

Arborfield and Newland Parish Council

When Arborfield and Newland Parish Council (the Council) responds to a major planning application we have to focus on analysing the applications against the adopted planning policies which are in force at the time. This is the only basis on which Wokingham Borough Council (WBC - the planning authority) can decide to accept or reject an application.

Until WBC completes and adopts the Local Plan Update (LPU) the key planning policies are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the Core Strategy and the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan, all of which have to be considered by WBC when deciding whether to grant or refuse an application.

In the case of a refusal by WBC the applicant can appeal the decision, potentially taking all the way to a planning inspector. In the case of an approval by WBC the only recourse the Council has if it believes that WBC made an incorrect decision based on planning policy is to apply for a judicial review – because of the costs involved this is really a last resort and the Council would need to be very confident that WBC had made a procedural error or incorrectly interpreted policy before the Council could justify taking this step.

The Council does not automatically reject all applications, but we have taken a policy decision that we will always seek to uphold the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (the plan <https://arborfield.org.uk/documents/neighbourhood-plan-4-4mb/>) which was adopted following local consultation and a referendum. This Plan considered the local housing demand, which has been more than met by the developments in the Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location (Arborfield Green) as well as considering suitable locations for local employment. The Plan seeks to protect the rural nature of Arborfield and Barkham, preserve settlements as discrete units with clear divisions, and ensure the overall character of the area is protected. The Plan also considered sustainability and sought to ensure that development was delivered in locations that would support non-car transport.

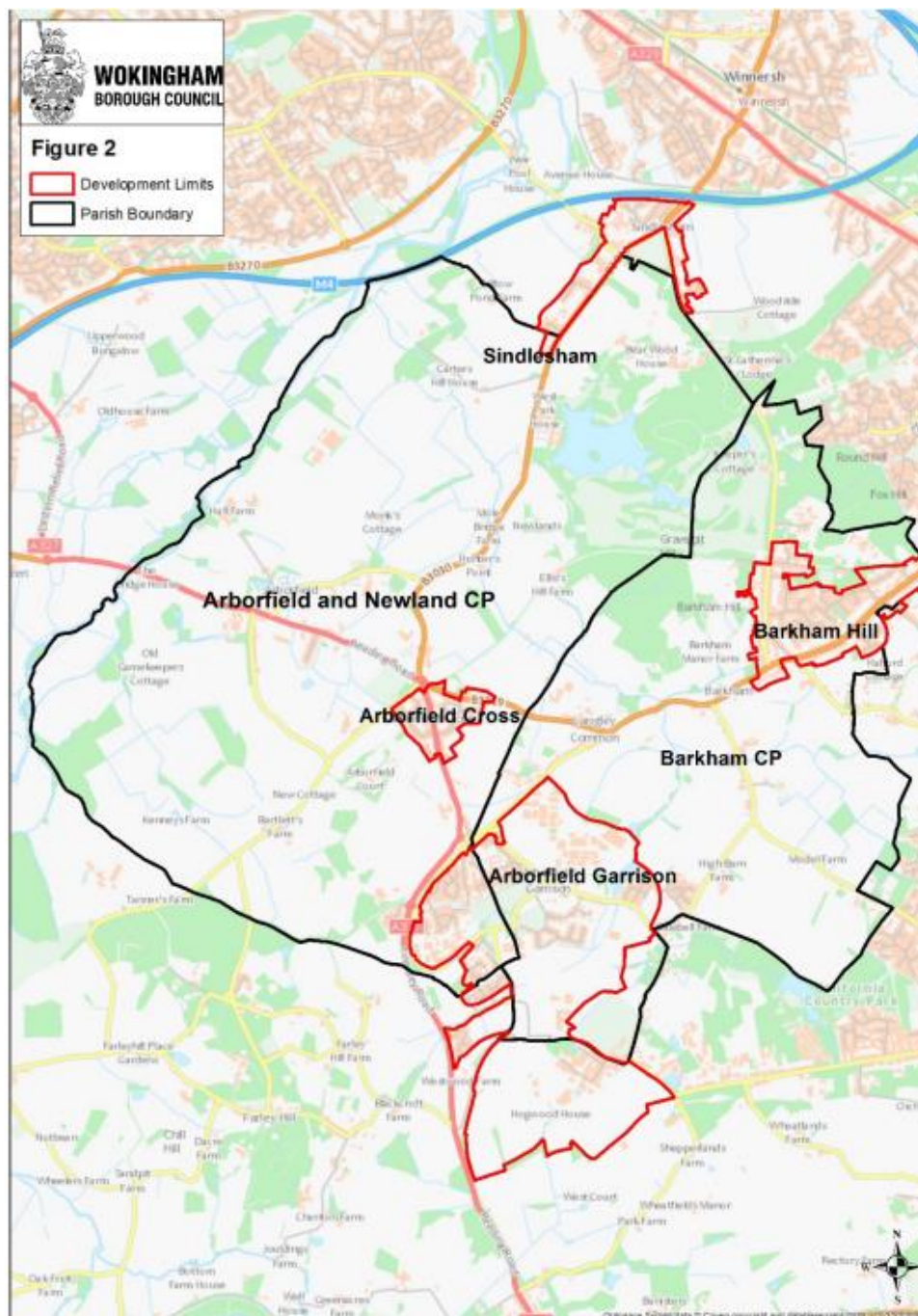
The Council has been active in supporting applications that do not contravene the policies and has worked with WBC on reserved matters applications for Arborfield Green to ensure that residents get the most benefit possible from this development.

