



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

◆ **RIGHT HOMES, RIGHT PLACES**

Wokingham Borough
Local Plan Update
2023 - 2040
Proposed Submission Plan



Foreword

A local plan is required to manage the process of development; it protects the borough against inappropriate new building and provides a planned approach to delivering the new housing required by central government. A new local plan is also needed if infrastructure is to be provided at the level required to support new development.

Wokingham Borough Council's proposed local plan sets out a clear strategy to deliver a vision of thriving, green, and inclusive communities.

The strategy for locating development is based on that proposed in past consultations, reinforced by further assessment and evidence gathering. Preparation has involved engagement with statutory bodies and neighbouring local authorities, and has had careful regard to the matters raised by town and parish councils, residents and businesses.

While the plan owes much to the past draft proposals, it has some important new policy features. These push the boundaries further than before, as with our new higher targets for much-needed affordable housing and the new cutting-edge energy efficiency and environmental standards that we will be requiring developers to meet.

All local plans involve difficult choices. I understand why people living near proposed development sites may feel unhappy. But the council has a duty to positively plan for development and in doing so protect the borough from unplanned and speculative proposals. We can do that only by having an up-to-date plan that allocates enough land for new housing.

Unplanned or speculative development often comes with inadequate infrastructure. Our aim in the new plan is to deliver the infrastructure required to sustain population growth and to help build sustainable and healthy new communities.

Infrastructure is secured more easily through large developments. Loddon Valley Garden Village, the centre piece of the proposed local plan, remains the principal new location for development. It will deliver new homes near key employment locations. It will increase educational provision and provide a substantial new country park for the enjoyment of the community as well as biodiversity improvements, flooding betterment, and good connections to other areas.

While Loddon Valley Garden Village will meet a significant portion of the new housing requirement, medium-sized and smaller sites throughout the borough will make a contribution to ensure that new housing can be delivered at a more even pace through the plan period.

The proposed local plan also sets out to preserve key areas of the borough from inappropriate development. It identifies significant new areas of countryside as valued landscapes and new sites of urban landscape importance within settlements. It also

designates over a hundred Local Green Spaces, which have a level of protection analogous to the Green Belt in open countryside.

I thank all those involved in preparing the plan, especially our planning officers, but also my predecessors as executive members for Planning and the Local Plan. Having a new local plan in place, will enable the better management of development and allow us to prepare for the future in a considered and orderly way.

Cllr Stephen Conway

Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing, Partnerships and the Local Plan

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About this consultation and how to respond

About this consultation and how to respond

Wokingham Borough Council has prepared the Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update: Proposed Submission Plan. The purpose of the plan is to set out the planning policies the council proposes to use to manage development across the borough.

This version of the Local Plan Update has been published and representations (written comments) invited.

This publication is carried out in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. This version of the plan is often therefore referred to as the Regulation 19 plan.

Consultation runs from Monday 30th September – 5pm on Wednesday 13 November 2024.

At this stage representations are invited on the plan within the specific remit of the ‘tests of soundness’ set out in the National Planning Policy Framework and also on legal compliance.

As defined within the National Planning Policy Framework, a plan is sound if it was:

- a) Positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
- b) Justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
- c) Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
- d) Consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

The plan has been tested through sustainability appraisal and a Habitat Regulations Assessment. Representations on these documents is also invited.

The plan, SA and HRA are available to view and download from the council’s website.

Guidance has been prepared to help people respond.

You can submit your representations in the following ways, but the preferred method is through the online form via the council’s website:

- By online form at: <https://engage.wokingham.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/right-homes-right-places-local-plan>
- By email: download the representation form, completing it and emailing it to Planning Policy (clearly marked “Proposed Submission Plan Consultation”) at: lpu@wokingham.gov.uk

- By post: to Planning Policy (Proposed Submission Plan Consultation), Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN

In addition to placing documents on its website, a copy of the Local Plan Update is also available at the council offices at Shute End, Wokingham.

Representations made during this consultation period will be sent to the Planning Inspector appointed by the government to consider the plan.

1

Introduction

1. Introduction

What is the Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040?

- 1.1 This Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040 sets out the vision, strategic objectives and strategy for managing development across Wokingham Borough.
- 1.2 It provides the framework to guide the growth of the borough, addressing needs and opportunities for housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure, as well as the basis for conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and achieving well designed places. It will work alongside other council strategies and those of partner organisations to deliver sustainable and healthy communities.
- 1.3 The Local Plan Update is at the heart of the planning system and, alongside the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (2023) and made neighbourhood development plans, forms the statutory starting point for making decisions on planning applications.
- 1.4 The new local plan, once adopted, replaces the Core Strategy (2010) and the Managing Development Delivery (2014) local plans.

Why is it important to have a new local plan?

- 1.5 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes, commercial development, and supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner. To ensure economic, social and environmental objectives are appropriately considered, the planning system is plan-led.
- 1.6 Local plans are the principal documents which set out the strategy and associated policies for managing development. In doing this, a local plan considers how much development is required and of what type, where it should go and where it should not go. Improvements to infrastructure are aligned alongside, ensuring communities have access to schools, open spaces and shops.
- 1.7 A new local plan will ensure the needs of residents and local businesses are properly addressed and planned for in a coordinated way, and those important areas and features of the borough's environment are conserved are protected. This is the best way to help deliver development that is sustainable.
- 1.8 The challenge of meeting development needs is greater in Wokingham Borough than many other areas. This is due to the comparatively limited availability of previously developed land that can be re-used to meet future needs and the presence of constraints such as the Green Belt, flooding and the emergency planning zone around AWE Burghfield, all of which act to limit the supply of potentially suitable land and choices.
- 1.9 If a new local plan is not prepared development will still take place, however the council will not be able to positively manage the type and location of development. The council will also be less able to require the improvements to infrastructure, the provision of affordable housing and the achievement of higher environmental standards, which are essential to support additional development and deliver a wide range of benefits of residents.

How has the Local Plan Update been prepared?

- 1.10 The preparation of the Local Plan Update has been informed by the requirements of national planning policy and guidance, other council plans and strategies, stakeholder and community engagement, discussions with neighbouring authorities and other relevant bodies under the Duty to Co-operate, and a technical evidence base.

National planning policy and guidance

- 1.11 Local plans must comply with specific requirements set out in national planning policy and guidance. In particular a local plan may only be adopted and used where it passes examination by a government appointed Planning Inspector which will consider whether the plan was prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements and whether it is sound. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that a plan is sound if it was:
- a) Positively prepared – providing a strategy which, as a minimum, seeks to meet the area’s objectively assessed needs; and is informed by agreements with other authorities, so that unmet need from neighbouring areas is accommodated where it is practical to do so and is consistent with achieving sustainable development;
 - b) Justified – an appropriate strategy, taking into account the reasonable alternatives, and based on proportionate evidence;
 - c) Effective – deliverable over the plan period, and based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic matters that have been dealt with rather than deferred, as evidenced by the statement of common ground; and
 - d) Consistent with national policy – enabling the delivery of sustainable development in accordance with the policies in this Framework and other statements of national planning policy, where relevant.

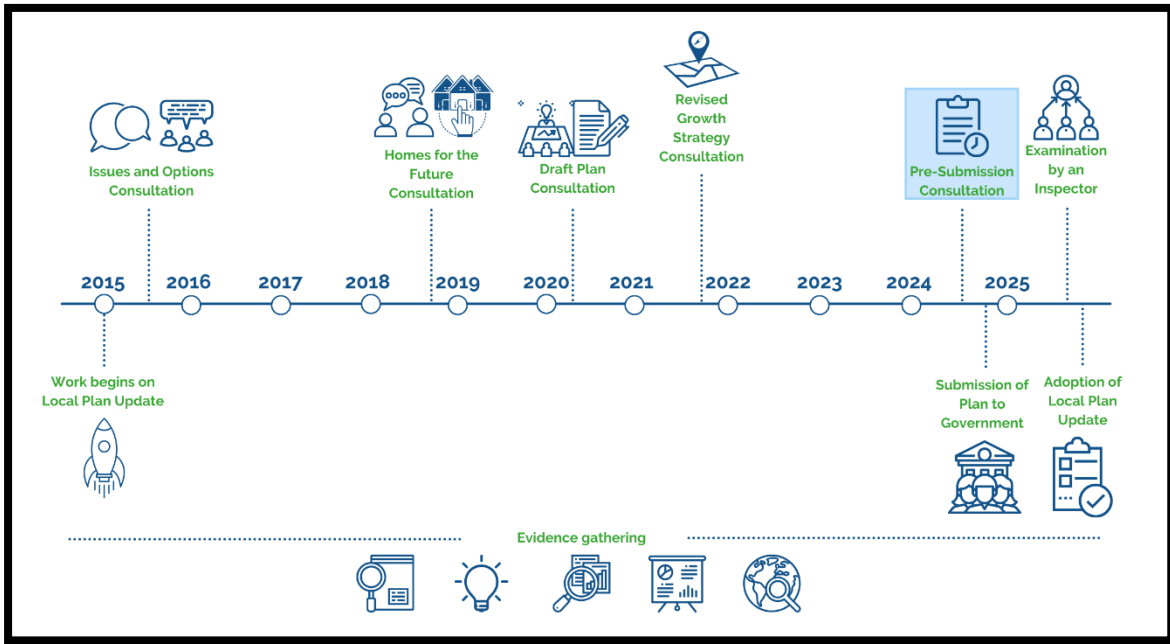
Other plans and strategies

- 1.12 At a local level regard has been had to the plans and strategies of key authorities and agencies, as well as those of the council itself, including the Council Plan, Climate Change Action Plan and made neighbourhood development plans.

Stakeholder and community engagement

- 1.13 As part of the preparation of the Local Plan Update, significant consultation has been undertaken providing an opportunity for residents and stakeholders to highlight issues and opinion into the plan process. All comments made at each stage have been carefully reviewed in preparing the Local Plan Update, alongside the requirements of national planning policy and guidance and technical evidence.
- 1.14 The timing of key consultations is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Timeline of plan preparation.



Duty to Cooperate

- 1.15 Under the Duty to Co-operate, the council has worked closely with neighbouring local authorities on a range of strategic matters such as transport, employment, infrastructure and the environment. In addition, the council has engaged worked with other prescribed organisations including National Highways, Natural England, Historic England, the Environment Agency, the Integrated Care Board, Thames Water and South East Water.
- 1.16 Information on how the council has positively engaged is set out in a Duty to Cooperate Statement that can be viewed on the council’s website.

Technical evidence base

- 1.17 The Local Plan Update is accompanied by a wide range of technical evidence which has informed and supported its preparation. The evidence is proportionate to the scale and nature of the process as advised by national planning policy. All evidence studies are available on the council’s website. Further details on several aspects are provided below.

Sustainability appraisal

- 1.18 A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) has been undertaken alongside the preparation of the Local Plan Update. The purpose of SA is to ensure that the plan preparation process maximises the contribution that a plan makes to sustainable development and minimises any potential adverse impacts. The SA process involves appraising the likely social, environmental and economic effects of the policies and proposals within a plan from the outset of its development.
- 1.19 The SA incorporates the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process. This requires the formal assessment of plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment and which set the framework for future consent of projects requiring Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

- 1.20 SEA and SA are separate processes but have similar aims and objectives. SEA focuses on the likely environmental effects of a plan whilst SA includes a wider range of considerations, extending to social and economic impacts.

Habitats regulations assessment

- 1.21 A Habitats Regulation Assessment has been prepared to consider any aspects of the Local Plan Update that have the potential to cause likely significant effects on the integrity of habitats sites (Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Ramsar sites), either in isolation or in combination with other plans and projects, and to agree an appropriate avoidance and mitigation strategy where such effects are identified.

Health impact assessment

- 1.22 A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) assesses the potential effects a plan, programme or policy can have on the health of the population and the distribution of those effects within the population. Through the process of preparing a HIA, health and wellbeing have been considered in the preparation of the Local Plan Update.

Equalities impact assessment

- 1.23 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been carried out in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that throughout all stages and elements of the preparation of the Local Plan Update, as well as the content of the plan itself, the council has had regard to its duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

[How to use the Local Plan Update](#)

- 1.24 The Local Plan Update comprises the following sections:

1. Introduction;
2. Plan context;
3. Vision and objectives;
4. The spatial strategy 2023-2040;
5. Delivering the spatial strategy;
6. Climate change and energy;
7. Connections;
8. Economy, employment and retail;
9. Housing;
10. Flooding and drainage;
11. Natural environment;
12. Design, heritage and the built environment;
13. Healthy and safe communities; and
14. Monitoring and implementation.

- 1.25 Policies are numbered and appear in a box. Policies are followed by supporting text which seeks to explain what the policy is seeking to do and provides further information on implementation.

- 1.26 There are two different types of policies: strategic policies and non-strategic policies.

- 1.27 Strategic policies set out an overall strategy for the pattern, scale and design quality of places (to ensure outcomes support beauty and placemaking), and make sufficient provision for:
- a) housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;
 - b) infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
 - c) community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and
 - d) conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- 1.28 Non-strategic policies set out more detailed policies for specific areas, neighbourhoods or types of development. This can include allocating sites, the provision of infrastructure and community facilities at a local level, establishing design principles, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment and setting out other development management policies.
- 1.29 A list of all policies, highlighting which are considered to be strategic and non-strategic is provided in Section 4: The Spatial Strategy 2023-2040. If viewing this plan in colour, and to further assist, strategic policies are framed by a light red background, whilst non-strategic policies are framed with a light green background.
- 1.30 The Local Plan Update should be read and interpreted as a whole. All policies should be viewed together and not in isolation in the preparation and consideration of planning applications. Development proposals will be judged against all relevant policies.

Policies map

- 1.31 The Local Plan Update is supported by an interactive online Policies Map which shows relevant policies from the plan and other parts of the development plan spatially. It includes details of all relevant planning designations and other key spatial data.

Neighbourhood development plans

- 1.32 As of September 2024, there are five made neighbourhood development plans within the borough. Several other areas are also progressing work that may lead to additional plans.
- 1.33 The Local Plan Update sets out the strategic context within which any new neighbourhood development plan, or any review of an existing plan will operate. They must comply with national policy, international obligations and human rights requirements and be in 'general conformity' with the strategic policies set out in the Local Plan Update.

Monitoring, implementation and review

- 1.34 The council recognises that the Local Plan Update is a long-term strategy and is committed to monitoring its implementation. This is essential so that early action can be taken to overcome any unforeseen barriers to delivery. Monitoring is also important to enable residents and stakeholders to be aware of progress.

- 1.35 An annual Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) assesses the overall performance of planning policies. Specific site development monitoring already takes place on a rolling annual basis.
- 1.36 The monitoring indicators that will be used to assess the Local Plan Update are set out in Section 14: Monitoring and implementation.
- 1.37 The NPPF sets out that local plans should be kept up to date and should be formally reviewed every five years to assess whether they need updating. The council therefore intends to formally review the plan within five years of adoption. It is not proposed to undertake any additional short-term reviews unless it is clear from the AMR that key elements of the strategy are not being delivered.

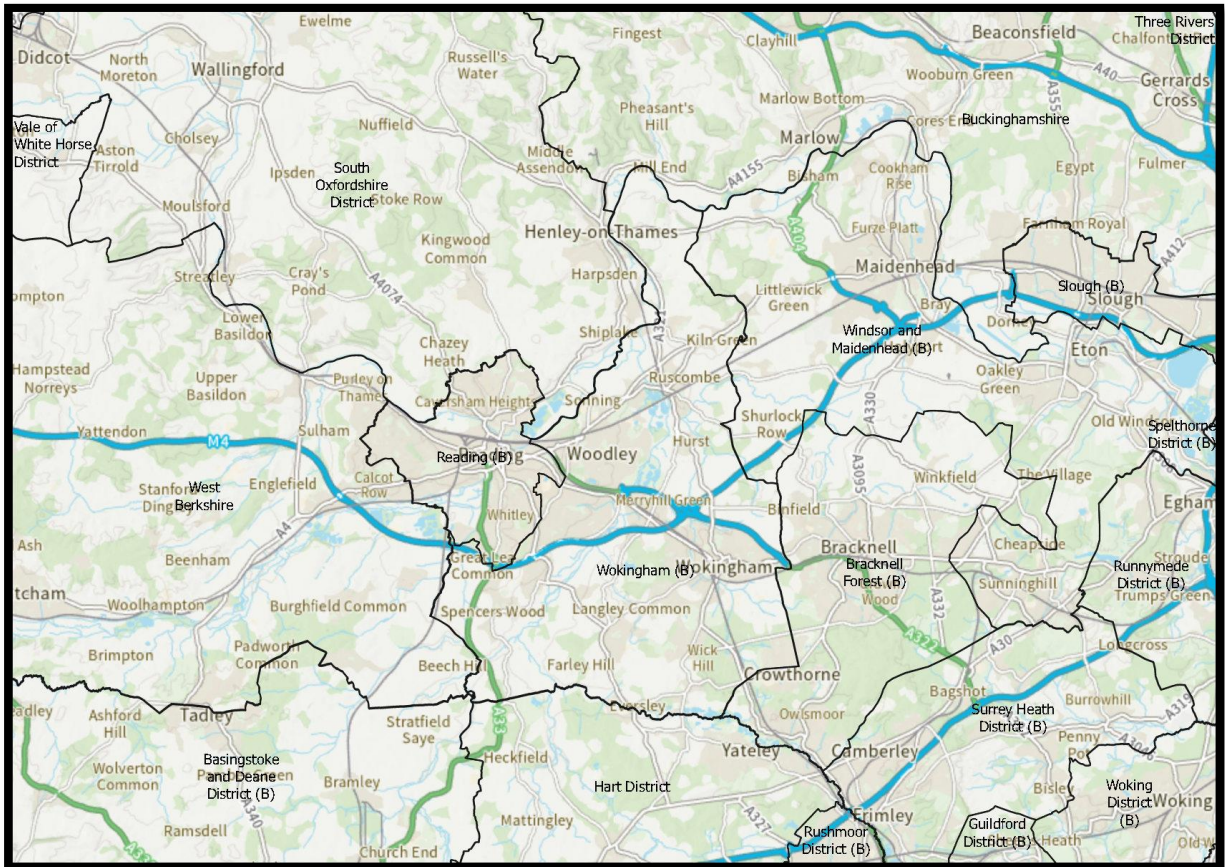
2

Plan Context

2. Context and Challenges

- 2.1 Wokingham Borough lies approximately 50km west of London, in the heart of the Thames Valley and within the Royal County of Berkshire. The borough covers an area of 17,892 hectares and is divided into 17 parishes. The borough is characterised by a variety of settlements, with the largest being Earley, Winnersh, and Woodley, which are in proximity to Reading, and Wokingham.
- 2.2 The borough benefits from good transport connections, with the M4 running east-west through the centre. The borough also has direct rail connections to London Paddington/Reading/Henley-on-Thames (from Twyford station), London Waterloo/Reading (from Wokingham, Earley, Winnersh Triangle and Winnersh stations), and to Redhill/Gatwick (from Wokingham station).
- 2.3 The geographical context, including adjoining local authorities, is shown in Figure 2 below¹.

Figure 2: Wokingham Borough and neighbouring local authorities



¹ Hart District Council and Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council are located within the administrative area of Hampshire County Council. South Oxfordshire District Council is located within administrative area of Oxfordshire County Council.

Figure 3: Key facts



Population

- 2.4 The borough has a population of 177,500. Between 2011 and 2021, the population of the borough grew by 15%, the third highest in the South East (average 7.5%) and one of the highest levels in England (average 6.3%).
- 2.5 Wokingham Borough is an affluent area, which is ranked as the second least deprived local authority area in England². In 2021, 17% of the population were aged 65 and over, compared to the average for the South East of 19.4% and in England of 18.6%.

Climate change

- 2.6 Climate change is having an impact on the local environment with weather events becoming less predictable.
- 2.7 Wokingham Borough Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019. This committed the council to playing as full a role as possible in achieving a carbon neutral borough by 2030. Amongst other things, the motion required the council to produce a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP). The CEAP establishes ten priority areas and 102 actions to mitigate CO₂ emissions and achieve our 2030 goal.
- 2.8 The borough's carbon footprint as of 2020 was 505 kilo tonnes of CO₂ taking into account emissions from industry, travel, homes and also carbon absorption (such as through trees, giving a negative figure). Progress to date includes a reduction in total waste in the borough which resulted in 80,758 tonnes of CO₂ saved, launching the Solar Together scheme to help able-to-pay residents install solar panels on residential properties, and planting over 40,000 trees between November 2021 and March 2023 contributing towards offsetting an estimated 6,036 tonnes of carbon equivalent emissions.
- 2.9 Key opportunities/challenges:
- To improve opportunities for active travel, reducing car and vehicle dependency for local and unnecessary journeys.
 - To ensure new buildings meet the highest fabric and energy efficient standards, so reducing impacts on climate change from development and acting to reduce energy demand and fuel bills.
 - To increase resilience of communities and the environment to the effects of climate change.
 - To increase the amount of energy generated locally from low carbon and renewable resources.

Getting around

- 2.10 Car ownership in the borough is high with 39.5% of households owning two and 14% owning three or more cars. In common with many other parts of the country, transport is the key carbon emitter and a reduction in vehicle usage through sustainable transport schemes would help make a strong contribution to the challenges associated with climate change.
- 2.11 The latest Local Transport Plan (LTP4) sets out the approach for all aspects of transport across the borough and shows the differing level of public transport and accessibility between the rural and more urban areas of the borough, and splits the borough into four broad areas:

² ONS, 2019.

- Wokingham and Winnersh have the highest levels of containment and active travel.
- Earley, Woodley and Shinfield have a high draw to Reading, good public transport, local services and walking and cycling.
- Wokingham south, including Finchampstead and Arborfield, is rural with high car dependency
- Wokingham north, including Twyford and Wargrave, is rural with high car dependency but with connectivity via Twyford train station.

2.12 Opportunities for sustainable travel differs between areas in the borough. In more rural areas there may be scope to improve public realm and cycle parking at key centres, while continuing the development of greenways. In urban areas there will be more scope to encourage active travel by making it easier to walk and cycle to facilities through improved links and facilities. The Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) sets out the council's long term plan to improve walking and cycling.

2.13 Key opportunities/challenges:

- To improve opportunity for active travel, reducing car and vehicle dependency for local and unnecessary journeys.
- Improving community infrastructure and services amongst rural settlements with dispersed catchment populations whilst aiming to maintain the viability and vitality of services in villages.
- Managing congestion and promoting different transport and travel choices.
- Improving air quality.

Natural, built and historic environment

2.14 The borough has a rich and varied natural environment which is highly valued by residents, both for the quality and diversity of landscape and biodiversity, but also for the attractive setting, which is a key aspect of the local character, and related recreational opportunities.

2.15 The borough supports various types of green and blue infrastructure, which includes the Rivers Thames, Loddon and Blackwater. The impacts of future growth will need to be managed, with improvements to water services infrastructure to maintain water quality.

2.16 The borough has four nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs): Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI, Longmoor Bog SSSI, Heath Lake SSSI and the Lodge Wood & Sandford Mill SSSI, many areas of ancient woodland, over one hundred Local Wildlife Sites (LWS), 11 Local Nature Reserves and five Local Geological Sites. The rivers Thames, Loddon and Blackwater flow through the borough, providing and supporting important habitats and recreation.

2.17 Wokingham Borough Council declared an ecological emergency in January 2024, highlighting the need to address ecological issues alongside climate emergency actions to ensure the delivery of biodiversity and environmental enhancements.

2.18 The borough is fortunate to benefit from a range of historic and diverse settlements which span several periods in history. The borough contains 16 conservation areas, a significant number of listed buildings, scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens.

2.19 Key opportunities/challenges:

- Supporting the delivery of attractive, high-quality, design led developments and the creation of healthy, inclusive and safe communities, that are well served by good quality services and facilities to support people's lives.
- To meet development needs in ways which take account of the environment and respect local distinctiveness.
- Conserving and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, important landscapes and green and blue infrastructure.
- Incorporating historic buildings/monuments into new places/open spaces to enable them to be understood and be enjoyed.
- To improve access to the countryside and green spaces.
- Delivering net gains in biodiversity.

Employment and retail

- 2.20 Wokingham Borough is an attractive location for a range of business sectors and services. Its proximity to London and Reading, location on the M4 corridor and rail connections have helped its commercial success.
- 2.21 66% of residents over 16 years of age are economically active and 45% of residents have a higher-level qualification such as a degree, higher degree or NVQ level 4-5. Employment in the borough is largely based around the service sector, dominated by the IT, communications and pharmaceutical sectors with many major international companies, such as Microsoft, Oracle, Pepsico and Johnson & Johnson located locally.
- 2.22 Town, district, and local centres play an important role providing both employment and acting as focal points for communities. Since 2018, the borough's retail business sector experienced growth, largely as a result of the regeneration of Wokingham Town Centre. This growth contributed towards the 13,000 people employed in the retail sector throughout the borough in 2021, in addition to an increase in the number of retail businesses.
- 2.23 The rural economy includes traditional industries such as agriculture, alongside leisure, industrial and other businesses.
- 2.24 Key opportunities/challenges:
- Continue to support and protect a range of employment opportunities across the borough.
 - Supporting employment destinations to evolve to meet the changing need of business.
 - Supporting town and district centres to evolve so they meet the varied needs of residents and remain at the heart of communities.
 - To work with businesses to provide opportunities for residents to gain new skills.

Health and wellbeing

- 2.25 The health of people in the borough is generally better than the average for England. In 2021, 87% of residents described their health as very good or good, which compares favourably to the figure for England of 82.2%. Like many places, health is not uniform and people are more likely to have poorer health and die younger in more deprived neighbourhoods.

2.26 Key opportunities/challenges:

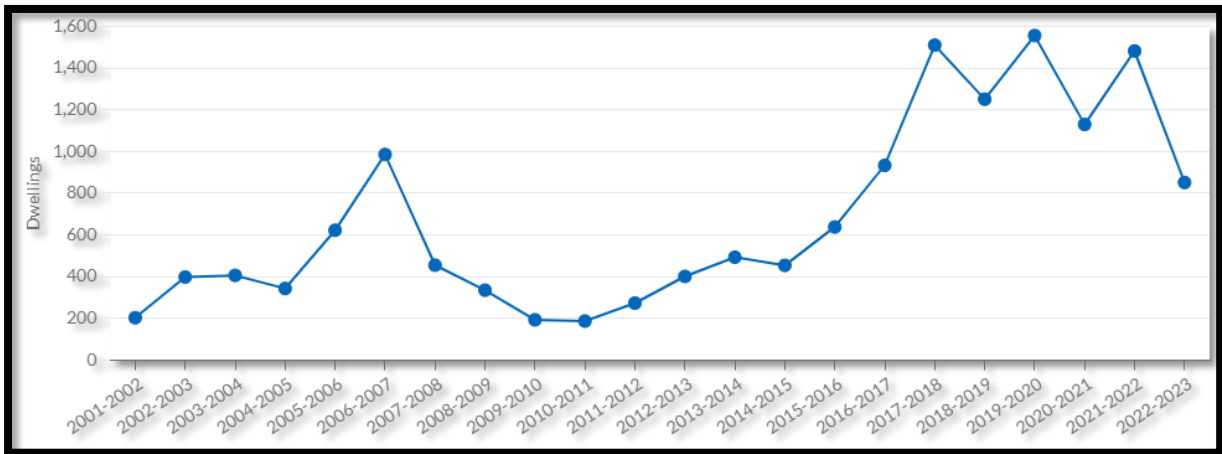
- To reduce health inequalities across the borough.
- Encouraging healthier lifestyles improving opportunities for active travel and access to the countryside and green spaces.
- Balancing health facility and service provision with new growth patterns.

Housing

2.27 In 2021 there were 71,523 dwellings in Wokingham Borough, with detached or semi-detached housing the predominant types. Compared to the average across England, flats and terraced housing make up a significantly lower proportion of the housing stock.

2.28 Most of the recent housing growth has been within the four Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) located at North Wokingham, South Wokingham, South of the M4 and on the site of the former Arborfield Garrison, focusing development of new housing alongside the necessary infrastructure.

Figure 4: Net additional dwellings 2001/02-2022/23.



2.29 Applying the method set out in national planning guidance calculates local housing need to be 748 dwellings per year from 1 April 2023.

2.30 78% of residents own their own home, either outright, with a mortgage, or via shared ownership, which is higher than the national average.

2.31 Like much of the South East, average property prices in the borough are substantially higher than the average across England. House prices have followed local trends and have not been impacted by the high levels of house building. As a result, the affordability of housing remains a key issue, particularly for the young.

2.32 Affordable housing is housing which is provided to assist those who cannot access suitable housing in the market. The various types of affordable housing tenure include rent and shared ownership. In January 2024, 1,299 households were on the housing register waiting list seeking affordable rented accommodation. Of these 599 households were considered not to be adequately housed and having a significant or urgent need for housing.

2.33 The ageing population will have implications for the type and design of housing in the future. Enabling people to continue to live in their own home will require adaptations to existing homes as

well as a greater proportion of new homes being designed to be accessible. This will need to be supported by specialist housing.

2.34 Key opportunities/challenges:

- Providing a sufficient supply of land for new homes.
- Ensuring a range of housing tenures, types and sizes are provided to meet the needs of local communities and provide choice and flexibility in the housing market.
- Providing sufficient affordable housing to assist people with a significant need for housing.
- Providing supported and specialist housing and health and social care infrastructure to meet the needs of an ageing population to redress the balance of dwelling sizes by increasing the number of smaller properties.
- Meeting the housing needs of specific groups such as older people and the Gypsies and Traveller community.

Delivering infrastructure

2.35 Sustainable and successful communities need to be supported by suitable physical and social infrastructure to ensure the quality of life for residents. This includes schools, roads, sports pitches and open spaces, community facilities, utilities and digital infrastructure. Key community services and facilities therefore need to be protected, whilst a proactive approach is required to infrastructure planning.

2.36 The number of new houses being built in recent years has been higher than in recent decades. Most new homes have been built in the four Strategic Development Locations (SDLs).

2.37 This growth has been accompanied by nearly £1 billion in infrastructure, largely funded by the developments, but also supported by the council. This has included new primary schools, a secondary school, new major relief roads, 240 hectares of public open space and 5 new community centres.

2.38 The council will need to continue to work closely with infrastructure providers to deliver the appropriate infrastructure and services in the most efficient ways.

2.39 Key opportunities/challenges:

- Working with utility and service providers to identify and deliver necessary infrastructure.
- Protecting and enhancing community services and facilities.

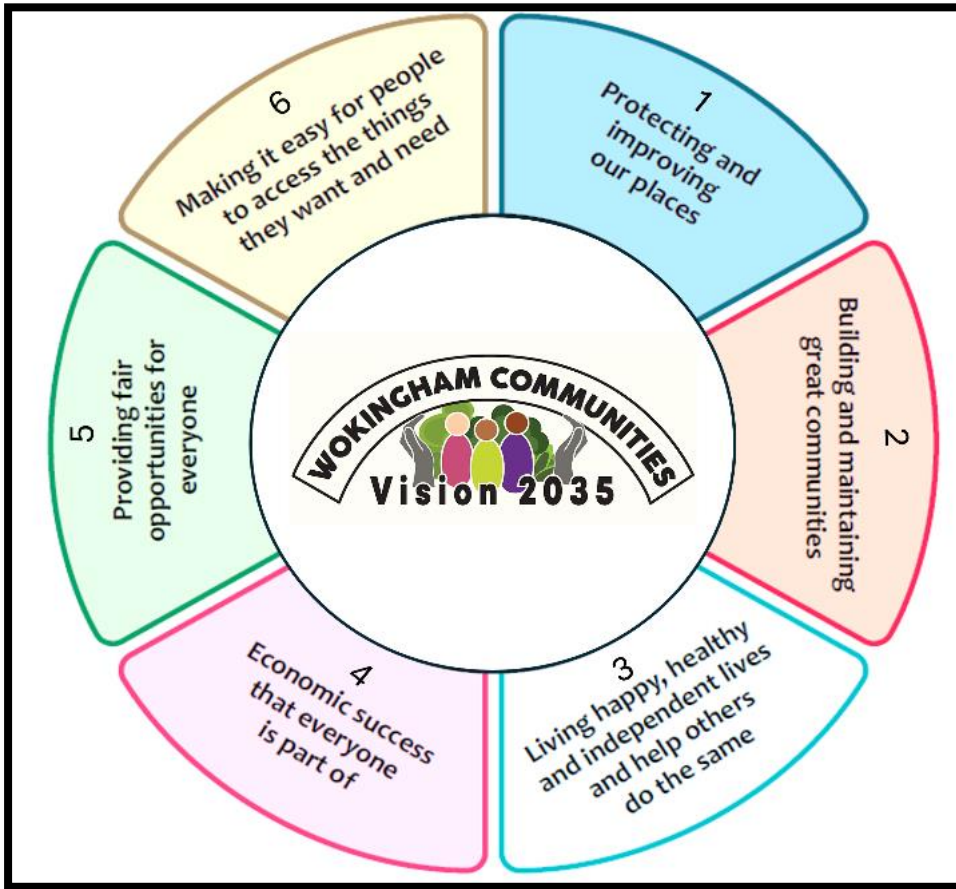
Wokingham Vision 2035

2.40 Wokingham Vision 2035 is the community vision for the borough. Its creation has been led by a steering group formed by 18 partner organisations which actively work in local communities.

2.41 The vision captures the aspirations and experiences of those who live and work in the borough, and reflects on these with the aim of making Wokingham Borough the best place it can be over the years ahead. It will be used by partners to guide their actions, whilst working with communities to foster commitment from local people.

2.42 The vision identifies 6 ambitions as set out in Figure 5 below and in the text which follows.

Figure 5: Wokingham Vision 2035.



Protecting and improving our places

2.43 We care about the environment and want to protect it. We love the green spaces and enjoy spending time in the countryside as well as our town and village centres. As a community we take pride in what it looks like and want high standards maintained.

2.44 But we are worried about the changes needed to reduce carbon emissions; loss of green space; unequal access to nature and potential threat to its clean and tidy appearance.

Making it easy for people to access the things they want and need

2.45 There are great facilities, things to do and services across the borough but not everybody can get to them easily or even at all. Some people struggle to live fulfilling lives. We are frustrated that it's not always as easy getting around the borough as we would like, with congestion seen as an increasing problem and not all things or services accessible to all. Options such as public transport or cycling are not always sufficient.

Building and maintaining great communities

2.46 Community spirit is strong here. We have passionate charities and volunteers dedicated to making life better. This is a place most people find safe, welcoming and friendly. However, we want to

strive for inclusion for all and places where everyone feels they belong. We must also make it easy and fulfilling to give our time to help others.

Providing fair opportunities for everyone

- 2.47 The towns and villages of Wokingham are places of opportunity. Our schools are good and many of our young people get excellent results. We must work together to maintain high standards and ensure they are shared by all. This is a great place to live with good facilities and local events that bring people together. It is also an expensive place to live with some people unable to afford its benefits and a concern about the future generations' ability to find a home here.

Economic success that everyone is part of

- 2.48 There is economic strength in our borough. We are home to many businesses and a university of outstanding innovation. But we must adapt to a changing world and the needs of our communities. We will strive to make sure economic success is open to all and that nobody is left out.

Living happy, healthy and independent lives and help others do the same

- 2.49 The borough is one of the healthiest places in the country with a largely active and engaged population. People are well supported within the resources available, and help is at hand for those who need it. But health is experienced individually not collectively and there are differences in experience that aren't equal. We will work as a community to help everybody stay fit, well, happy and supported across our borough.

3

Vision and Objectives

3. Vision and Objectives

3.1 This chapter sets out the vision for Wokingham Borough in 2040 and a series of supporting strategic objectives, which together provide the foundation for the policies of this Local Plan Update.

Vision

- A borough that focuses on the needs of our communities.
- A borough that will be sustainable for generations to come.
- A borough where people choose to live, learn and work because both the places we build and the places we protect are valued and enriching.

A vision for meeting the needs of our communities

- 3.2 Wokingham Borough will be a place where people of all ages feel they belong to inclusive and thriving communities.
- 3.3 The needs of communities will be at the heart of the places that are built. This means that new homes will respond to the diverse needs of residents, including the local demographic need, as well as meeting our overall requirement for housing. Providing affordable housing and specialist homes which allow people to live independently will be at the heart of development, with housing also offered for people who require support. Meeting the needs of communities also means taking account of the evolving needs of employers both in terms of providing an environment in which businesses can evolve with changing needs and workforce expectations, and in enabling people to work from home.
- 3.4 Residents will feel connected with their community, with people of all ages and all abilities feeling safe and having a sense of belonging and enjoyment. The revitalisation of Wokingham town centre will ensure that town centres continue to act as social, cultural and economic hub. The evolution of other centres will also be supported as will the creation of new centres within planned strategic developments.
- 3.5 The vision is not to simply build new homes and offices, it is to create communities where every consideration has been given to both existing residents in an area and those people that will live there in the future. Open green spaces should be easily accessible and opportunities for walking and cycling will allow them to be the mode of choice for short journeys, helping people to lead healthier lives. Whilst development places new demands on infrastructure, it also brings the opportunities for investment. The Community Infrastructure Levy will be used in a targeted way to maximise the benefits as well as to manage growth pressures.
- 3.6 Residents will have the opportunity to live the safest, most secure, healthiest and happiest life possible.

A vision for sustainability

- 3.7 Climate change is challenging the way things are done. Every action taken must take us a step closer to being a net zero carbon society, reduce the unnecessary use of resources, and help lead to healthier lives.
- 3.8 Action is required to combat the effects of climate change. Key to that will be locating most of the new development in locations that reduce car dependency and provide opportunities to make walking, cycling and public transport a viable, attractive and easy option. High quality digital connectivity will be embraced to limit the need to travel.
- 3.9 All new development will be designed and constructed to achieve sustainable building, to secure lower carbon emissions levels and reduce other environmental impacts. Innovation aimed at improving sustainability both for the construction and operation of the development will be welcomed. Renewable energy generation and adaptation of homes will be supported.
- 3.10 Measures will be taken to adapt to the effects of climate change, including minimising the risk of flooding, and reducing demand for water, as well as supporting the adaptation of buildings so they remain comfortable in extremes of heat and cold.
- 3.11 The move away from petrol and diesel cars towards cleaner means of transport, such as electric cars, will help achieve improvements in air quality and reduce carbon emissions. Embracing and planning for smart and innovative technologies will make it easier to adopt new opportunities as they arise. Where the direct provision of infrastructure is not possible now, future provision will be enabled.
- 3.12 Places in the borough should enrich lives. The valued, green environment and waterways will be protected, expanded and improved by integrating soft landscaping and habitat creation into the design of developments. This will support biodiversity and nature, bring wildlife into the built environment and spaces, helping to mitigate some of the impacts of climate change and the impacts of new development. Conserving the countryside, in particular valued landscape and habitats, plays a key role in maintaining biodiversity and providing places where people of all ages can visit and enjoy, as part of healthier and active lifestyles.
- 3.13 The borough will feel like a healthier place, because it will be a healthier place.

A vision for the right kind of growth

- 3.14 The borough's towns and villages will be rewarding places to live, learn, work or visit. The places that are built will respect and add to the heritage of the area and local character, whilst allowing for innovation, creating a welcoming environment which everyone finds enjoyable and safe. By promoting healthier lifestyles and reducing the dominance of private cars including traffic and congestion, a sustainable pattern of development will be supported which maximises opportunities for active travel such as walking, cycling and wheeling, and public transport.
- 3.15 Most development will be directed to places where people of all ages are able, or will be able, to access a wide range of local services and facilities. The use of appropriate higher development densities will help secure the ongoing viability of services and facilities.
- 3.16 Notwithstanding this aim, this needs to be balanced with the needs of smaller villages which have comparably less access to services and facilities. These competing needs will be balanced by

identifying suitable opportunities for villages to grow, allowing both existing residents to stay where they grew up and new residents to help support the community. Such opportunities are limited in scale and number and could include rural exception developments. Additional development beyond what is identified will not be supported unless there are exceptional circumstances.

- 3.17 The borough's town centres are the place to go for leisure and culture, because they offer everything; a place where people of all ages can shop, socialise and be entertained, providing experiences with which online retailing simply cannot compete. These are increasingly important aspects of creating thriving communities in today's world.
- 3.18 To sustain successful economic growth, it is not enough just to sit back. New and evolving businesses will be supported with an environment that allows businesses to adapt to changes in practice and technology. The emphasis will be on sustainable economic development, of the right type and in the right place to meet employment needs both within settlements and in rural areas.
- 3.19 The sense of place comes from the vibrancy and diversity of towns and villages, and how they are interspersed with countryside, woodland and waterways. Planned developments must take that sense of place as the starting point, providing bespoke quality responses for each place to achieve sustainable, quality designed development and public realm.
- 3.20 The borough will continue to be a place where people want to live, learn, work and achieve.

Objectives

Climate change

1. Make the fullest contribution possible to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change and the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Getting around

2. Reduce the need to travel and widen travel choice, by providing local opportunities to access learning and employment, services and facilities, through ensuring that options for walking, cycling and public transport are attractive, accessible for all, convenient and safe, and by enabling digital connectivity.

3. Improve strategic transport connectivity by walking, cycling, wheeling, public transport and road, both between places within and outside of the borough.

Natural, built and historic environment

4. Maintain and strengthen the sense of place by securing quality designed development through protecting and enhancing the distinctive historic environment, landscape character, townscape character and biodiversity value, assisting vibrancy, and by keeping settlements separate.

5. Promote quality and innovation in the design of buildings and public spaces, ensuring they are attractive, accessible, welcoming and meet needs of all groups in the community.

Employment and retail

6. Champion thriving town and local centres to provide the focus of their communities both in social and economic activity, ensuring they can adapt to the challenges they face.

7. Enable conditions to allow the economy to creatively grow by being adaptable to structural and technological change, ensuring the economic benefits are felt by all.

Health and wellbeing

8. Improve health and wellbeing by enabling independence, encouraging healthy lifestyles, facilitating social interaction and creating inclusive and safe communities.

Housing

9. Contribute our fair share towards meeting the need for more housing, ensuring that a range of suitable housing options are available across both towns and villages which cater for and adapt to a variety of needs including affordable housing and the growing ageing and those with additional care and support needs.

Delivering infrastructure

10. Facilitate timely provision of new and improved infrastructure by working with providers to achieve focused investment and by securing appropriate benefits from new development.

4

The Spatial Strategy 2023-2040

4. The Spatial Strategy 2023-2040

Principles guiding the spatial strategy

- 4.1 The Local Plan Update has been prepared in accordance with the principles of achieving sustainable development as set out in the NPPF. This means striving to meet social, economic and environmental objectives to provide a good quality of life for existing and future generations. The aim is to retain and enhance the distinctive qualities of the borough and create strong, cohesive and inclusive communities which respond to environmental challenges such as climate change.
- 4.2 The spatial strategy directs the majority of growth to locations that are already sustainable or that can be made sustainable. This is consistent with early work, which alongside responses to public consultations highlighted that the following elements should inform the spatial strategy:
- Protecting the identity of places, and the role of the countryside and Green Belt in achieving this;
 - Optimising the re-use of previously developed land within settlements to help meet development needs and reduce the loss of greenfield land;
 - Focusing growth on sustainable locations, which would benefit from existing or the creation of new services, facilities and employment and have the potential to reduce the need to travel and vehicle emissions;
 - Preference for large scale developments, where infrastructure can be planned, funded and provided alongside;
 - Recognition that a proportionate level of housing growth will be required across settlements in order to meet housing needs and maintain a suitable supply of sites;
 - The positive adaptation of employment locations to future requirements; and
 - The evolution of town and other centres to changing markets whilst remaining at the heart of communities.

What are the needs for development up to 2040?

