



Arboretum & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

The Draft Plan

Welcome to the Draft Plan Consultation

The new Neighbourhood Plan has now been drafted. We have used information from:

- The Residents' Survey and results from the earlier public consultation
- The work done by a number of focus groups comprising local residents
- Contributions from other organisations, including other Neighbourhood Plan groups
- The landscape views submitted recently by many local people
- A variety of studies carried out by members of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and others

This exhibition has been arranged as part of public consultation on the Draft Plan, to provide people with an opportunity to talk to members of the Steering Group about how the plan has been developed, and what it contains.

There is a pull-out response form in the centre pages of each of the parish magazines, also comments can be submitted online, at www.arbarplan.com, where the Draft Plan and all of the supporting documents may be found too.

We hope as many people as possible will be able to respond to the consultation, so that the Plan can be completed and submitted, strongly supported as ***a plan for the community, by the community.***

The following boards are set out to summarise, briefly, how we got to where we are in each of the four main policy areas, and the key points of the policies being included in the plan.



Initial Public Event
Photo : Laurence Heath

A plan for the community by the community



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Sustainability

The concept of sustainability in planning has been around for some time, so defining it is relatively straightforward. For example, a popular definition is:

"Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"

Achieving it, in a balanced way that will endure for the future, is considerably more challenging.

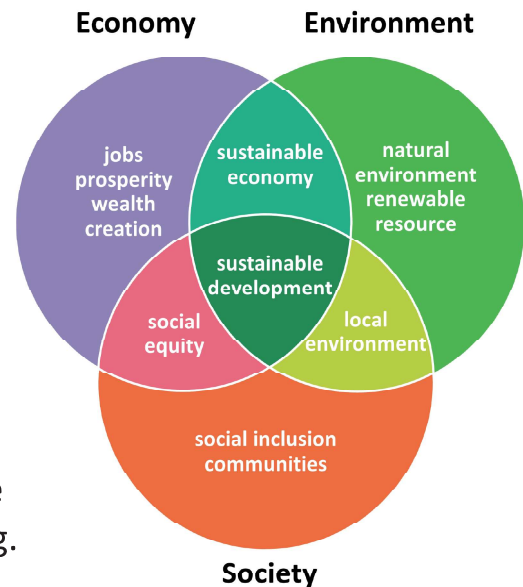
The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) points to sustainability as the 'golden thread' which must run through planning, and suggests it may be achieved through a range of themes including;

- A prosperous rural economy
- Sustainable transport
- A wide choice of quality homes
- Conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment

A great deal of work has been carried out on sustainable development as it relates to the Neighbourhood Plan area, feeding into all of the policy areas covered in the plan. Sustainability can't be simply bolted onto a plan with a few extra policies – it has to be the constant basis upon which the plan is prepared.

Feedback that we have received from the community supports this approach. Under this general heading we have had comments on issues ranging from traffic to flooding, and development to conservation.

Neighbourhood plan policies must relate to land use, and we have used that as an opportunity to reflect the sustainability agenda throughout the draft plan.





Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Identity and Rural Setting [1]

Both Arborfield and Barkham are semi-rural Parishes with landscapes comprising historic farmland, wooded areas and ancient hedgerows, interspersed with residential areas of different ages and styles.

The parishes have a rich and well documented history with evidence of habitation from the Bronze Age.



St. James Church
Photo : ABCH

The histories of Arborfield and Barkham have much in common, yet each parish also has its own distinct heritage and identity.

One of the strongest messages to come out of previous consultations is the value that people place on the rural setting of the settlements, and their individual identities. Ninety eight percent of people think that the rural surroundings, and space between settlements, are what make Arborfield and Barkham good places to live.



Footpath AN17 Towards Bartletts Farm
Photo : Diana Thorne

Views of the countryside are especially important in establishing countryside character. Our request for pictures of views that people feel need protection has led to the submission of a large number of images, and we are using this library to support policies that seek to protect and enhance the landscape.

We also have a rich built heritage, with a Conservation Area, Areas of Special Character, and a considerable number of Listed Buildings, all of which contribute to our local environment. There are also areas which should be specially designated but are not, so we will be bringing some of these into the plan.



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Identity and Rural Setting [2]

Separation between settlements is one of the key issues flagged in the current Local Plan for Wokingham Borough.

When the Strategic Development Locations were adopted, of which Arborfield Green is the largest, the Council sought to maintain separation from existing communities through the designation of a separation zone.



Tree Arch School Road
Photo : Graeme Dexter

This failed to get into the final Local Plan, so we are including it in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Local Green Spaces can be designated through the Neighbourhood Plan, providing additional protection, and Arborfield Park and The Junipers Field are being designated, and some others small areas considered.

