive network of public rights of way, including The Coombes Circular Walk. Originally this land was part of the Bearwood Estate. It has the status of Local Wildlife Site and Local Geological Site, and is appreciated for its fine landscape value and bio diversity.
- ii. Arborfield Recreation Ground: owned and managed by Arborfield and Newland Parish Council, it includes football pitches, children's play area and is widely used by dog walkers.
- iii. Pound Copse owned and managed by Arborfield and Newland Parish Council, is a small attractive tract of woodland, some 2.31 acres in extent. It is covered by a preservation order and comprises the remnant of a much larger area of woodland cut down to make way for arable cultivation in the 1960's. Despite its size it contains a wealth of trees and shrubs, including oak, ash, hornbeam, holly, silver birch and wild cherry. The undergrowth is mainly bramble interspersed with shrubs, such as hazel and buckthorn.
- iv. Rooks Nest Wood: a SANG owned and managed by WBC.
- v. Hazebrook Meadows: a SANG recently created and managed by Crest Nicholson.
- vi. The Junipers: owned by WBC, it includes children's play area and is widely used by dog walkers.
- vii. Former MOD sports grounds at Arborfield Green, adjacent to Princess Marina Drive
- viii. In addition there are a number of local play areas.

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5. Identified Needs

The recent Residents Survey demonstrated that residents have a strong attachment to the rural and village character of the area. There was strong support for the proposition that the rural setting makes Arborfield and Barkham good places to live, with 98% of respondents agreeing. Meanwhile 91% strongly agreed and a further 8% agreed that the unique identity of the area is best preserved by retaining open spaces around the villages. This shows that there is strong support for retaining open spaces, and these can be protected by providing extensive amenity areas, including country parks, SANGS and sports fields.

A strategically planned network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features would be well supported. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Green Infrastructure includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens.

6. Development

Arborfield Strategic Development Location (SDL)

The SDL on the site of the former Arborfield Garrison and now known as Arborfield Green is now under construction. This SDL will provide around 3,500 new dwellings and an increase of circa 8,400 people, assuming an average household size of 2.4 persons per dwelling.

The scale of the development proposed within the Arborfield SDL will therefore result in a significant population growth. Consequently this SDL will be required to provide new facilities of all types of public open space and sports facilities to meet the standards set within the MDD DPD Policy TB08 Open space, sport and recreational facilities standards for residential development.

Planning policy for the protection of existing open spaces from development and for provision of public open space as part of new development is covered by Wokingham Borough Council's Development Plan. The Strategy sets out an overarching framework for the development of the Borough's network of open spaces and sports facilities up to 2026. In summary it will provide:

- Detailed guidance on the application of the provision standards, as set out in Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document Policy TB08 Open Space, sport and recreational facilities standards for residential development.
- Benchmark outline specifications for the each open spaces and sports facilities typologies.
- Detailed guidance on the delivery of the open space and sports facility requirements for each of the four Strategic Development Locations (SDLs).
- Detailed guidance on the delivery of the open space and sports facility requirements for other development proposals (non SDLs)

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New Development

New developments should also be required to provide additional amenity space of one sort or another. Besides providing recreational and sporting opportunities, additional open spaces provide a landscape buffer around any new developments so that they merge into the landscape and continue the separation of settlement areas, which is much valued by residents.

These amenity areas, extending around developments, also create the opportunity to create linear parks which could enable extension of the Greenways network. Besides the recreational benefit, this approach would also support the possibility of sustainable travel, in particular cycling, in a way which is not currently possible within the parishes.

As a target, for every hectare of development land, there should also be 50% of new amenity space.

7. Greenspace

Amenity greenspace

The Borough Council expects that this typology should be aimed at providing useable public open space such as unequipped children's play space, pocket parks for informal recreation and visual amenity space.

Green Belt

A designation for land around certain cities and large built-up areas, which aims to keep this land permanently open or largely undeveloped. The purposes of the green belt is to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas, prevent neighbouring towns from merging, safeguard the countryside from encroachment, preserve the setting and special character of historic towns and assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. Residents would like to see parts of the parish designated as green belt though the NPPF is not encouraging in this respect:

The general extent of Green Belts across the country is already established. New Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances, for example when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions. If proposing a new Green Belt, local planning authorities should:

- demonstrate why normal planning and development management policies would not be adequate;
- set out whether any major changes in circumstances have made the adoption of this exceptional measure necessary;
- show what the consequences of the proposal would be for sustainable development;
- demonstrate the necessity for the Green Belt and its consistency with Local Plans for adjoining areas; and
- show how the Green Belt would meet the other objectives of the Framework.