It is always helpful if local residents are active in responding to planning applications, whether you support or oppose the application so we have provided a summary of the key planning policies to consider when you are assessing an application. Please feel free to use these policy points in your own submissions.

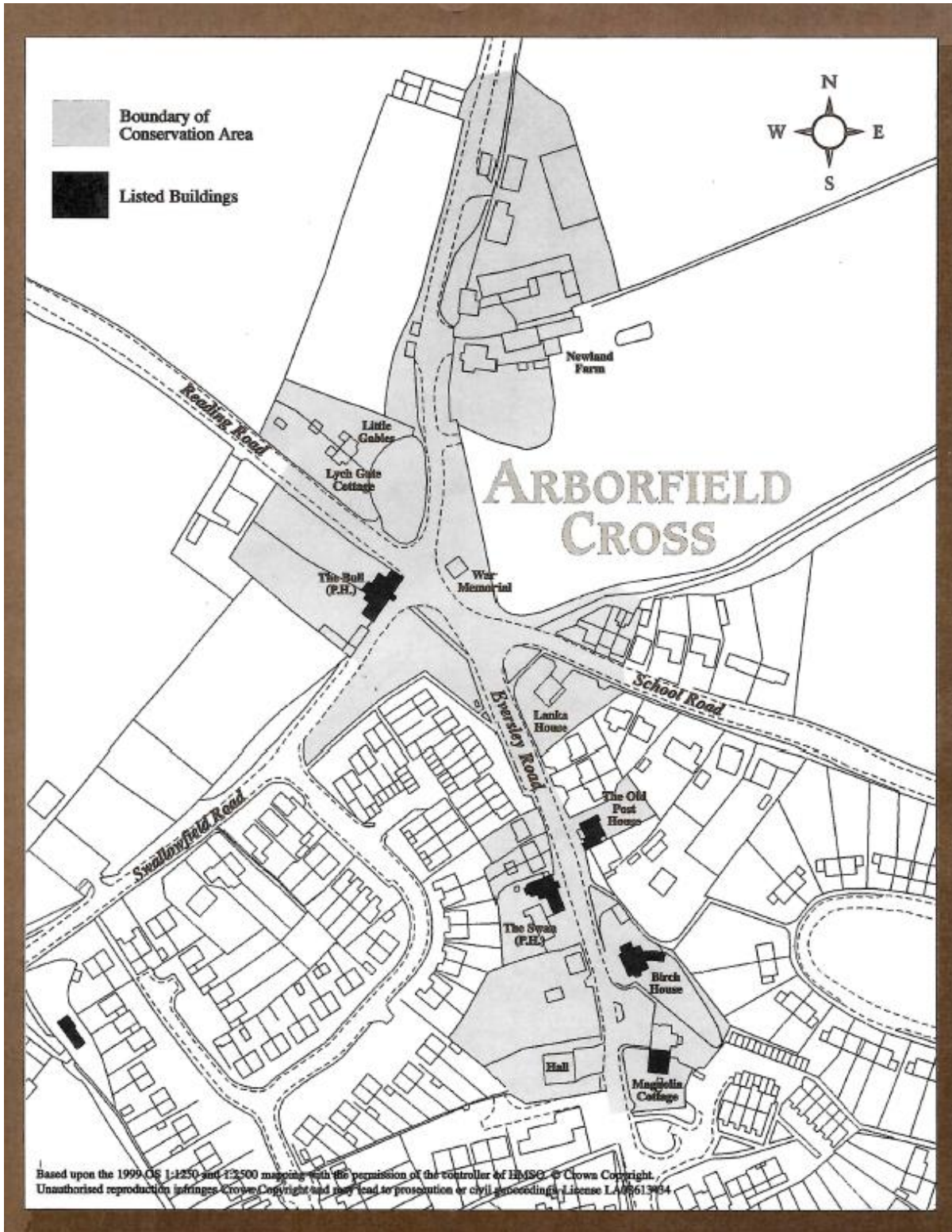
The NPPF contains a presumption in favour of sustainable development and as WBC have not completed adoption of a new LPU the tilted balance principle is applied. This says that where the benefit outweighs the harm of the development the presumption on the planning authority should be to approve the application. Harm and benefit are assessed on the immediate local area, hence a development providing a new school and shops to an area that needs these facilities might be considered to have sufficient benefit to outweigh the harms caused by contravention of some of the Plan and Core Strategy policies. In Arborfield's case, as our housing need assessed in the Plan has been met with the Arborfield