Policies

Four policies are being proposed under the heading of Identity and Rural Setting, covering the following:

- IRS1 Conservation and enhancement of the identity and rural setting of settlements
- IRS2 Preservation of the separation areas between Arborfield, Barkham and Arborfield Green
- IRS3 Protection and enhancement of the natural environment and green spaces
- IRS4 Protection and enhancement of the special and historic character of the area

The full text of all the policies included in the Draft Plan is provided in a booklet available from members of the Steering Group at this exhibition, and from the Neighbourhood Plan website at www.arbarplan.com



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Thriving Communities



Arborfield Green Community Centre Play Area
Photo : Jan Heard

When we talk about Thriving Communities, the focus is often on employment and economic activity. Social issues also play a key role in building and sustaining communities, and both aspects can be supported through land-use policies in a neighbourhood plan.

Some aspects of community facilities, such as green spaces and the developing greenways network, are covered in other policy areas.

Survey and consultation feedback shows that people are generally satisfied with the level of community provision, but would not wish to see it reduced. Policies are included in the draft Plan to provide for this.

One of the major issues raised relates to the provision of healthcare facilities as part of the Arborfield Green development which, currently, is far from certain. Some other aspects of community provision remain less well-defined or secured than we would like. These issues are also reflected in the draft policies.

For employment uses, the draft plan is supportive, provided that expansion plans relate to approved activities, and make best use of existing buildings.

Policies

Three policies are being proposed under the heading of Thriving Communities, covering the following:

- TC1 Retention of valued local community facilities
- TC2 Properly planned and designed new facilities, including a medical centre at Arborfield Green
- TC3 Conditional support for new small businesses and expansion of existing lawful activities



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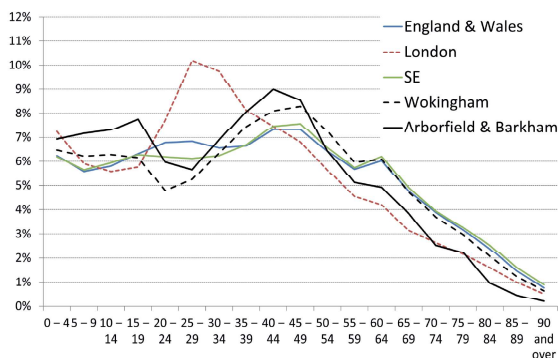
Appropriate Housing [1]

The Neighbourhood Plan will look forward to a horizon year of 2036 – that's 10 years beyond the end of the current Local Plan, during which Wokingham Borough will have to build around another 10,000 homes. These will be over and above those already in the pipeline, such as Arboretum Green and the other Strategic Development Locations.



Affordable Housing?
Photo : Haymarket Media Group

The pressure for new development has been identified through feedback as one of the items that people are most concerned about. For some, the loss of countryside is the big issue. For others, the additional congestion, on an already congested road network, that will result from yet more development traffic is seen as unacceptable.



19-34 Age Range Dip

We have done a lot of work on establishing housing need in the area covered by the Neighbourhood Plan. It is clear that our population age profile dips sharply in the 19-34 age range, confirming that some young people are moving away and not being replaced. The lack of affordable housing probably plays a large part in that process.

Overall, there is a calculated need for around 900 additional homes in the Neighbourhood Plan area between now and 2036. Given that the portion of Arboretum Green that is in the Plan area already has consent for 1800 new homes, we are not allocating any new land in the Plan for additional housing development.

Proposals for housing development within the boundaries of existing settlements will be acceptable, subject to all the other policies in the Plan. Beyond this, strict exception policies will apply and only brownfield sites will stand any chance of approval.



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Appropriate Housing [2]

Proposals for development of any kind will be unacceptable if they involve areas subject to flooding, and it will be required that drainage and sewage systems prevent any adverse impact on local watercourses or infrastructure.

The continuing pressure for development is such that proposals for housing may well materialise and, in due course, be determined by a Planning Inspector. It is crucial, then, that the plan contains a backstop in the form of strong guidance on any new housing, so that any that is allowed on appeal is, at least, well laid-out and designed to a high standard.



One of the areas of concern expressed widely in consultation responses was the need for affordable housing, and potentially special arrangements for key workers such as teachers and staff working in the health service. These issues are provided for in the policies.

Policies

The housing policies in the Draft Plan cover a lot of ground and run to two full pages, even without explanatory text. The following should be regarded as headlines for the policies themselves. Five policies are being proposed under the heading of Appropriate Housing, some of which are very long and subdivided into sections, covering the following:

- AH1 New housing within settlement boundaries or on brownfield sites
- AH2 Support for housing to meet local needs, e.g. affordable and key worker homes
- AH3 Very strict exception policies for new development outside settlements
- AH4 Any new development to be of high quality, with generous open space, and properly landscaped
- AH5 No adverse drainage and sewage impacts and no development in flood areas



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Getting Around

Another big ticket item from previous consultations is traffic congestion. With almost the highest level of car ownership in the country, no railway station and only limited bus services, over 90% of commuting is by car.