This may not be possible within the terms of reference for creating a Neighbourhood Plan. However, the following quotes taken from the NPPF would seem to be appropriate to the role of development within the parishes of Arborfield and Barkham:

- “recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it”
- “contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution”
- “conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations;”

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Green Infrastructure

A strategically planned and delivered network of high quality green spaces and other environmental features. It should be designed and managed as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. Green Infrastructure includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, allotments and private gardens. In particular, this Neighbourhood Plan seeks to “support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This should include supporting the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres”

SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace)

As the SDL is located within the 5km protection zone of the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area, environmental legislation requires the provision of sufficient SANGS to mitigate the impact on wildlife.

To meet this requirement, extensive SANGs are being created, specifically Hazebrook Meadows which lies along the east side of the SDL. This now provides an extensive landscaped amenity area, with purpose built footpaths where local residents can enjoy walking in a countryside location.

Country Parks

Wokingham Borough Council does not require new Country Parks within the Borough (other than those allocated under MDD DPD Policy SAL06: Allocated Country Parks or in other exceptional circumstances) but is instead seeking to accommodate the significant increase in visitor pressure that will result from the projected growth in the Borough’s population over the next ten years, within its existing facilities.

The Borough’s Country Parks network caters for a borough-wide need. Development in the borough will create additional pressures resulting in a need to improve the capacity of the provision. All new residential development will be required to provide a contribution towards the necessary capital investment to carry out enhancements in both the quality and accessibility of its Country Parks.

Parks and gardens

The Borough Council would like to encourage the provision of new public parks in each of the new settlement areas, varying in size and nature from small neighbourhood parks to larger Borough parks. The Council expects a minimum facility size of 2ha although it may be possible to consider a smaller minimum facility size if it can be demonstrated that the proposed space is particularly useable or valuable in the local context.

Natural/semi natural greenspace (excluding country parks)

The Borough Council expects this typology should be aimed at either protection of existing local biodiversity, the creation of new UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Habitats (Habitats of Principal Importance or Section 41 NERC Act habitats and/or enhancements aimed at improving the capacity of the site to support protected or UK BAP Species (Species of Principal Importance or Section 41 NERC Act species).

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There are a number of sites within the area covered by this plan that could be enhanced to support greater biodiversity, particularly along the river Loddon, which is already an important habitat for many species of wildlife, some of it unique to this area.

8. Playgrounds and Sports Facilities

Children's Play

The Children's Play typology includes facilities aimed at both younger children and at older young people. It is essential that the children's play facilities that meet the needs of all age groups are considered in relation to new residential development.

Children's play (equipped)

The Borough Council is committed to the provision of a wide range of children's play facilities that are fully inclusive and suitable for the entire age range, both genders and disabled children. The Council is keen to encourage innovative and imaginative approaches to children's play provision and would welcome schemes that incorporate elements of natural play and/or Local landscaped Areas of Play (LLAP) where this is deemed to be appropriate. The Open Space, Sport & Recreation Facilities Assessment and Standards (2010 - 12) identifies that the borough is deficient in facilities aimed at teenage children and it is essential that skate parks, BMX tracks, Shelters, parkour courts and Ball Courts such as Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) etc. are considered in the context of new residential development.

The residents survey highlighted the need for more provision aimed at "teenagers", with 77% of respondents wanting greater provision of recreational facilities for this age group.

Outdoor sports facilities

The Open Space, Sport & Recreation Facilities Assessment and Standards (2010 - 12) indicates that the borough has a small overall surplus of senior pitch provision but a significant under supply of junior and mini pitches. The Council expects any new playing pitch facilities to be designed to meet the identified demand for additional pitch provision.

The council does not favour the pepper potting of sports pitches within new developments due to the difficulty of providing the ancillary facilities required, such as car parking and changing rooms/pavilions on small scale schemes.

The Council is committed to a 'Sports Hub' approach on all the SDLs which is aimed at producing 3 new strategic sports pitch sites and an extension to Cantley Park. These 'Sports Hubs' will need to incorporate adequate car parking and changing facilities in line with national best practice. At least 10% of the pitch provision (or a senior artificial turf pitch, 3G 45.75m x 90m if this is larger) should be delivered as either artificial turf pitches or hard courts or and at least 60% of the pitch provision should be delivered as natural grass pitches.