Housing Need and Provision

- 4.3 The NPPF states the objective to significantly boost the supply of new homes. It requires local authorities to identify the minimum number of homes needed by using a nationally prescribed formula referred to as the standard method. In broad terms, the standard method multiplies the number of households expected to form in a local authority by an adjustment factor based on the affordability ratio of median house prices and median earnings.
- 4.4 Whilst the outcome of the standard method is referred to in the NPPF as an advisory starting point for establishing a housing requirement, an alternative method for assessing housing need can only be applied where there are exceptional circumstances.
- 4.5 In addition to the outcome of the standard method, the NPPF requires that any needs that cannot be met by neighbouring areas should be taken into account in establishing the housing requirement. There are no current requests from other Berkshire local authorities within the Housing Market Area.

- 4.6 The standard method is recalculated each year as new affordability data is published. The outcome of the standard method at 1 April 2023 was a housing need for Wokingham Borough of 795 dwellings per annum (dpa). The figure for 1 April 2024 was 748 dpa.
- 4.7 Once housing need is established, the NPPF expects local authorities to set planning policies which, as a minimum, meet the development needs of the area, unless policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a strong reason for restricting the overall scale of development, or the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against policies in the NPPF.
- 4.8 The council recognises that it is important to have up-to-date planning policies to maintain a plan led approach to growth that reflects local priorities and ambitions. It is important to ensure that development is built in the right locations, with the right infrastructure, and to the right standards that can support the council’s declaration of a climate emergency. The Local Plan Update uses the outcome of the standard method as the basis for setting the housing requirement. In line with the standard method, the Local Plan Update therefore needs to set out a strategy to accommodate 12,763 new homes over the 17 year plan period.
- 4.9 When assessing how much new housing the council has to enable through new site allocations, the amount of housing already in the pipeline is taken into consideration. There are a large number of sites in the borough which already have planning permission for new homes, some of which have been completed since the start of the plan period. There are also a number of sites that have been allocated by the existing Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery local plans which have not yet been developed. The Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location and the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location will continue to be allocated in the Local Plan Update, reflecting their strategic scale and long-term delivery and also to provide a policy framework for their continued delivery. Evidence also shows that ‘windfall’ development (unidentified sites that have not been allocated by a local plan or neighbourhood development plan but come forward for development) makes a substantial contribution to housing provision and that this will continue. As such, an allowance has been made for homes that can be anticipated from windfall developments. An additional allowance is also made for windfall development within Wokingham town centre to reflect changes in the retail and office market.
- 4.10 The tables below set out the housing requirement and the housing supply without new allocations over the plan period 1st April 2023 to 31 March 2040. Comparison shows a shortfall of around 4,439 additional homes.

Table 1: Housing need.

	Number of dwellings
Standard method 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 (1 year x 795)	795
Standard method 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2040 (16 years x 748)	11,968
Total	12,763

Table 2: Base housing land supply.

	Number of dwellings
Sites with planning permission for 10 or more dwellings)	5,885
Sites with resolution to grant planning permission for 10 or more dwellings	359
Sites with planning permission for 9 or fewer dwellings and sites which can be anticipated (windfall)	1,880
Wokingham town centre broad area	200
TOTAL	8,374

Other housing needs

- 4.11 Within the context of the overall housing requirement, the NPPF expects the needs of different groups to be assessed and reflected in planning policies. This includes the needs of those who require affordable housing; families with children; older people (including those who require retirement housing, housing-with-care and care homes); students; people with disabilities; service families; Travellers; people who rent their homes and people wishing to commission or build their own homes. Evidence shows a significant need for affordable housing.
- 4.12 The Local Plan Update seeks a proportion of affordable housing from developments of at least 5 new homes. These will be delivered with a priority on social rented accommodation, which is the tenure best suited to meeting local needs. Other needs will generally be met through the delivery of accommodation on larger allocations. In addition, some land has been specifically allocated for accommodation for the Traveller community. A positive policy framework will allow windfall sites to be permitted in suitable locations.

Employment

- 4.13 The NPPF states that planning policies should create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt, whilst setting out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth.
- 4.14 The borough benefits from several established Core Employment Areas which are allocated for employment uses, with a number of national and international businesses operating from offices, and industrial and warehousing units. These businesses help to drive the economy of the Thames Valley, and south east England.
- 4.15 Core Employment Areas offer the most sustainable locations for new major economic development, to support economic growth and attract inward investment. Under-utilised areas provide opportunities for new economic development, alongside the redevelopment or refurbishment of older units. A more flexible approach to ancillary uses will help to ensure these areas remain at the forefront of the economy of the Thames Valley.
- 4.16 Major new economic development has also come forward at the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, including Shinfield Studios, the British Museum and Natural History Museum. These significant new developments highlight the recent changes to the economy, and how the borough is well placed to take advantage of these new opportunities.
- 4.17 Town and district centres also provide sustainable opportunities for new economic development, often as part of mixed use proposals that can make the most efficient use of previously developed land.

- 4.18 To understand the impacts of changes to the economy, and new and flexible working practices, increased demand for warehousing and logistics space, and the rise of new creative industries locally, the Economic Land Needs Study (ELNS) has been prepared. This provides an updated assessment of the future employment needs in the borough to 2040.
- 4.19 When assessing how much new employment land the council has to enable through new site allocations, the amount of development already in the pipeline is taken into consideration. There are a number of sites in the borough which already have planning permission for new employment floorspace, some of which have been completed since the start of the plan period.
- 4.20 The NPPF expects future economic needs to be met as far as possible. The delivery of new floorspace, on existing Core Employment Areas, new site allocations and other suitable sites will help to meet future economic needs. Table 3 shows the identified employment needs to 2040, taking into account recent completions, and commitments. This shows that future office needs are anticipated to be met, because there is an oversupply of over 15,000m² of office floorspace when compared to identified needs. However, based only on completions and commitments data there is anticipated to be a shortfall in meeting future industrial need. Land is allocated for further employment uses, including industrial, to help meet this identified need.

Table 3: Future employment needs.

	Industrial	Office
Identified needs (2022-2040)	73,756m ² (18 Ha)	30,761m ² (GIA)
Completions (2022-2023)	41,284m ²	4,979m ²
Commitments at 31 st March 2023	7,731m ²	41,313m ²
Net need (2023-2040)	24,741m ²	15,531 m ² over supply

- 4.21 This scenario is common among several other councils in the Thames Valley, with an increase in demand for employment floorspace, and particularly industrial, warehousing and logistics uses.

Retail

- 4.22 The NPPF states that planning policies should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation.
- 4.23 The borough benefits from several established retail centres, including town, district and local centres, which together help to meet the needs of local communities, alongside visitors and businesses by providing a variety of different retail, cultural and leisure uses. Wokingham town centre has benefitted from significant recent investment, resulting in new retail, leisure and entertainment uses and new proposals are anticipated to continue to come forward to support the vitality of the centre.
- 4.24 To understand the future needs a Retail and Commercial Leisure Study assessed the future requirements of convenience and comparison goods floorspace and commercial leisure to 2040. The assessment calculated there was no capacity to support additional comparison goods (non-food stores such as clothing and electronics). However, there is a need for between 14,700m² and 17,200m² of convenience goods (food stores) by 2040. The study also forecast a growth in leisure spending, with the majority anticipated in the form of restaurants and cafes.
- 4.25 New convenience floorspace is expected to come forward on several sites across the borough. There are committed schemes at the Shinfield and Arborfield Green. Whilst there are no other sites

specifically allocated for retail use, additional convenience floorspace can come forward on windfall sites. The sequential test will be applied to applications for main town centre uses outside defined centres, alongside an impact assessment to understand the potential implications of the development on the vitality and viability of town centre uses.

- 4.26 Changes to the use classes order have provided additional flexibility to move between different uses, including in retail centres. This may result in incremental adaptations to the role and function of retail centres, by including a wider mix of retail, business and residential uses.

How has the council developed its spatial strategy?

- 4.27 A wide range of factors have influenced the chosen spatial strategy. A key consideration is what and where land is available for development. Potential land was identified through 'Call for Sites' exercises and consultations. All areas of land promoted to the council have been assessed through the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) for their broad suitability, availability and achievability for development. The HELAA does not determine the spatial strategy or identify what sites should be allocated for development, however the output is a pool of land that might reasonably form part of a potential strategy to manage development.
- 4.28 Another key consideration is the Sustainability Appraisal (SA). This has tested the impacts of different spatial options upon some key economic, social and environmental objectives.
- 4.29 A range of evidence studies have been used to inform judgements. This included consideration of landscape character, flood risk, and transport impacts.

Overview of the strategy

- 4.30 The Local Plan Update's spatial strategy seeks to maximise opportunities to re-use or redevelop previously developed land (brownfield land). In addition to setting out a generally supportive framework for new development within built up areas that contribute to the well-being of the area, it proactively supports the continued regeneration of Wokingham town centre and the enhancement of Woodley town centre and Earley district centre.
- 4.31 However, it is recognised that given the nature of the borough and the level of future need, it is necessary to allocate greenfield land for development. Such allocations are focused on the delivery of a new garden village on land between Shinfield, Sindlesham and Arborfield known as Loddon Valley Garden Village; around the edge of the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location; and the Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location. Loddon Valley Garden Village has capacity for around 3,930 new homes of which 2,700 would be built within the plan period.
- 4.32 A number of other site allocations have also been included, varying in scale, to provide a mix of sites in terms of scale and location. These sites were considered the most suitable to accommodate development through the site assessment process and will ensure a supply of deliverable sites over the plan period to meet needs. Some of these allocations are on the edge of minor settlements. The scale of development proposed is considered proportional to the overall housing requirement and will help to maintain the vitality of those communities and meet local housing needs.
- 4.33 No sites are allocated in the western most part of the borough which is constrained by its location close to AWE Burghfield, as such, the needs arising here will be met elsewhere in the borough.

- 4.34 The above strategy will provide a range of accommodation to meet housing needs, including specialist accommodation for older people, plots for residents who wish to build their own home, and accommodation for the Traveller community.
- 4.35 Whilst actions will maximise the delivery of affordable housing, it is not possible to meet the need in full. The delivery of affordable housing will prioritise those household in highest priority need through seeking social rented accommodation.
- 4.36 The council will monitor delivery to ensure a rolling supply of deliverable housing sites. In the event that a future supply cannot be demonstrated, the council will consider actions to unblock stalled schemes. If in the unlikely event that issues cannot be resolved, a review of the Local Plan Update may be undertaken.
- 4.37 In relation to employment, the strategy seeks to optimise the use of the current Core Employment Areas and town centres. The existing stock will be regenerated and improved in quality to better meet needs. Diversification will also be supported, where suitable. In addition, new employment floorspace will come forward as part of Loddon Valley garden village in the form of an extension to the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park.
- 4.38 The spatial strategy will therefore continue to protect and support Core Employment Areas, as well as supporting the development of Loddon Valley. The plan will also support the rural economy to ensure appropriate rural businesses are able to form and grow.
- 4.39 Town and district centres are recognised to be at the heart of communities. The spatial strategy protects centres which provide access to retail, services and leisure uses, and enables them to adapt to changing needs of residents and businesses. The Local Plan Update also identifies a network of local centres that help meet day-to-day needs. These centres play a significant role in maintaining and enhancing the prosperity of the borough, and local provision can help to minimise the need to travel, thus supporting the council's actions on the climate emergency declaration.
- 4.40 The Local Plan Update requires new development to provide sufficient infrastructure at the right time. Suitable infrastructure is critical to ensure new and existing residents and businesses have good access to high quality services and facilities. This will include the provision of all forms of infrastructure from highways improvements, utilities provision including water, and education and health facilities. The council is working with service providers to understand and comprehensively plan for these needs and has set this out in an Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- 4.41 The Local Plan Update includes policies that will ensure that new and redeveloped sites deliver high quality development that meets the economic, social and environmental objectives of national legislation, the NPPF, and the council's climate emergency declaration. New homes will be required to be energy efficient and include renewable energy generation sufficient to meet the total energy need over the course of a year. Development will also seek to minimise embodied carbon arising from the construction of new buildings.
- 4.42 Turning away from development, the Local Plan Update identifies key landscapes and green spaces. 13 valued landscapes have been identified each of which display a range of important attributes. In addition, over 100 Local Green Spaces are designated as being particularly important to the local community and will be protected from inappropriate development.
- 4.43 The following section provides more detail about the strategy for different parts of the borough.

Wokingham

- 4.44 Wokingham will be a focus of growth, reflecting the town's transport links and the range of retail and employment opportunities. Wokingham town centre will see continued regeneration to improve its vitality and viability. Planned development will principally be around the town centre and the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location, which has been extended south to provide additional homes.
- 4.45 The delivery of the North Wokingham Strategic Development Location created through the Core Strategy Local Plan is largely complete and is not carried forward into the Local Plan Update.

Arborfield Green (the former Arborfield Garrison)

- 4.46 Arborfield Green, based on the former Arborfield Garrison, is a new community created through the Core Strategy local plan. The area has the potential to deliver addition to those already permitted, building upon the principles established by the existing development. The additional homes will be focused to the north of the settlement on the site of the current Arborfield Studios and land to the northeast known as Barkham Square.

Earley, Woodley, Winnersh

- 4.47 Earley, Woodley and Winnersh are mature communities which benefit from a range of services, facilities and transport links. The settlements benefit from key areas of green space which are important to local character and identity through providing separation.
- 4.48 There are limited opportunities to allocate land for development, however some development can be expected through natural regeneration. The enhancement of Woodley town centre and Lower Earley district centre is encouraged so that they continue to be at the heart of the surrounding communities.

Loddon Valley Garden Village

- 4.49 Land between Shinfield, Sindlesham and Arborfield has significant potential to create a sustainable new garden village – the Loddon Valley Garden Village. This is the largest new planned development within the Local Plan Update with the potential to deliver around 3,930 new homes. Of these, around 2,700 of the homes would be built in the period to 2040, with the remainder built in the following years.
- 4.50 New settlements such as this are supported by the NPPF. It will be a sustainable and infrastructure-rich new community that will help to diversify supply and boost delivery rates. The new settlement will need to be as self-contained as reasonably possible by including a village centre with a sufficient range of facilities and services to ensure that the community's day to day needs can be met locally without the need to travel further. It will also have its own identity and character which is strongly informed by its rural location. There are opportunities to prioritise active travel and integration into the public transport network. A new country park will be provided, benefitting the residents of the garden village as well as the existing communities in the wider area including Shinfield and Lower Earley.

Shinfield, Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross

- 4.51 The council recognises that the extension of emergency planning arrangements around AWE Burghfield now incorporate the villages of Spencers Wood and Three Mile Cross. No development is allocated here. Land to the south of Shinfield, which is situated beyond the emergency planning arrangements, is allocated for additional housing.
- 4.52 The delivery of the South of the M4 Strategic Development Location created through the Core Strategy Local Plan is largely complete and is not carried forward into the Local Plan Update.

Twyford and Ruscombe

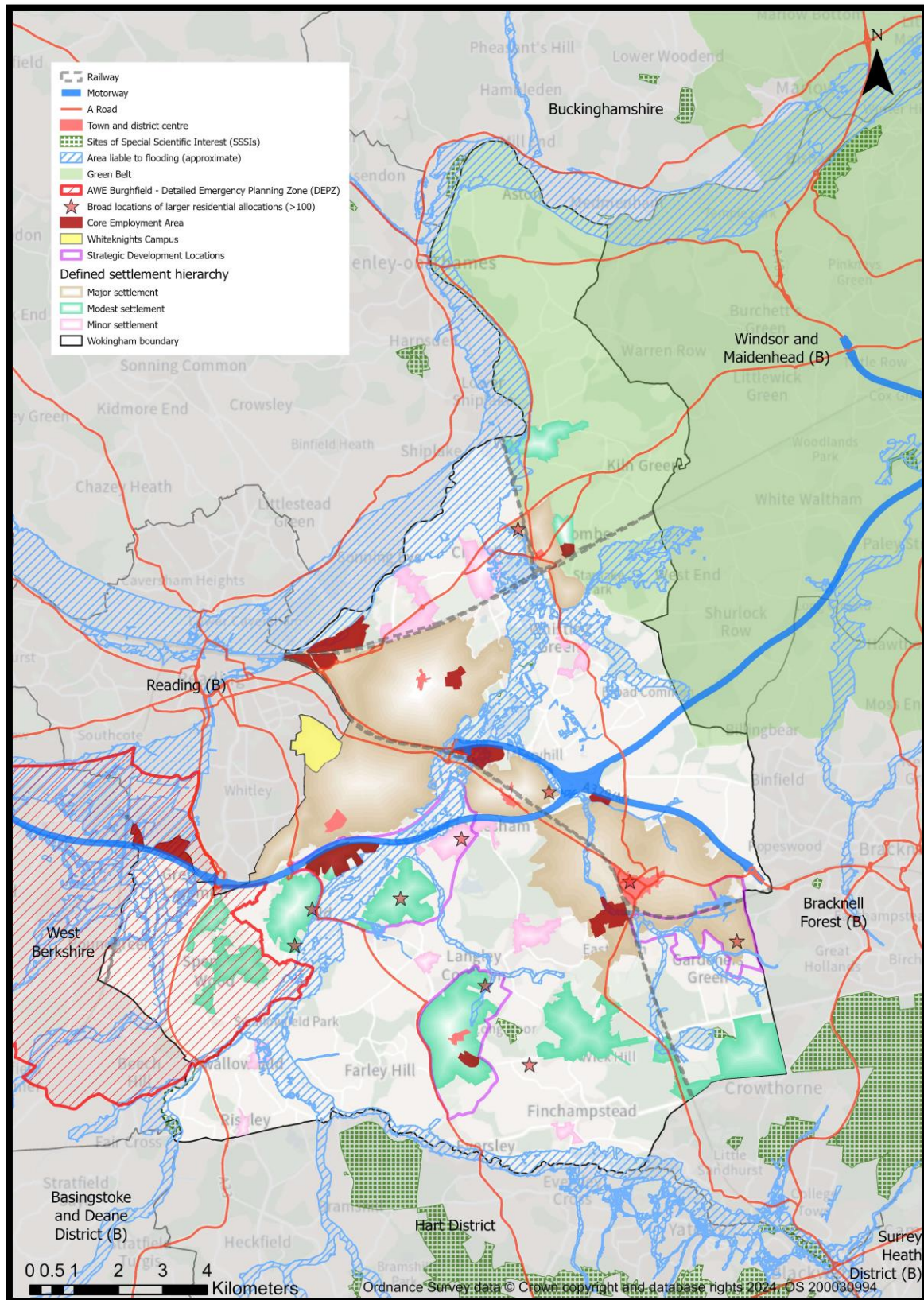
- 4.53 Most of the land to the west of Twyford and Ruscombe is located within the flood plain of the River Loddon. Land to the east is within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The council does not consider there to be exceptional circumstances to release land from the Green Belt and as such there are limited opportunities for development.

Other settlements and the rural area

- 4.54 Whilst the spatial strategy is one which focuses the majority of development in locations where more services, facilities and jobs are available, or can be made available, as part of a development proposal, the proportionate growth of smaller settlements can make a valuable contribution to meeting housing needs and supporting the area to remain viable and thrive.
- 4.55 The approach to smaller settlements and rural areas has been informed by a settlement hierarchy which places settlements into three categories – major, modest and minor. Allocations for new homes have been made with regard to the settlement hierarchy and taking into account other factors such as the character and the relationship with the wider settlement pattern.
- 4.56 The council recognises the importance of supporting and enhancing the rural economy and the role it plays in supporting rural communities. The rural area has a wide range of land-based businesses, as well as other non-traditional businesses which enhance the prosperity of the rural area. Suitable proposals for rural economic growth, including farm diversification and where the use and scale is appropriate to its location, are supported.

Key Diagram

4.57 The following Key Diagram provides a spatial representation of the spatial strategy.



Strategic Policies

- 4.58 Strategic Policies comprise the overarching growth strategy and framework for the borough which underpin the Local Plan Update and provide the core principles which development proposals are expected to meet.
- 4.59 Table 4 provides a list of all policies in this Local Plan Update, highlighting which are considered to be strategic and non-strategic. If viewing this plan in colour, to further assist, strategic policies are framed by a light red background, whilst non-strategic policies are framed with a light green background.

Table 4: Strategic Policies.

Policy ref	Policy title	Is the policy strategic?
SS1	Sustainable development principles	Yes
SS2	Spatial Strategy and Settlement Hierarchy	Yes
SS3	Development within or adjacent to major and modest settlements	Yes
SS4	Development within or adjacent to minor settlements	Yes
SS5	Development in the countryside	Yes
SS6	Development in the Green Belt	Yes
SS7	Development in the vicinity of AWE Burghfield	Yes
SS8	Meeting employment needs	Yes
SS9	Whiteknights Campus	Yes
SS10	Meeting housing needs	Yes
SS11	Arborfield Strategic Development Location	Yes
SS12	South Wokingham Strategic Development Location	Yes
SS13	Loddon Valley Garden Village	Yes
SS14	Sites allocated for residential, including residential as part of mixed-use development	Yes
SS15	Securing Infrastructure	Yes
SS16	Safeguarded routes	Yes
SS17	Transport improvements	Yes
CE1	Design principles for efficient buildings	Yes
CE2	Environmental standards for non-residential development	Yes
CE3	Environmental standards for residential development	Yes
CE4	Supporting a circular economy	Yes
CE5	Embodied carbon	Yes
CE6	Reducing energy consumption in existing buildings	Yes
CE7	Low carbon and renewable energy generation	Yes
CE8	Protecting renewable energy infrastructure	Yes
C1	Active and sustainable transport and accessibility	Yes
C2	Mitigation of transport impacts and highways safety and design	Yes
C3	Active travel	Yes
C4	Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way	Yes
C5	Parking and electric vehicle charging	Yes
C6	Technology and innovation in transport	No
C7	Digital Infrastructure and communications technology	No

C8	Utilities	Yes
ER1	Core Employment Areas	Yes
ER2	Employment Uses Outside Core Employment Areas	No
ER3	Supporting the Rural Economy	No
ER4	Employment and Skills Plan	No
ER5	The hierarchy of centres	Yes
ER6	Town, district and local centres and shopping parades	No
ER7	Strengthening the role of centres	Yes
ER8	Wokingham town centre	No
ER9	Woodley town centre and Lower Earley district centre	No
H1	Housing mix, density and standards	Yes
H2	Presumption against residential losses	Yes
H3	Affordable housing	Yes
H4	Exception Sites	No
H5	Rural workers' dwellings	No
H6	Self-build and custom housebuilding	No
H7	Specialist accommodation	No
H8	Conversion and sub-division of dwellings	No
H9	Gypsies and travellers and travelling showpeople provision	Yes
H10	Traveller Sites	No
H11	Houseboat moorings	No
H12	Residential development of existing residential gardens	No
H13	Retention of mobile home parks	No
FD1	Development and flood risk (from all sources)	Yes
FD2	Sustainable drainage	No
FD3	River Corridors and watercourses	No
NE1	Biodiversity and geodiversity	Yes
NE2	Biodiversity net gain	Yes
NE3	Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area	Yes
NE4	Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows	No
NE5	Landscape and design	No
NE6	Valued landscapes	Yes
NE7	Sites of Urban Landscape Value	Yes
DH1	Place Making and quality design	Yes
DH2	Safeguarding amenity	No
DH3	Shopfronts	No
DH4	Advertisements and signage	No
DH5	The Historic Environment	No
DH6	Archaeology	No
DH7	Equestrian development	No
HC1	Promoting Healthy Communities	Yes
HC2	Community Infrastructure	Yes
HC3	Local Green Space	No
HC4	Open Space, Sport, Recreation and Play Facilities	Yes

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HC5	Environmental Protection	No
HC6	Air Pollution and Air Quality	Yes
HC7	Light Pollution	No
HC8	Noise Pollution	No
HC9	Contaminated Land and Water	No
HC10	Odour, fumes and dust	No

5

Delivering the Spatial Strategy

5. Delivering the Spatial Strategy

- 5.1 The spatial strategy sets out the response for meeting the development needs of Wokingham Borough over the period 2023 to 2040 in a way which responds to the vision and objectives for the Local Plan Update.
- 5.2 Achieving sustainability is at the heart of the spatial strategy approach and the Local Plan Update as a whole. This means striving to meet the social, economic and environmental needs to provide a good quality of life for existing and future generations. The aim is to retain and enhance distinctive quality of the borough and create strong, cohesive and inclusive communities which respond to environmental challenges such as climate change.
- 5.3 The spatial strategy seeks to meet national planning policy requirements where opportunity exists, is informed by consultation feedback and is based on an extensive evidence base covering a wide range of issues including the availability of land for development, infrastructure, flood risk and climate change, and sustainability appraisal.
- 5.4 A key part of the strategic approach is the identification of areas where growth will be directed, taking account of local qualities and the needs of the market. Growth is focused towards the borough's existing settlements which together contain the largest quantity of existing housing, employment and services and facilities. In addition, the creation of a new sustainable garden village is planned with strong place-making principles. Smaller villages will experience some change to enable their proportionate evolution and to ensure other areas are not over burdened.
- 5.5 The spatial strategy will reduce the carbon footprint of Wokingham Borough from what might otherwise occur and therefore support the council's climate emergency declaration, as well as helping to meet national climate commitments.

Policy SS1: Sustainable development principles

1. As appropriate to their nature, development proposals will be expected to:
 - a) Contribute to meeting identified development needs;
 - b) Be located so as to offer the choice of active means of travel and/or public transport, reducing the need to travel by private car for day-to-day activities;
 - c) Make efficient use of land/buildings, especially suitable previously developed land;
 - d) Maintain, enhance or create a high quality and safe environment which contributes positively to the character and identity of the area;
 - e) Promote healthy lifestyles, well-being and social inclusion;
 - f) Maintain the separate identity of settlements and places, avoiding physical or perceived coalescence;
 - g) Reduce energy demand in line with the principles of the energy hierarchy, considering the orientation, layout and design of development to maximise passive heating and cooling systems opportunities and implement a fabric first approach to construction;
 - h) Respond to climate hazards, incorporating appropriate adaptation and resilience measures;

- i) Avoid high risk flood areas, or where necessary provide appropriate mitigation measures;
- j) Avoid the unplanned loss of best and most versatile agricultural land, except in exceptional circumstances;
- k) Avoid areas where pollution may impact upon the amenity of future occupiers;
- l) Conserve and enhance the significance of heritage assets, including their wider settings;
- m) Conserve and enhance the landscape character of the area, with particular attention paid toward significant landmarks and toward landscape attributes and features;
- n) Conserve and enhance the biodiversity of the area, and deliver measurable net gain; and
- o) Provide or contribute to the provision of social, physical, transport, and green and blue infrastructure to support communities.

- 5.6 The NPPF advises that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways.
- 5.7 No single development proposal is likely to contribute equally across economic, social and environmental objectives. However, setting out key sustainable development principles will help ensure that all three aspects are considered.
- 5.8 The principles in Policy SS1 should be balanced through the development process, and will contribute across economic, social and environmental objectives. The following lists some of the ways development proposals might contribute towards achieving sustainable development.

Economic

- By ensuring that development proposals contribute towards meeting the local needs of business and residents. This includes development proposals that:
 - Add to the diversity of jobs and businesses.
 - Help form clusters of complementary businesses.
 - Support the continued viability and vitality of town and other centres.
- By ensuring that land is used efficiently, taking account of the character and amenity of the area and accessibility. This includes seeking higher development densities in town centres.
- By ensuring that development proposals are not at unacceptable risk of flooding or lead to increased risk of flooding elsewhere.
- By identifying the need for new and upgraded infrastructure and working to ensure that it is provided in a timely and coordinated way.

Social

- By ensuring that development proposals contribute towards meeting the local needs of residents for suitable housing. This includes development proposals that:
 - Support the delivery of affordable housing.
 - Help meet the specialist accommodation needs for the increasing proportion of older people and other specialist needs.

- By protecting existing and providing essential new infrastructure, services and facilities that meet the needs of existing and future residents. This could include additional health facilities, educational facilities, footpaths/cycleways, open space and recreational facilities, all of which can make an important contribution to the health, wellbeing, social inclusion and safety of communities.

Environmental

- By creating a high-quality distinctive natural and built environment that takes account of the character of urban and rural landscapes.
- By protecting and enhancing the significance of buildings, sites and features of archaeological and historic interest, together with their settings.
- By ensuring better integration of transport and land use planning to reduce the need to travel.
- By promoting development in locations that provide a choice of walking, cycling and/public transport for day-to-day needs. This might be sought through improvements to infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport.
- By encouraging the efficient use of land, especially the re-use of previously developed land.
- By mitigating and adapting to climate change through the careful design of development, including minimising the need for operational energy in line with the energy hierarchy.
- By preventing pollution through the provision of adequate infrastructure and mitigation where there is a risk of environmental quality such in air quality, noise, dust and artificial lighting.
- By protecting areas of importance for nature conservation, taking opportunities to extend the networks of green and blue infrastructure and securing measurable net gains in biodiversity.

Policy SS2: Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy

1. Growth should create strong, cohesive and inclusive communities that provide for a high quality of life. A larger number of people should be able to access jobs, services and facilities locally to help to minimise unnecessary travel. Places and buildings should be designed to adapt to and mitigate the impact of climate change. Growth should not undermine the separate identity of places and settlements.
2. The distribution of growth will be based on the following actions:
 - a) Making the most efficient use of available and suitable previously developed land within defined settlements;
 - b) The sustainable extension of defined major and modest settlements;
 - c) The evolution and sustainable extension of existing planned developments at Arborfield Green (the former Arborfield Garrison) and South Wokingham;
 - d) The delivery of a new sustainable garden village on land between Shinfield, Sindlesham and Arborfield, known as Loddon Valley Garden Village; and
 - e) The proportionate and sustainable extension of defined minor settlements.
3. Town and other centres will continue to play a vital role in the heart of communities and will be supported to evolve and adapt to the changing needs of residents, visitors and

business. Higher densities will be sought in town and other centres, having regard to the sustainability of the location and the character and amenity of the surroundings. Core Employment Areas will be retained and their evolution and adaptation to the economic demands of businesses will be supported.

4. The Green Belt will be protected from inappropriate development and is not a location where additional development is planned.
5. The Detailed Emergency Planning Zone surrounding AWE Burghfield is not a location where additional development is planned. Any development proposals will be determined with regard to public safety, emergency response and national security and defence requirements.
6. Decisions on the location and scale of development should be informed by the settlement hierarchy as set out below and shown on the policies map.

Major settlements

7. Major settlements are places which provide the highest range of services and facilities that serve the needs of those that live there and the wider area. In general, they are towns and large villages. These places will be the focus of housing growth, where opportunities exist, supported by existing levels of employment, retail and wider service provision.

The following places are defined as major settlements: Earley, Green Park, Shinfield (north of M4), Twyford, Winnersh, Wokingham and Woodley.

Modest settlements

8. Modest settlements are places which provide a reasonable range of services and facilities that serve the needs of those that live there. In general, they are medium sized villages. To maintain and enhance their role, these places will accommodate an appropriate level of housing growth, where opportunities exist.

The following places are defined as modest settlements: Arborfield Green, Finchampstead North, Pinewood (Crowthorne), Ruscombe, Shinfield (south of M4), Spencers Wood, Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, Three Mile Cross and Wargrave.

The Loddon Valley Garden Village (Policy SS13) is expected to be a modest settlement.

Minor settlements

9. Minor settlements are places which have limited services and facilities. In general they are small villages. These places will receive an appropriate level of planned housing growth, where opportunity exists, to support the evolution of the community in a way which respects its rural character. Beyond planned development through site allocations made in this plan or any applicable neighbourhood development plan, development will be limited to exception sites which accord with Policy H4.

The following places are defined as minor settlements: Arborfield Cross, Barkham Hill, Charvil, Finchampstead, Hurst, Riseley, Sindlesham, Sonning and Swallowfield.

Countryside

10. The countryside is defined as the area beyond the settlements defined in the settlement hierarchy. Except for specific allocations identified in this plan, the countryside is not a location where additional development is planned, although limited types of development to support local needs and the rural economy will be supported in accordance with Policy H4 and Policy H5.

- 5.9 The spatial strategy seeks to focus growth on the borough's main settlements, where opportunity exists, building upon the existing settlement pattern and services and facilities.
- 5.10 The efficient use of previously developed land is supported in principle, as is the use of higher development densities in town and other centres in line with their sustainability and the character and amenity of the surrounding area. Greenfield allocations are however required to meet the majority of needs, and the spatial strategy outlines the range of sites including a new garden village and sites on the edge of settlements. The council is satisfied that development needs can be met sustainably through land outside of the Green Belt, and as such no exceptional circumstances exist to necessitate amending the extent of the Green Belt.
- 5.11 The creation of a new garden village – Loddon Valley Garden Village – carries forward the approach of the Core Strategy local plan (2010) which allocated land for four major developments: Arborfield Green (the former Arborfield Garrison), South of the M4 (Shinfield/Spencers Wood/Three Mile Cross), North Wokingham and South Wokingham Strategic Development Locations. This approach has enabled significant new infrastructure such as schools, shops, sports facilities and open spaces to be delivered alongside new homes and jobs, as well as allowing the character of towns and villages to be retained. The South of the M4 and North Wokingham Strategic Development Locations are approaching completion, allowing the allocation to be withdrawn and settlement areas to be defined.
- 5.12 The spatial strategy steers growth to sustainable locations, with an appropriate balance across the borough's larger and smaller settlements and of different type and scale of sites. The approach will maintain vibrant and balanced communities with their own sense of identity, while conserving and enhancing the environmental qualities of the borough. Through enabling a large number of people to access jobs, services and facilities locally, unnecessary travel can be reduced, aligning the approach to the climate emergency. The approach also ensures that no locations are over-burdened or that other locations are not starved of growth.
- 5.13 The settlement hierarchy provides a framework for steering development to the most sustainable settlements and in a way which supports the settlement's role. Settlements higher up the hierarchy are those which have a broader range of services and facilities compared to those lower down the hierarchy.

Policy SS3: Development within or adjacent to major and modest settlements

1. Within major and modest settlements, development proposals in addition to those specifically identified as allocations or areas of change in this plan, will be supported in principle.

2. Outside of the Green Belt, residential development proposals on unallocated sites adjacent to major and modest settlements will generally be refused unless all the following exceptional circumstances are met:
 - a) Where a five year housing land supply of deliverable housing sites cannot be demonstrated and the plan is more than five years old, or the Housing Delivery Test indicates that the delivery of housing was below 75% of the housing requirement over the previous three years; and
 - b) The development proposal:
 - i. Is relative to the scale of the shortfall evidenced in the Housing Delivery Test;
 - ii. Is demonstrably deliverable within 5 years and will contribute towards addressing the shortfall evidenced in the Housing Delivery Test;
 - iii. Is consistent with the role and function of the relevant settlement in the settlement hierarchy;
 - iv. Would integrate successfully with the community it adjoins having regard to core shape, form and size of the settlement, the mix of uses proposed and the design, layout and accessibility of the scheme;
 - v. Is sustainably located where future residents would have realistic opportunities to use active and sustainable modes of transport for day-to-day travel and would not be reliant on private motor-vehicles;
 - vi. Would not unacceptably compromise the visual or perceived separation of settlements; and
 - vii. Would not compromise the delivery of any other site allocations.
3. Proposals involving the partial or full redevelopment of previously developed land or providing exception housing in accordance with Policy H4 will be supported in principle where development would not unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside and accord with any adopted local design policies.

- 5.14 The strategy of this Local Plan Update is one which focuses the majority of development in locations where more services, infrastructure and jobs are available, or can be made available as part of the development, minimising the need to travel. Development proposals within defined major and modest settlements will be supported in principle, particularly those within areas of change such as town centres.
- 5.15 Whilst the council is confident that the plan is achievable, it is appropriate to consider what actions might be taken in the event of unforeseen issues with housing delivery. Where a five year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated, or the Housing Delivery Test shows that housing delivery has been below 75% of its housing requirement over the previous three years, the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF applies.
- 5.16 Policy SS3 seeks to ensure that any development proposals being considered under the presumption in favour of sustainable development do not undermine the spatial strategy and specifically are located where future occupiers benefit from the relative sustainability of the borough's larger settlements. Unplanned development adjacent to minor settlements is considered to conflict with the spatial strategy and be unsustainable.

Policy SS4: Development within and adjacent to minor settlements

1. Within minor settlements, residential development proposals of up to 9 dwellings in addition to those specifically identified in this plan, will be supported in principle.
2. As an exception, proposals for limited residential development adjacent to minor settlements will only be supported where one of the following circumstances is met:
 - a) The proposal involves the partial or full redevelopment of previously developed land which would not unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside or the rural setting of the village;
 - b) The proposal represents limited infilling of an otherwise built-up frontage and where the site is compatible with the core shape, form and size of the settlement;
or
 - c) The proposal constitutes exceptions housing in accordance with Policy H4.
3. Residential development proposals outside the Green Belt and on unallocated sites adjacent to minor settlements will be refused. This includes when a five year housing land supply cannot be demonstrated, or the Housing Delivery Test indicates that the delivery of housing was below 75% of the housing requirement over the previous three years.

- 5.17 There are a number of minor settlements distributed across the borough. Each varies in terms of character, relationship with the wider settlement hierarchy and, within the context of limited provision, have varied local services and facilities.
- 5.18 The spatial strategy supports the planned growth of minor settlements. Each settlement is not intended to have the same amount of planned growth; instead, the level of growth will depend on the role and function that they perform for the surrounding spatial area, and will be related to their location, size, and range of facilities and services, as well as the availability of suitable development opportunities.
- 5.19 The spatial strategy focuses the majority of growth to major and modest settlements and the creation of a new garden village because they are the most sustainable places, whilst maximising the use of previously developed land and reducing the need to travel.
- 5.20 Unplanned development adjacent to minor settlements is considered to conflict with the spatial strategy and be unsustainable even in the event of unforeseen housing delivery issues. Development proposals will only be supported in the specific circumstances set out in Policy SS4.
- 5.21 Limited infilling of an otherwise built-up frontage is considered to be the development of a small gap in an otherwise continuous frontage, such as a row of dwellings or the small-scale redevelopment of existing properties within such a frontage. It also includes infilling of small gaps within built development. It should be appropriate to the scale of the locality and not have an adverse impact on the character of the locality. In assessing the suitability of any proposal regard will be had to the scale, massing, extent and density of built form on either side of the identified settlement boundary and the physical proximity of the site to the defined settlement boundary.

- 5.22 Through neighbourhood development plans, communities can seek to further grow or develop minor settlements if this is a sustainable and locally-supported approach.

Policy SS5: Development in the countryside

1. The countryside, as shown on the Policies Map, will be recognised for its intrinsic character and beauty, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services, in accordance with national policy.
2. Development proposals in the countryside will in general only be supported for the types of development set out below:
 - a) The construction of new dwellings which accord with Policy H4: Exceptions sites, Policy H5: Rural workers' dwellings and Policy H10: Traveller sites;
 - b) Development proposals for which land is allocated;
 - c) Development which supports the rural economy and equestrian uses in accordance with Policy ER3: Supporting the rural economy and Policy DH7: Equestrian development;
 - d) Low carbon and renewable energy generation schemes in accordance with Policy CE7: Low carbon and renewable energy generation;
 - e) The re-use or conversion of existing buildings of permanent and substantial construction which would not require extensive reconstruction;
 - f) The replacement, extension or alteration (including sub-division) of existing buildings of permanent and substantial construction, and which do not lead to disproportionate increases in scale, form or footprint beyond the original building;
 - g) Redevelopment or infilling of previously developed land that does not unacceptably harm the character and appearance of the surrounding countryside or the rural setting of the village;
 - h) Agricultural and forestry development that is demonstrated to be reasonable and proportionate to the need;
 - i) Outdoor sports, recreation, leisure and nature conservation development that is demonstrated to be necessary, reasonable and proportionate for the use;
 - j) The provision of essential community facilities which cannot be located within settlement boundaries and are demonstrated to be necessary, reasonable and proportionate to the use;
 - k) The provision of essential utilities and infrastructure (including development for strategic transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a countryside location), and cemeteries and burial grounds; or
 - l) Minerals and waste development in accordance with relevant policies in the minerals and waste local plan.
3. All development proposals within the countryside must take a landscape led approach to development in accordance with Policy NE5: Landscape and design and, where applicable:
 - a) Contribute to and enhance the local, natural and historic environment;
 - b) Be of a scale, nature and location within the countryside that is appropriate with regard to its use;
 - c) Be sited and designed to minimise visual impact;

- d) Not lead to the physical, visual or perceived coalescence of existing settlements either individually or cumulatively;
- e) Not lead to isolated new dwellings;
- f) Not lead to the need for additional buildings;
- g) Maximise opportunities to make the location more sustainable;
- h) Have no unacceptable adverse impacts on highway safety or have a severe residual cumulative impact on network capacity; and
- i) Maximise opportunities to improve public access to the countryside.

- 5.23 A settlement hierarchy for the borough is set out in Policy SS2, with associated settlements shown on the Policies Map. The strategy of this plan is one which focuses the majority of development within defined settlements and in a new garden village – the Loddon Valley Garden Village. For the purposes of this plan, ‘countryside’ is defined as land beyond the defined settlement areas.
- 5.24 Restricting general development in the countryside recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystems. It also helps protect the separate identity of settlements and places, and maintain and respect the landscape character of the borough, including areas identified as valued landscapes.
- 5.25 Preventing the proliferation of development in areas away from defined settlements, or unplanned growth of minor settlements, is important with these smaller settlements and the countryside generally not having or being well located to access local services and facilities. This results in a greater reliance on private car use for travel.
- 5.26 In certain circumstances, development in the countryside is appropriate. Defining the types of development that are acceptable in countryside locations has the benefit of delivering certainty and consistency to residents, developers, and decision makers. Consistency and certainty are fundamentally important principles of the plan-led system.
- 5.27 Any proposed development will need to be of a scale, nature and location within the countryside that is appropriate to the locality with regard to the use that is proposed, for example its location is justified by means of proximity to existing established uses or natural features. Where this is achieved, development will also be required to minimise its impact upon the character and appearance of the area. They should be of an appropriate scale, design and materials having regard to the locality (for example location within the site, scale in relation to plot size, and in relation to existing/nearby development). The re-use of existing buildings within the site is expected to be prioritised, before proposals for new buildings. Evidence must be provided to explain and justify the need for specific proposals, including their use.
- 5.28 In all cases, development in the countryside must satisfy the requirements of Policy SS5 part 3. In terms of 3g), proposals must maximise opportunities to make the location more sustainable, which may include measures such as improving or linking into the public right of way or greenways networks and improving access by public transport.

Development proposals for which land is allocated

- 5.29 Criterion 2b) supports development proposals which accord with allocations within the development plan. This includes allocations within this plan (for example Gypsy and Traveller allocations) as well as in a made neighbourhood development plan. Where development proposals are for an alternative development than that which the land has been allocated for, then this would not accord

with 2b). There are five made neighbourhood plans in the borough at the time of writing. None of these plans currently allocates land for development within the countryside. However, it is recognised that a number of other neighbourhood plans are in progress and that these, or future reviews of made plans, could support development which is considered necessary to meet local needs or aspirations.