On a highway network that has developed little in the last century other than through the addition of development roads and better surfacing; the result is serious and long-lasting congestion, with traffic spilling onto unsuitable routes.



Coppid Hill Traffic
Photo : Laurence Heath

Accordingly, the headline policy is that any new development should not result in traffic using unsuitable routes, whether country lanes or residential streets.

Support is provided for planned highway improvements: Arborfield Cross Relief Road, Arborfield Village Centre Improvements, Barkham Bridge Widening, and the completion of the Nine Mile Ride Extension.

A good deal of work on greenways has resulted in proposals for a local network, as part of the Borough-wide initiative, and these are proposed in the draft Plan for implementation.

Policies

Four policies are being proposed under the heading of Getting Around, (although most transport proposals are for the highway authority to progress), covering the following:

- GA1 New development must not increase traffic on unsuitable roads
- GA2 Implement local network of green routes for non-motorised users
- GA3 Arborfield Cross Relief Road, Arborfield Village Centre Improvements, Barkham Bridge Widening and Nine Mile Ride Extension supported
- GA4 Bus routes in new developments must have adequate road widths and junctions

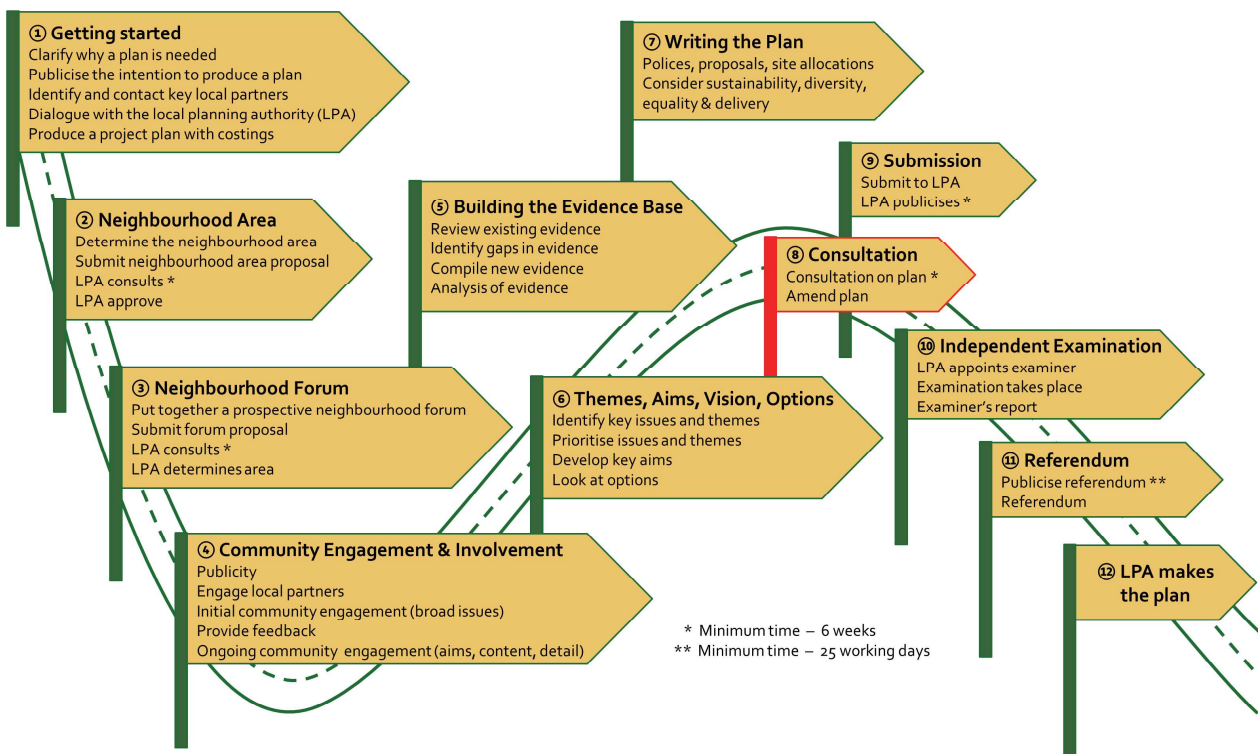


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What Next?

There are a number of stages to developing a new plan, as depicted in the diagram below.

Neighbourhood Plan Process



This consultation is step eight of twelve. In parallel with this consultation, we are also having the draft Plan subjected to a 'health check' - carried out by an experienced planning professional who has reviewed plans for other areas.

As soon as we have reviewed the consultation responses and the health check report, we will be making any adjustments required and submitting the plan to Wokingham Borough Council, probably after the summer break.

From there, Wokingham Borough Council will be processing the Draft Plan through its final stages, leading to a referendum, probably early in the New Year.

Once in force, all development proposals must be measured against the Plan.

A plan for the community by the community