Green development, we have sufficient school places in the area and sufficient shops there are few scenarios in which a development would deliver sufficient benefit to outweigh the harms of contravening the policies set out below. The Council has pointed out to WBC in some responses that “the harms outweigh any benefit to the local area and that there is nothing the developer can do in the proposed development to mitigate the harms sufficiently to alter the balance.

Settlement boundaries as per the Neighbourhood Plan



Arborfield Cross Conservation Area



Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan Policies

Policy IRS1 – preservation and separation of settlements so as not lead to the physical, visual or perceived coalescence of existing settlements – Any proposed development of any scale that is outside the current settlement boundaries is likely to contravene this policy as they will erode the separation between the settlements.

Policy IRS2 – Recognise, Respect and Preserve Identity and rural setting of settlements – Any major development is likely to contravene this policy as any loss of the rural land surrounding the existing settlements will erode the identity and rural setting.

Policy IRS4 – Protection and enhancement of historic character of the area – demonstrate how the development would protect or enhance the historic natural character of the area specifically Arborfield Cross Conservation Area – any proposed development close to the conservation area (centre of Arborfield Cross) or affecting the setting of the listed buildings is likely to contravene this policy.

Policy AD1 – New developments within settlement boundaries – any developing within the settlement boundaries (current built up areas) is unlikely to contravene this development, any development proposed on current greenfield sites is likely to contravene.

Policy GA3 Public Transport Improvements with Long Term Viability – Any development that adds more car transport to the roads without providing public transport mitigations is likely to contravene this policy.

Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy Policies

CP1 Sustainability – Any development that does not have realistic non-car modes of transport to reach major transport hubs or places or retail, work or education is likely to breach this policy. Walking routes need to be reasonable to ensure new residents do not default to use of a car. There is limited public transport in the area and it is worth pointing out that there is no non-car route to get to our closest medical facility at Swallowfield.

CP3 General Principles of development, subsection a - Massing of properties should be in keeping with the general character of the area, hence any development proposing large blocks of apartments would be likely to contravene this policy.

CP4 Infrastructure – Any development of substantial scale that does not provide on-site infrastructure (retail, education etc) is likely to contravene this policy.

CP9 Scale and location of development proposals – Arborfield Cross is designated as limited developments. Arborfield Garrison designated as modest development. Any major development outside the existing developed areas is likely to contravene this policy.

CP11 Proposals outside development limits – Similar to Plan policy IRS1, any major development outside the existing settlement limits is likely to contravene this policy.

CP18 Arborfield Garrison SDL – priority should be given to building within the Arborfield Garrison SDL and the Council has supported the reserved matter applications which are being brought forward to complete the delivery of the masterplan. Hence major developments proposed outside this area are likely to contravene this policy.