Proposals affecting existing buildings and previously developed land

- 5.30 The appropriate conversion and re-use of buildings provides opportunities to diversify the rural economy and contribute to the economic growth of the area. It can also contribute towards the reduction in demand for new buildings in the countryside and can be a means of conserving traditional buildings which are locally distinctive features within the landscape.
- 5.31 Where buildings are to be converted, they should be of permanent and substantial construction. Locally distinctive features such as ventilation openings, large cart doors and stable joinery should be retained, to maintain the character of the building and its setting within the surrounding area. Buildings can often be converted without causing material harm to the open character of the surrounding area, however it is recognised that uses or levels of use can either directly or indirectly have an adverse effect. A structural survey should be submitted as part of any planning application to demonstrate that the proposal is of permanent and substantial construction.
- 5.32 Development proposals for the re-use of agricultural buildings, must clearly demonstrate that the building is no longer suitable/needed for an agricultural use. Where it is demonstrated that the building is genuinely surplus to agricultural requirements, it is important that the proposed alternate use is introduced with a degree of subservience so as to not overwhelm or harm the primacy of the agricultural use or the rural character. It is also important that the re-use does not subsequently result in additional agricultural buildings being required elsewhere to replace those converted to different uses.
- 5.33 Where it is demonstrably not possible to convert or re-use existing buildings, development proposals for replacement, extension or alteration may be acceptable. Such proposals should ensure the form of the proposed use is sympathetic to the character of the surrounding area and does not result in a material change in size or scale. In determining whether proposals are detrimental to the rural character, the council will take into account: the size of the plot; character of the site and its surroundings; the siting within the plot; floorspace, volume and height; and design of the proposed use. For the purposes of this policy, an 'original building' means the building that existed on 1 July 1948 or, if there was no building on 1 July 1948, the building as it was originally built.
- 5.34 The overarching spatial strategy prioritises the development of previously developed land (PDL) where possible. Whilst developers are expected to make the best use of PDL within settlement boundaries, this policy provides a degree of flexibility to allow for some development on PDL in the countryside where appropriate. It should not be assumed that the whole of the curtilage of land occupied by a permanent structure is PDL. In considering proposals affecting PDL, regard will be had of the need for new buildings to be sited close to the original building(s) to avoid the unnecessary proliferation of built form in the countryside, unless an alternative position within the existing curtilage would provide notable benefits and have no adverse impact on the wider setting. All proposals will firstly be considered in a landscape led context because previously developed sites will not always be appropriate in terms of landscape character.

Sport and recreation

- 5.35 It is recognised that land for certain types of outdoor sport and recreation development is more likely to be available in the countryside rather than within settlements. Where such uses are considered appropriate, some operational development, such as a club house or changing rooms, may be acceptable provided it is of a proportionate scale to the use and subject to there being no unacceptable harm as regards landscape and countryside character. Proposals for sport and recreation that would also be classified as a 'main town centre' use (as defined in relevant national planning policy) will not be considered an appropriate form of development in the countryside.

Essential infrastructure and utilities

- 5.36 It may be necessary to locate essential infrastructure and utilities in the countryside. This may relate to provisions of statutory undertakers such as water supply, waste water, electricity, telecommunications infrastructure, and transportation improvements. Where proposals are proposed in the countryside, they must be designed to minimise any harm to the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Renewable energy

- 5.37 Low carbon and renewable energy generation provides benefits to tackling climate change. Development proposals for standalone low carbon and renewable energy schemes will be supported in the countryside in principle, subject to satisfying the detailed requirements set out in Policy CE7.

Policy SS6: Development in the Green Belt

1. The Green Belt, as shown on the policies map, will continue to be protected against inappropriate development in accordance with national planning policy.
2. Development proposals will only be permitted for the limited types of appropriate development set out below, unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated.
3. The construction of new buildings are considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:
 - a) Buildings for agriculture and forestry;
 - b) The provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;
 - c) The extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
 - d) The replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
 - e) Limited infilling in villages;
 - f) Limited affordable housing for local community needs; and
 - g) Limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:

- i. Not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or
 - ii. Not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the borough.
4. Other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt, provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:
 - a) Mineral extraction;
 - b) Engineering operations;
 - c) Local transport infrastructure which can demonstrate a requirement for a Green Belt location;
 - d) The re-use or conversion of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction;
 - e) Material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds); and
 - f) Development brought forward under a Community Right to Build Order or Neighbourhood Development Order.
5. All development proposals should be carefully managed to minimise visual impacts and preserve the openness of the Green Belt and, where relevant, also meet the following criteria:
 - a) For agriculture and forestry dwellings:
 - i. There is a demonstrable essential and permanent need for the new dwelling based on the functional requirements of the enterprise it is intended to serve that cannot be met elsewhere; and
 - ii. The dwelling is commensurate in scale and size to the needs of the enterprise it is intended to serve.
 - b) For replacement buildings:
 - i. The replacement building would be sited on or close to the position of the existing building, except where an alternative siting within the curtilage does not adversely affect the character of the area and demonstrably improves the openness of the Green Belt.
 - c) For extensions and alterations to existing buildings:
 - i. The existing building is of permanent and substantial construction and would not require extensive reconstruction; and
 - ii. The scale, form and footprint of the proposed use would not have an adverse impact on the character of the area or openness of the Green Belt.
 - d) For the re-use of buildings:
 - i. The existing building is of permanent and substantial construction and its form is in keeping with its surroundings and would not require extensive reconstruction or a material change in size or scale;

- ii. The proposal would not result in the need to construct additional agricultural or other buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the building to be re-used is no longer suitable for use; and
 - iii. The proposed use is low employment or low traffic generating activity, suitable to its location and level of accessibility.
6. Development proposals outside the Green Belt, but conspicuous when viewed from it, should minimise any detrimental impacts to visual amenity and preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

5.38 The area extending to the east and north of Twyford forms part of the Metropolitan Green Belt which surrounds London. The main aim of Green Belt is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open, but like all countryside, it also provides opportunities for people to access a rural environment, protects land for agriculture, forestry and similar land uses, and for nature conservation.

5.39 The NPPF restricts the types of development allowed in the Green Belt to a number of appropriate forms. Inappropriate development is considered by definition to be harmful Belt and should not be supported, except in very special circumstances. A very special circumstances case to justify development will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Agriculture and forestry workers dwellings

5.40 Agriculture and forestry are the traditional activities in the countryside. In most cases, agricultural and forestry workers will be expected to live in nearby towns and villages.

5.41 Proposals for new agricultural and rural worker dwellings in the Green Belt will be judged on a case-by-case basis. Any such dwelling should be:

- Responding to an essential and permanent agricultural/forestry need on an enterprise that cannot be met elsewhere; and
- Proportionate to the enterprise it is intended to serve, not the personal preference of the occupier.

5.42 Consideration may be given to the removal of some permitted development rights for the extension of dwellings to ensure that any new dwelling remains proportionate and available to the agricultural enterprise in the long term. Temporary planning permissions will be considered where a new agricultural or forestry enterprise is being established and viability is not yet proven.

5.43 Development proposals covered by this policy should also accord with Policy H5: Rural Workers' Dwellings.

Replacement buildings

5.44 Replacement buildings are expected to be sited on or close to the position of the existing or original building, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that an alternative position within its curtilage would reduce the overall impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

- 5.45 When considering proposals for replacement buildings, the starting point will be the size of the existing building. When assessing whether a replacement building is materially larger than the one it replaces, volume calculations for this type of development proposal should be submitted as part of any planning application to identify the size of the building and have regard to the council's Design Guide and Local Validation List requirements. This being volume as a measurement of external structure, inclusive of roofs voids and basement areas.
- 5.46 Where there are substantial, permanent outbuildings, it may be possible to replace them, together with the existing building, provided that the impact upon the openness of the Green Belt is more appropriate than the existing form of development.

Extensions and alterations to existing buildings

- 5.47 The extension or alteration of buildings in the Green Belt is not considered to constitute inappropriate development, provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building. The starting point for consideration of proposals for extensions to existing buildings in the Green Belt will be the siting, scale, form and footprint of the original building. This means the building that existed on 1 July 1948 or, if there was no building on 1 July 1948, the building as it was originally built.
- 5.48 When assessing whether a proposed extension represents a disproportionate addition, comparison will be made between the size of the original building with the proposed extension, taking account of its siting, scale, form and footprint, and effect of the proposals on the openness and character of the area. Volume calculations should be submitted as part of any planning application to identify the size of the building and have regard to the council's Design Guide and Local Validation List requirements. Volumes for any subsequent extensions should be calculated, together with the volume of the proposed extensions. This being volume as a measurement of external structure, inclusive of roof voids and basement areas.

Change of use of buildings

- 5.49 The re-use of buildings provides opportunities for the diversification of the rural economy and contributes to the economic growth of the area. It can also contribute towards the reduction in demand for new buildings in the Green Belt and can be a means of conserving traditional buildings. Where a development proposal relates to the re-use of an agricultural building, it must not result in the need to construct additional agricultural buildings, unless it can be demonstrated that the building to be re-used is no longer suitable/needed for an agricultural use.
- 5.50 Where buildings are to be converted, they should be of permanent and substantial construction. Buildings can often be converted without causing material harm to the open character of the Green Belt and surrounding area, however it is recognised that uses or levels of use can either directly or indirectly have an adverse effect. A structural survey should be submitted as part of any planning application to demonstrate that the proposal is of permanent and substantial construction.
- 5.51 When considering proposals for re-use, it is important to ensure the form of the proposed use is in keeping with the character of the surrounding area and does not require re-construction or a material change in size or scale. Locally distinctive features such as ventilation openings, large cart doors and stable joinery should be retained in proposals to maintain an appropriate character for the building and its setting within the surrounding area.

Energy generation

5.52 Whilst the council is fully supportive of the production and use of renewable energy to help meet local energy needs, such development proposals is not deemed appropriate by the NPPF. As such, development proposals will only be permitted in very special circumstances. Where such circumstances are deemed to exist, any development proposal is expected to be consistent with the requirements of Policy CE7: Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Generation.

Policy SS7: Development in the vicinity of Atomic Weapons Establishments (AWE)

1. Development proposals within consultation zones surrounding AWE Burghfield and AWE Aldermaston as set by the Office for Nuclear Regulation or other relevant national and local agencies, and exceptionally beyond, will be managed in the interests of public safety, emergency response, and national security and defence requirements.
2. Development proposals will refused unless all the following criteria are met:
 - a) The development, individually or cumulatively:
 - i. Will not pose an external hazard to the current and future operation of AWE Burghfield and/or AWE Aldermaston; and
 - ii. Will not adversely affect the current or future operation and security of AWE Burghfield and/or AWE Aldermaston.
 - b) The increase in the number of people living, working, shopping and/or visiting the proposal (including at different times of the day), individually and cumulatively:
 - i. Will not have an unacceptable risk to human health; and
 - ii. Will not have an adverse impact on the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan.
3. The assessment of development proposals will in particular have regard to the following:
 - a) The nature, character and vulnerability of the proposed use;
 - b) The potential increase in population;
 - c) The scale of proposed development;
 - d) The location of the proposed development; and
 - e) Any specific advice from the emergency planners, AWE plc, and the Office for Nuclear Regulation.

5.53 AWE plc operates AWE Burghfield and AWE Aldermaston in the adjoining local authority of West Berkshire District Council. Both are operated on behalf of the Ministry of Defence and are nuclear licensed sites. In addition, the sites handle conventional chemicals and explosives. The sites are critical to sustaining the UK government’s nuclear deterrent and supporting national defence and security. Activities include the assembly, maintenance and decommissioning of warheads. The sites are regulated by the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) and other agencies.

5.54 Nuclear installations present a potential major hazard as a result of the quantities of radioactive materials on the site. Under the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPPIR), a Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) must be defined around both AWE Burghfield and AWE Aldermaston. A DEPZ is the geographic area in which an effective

Off-Site Emergency Plan must be in place to minimise and mitigate the consequences of any radiological emergency.

5.55 In addition to the DEPZ, a number of other zones are defined in which consultation with the ONR and other agencies is required. The current zones and the ONR consultation criteria are set out in Table 5. The DEPZ and consultation zone and criteria are subject to review outside of the planning system. This may result in the DEPZ and other consultation zones remaining the same, extending or reducing in size and geography over time. For the avoidance of doubt, Policy SS7 should be applied to the DEPZ, consultation zones and criteria as defined at the time of making a decision on a planning application.

Table 5: Office for Nuclear Regulation land use planning consultation zones (2023).

Zone	Consultation Criteria
On the nuclear site	Any development.
Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ)	<p>Any new development, re-use or re-classification of an existing development that could lead to an increase in residential or non-residential populations, thus impacting on the off-site emergency plan.</p> <p>Any new development, re-use or re-classification of an existing development that could pose an external hazard to the site.</p> <p>Any re-use or re-classification of an existing development that could introduce vulnerable groups to the DEPZ.</p>
Outer Consultation Zone (OCZ)	<p>Any new residential development of 200 dwellings or greater.</p> <p>Any re-use or re-classification of an existing development that will lead to a material increase in the size of an existing development (greater than 500 persons).</p> <p>Any new non-residential development that could introduce vulnerable groups to the OCZ.</p> <p>Any new development, re-use or re-classification of an existing development that could pose an external hazard to the site.</p>
12km Zone	<p>Major hazard facilities i.e. those included within the scope of the Control of Major Accident Hazard Regulations 2015, the Offshore Installations Regulations 2015, the Offshore Installations (Safety Case) Regulations 2005, or the Pipelines Safety Regulations 1996 that could pose an external hazard to the site.</p> <p>Military installations storing munitions.</p>
Special Case	Special case developments that either introduce a new hazard or change the existing external hazards posed to nuclear sites, irrespective of distance from nuclear sites.

	<p>At the current time these special cases include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or expanded airports (including civil airports, military airports and airfields) that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) qualify as NSIPs under the Planning Act 2018; or (b) would enable a material increase in the number of aircraft movements; or material changes in aircraft types and sizes, in the nature of aircraft operations (passenger, cargo, military etc), in the number and orientation of runways, or in flight paths; • Other launch facilities; • Large reservoirs. These are currently defined as a reservoir with a maximum impounded capacity of 25,000 m³ (25 megalitres) or greater; • Activities that involve hydraulic fracturing of rock, as this can induce seismicity. Example developments that may come forward in the UK in the near future are geothermal power and the injection of CO₂ as part of carbon capture and storage. (Note: the current UK moratorium on fracking for shale gas means that further developments for this purpose are now frozen); and • Military airspace use (e.g. for training) and military practice, bombing or firing ranges.
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- 5.56 In respect of both AWE sites, the ONR, AWE plc / Ministry of Defence, and the council’s Emergency Planning Team will be consulted on relevant planning applications.
- 5.57 Advice provided by the ONR seeks to limit both the potential for development to pose an external hazard to nuclear sites and the radiological consequences to members of the public in the event of an emergency occurring. The council’s Emergency Planning Team provide comments on development proposals in relation to the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan. Their advice is often based on wider engagement with West Berkshire District Council as owners of the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan and the Off-Site Emergency Planning Group (a group of responding local, regional and national agencies).
- 5.58 The ONR will normally advise against a particular development proposal should they not receive adequate assurance that the increase in population can be accommodated within the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan. The ONR will consider the feedback provided by emergency planners. Should it be considered that a development proposal would result in an unacceptable risk to the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan, Policy SS7 makes it clear that planning permission will be refused.
- 5.59 Development proposals beyond the DEPZ, within the OCZ or 12km zone are less likely to have an adverse impact depending on their specific scale and nature.
- 5.60 With consultation zones around AWE sites crossing West Berkshire District, Reading Borough Council, Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council and Wokingham Borough Council, the council will monitor committed and future development proposals in partnership to help understand the impact of development proposals.

Policy SS8: Meeting employment needs

1. The sustainable growth of office and industrial space will be supported to meet the diverse needs of the local economy. The appropriate intensification, redevelopment and upgrading of existing sites and premises will be encouraged and supported to ensure the efficient use of land, help meet future demands and respond to modern business needs.

Core Employment Areas

2. Core Employment Areas will be retained and protected, and development proposals that facilitate their ongoing regeneration and evolution in accordance with economic needs and Policy ER1 will be supported.
3. The provision of new employment floorspace will be supported by extensions to the following Core Employment Areas:
 - a) Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, Shinfield, for approximately 100,000 m² of research and development floorspace or equivalent trip generating activity within Class E(g), B2 and B8 uses; and
 - b) Hogwood Farm Industrial Estate, Arborfield, for approximately 6,000 m² floorspace of B2 uses.

Other sites

4. Development proposals for employment uses will also be supported by:
 - a) Encouraging new employment uses within town, district and local centres, at an appropriate scale to those centres; and
 - b) Appropriate intensification, redevelopment and upgrading of existing sites in employment use, to make more efficient use of land, and support meeting future economic needs.
5. Outside Core Employment Areas, town, district and local centres and allocated sites, economic development will typically be limited to small scale proposals which satisfy the requirements of Policies ER3 and ER4.

5.61 Wokingham Borough is in the heart of the Thames Valley and plays an important role in the continued economic success of the region and is home to many multinational corporations with expertise across the key sectors of digital technology, life sciences and healthcare, and energy and environment, alongside a highly skilled workforce. Thousands of smaller businesses together ensure the Wokingham economy remains buoyant and attractive to investors.

5.62 The Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS) (2020) highlights the importance of maximising the geographical advantages of the Thames Valley. The BLIS has a vision that 'Berkshire should grow with ambition and intent to harness the best of both global and local'. From this it identifies six overarching 'priorities' to create a sustainable economy, that accelerates growth that is smart, knowledge intensive, inclusive and resilient. As this strategy is still being implemented, the Local Plan can help support opportunities for long-term economic growth in these sectors.

5.63 For this economic success to continue, it is important to respond to the changing needs of the labour market, including flexible workspaces and an integrated and connected borough that allows businesses to adapt. A borough where people want to be and stay. At a local level this ambition is outlined in the council's 2035 Vision, which highlights the importance of a strong local economy which adapts to the needs of communities to help deliver economic success. The emerging Wokingham Borough Economic Development Strategy further sets out a series of actions and interventions at the local level around four key themes with the aim of improving the borough's offering as a location to live, work and do business.

Future economic needs

5.64 To better understand the functional economic geography of the area, the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVBLEP) and the six Berkshire authorities commissioned a study to investigate economic relationships, linkages and flows which characterise the sub-regional economy. The Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area Study (FEMA) (2016) defined three core functional economic market areas, based on a 'best fit' to local authority boundaries due to their consistently strong inter-relationships. Wokingham Borough is in the Central Berkshire Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) along with the Boroughs of Bracknell Forest, Reading, and part of Windsor and Maidenhead.

5.65 Employment uses for the purposes of the employment policies primarily relate to business, industry, distribution and storage uses (BIDS), based on the Use Classes Order 1987 (as amended 1 September 2020):

- B2: General Industry
- B8: Storage and distribution
- E(g): Offices, research and development or light industrial.

5.66 To take account of more recent data, an Employment Land Needs Study (2020) was undertaken to assess the future employment land and floorspace requirements in Wokingham Borough, based on jobs forecasts and a specific scenario that relates to the calculation of Local Housing Need. In 2023, an updated study, the Employment Land Needs Review, was published. This supersedes the 2020 study and provides an updated assessment of the future employment needs in Wokingham Borough. This study takes into account recent changes to the economy and working practices, including increases in remote working, the growth of demand for warehousing and logistics space, alongside local changes such as the increased demand for film studio space. 'Industrial' refers to both warehousing and industrial (B1(c), B2 and B8) uses because in practice these activities are interchangeable and routinely require/occupy the same type of space.

5.67 When considering the balance between demand and supply, including future commitments, the study found that there is no quantitative requirement for additional office land/floorspace as gross supply exceeds gross demand. The study therefore recommends there is no need to allocate any additional land for office use.

5.68 Some lower grade offices developments have experienced higher levels of vacancy, and pressure for alternative uses, including residential and more recently industrial. Given changes to the use classes order, the council's ability to manage these changes has been reduced. The council will consider the use of Article 4 Directions to retain the integrity of Core Employment Areas where necessary.

- 5.69 In contrast, the study found that there is a larger need for new industrial floorspace, with a minimum of 18ha of additional land over the plan period. This recognises the existing low levels of vacancy, high job densities and very limited recent industrial floorspace losses.

Employment development

- 5.70 Employment commitment data shows a general reduction in the stock of B1 floorspace. Some of these floorspace losses are due to the use of Permitted Development Rights, allowing the change of use from offices to residential. A key driver has been the difference between residential values and office values, particularly for lower grade office space. The delivery of B2 and B8 floorspace has increased in recent years, due to demands for logistics, industrial and warehousing. The total outstanding permissions for employment floorspace (including B1, B2 and B8) amount to 49,044m².

Future economic supply

- 5.71 New economic development will support the council's ambitions to capitalise on a highly skilled local workforce, support a diverse local economy and provide new employment opportunities.
- 5.72 New employment development will be focused on Core Employment Areas and town, district and local centres. The jobs provided by businesses located in Core Employment Areas play a vital role in the economy of the borough and the wider Thames Valley. This role must be protected and enhanced for the benefit of the economy and the reputation of the Thames Valley as a place to establish and grow business. Recently parts of some Core Employment Areas have been redeveloped for more intensive, higher density uses, which capitalises on previously developed land which often benefit from good accessibility and transport. Additional opportunities on underutilised parts of Core Employment Areas can provide additional employment floorspace over the plan period. Policy ER1 provides further information on Core Employment Areas.
- 5.73 Town centres are recognised as being well connected places at the heart of communities. Businesses play a vital role in the vitality and viability of town centres and provide a key complementary use supporting the wider role of the centres. They can also provide opportunities for a wider variety of employment types than larger business and industrial parks.
- 5.74 Recently, a focus of new employment floorspace has been film studio space, notably at Shinfield Studios and but also Winnersh Triangle. At the TVSP further recent developments include the British Museum and proposals for the Natural History Museum, with further schemes proposed. In total around 100,000m² additional of employment floorspace will be delivered as part of an extension to the TVSP which will support the long term vision for Loddon Valley garden village as a sustainable community.
- 5.75 Outside Core Employment Areas, smaller scale economic development will be supported in other locations as set out in subsequent policies, this includes the flexible and sustainable growth of small businesses in appropriate locations.
- 5.76 The delivery of new floorspace, including from land allocated in this policy will help to meet the borough's future economic needs for both office and industrial. Committed employment developments, alongside the intensification and expansion of Core Employment Areas will provide a supply which will deliver additional office and industrial floorspace across the plan period. Development proposals will be supported for employment uses in appropriate locations in accordance with the policies in this plan. The take up of employment floorspace will be monitored to identify any emerging trends.

Policy SS9: Whiteknights Campus

1. The University of Reading is a national and international educational establishment of strategic importance, which will continue to adapt and expand over the plan period. The Whiteknights Campus as shown on the Policies Map will continue to be a focus for development associated with the University of Reading. Such development may include additional student, staff, teaching, research and enterprise accommodation, infrastructure and services, and sports and leisure facilities, among other uses. Access to and within the site will be improved where necessary.
2. Wokingham Borough Council will continue to work proactively with the University of Reading and Reading Borough Council to support the continued adaptation and development of the Whiteknights Campus as a focus for the University of Reading, to allow the university to continue to fulfil its important role in the economic success of the area.
3. Where development would result in a material need for additional students to be housed, it should be supported by an appropriate increase in existing or planned student accommodation. Provision of new student accommodation on the Whiteknights Campus, or as a reconfiguration or extension of nearby dedicated accommodation, will therefore be acceptable in principle where the need of student accommodation has been established, subject to other policies in the Local Plan Update.
4. Development proposals will accord with the following criteria:
 - a) Conserve, and where possible enhance, the historic parkland landscape, heritage assets and their settings;
 - b) The open areas and the character of the area are respected;
 - c) Areas of wildlife significance (including Local Wildlife Sites) and current or potential green and blue infrastructure networks are retained and enhanced, and will not be detrimentally affected by development, including through light effects;
 - d) The safety of those using the campus (including pedestrian and highway safety issues and designing out crime) will be maintained or enhanced;
 - e) No significant detrimental impacts on the amenity of neighbouring residential properties from the development, including from noise and parking; and
 - f) The loss of undeveloped areas on the site will be weighed against the benefits of development to the wider community.

5.77 The University of Reading is a national and international educational establishment of strategic importance to Wokingham Borough and the Thames Valley. It occupies a number of sites both within and beyond the borough. During 2023/24, the university has around 15,000 taught students and over 4,000 staff, with the Whiteknights Campus the main hub of activity. Students and, staff and visitors need to be supported by appropriate services, facilities and infrastructure.

5.78 The main education site, Whiteknights campus (circa 120 hectares), is split across the administrative boundaries of Wokingham Borough Council and Reading Borough Council.

- 5.79 The Whiteknights Campus will continue to be the main focus for future development associated with the university. The university's Estate Strategy 2022-2032 sets out a ten-year vision for the campus and focuses on repurposes, reconfiguring and enhancing existing buildings, including their transition to more sustainable operations. The strategy does not anticipate significant new built development.
- 5.80 The Whiteknights Campus is located on the 19th century Whiteknights Park and contains significant ecologically important assets such as a Local Wildlife Site, parkland, woodland and lakes. The site also provides links to existing assets of green infrastructure. The area is located within the Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay Landscape Character Area, which contains a network of recreational spaces, associated with areas of remnant historic parkland, such as Whiteknights Park. The area is also a prominent part of the local landscape and adjoins part of the East Reading wooded ridgeline, with large tracts of open space, which is designated as a Major Landscape Feature in Policy EN13 of Reading Borough's Local Plan (2019). A number of heritage assets, including listed buildings are located on the site. As the campus and its activities continue to evolve, development proposals should consider the potential effects on the surrounding residential areas.
- 5.81 With the Whiteknights Campus split across local authority boundaries a consistent approach is required³. Policy SS9 achieves this and will be supplemented by the two local authorities working closely in considering any development proposals.

Policy SS10: Meeting our housing needs

1. Provision will be made for a minimum of 12,763 net additional dwellings for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2040, an average of 751 dwellings per annum.

- 5.82 The NPPF advises that to determine the minimum number of homes needed, strategic policies should be informed by a local housing need assessment, conducted using the standard method in national Planning Practice Guidance, unless exceptional circumstances exist which justify an alternative approach to assessing need. In addition, it adds that any needs that cannot be met within neighbouring areas should be taken into account when establishing the amount of housing that should be planned for.
- 5.83 The standard method calculates the local housing need for Wokingham Borough to be 748 dwellings a year at 1 April 2024. The calculation for the previous year was 795 dwellings.
- 5.84 The number of homes that should be planned for is not necessarily the same as the local housing need. Circumstances where it may be appropriate to plan for a higher number include but are not limited to situations where increases in housing need are likely to exceed past trends. This can include unmet needs from neighbouring areas, strategic infrastructure requirements that are likely to drive need and local growth strategies.
- 5.85 Although the NPPF no longer refers to Housing Market Areas, the national Planning Practice Guidance provides a definition which refers to key functional linkages between places where people live and work. The Berkshire (including South Bucks) Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA, February 2016) included work on functional relationships. This found that Wokingham Borough formed part of a Housing Market Area focused on Reading and including the four local authorities of

³ Reading Borough Local Plan (2019), Policy ER2: Whiteknights Campus, University of Reading.

Bracknell Forest Council, Reading Borough Council, West Berkshire District Council and Wokingham Borough Council. As a result, there has been much collaborative working and engagement between these local authorities on housing matters as local plans have been prepared.

- 5.86 Reading Borough Council identified an identified shortfall in housing supply of 230 dwellings through their adopted local plan to 2036. This identified shortfall is now projected to be met and exceeded within Reading Borough. Engagement with Reading Borough Council regarding a forthcoming update to their local plan has suggested that under the current NPPF, housing need over the new plan period is also capable of being met in full within Reading Borough and as such there no unmet need would arise. Notwithstanding, it should be noted that the currently defined unmet need of 230 dwellings can be accommodated by flexibility within the adopted or emerging local plans of the three other local authorities within the Housing Market Area.
- 5.87 The housing requirement for Wokingham Borough as set out in Policy SS10 is based on achieving the local housing need as identified by the standard method, which calculates as 12,763 dwellings over the plan period⁴ or an average of 751 dwellings per year.
- 5.88 A housing requirement of 751 dwellings per year is significantly higher than the Wokingham Core Strategy local plan which requires an average of 662 dwellings per year and accords with the ambition to significantly boosting housing supply set out in the NPPF.
- 5.89 Taking account of existing commitments and development that can be anticipated from unidentified sites, this plan allocates land to meet the minimum requirement. In recognition that unforeseen circumstances may delay the delivery of allocated housing sites, appropriate flexibility has been built into the enabled housing land supply. The plan is therefore capable of delivering a greater scale of housing growth.
- 5.90 Table 6 provides a summary of the enabled housing land supply.

Table 6: Housing land supply.

Source	Number of dwellings
Sites with permission for 10 or more dwellings	5,885
Sites with resolution to grant permission for 10 or more dwellings	359
Sites with planning permission for 9 or fewer dwellings and sites which can be anticipated (windfall)	1,880
Wokingham town centre broad area	200
Arborfield Green SDL allocation (Policy SS11) (Excluding sites with permission)	910
South Wokingham SDL allocation (Policy SS12) (Excluding sites with permission and resolution to grant permission)	980
Loddon Valley Garden Village SDL allocation (Policy SS13)	2,700

⁴ Calculated as 1 year x 795 dwellings plus 16 years at 748 dwellings.

Other allocations (Policy SS14) (excluding sites with permission and resolution to grant permission)	1,081
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All figures for the number of dwellings refer to completions or projected delivery from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2040.

Site selection

- 5.91 The council's overall approach to identifying land for allocation is set out in the Site Selection Topic Paper. Various technical assessments of individual sites were carried out to help identify the most suitable locations for development and the approximate capacity of sites.

Housing trajectory

- 5.92 The NPPF requires local planning authorities to illustrate the expected rate of housing delivery over the plan period through a housing trajectory. In preparing the housing trajectory, which is provided in Appendix F, the council engages with landowners and developers and gives consideration to likely lead in times, start dates and build rates on different types of site.
- 5.93 The trajectory will be updated annually and reported in the annual Authority Monitoring Report (AMR).

Five year housing land supply

- 5.94 The NPPF refers to the need for a five year supply of deliverable housing sites against the adopted housing requirement. National Planning Practice Guidance states that robust evidence is needed to ensure that the five year housing land supply is sound and that the plan must identify a 5 year housing land supply from its date of adoption. The housing trajectory shows this can be achieved.
- 5.95 The ability to demonstrate a five year land supply is important in making decisions on planning applications. If the supply falls below the required amount, the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF applies, which means that alternative unplanned sites, including those in the countryside may be permitted. The council is keen to follow a plan-led approach in accordance with the NPPF to prevent this happening. The flexibility built into the land supply should help avoid the need for unplanned development.

Neighbourhood development plans

- 5.96 The Local Plan Update is not reliant on additional land for housing being identified in neighbourhood development plans to meet the housing requirement. All neighbourhood development plans made to date have not included allocations for housing. No emerging neighbourhood development plan seeks to allocate land for housing. The council will supply a housing requirement for designated neighbourhood areas which reflects the spatial strategy set out in the Local Plan Update taking account of completions, permissions, allocations and a proportional contribution to windfall development. Where this is not possible, the council will provide an indicative figure if requested to do so by the qualifying body.

Policy SS11: Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location

1. The area identified as Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location (SDL), as shown on the Policies Map, is allocated for a sustainable, well designed, mixed-use development.
2. The development will be delivered in accordance with the development, place shaping and delivery principles set out below.

Development principles

3. Phased delivery of
 - a) Around 3,047 dwellings comprising:
 - i. 2,137 dwellings through completions, extant planning permissions, resolutions to grant planning permission;
 - ii. 300 dwellings by optimising development density at land currently occupied by Arborfield Studios;
 - iii. 600 dwellings on land to the north of Arborfield Studios, known as Barkham Square; and
 - iv. 10 dwellings at Westwood Yard, Sheerlands Road.and including:
 - i. 40% affordable homes in accordance with Policy H3;
 - ii. 25 self and custom build service plots;
 - iii. 5 Gypsy and Traveller pitches⁵; and
 - iv. Specialist accommodation, including accommodation for older persons.
 - b) Around 6,000m² of employment floorspace.
 - c) One 2-form entry primary school (including appropriate onsite early years provision) with potential to expand to 3-form entry in the future.

The school should include space for the integrated teaching of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.
 - d) A district centre providing a range of services and facilities in a location central to the planned housing, to include retail, leisure, employment, cultural, and health uses.
 - e) Two local centres providing day to day retail and other local community uses.
 - f) A solution to avoid and mitigate the impact of development upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area through provision of sufficient Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (subject to monitoring of the quality and quantity standards).

⁵ Requirement only applies to the area without planning permission at September 2024, optimisation of Arborfield Studios, Barkham Square and Westward Yard, Sheerlands Road.

Place shaping principles

4. The siting, layout, form, design and landscaping should:
 - a) Protect and retain the physical, visual and perceived separation of the defined settlements of Arborfield Cross, Barkham Hill and Finchampstead North;
 - b) Achieve climate resilient neighbourhoods through the application of adaptation and mitigation methods, including embedding passive design principles and energy demand reduction measures in the sustainable design and construction of buildings and homes;
 - c) Incorporate measures to conserve and enhance heritage assets and their settings, through appropriate design and the provision of sufficient space; and
 - d) Locate new buildings outside areas of flood risk, with development planned for sequentially, by placing the most vulnerable development in the lowest areas of flood risk.
 - e) Draw on the recreational and ecological opportunities of watercourses.

Delivery principles

5. The delivery of the SDL must be supported by a comprehensive masterplan and package of infrastructure to support a thriving and healthy community, including the following:

Masterplanning

6. To ensure that development comes forward in a strategic, coordinated and comprehensive manner, delivery should be led by a masterplan that demonstrates how the principles established in this policy, supporting guidance in Appendix A, the Arborfield Garrison SDL SPD and permitted development have been considered to ensure high quality development with a distinctive character. The masterplan must provide:
 - a) A coordinated and comprehensive approach to development, which demonstrates how the proposed development will integrate with the planned and permitted development within the SDL;
 - b) A strategy for the quantum and distribution of land uses, access points, design and layout principles (including a design code), which draws on a detailed understanding of the area's characteristics, opportunities and constraints; and
 - c) A strategy for the timely delivery of facilities and infrastructure necessary to support the delivery of the SDL.

Drainage and flood alleviation

7. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive drainage and flood alleviation strategy that:
 - a) Provides high quality sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) that are integrated into the wider landscape and green and blue infrastructure strategy, including mitigation at source and makes a positive contribution to attractive open spaces, and improvements to biodiversity and water quality; and
 - b) Establishes clear and robust arrangements for future maintenance.

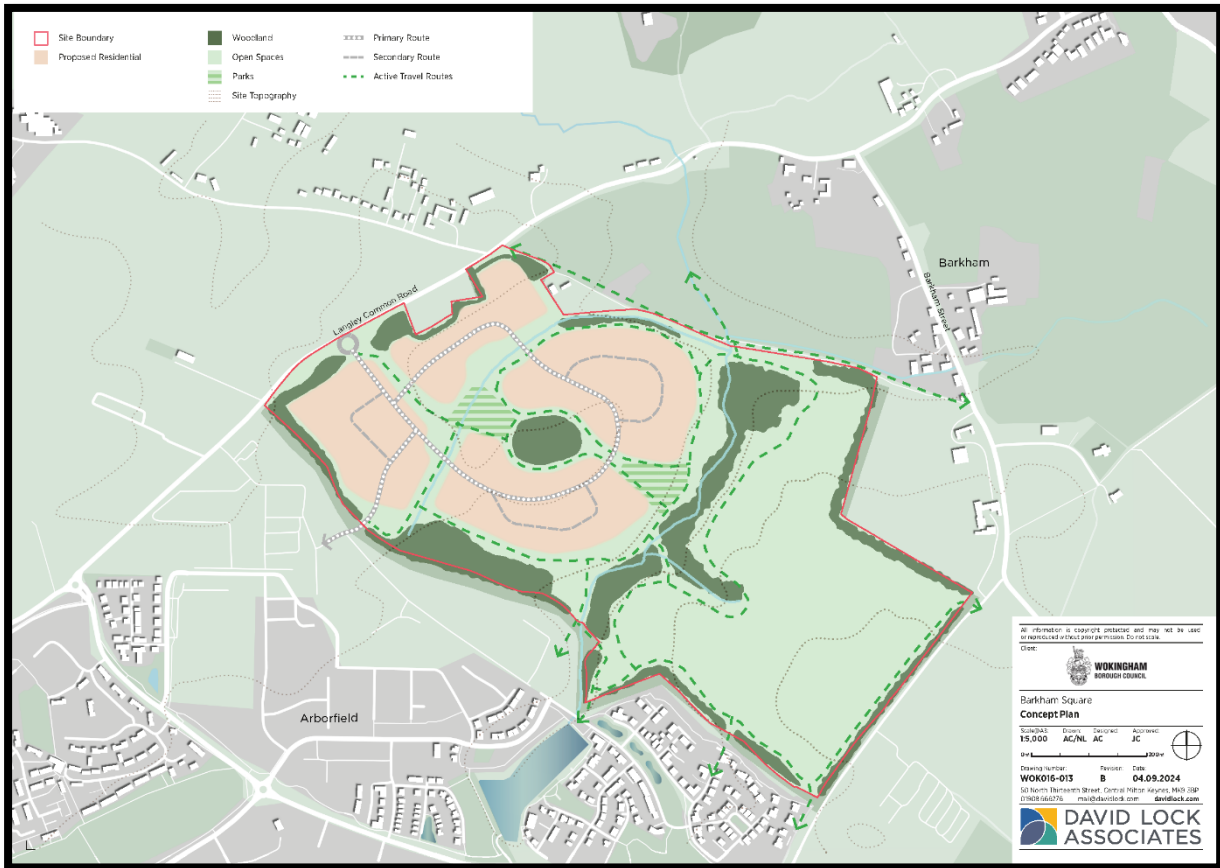
Biodiversity

8. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive ecological strategy that:
 - a) Achieves a measurable biodiversity net gain of at least 10% as calculated using the latest statutory metric; and
 - b) Provide measures to avoid and mitigate the impact of development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. This will include the provision of sufficient and accessible Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace within the SDL (as set out in Policy NE3).

Transport

9. Development proposals should devise and implement a sustainable transport and movement strategy that has been informed by a detailed Transport Assessment and provides:
 - a) Improvements to the quality and frequency of public transport services, such as corridor routes to Bracknell, Reading, Winnersh and Wokingham;
 - b) New and improved connections for cyclists and pedestrian both through and beyond the SDL to communities, facilities, services and local employment opportunities, including those in the Arborfield SDL, Finchampstead North and Crowthorne. Connections should be safe, suitable and convenient;
 - c) Prioritisation of cycle and pedestrian movements through the SDL to maximise connectivity and accessibility to the district centre and planned education provision;
 - d) Prioritisation of pedestrian movements to maximise connectivity to SANG, including Hazebrouck Meadows;
 - e) Highway improvements along the Barkham Road, the A327 (to both the M3 and Reading) and routes towards Bracknell and Wokingham; and
 - f) Improvements to the management of general traffic, including the consideration of traffic calming measures.

Figure 6: Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location: Barkham Square concept plan.



- 5.97 The former Arborfield Garrison was originally identified in the Core Strategy local plan (2010) as a location for sustainable, well-designed mixed-use development for around 3,500 homes in the period to 2026.
- 5.98 A number of phases of the planned development have since been completed, including around 1,000 new homes by end of March 2023. Key parts of the supporting infrastructure have also been completed including a secondary school (Bohunt School), the first of two planned primary schools (Farley Hill Primary School) and the Arborfield Cross Relief Road (Observer Way) and Nine Mile Road Extension. Planning permission has been granted for the new district centre incorporating retail and leisure uses.
- 5.99 In reviewing the original vision, additional development opportunities has been identified. This is largely through the intensification of the currently undelivered parcels in the northern part of the SDL (estimated to be an additional 300 dwellings over and above the original vision) and the expansion of the SDL to include an adjoining area of land (estimated to be an additional 600 dwellings). In addition, a modest amendment is made to incorporate land at Westwood Yard, Sheerlands Road (10 net additional dwellings). The residential development at Hogwood Park, the former training ground of Reading Football Club is also now included within the SDL.
- 5.100 It will be necessary to ensure that further development within the Arborfield Green SDL improves opportunities for active travel to nearby centres and destinations in Wokingham town, both support the vitality and viability of the centre and to reduce overall private car trips in the surrounding area.

- 5.101 Further guidance to Policy SS11 is set out in Appendix A. This is supplementary to the original Arborfield Garrison SDL Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD sets out principles to ensure high quality development with a distinctive character and will remain in its current form. Further guidance may be prepared in due course to ensure the additional development continues to reflect the key principles and concept.
- 5.102 A defined settlement area has been defined on the Policies Map which reflect areas where building is anticipated based on the concept plan. The council recognises that these areas are indicative and that masterplanning will establish where building will occur in more detail. The Policies Map will be updated in the future once there is greater certainty.

Policy SS12: South Wokingham Strategic Development Location

1. The area identified as South Wokingham Strategic Development Location, as shown on the Policies Map, is allocated for a sustainable, well-designed, mixed-use development.
2. The development will be delivered in accordance with the development, place shaping and delivery principles set out below.

Development principles

3. Phased delivery of:
 - a) Around 2,975 dwellings comprising:
 - i. 1,875 dwellings through completions, extant planning permissions and resolutions to grant planning permission of which at least 1,775 dwellings are to be delivered by 31st March 2040; and
 - ii. 1,100 dwellings on land south of Waterloo Road, of which at least 980 dwellings are to be delivered by 31st March 2040.and including:
 - iii. 40% affordable homes in accordance with Policy H3;
 - iv. 25 self and custom build service plots⁶;
 - v. 6 Gypsy and Traveller pitches⁷; and
 - vi. Specialist accommodation, including accommodation for older persons.
 - b) Two primary schools (including appropriate onsite early years provision):
 - i. One 2-form entry primary school within the area that has planning permission; and
 - ii. One 1-form entry primary school within the planned development on land south of Waterloo Road.

Each school should include space for the integrated teaching of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.

⁶ Requirement only applies to the area without planning permission at September 2024, land south of Wokingham Road.

⁷ Requirement only applied to the area without planning permission at September 2024, land south of Wokingham Road.

- c) Appropriate retail centres to serve the northern and southern parts of the SDL providing day-to-day retail facilities.
- d) A sports hub at Gray's Farm providing open space, sports and leisure facilities and other community uses.
- e) A solution to avoid and mitigate the impact of the development upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area through provision of sufficient Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (subject to monitoring of the quality and quantity standards).

Place shaping principles

- 4. The siting, layout, form, design and landscaping of development should:
 - a) Protect and maintain the physical, visual and perceived separation of the defined settlements of Wokingham, Crowthorne / Pinewood (Crowthorne), Finchampstead North and Bracknell;
 - b) Achieve climate resilient neighbourhoods through the application of adaptation and mitigation methods, including embedding passive design principles and energy demand reduction measures in the sustainable design and construction of buildings and homes;
 - c) Incorporate measures to respect the setting of Holme Green Lane;
 - d) Incorporate measures to conserve and enhance heritage assets and their settings, through appropriate design and the provision of sufficient space;
 - e) Locate new buildings outside areas of flood risk, with development planned for sequentially, by placing the most vulnerable development in the lowest areas of flood risk; and
 - f) Draw on the recreational and ecological opportunities of the Emm Brook and its tributary by utilising its role and function in natural flood management and biodiversity enhancement; and increasing accessibility to watercourses as part of the provision of a continuous, high quality and attractive and accessible open space network.

Delivery principles

- 5. The delivery of the SDL must be supported by a comprehensive masterplan and package of infrastructure to support a thriving and healthy community, including the following:

Masterplanning

- 6. To ensure that development comes forward in a strategic, coordinated and comprehensive manner, delivery should be led by a masterplan that demonstrates how the principles established in this policy, supporting guidance in Appendix B, the South Wokingham SDL SPD and permitted development have been considered to ensure high-quality development with a distinctive character. The masterplan must provide:
 - a) A coordinated and comprehensive approach to development, which demonstrates how the proposed development will integrate with the planned and permitted development within the SDL;

- b) A strategy for the quantum and distribution of land uses, access points, design and layout principles (including a design code), which draws on a detailed understanding of the area's characteristics, opportunities and constraints; and
- c) A strategy for the timely delivery of facilities and infrastructure necessary to support the delivery of the SDL.