The council is willing to consider the following alternatives to delivering all the required new playing pitch provision in 'Sports Hub'.

- i. The dual use of both primary and secondary school sports facilities may be acceptable providing that these facilities include a higher proportion of artificial turf pitches or hard courts than might otherwise be expected. A secure community use agreement in line with Sport England template as part of the planning obligations (S106) will be required if dual use option is to be considered.

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- ii. The enhancement of existing Borough, Town or Parish Council owned sports facilities where appropriate. Any proposals must be able to show that the enhancements will increase the capacity of the site to accommodate additional sports use (i.e. conversion of grass pitches to artificial turf pitches or hard courts and/or improvements to drainage of existing grass pitches)

Changing rooms and car parking

The council expects that 'Sports Hubs' should include adequate car parking and changing/pavilion facilities. Car parking spaces should be sufficient to accommodate the expected level of use of the site and should include both permanent car parking provision and temporary overflow car parking (sufficient to accommodate at least a 20% increase spaces on the site).

Swimming Pools

All residential development (including SDLs) will be required to provide a contribution towards the strategic provision of additional swimming pool capacity within the borough.

The application of the standard for swimming pool provision within Policy TB08 of the Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document will give rise to a requirement for around 218.1m² of new swimming pool capacity for the 11,000 dwellings to be developed in the plan period. This is equivalent to a single new 4 Lane 25m Pool (25m x 8.5m).

The Council intends to deliver this additional capacity through either the enhancement or extension of an existing swimming pool site, or by the provision of new swimming pool site.

9. Other Green Space Requirements

Allotments

The Council expects that new allotments should be constructed on level ground that is not liable to flooding, with uncontaminated soils and access to adequate parking, toilets, composting and water.

Cemeteries/Burial grounds

All residential development (including SDLs) will be required to provide a contribution towards the strategic provision of additional Cemeteries/Burial grounds capacity within the borough. There is the potential within the area covered by this plan for provision of a "natural" or woodland burial site, should such a facility be considered desirable by the wider community.

10. Adoption and maintenance contributions

There will be a requirement on developers to demonstrate that, where on-site provision is provided, it will be appropriately managed and maintained. The Council would prefer that all new the facilities were eventually adopted either by the Borough Council or where appropriate by the local Town or Parish Council. In these situations the developer will be required to transfer a sum of money to the adopting authority to cover the costs of the sites future maintenance.

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Where long term maintenance arrangement other than adoption by the Council are proposed the developer will need to be able to demonstrate to the Council that these arrangements are both reasonable and robust, and that any management vehicle proposed is financially viable in the long term.

11. Developing an Open Spaces Policy

- i. Publicly accessible open spaces are an important resource in the provision of a happy and healthy lifestyle. Our policy should aim to preserve open spaces wherever this is possible, and where not possible, to replace them with something similar or even better.
- ii. The prevention of “urban sprawl” and the preservation of the essential character of the parishes of Arborfield and Barkham as two distinct villages is a primary objective.
- iii. Any future developments should take account of the “Garden Village” principles.
- iv. Wherever possible new developments will preserve the setting and special character of this largely rural area by encouraging the recycling of “brown field” sites.
- v. Recreation, leisure and sporting facilities are also a key component in developing a healthy lifestyle and our policy needs to promote and encourage making them as widely accessible as possible. An integrated “greenways” network that links footpaths, bridleways, cycle paths, car parks and public transport with access to open spaces should be considered an urgent priority and an essential prerequisite of any new development.
- vi. Outdoor infrastructure development such as parks and playgrounds should aim to cater for all ages and abilities. In particular it is noted that the creation of facilities for teenagers is an urgent priority.
- vii. The creation of community allotments is another urgent priority, at present there are none.
- viii. The undersupply of junior pitches needs to be addressed.
- ix. Dual use of open spaces and recreational facilities could help overcome some of the community infrastructure needs and should be encouraged where it is practicable to do so.
- x. The council do not appear to have a policy statement regarding outdoor public art. This could be an opportunity to create one.
- xi. Where appropriate the Parish Councils should be enabled and encouraged to adopt responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of our open space resources.
- xii. The preservation of natural species and the encouragement of bio diversity should be considered to be a primary function of at least some of our open spaces.
- xiii. Good stewardship and the proper management of our outdoor spaces will be a priority concern of our policy. This land management will be reviewed regularly to take account of the best practices available.
- xiv. Additional space for burial will be required and needs to be planned for.