Drainage and flood alleviation

7. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive drainage and flood alleviation strategy that:
 - a) Provides high quality sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) that are integrated into the wider landscape and green and blue infrastructure strategy, including mitigation at source and makes a positive contribution to attractive open spaces, and improvements to biodiversity and water quality; and
 - b) Establishes clear and robust arrangements for future maintenance.

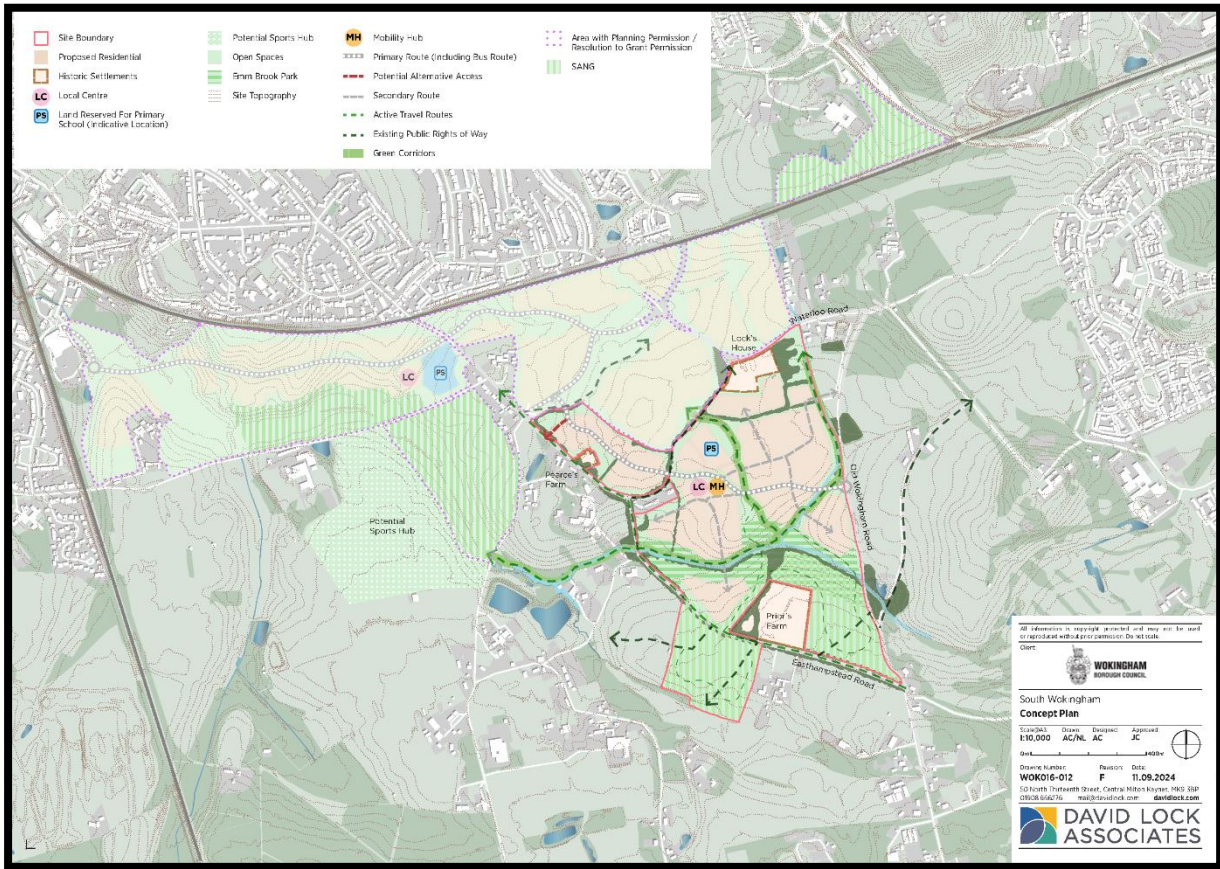
Biodiversity

8. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive ecological strategy that:
 - a) Achieves a measurable biodiversity net gain of at least 10% as calculated using the latest statutory metric; and
 - b) Provide measures to avoid and mitigate the impact of development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. This will include the provision of sufficient and accessible Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace within the SDL (as set out in Policy NE3).

Transport

9. Development proposals should devise and implement a sustainable transport and movement strategy that has been informed by a detailed Transport Assessment and provides:
 - a) New and improved off-site connections for pedestrians and cyclists, providing safe, suitable and convenient access to surrounding countryside, communities, facilities, services and employment opportunities, including those in Wokingham, Crowthorne and Bracknell; and
 - b) Highway improvements along the A321 and A329 corridors and provision of the South Wokingham Distributor Road (SWDR), introducing suitable and focused congestion management measures to control access by general traffic, other than by active travel and public transport services.

Figure 7: South Wokingham Strategic Development Location: Land south of Waterloo Road concept plan.



- 5.103 Land at South Wokingham was originally identified in the Core Strategy local plan (2010) as a location for sustainable, well-designed mixed-use development for around 2,500 homes in the period to 2026.
- 5.104 Several phases of the development have been completed, with 636 new homes completed by end of March 2023, on the area north of the railway line at Montague Park. Key parts of the supporting infrastructure have also been completed, including the first of two planned primary schools (Floreath Montague Park Primary School) and a neighbourhood centre providing local access to community services and facilities.
- 5.105 In reviewing the original vision, the completed area north of the railway at Montague Park has been removed from the strategic development location. With regard to the area south of the railway, a development opportunity largely within the original extent of the strategic development location has been identified utilising land south of Waterloo Road to provide around 1,100 additional dwellings. Subject to good design, this must integrate well with the already planned and permitted development. In addition, the allocation incorporates Gray’s Farm, which is intended to provide a sports hub for sports and community uses.
- 5.106 Further development within the South Wokingham SDL must improve opportunities for active travel to nearby centres and destinations in Wokingham town, Crowthorne and Bracknell, both to support the vitality and viability of each centre and to reduce overall private car trips in the surrounding area.

- 5.107 Further guidance to Policy SS12 is set out in Appendix B. This is supplementary to the original South Wokingham SDL Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD sets out principles to ensure high quality development with a distinctive character and will remain in its current form. Further guidance may be prepared in due course to ensure the additional development continues to reflect the key principles and concept.
- 5.108 A defined settlement area has been defined on the Policies Map which reflect areas where building is anticipated based on the concept plan. The council recognises that these areas are indicative and that masterplanning will establish where building will occur in more detail. The Policies Map will be updated in the future once there is greater certainty.

Policy SS13: Loddon Valley Garden Village

1. The area identified as Loddon Valley Garden Village Strategic Development Location, as shown on the policies map, is allocated for a beautifully and imaginatively designed community including housing, employment, social and physical infrastructure.
2. The garden village will be delivered in accordance with the development, place shaping, and delivery principles set out below.

Development principles

Phased delivery of:

- a) Around 3,930 dwellings, of which at least 2,700 dwellings will be delivered by 31st March 2040, including:
 - i. 40% affordable homes, in accordance with Policy H3;
 - ii. 100 custom and self build serviced plots;
 - iii. 20 Gypsy and Traveller pitches; and
 - iv. Specialist accommodation, including accommodation for older persons.
- b) Around 100,000 m² of research and development floorspace or equivalent trip generating activity within use class E(g), B2, B8 and other complementary uses, through an extension to the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park.
- c) Schools, including:
 - i. Two 3-form entry primary schools (including appropriate onsite early years provision); and
 - ii. An 8-form entry secondary school, with additional land reserved to enable expansion to 12-form entry with sixth form.

Each school should include space for the integrated teaching of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.
- d) A district centre providing a range of services and facilities in a location central to the planned housing, to include retail, leisure, employment, cultural, and health uses;
- e) Two local centres providing day to day retail and other local community uses;

- f) A multi-functional country park which is accessible to settlements beyond the garden village; and
- g) A solution to avoid or mitigate the impact of development upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area through the provision of sufficient Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) (subject to monitoring of the quality and quantity standards).

Place shaping principles

- 3. The siting, layout, and form of development, including landscaping should:
 - a) Draw on and enhance the site's context, changes in topography and its considerable natural assets such as the River Loddon and Barkham Brook, irreplaceable habitats, and hedgerows, trees, woodland and other features;
 - b) Protect and retain the permanent physical and visual sense of separation of Arborfield and the defined settlements of Arborfield Cross and Shinfield;
 - c) Be designed around a series of walkable neighbourhoods, each providing a range of accessible services and facilities. Where important local facilities are necessarily located beyond the neighbourhood, these should be linked by accessible and attractive routes which support and encourage active travel. The promotion of community facilities for shared use, such as outdoor and indoor sports and leisure provision will be strongly encouraged;
 - d) Establish a comprehensive and integrated network of high-quality and attractive active travel routes, greenways and bus services within the garden village and to destinations in the wider area;
 - e) Incorporate measures to protect the separate identity of Carter's Hill;
 - f) Incorporate measures to conservation and enhancement of heritage assets, including listed buildings, through appropriate design and the provision of sufficient space;
 - g) Locate district and local centres where they are accessible to the planned housing, and are of an appropriate scale to meet the day-to-day needs with a range of retail (including food store of around 2,500m²), leisure, cultural, community, health and service facilities;
 - h) Locate higher development densities around the district and local centres, transport nodes, and along public transport routes subject to site specific sensitivities such as landscape, character and heritage;
 - i) Locate new buildings, except those for water compatible uses, outside areas of flood risk, with development planned for sequentially, by placing the most vulnerable development in the lowest areas of flood risk; and
 - j) Draw on the recreational and ecological opportunities of the River Loddon and Barkham Brook to create a multi-functional country park which provides coherent ecological networks, recreational opportunities and active travel connectivity.

Delivery principles

4. The delivery of the garden village must be supported by a comprehensive package of infrastructure to support a self-sustaining, thriving and healthy community including the following.

Masterplanning

5. To ensure that development comes forward in a strategic, coordinated and comprehensive manner, delivery should be led by a single agreed vision and masterplan for the whole garden village that demonstrates how the principles established in this policy and supporting guidance in Appendix C have been considered to ensure high quality development. The masterplan must be produced in partnership between the council, developers, landowners and key stakeholders, and involve consultation with the local community. Development proposals on individual land parcels must accord with the principles and requirements set out in the agreed vision and masterplan. The masterplan must provide:
 - a) A coordinated and comprehensive landscape led approach to development of the whole Loddon Valley Garden Village to avoid piecemeal and ad-hoc development proposals;
 - b) A strategy for the quantum and distribution of land uses, access points, design and layout principles (including a strategic design code) which draws on a detailed understanding of the area's characteristics, opportunities and constraints;
 - c) A strategy for the timely delivery of facilities and infrastructure necessary to support each phase of delivery and the garden village as a whole;
 - d) A strategy for creating a distinctive and sustainable community, embracing the best of town and country and that delivers climate resilience; and
 - e) A strategy for integrating and implementing arts and cultural activities including public art.

Landscape and green and blue infrastructure

6. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive strategic landscape and green and blue infrastructure strategy that:
 - a) Provides a new country park incorporating the River Loddon and Barkham Brook that contributes to, and enhances, coherent ecological networks and habitats, which are integrated into the wider green and blue infrastructure beyond the garden village;
 - b) Protects and enhances the identified attributes of the River Loddon Valued Landscape and Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape;
 - c) Provide a network of connected, accessible and high-quality open spaces that includes tree lined streets, opportunities for local food growing and natural play, that integrate with the wider green and blue infrastructure network;
 - d) Retains, and incorporates appropriate buffers for, ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees, watercourses, hedgerows, and other trees into the connected green and blue infrastructure of the site;

- e) Provides a network of safe, attractive, landscaped and accessible public rights of way across the site, and where appropriate demonstrates how they connect into the existing rights of way network;
- f) Contributes to establishing the Loddon long distance footpath for active travel; and
- g) Establishes clear and robust arrangements for future maintenance.

Drainage and flood alleviation

7. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive drainage and flood alleviation strategy that:
- a) Provides high quality sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) that are integrated into the wider landscape and green and blue infrastructure strategy, including mitigation at source and makes a positive contribution to attractive open spaces, and improvement to biodiversity and water quality;
 - b) Considers and takes opportunity as appropriate to improve the management of flood risk and reduce the risk of flooding to areas beyond the garden village; and
 - c) Establishes clear and robust arrangements for future maintenance.

Biodiversity

8. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive ecological strategy that:
- a) Achieves a measurable biodiversity net gain of at least 20% as calculated using the latest statutory metric;
 - b) Shows how priority habitats and ecological features will be protected and enhanced, having particular regard to any Biodiversity Action Plan and Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities;
 - c) Provide a suitable buffer between the built development and ecological areas, including (but not limited to) Local Wildlife Sites, areas of irreplaceable habitat and areas of priority habitat; and
 - d) Provide measures to avoid and mitigate the impact of development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. This will include the provision of sufficient and accessible Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace on-site (as set out in Policy NE3).

Housing

9. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive housing strategy that:
- a) Provides a mix of housing types, sizes (including those suitable for extended family living), and tenures that reflect the identified housing needs and demands as set out in the council's most up to date evidence of housing need;
 - b) Applies designs which support spaces suitable for home working; and

- c) Shows how the mix of housing types, sizes and tenures will be coordinated through each phase of delivery.

Employment and Jobs

- 10. Development proposals should contribute towards a wide range and mix of employment, skills and training opportunities in different sectors of the economy, including small-scale business space and small/medium sized flexible units, within district and local centres as appropriate.

Sustainable design and construction

- 11. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive energy and sustainability strategy that:
 - a) Applies passive design principles to ensure that form, orientation, building typologies, development densities and green and blue infrastructure are appropriately used to reduce energy demand and deliver climate resilient neighbourhoods;
 - b) Implements the energy hierarchy at all scales and demonstrates a fabric first approach;
 - c) Ensures that the total operational energy demand at completion of the Loddon Valley Garden Village is met from renewable or low-carbon sources on site, prioritising opportunities for heat networks, community energy initiatives or other solutions which take advantage of the scale of the development;
 - d) Provides measures to reduce the whole-life impacts by creating adaptable, durable buildings and employing construction methods and materials which minimise embodied emissions; and
 - e) Provide measures to reduce water consumption.

Transport

- 12. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive sustainable transport strategy that has been informed by a detailed Transport Assessment and:
 - a) Provides layouts, street designs and associated measures that are safe, suitable and convenient for all users, that prioritise active travel, and facilitates high quality public transport services both within and to key destinations beyond the garden village. This will include:
 - i. The phased delivery of active travel and public transport measures;
 - ii. An on-site dedicated network of segregated facilities for pedestrians and cyclists that integrate with active travel networks, including the Public Rights of Way network; and
 - iii. The provision of new and improved off-site connections for pedestrians and cyclists, providing safe, suitable and convenient access to the surrounding communities, facilities, services and employment opportunities including the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park,

MereOak Park and Ride, Green Park, Green Park Station, Shinfield, Lower Earley, Winnersh and Winnersh Triangle Station.

- b) Demonstrates that the design of the access arrangements and the associated highway improvements take into account all the planned development; and
- c) Ensures that development will not have a severe adverse impact on the local and strategic highway networks, nor an unacceptable impact upon highway safety, following the inclusion of suitable measures to mitigate the impact.

Utilities

13. Development proposals should devise and implement a comprehensive utility and digital infrastructure and communications strategy. This will include the:

- a) The phased delivery of water, foul water, sewerage and electricity upgrades; and
- b) The phased delivery of Fibre to the Premises (FTTP) connectivity, including access to full-fibre gigabit-capable broadband; and 4G and 5G mobile technologies.

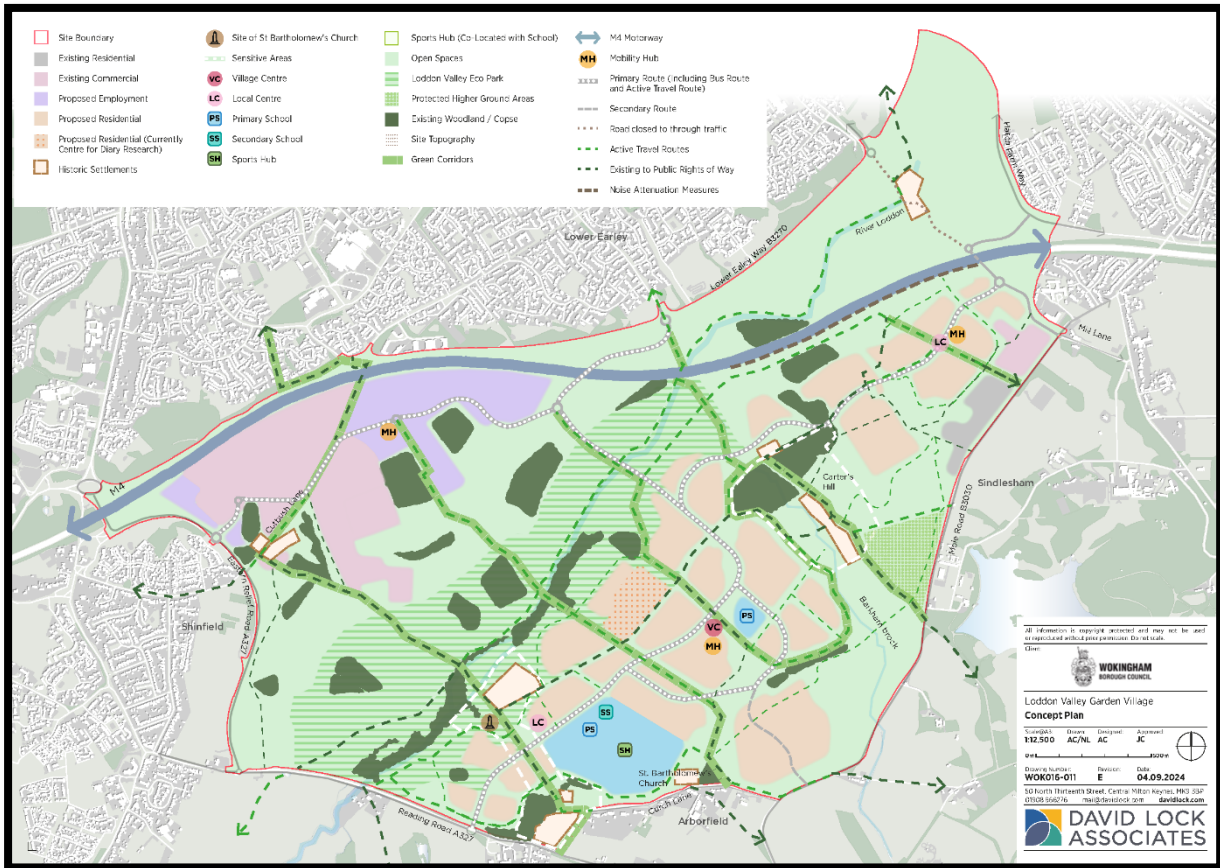
Minerals and waste

14. The potential for on-site minerals resources which may be winnable through prior extraction should be informed by minerals resource assessments. Where viable, development proposals should respond and implement a strategy for prior extraction.

Stewardship

15. Development proposals should proceed in accordance with an agreed strategy for the long-term governance and stewardship arrangements for community assets, including country park, open spaces, public realm areas and community and other relevant facilities.

Figure 8: Loddon Valley Garden Village concept plan.



- 5.109 Loddon Valley Garden Village will be a holistically planned, beautifully designed, and sustainable new community. The site, which will align to the principles and qualities for Garden Communities⁸, will make provision for around 3,930 new homes alongside employment and a range of services and facilities. Of the total number of homes, a minimum of 2,700 are expected to be completed within the period to 2040.
- 5.110 Loddon Valley Garden Village should be a place where people will want to live, where they feel healthy and happy, and which provides opportunities for communities to prosper and flourish. The new settlement will comprise 40% affordable homes, include local services and facilities to minimise the need for unnecessary travel, and where travel is required, support opportunities to do this by active means such as walking, wheeling and cycling. The country park will provide recreational opportunities for the new community as well as those nearby, and significant biodiversity improvements.
- 5.111 An integral element of the new garden village is the provision of homes in proximity to jobs with the location incorporating the existing Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, a location which includes a mix of science and technology, film studios, educational and health uses. In providing new homes in proximity to key job locations, it is not assumed that all residents would work in the immediate area but the approach provides a clear opportunity to reduce travel compared to other approaches. It is accepted that wider travel will always be necessary and must be planned for.

⁸ Town and Country Planning Association (2017) Garden Villages Guidance; Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) Prospectus on 'Garden Communities'

- 5.112 The scale and complexity of the garden village requires that development comes forward in a coordinated manner and led by a single agreed vision. The new community will be supported by a comprehensive package of infrastructure to incentivise sustainable behaviours and travel choices. This will include a framework to maximise opportunities for active travel within the new community and between the surrounding places (including a new connection over the M4 to Earley), primary schools and a secondary school, and district and local centres.
- 5.113 An integral element of the garden village is the creation of a country park along the River Loddon Valley, an area currently without public access. This will facilitate wider public access along the river corridor and to open space in the wider area. The river corridor provides a significant opportunity for comprehensive habitat management, restoration and enhancement, improving biodiversity.
- 5.114 Further guidance to Policy SS13 is set out in Appendix C. Further guidance may be prepared in due course to ensure the additional development continues to reflect the key principles and concept. Defined settlement areas have been defined on the Policies Map which reflect areas where building is anticipated based on the concept plan. The council recognises that these areas are indicative and that masterplanning will establish where building will occur in more detail. The Policies Map will be updated in the future once there is greater certainty.

Policy SS14: Sites allocated for residential, including residential as part of mixed-use development

1. The sites listed below and shown on the Policies Map, are allocated for residential development (including residential as part of mixed-use development).
2. Development proposals should consider the site specific development guidelines, as set out in Appendix E.

In considering the site specific development guidelines flexibility may be applied to allow for material changes in circumstance as a result of the passage of time or to enable alternative solutions that will deliver the same, or preferably, a better planning outcome.

3. Development proposals are expected to come forward through a design led approach, involving the local community. For the larger sites, and where outlined in the development guidelines, it will be necessary for a masterplan and a strategic design code to be prepared.

Ref	Site name	Approx No. wellings	Permission / resolution to grant ⁹
SS14.1	High Barn Farm, Commonfield Lane, Barkham*	20	-
SS14.2	Honeysuckle Lodge, Commonfield Lane, Barkham*	4	-
SS14.3	Woodlands Farm, Wood Lane, Barkham*	15	-
SS14.4	Land west of Park Lane, Charvil	61	-
SS14.5	24 Barkham Ride, Finchampstead	30	-
SS14.6	31-33 Barkham Ride, Finchampstead	80	Yes
SS14.7	Greenacres Farm, Nine Mile Ride, Finchampstead	100	-

⁹ At September 2024.

SS14.8	Hillside, Lower Wokingham Road, Finchampstead	15	-
SS14.9	39-53 New Road, Ruscombe	20	-
SS14.10	Land to the rear of Northbury Lane, Ruscombe	12	-
SS14.11	Land north of Arborfield Road, Shinfield	191	-
SS14.12	Land east and west of Hyde End Road, Shinfield	175	-
SS14.13	Rustlings, The Spring and land rear of Cushendall, Shinfield Road, Shinfield (North)	10	-
SS14.14	69 King Street Lane, Sindlesham	28	Yes
SS14.15	Land off Wheatsheaf Close, Sindlesham	24	-
SS14.16	Land east of Pound Lane, Sonning	50	Yes
SS14.17	Land at Sonning Farm, Sonning	25	-
SS14.18	Land west of Trowes Lane, Swallowfield	81	Yes
SS14.19	Land at Bridge Farm, New Bath Road, Twyford	200	Yes
SS14.20	Land west of Old Forest Road, Winnersh	50	-
SS14.21	Land off Poplar Lane and Watmore Lane, Winnersh	111	Yes
SS14.22	Land rear of the Bulldog garage and BP garage, Reading Road, Winnersh	34	-
SS14.23	Winnersh Plant Hire, Reading Road, Winnersh	60	-
SS14.24	Woodside, Blagrove Lane, Wokingham*	4	-
SS14.25	Rosery Cottage and 171 Evendons Lane, Wokingham**	35	Yes
SS14.26	Bridge Retail Park, Finchampstead Road, Wokingham	59	-
SS14.27	Land south of London Road, Wokingham	12	-
SS14.28	Land adjacent to Amen Corner, north of London Road, Bracknell	45	Yes
SS14.29	Station Industrial Estate, Oxford Road, Wokingham	40	-
SS14.30	Wokingham Borough Council offices, Shute End, Wokingham	100	-
SS14.31	Land at the north corner of Wellington Road and Station Road, Wokingham	20	-

*Sites allocated for Gypsy and Traveller pitches or Travelling Showpeople plots.
 **Site capacity based on or includes a care home adjustment factor.

- 5.115 The above sites have been selected for allocation through a process that has taken into account a large amount of information from technical studies, developers and landowners, consultation responses and many others.
- 5.116 The approximate numbers of dwellings are based on a broad assessment of the site, or the planning application where permission has been granted or a resolution to grant has been made. The number of dwellings is 'indicative' and does not represent a fixed requirement for each site. Those proposing developments are encouraged to produce the most appropriate design-led solution, taking all relevant local and national policies, in arriving at a total dwelling figure for their site. The design-led approach should not be unnecessarily constrained by the indicative figure.
- 5.117 The homes provided through Policy SS14 will not just be provided in a range of locations but also on a range of sizes of sites. The identified sites include a number under 1 ha in size, as encouraged by the NPPF to increase opportunities for smaller scale house builders.

- 5.118 For the avoidance of doubt, sites with permission or resolution have been counted in the base supply in Table 10 under Policy SS10: Meeting Housing Needs and excluded from the capacity of recorded against Policy SS14. This avoids double counting whilst ensuring that the land is used for residential development and not alternative uses.

Policy SS15: Securing infrastructure

1. Development proposals will only be supported where the impacts are mitigated through the timely provision of necessary local or strategic infrastructure.
2. Development proposals must:
 - a) Secure necessary new, and/or improvements to existing, infrastructure via direct provision or an appropriate contribution that makes the development acceptable;
 - b) Ensure appropriate arrangements are in place to secure the future management and maintenance of infrastructure that is or will be provided; and
 - c) Plan and design utilities from the outset to minimise future disruption when upgrades and / or repairs are required.

Legal obligations and/or planning conditions will be used to secure the necessary improvements to, or the provision of, infrastructure to the required standard.

3. Where full mitigation measures and contributions are not delivered or provided, a development proposal is likely to be unsustainable and will only be permitted where:
 - a) The application is supported by a viability assessment that has been produced in accordance with national guidance and which has been assessed by the council as appropriate and based on reasonable assumptions;
 - b) The value of the legal obligations that are to be secured have been maximised having regard to likely viability;
 - c) Where appropriate, a clawback mechanism has been incorporated into the legal obligation to ensure that additional mitigation is secured in the event that final development is more viable than anticipated at the time of permission; and
 - d) If following a viability assessment process, the benefits of the development outweigh the ability to mitigate the impacts in full having regard to other material considerations.

- 5.119 To ensure that new development is sustainable, it needs to be supported by adequate and appropriate infrastructure. Infrastructure includes, but is not limited to physical, social and green and blue infrastructure.
- 5.120 Development proposals will be expected to mitigate all relevant impacts taking account of cumulative levels of development that have already been accepted, and mitigation measures that have already been agreed or implemented. Infrastructure must be delivered to a standard which is adoptable by the council.
- 5.121 Policy SS15 should be read in conjunction with the council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan, CIL charging schedule and other documents governing legal obligations (including planning and highways

obligations) or any successor infrastructure contributions mechanism. Where appropriate, the council will permit developers to provide the necessary infrastructure and facilities themselves as part of development proposals, rather than by making financial contributions. In all instances, provision must include secured funding for long term management and maintenance in accordance with the required standard.

- 5.122 Upon completion, it is the council's strong preference that key infrastructure is passed to the council or relevant parish/town council. This includes roads, open spaces, drainage infrastructure, allotments, street lighting. A commuted sum will be required to cover the cost of maintenance over an appropriate length of time, which will be dependent on the type of infrastructure. Infrastructure will only be adopted once the council is satisfied it has been delivered to standard and once an appropriate commuted sum has been paid.
- 5.123 Where infrastructure is not passed to the council or the relevant parish/town council, and is instead maintained by a private management company, the council will need to be satisfied that arrangements are in place prior to first occupancy to management and maintenance of the infrastructure in the long-term. This will include an agreed specification and maintenance schedule (as a minimum to the council's standard), with funded inspections during the implementation phase of development, the securing of sufficient funding to cover the interim costs of maintenance, repairs to, and replacement of equipment, during the establishment and initial period of the management company, and permanent and meaningful resident representation on the company board.
- 5.124 With regard to utilities infrastructure, it is imperative that this is thoughtfully designed from the outset to avoid disruption to residents when upgrades or repairs are required, for example by running in off carriageway service corridors within footways or verges and minimising the crossing of the roads. Where excessive crossings are proposed, the council may not adopt the road or seek an increased contribution to cover the likely higher costs of management and maintenance.
- 5.125 In relation to development viability, the national Planning Practice Guidance is clear that the price paid for land is not a relevant justification for failing to accord with relevant policies in a local plan. Landowners and site purchasers should consider this when agreeing land transactions and future infrastructure requirements.
- 5.126 The policy requirements and legal obligations set out within the Local Plan Update have been subject to plan-wide viability assessment. The NPPF and national Planning Practice Guidance recognise that where up-to-date policies have set out the contributions expected from development, planning applications that fully comply with them should be assumed to be viable. The onus is on the applicant to demonstrate whether particular circumstances justify the need for a viability assessment at the application stage, with examples provided including 'significant economic changes'¹⁰. It is however recognised that there may be exceptional cases where, based on site-specific circumstances, the cumulative effect of policy requirements and obligations would compromise development viability for particular schemes. In such cases, the applicant will need to robustly demonstrate how this would threaten delivery of the development proposal, taking account of viability evidence supporting the plan and having regard to national guidance. Development specific viability assessments should be independent, transparent and fully funded by the applicant and will be published in an appropriate manner with the planning application supporting documents. Reviews of viability assessments will also be funded by the applicant. Where appropriate, a clawback mechanism will need to be incorporated into a legal obligation.

¹⁰ Planning Practice Guidance – Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 10-007-20190509

Policy SS16: Safeguarded routes

1. Land is safeguarded to support the delivery of strategic transport infrastructure as listed below and shown on the Policies Map.
 - a) Improvements to highway capacity along A327 (including Eversley Bypass, subject to review by Hampshire County Council as lead authority); and
 - b) Land for a Third Thames Crossing from Thames Valley Park Drive/A3290 into South Oxfordshire.

The council will work with appropriate partners, stakeholders, and other bodies to investigate and where supported, deliver these schemes.

2. Development proposals which would prejudice the delivery of the strategic transport infrastructure, or their effective operation, will generally be refused.

5.127 In order to widen travel choice and/or mitigate the impacts of new development, land required to deliver strategic transport projects will be safeguarded. The transport infrastructure necessary for the borough will be kept under review, having regard to matters crossing local authority boundaries and in consultation with Highway Authorities.

5.128 It is acknowledged that the achievement of the Third Thames Crossing project would involve land outside of the borough within the administrative boundary of South Oxfordshire District where a potential bridge would be required to land. Safeguarding the route reflects the project being identified by Transport for South East. It is acknowledged that at present there is no deliverable proposal, and that further business case and assessment of impacts would need to be completed before any proposal could be considered.

5.129 Where applications for development within the safeguarded areas comes forward, an assessment will be undertaken of whether the proposals would prejudice identified projects including their consideration, construction, delivery and effective operation.

5.130 Any development proposal that may reasonably be considered to potentially impact an identified project must demonstrate how adverse impact will be avoided. Where necessary, careful consideration should be given to the relationship between the proposed development and the project in terms of design, and with regard to matters such as building layout, noise insulation, landscaping, the historic environment and means of access. Where adverse impacts cannot be avoided, the development proposal will not be supported.

Policy SS17: Transport improvements

1. The council will work with appropriate partners, stakeholders, and bodies to deliver the following ambitions where suitable and viable:

Active travel

- a) Measures which tackle severance and enhance active travel networks to improve access to services and facilities, particularly in town and village centres;
- b) Delivery of Greenways to link settlements, including proposed developments, and points of interest;
- c) Improvements to increase active travel, including new or enhanced infrastructure and measures that improve the safety and/or amenity of travel, having regard to relevant cycling and walking strategies as appropriate;
- d) Delivery of facilities that support the efficient shift between different active and sustainable transport modes;

Public transport

- e) Access improvements to train stations by active and sustainable modes of transport, as well as potential parking improvements where this is appropriate;
- f) Improvements to the Reading to London Paddington Great Western Mainline;
- g) Improvements to the Reading to London Waterloo line ;
- h) Support for western rail link to Heathrow Airport from Great Western Mainline;
- i) Support for southern rail link to Heathrow Airport from South West Mainline;
- j) Improvements to the quality and frequency of bus services along any part of the network, having regard to relevant strategies as appropriate;
- k) Improvements to bus infrastructure including priority measures as set out in the most up to date Bus Service Improvement Plan;
- l) Improvements to create transport hubs at appropriate locations, which may include provision or expansion of Park and Ride facilities;
- m) Measures to maintain the operation of the rail and road network during times of flooding;

Road network

- n) Opportunities to reduce traffic in defined settlements and centres within the retail hierarchy, potentially including diversion of traffic onto (new or existing) alternative routes;
- o) Targeted highway improvements to reduce congestion and tackle the adverse environmental impacts of traffic.

- 5.131 Policy SS17 supports in principle transport ambitions that will deliver active travel, public transport, and road network improvements. Specific improvements are set out in adopted strategies which include the Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan; Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan; Bus Service Improvement Plan; and Enhanced Partnership agreement. Development proposals will be expected to support these ambitions where relevant, as well those set out in subsequent transport strategies.

5.132 The listed ambitions include some that are less well developed in their nature or geographic location, some which are located outside the borough but might have a positive impact (e.g. Western Rail Link to Heathrow Airport) as well as some which do not require specific development upgrades within the borough to accommodate. To enable delivery of transport network improvements, there will be a need for on-going positive engagement with infrastructure providers throughout the plan period and a need for development proposals to make appropriate contributions to, or direct provision of, improvements where this is necessary and relevant to the proposal.

6

Climate Change and Energy

6. Climate Change and Energy

- 6.1 Under the Paris Agreement 2015, the UK is committed to following a decarbonisation pathway that aims to limit the global average temperature change. In June 2019, the UK passed legislation to revise the Climate Change Act target to an emissions reduction of at least 100% by 2050 ('net zero'). This importance of climate change is recognised in the legal duty set out in [Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004](#) (as amended by Section 182 of the Planning Act 2008) for Local Plans to include "*policies designed to secure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority's area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change*". Additionally, the NPPF lists adapting and mitigating to climate change as a core principle of sustainable development and recognises climate change as a strategic priority to be addressed by local plans.
- 6.2 Wokingham Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency on 18 July 2019. The declaration set out the commitment to play as full a role as possible, leading by example as well as by exhortation, in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030. Amongst other things, the motion committed the council to produce a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP).
- 6.3 The CEAP sets out baseline emissions data for the borough and lays out activities that the council intend to take towards the aim of carbon neutrality by 2030. Since the initial CEAP was published, four CEAP Progress Reports have been produced, detailing updates on each action and refining the specific targets. The CEAP has evolved, and will continue to, as work progresses.
- 6.4 The future growth of Wokingham Borough through new development has the potential to impose a large environmental footprint in terms of consumption of resources and materials, the use of energy and the associated emission of greenhouse gases that contribute towards climate change.
- 6.5 It is essential that development proposals utilise every opportunity to reduce carbon emissions that would otherwise arise to limit the extent of future climate change. The priorities for Wokingham Borough are to minimise the need to travel by private car and to improve the energy efficiency of buildings. This reflects the two largest areas of local carbon emissions.
- 6.6 Achieving the local target set in the CEAP of achieving a carbon neutral borough by 2030 and the national goal of net zero by 2050, will only be possible if significant changes are made to the way development is delivered, primarily through energy demand reduction measures and actions to promote sustainable modes of transport.

Policy CE1: Design principles for efficient buildings

1. Development proposals should adequately demonstrate the following design principles have been considered, in the order listed:
 - a) **Orientation of buildings** – positioning buildings to maximise opportunities for useful solar gain and minimising winter cold wind heat loss;
 - b) **Form of buildings** – creating buildings that are more efficient to heat and stay warm in colder conditions and stay cool in warmer conditions because of their shape and design;

- c) **Fabric of buildings** – a) minimising the operational impacts of development through use of materials and building techniques that reduce heat and energy needs and b) reducing the embodied impacts of development by specifying materials with a lower embodied carbon content and/or high practical recyclable content and designing for durability, adaptability and deconstruction;
- d) **Heat supply** – meeting a building’s space-heating needs without direct use of fossil fuels. This means no connection to the gas network or use of oil, bottled gas, coal or other fossil fuels; and
- e) **Renewable energy generation** – generating enough energy from renewable sources onsite (and preferably on plot) to meet reasonable estimates of all regulated and unregulated total annual energy demand across the year.

An Energy and Sustainability statement, as required by Policies CE2 and CE3, must set out all practical steps taken to meeting each of the above principles.

- 6.7 It is vital to ensure that development approved today will have a much-reduced energy demand compared to buildings which exist today, and, in doing so, stand the test of time and be fit for a net-zero carbon future. Clean growth is essential to meet future emission targets and to avoid costly retrofit programmes at a later date, recognising that it is significantly cheaper and easier to install energy efficiency and low carbon heating measures when new buildings are constructed than retrofitting them later.
- 6.8 New buildings must therefore be of the highest possible thermal efficiency. The expected energy use of such buildings must be as low as possible, with development proposals, as the final step, taking all practical and reasonable actions to generate low or zero carbon energy onsite, recognising that new buildings cannot continue to burn fossil fuels for heating if the Borough is to meet its local goals on emissions reduction or be aligned with national carbon budgets. Overall, those contemplating development proposals should follow the design principles for efficient buildings as part of the design process, as set out in Policy CE1 which follows the energy and cooling hierarchies as set out below.
- 6.9 The energy hierarchy states that the below steps should be followed in order:
- A. **Reduce the need for energy** – site layout and orientation of buildings can reduce the energy demand of buildings by capitalising on passive solar gain which utilises the energy from the sun to heat and provide light while avoiding unwanted thermal gains by effective use of solar shading;
 - B. **Use energy efficiently** – there are many measures available to ensure that buildings use energy efficiently. These include thermally efficient building elements, high levels of airtightness and insulation, and energy efficient appliances (light fittings etc);
 - C. **Supply energy efficiently** – by using existing supplies more efficiently, including taking opportunities to connect to any available local heat / cooling and/or power networks, greenhouse gas emissions can be significantly reduced (also termed low carbon sources) e.g. Combined Heat and Power (CHP) networks;
 - D. **Use renewable energy** – by incorporating technologies that obtain energy from flows that occur naturally and repeatedly in the environment, such as from the wind (wind turbines), the fall of water (hydroelectric), from the sun (photovoltaics), from the thermal energy in the ground (ground source heat) and from latent thermal energy in air and water (air source and water source heat respectively);

- E. **Monitor performance** – in order to ensure transparency around true building performance it is important that performance is monitored, verified and reported. As a minimum this should include recording energy example are strongly encouraged.
- 6.10 The RIBA Post Occupancy Evaluation and Building Performance Evaluation Primer is recommended as an introduction to performance monitoring for design teams. Development proposals satisfying BREEAM certification will be considered to have demonstrated monitoring of performance, with this being a requirement.
- 6.11 The cooling hierarchy states that the below steps should be followed in order to achieve buildings that are sustainable and avoid risk of overheating:
- a) **Minimise internal heat gains** through energy efficient design;
 - b) **Reduce unwanted solar gain** through orientation, shading, albedo, fenestration, insulation and proximity to green infrastructure;
 - c) **Stabilise internal temperature** through exposed internal thermal mass;
 - d) **Incorporate passive ventilation measures** such as stack and cross ventilation Incorporate mechanical ventilation (ideally with integrated heat recovery);
 - e) **Active cooling systems** should be considered as a last resort (ensuring they are the lowest carbon options) and be in conjunction/combination with (A) - (D)
- 6.12 Space heating provided through grid-electricity can be considered to be partially and increasingly decarbonised as an increasing proportion of national supply is provided from renewable sources. Space heating provided through on-site renewable sources can be considered to be fully decarbonised.
- 6.13 The more effort that is put into following steps a)-c) of Policy CE1 from the earliest design stages, the more reward can be achieved in the most cost-effective way, with only residual carbon reduction needing to be addressed through steps d) and e). When designing development proposals, thinking should not start at step d) or e) as this will be the least effective and most expensive options towards reducing carbon emissions. The National Design Guide (January 2021) provides some preliminary further guidance on the design principles set out above, and a number of other organisations such as LETI, TCPA, The Passivhaus Trust, UKGBC and BRE provide expertise and guidance. The LETI Climate Emergency Design Guide is highly recommended for accessible guidance for design teams.

Policy CE2: Environmental standards for non-residential development

Energy Standards

1. Non-residential development proposals involving new buildings must be supported by an Energy and Sustainability Statement which confirms that the proposals satisfy the following requirements:
 - a) The development proposal generates at least the same amount of renewable electricity on-site (and preferably on-plot) as it demands over the course of a year, such demand including all energy use (regulated and unregulated), calculated using a methodology proven to accurately predict a building's actual energy performance; and

- b) To help achieve point a) above, non-residential development proposals are expected to achieve a site average space heating demand of around 15-20kWh/m²/year and a site average total energy demand of no more than 70 kWh/m²/year through a 'fabric first' approach to construction. No individual unit is to have a total energy demand in excess of 90 kWh/m²/year, irrespective of amount of on-site renewable energy production. (For the avoidance of doubt, 'total energy demand' means the amount of energy used as measured by the metering of that building, with no deduction for renewable energy generated on site).
2. The Energy and Sustainability Statement must include details of assured performance arrangements, calculated using a methodology proven to accurately predict a building's true energy performance, such as CIBSE TM54 or the PHPP, against 1 a) and b) above. As a minimum, this will require:
 - a) The submission of 'pre-built' estimates of energy performance; and
 - b) Prior to each building being occupied, the submission of updated, accurate and verified 'as built' calculations of energy performance. Such a submission should also be provided to the first occupier (including a Non-Technical Summary of such estimates).
 3. Proposals should demonstrate a deliverable commitment to on-going monitoring of energy consumption, post occupation, which has the effect, when applicable, of notifying the occupier that their energy use appears to exceed significantly the expected performance of the building, and explaining to the occupier steps they could take to identify the potential causes of such high energy use.

Exceptional Basis Clauses

4. In those circumstances where 1 a) and/or b) are not met (though in all cases the energy performance arrangements of points 2 a) and b) are still required), the development must be considered against the following exception clauses:

- a) Clause 1 (technical or policy reasons):

Where, on an exceptional basis, points 1 a) and/or b) cannot be met for technical (e.g. overshadowing), other policy reasons (e.g. heritage), or other technical reason linked to the unique purpose of the building (e.g. a building that is, by the nature of its operation, an abnormally high user of energy), then the Energy and Sustainability Statement must demonstrate both why they cannot be met, and the degree to which each of points 1 a) and b) are proposed to be met. A lack of financial viability will not be deemed either a technical or policy reason to trigger this exceptional basis clause.

Where this exceptional basis clause is utilised, and where it the provision of a building or buildings where the floor space to be created by the development is 1,000 square metres or more, then the applicant must either:

- i. Enter into an appropriate legal agreement which will either provide renewable energy infrastructure offsite equivalent to at least offsetting the additional energy requirements not achieved on site; or

- ii. Enter into an appropriate legal agreement to provide a financial contribution to the council's carbon offset fund to enable the offsetting of the remaining performance not achieved on site; or
- iii. Demonstrate that the building/s will be connected to a decentralised energy network or combined heat and power unit.

b) Clause 2 (use of an accredited certification scheme):

To simplify (and hence speed up) the decision-making process, applicants are able to demonstrate, as an alternative to policy requirements 1 a) and b), that the development proposal achieves one of the following certifications:

- i. BREEAM: Outstanding or Excellent;
- ii. Passivhaus: Plus or Premium;
- iii. Passivhaus Classic, provided this is supplemented with evidence to demonstrate how point 1 of this policy will also be met; or
- iv. Any other recognised national independent accreditation scheme, provided such scheme is demonstrated to be consistent with the requirements of this policy.

c) Clause 3 (viability):

It is acknowledged that for development proposals on previously developed land, the full delivery of requirements 1 a) and b) may not be possible in some cases for viability reasons. Consequently, in such circumstances, an Energy and Sustainability Statement will still be required, and, if full delivery of requirements 1 a) and b) are not proposed to be met, must set out the degree to which the requirements are proposed to be met in order to enable the development to become viable.

Water standards

5. To minimise impact on the water environment, all non-residential development proposals must:

- a) Incorporate greywater recycling and rainwater harvesting measures, where practicable;
- b) Incorporate measures such as smart metering, water saving and recycling measures, including retrofitting, to help to achieve lower water consumption rates and to maximise future-proofing;
- c) Ensure external hard surfacing is permeable (unless there are technical and unavoidable reasons for not doing so in certain areas) thereby reducing energy demand on the water recycling network; and
- d) Consider the potential to incorporate a green roof and/or walls as part of wider sustainable water management.

Policy CE3: Environmental standards for residential development

Energy Standards

1. Residential development proposals involving new buildings must be supported by an Energy and Sustainability Statement which confirms that the proposals satisfy the following requirements:
 - a) The development proposal generates at least the same amount of renewable electricity on-site (and preferably on-plot) as it demands over the course of a year, such demand including all energy use (regulated and unregulated), calculated using a methodology proven to accurately predict a building's actual energy performance; and
 - b) To help achieve point 1 above, residential development is expected to achieve a site average space heating demand of around 15-20kWh/m²/year and a site average total energy demand of 35 kWh/m²/year, through a 'fabric first' approach to construction. No single dwelling is to have a total energy demand in excess of 60 kWh/m²/year, irrespective of amount of on-site renewable energy production. (For the avoidance of doubt, 'total energy demand' means the amount of energy used as measured by the metering of that home, with no deduction for renewable energy generated on site).
2. The Energy and Sustainability Statement must include details of assured performance arrangements, calculated using a methodology proven to accurately predict a buildings true energy performance, such as CIBSE TM54 or the PHPP, against 1 a) and b) above. As a minimum, this will require:
 - a) The submission of 'pre-built' estimates of energy performance; and
 - b) Prior to each dwelling being occupied, the submission of updated, accurate and verified 'as built' calculations of energy performance. Such a submission should also be provided to the first occupier (including a Non-Technical Summary of such estimates).
3. Proposals should demonstrate a deliverable commitment to on-going monitoring of energy consumption, post-occupation, which has the effect, when applicable, of notifying the occupier that their energy use appears to significantly exceed the expected performance of the building, and explaining to the occupier steps they could take to identify the potential causes of such high energy use.

Exceptional Basis Clauses

4. In those circumstances where 1 a) and/or b) are not met (though in all cases the energy performance arrangements of points 2 a) and b) are still required), the development must be considered against the following exception clauses:
 - a) Clause 1 (technical or policy reasons):

Where, on an exceptional basis, points 1 a) and/or b) cannot be met for technical (e.g. overshadowing) or other policy reasons (e.g. heritage), then the Energy and Sustainability Statement must demonstrate both why they cannot be met, and

the degree to which each of points 1 a) and b) are proposed to be met. A lack of financial viability will not be deemed either a technical or policy reason to trigger this exceptional basis clause.

Where Clause 1 is utilised, and where the proposal is of 10 or more homes, then the applicant must either:

- i. Enter into an appropriate legal agreement which will either provide renewable energy infrastructure offsite equivalent to at least offsetting the additional energy requirements not achieved on site; or
- ii. Enter into an appropriate legal agreement to provide a financial contribution to the council's carbon offset fund to enable the offsetting of the remaining performance not achieved on site; or
- iii. Demonstrate that the residential units will be connected to a decentralised energy network or combined heat and power unit.

b) Clause 2 (use of accreditation certification scheme):

To simplify (and hence speed up) the decision-making process, applicants are able to demonstrate that they have met the requirements of points 1 a) and b) if they provide certified demonstration of compliance that the development proposal achieved one of the following certifications:

- i. Passivhaus Plus or Premium; or
- ii. Passivhaus Classic, provided this is supplemented with evidence to demonstrate how point 1 of this policy will also be met;
- iii. Home Quality Mark; or
- iv. Any other recognised national independent accreditation scheme, provided such scheme is demonstrated to be consistent with the requirements of this policy.

c) Clause 3 (viability):

it is acknowledged that for development proposals on previously developed land the full delivery of requirements 1 a) and b) in this policy may not be possible in some cases for viability reasons. Consequently, in such circumstances, an Energy and Sustainability Statement will still be required, and, if full delivery of requirements 1 a) and b) are not proposed to be met, must set out the degree to which the requirements are proposed to be met in order to enable the development to become viable.

Water standards

5. To minimise impact on the water environment, all residential development proposals must:

- a) Meet the higher water efficiency standard of 105 litres or less per person per day (excluding allowance of up to five litres for external water consumption). Development proposals which go further than this (to, for example, 85 litres per day per person) are encouraged.

- b) Incorporate greywater recycling and rainwater harvesting measures, where practicable;
- c) Incorporate measures such as smart metering, water saving and recycling measures, including retrofitting, to help to achieve lower water consumption rates and to maximise future-proofing;
- d) Ensure external hard surfacing is permeable (unless there are technical and unavoidable reasons for not doing so in certain areas) thereby reducing energy demand on the water recycling network;
- e) Consider the potential to incorporate a green roof and/or walls as part of wider sustainable water management; and
- f) Ensure, where possible, that residential garden areas include a rain harvesting water butt(s) of minimum 100 litre capacity.

- 6.14 To achieve local and national carbon reduction targets, reducing energy demand from development must be prioritised. Nationally, improvements to the energy efficiency of buildings is proposed through what is described as the Future Homes Standard and Future Buildings Standard which form part of the UK Building Regulations. While interim measures are currently in place, the full standards have yet to take effect. The council wishes to go further, faster, believing this is necessary and demonstrably achievable.
- 6.15 Policies CE2 and CE3 seek to secure net zero development, where net zero is defined as “a scenario in which the quantity of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions arising from the development’s operational energy use on an annual basis is zero or negative, and where whole-life emissions are reduced through sustainable design measures.”
- 6.16 The requirement for new development to generate the same amount of renewable energy as it demands each year is targeted to significantly reduce the net carbon emissions arising from operating buildings.
- 6.17 As explained in under Policy CE1, the need to reduce the demand for energy through implementation of the energy hierarchy before balancing the residual remand through on-site renewables is critical. This ensures that a building’s fabric performance remains the primary means of reducing energy consumption, avoiding the need for costly retrofitting, and contributing to the buildings’ climate resilience.
- 6.18 All proposals for new buildings are required to be supported by an Energy and Sustainability Statement. As a minimum, this should include:
- Evidence of how the design principles defined in Policy CE1 have informed the design;
 - Evidence of how the Energy Hierarchy has informed the design; and
 - Evidence of how the Cooling Hierarchy has informed the design.
- 6.19 Additionally, the Energy and Sustainability Statement must demonstrate how the relevant energy standards for either non-residential (Policy CE2) or residential development (Policy CE3) will be complied with, including accurate and verified ‘as built’ calculations of energy performance. Modelled energy performance should be updated to reflect the impacts of the detailed design stage, and an updated ‘as built’ version of this calculation should be provided at such time as it becomes available, prior to the first occupation of each building.

- 6.20 If any Exceptional Basis Clause is intended to be used, the Energy and Sustainability Statement must clearly demonstrate why the full requirements of Policy CE2 or Policy CE3 as relevant cannot be complied with, the degree to which the policy requirements can be met and the intended mechanism for satisfying the requirements of the chosen clause.
- 6.21 Space heating demand is an effective way to assess the performance of building fabric since it is directly related to thermal performance. Space heating demand is defined as “the energy per m² habitable area which is needed to maintain a comfortable internal temperature over an annual period.” Both space heating demand and total energy demand are measured in kwh/m²/year.
- 6.22 The requirement for new buildings to target an average space heating demand of 15-20 kwh/m²/year reflects industry best practice guidance such as the LETI Climate Emergency Design Guide which lists a space heating demand of 15 kwh/m²/year as a key performance indicator for operational energy across all building types. Additionally, Passivhaus buildings typically have a space heating demand of 15 kwh/m²/year or less.
- 6.23 The requirement for a site average energy demand of 70 kwh/m²/year for non-residential development and 35 kwh/m²/year for homes are also reflective of industry best practice guidance. For reference, the LETI Climate Emergency Design Guide recommends an energy demand of 65 kwh/m²/year for schools, 55 kwh/m²/year for offices and 35 kwh/m²/year for homes. These levels of energy demand will ensure that covering any residual demand through on-site renewable energy generation is feasible in the majority of cases. Exceptional basis clauses are provided to cover those situations where a variation to this requirement may be permissible.
- 6.24 The need to capture data on how buildings perform through ‘pre-built’ and ‘as-built’ modelling relates to the fact that actual thermal performance and energy demand are poorer than indicated in pre-construction modelling in the majority of cases. This issue is known as the energy performance gap, and it can cause higher than expected energy costs and higher than anticipated carbon emissions relating to building operation. Submission of ‘as-built’ modelling serves to encourage quality control in construction, which can help to close this gap. Commitment to ongoing monitoring and reporting of building performance is strongly encouraged, to provide valuable data to building operators.
- 6.25 BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) is a system based on credits gained by aligning a project with holistic sustainability criteria using UK and European Standards. It is administered by the Building Research Establishment (BRE). Specific BREEAM frameworks for different types of project and certifiable scores range from Pass to Outstanding. The more credits gained, the better the score. BREEAM is carried out by certified assessors; certification does not require in-house expertise in design teams.
- 6.26 Passivhaus is an accreditation framework administered in the UK by The Passivhaus Trust, based on a simple, spreadsheet-based tool: The Passivhaus Planning Package (PHPP). The standard certifies a building’s fabric efficiency and can be applied to homes, schools, leisure centres and other building types. Schemes build to the standard will be highly insulated, airtight and demand little energy to run (a saving of 90% compared with standard construction, and 75% compared with modern, energy efficient construction). Passivhaus standard buildings typically perform as modelled, meaning they avoid the energy performance gap.
- 6.27 Energy produced close to the location where it will be used is known as decentralised energy. Decentralised energy supply incurs less wastage compared with centralised supply. The improved efficiency and potential for low and zero carbon origin energy means that local energy networks and

district heat networks, for example, have important roles in decarbonising operational energy from the built environment. Creation of and connection to decentralised energy networks is therefore encouraged.

- 6.28 Reducing the demand for the supply and disposal of water has an impact on the water consumption of a building as well as its operational carbon footprint. For example, Water UK estimates that for every 100 litres water butt that is filled and used for garden watering in place of mains water, 79g of carbon dioxide is saved.
- 6.29 Through Part G of the Building Regulations all developments are required to achieve a mandatory standard of 125 litres per person per day. The optional technical standards for housing allows local authorities to apply a higher standard of 110 litres per person per day where there is a clear local need. This includes a fixed factor of water for outdoor use of 5 litres per person per day. Wokingham Borough is identified as being within an area of serious water stress and so this optional standard is required.

Policy CE4: Supporting a circular economy

1. In order to understand and reduce the lifecycle impacts of development, development proposals which demonstrate compatibility with, or furthering of, a strong circular economy in the local area will be supported in line with wider sustainable development objectives.
2. Residential development proposals of 10 dwellings or more, or non-residential development proposals of 1,000 m² or greater gross internal area, will be required to submit a circular economy strategy as part of the Energy and Sustainability Statement. Where the development proposal includes the demolition of existing buildings or structures, the circular economy strategy should include a pre-demolition audit quantifying the material to be deconstructed and identifying suitable recovery routes.

- 6.30 A circular economy is one which focuses on the minimisation of waste through designing for durability, adaptability, reuse and recycling. It is a direct contrast to the past model of 'make, use and dispose' method of construction which produces negative impacts including greenhouse gas emissions, pressure for landfill, unsustainable levels of water and material extraction, and pollution.
- 6.31 The council wishes to support a circular economy through designing for durability, adaptability and longevity, and the use of recycling, reusing, repairing and sharing.
- 6.32 In order to comply with Policy CE4, residential development proposals of 10 dwellings or more and non-residential development proposals of 1,000 m² or greater gross internal area, will be required to submit a circular economy strategy as part of their Energy and Sustainability Statement, providing evidence of how the circular economy principles have informed the design.
- 6.33 Circular economy strategies should outline how the following circular economy principles have been considered and incorporated from concept design stage onwards:
- Reducing the need for demolition by reusing existing structures wherever possible and fully justifying any residual demolition proposed;

- Identifying local opportunities for material recovery that contribute to minimising the proportion of construction waste sent to landfill;
- Identifying local opportunities for development proposals to specify reclaimed and recycled materials;
- Identifying opportunities to specify materials that are locally produced to reduce transport impacts;
- Identifying opportunities to specify materials which contribute to regeneration of natural systems;
- Design for adaptability, ease of maintenance and durability at all scales; and
- Design for deconstruction with minimal waste.

6.34 Development proposals which do not meet the threshold where circular economy strategies are required, but which address the above measures through their Energy and Sustainability Statement, are welcomed.

6.35 Circular economy strategies and pre-demolition audits should be produced following best practice guidance such as the BRE SMARTWASTE Code of Practice: Pre-redevelopment Audits. UKGBC's guidance document Circular Economy: How To Guide is strongly recommended to support in the preparation of circular economy strategies.

6.36 It is recognised that avoiding disposal to landfill will not be achievable in many instances. Policy CE4 introduces an aspirational element to encourage environmentally responsible construction and sites alongside other policy requirements such as those promoting the harvesting and recycling of rainwater; the integration of renewable energy technologies or sustainable modes of transport – that equally embody the principles of circularity. It should be applied in conjunction with those policies as well as relevant policies in the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals & Waste Plan or any successor strategy.

Policy CE5: Embodied carbon

1. Development proposals should, where practical and viable, take opportunities to reduce the development's embodied carbon content, through the careful choice, use and sourcing of materials. Sustainability statements submitted in support of applications should detail how the need to reduce embodied carbon has influenced the design.
2. Residential development proposals of 50 dwellings or more, or non-residential development proposals of 5,000 m² or more gross internal area, will be required to submit a whole-life carbon assessments through a nationally recognised Whole Life-Cycle Carbon Assessment methodology and demonstrate actions taken to reduce life-cycle carbon emissions. This should explicitly set out what opportunities to lower a building's embodied carbon content have been considered, and which opportunities, if any, are to be taken forward.

Demolition

3. To avoid the wastage of embodied carbon in existing buildings and avoid the creation of new embodied carbon in replacement buildings, there is a presumption in favour of repairing, refurbishing, re-using and re-purposing existing buildings over their demolition. Development proposals that would result in the demolition of a building (in whole or a

significant part) should be accompanied by a full justification for the demolition per the requirements of Policy CE4: Supporting a circular economy.

Demolition will only be acceptable where it is demonstrated that:

- a) The building proposed for demolition is in a state of such disrepair that it is not practical or viable to be repaired, refurbished, re-used, or re-purposed; or
 - b) Repairing, refurbishing, re-using, or re-purposing the building would likely result in similar or higher up-front embodied carbon cost than if the building is demolished and a new building is constructed; or
 - c) Repairing, refurbishing, re-using, or re-purposing the building would create a building with such poor fabric performance that on a whole-life basis (i.e. considering embodied and operational emissions) a lower net carbon solution would result from demolition and re-build; or
 - d) Demolition of the building and construction of a new building or space would demonstrably deliver significant public benefits that outweigh the carbon savings which would arise from the building being repaired, refurbished, re-used, or re-purposed.
4. Applications within the countryside relating to the re-use or conversion of existing buildings will only be acceptable where they also meet the requirements of Policy SS5 or ER3 as applicable.

- 6.37 A significant proportion of a building's lifetime carbon and other GHG emissions is locked up in its fabric and systems. The UK Green Building Council estimate that around 30% of total GHG emissions arising from the built environment are embodied emissions, meaning they are generated by extraction, transport and manufacture processes that happen before a building is first occupied.
- 6.38 This proportion will increase as operational emissions decrease through more stringent energy efficiency targets and energy grid decarbonisation. It is therefore critical to address embodied emissions as part of the overall consideration of sustainable development.
- 6.39 There are many ways in which emissions arising from construction of buildings can be reduced, such as through use of recycled, local and low-impact materials, by choosing low impact construction methods such as off-site fabrication and by using appropriate design to minimise the need for the most impactful processes.
- 6.40 In order to comply with Policy CE5, all development must demonstrate how the need to consider and reduce embodied greenhouse gas emissions has informed the design. Evidence that embodied impacts have been considered in the specification and design of buildings by identifying local supply chains, committing to reuse parts of demolished structures or recycled materials and specifying materials with low Global Warming Potential (GWP) is encouraged.
- 6.41 Residential development proposals of 50 dwellings or more, or non-residential development proposals of 5,000 m² or greater gross internal area, will be required to submit a whole-life carbon assessments through a nationally recognised Whole Life-Cycle Carbon Assessment (WLCA) methodology and demonstrate actions taken to reduce life-cycle carbon emissions. WLCAs should be appended to the Energy and Sustainability Statements and may be referenced within the Energy and Sustainability Statement when explaining the approach to reducing whole-life impacts of development. This requirement is introduced to encourage consideration of the embodied emissions

from the earliest design stage. These assessments are carried out by independent professionals and account for embodied and operational impacts over the life of a building. No limit on the rate of global warming potential (GWP) per m² is proposed at this stage however it is anticipated that this will be introduced in future.

- 6.42 Where demolition is proposed, the Energy and Sustainability Statements must demonstrate that one or more of the criteria for acceptable demolition defined in Policy CE5 is met. This should be supported by an appended pre-demolition audit, where relevant, in order to comply with Policy CE4.

Policy CE6: Reducing energy consumption in existing buildings

1. Development proposals which would result in improvements to the energy efficiency, carbon emissions and/or general suitability, condition and longevity of existing buildings will be supported in principle, with weight attributed to measures in proportion to the scale of improvement in fabric performance.
2. The sensitive retrofitting of energy efficiency measures and the appropriate use of micro-renewables in historic buildings, including listed buildings and buildings within conservation areas will be supported, providing no unacceptable impact to the significance of the heritage asset.
3. Development proposals which involve the change of use or redevelopment of an existing building, or an extension to an existing building, should take all opportunities to improve the energy efficiency (including the original building, if it is being extended).

- 6.43 Whilst many new homes and commercial buildings are expected to be built in Wokingham Borough over the plan period, the vast majority of buildings that will be occupied in 2040 will be those built in earlier times when energy and performance standards were much lower than at present. Existing domestic buildings contribute around 47.7% of Wokingham Borough's carbon dioxide emissions, whilst existing non-domestic buildings contribute around 21.1%. Retrofitting the existing building stock therefore presents a significant opportunity to help meet the 2030 carbon neutrality target set by the CEAP. Reducing the emissions of existing buildings is also essential to enable the UK to achieve its legally binding emissions targets.

- 6.44 It is recognised that many improvements or alterations to existing buildings will not require planning permission. However, where permission is required, development proposals which do consider and take such viable opportunities will be supported in principle, subject to other material considerations. In particular, residential properties which, following an extension or conversion, will achieve improvements in the metrics of energy use intensity, space heating demand and water heating demand will be welcomed. To gain this in principle support, pre-development performance should be detailed as part of the application, together with evidence of modelled performance of the completed development.

- 6.45 Retrofit development is encouraged to be fossil-fuel free and incorporate on-site renewable energy generation. Retrofit development which demonstrates best practice energy standards will be viewed as significantly beneficial. Best practice standards are considered to be an energy use intensity of 50kwh/m²/yr, space heating demand of 50kwh/m²/yr and water heating demand of

20kwh/m²/yr as outlined in the LETI *Climate Emergency Retrofit Guide*. This guide and the associated primer are strongly recommended.

- 6.46 Another useful tool is PAS 2035:2019 *Retrofitting Dwellings for Improved Energy Efficiency: Specifications and Guidance*. Targeted at existing homes (rather than new development, or home extensions) it is a key document in a framework of new and existing standards on how to conduct effective energy retrofits of existing buildings. It covers how to assess dwellings for retrofit, identify improvement options, design and specify Energy Efficiency Measures and monitor retrofit projects. To assist the assessment process, the use of this tool or other recognised existing assessment methods, is encouraged.

Policy CE7: Low carbon and renewable energy generation

Energy generation schemes

1. Development proposals for new standalone low carbon and renewable energy generation schemes and associated infrastructure, or extensions to existing schemes, will be supported where:
 - a) They are of an appropriate size and scale, and do not give rise to unacceptable impacts on landscape, biodiversity, agricultural land quality and food production, heritage assets, and the character of the area;
 - b) There are no unacceptable impacts on residential amenity, or the amenity of other sensitive neighbouring uses, by virtue of matters including noise, vibration, overshadowing, or shadow flicker;
 - c) They demonstrate that a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain will be achieved through the development actions; and
 - d) Where relevant, they include a satisfactory scheme to restore the site to a quality of at least its original condition once operations have ceased. Where necessary, this will be secured by bond, legal agreement, or condition.

Adverse effects will be weighed against the wider environmental, economic, social and community benefits provided by the proposal. In this regard, and as part of the planning balance, significant additional weight in favour of the proposal will arise for any proposal which is community-led for the benefit of that community.

End of life removal

2. Development proposals will be required to make satisfactory provision for removal through the preparation of an 'End of Life Removal Scheme'. A scheme should demonstrate how any biodiversity net gain that has arisen on the site will be protected or enhanced further, and how the materials to be removed would, to a practical degree, be re-used or recycled. The scheme should be implemented within one year of the facility becoming non-operational.

- 6.47 The generation and use of energy from low carbon and renewable sources reduces demand for fossil fuels, thus reducing harmful greenhouse gas emissions, as well as leading to other benefits which

include employment opportunities, energy security, climate change resilience and potential cost savings for consumers.

- 6.48 Due to the benefits low carbon and renewable energy generation brings to tackling climate change, and meeting the CEAP targets, such development proposals will be supported unless there are significant unacceptable impacts that outweigh the benefits. Applications for low carbon and renewable energy generation may include solar farms, wind turbines, hydro-power, biomass, district heating, combined heat and power (CHP) from renewable resources and others.
- 6.49 To assist in the consideration of areas which may be suitable for renewable energy, the Local Plan Update Climate Change Evidence Base (2022) produced by Arup, includes an assessment of future renewable energy capacity in the borough. Whilst local wind speeds were found to be insufficient for wind generation, the study identified broad areas which may be suitable for ground mounted solar PV as well as areas with sufficient heat density to support potential heat networks.
- 6.50 The council encourages proposals for low carbon and renewable energy generation that are led by, or meet specific needs of, local communities. Neighbourhood planning can be a useful mechanism to achieve community led renewable energy schemes and consequently groups preparing neighbourhood development plans are encouraged to identify and allocate suitable sites.
- 6.51 To ensure that the benefits are not outweighed by the impact of transportation, development proposals for biomass infrastructure will only be supported where there is a local and adequate source of material, and local arrangements are also in place for the disposal of ash.

Policy CE8: Protecting low carbon and renewable energy infrastructure

1. Development proposals should not significantly harm:
 - a) The technical performance of any existing or approved low carbon or renewable energy generation installation;
 - b) The potential for optimisation of strategic low carbon or renewable energy installations; and
 - c) The availability of the resource, where the operation is dependent on uninterrupted flow of energy to the installation.

- 6.52 In addition to supporting the development of new renewable and low carbon energy schemes and installations, the need to protect existing or planned schemes must also be recognised. Policy CE8 aims to safeguard such installations to ensure that their benefits to the environment and users (e.g. low carbon energy generation and reduced heating bills) can continue.

7

Connections

7. Connections

- 7.1 The planning system has a vital role to play in creating places that are well connected, which offer reliable access to services and facilities, reduce the need to travel, and which ensure, where travel is necessary, that there is a choice of active and sustainable transport modes. It must also consider and mitigate the impacts of new development on the transport network.
- 7.2 To promote healthier lifestyles and to reduce the dominance of private cars in terms of traffic and congestion, the Local Plan Update spatial strategy promotes a sustainable pattern of development which maximises opportunities for undertaking trips by active means, (including walking, cycling, and wheeling) and by public transport, within the wider context and qualities of the borough.
- 7.3 Embracing and planning for smart and innovative technologies will make it easier to adopt new opportunities as they arise to further reduce the impact of travel.

Policy C1: Active and sustainable transport and accessibility

1. Development proposals must support the delivery of active and sustainable transport measures.
2. Development proposals should prioritise travel by active means (including walking, cycling and wheeling), public transport, and incorporate inclusive infrastructure which provides connections to and within the development. This should focus on making the most efficient use of existing highway, including, where appropriate, reallocation of space to more sustainable modes.
3. Development proposals should support the increased uptake of electric and zero emissions vehicles, in accordance with Policies C4 and C5.
4. Development proposals must contribute to the delivery of an integrated transport system that is safe and accessible to all by implementing a proportionate package of measures that:
 - a) Ensure development is located where people of all ages and level of physical ability are able, or will be able, to access a wide range of essential social, community, and cultural facilities;
 - b) Optimise accessibility and connectivity both within the proposed development and in the surrounding area, which includes having regard to schemes identified in cycling and walking strategies;
 - c) Make active travel (including walking, cycling and wheeling) the mode of choice for shorter journeys, both within and outside the site, including safe and attractive links to new and existing facilities, services, bus stops, train stations and existing non-motorised routes;

- d) Ensure buildings and spaces are inclusively designed to be legible and permeable for all, and provide for the delivery of, and improvement to, walking and cycling routes that serve the site, the wider area and adjoining development parcels;
- e) Reduce reliance on single occupancy car trips and prioritise and increase the use of sustainable transport modes;
- f) Maximise opportunities to provide improved and viable public and community transport and other mobility services and routes, including through active engagement with providers as appropriate;
- g) Maximise integration of, and interchange between, sustainable transport modes;
- h) Embrace opportunities to minimise congestion and delay, as part of an effective strategy to manage harmful emissions and improve air quality; and
- i) Facilitate transport innovations and solutions which reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Development proposals should show how they have met criteria 4a) to 4i) above and, where appropriate, demonstrate how they support the objectives and policies of the most up to Local Transport Plan (and its supplementary and supporting strategies) or any successor strategy.

- 7.4 The NPPF states that transport issues should be considered at the earliest stage of development proposals, so that the potential impact on transport networks can be addressed; that opportunities from existing and proposed infrastructure are realised; that opportunities to improve walking, cycling and public transport are identified and pursued; the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure are addressed; and that transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes.
- 7.5 The Local Plan Update aims to deliver development that is people focused, rather than vehicle focused. At all stages, development proposals should consider the requirement of reducing the need to travel and, where possible, ensuring that services and facilities are located within an acceptable walking and cycling distance of new places of employment or residences. The overall spatial strategy of the Local Plan Update and Policy C1 are predicated on locating development where most people will be able to access a wide range of services and facilities by active, non-motorised means, including walking and cycling.
- 7.6 Enabling communities to access the things they need to live locally, reducing their need to travel, and providing for increased active and sustainable travel, enables the delivery of sustainable development which is consistent with the concept of '20-minute neighbourhoods'. Associated benefits of achieving these aims are supporting improved health and wellbeing, and contributing towards decarbonising transport systems which is essential in addressing the climate emergency and achieving net zero carbon by 2030.
- 7.7 The council's Local Transport Plan (LTP) sets out the overall strategy and delivery arrangements for transport across the borough. Its supporting documents include the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The council actively seeks to further develop active travel networks to encourage more travel by sustainable modes. In accordance with Policy C1 b), cycling and walking strategies include the LCWIP and Greenways Strategy, should be considered in devising development proposals. The LCWIP identifies specific walking and cycling improvements on key corridors. Adding to these networks and ensuring suitable access to these

networks will also need to be considered. With particular reference to walking and cycling the LTN 1/20 design standard should be met where possible. The council have also partnered with Reading Borough Council and West Berkshire District Council in the development of a LCWIP for the wider Reading urban area. The LCWIPs will be used to inform the council's own future investment.

- 7.8 Wokingham Borough has one of the highest car ownership rates in England. Delivering developments which offer a range of high quality and easily accessible transport choices is essential to facilitate modal shift and reduce reliance on private cars and associated congestion and environmental impacts. The layout of proposed development should prioritise pedestrians and cyclists and enable them to move easily between places both within and beyond the site. Particular regard should be made to links to train stations and bus stops, local shops and community facilities, including schools and community/leisure and education facilities.
- 7.9 Developments where public transport services are infrequent are likely to struggle to meet sustainable mode shares, and development proposals should demonstrate a range of options have been to make these viable and attractive in the long-term. Enhancement of public transport provision could include increased frequencies and improved integration between bus and rail routes together with the provision of new stops or routes. The council expects proposals to contribute towards solutions which enhance the sustainability of the site together with the location generally.
- 7.10 For the purpose of this plan, good public transport services are those that meet the following requirements:
- At least a thirty-minute service frequency during the period 7:00 to 19:00 Monday to Saturday; and
 - At least an hourly service frequency, but ideally a thirty-minute frequency, between 7:00 and 22:00 on Sundays and outside the above hours.
- 7.11 People proposing development proposals are expected to consider the reliability of services and, where appropriate, provide infrastructure which will improve journey times and reliability. Mitigation through public transport should aim to be commercially viable in the long term.
- 7.12 The council is committed to promoting transport innovations, encompassing varied initiatives and interventions, like autonomous vehicles, electric vehicles and associated charging infrastructure, mobility hubs, bike sharing or car clubs, etc. There will be advances in technology over the course of the plan period and development proposals are encouraged to explore and evidence how new technologies and ideas can contribute to the sustainability of schemes in an achievable and viable way.

Policy C2: Mitigation of transport impacts and highways safety and design

1. Development proposals must fully assess the transport impacts of the development and provide for appropriate mitigation to minimise the adverse effects. Specifically, development proposals are required to:

- a) Ensure that any material adverse impacts on existing and forecast traffic conditions are mitigated;
- b) Provide, or make reasonable contributions towards providing, the transport infrastructure necessary to address the needs arising from the proposal, having regard to the cumulative impacts of development, secured either as a requirement of planning conditions or by the payment of financial contributions through planning obligations, and/or the Community Infrastructure Levy;
- c) Prepare and submit Transport Assessments or Statements alongside development proposals in accordance with the council's Local Validation requirements; and
- d) Implement measures to promote and improve sustainable travel through agreed travel plans or through making an appropriate contribution to the borough wide My Journey initiative or any successor scheme. Travel plans should include appropriate monitoring to ensure targets are met.

2. With regards to highways safety and design, all development proposals must implement a proportionate package of measures that:

- a) Ensure safe and suitable access to the site for all users;
- b) Contribute towards a high quality public realm designed in accordance with Living Streets (or any successor document), user access hierarchy and demonstrate how the relevant principles of Healthy Streets have been incorporated;
- c) Prioritise pedestrian, cycling and sustainable transport in accordance with Policy C1;
- d) Design roads to optimise traffic flows to avoid adverse environmental impacts; and
- e) Provide effective, convenient and safe delivery, collection, servicing and refuse, and recycling collection arrangements.

Proposals for new roads should be tracked for larger vehicles and, if served by bus routes, would need to accommodate bus stop infrastructure to an agreed standard with the local highway authority.

- 7.13 The predicted level of development in Wokingham Borough can only be accommodated through major investment in transport, particularly sustainable modes. New development should make appropriate provision for works that contribute to the programmes developed as part of the Local Plan Update and the Local Transport Plan strategy, either directly or through making appropriate contributions.
- 7.14 All development proposals will be assessed for their impact upon the transport network, including the local and trunk road and motorway networks and, where relevant, the rail network. Development proposals should provide mitigation measures in line with their impacts on these networks, taking account of levels of development that have already been accepted, and mitigation measures that have already been agreed or implemented.
- 7.15 Planning permission will not be granted unless all transport improvements considered necessary to overcome any adverse impacts of the development can be secured by planning agreement, planning conditions or an undertaking given by the developer that they will be implemented as part of the development.

- 7.16 Travel Plans must be submitted for all major development proposals and any schemes likely to impact on the local highway network. The content and scope for the Travel Plan will be negotiated between the council and the developer on a case-by-case basis, taking account of the specific location and nature of the proposed development. Travel Plans should include robust measures to ensure that the proposals in them are implemented, monitored and reviewed as necessary. The council may pursue further mitigation via Section 106, if targets are not met or plans are not carried out as agreed in the Travel Plan.
- 7.17 The council's My Journey initiative is a borough-wide sustainable travel awareness initiative which encourages residents and employees to consider and make use of the various travel options available to them for local journeys. The initiative works closely with community groups, businesses and schools to provide advice and guidance to tailor programmes to match the needs to the organisation. In lieu of a site-specific travel plan, financial contributions towards the My Journey initiative, or any successor scheme, are acceptable as an alternative way of ensuring sustainable modes of transport are considered in development proposals.
- 7.18 The highway layout of all new developments is expected to follow the key principles to highways design set out in the *Living Streets: A Highways Guide for Developers in Wokingham* or any successor document. These layouts should be compliant with the philosophy of *Manual for Streets* (DfT, 2007c) and *Manual for Streets 2* (CIHT, 2010) by creating quality places that are fully accessible by all modes of transport.
- 7.19 All development proposals should follow the user access hierarchy, whatever the size of the development. This hierarchy essentially prioritises the needs of pedestrians and cyclists first, then public transport, and then lastly motor traffic. The hierarchy is as follows:
- 1st Pedestrians (including provision for people with mobility and visual impairments);
 - 2nd Cyclists;
 - 3rd Public & shared transport;
 - 4th Freight and specialist service vehicles (emergency services and waste collection);
 - 5th Electric vehicles and car sharing;
 - 6th Diesel and petrol vehicles.
- 7.20 The council endorses the *Healthy Streets* approach, developed by Transport for London, which is based on 10 key indicators. Developments proposals must demonstrate how street layouts and public realm satisfy the indicators. Schemes that perform well against these indicators are considered by definition to have streets that are well designed. The indicators are as follows:
- Pedestrians from all walks of life;
 - People choose to travel by active means (including walking and cycling) and use public transport;
 - Clean air;
 - People feel safe;
 - Not too noisy;
 - Easy to cross;
 - Places to stop and rest;
 - Shade and shelter;

- People feel relaxed;
- Things to see and do.

7.21 To ensure the free flow of traffic, roads should be designed to avoid queuing and congestion as much as is practicable. This includes locating underground infrastructure outside the main carriageway, allowing it to be served without closing part of the road, and minimising the number of points where utilities cross the carriageway in accordance with Policy SS15.

Policy C3: Active travel

1. Development proposals must promote sustainable transport by prioritising active travel, including walking, wheeling, and cycling.

Walking and Wheeling

2. Development proposals should:
 - a) Prioritise and improve the pedestrian environment and contribute towards achieving a high-quality public realm, including the provision of facilities for pedestrians to rest and relax (including seating) and high-quality and safe road environment (including safe crossings, where needed).
 - b) Be permeable, easy and safe to walk and wheel through, and enhance existing routes which are adequately lit, create step-free legible access and entrance points whilst providing direct links to other pedestrian movement corridors.
 - c) Avoid severance and, where necessary, provide for routes and crossings close to desire lines, particularly those to everyday facilities.
 - d) Maintain and enhance walking and wheeling routes identified in the most up to date walking and cycling strategy and create high quality links to connect to these routes where appropriate.
 - e) Provide or contribute towards improved wayfinding, including signposted links to key infrastructure, public transport hubs, green spaces, Green Routes and Greenways networks, where appropriate.
 - f) Consider the needs of all users through inclusive design.

Cycling

3. Development proposals should:

- a) Contribute towards the improvement of the public realm to support cycling, including the provision of facilities to support cyclists. Care should be taken to ensure the safety of cyclists and avoid conflict with other users of the public realm;
- b) Maintain and enhance the quality of cycle routes as appropriate, including those identified in the most up-to-date walking and cycling strategy, as well as maximising opportunities to add to or extend these, in order to support a high quality integrated cycle network;
- c) Provide supporting facilities including pick-up points, secure and sheltered cycle parking (for both occupiers and visitors), electric bike charging facilities, and shower, changing and storage facilities to support target mode shares as appropriate;
- d) Provide or contribute towards, improved wayfinding, including signposted links to key infrastructure, public transport hubs, green spaces, Green Routes and Greenways networks, where appropriate; and
- e) Consider the needs of all users through inclusive design.

- 7.22 Walking, cycling and wheeling – which refers to anyone using a wheelchair or a pushchair as well as those travelling on a scooter (excluding e-scooters) – are among the cheapest, most inclusive forms of transport and can have wide ranging benefits, from reducing congestion and pollution from exhaust emissions, to contributing to the improved health and physical fitness of the population and reduced loneliness. They can also play an important role in multimodal journeys in combination with other sustainable travel modes, such as bus and rail services.
- 7.23 Whilst walking and cycling tend to dominate functional travel demands, other forms of active travel serve an important leisure function in supporting healthy lifestyles. Walking and cycling infrastructure is generally capable of meeting the scooter and running needs of communities.
- 7.24 The council will continue to improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists through a variety of measures including the development of the cycle network, upgrading public realm, reducing severance and improvements to junctions and the introduction of traffic calming. In accordance with Policy C2 and the user access hierarchy, new roads and junctions must show how pedestrians and cyclists are prioritised over vehicular traffic, taking into account national guidance. Where it is appropriate and achievable, improvements to existing junctions should include increased pedestrian and cyclist priority.
- 7.25 The ability to travel using active forms of transport must be integrated into the design of new developments and connectivity to and from the development and existing built up areas should be a key component of the layout of development. Consideration must be given to the quality of the walking, wheeling and cycling environments to ensure routes are safe, legible and attractive, connecting well into the existing public rights of way network and to facilities such as bus stops.
- 7.26 Development layouts must be fully accessible and be designed to encourage active travel by providing direct routes following future and existing desire lines to everyday facilities and services. Pedestrians, particularly those with mobility, visual and/or auditory difficulties, are the most vulnerable of all users of the highway and their personal safety can be compromised by poorly designed developments.

Proposals should take account of points of conflict with vehicular traffic, severance issues (physical and perceived) and the need for other pedestrian and cyclist accessibility improvements, providing end to end consideration of journeys for all users.

- 7.27 Cycle routes should be segregated from vehicle and pedestrian traffic in order to increase user safety, in accordance with locally adopted infrastructure design guidance and national guidance, including that set out in LTN1/20. It is acknowledged that safer, more joined up cycle routes will make cycling a more attractive travel option for residents, commuters, and visitors.
- 7.28 Provision of secure and sheltered cycle parking and storage facilities are essential in order to encourage this mode of transport. Therefore, the needs of cyclists should be given careful consideration during the design of new developments as provision of parking and storage space is intrinsically linked to the quality of the public realm.
- 7.29 The requirements of Policy C3 should be demonstrated through the Transport Assessment or Transport Statement required to support applications in accordance with the council's local validation requirements.

Policy C4: Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way

Green and blue infrastructure

1. Green and blue infrastructure will be protected and enhanced for their biodiversity, recreational, amenity, health, townscape and landscape value, and their contribution towards mitigating and adapting to climate change.
2. Development proposals should plan for a network of publicly accessible green and blue infrastructure from the outset as appropriate. New development should:
 - a) Avoid the loss, fragmentation, isolation or other adverse impacts on networks of habitats and existing green and blue infrastructure (including green routes and long-distance riverside paths as shown on the Policies Map), unless replacement provision can be provided which will improve the green and blue infrastructure network in terms of its quantity, quality and accessibility;
 - b) Provide opportunities for, or contribute towards, improvements and enhancements to the quality and quantity of the wider multi-functional green and blue infrastructure network and other open spaces (for example extending spaces and connections and/or better management), in particular by integrating existing green and blue infrastructure assets into the proposed development through high-quality design;
 - c) Promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green and blue corridors, for people and wildlife by strengthening ecological networks and connecting settlements to the countryside via a network of

Greenways, green routes, public open spaces, footpaths, riverside paths, bridleways and cycle routes. This includes connections to local services and facilities, public transport and green spaces; and

- d) Provide clear arrangements for the long-term maintenance and management and/or enhancement of the green and blue infrastructure assets.

Public Rights of Way

3. Development proposals must integrate with the Public Rights of Way network to promote connectivity and contribute towards the delivery of prioritised routes in the council's rights of way improvement plan where appropriate. New Public Rights of Way will be supported where they are designed to be safe, inclusive and inviting spaces.
4. Development proposals in the vicinity of the Emm Brook, River Loddon and River Blackwater should contribute towards the achievement of a multi-use riverside footpath, cycleway and bridleway as defined on the Policies Map and in the council's rights of way improvement plan.
5. Development proposals for new, extended or enhanced green routes will be supported. Green routes are set out on the Policies Map.

7.30 The NPPF is clear that local plans should maintain and enhance networks of habitats and green and blue infrastructure, including where this can enable and support healthy lifestyles. Existing networks of green and blue infrastructure are valued by residents, and are important for recreation, leisure, community use, townscape and landscape quality and visual amenity. Policy C4 seeks to protect and enhance existing green and blue infrastructure and capitalise on opportunities to provide new infrastructure that links new and existing communities. This supports the council's wider objectives to encourage active travel, mitigate and adapt to climate change and enhance biodiversity and habitat networks.

7.31 Green infrastructure is a network of multi-functional green space and other green features, both urban and rural, which are essential for providing quality of life, well-being and environmental benefits for communities. It also plays an active role by facilitating biodiversity net gain, managing landscapes and flood risk, and mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Green infrastructure networks include the natural, planned and managed green areas in urban and rural settings.

7.32 Green infrastructure networks include but are not limited to: Public Rights of Way (PROW), countryside; open spaces; river valleys, corridors and wetlands; Sites of Urban Landscape Value (SULVs); Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS); landscape features; 'green' corridors, including ecological corridors; Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG); allotments; amenity areas within developments; informal recreation areas; green routes; country parks and public rights of way. Blue infrastructure is more specifically linked to water, including main rivers, pools, ponds, ordinary watercourses and sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), which often work in tandem with green infrastructure.

7.33 The borough has a wide variety of green corridors and waterscapes mainly associated with the three low land river valleys in the borough: Thames Valley, Loddon Valley and the Blackwater Valley. They make a

significant contribution to the character of the landscape and form an important part of the borough's network of green and blue infrastructure, connected by a series of Greenways and Green Routes. In addition, the borough also contains a wealth of parks and gardens, riverside paths, woodlands, allotments, common land and designated sites of nature importance, which provide vital ecosystem services and provide green spaces for informal / formal recreation.

- 7.34 Improving accessibility and connectivity to existing green infrastructure assets and the wider green infrastructure network must be integral to the layout of development proposals, which will help promote and support healthy and active communities. For instance, development proposals should create attractive, safe and accessible routes within and across the site(s) to connect to public transport, existing areas of green space and community services and facilities, such as schools and town, district or local centres. The council's long-term plan to improve cycling and walking in the Borough – the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)– identifies local routes to encourage active transportation and suggests ways they can be improved.
- 7.35 Development proposals should be consistent with the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) 2020-2030 or successor document, which sets out the strategy and priorities for the management and improvement of the rights of way network. Development proposals that include or are adjacent to an existing Public Rights of Way should be supported by a Rights of Way Impact Assessment in line with the council's Local Validation List requirements to demonstrate that development will not have an adverse impact on the existing network.
- 7.36 In addition to green corridors, opportunities to positively integrate and enhance watercourses and main river corridors in development will be sought by the council, such as maintaining and enhancing access for walking and cycling (including Greenways and Green Routes). Therefore, this policy should be read and be implemented alongside Policy FD3 where development proposals include or are adjacent to a watercourse or river corridor.
- 7.37 The council's Greenways Strategy sets out the network of traffic free commuting and leisure routes connecting existing and new settlements. Wherever possible, Greenways will have a hard, permeable surface which ensures accessibility for all users, including people with visual and physical impairments. A number of these routes have been delivered, which consist of existing public footpaths, byways and bridleways, with the aim of creating a network of connected traffic-free routes across the borough.
- 7.38 This network of routes will be further expanded to ensure future development is well integrated and connected. The establishment of the River Loddon Long Distance Path (LDP) will provide informal recreation links in the form of a footpath and bridleway to link the Thames Valley Path at Wargrave to the Blackwater Valley Path at Swallowfield. The River Loddon LDP will also link between many Greenway routes, in particular those greenways connecting Strategic Development Locations. Significant new green and blue infrastructure will be provided by delivery of the Loddon Valley Garden Village proposal. The establishment of a riverside path and bridleway along the River Blackwater/River Loddon will provide for informal recreational links to connect with the Thames Path National Trail and the Blackwater Valley footpath. The establishment of the riverside footpath and cycleway along the Emm Brook will also provide for informal recreation links, connecting Wokingham Town and Dinton Pastures Country Park at Winnersh.

- 7.39 The council supports the continued need to protect and further enhance these long-distance recreational paths, and the integration of public rights of way, greenways and other routes, with wider networks, including the National Cycle Network and the Thames Path to provide a holistic approach.
- 7.40 The starting point for green and blue infrastructure should be the existing provision across the site and beyond. A landscape led approach to development schemes, that takes into account the Landscape Character Assessment, valued landscapes and other relevant policies of this Plan would form an important part in setting out a vision for delivering green and blue infrastructure. Policies NE5 and NE6 set out further information about Landscape Character and valued landscapes.
- 7.41 The networks of green and blue infrastructure are an important element of providing a robust habitat network that connects sites recognised for their high wildlife value. Green and blue infrastructure is most effective where it enhances habitat recovery, providing connectivity between wildlife sites and contributing to the objectives of Biodiversity Opportunity Areas.
- 7.42 To ensure the benefits of green and blue infrastructure are delivered, it must be well planned, designed and maintained.

Policy C5: Parking and electric vehicle charging

1. Development proposals should provide and retain vehicle parking (including motorcycles) and cycle parking that caters for the needs of all users (including people with disabilities and visitors) that is appropriate to the location and the scale of development.

The assessment of requirements will have particular regard to the following factors:

- a) The accessibility of the proposed development;
- b) The type, mix, occupancy and use of the proposed development;
- c) The availability of and opportunities for public transport;
- d) The level of car ownership in the area; and
- e) Other locally specific issues including availability of parking and enforcement nearby.

Electric vehicle charging

2. All development proposals should provide electric vehicle charging points in line with adopted standards.
3. Proposals to retrofit charging points into existing areas will be encouraged providing this would not result in any adverse impact on highway, pedestrian or cycle safety.
4. All charging points should be appropriately located to allow for easy and convenient access from the charge point to the parking space(s), and be designed and located in a way which:
 - a) Minimises the intrusion of the charge point on the wider use and access of the land;
 - b) Minimises the risk of vehicle collision with the charge point; and

c) Has ease of access for maintenance and replacement of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

4. Residential development proposals of 10 dwellings or more, or non-residential development proposals of 1,000 m² or greater gross internal area will be required to submit an Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy to demonstrate that the provision of electric vehicle charging facilities in developments are in a safe, convenient and accessible location, in accordance with requirements 4a) – c) above.

- 7.43 The council is committed to accelerating net zero targets and maximising the use of for sustainable modes of transport. However, it is recognised that car ownership levels in the borough are currently high and that cars and other vehicles will in the short term continue to play a vital role in many people's lives. Where car ownership is likely to remain high, it is vital that the planning system plays its role in accelerating the transition to non-fossil-fuelled vehicles. Policy C4 therefore accounts for the need to provide appropriate car and cycle parking and electric vehicle charging infrastructure.
- 7.44 In the context of many people continuing to rely on private vehicles, it is important that appropriate vehicle parking is delivered as a component of any development proposal, which suitably caters for all users including residents, workers, visitors, and people with disabilities. The provision of appropriate levels of parking requires a careful balance to be struck. On the one hand, it is important that enough parking is provided to reduce adverse impacts on the safety and function of the highway, as well as the visual impact from parking on non-designated parking areas such as grass verges. But on the other, there is a need to use land efficiently and encourage the use of an attractive and viable public transport network, with excess parking likely to encourage undesirable levels of car ownership and usage. All relevant proposals should have regard to the council's most up to date standards for vehicle and cycle parking, which will be used as guidance in the determination of planning applications. Where robust evidence is provided and more sustainable transport modes are both available and accessible, parking provision can be considered more flexibly, especially in town and local centres, but there should always be disabled parking provision and well designed, secure and sheltered parking for cycles.
- 7.45 Improved cycle storage, cycle parking facilities and associated infrastructure at public transport hubs, businesses, schools and essential services and facilities can contribute towards promoting walking and cycling as a health enhancing physical activity. Cycle parking / storage should be situated in convenient, secure and easy to access locations within developments and be covered in order to maximise bicycle usage as a mode of transport. For many land-uses this will require formal provision of lockers, changing rooms, storage and showers, appropriate to the Travel Plan mode share target.
- 7.46 The NPPF sets out that policies for parking standards should, amongst other things, take account of the need to ensure an adequate provision of spaces for charging plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles. New Building Regulations Part S came into force in June 2022 which require the provision of charging points in both residential and non-residential developments. Nationally, a ban the sale of diesel and petrol vehicles is proposed within the plan period. Notwithstanding the commitments at the national level, the council's CEAP includes the target of achieving a 50% reduction in Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) private car mileage by 2030. The national and local context therefore necessitates that planning decisions assist the phasing out of fossil fuel vehicles and encourage the uptake of low carbon vehicles.

- 7.47 Electric and hybrid vehicle ownership is increasing and will need to become more prevalent to address local and national emissions targets. One of the principal barriers to increased use of low-emissions vehicles is the lack of supporting infrastructure, particularly charging facilities at residential properties. It is therefore important that adequate electric vehicle charging facilities, including necessary infrastructure, is designed into development proposals from the outset, especially residential developments. In areas where the charge rate might be adversely affected by grid capacity, developments should explore opportunities to enhance renewable energy provision.
- 7.48 Local guidance on how electric vehicle charging points should be delivered is set out in the council's 'Living Streets: A Highways Guide for Developers in Wokingham'. This must be taken into account when planning new development. This document pre-dates changes to building regulations, and therefore the council's approach to electric charging provision is likely to evolve. Development proposals will need to have regard to the most up to date guidance. Opportunities to go beyond the minimum standards are encouraged. Charging points may vary from communal points where there are shared parking areas in non-residential developments or for developments of flats, to individual points associated with houses.
- 7.49 In accordance with Policy NE3, development proposals would need to ensure that there is no increased parking provision within the 400 metres zone surrounding the Thames Basin Heaths SPA.

Policy C6: Technology and innovation in transport

Technological innovation

1. Technology and innovation in transport which is designed to improve mobility, reduce congestion and improve emissions and air quality will be supported provided it does not have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or amenity, and does not give rise to other unacceptable environmental concerns.

Existing refuelling stations

2. Existing refuelling stations will be retained, unless demonstrated to be operationally unviable. Opportunities to incorporate new technologies into existing refuelling stations, (such as hydrogen refuelling, electric vehicle charging facilities) should be maximised and should be fully explored before a change to an alternative use is considered for the site.
3. Complementary uses at refuelling stations will be considered favourably where this would support their evolution, providing there would be no unacceptable impact on the vitality and viability of centres defined in the retail hierarchy.

New refuelling stations

4. There will be a presumption against development proposals for new refuelling stations providing for fossil fuels. New or replacement refuelling facilities will be directed to accessible locations on the highway network and must incorporate the latest refuelling technologies from the outset. The layout and design of new or replacement facilities should

be as flexible as possible to allow incorporation of, and adaptation to, future technological innovations.

- 7.50 Technological advances and innovations will change the way people travel and the operation of the transport network. Currently, transport is the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK and the second highest source, behind domestic buildings, in Wokingham Borough at 31.7%¹¹. New modes of travel will help to improve mobility by offering a wider choice of travel options; other technological changes will help to reduce congestion by removing vehicles from the road, particularly in terms of deliveries and collections. The council will embrace the opportunities such changes offer, whilst ensuring that the introduction of new technologies does not compromise the safety or security of people living in, working in, or visiting the Borough.
- 7.51 One such concept that is becoming more prevalent across the UK is mobility hubs. Mobility hubs are places in a community that bring together public transport, active travel, car clubs, Mobility as a Services (MaaS), and other ways for people to travel by means other than private car. They often offer amenities including cycle storage, workspaces, parcel delivery, wifi, cafés, and bike repair. The creation of a network of mobility hubs, will become increasingly important. Accordingly, development proposals should consider the viable introduction of mobility hubs within public realm areas, including the consideration of providing bus stops that are capable of conversion to meet future needs.
- 7.52 As new eco-friendly forms of vehicle become more prevalent, it is important that an appropriate refuelling / recharging network is in place across the borough to cater for them. Development proposals should therefore retain and provide appropriate refuelling infrastructure to meet future demand. Though the council will strongly encourage non fossil-fuelled vehicles, it is recognised that take up will not be immediate and existing fuelling stations will continue to play a role. They should be retained in order to prevent unnecessarily long journeys to refuel vehicles. However, the evolution of refuelling stations to cater for non-fossil fuel sources, is strongly encouraged. Where complementary uses are proposed in order to support the transition of facilities to future technologies, these will generally be looked upon favourably provided they are ancillary to the refuelling function and where there would be no unacceptable impact on defined retail centres. For example, where charging facilities are incorporated, uses which allow for drivers to be engaged while they wait, can serve a positive complementary function.
- 7.53 Where possible, the council will work constructively to enable commercial vehicle operators to repurpose existing depots and storage facilities, to accelerate the transition towards non-fossil fuelled vehicle fleets.

¹¹ Taken from the Climate Emergency Action Plan and excluding motorways and railways, which are not considered within the borough's scope

Policy C7: Digital infrastructure and communications technology

1. The roll out and continued improvement of digital infrastructure and communications technology will be supported, including full-fibre gigabit-capable broadband, 4G and 5G technologies.
2. Development proposals for new residential, employment and retail uses must demonstrate how gigabit-capable broadband and mobile connectivity have been incorporated.

New digital and communications technology infrastructure

3. Development proposals for digital infrastructure or communications technology will be supported where they:
 - a) Minimise adverse impacts on local character, amenity, heritage assets, the quality of the public realm or pedestrian / highway safety;
 - b) Explore innovative design and technology solutions, such as concealment/camouflage options, to minimise visual impact;
 - c) Explore opportunities to make the most efficient use of existing telecommunication sites, such as mast sharing or use of existing buildings or structures; and
 - d) Demonstrate no preferable alternative sites are potentially available which would result in a development that would be less visually intrusive.

Fibre to the Premises (FTTP):

4. New residential and non-residential development proposals must provide access to full fibre gigabit capable broadband or, where it has been demonstrated not to be achievable, the fastest possible connection at first occupation.
5. In locations where full fibre connectivity is not currently available, development proposals must:
 - a) Provide clear evidence of engagement with a range of digital infrastructure providers at the earliest opportunity in the planning process on the upgrading or roll-out of digital infrastructure;
 - b) Where one or more providers have agreed to provide access to superfast broadband connectivity or full fibre, be designed to connect into the new service and be made available to occupiers; and
 - c) Utilise dedicated telecommunications ducting to enable the future provision of full fibre connectivity.

Telecommunications Infrastructure:

6. Development proposals should consider mobile telecommunications requirements to ensure that there is suitable coverage.

- 7.54 Access to high quality digital infrastructure and communications technology is a key component of ensuring social inclusion and business growth. As more people continue to communicate, shop, learn and work online, it is important that our digital infrastructure is capable of supporting an increased demand for broadband, mobile and wireless technologies.
- 7.55 Though future investment in digital infrastructure and communications technology is vital, it should be provided and coordinated in a manner that respects the borough’s environment and heritage, and in a way that minimises disruption to the free flow of traffic.
- 7.56 New apparatus to support the roll out of 5G is expected to require infill coverage within established residential areas but this will need to be balanced against any potential adverse impacts on local character, amenity, heritage assets, the quality of the public realm or pedestrian / highway safety. Developers will be expected to demonstrate through submission of evidence with applications for planning permission or prior approval that opportunities have been explored to minimise adverse impacts, either through design and technology solutions, the siting of new installations on existing buildings or by sharing masts with other providers.
- 7.57 New apparatus should be sited away from heritage assets and other local landmarks wherever possible, and seek to minimise unnecessary and visually obtrusive clutter of the public realm. To minimise disruptive street works, installation should be via service margins/corridors and not on the highway. Similarly, buildings should be designed to enable upgrading without disruptive works or additional costs of retrofitting.
- 7.58 Equipment that is no longer required should be removed in accordance with Ofcom’s Electronic Code of Practice, to reduce clutter and improve the experience of pedestrians and other highway users and the quality of the public realm.

Policy C8: Utilities

1. Development proposals must demonstrate that there is sufficiency capacity for electricity, water supply and waste water collection and treatment infrastructure on and off site to service the development, and that agreement has been or will be sought from the appropriate utility / service providers.
2. Development proposals which results in the need for off-site upgrades to the existing utility network should ensure the occupation of the development is aligned with the delivery of the necessary infrastructure.

Accounting for existing infrastructure

3. Development proposals should be carefully designed to take account of existing infrastructure and minimise the potential for future disruption from maintenance and upgrading of infrastructure by:
 - a) Utilising service margins/corridors for external installations;

- b) Minimising the number of underground road crossings; and
- c) Inside buildings, utilising serviceable ducting to enable future upgrading.

New infrastructure schemes

- 4. Development proposals for new utilities infrastructure, or the extension or upgrading of existing utilities infrastructure, will be supported provided that any adverse impacts on amenity, character and the highway network can be minimised.

- 7.59 It is important that development proposals are supported by necessary infrastructure and that any new and upgraded infrastructure is in place at the right time. The provision of utilities, including electricity, water and wastewater infrastructure, is needed to support sustainable development.
- 7.60 Development proposals should be supported by information to demonstrate that there is either sufficient infrastructure capacity to service the development, or that this can be readily provided. Developers are encouraged to engage with utility providers, including electricity providers, relevant water supply /waste water company and the Environment Agency (where appropriate), early in the planning process to identify any potential infrastructure requirements.
- 7.61 Policy C8 seeks to ensure that development is appropriately supported by any necessary infrastructure delivery, to reduce the risk of unacceptable impacts on existing or new properties, and on the environment through for example the pollution of land and watercourses.
- 7.62 Utility infrastructure should be appropriately designed into schemes at an early stage to ensure future upgrade / repair works have minimal impact on the area, particularly the highway network.
- 7.63 The development or expansion of existing water supply or wastewater facilities will generally be supported where it is needed to serve existing or proposed development, or in the interests of long-term water supply and wastewater management, provided any potential adverse impacts on the land-use or environment are minimised.

8

Economy, Employment and Retail

8. Economy, Employment and Retail

- 8.1 Wokingham Borough is a key area in the economically important Thames Valley. The planning system plays a key role in supporting jobs, business and investment.
- 8.2 Through the Local Plan Update, specific policies seek to contribute to meeting current and future needs for economic development by protecting key areas and facilitating their evolution to meet changing business needs.
- 8.3 Town and district centres are at the heart of their communities, playing both an important contribution to jobs and commerce, but also a social role as places to meet and spend time.

Policy ER1: Core Employment Areas

1. Core Employment Areas will be protected for continued economic use. Development proposals will be supported where they provide a range of types and sizes of units, including flexible space that can be easily adapted to meet current and future needs, and encourages start ups and grow on space.
2. Development proposals for business, industry or warehousing will be supported in principle at Core Employment Areas, as defined on the policies map and listed below:
 - a) Green Park Business Park, Reading;
 - b) Headley Road East Industrial Estate, Woodley;
 - c) Hogwood Industrial Estate, Finchampstead;
 - d) Molly Millars Industrial Estate, Wokingham;
 - e) Ruscombe Business Park, Ruscombe;
 - f) Suttons Industrial Estate, Earley;
 - g) Thames Valley Business Park, Earley;
 - h) Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, Shinfield;
 - i) Toutley Industrial Estate, Wokingham; and
 - j) Winnersh Triangle Business Park, Winnersh.
3. Expansion and intensification of employment uses within Core Employment Areas will be supported where:
 - a) It is appropriate to the character of the local area; and
 - b) It does not have an unacceptable impact on nearby residential uses, other employment uses and other uses, including impacts caused by traffic movements, noise, emissions, odour, hours of operation and lighting.
4. Development proposals for new uses that are complementary to the successful operation of Core Employment Areas and that support rejuvenation or regeneration will be supported provided that:

- a) Non-employment uses would support the character and economic function of the Core Employment Area and not lead to a significant reduction in employment uses; and
- b) The use does not undermine the continued economic function of the wider Core Employment Area.

Loss of employment floorspace

- 5. Development proposals involving non-employment uses within Core Employment Areas will only be acceptable in the following exceptional circumstances:
 - a) It does not hinder or undermine the continued operation and role of the Core Employment Area;
 - b) It is evidenced that there is no market interest in the site for employment purposes following genuine, active and effective marketing; and
 - c) There is evidence of need for the proposed development, and the need for it to be located within a Core Employment Area.

- 8.4 Major employment development will be directed primarily to Core Employment Areas. These are successful employment locations which play an important role in supporting the wider economy and provide local employment opportunities, and it is therefore important that their integrity is protected.
- 8.5 Some flexibility with existing employment land will allow an appropriate balance of uses to develop in the right locations. It is therefore not appropriate to simply apply a blanket protection to all land currently used for employment across the borough. Core Employment Areas have been identified as those areas of greatest economic significance, providing space to ensure that the local economy is balanced and that those activities which support higher value businesses are in proximity. Policy ER1 does not primarily aim to protect a specific number of jobs (which could be replaced in a non-employment use) but is rather about the balance of the economy.
- 8.6 'Employment uses' in the context of this policy are primarily Business, Industrial, Distribution and Storage (BIDS) uses or is a use where an employment area is the only realistic location. This is a judgement on a case-by-case basis, but relevant considerations will include the effects of noise and disturbance, odours etc., HGV movements and whether the use requires a building that would detract from the character of other areas, e.g. with high, blank, featureless frontages and very large building footprints.
- 8.7 Technological advances and the impact of the covid 19 pandemic are changing working practices. A growth in hot-desking, remote working, less regimented working hours, freelancing and small businesses are all increasing demand for more flexible workspaces that facilitate collaboration and provide supporting facilities on-site for workers to help improve their work-life balance. To ensure Core Employment Areas continue to meet the ongoing needs of businesses, complementary uses will be allowed where they support the continued economic function and attractiveness of the area, for example through the provision of services and facilities that support workers and customers where none are currently within reasonable walking distance.

- 8.8 To ensure a healthy and balanced economy, it is important that a variety of sizes and types of premises is available. Development proposals which widen the range of premises, including flexible employment space that can easily be subdivided to meet the needs of small and growing businesses will be supported.
- 8.9 To retain existing buildings in employment use, and allocated employment land, evidence will be required to show how the property or land cannot be used for its existing or designated employment use before alternative uses will be considered. As a first step, a mixed use enabling development which incorporates employment space should be considered.
- 8.10 In general marketing of a property should be for at least 18 months and at a realistic price, including supporting details of any valuations undertaken as part of the marketing process. A statement should be submitted as part of any planning application demonstrating that an existing use is no longer viable, alongside evidence that shows genuine and sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the property at a reasonable value have been undertaken. The extent of marketing required will be proportionate to the type of unit(s) (for example an international headquarters style unit would require wider marketing than the UK). The responses received from interested parties and their justification for not pursuing the property should also be included. An 18 month marketing period is considered appropriate, as Core Employment Areas form a key part of the economic strategy, and ample time will be needed to undertake marketing that is both genuine and sustained, especially where it is undertaken internationally.

Policy ER2: Employment uses outside Core Employment Areas

New employment floorspace

1. Employment development proposals of less than 1,000m² gross internal area within a defined settlement but outside Core Employment Areas will be supported provided:
 - a) It is appropriate to the character of the area; and
 - b) It does not have an unacceptable impact on nearby residential uses, other employment uses and other uses, including impacts caused by traffic movements, noise, emissions, hours of operation, odour and lighting.
2. Employment development proposals of 1,000m² or greater gross internal area within a defined settlement but outside Core Employment Areas must demonstrate:
 - a) Compliance with a sequential approach to location that demonstrates there are no suitable and available opportunities within Core Employment Areas;
 - b) How it is appropriate in nature and scale to its location;
 - c) The number and type of jobs likely to be created, including how they are to be sourced; and
 - d) It does not have an unacceptable impact on nearby residential uses, other employment uses and other uses, including impacts caused by traffic movements, noise, emissions, hours of operation, odour and lighting.

Loss of employment floorspace

3. Development proposals involving the loss of employment uses or land outside of Core Employment Areas will only be supported where:
 - a) It is appropriate to the character of the area;
 - b) It does not have unacceptable impacts on nearby uses;
 - c) There is strong evidence that there is no market interest for employment purposes, following genuine, active and effective marketing; and
 - d) It would not lead to an unacceptable piecemeal change.

- 8.11 The economy of the borough is supported by several employment sites that provide opportunities for small and medium sized businesses. Such businesses are an important to achieving a diverse local economy. Although these sites have not been designated as Core Employment Area designation, such employment locations should be protected for continued employment use, and enhanced where appropriate.
- 8.12 The intensification of existing employment sites will generally be supported. Such proposals will need to be in keeping with existing development and provide clear justification for intensification. Where expansion of existing sites would be onto adjacent greenfield land, detailed information and strong justification will be required as part of any application.
- 8.13 Proposals for new development may come forward on sites outside Core Employment Areas, that are not allocated for employment uses. Where a site is not already in employment use, an assessment will be made of the benefits arising from the proposal. Each case will need to be considered based on its merits and the local circumstances.
- 8.14 Major office development will generally not be suitable outside of Core Employment Areas and town centres.
- 8.15 Loss of existing employment uses outside the Core Employment Areas may be acceptable, with consideration given to the needs of the local economy and community that it serves. Evidence will be required to show how the property or land cannot be used for its existing employment use. In general marketing of a property should be for at least 12 months and at a realistic price, including supporting details of any valuations undertaken as part of the marketing process. This is a shorter period than for Core Employment Areas, which reflects the role of the land and property in employment use in other locations.
- 8.16 A statement should be submitted as part of any planning application demonstrating that an existing use is no longer viable, alongside evidence that shows genuine and sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the property at a reasonable value have been undertaken. Supporting evidence demonstrating how the proposal would be beneficial to the local community may also be beneficial for appropriate new uses.

Policy ER3: Supporting the rural economy

1. Development proposals that contribute towards supporting a prosperous rural economy will be encouraged.
2. Development proposals for economic development in the countryside will only be supported where:
 - a) There is a genuine need to support an existing or new rural business or enterprise;
 - b) The scale and nature of the proposed development is appropriate to its rural location;
 - c) The reuse or adaptation of existing buildings has been incorporated into the development, and where appropriate buildings which are derelict or offer no opportunity for beneficial use have been removed;
 - d) Any conversions, buildings or structures are of a high quality design that is of a scale which is proportionate to its use and reflects and respects the character of the rural setting;
 - e) There would be no significant adverse impacts to the amenity of nearby residents, including through odour, noise, lighting or operations;
 - f) Environmental improvements are incorporated into the design of the development, for example additional landscaping and biodiversity enhancements; and
 - g) Any traffic generated would not be inappropriate for the rural road network.
3. Development proposals will generally be supported which facilitate the introduction of or improvement to electronic communications networks and digital infrastructure to help support local businesses, including the expansion of full fibre gigabit capable broadband.
4. Development proposals for live-work units within the countryside will be supported where they allow buildings to be appropriately converted and where they would not lead to the isolated development of dwellings.

Farm diversification

5. Small scale retail development associated with farm shops and horticultural nurseries will be supported where proposals are ancillary to the main use of the farm/nursery and do not cause significant harm to the vitality and viability of retail centres.
6. Development proposals for farm diversification must be accompanied by a comprehensive whole farm diversification plan, which establishes how the proposed changes will assist in retaining the viability of a farm and its agricultural enterprise.

- 8.17 In accordance with the NPPF, this policy approach supports the suitable growth and expansion of businesses in rural areas to help create a sustainable and prosperous rural economy, while also respecting the character of the countryside. It is recognised that in some circumstances business and community uses to meet specific local needs may have to be located adjacent to or beyond existing settlements.

- 8.18 All proposals covered by this policy should also accord with SS5. Proposals for development located within the Metropolitan Green Belt should also refer to Policy SS6.
- 8.19 For the purpose of this policy, a rural business is defined as any type of business which is suitable for a rural location. Typically, businesses suited to rural locations will be those that generate low employment and low traffic movements. Larger scale, more intense employment development would negatively impact on the character of the countryside and adversely affect the rural road network. Such larger scale employment development is better located within settlements, where there is associated access to public transport, services and facilities, in accordance with the approach to employment development set out in Policy ER2.
- 8.20 In order to support the rural economy, national policy is clear that the sequential test should not be applied to applications for small scale rural offices or other small scale rural development. For the purposes of this policy, small-scale is considered to be proposals which fall below the 500m² threshold. Development for main town centre uses outside designated centres would need to meet the relevant tests set out in Policy ER8.

Policy ER4: Employment and skills plans

1. Development proposals for 10 or more dwellings or 1,000m² of non-residential floorspace should be accompanied by an Employment and Skills Plan to show how the proposal provides opportunities for training, apprenticeships or other vocational initiatives to develop local employability skills required by developers, contractors or end users of the proposal.
2. Where it is demonstrated that an Employment and Skills Plan either cannot be implemented, or is inappropriate for the proposal, an in lieu financial contribution will be sought to fund relevant employment, skills and training initiatives elsewhere.

- 8.21 While employment rates in Wokingham Borough are high, there are pockets of long-term unemployment and residents that require additional support. The council's Economic Development Strategy aspires for all residents to share the benefits of a strong economy, with reduced levels of deprivation and increased labour market participation. A suitably skilled local workforce also reduces reliance on labour from outside the borough, reducing congestion and carbon emissions.
- 8.22 Major development schemes must submit a site specific Employment and Skills Plan, and accompanying method statement, to ensure residents have the skills businesses need, and the ability to compete in the market. The plan should be undertaken in line with the council's guidance or any subsequent revision, and secured through a legal agreement. All reasonable steps should be explored to provide an appropriate plan. Where it is demonstrated that this is not possible, an in lieu financial contribution will be required to support other related initiatives.

Policy ER5: The hierarchy of centres

1. All centres will be supported and strengthened to ensure they continue to be the focus of local communities. Development proposals that protect and enhance their role and function will be supported in principle.
2. The hierarchy of centres in the borough is set out below and defined on the Policies Map:
 - a. Major town centre:
 - i. Wokingham town centre.
 - b. Small town and district centres (listed alphabetically by location):
 - i. Arborfield Green district centre (being delivered through the SDL);
 - ii. Lower Earley district centre;
 - iii. Shinfield Road district centre;
 - iv. Twyford village centre;
 - v. Winnersh centre; and
 - vi. Woodley town centre.
 - c. Local centres (listed alphabetically by location):
 - i. Crowthorne Station, Dukes Ride, Crowthorne (Pinewood);
 - ii. Greenwood Road, Crowthorne (Pinewood);
 - iii. Maiden Place, Earley;
 - iv. Silverdale Road, Earley;
 - v. Shepherd's Hill, Earley and Woodley;
 - vi. California Crossroads, Finchampstead North;
 - vii. School Green, Shinfield;
 - viii. Basingstoke Road near the junction for Beech Hill Road, Spencers Wood;
 - ix. Basingstoke Road, Three Mile Cross;
 - x. Wargrave High Street, Wargrave;
 - xi. Ashridge Road, Wokingham;
 - xii. Clifton Road / Emmbrook Road, Wokingham;
 - xiii. Bean Oak Road, Wokingham;
 - xiv. Rances Lane, Wokingham;
 - xv. Howlett Grove, Matthewsgreen, Wokingham;
 - xvi. Beechey Place, Montague Park, Wokingham;
 - xvii. Woosehill Centre, Woosehill, Wokingham;
 - xviii. Woosehill Lane, Woosehill, Wokingham;
 - xix. Brecon Road, Woodley;
 - xx. Coppice Road, Woodley; and
 - xxi. Loddon Vale, Woodley.
3. New district and local centres are planned as part of the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location (Policy SS12) and Loddon Valley Garden Village (Policy SS13) allocations, where they are suitable in scale to the level of growth proposed.

4. Primary Shopping Areas are defined on the Policies Map in Lower Earley, Twyford, Winnersh, Wokingham and Woodley.
5. Development proposals for main town centre uses will be supported in accordance with the hierarchy and a 'town centre first' sequential approach, where they are suitable in terms of scale and design.

- 8.23 Town, district, and local centres play an important role as the focal point of local communities by providing a variety of shops, services and facilities. It is vital that planning decisions support and enhance the role of these centres in an appropriate way.
- 8.24 To better understand the retail and commercial needs of western Berkshire, Wokingham Borough jointly commissioned a study to look into the specific retail needs of four authorities. The Western Berkshire Retail and Commercial Leisure Assessment (2016) set out the need for comparison and convenience floorspace over the period 2016 – 2036 across the four authorities.
- 8.25 To take account of more recent data, and to consider the potential impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, an updated Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (2022/23) assessed the future requirements of convenience and comparison goods floorspace and commercial leisure in Wokingham borough to 2040. The study also takes into account recent changes to permitted development rights and the Use Classes Order, which means it is possible for retail units to change use (to e.g. restaurants, offices, or gyms) without requiring planning permission. The assessment is based on qualitative and quantitative methods, including telephone surveys and the impact of recent development. High levels of online spending have reduced expenditure to support additional physical retail floorspace, especially for comparison goods. However, there remains a need for additional convenience goods floorspace, with existing stores generally performing well. The assessment therefore calculated no capacity to support additional comparison goods (non-food stores such as clothing and electronics) and between 14,700m² and 17,200m² of convenience goods (food stores) by 2040. The study also forecast growth in leisure spending, with the majority anticipated to be in the form of restaurants and cafes.
- 8.26 A flexible approach will therefore be taken with additional retail floorspace capable of being delivered within the identified centres, particularly primary shopping areas, in accordance with market demand. This approach will be kept under review and amended as necessary through future local plan reviews, as required by national policy.
- 8.27 National policy encourages local planning authorities to pursue policies which support the vitality and viability of town centres as part of a 'town centre first' approach. This recognises that town centres are at the heart of communities, with policies seeking to manage and facilitate growth. However, the retail sector and the role of town centres is changing and facing challenges more recently. Successful town centres are places which are activity based; places where the community can gather; places where, not only shops, but complementary uses draw people into the centre. As a result, there is reduced emphasis on protecting all retail uses and a shift towards providing complementary mixed use centres. This has been reflected in the removal of primary and secondary frontages.
- 8.28 The hierarchy of retail centres recognises the important role of different parts of the borough in providing retail and associated services. Wokingham town centre acts as the major retail location in the borough and provides a mixture of convenience and comparison retail, alongside other services and

facilities including leisure and entertainment, constituting main town centre uses as defined in the national policy. This mix of uses ensures a lively and varied centre that helps to fulfil the needs of different groups throughout the day and as part of the night time economy. The importance of Wokingham town centre is further recognised in Policy ER8.

- 8.29 District centres have often been delivered as part of large scale housing schemes, both historically, and as part of the Strategic Development Locations delivered under the Core Strategy local plan. These centres are also suitable for town centre style uses which play an important and active part of meeting residents' needs. A number of district centres include anchor tenants in the form of supermarkets, which alongside comparison goods retailers provide services that are wider than local. In particular, Woodley Town Centre provides a wider variety of services including banks, clothing stores and restaurants, which demonstrate its importance within the hierarchy, and ability to attract and retain town centre uses.
- 8.30 Local centres provide the day to day retail needs for their local communities, such as convenience stores. They play an essential role in local communities by promoting social interaction and providing places to meet and socialise, whilst reducing the need to travel by car to town or district centres. It is therefore important that a range of services are available at local centres and are accessible by active travel modes.
- 8.31 There are a number of retail facilities that, whilst planned for, have not been delivered and therefore have not been included in Policy ER5. Any new retail facilities (such as those within the Strategic Development Locations) should be considered in the context of the defined hierarchy. The delivery of a new garden village at Loddon Valley will provide opportunities for new retail, leisure and entertainment uses, as part of new centres. Further detail regarding the type, amount and scope of such uses will be set out in more detailed masterplanning work.
- 8.32 Town centre boundaries and primary shopping areas identify where the main uses of each centre are expected to be located. This maintains the functions of centres, by providing a compact, walkable and easily accessible area. Further detail on the range of uses permitted in primary shopping areas is set out in Policy ER6. The NPPF and national Planning Practice Guidance advise that planning policies should define the extent of primary shopping areas as a key tool to shape and support town centres, which have been updated in light of changes to the Use Classes Order. Despite the changes to the Use Classes Order, policy and guidance continue to support the identification of primary shopping areas and seeking to encourage particular types of uses within those defined areas. As a result, the policy approach will continue to influence the types of uses expected within primary shopping areas and resist changes of use, as far as is practicable, which would undermine this function unless there is appropriate justification.

Policy ER6: Town, district and local centres and shopping parades

New development

1. Development proposals in town, district and local centres, and shopping parades must:
 - a) Maintain or enhance the vitality and viability of the centres as places to shop, work and spend leisure time, including into the evening where appropriate to the role and function of the centre;
 - b) Be of a scale, type and format that reflects and enhances the character of the centre including its role and function within the hierarchy;
 - c) Enhance the provision of day-to-day shopping facilities, where appropriate in relation to the role and function of the centre;
 - d) Maximise opportunities to improve accessibility for all users; and
 - e) Maximise opportunities to improve digital infrastructure within the centre and promote smart technology, where practicable.

2. Development proposals for the following uses will be supported within Primary Shopping Areas:
 - a) Retail uses and the retention of prominent shop fronts;
 - b) Main town centre uses and services, providing they support the overall function of the centre and maintain an active frontage; and
 - c) Office and residential development on the upper floors of units.

Loss of retail in Primary Shopping Areas

3. Changes of use within the Primary Shopping Areas from retail to non-Class E uses will only be permitted where they do not result in a disproportionate concentration of non-Class E units that would be harmful to the vitality of that centre.

Loss of shopping facilities in local centres

4. The loss of day-to-day shopping facilities in local centres will only be permitted where:
 - a) Alternative day-to-day shopping facilities are available via convenient and safe walking routes and within reasonable walking distance from the existing retail use; or
 - b) The existing retail use is demonstrated to no longer be viable through evidence that genuine sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the facility at a reasonable value have been undertaken.

- 8.33 The long term viability and vitality of all centres ensures residents, businesses and visitors have easy access to services and facilities. The primary focus of centres has traditionally been retail uses, however over recent years there has been a well-documented shift to a greater mix of retail, leisure and entertainment uses in centres, which can at least partially be attributed to the growth in online retailing.

The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (2022/23) further highlights this growth in commercial leisure spending, and how it is anticipated to continue.

- 8.34 Town centres are not only a shopping destination, but are evolving to become experience destinations with multiple reasons to visit at different times of the day and evening. As a welcoming place with activities and events, town centres are also easy to access and navigate. A wider mix of uses, including homes and businesses, supports retail and leisure and ensures the longevity of town centres as places to live and spend time.
- 8.35 Changes to Use Classes Order mean there is now greater flexibility to change between a range of commercial, business and service uses without the need for planning permission, as part of new Use Class E. Whilst acknowledging there is now less scope to control town centre uses through the local plan, the intention of Policy ER6 is to continue to encourage an appropriate mix of uses within centres as far as practicable. The role that retail plays within centres is recognised in national policy and guidance, specifically relating to primary shopping areas. Accordingly, this policy continues to recognise primary shopping areas as the locations where a good variety of shops is expected. The impacts of these changes will be regularly monitored and evaluated.
- 8.36 Day-to-day shopping facilities in local centres should be retained, although it is acknowledged that in some circumstances this may not be possible or appropriate. This could be due to various market constraints, or an evolution of the role of the centre and the community it serves. Day-to-day shopping facilities are those mostly selling essential goods and by definition will include facilities in F2(a) use. Day-to-day facilities may also include uses falling outside of F2(a) use, including post offices, newsagents, convenience stores selling food items, pharmacies and petrol stations with ancillary retail use. Development proposals for a change of use from a day-to-day shopping facility will need to provide marketing evidence as part of any planning application to demonstrate why an existing use is no longer viable, alongside evidence that shows genuine and sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the property at a reasonable value have been undertaken. This statement should also include work undertaken to demonstrate how the proposed use would be appropriate and beneficial to the local community and the role of the centre. To be considered sustained, marketing should be carried out in an active and continuous manner for a period of at least 12 months. The advice of the council should be sought prior to the commencement of any marketing campaign to ascertain the extent of marketing required and to discuss the extent of alternative uses that should be explored.
- 8.37 Where a change of use is proposed to a unit which is covered by a restrictive condition limiting its use to a particular type, applicants will be expected to submit marketing evidence in accordance with the requirements for day-to-day shopping facilities to justify the proposed change.
- 8.38 Residential development on the upper floors of existing retail units will be supported as part of providing homes in an accessible location. However, the conversion of ground floor units to residential use must be supported by robust evidence justifying its viability and appeal to the market and will be carefully considered against the wider policy requirements of the plan.
- 8.39 Whether a shopfront is 'prominent' will depend on a range of factors. This may include particular design quality, heritage interest, or the shopfront being situated in a visually prominent location (such as at key junctions, at focal points, at major gateways and to terminate important views). Prominent shopfronts should be retained as far as is practicable for their contribution to the character of the centre and / or

primary shopping area. All proposals for new shopfronts or alterations to existing shopfronts must comply with Policy DH3.

Policy ER7: Strengthening the role of centres

1. Main town centre uses should be located within the centres defined in the hierarchy set out in Policy ER5 where sites are suitable, available and viable.
2. Development proposals for main town centre uses outside of a defined centre must comply with the sequential test and the retail impact assessment, where they meet the threshold identified below.

Sequential test

3. Development proposals for 500m² (gross) or more of town centres uses on new sites or extensions to existing sites in locations outside a defined centres or allocations including town centre uses, must comply with the sequential test.
4. The sequential test should assess in-centre sites in the order of preference of the hierarchy of centres, unless a proposed development is intended to meet a particular local need in a specific area.
5. Robust evidence will be required to demonstrate that there are not more sequentially preferable locations which could accommodate the floorspace.

Retail impact assessment

6. Development proposals for 500m² (gross) or more of retail or leisure uses on new sites or extensions to existing sites in locations outside of a defined centres or allocations including retailed and leisure uses, will submit a retail impact assessment.
7. The assessment must demonstrate that the proposal will not have an adverse impact on the vitality and viability of existing and future identified centres.

8.40 Town centres play an important role as the centre of local communities, and it is therefore critical that town centre uses are directed towards Wokingham town centre, and small town and district centres in the first instance.

8.41 The sequential test will be applied to ensure development for main town centre uses is directed to the most appropriate location, with preference given to those higher up in the hierarchy, to ensure that proposals do not have a detrimental impact on the vitality and viability of centres. Any development proposals outside of a defined centre must be clearly justified and explained. A sequential test is not required for office development within the Core Employment Areas.

- 8.42 The NPPF allows local authorities to set a threshold for impact assessments appropriate to the local area. Impact assessments help to understand the implications of proposals on the town centre and can inform decisions regarding the pattern of development. Where impact assessments indicate significant adverse impacts on the existing vitality and viability of a centre, development proposals will not be supported. The level of adverse impact will be based on individual cases.
- 8.43 Designated centres are defined on the Policies Map. Future centres are expected to be delivered as part of the South Wokingham SDL and Loddon Valley Garden Village. These future centres are not specifically defined on the Policies Map given their exact locations and extents will evolve as further masterplanning. However, where applications come forward that are demonstrably related to the delivery of an allocation including a new centre, no sequential or impact tests are required.

Policy ER8: Wokingham town centre

1. Development proposals within or in proximity to Wokingham town centre should promote and enhance its role, vitality and viability. Development proposals should retain and enhance the historic market town character and support its role by:
 - a) Retaining prominent shopfronts within the primary shopping area as far as is practicable;
 - b) Providing and maintaining complementary town centre uses (including offices and residential) within the defined town centre boundary;
 - c) Expanding the food, entertainment and leisure, and cultural offer, including into the evening as appropriate;
 - d) Supporting the regeneration of sites for main town centre uses;
 - e) Supporting the appropriate development of upper floors within the town centre, where possible access should be on the street frontage;
 - f) Supporting higher density development where appropriate;
 - g) Conserving and enhancing historic quality and interest;
 - h) Improving the attractiveness and usability of the existing public realm, including through public art, materials, street furniture and way finding;
 - i) Providing an environment that allows people to easily move around by active travel;
 - j) Ensuring appropriate parking for vehicles and cycles, including electric charging;
 - k) Maintaining and enhancing important public spaces in the town centre; and
 - l) Providing quality spaces for outdoor events.

- 8.44 Over the past ten years Wokingham town centre has undergone significant regeneration, with a vision to revitalise the town centre for the borough's residents and visitors, meeting the needs of the future, whilst enhancing and celebrating the market town heritage. The regeneration has provided additional floorspace for retail, leisure and entertainment uses and diversified the type of uses available in. This has helped to increase the proportion of local residents choosing to visit Wokingham town centre thereby supporting the local retail and commercial leisure sectors.

- 8.45 This regeneration was led by the Core Strategy (2010) local plan and supporting Wokingham Town Centre Masterplan SPD (June 2010). Recent schemes have improved the public realm in Market Place; provided new retail, food and drink and residential development at Peach Place, redeveloped Elms Field, implemented Phase I of the Carnival Pool re-development and enhanced access to Wokingham train station. The delivery of these schemes provides wider entertainment and leisure facilities including a new cinema and hotel, underlining commitment to the town centre. Regeneration is continuing to enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre.
- 8.46 All development proposals within and in proximity to Wokingham town centre should continue the positive momentum of regeneration created by completed and committed development schemes and must be consistent with the on-going objectives set out in the Wokingham Town Centre Masterplan SPD or any successor document.

Policy ER9: Woodley town centre and Lower Earley district centre

1. Development proposals that seek to enhance the vitality and viability of Woodley town centre and Lower Earley district centre will be supported where they incorporate:
 - a) Improvements to the cohesion of the centre, including links through and around the centres by active travel;
 - b) Improvements to permeability and legibility to support easy and safe movement;
 - c) Remediation and enhancement of shop fronts and building facades; and
 - d) Improvements to the public realm, including open space and green infrastructure.

- 8.47 Following the major town centre of Wokingham, Woodley town centre and Lower Earley district centre are the two largest centres in the borough and they play an important role in meeting residents' local needs. While a key focus of regeneration in recent years has been Wokingham town centre, it is important to create a positive framework for redevelopment opportunities if they were to come forward.
- 8.48 Woodley town centre is a purpose-built centre based on a wide, central shopping parade, with attractive areas of public realm and regular events held. The town centre is anchored by supermarkets at either end and has a good range of national retailers for its size, with a healthy independent retail sector. The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (2022/23) recognised the good variety of town centre uses such as restaurants, cafes and takeaways contributing to the overall vitality and viability of the centre, including after normal retail trading hours. It is a well used centre that is popular with local residents.
- 8.49 It is therefore important the centre is able to provide a variety of uses, low vacancy rates and where appropriate adapt as new development proposals come forward. This could support improved legibility through and within the centre, including between the various surface level car parks and the central parade.

- 8.50 Lower Earley district centre is a purpose-built shopping precinct, comprising several sections. The centre is anchored by an Asda superstore with an attached shopping parade, which includes a mix of community and smaller retail units. The Loddon Valley leisure centre is located adjacent to the east. A further section is located to the west, with purpose built retail units incorporating predominantly convenience retail and fast food outlets. The central and western areas are severed by Chalfont Way, which reduces permeability.
- 8.51 The Retail and Commercial Leisure Study (2022/23) considered the centre to be healthy, with a good provision of retail uses to serve the surrounding residential catchment. However, it also recognised that the centre is largely car dominated with limited opportunities for movements by active travel between the sections of the centre. There are no current proposals for the remodelling of the centre, but future development proposals should consider how improvements to the cohesion, permeability and accessibility of the centre can be delivered, to ensure its long term role. Public realm improvements that help to deliver a well designed and multi-functional space could provide meeting areas, and space for outdoor events.
- 8.52 Proposals at either Woodley town centre or Lower Earley district centre would require extensive engagement with local communities to better understand the opportunities available, and how the centres can adapt to ensure their long term vitality and viability as centres for retail and leisure.

9

Housing

9. Housing

- 9.1 Good quality housing is a fundamental need that plays a significant role in shaping our lives and our communities. A home is a vital part of people’s lives and contributes to creating a safe, healthy and prosperous society.
- 9.2 The NPPF makes clear that when considering the delivery of new homes the size, type and tenure of housing needed for different groups in the community should be assessed and reflected in planning policies. Through the Local Plan Update, specific policies seek a range of types of accommodation for people to live in. These include market housing; affordable housing; self build and custom build homes, housing for older people and those with specialist needs, and accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers. Needs will generally be met through the delivery of an appropriate mix of accommodation on larger allocations and other larger developments. Some needs will also be met through specific allocations.
- 9.3 Changing needs will be supported by requiring a greater proportion of new homes to be accessible and adaptable, including those suitable for wheelchair users.
- 9.4 To ensure a sufficient supply and choice of housing, it is important that not only are additional new homes provided, but also that the existing housing stock and land is intended for residential use, is protected. This should ensure there is sufficient overall net gain of new homes to meet future needs.

Policy H1: Housing mix, density and standards

1. Residential development proposals will contribute to the delivery of sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities by providing an appropriate mix of housing types, tenures, densities and sizes, to meet the existing and future housing needs of all sectors of the community, including those with specialist requirements.

Mix and Density

2. The mix of housing provided should reflect and respond to the identified housing needs and demands as set out in the council’s most up to date evidence of housing need.
3. Development proposals should optimise density, make efficient use of land and achieve high quality design, that responds to the size, location, opportunities and constraints of the site, and is appropriate to the character and amenity of the area. Development proposals within the defined town and district centres and in urban locations with a good standard of accessibility to public transport will be expected to achieve higher densities as appropriate.

Accessibility

4. All residential development proposals, including those providing a form of specialist accommodation for older people (including extra care housing) will be accessible and

adaptable in line with M4(2) of the Building Regulations, unless it is built in line with M4(3) (see below).

5. Development proposals for 20 or more new build dwellings will be required to deliver at least 5% of the new housing as wheelchair accessible and adaptable in line with M4(3) of the Building Regulations.
6. Development proposals for specialist accommodation for older people (including extra care housing) will be required to deliver at least 25% of all new housing as wheelchair accessible and adaptable in line with M4(3) of the Building Regulations.
7. Development proposals that do not meet the accessibility standards will need to provide robust evidence to justify that exceptional circumstances exist.

Internal Space Standards

8. Residential development proposals must meet the up to date nationally described space standard for minimum internal space.

Mix and Density

- 9.5 To deliver a choice of high quality homes, widen opportunities for home ownership and create sustainable, inclusive and mixed communities, it is important to plan for a mix of homes that most closely meets the identified needs of existing and future residents. This is supported by the NPPF requirement for local authorities to provide a range of housing types and sizes.
- 9.6 The mix of new homes should be provided based on current and future demographic and market trends, as well as on the needs of various groups within the community including those requiring specialist housing accommodation, the travelling community and those seeking plots for self or custom build properties.
- 9.7 The council's Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) (2023) identifies the overall need for different types of market and affordable dwellings as a percentage of the Local Housing Need, which should act as the starting point when bringing forward proposals for individual sites.

Table 7: Indicative housing mix

Number of bedrooms	Affordable Housing	Total Market Housing
1 bedroom	17%	5%
2 bedrooms	38%	13%
3 bedrooms	33%	47%
4+ bedrooms	12%	36%

- 9.8 The mix of homes should be able to react to changing circumstances and contribute to the mix of both the wider area and the development site itself. For example, there are current demands for smaller 1 and 2 bedroom properties to be provided as a mix of housing and apartments, which provides greater opportunities for private outdoor amenity space. The final mix of dwelling types and sizes will be

subject to negotiation, and applicants will be required to provide sufficient evidence to support their proposals.

- 9.9 Development density should have clear regard to the characteristics of the surrounding area. Higher densities will generally be more appropriate in and around accessible locations such as Wokingham town centre and other transport hubs. There may be further opportunities for higher densities on larger sites, where there is scope to design a range of areas and neighbourhoods with varying characteristics, particularly within Loddon Valley Garden Village.
- 9.10 The mix and density of developments should take into consideration place-making aspects such as character and setting, access to walking, cycling and public transport, high quality design and environmental and neighbour impacts, as set out in Policy DH1.

Housing Standards

- 9.11 Building Regulations set out minimum standards for new housing. National Planning Practice Guidance sets out 'optional' standards which exceed Building Regulations, which local planning authorities can consider. These cover accessibility, internal space, and water efficiency (see Policy CE3). Policy H1 requires the use of the options standards for accessibility and internal space.

a) Accessibility

- 9.12 There are two levels of options standards for housing accessibility:
- M4(2) of the Building Regulations is for accessible and adaptable dwellings; and
 - M4(3) relates more specifically to wheelchair user dwellings.
- 9.13 In 2020 a national consultation proposed to mandate M4(2) as a minimum requirement in Building Regulations. Although this change has yet to be confirmed, it is still expected that all new dwellings will be required to meet the M4(2) standard in future. Meeting this standard requires relatively straightforward design measures that ensures a homes is more adaptable to the needs of the occupier. These design measures will be important to enabling people to stay in their own home as they age and mobility decreases.
- 9.14 The LHNA (2023) calculates that the number of households that are likely to need wheelchair adapted housing will increase by 670 from 2021-2040. A minimum of 5% of new dwellings on applicable sites should meet the higher M4(3) standard to help meet the future needs of residents.
- 9.15 The requirements for wheelchair user dwellings have been set at a level that would allow the anticipated need to be met meet. This standard should enable those who may not have specific needs now to remain in their homes as their circumstances change. Where affordable housing is delivered on site a proportionate number should meet the M4(3) standard.
- 9.16 Where the provision of M4(3) housing creates a percentage which does not equal a whole number, the number of units may be rounded upwards to the nearest whole dwelling.

b) Internal Space Standards

- 9.17 All new housing should include sufficient internal space to cater for a variety of different household needs with the aim of promoting high standards of liveability, accessibility and comfort. Sufficient internal space also supports independent living as circumstances change, and home working, which can help to minimise the need to travel.
- 9.18 The council has successfully applied similar minimum internal space standards to the national optional standards. Continuing application assists in ensuring new homes are flexible and adaptable, and is consistent with the 2020 amendments to the General Permitted Development Regulations, which ensures all new homes delivered through permitted development rights meet the national described space standards.
- 9.19 Where references to the nationally described space standard in the policy change, the requirement should be taken to refer to the most up-to-date standard.

Policy H2: Presumption against residential losses

1. Development proposals that would result in the net loss of existing residential units of accommodation, land allocated for residential accommodation, or land with planning permission for residential accommodation will only be supported where one or more of the following criteria are met:
 - a) The safeguarding of the residential use would be undesirable due to proven existing environmental considerations;
 - b) The development proposal would replace or improve substandard accommodation to a suitable standard, including meeting residential space standards;
 - c) The development proposed would provide, or enable the delivery of, an essential social, community or cultural facility or service where it has been demonstrated that no suitable and available alternative exists; and
 - d) The loss of residential units would be linked to a wider comprehensive scheme of development which would not lead to an overall net loss of residential units.

Where the net loss is acceptable in principle, the loss in the number of residential units of accommodation should be minimised.

2. Development proposals that would result in the partial loss or change of use of an existing unit of residential accommodation to non-residential use will only be supported provided all the following criteria are met:
 - a) The resultant development would provide satisfactory levels of residential amenity for future occupiers of the retained residential use, and would not unacceptably impact on the amenity of the occupiers of nearby properties and land uses; and
 - b) The retained residential accommodation would provide acceptable standards of accommodation including compliance with up-to-date residential space standards,

appropriate layout of rooms, appropriate noise insulation, and quality internal and external environment including usable outdoor amenity space.

- 9.20 To ensure a sufficient supply and choice of housing, it is important that not only are additional new homes provided, but also that the existing housing stock and land is intended for residential use, is protected.
- 9.21 The council recognises that there may be particular circumstances that justify the loss of residential uses and the circumstances where such a loss may be acceptable are set out in Policy H2.
- 9.22 If loss is proposed to facilitate a social, community or cultural use it will need to be demonstrated with evidence that the proposed use cannot be accommodated in an existing non-residential use or building, including through co location with other social, community or cultural uses. This should be based on a search over a proportionate geographical area which is informed by the proposed use and the community / users it is expected to serve. For the purpose of this policy, essential social, community, and cultural uses will include: day to day shopping facilities; leisure and culture facilities (including arts, entertainment and sport facilities); community centres and meeting places (including places of worship); libraries; facilities for children (from nursery provision to youth clubs); education (including adult education); and healthcare facilities.
- 9.23 In relation to specialist accommodation, it is acknowledged that in some cases, there may be a net loss of accommodation, even though specialist accommodation is being re-provided on-site. This may be due to a need to bring care accommodation in line with relevant standards in relation to access and internal space provision. Applications falling within this category should be accompanied by supporting information to justify any reduction in bedspaces/dwelling equivalent provision.
- 9.24 There may be circumstances where development proposals would result in the partial loss of residential accommodation to other uses. Such proposals will be carefully considered in relation to the impact on remaining residential accommodation.

Policy H3: Affordable housing

1. All residential development proposals for at least 5 units of accommodation (gross) or 5 bedspaces (gross), or covering a site area of at least 0.16 ha, will provide affordable housing or affordable bedspaces, where viable. The minimum percentages of affordable housing or bedspaces sought are:

Location	Land type	%
Major settlements: Earley, Green Park, Shinfield (north of M4), Twyford, Winnersh, Wokingham, Woodley	Previously developed land	30
	Greenfield	40
Modest settlements: Finchampstead North, Pinewood (Crowthorne), Ruscombe, Shinfield (south of M4),	Previously developed land	40

Spencers Wood, Thames Valley Science, and Innovation Park, Three Mile Cross and Wargrave; and Minor settlements: Arborfield Cross, Barkham Hill, Charvil, Finchampstead, Hurst, Riseley, Sindlesham, Sonning and Swallowfield	Greenfield	40
Outside defined settlements	Any	40
Loddon Valley Garden Village	Any	40
Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location	Any	40
South Wokingham Strategic Development Location	Any	40

2. The expectation is that all development proposals for housing will be able to meet the above policy requirement. In exceptional circumstances applicants may submit an independently produced, open book viability assessment to justify any relaxation of the requirement. Any relaxation will require compelling reasons.
3. Affordable housing must reflect the sizes and types that meet the proven needs of people whose needs are not met by the general housing market. The council will negotiate the tenure, size and type of affordable units on a site by site basis having regard to housing needs, site specifics and other factors.
4. The delivery of affordable housing will be provided in accordance with the following order of priority:
 - a) On-site as part of the development. On strategic developments, affordable housing should be distributed across the development to create a mixed and balanced community;
 - b) In exceptional circumstances on an alternative site, and only if:
 - i. Provision would result in a more effective use of available resources; or
 - ii. It would meet an identified housing need, such as providing a better social mix and wider housing choice; or
 - iii. Site specific considerations mean it is more feasible to provide an offsite contribution.
5. An affordable home ownership product should be delivered as part of all applicable development proposals. First Homes should provide 25% of the affordable housing proposed where it is demonstrated that a discount of 50% makes the homes affordable. Where this level of discount does not make First Homes affordable, another form of affordable ownership product should be delivered.

6. Planning obligations will be used to ensure that affordable housing will remain at an affordable price for future eligible households, or for the subsidy to be recycled to alternative affordable housing provision.

- 9.25 With high house prices, many local people have difficulty finding suitable affordable accommodation, particularly the young who are more likely to be single person households, on lower incomes and less able to secure mortgage finance. The need for affordable housing is a priority for the council with access to suitable accommodation having wide implications for health, wellbeing, employment and wider life opportunities.
- 9.26 The council's Affordable Housing Strategy (2024-28) sets out four 4 strategic priorities to help meet the identified needs. This includes supporting a pipeline of affordable and sustainable homes, as well as providing suitable accommodation for the most vulnerable residents.
- 9.27 The NPPF defines affordable housing as housing for rent, first homes, discounted market sales housing and other affordable routes to home ownership for those whose needs are not met by the market. The rent or sale price is set below the prevailing market cost, allowing people on lower incomes to access suitable accommodation. Mechanisms, including legal obligations, are used to ensure housing remains available to others that might need it in the future.
- 9.28 The latest Local Housing Need Assessment (LHNA) (2023) has identified an overall need for affordable housing equivalent to an average of 352 households per annum, or around 45% of Local Housing Need. This is a significant need and provides a clear justification for affordable housing through residential development proposals.
- 9.29 Affordable housing needs are complex and should not be directly linked to the overall housing need for the borough. The NPPF states that affordable housing should only be sought from major development of 10 or more dwellings or on housing sites of 0.5ha or more. In designated rural areas local planning authorities may instead choose to set their own lower threshold. Designated rural areas applies to areas described under section 157(1) of The Housing Act 1985¹². Large parts of Wokingham Borough are designated rural areas, and given the significant need, it is considered justified and reasonable for the council to secure affordable housing on sites of 5 or more dwellings.
- 9.30 Although the focus of affordable housing is on housing, the need for suitable accommodation continues as someone ages, with there being a need for affordable bedspaces within care homes. The LHNA identified a substantial increase in the number of older people during the plan period, and whilst the council's aim is to support people to continue to live in their own home, the number of people that require specialist accommodation will increase.
- 9.31 For the avoidance of doubt, residential development proposals includes any application for market housing, residential caravans (including accommodation for Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople), older people's housing, such as extra care housing, sheltered housing, assisted living, retirement housing), and care homes.

¹² Identified in Schedule 1, The Housing (Right to Acquire or Enfranchise) (Designated Rural Areas in the South East) Order 1997.

Types and tenures of affordable housing

- 9.32 Several tenures of housing fall within the definition of affordable housing. This includes affordable housing for social rent and shared ownership, alongside other tenures including affordable rent, First Homes and discounted market sales housing. The council has a shared ownership model designed to ensure that homes remain affordable for our residents.
- 9.33 The council is supportive of the provision of housing for key workers as part of an appropriate mix of affordable housing. Key worker housing is a type of affordable rent that provides a more financially accessible housing option. A key worker is a someone who is considered to provide an essential service to the local economy and is in receipt of an income of £35,111 or less per annum (per person). The salary threshold is reviewed and published annually. Key workers include teachers, police officers, firefighters and other essential roles set out in the council's Allocations Policy.
- 9.34 First Homes are a specific kind of discounted market sale housing designed to help eligible buyers take their first step on the property ladder. The provision of First Homes is supported where they are viable. The national Planning Practice Guidance sets out the definition of First Homes, which includes setting a discount of a minimum 30% against the market value, and ensuring that after the discount has been applied, the first sale price must be no higher than £250,000 for homes outside London. Eligible First Homes buyers should also be first time buyers and have a household income not exceeding £80,000 per annum.
- 9.35 The NPPF gives local planning authorities the discretion to require a minimum discount of either 40% or 50% where a need can be demonstrated. The LHNA (2023) notes that there is strong evidence that a 50% discount is required to make First Homes a viable and affordable policy in the borough. A 50% discount should therefore be applied, and First Homes will be secured first, before other tenures. Where a 50% discount does not make First Homes affordable another type of affordable home ownership product should be delivered.
- 9.36 In accordance with the Planning Practice Guidance, a minimum of 25% of new homes on an eligible site would be delivered as First Homes. Of the remaining 75%, as a guide the council will seek a 70:30 split between social rent and shared ownership. The affordable housing tenure split will typically be 70% provided as social rent, 25% as First Homes, and 5% as shared ownership.
- 9.37 This split may be applied flexibly in exceptional circumstances where there are site specific issues, including viability. Other relevant evidence will include information from the Housing Register and the type and tenure of other affordable housing in the local area. Planning obligations will be used to secured First Homes in perpetuity.
- 9.38 The mix of housing will be considered on a case by case basis, with the latest available information regarding housing mix used as a starting point.

Provision of affordable housing

- 9.39 Affordable housing should be provided on site as part of a development proposal, and will be the minimum amount required, with a higher proportion sought where appropriate. An off-site contribution towards the provision of affordable housing may be acceptable where it is impractical to include on-site. Similarly, where it is deemed more practical, where the provision of affordable housing

creates a percentage which does not equal a whole number, the number of units may be rounded upwards, or a commuted sum will be required for the remaining proportion of the contribution to support additional off site provision.

- 9.40 As set out in the NPPF, for proposals on brownfield land where vacant buildings are being reused or redeveloped, the provision of affordable housing sought will be reduced by a proportionate amount that is equivalent to the gross floorspace of the existing building. This does not apply to vacant buildings which have been abandoned.
- 9.41 Affordable housing helps to provide mixed and balanced communities, supporting the economy of the borough, and the wider Thames Valley. To provide these communities, affordable housing units should be distributed “tenure blind” around a development site and should not be concentrated in one area, unless there are specific management issues.
- 9.42 The council will seek the maximum provision of affordable housing on all qualifying sites with vigour. Attempts to undermine or circumnavigate the provision of affordable housing or the payment of commuted sums will not be tolerated.
- 9.43 The council will be alert to, and not permit any benefit to be gained from, the piecemeal subdivision of a site to circumvent this policy. Sites in the same ownership, or where an ownership relationship can be proven, will be treated as a single planning unit/site and if the overall gross site is 0.16ha or more, the applicant will be expected to enter into a legal agreement to provide affordable housing.
- 9.44 The provision of affordable housing on rural exception sites will be supported in accordance with Policy H4 Exception Sites.

Viability Assessment

- 9.45 The historic and continued delivery of market and affordable housing demonstrates that sites will not be rendered unviable based on the amount, threshold and tenure split of affordable housing sought on applicable sites.
- 9.46 Viability assessment undertaken in support of the local plan has demonstrated that the requirements and thresholds of this policy are achievable. It is recognised that in specific circumstances exceptional costs may affect the viability of development. Any claims that a site cannot be developed viably with a policy compliant affordable housing contribution must be justified through an open book financial appraisal which should be independent, transparent and fully funded by the applicant, and will be published in an appropriate manner with the planning application supporting documents. Reviews of viability assessments will also be funded by the developer. Any relaxation in the provision of affordable housing must be the minimum to make the scheme viable.
- 9.47 In exceptional circumstances where a lower level of affordable housing provision is sought, planning obligations will include a review mechanism to reassess the viability of the development over a specified period. If viability has subsequently improved, additional affordable housing, or a commuted sum to the same value must be provided to the same level specified in the policy.

Policy H4: Exception sites

Rural Exception Sites

1. Development proposals for Rural Exception Sites that provide affordable housing to meet local needs will be permitted provided that:
 - a) The dwellings are designed to meet an established local affordable housing need as evidenced through a Local Housing Need Survey of the town/parish or a specific local survey using a methodology agreed by the council;
 - b) The number, size, type and tenure of dwellings proposed are suitable to meet the identified need and will usually be limited to small scale sites of up to 9 dwellings unless it can be demonstrated that a larger development will not have an adverse impact on the other criteria;
 - c) The affordable homes are secured in perpetuity for those with a local connection to the town/parish within which the scheme is located; and
 - d) The site is situated outside defined settlements but adjoins or is well related to, the existing defined settlement and is in keeping with the character of the local area.
2. A limited number of market dwellings for the sole purpose of making a proposed development financially viable will be supported, subject to site specific viability testing, and be limited to up to 20% of the gross number of total dwellings. Any market housing included within a proposal should demonstrate how it will be integrated with the rural exception development and take into account the character of the local area.

First Home Exception sites

3. Development proposals for First Home exception sites for affordable housing will be supported where they meet criteria 1a) to 1d) for rural exception sites. Where other affordable housing tenures are proposed on a First Homes exception site, applicants are expected to provide robust evidence of an identified need for the mix proposed.

Community-led development

4. Development proposals for community-led housing that provide limited affordable housing will be supported provided that:
 - a) The site is adjacent or well related to an existing defined settlement;
 - b) The site is less than 1ha in size and does not exceed 5% of the total size of the adjacent defined settlement;
 - c) It does not compromise areas or assets of particular importance;
 - d) It complies with local design policies and standards; and
 - e) An up-to-date assessment shows that the need for the dwellings proposed will not be met through housing allocations or development with extant planning permission.

- 9.48 The council will seek to meet local affordable housing needs in rural areas by encouraging affordable housing schemes that meet an identified local need on suitable sites outside of defined settlements. The involvement of the relevant town or parish council and local communities will be an important and active part of progressing these schemes to understand the affordable housing needs of people with a local connection to specific area.
- 9.49 It is recognised that in a number of rural settlements higher housing costs can inhibit people remaining in their local area. Exception Sites can therefore provide a means for people who would ordinarily not be able to afford to live within that settlement to remain within their local community.
- 9.50 The purpose of a Rural Exception Site is to meet the identified housing needs of local people. In applying this policy, consideration will be given to the needs of the local community who are current or recent former residents of a town or parish or have a current employment or family connection. The development of rural exception sites will therefore help to create sustainable, mixed communities.
- 9.51 An appropriate proportion of market housing on a Rural Exception Site will be supported, subject to a site-specific independent viability assessment. Market housing included within a scheme should be appropriately located, taking into account the character of the area and integration with the affordable housing units on the site.
- 9.52 The need for rural exception sites should be drawn from a Local Housing Need Survey of the town/parish or a specific local survey as agreed by the council. To ensure the long term availability of the affordable housing for local people, applicants will be required to agree to a planning obligation.
- 9.53 First Homes are designed to enable eligible buyers to take their first steps on the property ladder. Development proposals for First Homes will be considered in the same manner as rural exception sites. Proposals for First Homes exception sites cannot come forward in areas designated as Green Belt, and must also meet the criteria for First Homes set out in Policy H3.
- 9.54 Community-led development for housing can provide additional opportunities to deliver new housing that helps to meet the specific needs of local communities. In accordance with the NPPF, community-led housing should not compromise the protection given to areas or assets of particular importance, including the Green Belt, local green space and designated heritage assets¹³. A small proportion of market housing may be allowed on site where it is fully justified and is shown to be necessary to bring the wider site forward.
- 9.55 Community-led developments are defined in the NPPF and should be instigated and taken forward by a not-for-profit organisation set up and run primarily for the purpose of meeting the housing needs of its members and the wider community, rather than being a commercial enterprise. The organisation is created, managed and democratically controlled by its members.

¹³ A complete list is set out in NPPF footnote 7.

Policy H5: Rural workers' dwellings

1. Development proposals in the countryside for a rural worker dwelling which serves an existing agricultural, forestry or similar land based rural business requiring a countryside location, will be supported where all the following criteria are met:
 - a) There is an essential need for one or more permanent full-time worker(s) to be accommodated at all times on the site of a rural enterprise in order for the enterprise to operate;
 - b) The rural enterprise has been established for at least 3 years and has been demonstrated to be economically sustainable and financially viable for the foreseeable future;
 - c) The functional need for the rural worker dwelling cannot be accommodated in suitable existing accommodation available in an existing defined settlement within a reasonable distance of the rural enterprise in the first instance, or within another existing building on the site which is suitable for conversion or extension;
 - d) The size and scale of the dwelling is commensurate with the functional requirement of the intended occupant and their connection with the rural enterprise;
 - e) The dwelling is sited close to existing buildings as far as is practicable and is appropriately designed and landscaped to avoid unacceptable impact on the countryside character; and
 - f) No dwelling serving or associated with the rural business has been either sold or converted from a residential use or otherwise separated from the holding within the last 10 years. The act of severance may override the evidence of need.
2. Where rural worker accommodation is essential to support a new rural enterprise, it should be provided temporarily by a caravan, mobile home, or other temporary accommodation for the first three years. It will be required to satisfy the functional tests set out at 1a), c), d), and e) and additionally demonstrate that the following financial tests are satisfied:
 - a) There is clear evidence of a firm intention and ability to develop the enterprise concerned; and
 - b) There is clear evidence that the proposed enterprise has been planned on a sound financial basis.
3. Permission for all rural workers dwellings, including temporary accommodation, will be subject to a condition which restricts occupation of the dwelling to a person directly employed or last employed on a permanent full-time basis in rural enterprise, or to their surviving partner or dependents.
4. Agricultural Occupancy conditions will be retained unless robust evidence is provided that the condition is no longer necessary.

9.56 The NPPF seeks to avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless specific identified circumstances apply. One of these circumstances is the need for a rural worker to live permanently at, or near their

place of work in the countryside. For the purpose of Policy H5, rural workers are those employed in an agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance, where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attention 24-hours a day and where otherwise there would be a risk to human or animal health or from crime, or to deal quickly with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops or products). This may include equestrian use, where Policy DH7: Equestrian Development should also be considered, where relevant. While some rural workers dwellings may come forward via permitted development rights which allow the conversion of barns into dwellings, Policy H4 provides the criteria for assessing the suitability of proposed new dwellings when planning permission is required. Proposals for development located within the Metropolitan Green Belt should also refer to Policy SS14.

- 9.57 The policy approach expects rural worker accommodation to be provided within defined settlements in the first instance. This recognises that in most cases it will be more sustainable and convenient for rural workers to live in suitable existing or new dwellings in nearby towns or villages. Potentially intrusive new residential development in the countryside should be avoided unless there are sufficient special circumstances to justify the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at their place of work in the countryside. Whether an essential need exists will be assessed on a case by case basis and will depend on the needs of the enterprise concerned and not on the personal preferences or circumstances of any of the individuals involved. Convenience of being on site does not constitute an essential need. The need for a security presence will not on its own normally form an acceptable basis to justify a new dwelling.
- 9.58 A 'functional test' is required to establish whether there is an essential requirement for one or more workers to live permanently at or very close to the rural business or enterprise for it to function properly. The term 'at all times' covers both times of the day and times of the year. This may be if workers need to be available day and night, for example to look after animals. Applicants will need to provide robust justification that such a functional need for on site worker accommodation exists and provide further justification to explain why this need cannot be met by existing accommodation on site or in the area. Applicants will also need to justify the number of workers needed to satisfy the requirement, which will be dependent on the scale and nature of the enterprise. New dwellings must be of a size that is proportionate with the number of workers required and with the needs of the enterprise concerned. Rural worker dwellings that are unusually large, i.e. that are of a scale untypical of their intended purpose in allowing the rural business or enterprise to function properly, will be refused. In order to avoid excessively large dwellings over and above what is justified by the functional need, the council will also consider removing certain permitted development rights for any dwelling permitted.
- 9.59 A 'financial test' will also be necessary. New permanent accommodation will only be justified where there is an existing enterprise which is demonstrably economically viable. The council will take a robust approach to the assessment of the level of profitability given that these developments remain permanently in the countryside despite any failure of a rural enterprise. Therefore, the financial test will assess whether the proposed dwelling can be sustained in the long term by the rural enterprise, and the council will expect to see details of how the enterprise is expected to develop. Where the council requires verification of submitted information by independent valuers, this will be expected to be funded by the applicant. Some enterprises which aim to operate broadly on a subsistence basis, but which nonetheless provide wider benefits (e.g. in managing important landscapes or wildlife habitats), can be sustained on relatively low financial returns.

- 9.60 Where new businesses are being set up, there is a need for the financial viability of the business to be demonstrated before a permanent dwelling is considered. A period of three years allows time for a business to establish and justify the development of a permanent dwelling to meet an essential need. A temporary dwelling to meet an essential need can be sought in this initial period which will usually be restricted via a condition.
- 9.61 The applicant should ensure that all necessary information is included with any planning applications in order for the council to carry out to its satisfaction, the functional and financial tests. This includes budget books and recorded hours.
- 9.62 Where an application is submitted to remove an occupancy condition, robust marketing evidence should be provided to justify the change of circumstance. It must demonstrate that there is no longer a need for rural worker accommodation on the holding and the rural enterprise is no longer viable. Evidence will need to be provided that the property has been marketed appropriately for a minimum of 12 months and at a price which accurately reflects the existing occupancy condition and market expectations.

Policy H6: Self-build and custom housebuilding

1. Development proposals for self and custom build plots consistent with the policies of this local plan and the identified needs shown on the self and custom build housing register will be supported in principle.
2. The delivery of self-build and custom build housing will be:
 - a) Provided as serviced plots;
 - b) Subject to an agreed design code;
 - c) Required to be completed within 3 years of a self/custom builder purchasing a plot; and
 - d) Made available and marketed appropriately at a reasonable value, for at least 12 months. For the first two months of this period priority will be given to individuals and associations of individuals on the council's self-build register.

Any unsold plot(s) must remain on the open market as self-build or custom build whilst being offered to the council and Registered Providers. Only after these options have been exhausted can the plot(s) be delivered as market housing.
3. Development proposals on self and custom build plots should demonstrate innovative, high quality design that accords with the agreed design code and takes into account the character of the local area.
4. Delivery of market-led self and custom build plots will be in addition to, and not in lieu of, an affordable housing provision requirement in accordance with Policy H3.

- 9.63 Legislation and the NPPF provides support for those who wish to design and build their own home as part of diversifying the supply of housing. Self-build is where a person is more directly involved in organising and constructing their home. Custom housebuilding is where a person commissions a specialist advisor to deliver their own home. The Self-build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (as amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016) provides a legal definition of self-build and custom housebuilding. The Act does not distinguish between self-build and custom housebuilding and states that both are where an individual, an association of individuals, or persons working with or for individuals or associations of individuals, build or complete houses to be occupied as homes by those individuals.
- 9.64 The delivery of a variety of housing types and sizes is important in helping to achieve balanced and sustainable communities, contributing towards the delivery of homes to rent or buy, alongside the mainstream, larger housebuilders.
- 9.65 The NPPF places a strong emphasis on supporting self-build housing through planning, encouraging councils to plan proactively to encourage growth in this area. In accordance with the Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015, the council maintains a register of individuals and associations of individuals who have expressed an interest in self-build and custom house building. This has helped to inform the demand for plots within the borough¹⁴. Developers should contact the council the most up to date information, as future demand will be kept under review.
- 9.66 National Planning Practice Guidance acknowledges that secondary sources may also be used to provide information on the demand for plots, including data from building plot search websites, surveys of local residents and demand assessment tools.
- 9.67 Self-build and custom build plots can be delivered in a number of ways, ranging from multiple individually serviced plots within larger sites (as proposed through Policy H6) or single or small sites identified by individuals (windfall sites) or by town and parish councils and/or groups preparing neighbourhood development plans.
- 9.68 A serviced plot of land will have access to a public highway and connections for electricity, high speed broadband, water and waste water; or can be provided with this infrastructure in specified circumstances or within a specified time period. Grouping plots together on each site may facilitate the timely provision of this infrastructure.
- 9.69 Given the demonstrable interest in self and custom build housing, it is important self-build plots remain available. Developers must demonstrate that appropriate marketing has taken place before self-build plots can be released for development with conventional market housing. Developers must provide evidence to demonstrate:
- That the plot(s) have been marketed for a minimum of a 12 month period. This period should only begin from when the serviced plot(s) are first available for purchase. The plot provider shall notify the council that the formal 12 month marketing period has begun;
 - That the marketing and sale of plots is prioritised to those on the self-build register, to meet local demand;

¹⁴ Further information regarding the register is available on the council's website at <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/housing-and-tenants/housing-needs/register-self-build-home>

- An active and sustained local marketing campaign; and
- How the plot(s) have been marketed that brings them to the attention of the maximum number of potential purchasers at a fair open market value.

- 9.70 Where, following appropriate marketing there is insufficient interest in self or custom build plots that form part of a larger site, the developer should engage with the council to consider in the first instance whether the plots could be sold to the council or a Registered Provider. The provision of additional market housing will only be acceptable once these alternative options have been investigated.
- 9.71 To ensure high quality design, and to provide clarity at the marketing stage, on sites with multiple self-build plots the council will seek the agreement of a design code with the provider of the plots. Plots should not be marketed until a design code has been submitted to and agreed by the council. This will ensure the self-builder understands the parameters for the development and what can be achieved.
- 9.72 Where a development site has been divided into parts, or is being delivered in phases, the area to be used for determining whether this policy applies will be the original application site as part of a single planning site.
- 9.73 The council recognises that a development may need to be phased differently to incorporate self-build plots. The plot provider will need to work with the council to progress the most appropriate way for the proposed sites, taking reasonable account of the location of the plots within the site and the phasing of the surrounding development.
- 9.74 Serviced self-build plots will not form part of the affordable housing provision required in Policy H3. The percentage requirement of self-build plots will be additional to any other provisions set out in the plan. Affordable serviced self-build plots may be considered as part of the development proposal, however unless the plot(s) meet the affordable housing definition in the NPPF (Annex 2) it would be classed as private housing.
- 9.75 Loddon Valley Garden Village and the South Wokingham Strategic Development Location are expected to deliver custom and self-build plots as part of the overall housing mix. Additional windfall sites are expected to come forward and contribute to the self-build and custom housebuilding plots in the borough.

Policy H7: Specialist accommodation

New specialist accommodation

1. The council will work positively and collaboratively with statutory and voluntary agencies and the private sector to support households who require additional support or form of specialist accommodation to meet their needs. The council's preference is to encourage self-reliance and independent living but recognises that providing the right type of accommodation can enable these households to live successfully.
2. The delivery of specialist accommodation will be supported and met by:

- a) Requiring strategic scale development to include an appropriate onsite provision of specialist accommodation as part of a mixed community;
 - b) Approving applications for additional provision in accordance with H17 3 below; and
 - c) Protecting existing specialist accommodation in accordance with Policy H17 4 below.
3. Development proposals related to specialist accommodation (including housing with care or housing with support) will be supported where the following criteria are met:
- a) Local commissioning priorities or a local need has been evidenced through a specific survey / assessment using a methodology agreed with the council;
 - b) The accommodation is well located with regard to the type of accommodation being proposed. Locations within and close to an identified town or district centre are considered suitable in principle for all types of accommodation;
 - c) The site has access to a good range of services and facilities, including existing public transport routes, or incorporates essential community facilities and services, such as healthcare services or day care for older people;
 - d) The site has safe and suitable access to the highway network for vehicles and pedestrians and adequate space can be provided for emergency vehicles; and
 - e) Incorporate gardens and areas of amenity green space of an appropriate size and quality as an integral part of the development proposal.

Loss of specialist accommodation

4. Development proposals that would result in the loss of specialist accommodation (including residential, nursing or dementia care premises) will not be supported unless it can be clearly demonstrated that one or more of the following criteria are met:
- a) The proposal leads to the significant improvement of an existing premise / facility or the replacement of an existing premise / facility, of equal accessibility and convenience for the local community, with equivalent or improved facilities;
 - b) The premise / facility no longer meets the needs of the community; or
 - c) The premise / facility is no longer economically viable.

9.76 As set out at the start of this chapter, a home is a vital part of people's lives and contributes to creating a safe, healthy and prosperous society. Across communities there is a range of housing needs. The projected change in demographic of the borough will add to and change the nature of these needs.

9.77 It is essential that the planning system recognises these needs. Most needs can be met by ensuring new homes are accessible and adaptable, helping people to remain in their own home, with the tools to enable them to continue to live independently. Some people will however benefit from additional support and will need suitable accommodation to meet their existing needs.

9.78 The council's Housing Strategy supports self-reliance and independent living, which can help reduce the likelihood of vulnerable people living in institutional settings, reducing the need for expensive care services and unnecessary admissions to hospital or residential care. The council's Younger People's Housing Strategy further sets out the strategic direction for identified priority groups, including care

leavers, younger people at risk of homelessness and former Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Care Leavers (UASCs). The Strategy prioritises expanding housing options for those groups, supporting them to keep their tenancies, reducing homelessness and rough sleeping and working with younger people to plan next steps for their housing needs.

- 9.79 The Local Housing Need Assessment (LHNA) has assessed the likely level of need for bedspaces for older people (within use class C2), based on projections of how many people are likely to suffer from issues such as reduced mobility and dementia. It identifies an indicative need to plan for around 925 housing places over the period 2021-2040 to be provided through a mix of sheltered and extra care housing and domiciliary care to accommodate people with specific requirements, such as the older population and vulnerable people, including people with disabilities.
- 9.80 Working with key partners, including care and specialist accommodation providers, the council will encourage providers to take the Local Plan Update and its strategy into account when developing their own strategies and plans. Developers are also encouraged to undertake early engagement with the council and (where appropriate) the Integrated Care Board early in the planning application process to ensure the requirements of older people and those with additional support needs are carefully considered in the planning and design of their proposals.
- 9.81 Proposals for specialist accommodation related to either housing with support or housing with care should also make sufficient provision for open space to ensure older people and those with additional support needs have suitable access to green areas for social interaction and recreation within their community. Open should be provided in accordance with the standards set out in Policy HC4.

Policy H8: Conversion and sub-division of buildings

1. Development proposals for the conversion or sub-division of buildings into self-contained flats or houses of multiple occupation, or their subsequent extension, will be supported within defined settlements provided that all the following criteria are met:
 - a) The character and appearance of the existing building is respected in terms of materials, design, and principal architectural features;
 - b) The proposal would provide acceptable levels of residential amenity for future occupiers of the development, and would not unacceptably impact on the amenity of the occupiers of nearby properties;
 - c) The proposal would provide an acceptable standard of accommodation, including adequate living space (including any communal areas), appropriate layout of rooms between units of accommodation, appropriate noise insulation, and a high quality internal and external environment including natural lighting and ventilation;
 - d) The proposal provides acceptable access to the highway, vehicle parking and secure cycle storage and parking. All parking should be provided on-site and provision offered relative to accessibility;
 - e) The proposal provides adequate on-site space for refuse and recycling storage facilities which is conveniently located for collection. Facilities should be contained within a covered storage area; and

- f) The proposal would not, either individually or cumulatively, unduly dilute or harm an existing mixed and sustainable community through the significant overconcentration of flats or HMOs.

- 9.82 The conversion and sub-division of buildings into dwellings or multiple occupation can provide additional residential accommodation that makes more efficient use of existing properties.
- 9.83 Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) are homes which have shared basic amenities such as a kitchen or bathroom and are occupied by more than 3 unrelated individuals as their only or main residence. Smaller HMOs of between 3 and 6 individuals fall under the C4 planning use class whereas larger HMOs of greater than 6 persons are sui generis. Within Wokingham Borough, HMOs comprise only a small portion of the housing stock but are more common near railway stations and the University of Reading. Due to being a comparatively low cost housing option, HMOs make a positive contribution by meeting a particular type of accommodation need e.g. for students, people on low incomes, people with short term housing needs, or for single young professionals.
- 9.84 Whilst the conversion and sub-division of buildings can make a positive contribution to the housing stock, this can only be achieved where the existing property is suitable, and where the impacts on the wider area and its communities are acceptable. An overconcentration of flats and HMOs has the potential to lead to fundamental and unacceptable changes to an area's established housing mix and sustainability.
- 9.85 National permitted development rights allow the conversion of dwellings to smaller HMOs (i.e. to C4 planning use class), meaning that planning permission is not usually required. However, planning permission is necessary to create HMOs of greater than 6 bedrooms or where permitted development rights have been removed.
- 9.86 Development proposals for the conversion or sub-division of buildings will be assessed particularly in terms of the suitability of the property to provide quality accommodation and the impacts on the amenities of the wider area, and the ability to provide sufficient parking and servicing. Development proposals to extend properties which have previously been converted or sub-divided will be similarly assessed to ensure the impacts remain acceptable.
- 9.87 Development proposals should be designed so that the internal arrangement of rooms minimises opportunity for disturbance between different units of accommodation. Bedrooms should have adequate useable space having regard to shape and available headroom, and comply with minimum space standards. Any communal living spaces must be of adequate space to be able to cater for activities involving all members of the whole property. Facilities for refuse and recycling should be located away from the windows of habitable rooms, ideally covered, and be positioned to minimise adverse impacts on the streetscene.
- 9.88 Parking should be provided on-site. Parking demand should be calculated per bedroom and rounded-up to full cycle/car parking spaces. In most cases properties without sufficient on-site parking will not be suitable. Off-site vehicle parking will only be considered acceptable where it is clearly demonstrated that sufficient acceptable parking is available in the wider area through on-street parking or at nearby car parks. This will need to be robustly demonstrated and shown to be an attractive and realistic option for future occupiers through a parking survey.

9.89 Applications for development proposals should be supported by:

- A scaled plan with dimensions identifying the private accesses, (car/cycle) parking on site and other (bin) storage areas.
- A plan and/or suitable photographs identifying existing on-street parking/waiting areas and restrictions near the site.
- Vehicle ownership information of existing residents.

9.90 Where it may not be possible to provide sufficient parking on-site, applications for development proposals should in addition provide:

- An assessment of accessibility to town/district/local centres and transport interchanges, exploring routes, distances and infrastructure quality that may influence travel choices.
- Surveys of parking stress (sometimes known as [Lambeth Parking Study Methodology](#)), which may include wider areas to explore displaced parking demand.

9.91 Where development proposals are likely to result in displaced parking demands, the Council will work with developers to explore appropriate and proportionate mitigation which might include planning obligations to deliver car clubs and/or the expansion of traffic regulation orders.

Policy H9: Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople provision

1. Provision will be made for a minimum 86 net additional pitches for Gypsies and Travellers* in the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2040.
2. The accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople will be supported and met by:
 - a) Protecting existing Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople accommodation from redevelopment or change of use to other uses;
 - b) Allocating the sites listed in Part 3) below for additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches;
 - c) Requiring strategic scale development to include appropriate onsite provision of Gypsy and Traveller pitches as part of a mixed community; and
 - d) Approving applications for additional provision which accord with Policy H10.

Site allocations and delivery as part of strategic scale development

3. The sites listed below, and defined on the Policies Map, are allocated for residential caravan site use to be occupied by Gypsy and Travellers and should be used only for this purpose:

Ref	Site name	Approx no. pitches
SS14.1	High Barn Farm, Commonfield Lane, Barkham	20
SS14.2	Honeysuckle Lodge, Commonfield Lane, Barkham	4
SS14.3	Woodlands Farm, Wood Lane, Barkham	15

SS14.24	Woodside, Blagrove Lane, Wokingham	4
<p>4. The sites listed below, and defined on the Policies Map, are allocated for sustainable, well designed mixed-use development, which includes the provision of Gypsy and Traveller pitches as per Policy SS12 and Policy SS13:</p>		
Ref	Site name	Approx no. pitches
SS11	Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location	5
SS12	South Wokingham Strategic Development Location	6
SS13	Loddon Valley Garden Village	20
<p>5. All residential development proposals for 500 or more dwellings (gross) will provide 1 Gypsy and Traveller pitch per 200 dwellings, rounded up to the nearest whole figure, as part of inclusive mixed communities.</p> <p>*In accordance with the definition at Annex 1 of the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (2015) as updated 19 December 2023.</p>		

9.92 The NPPF together with Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) requires local authorities to assess the size, type and tenure of housing needed by different groups and for this to be reflected in planning policies. This includes the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showperson communities.

9.93 The council is required to set pitch and plot targets which address the likely permanent and transit accommodation needs of the Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople communities. The council’s Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (2023) (GTAA) identified a need for 86 Gypsy and Traveller pitches as set out in Table 8 below. No need was identified for Travelling Showpeople. The need represents both the accommodation needs cultural households, which encompasses households which lead a nomadic lifestyle.

Table 8: Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment Identified Need 2022/23 to 2039/40.

Period (years)	Cultural need (pitches)
Short-term need (2022/23 to 2026/27)	35
Longer-term need (2027/28 to 2039/40)	51
Total need (2022/23 to 2039/40)	86

9.94 Since the GTAA was published, 4 additional pitches¹⁵ are expected to be granted permission. The remaining need within the plan period is therefore reduced to 82 pitches.

¹⁵ Awaiting legal agreement to be signed.

- 9.95 Policy H11 allocates 4 sites specifically for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. Together these 4 sites have the capacity to deliver approximately 43 pitches. Strategic scale developments are also expected to make a proportionate contribution to meeting the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community. Taken together, expected permissions, specific allocations and delivery as part of strategic scale developments would contribute 78 pitches towards meeting the identified need. The remaining 8 pitches is expected to be met through windfall development proposals.
- 9.96 Provision within strategic scale development should be made in accordance with 1 pitch per 200 dwellings rounded up to the nearest whole pitch, e.g. a scheme which would equate to 2.4 pitches, should be rounded up to 3 pitches. The provision of pitches should be incorporated into masterplanning from an early stage. The council's strong preference is for onsite provision. In exceptional cases, off site provision may be acceptable provided the demonstration of genuine constraints to onsite delivery.
- 9.97 The council will be alert to, and not permit any benefit to be gained from, the subdivision of a larger site to circumvent provision. Sites in the same ownership, or where an ownership relationship can be proven, will be treated as a single planning unit/site and if the overall gross quantum of housing reasonably capable of being achieved is 500 or more dwellings, the applicant will be expected to provide Gypsy and Traveller pitches in accordance with the set standard. Additionally, attempts to deliberately reduce the number of dwellings proposed for a site to avoid the policy threshold will be strongly resisted. This is consistent with policies elsewhere in this plan, including Policy H1 and Policy DH1, which require development to make the most efficient use of land.

Policy H10: Traveller sites

1. Development proposals for new Gypsy and Traveller pitches and Travelling Showpeople plots will be supported where all of the criteria are met:
 - a) The site is located in a defined settlement or if in countryside, is well related to a defined settlement within or adjoining the borough;
 - b) The proposal is of a scale which does not dominate nearby settlements whether singly or cumulatively with any existing or permitted sites in the area;
 - c) Safe and suitable access to the highway network for vehicles, caravans and pedestrians can be provided and there is adequate space for the parking and manoeuvring of caravans within the site;
 - d) The scheme is sensitively and appropriately designed, including landscaping, to respect landscape character in accordance with Policies NE4, NE5 and NE6;
 - e) The proposal should be adequately serviced, or be capable of being adequately serviced, preferably by mains connections; and
 - f) The proposal provides acceptable standards of amenity for the site's occupants and does not have unacceptable impact on the amenity of neighbouring properties in accordance with Policy DH2.

In addition, Travelling Showpeople sites should demonstrate that the site has adequate space and is designed to allow for the manoeuvring, storage and maintenance of show equipment and associated vehicles.

2. Proposals for sites of mixed residential and business use will only be considered appropriate if the business use accords with Policy ER4 and would not result in an unacceptable loss of amenity to the residential occupiers or surrounding properties in accordance with DH2.

Loss of pitches or plots

3. Development proposals that would result in the net loss of existing pitches /plots, land allocated for pitches / plots, or land with planning permission for pitches / plots will only be supported when one or more of the following criteria are met:
 - a) The pitch, plot or site is no longer suitable for such use and that alternative provision on a site that is of equal or better quality is provided; or
 - b) It is clearly demonstrated that there is no current or foreseeable future need for pitches or plots in the borough.
4. Development proposals for pitches specifically to accommodate transit movements will be permitted, subject to satisfying parts 1, 2, and 3 of this policy.

- 9.98 As a guide, a Gypsy and Traveller pitch normally comprises space for a mobile home, a touring caravan, an amenity building, two vehicle spaces, and amenity space / small garden area / play space. However, it is recognised that composition can differ for reasons including site characteristics or the occupant's preference. A plot for Travelling Showpeople would typically comprise residential accommodation (in the form of mobile homes or touring caravans) and a storage and maintenance area for equipment, including fairground rides and associated vehicles.
- 9.99 The PPST recognises that Gypsy and Traveller pitches and Travelling Showpeople plots will generally be located in the countryside, given the lack of suitable available land within settlements. This is recognised within Policy H10, however proposals are expected to be well related to defined settlements so that occupiers have the opportunity to access local services and facilities. To be considered 'well related, sites generally will need to be within reasonable travelling distance by active travel modes to a nearby settlement, taking account of any barriers to movement. Proposals in the open countryside will be refused in accordance with the PPTS.
- 9.100 Policy H10 supplements other policies in the Local Plan Update such as those relating to flood risk, biodiversity and historic environment.
- 9.101 It is important that Gypsy and Traveller pitches remain available to help meet the accommodation needs of future generations. For this reason, existing and new pitches or plots will be protected from being redeveloped or being used for other purposes. This includes via applications to vary conditions which limit occupation to Gypsy and Travellers. Planning condition or legal agreement which limits the use and occupation of the site to Gypsies, Travellers, or Travelling Showpeople will be applied.
- 9.102 Gypsy and Traveller sites are considered inappropriate development in the Green Belt (in accordance with the PPTS) and are more vulnerable in terms of flood risk and with regard to the AWE offsite Emergency Plan. The provision of new pitches in Green Belt would require very special circumstances to be demonstrated in accordance with the NPPF and Policy SS6. New pitches in areas of flood risk and in

areas that would impact on the AWE Emergency Plan will generally be avoided, in accordance with Policies FD1 and SS7 respectively.

- 9.103 Where proposals are for transit provision for short term accommodation, pitches are likely to be smaller and will not be required to accommodate a residential component such as a static caravan/ mobile home, but should be sufficient to accommodate two touring caravans, two parking spaces and private amenities for each pitch. It is likely that a greater degree of flexibility can be placed on the location of transit sites with regards to proximity to settlements, which increased importance placed on accessibility to the strategic road network. This will need to be assessed on a case by case basis, but proposals for transit development will still need to be assessed against criteria 1, 2 and 3 of Policy H10.

Policy H11: Houseboat moorings

1. Development proposals for new permanent residential moorings will be supported where:
 - a) There would be no unacceptable impact on the operational requirements of the watercourse;
 - b) There would be no unacceptable impact on navigation of the watercourse or navigational safety;
 - c) Adequate access for emergency services to the mooring(s) exists or can be provided as part of the development to ensure safety;
 - d) There is good access to services and facilities by walking, cycling and public transport;
 - e) There is adequate car parking, where relevant, taking into account the number of moorings and the location of the site;
 - f) The site is connected or is capable of being connected to suitable utilities and on site services including water supply, electricity and disposal facilities for sewage and waste, as far as is practicable;
 - g) There is no obstruction to the use of adjacent tow paths and no impediment to the safety of their use;
 - h) There would be no unacceptable impact on biodiversity of the water course, its margins and nearby areas of nature conservation;
 - i) There would be no unacceptable visual or amenity impacts to the watercourse and nearby land uses; and
 - j) There would be no restriction on the desire for increased access and opportunities to enjoy enhanced water related infrastructure facilities for all residents and visitors.
2. Development proposals for transit moorings will be supported provided they satisfy criteria 1a) – 1e) and 1g) – 1j) set out above, and:
 - a) Make appropriate provision for refuse and sewage disposal facilities which should be sited so as not cause adverse visual or amenity impact.
3. Permission for all temporary visitor moorings will be subject to a temporary occupancy condition which restricts usage to a maximum period of 14 days.

9.104 A number of waterways pass through Wokingham Borough, however the River Thames is the only waterway that is navigable by larger boats. Other watercourses, such as the River Loddon and the River Blackwater, are generally too narrow to allow boats to pass along the majority of their length or to moor on their banks.

9.105 Local authorities have a statutory duty (under Section 124 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 which amends Section 8 of the Housing Act 1985) to carry out an accommodation needs assessment covering the provision of places on inland waterways where houseboats can be moored.

9.106 An assessment of accommodation needs of boat dwellers within the borough was undertaken in 2019. The Wokingham Boat Dwellers Accommodation Needs Assessment (BDAA) defines a mooring as:

‘a place beside a canal or river used to moor boats. Some moorings have facilities such as electricity hook up points or space for storage. They can be used for temporary (transit) mooring or permanent mooring. ‘Authorised’ moorings have planning permission whereas ‘unauthorised’ do not.’

9.107 A transit mooring is specifically defined as: ‘a mooring used for a short period of time – usually between 24 hours and 14 days. Transit moorings are managed by a range of private and public organisations including the Environment Agency (EA) and Canal and River Trust (CRT).’

9.108 The Wokingham BDAA identified no need for transit moorings within the borough. A need for permanent residential moorings was identified as follows:

Table 9: Boat Dwellings Accommodation Assessment Need 2019 to 2036.

Period	Identified need
2019-2024	9
2024-2029	0
2029-2036	0
Total	9

9.109 There has been no land promoted for houseboat moorings as part of the process of preparing the Local Plan Update. Availability of suitable land, given the number of private riparian landowners along the River Thames, was identified by numerous stakeholders as a barrier to delivery of moorings. Given the identified need, Policy H11 sets out a criteria based approach to assess any planning applications that might come forward.

Policy H12: Residential development of existing private gardens

1. The inappropriate development of private residential gardens will be resisted.
2. Development proposals for new residential development that includes land within the curtilage (or the former curtilage), of private residential gardens will be supported where they:

- a. Optimise the efficient and effective use of land, particularly in locations where higher densities are appropriate;
- b. Make a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms of:
 - i. The relationship of the existing built form, setting and spaces around buildings and compatibility with the general building height within the surrounding area;
 - ii. A design and layout which integrates with existing landscape features and the surrounding area, with regard to the built up footprint of each plot, building line(s), rhythm of plot frontages, parking areas;
 - iii. Existing pattern of openings and boundary treatments on the site frontage
 - iv. Minimising the exposure of private to public spaces and avoiding the need for additional physical security measures, such as incorporating appropriate hard and soft landscaping, particularly at site boundaries. This includes features such as the variety of trees, hedges and hardstanding/lawn etc.;
 - v. The materials and elevational detail are of high quality, and where appropriate distinctive and/ or complementary; and
 - vi. The arrangement of doors, windows and other principal architectural features and their rhythm between buildings;
- c. Incorporate access and parking arrangements which meet appropriate highway standards;
- d. Do not lead to unacceptable tandem development; and
- e. Do not prejudice the satisfactory development of the wider area.

9.110 Private residential gardens are a valuable asset within the borough, having amenity and opportunity for recreation, making an important contribution to the character of its residential areas, and helping to reduce flood risk and mitigate the effects of climate change, including the 'urban island heat' effect. Gardens can also provide significant opportunities for biodiversity and green infrastructure, in particular groups of gardens containing a network of habitats can provide 'stepping stones' from and between habitats, in both rural and urban areas.

9.111 The NPPF confirms that areas such as residential gardens in built up areas are excluded from the definition of previously developed land and that plans should consider setting policies to resist their inappropriate development. Within Wokingham Borough, private residential gardens are defined as:

- Land within the curtilage of a residential building(s); and/or
- Land where the previous lawful use was for private residential garden.

9.112 There is significant development pressure on residential gardens in the borough's towns and villages. Policy H1 seeks higher densities of development in and around Wokingham Town Centre and other transport hubs. In such locations the loss of garden land (often involving the subdivision of existing residential curtilages) may be acceptable where it can be demonstrated that a proposal would result in the optimal efficient use of land. Despite this type of development providing new housing in the borough, it can often appear cramped, and can have adverse effects on the character the area and streetscene. Understanding the relationship between development and the existing built form and

spaces around buildings is therefore necessary to ensure development proposals make a positive contribution to place. Policy H12 supplements the place making and design principles set out in Policy DH1.

- 9.113 'Tandem' development is used to describe a dwelling built behind another, the rear building having no frontage and being accessed by a private roadway or track alongside the front building.
- 9.114 Reference to principal architectural features includes chimneys, bays and other important features. All external hard surface areas should be of permeable materials.
- 9.115 The clear distinction between public and private spaces is important in contributing to the sense of continuity and enclosure for existing residents. Poorly designed spaces or the loss of spaces, associated with new development on private residential gardens, can cause overlooking and overbearing impacts on the amenity of existing neighbouring properties and gardens. Proposals for development on existing private residential gardens should therefore be consistent with Policy DH2.
- 9.116 Physical security measures includes gates and security railings. Gated communities will not be acceptable due to their adverse impact on community cohesion, and increasing the perception and fear of crime.

Policy H13: Retention of mobile home parks

1. Development proposals that would result in the loss of a mobile home park site, either in part or full, will only be supported if it will provide 100% affordable housing which will meet locally identified needs.

- 9.117 The NPPF recognises that a range of housing of different size, type and tenure are needed for different groups of people in the community.
- 9.118 There are a number of mobile home park sites across the borough which perform an important role in terms of providing lower cost home ownership accommodation. As a result, there is a need to safeguard the loss of these sites from redevelopment to alternative uses which would not meet a locally identified housing need.

10

Flooding and Drainage

10. Flooding and Drainage

- 10.1 Flood risk is a combination of the probability and potential consequences of flooding from all sources. These sources include rivers, rainfall, rising groundwater, sewers and drainage systems that exceed capacity, reservoirs, and lakes.
- 10.2 The risk of flooding is well understood, with hydraulic models being available from the Environment Agency, with further assessment undertaken by the council through the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA). Poorly maintained or blocked drains can however cause localised issues.
- 10.3 The Local Plan Update seeks to minimise the risk of flooding by following the sequential approach set out in the NPPF and national Planning Practice Guidance. All developments are expected to be safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere.
- 10.4 One of the impacts of climate change is an increased risk of flooding. The effect of climate change has been carefully assessed and considered. In most catchments, the extent of fluvial flooding is not likely to increase significantly due to confining topography. However, climate change is predicted to result in more frequent and extreme rainfall events, increasing the frequency and severity of flooding from fluvial and surface water sources. It is therefore important that development proposals consider the future management of rainfall within the site.

Policy FD1: Development and flood risk (from all sources)

1. Development proposals must take into account at all stages of development, and at the appropriate stage of the planning application process, all sources of flood risk, including historic flooding, current and future impacts of climate change, and cumulative impacts. Development proposals must be consistent with national policy and guidance and demonstrate how they have used, and where relevant comply with the site specific recommendations of, the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) to help determine the suitability of the proposal.
2. Development proposals in Flood Zones 2 or 3 must take into account the vulnerability of proposed development.

Sequential Test

3. Development must be guided to areas of lowest flood risk, in the first instance, by applying the sequential approach, taking into account the effects of climate change and flooding from all sources. Development proposals should ensure flood risk is not worsened for the application site and elsewhere, and ideally that betterment of existing conditions is achieved. Storm water attenuation areas should be located outside of Flood Zones 2 and 3.
4. The sequential test will not be required if one or more of the following applies:

- a) Minor non-residential extensions: industrial/commercial/leisure etc. extensions with a footprint of less than 250m²;
- b) Alterations: development that does not increase the size of buildings e.g. alterations to external appearance;
- c) Householder development: for example, sheds, garages, games rooms etc. within the curtilage of the existing dwelling, in addition to physical extensions to the existing dwelling itself. This definition excludes any proposed development that would create a separate dwelling within the curtilage of the existing dwelling e.g. subdivision of houses into flats; or
- d) Changes of use, except where the change of use is to a caravan, camping or chalet site, or to a mobile home or park home site.

Exception Test

5. In exceptional circumstances, development proposals in areas of flood risk will be supported where all of the following can be demonstrated:
- a) The development proposal provides wider sustainability benefits to the community that outweigh flood risk;
 - b) The development proposal will:
 - i. Be safe for its lifetime, taking account of the vulnerability of its users
 - ii. Not increase flood risk in any form elsewhere and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall
 - iii. Incorporate flood resilient and resistant measures into the design; and
 - c) Appropriate evacuation and flood response procedures are in place to manage the residual risk associated with an extreme flood event.

Flood Risk Assessment

6. An appropriately detailed, site-specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) is required:
- a) For all development proposals in areas of known historic flooding from any sources;
 - b) Where there is evidence of a risk from any sources of flooding;
 - c) For all development proposals in Flood Zones 2 and 3;
 - d) For development proposals in Flood Zone 1, an assessment should accompany all proposals involving:
 - i. Sites of 1 hectare or more;
 - ii. Land which has been identified by the Environment Agency as having critical drainage problems;
 - iii. Land identified in a strategic flood risk assessment as being at increased flood risk in future; or
 - iv. Land that may be subject to other sources of flooding, where its development would introduce a more vulnerable use.

10.5 The planning system has an important role to play in taking account of and adapting to flood risk and its long term implications. Development proposals should therefore avoid areas at the highest risk of

flooding, as part of a sequential approach that takes into account the current and future impacts of climate change.

- 10.6 Flooding should be considered from the outset of preparing development proposals through proactive and early engagement with the council, the Environment Agency and other appropriate Risk Management Authorities (RMA). This can help to inform design proposals to take into account the impact of flooding, including surface water and drainage. Policy FD1 should therefore be considered with reference to [Policy DH1 \(Place-Making and Quality Design\)](#).

Flood Zones

- 10.7 Flood Zones are the starting point for determining how to consider the implications of flood risk, and the sequential test. The Flood Zones refer to the probability of fluvial flooding only (flooding from rivers and watercourses). Flood Zone 2 (Medium Probability) and Flood Zone 3 (High Probability) are shown on the Policies Map, with Flood Zone 1 (Low Probability) being all the land falling outside Flood Zones 2 and 3. The Environment Agency mapping of Flood Zones is updated on a regular basis.
- 10.8 The council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) (2023) sub-delineates Flood Zone 3 into 'high probability' (Zone 3a) and the 'functional flood plain' (Zone 3b). Flood Zone 3b comprises land where water has to flow or be stored in times of flood.
- 10.9 Development proposals in Flood Zones 3a or 2 will only be considered if a sequential test has been undertaken by the applicant. Sites allocated in the Local Plan Update do not need to apply the sequential test again, but may need to reapply the exceptions test if relevant aspects of the proposal have changed since this was undertaken at the plan making stage, or if more recent information about existing or potential flood risk has become available. Where the exceptions test is required, it must be applied at the earliest possible stage.
- 10.10 Within Flood Zone 2 and 3 wholesale land raising should not be undertaken, for example, by the spreading of excavated material on site or the importation of additional fill. Such action increases the possibility of changing natural flows and increasing flood risk beyond the development area.
- 10.11 Additionally, it is expected that below ground stormwater storage is not to be located in Flood Zone 3. This is because the probability of the storage being compromised by fluvial inundation is higher than the level of protection it exists to provide (1% AEP (+40%cc). Wherever possible, and for the same reason, below ground storage should not be located in Flood Zone 2. Where a proposed drainage strategy incorporates below ground storage in Flood Zone 2 the strategy will require robust modelling to demonstrate that the stormwater storage will not be compromised by a fluvial event with a higher annual exceedance probability than the design storm event.

Flood Risk Assessments

- 10.12 The sequential and exceptions tests should be informed by either the SFRA, or a site specific Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) depending on when the planning application is being prepared. To fully consider the implications of the risk of flooding, FRA should take into account the impact of surface water flooding and drainage, ground water and other sources of flood risk, including reservoirs. The NPPF requires that flood risk is not increased on site or elsewhere as a result of development. On and off-site measures can

help to reduce flood risk or even improve existing conditions. This can include showing how the proposal retains overland flow routes.

10.13 National Planning Practice Guidance sets out that minor developments are unlikely to raise significant flood risk issues unless:

- They would have an adverse effect on a watercourse, floodplain or its flood defences;
- They would impede access to flood defence and management facilities, or;
- Where the cumulative impact of such developments would have a significant effect on local flood storage capacity or flood flows.

10.14 The Environment Agency and the government have also published advice on flood risk assessments in relation to minor development such as extensions and alterations.

10.15 Proposals will also need to have regard to the future Flood Risk Strategy for the borough and the requirements of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, including the SuDS Approval Body.

Policy FD2: Sustainable drainage

1. Development proposals must ensure surface water arising, including the impact of climate change, is managed in a sustainable manner. This must be demonstrated through either a:

- a) Site-specific Flood Risk Assessment; or
- b) Surface Water Drainage Strategy.

a) Development proposals will only be supported where the proposal would reproduce greenfield runoff characteristics and return run-off rates and volumes back to the original greenfield levels for greenfield sites; and for brownfield sites both run-off rates and volumes be reduced to as near greenfield as practicably possible, or 40% betterment of existing, whichever is achievable;

2. The provision of SuDS should:

- a) Be of an appropriate design (in line with the principles and local standards set out in the council's latest SuDS strategy and technical guide and any current national technical standards) to meet the long term needs over the lifetime of the development and which achieve wider social, ecological and environmental benefits;
- b) Include a clear strategy for adoption and maintenance to the satisfaction of the council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA);
- c) Do not cause adverse impacts on the public sewerage network serving the development where discharging surface water to a public sewer. Any discharges should be agreed in writing by the local sewerage undertaker;
- d) Effectively manage flood risk, improve the water environment, enhance biodiversity and mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change;

- e) Contribute towards water quality treatment and biodiversity enhancements in line with the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the Thames River Basin Management Plan; and
 - f) Avoid the use of underground tanks and conveyance, except when all other reasonable alternatives to provide a sustainable drainage solution have been exhausted.
3. In addition, residential development proposals of 10 dwellings or more, or non-residential development proposals of 1,000 m² or greater gross internal area, and developments in areas at risk of flooding from all sources, must incorporate SuDS as an intrinsic part of the design and layout of the proposal, unless it can be effectively demonstrated that it is not feasible within the constraints of the site.

- 10.16 Managing surface water at source is the most effective approach to ensure resilient drainage systems and to manage flood risk to the local and wider area. Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) are designed to manage stormwater locally, to mimic natural drainage and encourage its infiltration, attenuation and passive treatment. They provide an alternative to the direct channelling of surface water through networks of pipes and sewers to nearby watercourses.
- 10.17 SuDS are the first choice for managing surface water. Their design should be carefully considered from the early design stages of proposed developments.
- 10.18 All development proposals are required to follow the SuDS Management Train taking account of the specific characteristics of the site and its surrounds, including layout, topography and geology. SuDS must also be designed to meet national standards as set out in CIRIA Guidance C753 or subsequent national standards introduced through the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 to ensure the future sustainability of the drainage system. They should also follow design criteria and be technically feasible.
- 10.19 Where major or strategic developments involve more than one landowner a coherent approach should be taken to surface water management to ensure delivery of strategic SuDS as opposed to multiple developments generating their own isolated approach. Minor schemes should also demonstrate how development proposals would not exacerbate existing levels of drainage or water flow, by identifying specific mitigation measures.
- 10.20 The Environment Agency publish mapping showing the extent of surface water flooding which should be used to inform development proposals.
- 10.21 The wider social and environmental aspects of SuDS can include health and well-being benefits through the protection of drinking water resources and enhanced local amenity. SuDS features should be integrated into development proposals, forming an integral part of landscape design, which can support recreational and biodiversity opportunities and open space/green infrastructure.
- 10.22 The council's SuDS Strategy (2016) contains guidance for the design and application of SuDS, to assist developers designing schemes across varying scales. The strategy is supported by the SuDS Technical Guide (2016) which sets out the technical requirements and expectations.

10.23 The provision of SuDS within SANG may be acceptable, subject to consultation and negotiation with the council and Natural England.

Maintenance and Adoption

10.24 The satisfactory performance of SuDS depends not only on good design, construction and operation but also adoption and maintenance that meet or exceed national standards.

10.25 Applicants should submit a feasibility assessment of their intended utilisation of SuDS with their planning application. This information can be incorporated within a FRA or a Surface Water Drainage Strategy.

10.26 For major developments, a Maintenance Plan for the lifetime of the development should include arrangements to secure the operation of the scheme. The plan should ensure all those involved in the maintenance and operation of the SuDS system understand its long term functionality and maintenance. The plan should include:

- Surface management measures for the safe and sustainable removal of any waste arising from the drainage system, including the materials and standard of work required.
- An exceedance flow routing plan for unforeseen drainage failures or flows above a 1 in 100 year + 40% climate change event.
- The identification of exceedance flow routes through the development based on proposed topography, with flows directed to highways and areas of public open space. Flow routes through gardens and other areas in private ownership will not be supported.

10.27 A risk assessment may be required to determine whether adequate mitigation measures are in place, and subsequently agreed with the council. This should assess the risks associated with conveyance routes and storage areas for exceedance flows, flow depth, velocity, duration taking into account the impact of flooding to people and property on and off site.

10.28 The adoption and maintenance of SuDS will be the responsibility of Wokingham Borough Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) and SuDS approving body, upon agreement with the developer.

10.29 Most sewers in the borough are public sewers owned by Thames Water. Applicants are required to provide evidence that capacity exists in the public sewerage network to serve their development in the form of written confirmation. The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 amends the Water Industry Act 1991, making the right to connect surface water runoff to public sewers conditional upon the drainage system being approved by the SuDS Approving Body.

10.30 Development proposals should be consistent with Surface Water Management Plans produced by the authority or jointly with a neighbouring authority, and any new national standards, i.e. through Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010, policy or regulations.

10.31 The council will secure long term maintenance through planning obligations and/or conditions, in line with the Sustainable Drainage Systems Design Guide

Policy FD3: River corridors and watercourses

1. Development proposals should conserve and enhance the function, character, setting, biodiversity and historical significance of rivers and water courses.
2. Where appropriate, development proposals in vicinity to rivers and watercourses will be required to:
 - a) Meet the principles of high-quality design set out in PolicyDH1, having special regard to riverside setting and water frontage character, and consider views of the proposals from all public vantage points, including from the river or watercourse;
 - b) Maintain, and where possible enhance, public access for walking, wheeling and cycling (including Greenways, and Green Routes), and tourism and leisure activities, such as fishing and boating;
 - c) Maintain tree cover, conserve and enhance natural watercourse banks and their associated bankside and marginal vegetation and the ecological value of the area including its role as a wildlife network. Opportunities for the restoration and enhancement of natural elements of the environment should be incorporated within the design of developments proposals;
 - d) Provide or retain a minimum undeveloped buffer zone measured from the top of the river or watercourse bank at the point at which the bank meets the level of the surrounding land. A buffer of 8m should be provided for rivers. The buffer for watercourses should reflect the type, size and nature of the watercourse; and
 - e) Demonstrate how the development proposal will support the achievement of Water Framework Directive (WFD) objectives, and guidance set out in the Thames River Basin Management Plan or any local catchment management plans;
3. Appropriate proposals for sport, leisure and river-related employment, infrastructure and renewable energy generation will be supported where they meet the above criteria and where they do not obstruct access along or to the river or watercourse for any users, or harm its ecological value.
4. The culverting of any watercourses should be avoided where possible, and opportunities for the de-culverting of watercourses should be actively explored and pursued.

River Thames

5. The ecological value of the River Thames will be maintained and in appropriate circumstances restored and enhanced together with natural elements of the riparian environment. Development proposals should seek to promote the healthy growth in the use of the River Thames for communities, wildlife, leisure, business and tourism in ways that are compatible with its character, setting and ecology, and in line with the objectives of the River Thames Waterways Plan and the Environment Agency's Thames River Basin Management Plan.

6. Particular care will be taken to ensure developments within the setting of the River Thames complement the distinctive character of the water frontage and important views. Existing riverside access will be maintained and opportunities to improve or extend access to the river and adjoining sites will be supported.

- 10.32 Rivers and watercourses are distinctive aspects of landscape and townscape, and often provide opportunities for leisure as well as being key ecological habitat and wildlife corridors. The three low land river valleys of the Thames, Loddon and Blackwater in particular make significant contributions towards local character and are an important part of the borough’s network of green infrastructure.
- 10.33 Policy DH1 sets out the principles of place making and quality design. Policy FD3 supplements this to ensure that special contribution of rivers and watercourses is conserved and enhanced, and not harmed by insensitive development proposals.
- 10.34 The River Thames makes a particularly valuable contribution to the setting and landscape of the borough, stretching north-east from Thames Valley Park, via Henley-on-Thames towards Remenham. The river is a popular location for tourism, recreation and sporting activities, including the annual Henley Regatta, boating activities and walkers using the popular Thames Path. The Thames Waterway Plan and Thames River Basin Management Plan (2022)¹⁶, alongside other relevant documents together play an important role in maintaining and enhancing such a valuable natural asset. The Thames River Basin Management Plan sets out several environmental objectives which all public bodies must have regard to when making decisions affecting the quality of a water environment. Objectives include preventing the deterioration of the status of surface waters and groundwater, aiming to achieve ‘good’ status for all water bodies and reversing any significant, sustained upward trends in pollutant concentrations in groundwater.

¹⁶ [River basin management plans, updated 2022: current condition and environmental objectives - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/108111/river-basin-management-plans-updated-2022-current-condition-and-environmental-objectives.pdf)

11

Natural Environment

11. Natural Environment

- 14.1 It is important that development proposals conserve, maintains and enhances the special characteristics of the built and natural environment, to ensure development is sustainable in the long term, and that Wokingham Borough remains an attractive place for people to live, work and to visit.
- 14.2 The Local Plan Update places the environment at the centre of the strategy, ensuring the quality of places responds positively to the built and natural environments.

Policy NE1: Biodiversity and geodiversity

1. Development proposals should protect and enhance biodiversity and/or geodiversity features of conservation value and implement appropriate conservation management. The degree of protection will be proportionate to the status of the site or species in terms of its international, national and/or local importance.
2. Development proposals should demonstrate through a suitable level of ecological survey information and assessment how they conserve and enhance biodiversity and/or geodiversity including their long-term management.
3. Development will only be supported where it:
 - a) Avoids fragmentation of existing habitats and provides coherent ecological connectivity and permeability that is integrated and linked to the wider green and blue infrastructure network, through the restoration, enhancement and connection of: linear features such as wildlife corridors; stepping stones; and any nature recovery networks (including links to habitats outside the borough);
 - b) Incorporates beneficial biodiversity and/or geodiversity conservation features and enhances existing features through design, layout and landscaping;
 - c) Provides or retains appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites, protected species, priority species or priority habitats or main rivers, which are informed by detailed site-based assessment;
 - d) Seeks to eradicate or control any invasive non-native species present on site; and
 - e) Is compatible with any national, regional, county, and local biodiversity action plans, Local Nature Recovery Strategy and/or other strategic conservation management plans for species or habitats.

In addition to the above, where specific identified sites are likely to be affected, the following will be taken into account:

Internationally Designated Sites

4. Development proposals likely to result in a significant effect on internationally designated sites either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, will not be supported unless

it can be demonstrated that the adverse effects on the integrity of the designated site can be fully avoided, mitigated and/or compensated.

Nationally Designated Sites

5. Development proposals that are likely to have an adverse effect on the notified features of a nationally designated site will only be supported in exceptional circumstances, and provided it has been clearly demonstrated that:
 - a) A suitable alternative site with a lesser impact than that proposed is not available;
 - b) The on-site biodiversity or geodiversity benefits of the proposal including, where applicable, the overall site or wider habitats network, clearly outweigh the impacts on the notified features of the site; and
 - c) All appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures have been proposed and secured.

Irreplaceable Habitats

6. Development proposals that are likely to result in the loss or deterioration of an irreplaceable habitat, (such as ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees) will only be supported in exceptional circumstances, where:
 - a) A suitable alternative with a lesser impact than that proposed is not available;
 - b) It has been adequately demonstrated that the irreplaceable habitat cannot be retained within the proposed development scheme;
 - c) The need and benefits of the proposed development in that location and form clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration; and
 - d) Adequate compensation measures are provided on site wherever possible, and off-site where this is not feasible. The scale and quality of the compensation measures required will be commensurate to the loss or deterioration of the irreplaceable habitat and will be considered on a site-by-site basis, including their long-term management and maintenance.

Sites of Local Importance

7. Development proposals which are likely to have an adverse effect on a site of local importance (including priority species or priority habitats, and sites that meet the criteria for designation as a Local Wildlife Site or Local Geological Site) will only be supported where they accord with the following sequential approach:
 - a) No alternative with a lesser impact is available;
 - b) The need and benefits of the proposed development in that location and form clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration;
 - c) All proportionate mitigation measures to minimise adverse effects are included within the development proposal; and
 - d) As a last resort, secure appropriate compensation measures on-site wherever possible, and off-site where this is not feasible, including their long-term management and maintenance.

- 14.3 Wokingham Borough has a rich variety of biodiversity and geodiversity features and habitats, which are an important factor in both the quality of life experienced by residents and the attractiveness of the area to business. The council is committed to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity and will work with partners to ensure a proactive approach.
- 14.4 Existing biodiversity resources on sites should be carefully assessed and incorporated into development proposals to restore, enhance and connect features. The mitigation hierarchy should be used as a sequential approach, completing each step before moving to the next with compensation being the last resort. In the first instance, development proposals should try to avoid adversely affecting existing habitats by using alternative sites or layout designs. Where avoidance is not possible, and the need for and benefit of development outweighs the harm to the nature conservation value of the site, habitat or species, impacts should be adequately mitigated.
- 14.5 Planning applications should be supported by a biodiversity report/survey to enable an assessment of the implications for biodiversity. Surveys and reports should be prepared by suitably qualified or experienced ecologists. Where development proposals are anticipated to have significant impacts on nature conservation sites, further surveys may be required.
- 14.6 Development proposals are required to demonstrate how existing wildlife habitats and corridors will be safeguarded and managed during and after development, through the provision of buffers, including around trees, hedgerows, woodlands and rivers, where required. Where necessary, a management plan outlining mitigation measures will be required to sensitively manage any issues affecting biodiversity resources arising from the development.
- 14.7 Enhancements to the biodiversity value of a site, such as creating new habitats, should be incorporated into the design. Creative solutions are possible on all sites, including small sites within urban areas.
- 14.8 In circumstances where biodiversity is thought to have been intentionally removed or degraded, for example through neglect, ploughing or the removal of trees, or where access for ecological site surveys is refused, the council will take the highest potential condition for the site as was likely to have been present (had the removal or degradation not occurred) as the baseline for calculating Biodiversity Net Gain. Habitat type and condition of a site will be assessed by comparing up-to-date and historical ecological surveys, aerial photography and land use data.
- 14.9 Policy NE1 sets out how new development will be expected to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment at a landscape scale as well as sites of biodiversity importance at different levels.
- 14.10 Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a new system of spatial strategies for nature recovery. The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy provides a blueprint for Berkshire's Nature Recovery Network; and maps areas of current and particular importance for biodiversity, as well as guiding the delivery and prioritization of biodiversity net gain and other nature recovery measures in planning and development. The Local Nature Recovery Strategy can provide a starting point for identifying appropriate habitat creation and improvement measures.

Sites of international importance

- 14.11 The most important sites for biodiversity and individual wildlife species receive statutory protection under international and national legislation and form part of the national site network. Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are internationally important and are afforded the highest level of protection. Candidate SACs and proposed SPAs will be afforded the same level of protection as those already designated.
- 14.12 Whilst there are currently no internationally important conservation sites within the borough, there are a number situated in neighbouring local authorities. The council also has a duty to ensure that development proposals do not adversely affect the integrity of international sites outside of its geographical area and will work with partners to ensure this.

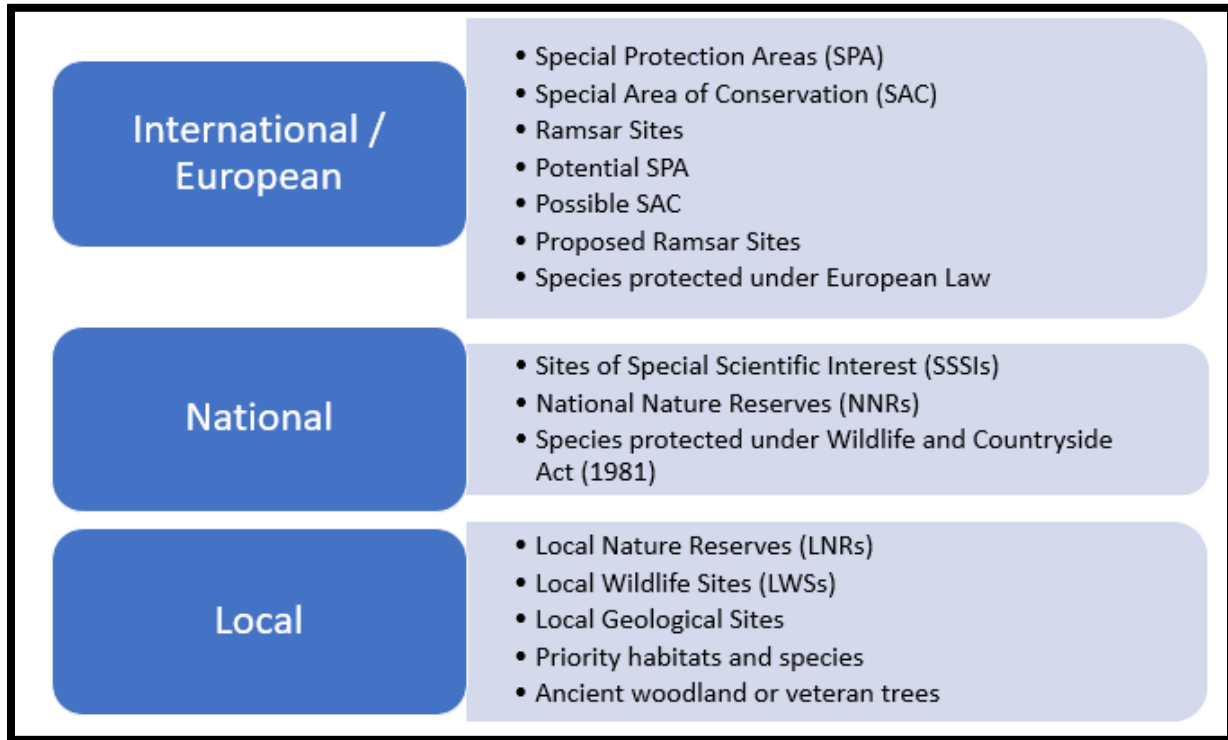
Sites of national importance

- 14.13 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are nationally designated sites which have important wildlife or geological value. There are currently four SSSI located within the borough:
- Heath Lake.
 - Longmoor Bog.
 - Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill.
 - Standford End Mill and River Loddon.

Irreplaceable habitats

- 14.14 The NPPF states that ‘development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists’. Within Wokingham Borough there are a number of irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees and lowland fens. However, this list is not definitive; and applicants should assess whether there are any other irreplaceable habitats present on a site-by-site basis. Irreplaceable habitats are often considered irreplaceable due to the long timescales for their creation, as well as difficulty of creation. Compensation may be a package of habitat creation, enhancement or restoration measures but will only be considered acceptable where there is a net increase in high distinctiveness habitat or the same broad type as that lost. This will be assessed on a site-by-site basis and, where necessary, in consultation with the relevant conservation body.

Figure 9: Hierarchy of UK Nature Conservation Designations.



Sites of local importance

14.15 Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites are areas identified for their county to regional significance and are an important component in the wider ecological network. Sites of local importance are subject to survey and review. Consequently, they are a ‘living list’ which is subject to change over time.

Protected and priority species and habitats

14.16 Some species, such as bats, great crested newts and badgers, have special protection under international and national legislation (such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992) and must be considered as part of the planning application process. Similarly, priority species and habitats are identified under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act as of principal importance for the purposes of conserving biodiversity in England. The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre holds information for rare, scarce and notable species in Wokingham Borough.

14.17 Where there is a reasonable likelihood that a protected or priority species or habitat may be present and affected by a proposal, comprehensive surveys will need to be undertaken to provide the evidence needed to allow a determination to be made. Appropriate avoidance, mitigation or compensation measures should be provided where development would disadvantage the conservation of a priority species.

Policy NE2: Biodiversity net gain

1. All development proposals should demonstrate a minimum biodiversity net gain of 10% (unless specified in another site allocation policy) calculated via the most up-to-date national biodiversity accounting metric and provide details of the long-term maintenance and management of the net gain. This should be delivered on site in the first instance, or through biodiversity off-setting where appropriate.

- 14.18 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) can be defined as “development that leaves the environment in a measurably better state than beforehand” (DEFRA, 2018). BNG will principally be achieved through a combination of retaining important features of the proposed development site and by making on site biodiversity enhancements.
- 14.19 To achieve net gain, a development proposal must have a higher biodiversity unit score after development than before development. A national biodiversity accounting metric is used to measure the biodiversity unit score of the proposed development site and what will exist after development. The most up to date Natural England biodiversity metric should be used to allow the assessment of biodiversity impact of a given development, and where appropriate the size of contribution required to offset the ecological impact of that development.
- 14.20 To demonstrate that a development proposal secures the required BNG as specified in Policy NE2 or the relevant site allocation policies, planning applications must be supported by appropriate evidence. These assessments should be undertaken by a suitably qualified and/or experienced ecologist, be consistent with national standards and guidance and will need to include a Biodiversity Gain Plan (including the completed metric calculator) to measure the net gain achieved on site or loss that would need to be compensated. Detail will be required on how the net gain will be maintained, monitored and managed.
- 14.21 The assessment should be proportionate to the scale and impact of the development and so for householder and most minor applications this will initially involve a Preliminary Protected Species Survey or Preliminary Ecological Appraisal in order to assess if further work is required.
- 14.22 The mitigation hierarchy will be applied as part of any biodiversity accounting process to ensure any potential harm to biodiversity, either direct or indirect, is avoided, such as by finding an alternative site or through appropriate design. If harm cannot be avoided it must be reduced through appropriate mitigation measures. If any residual harm remains after avoidance and mitigation then, as a last resort, compensation should be sought through biodiversity off-setting.
- 14.23 Legal obligations, planning conditions or conservation covenants will be used to secure effective avoidance, mitigation, monitoring, and compensation measures.

Policy NE3: Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

1. Development proposals, which either alone or in combination with other plans or projects, are likely to have a significant adverse effect on the ecological integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) without appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures will be refused.
2. Development proposals that are likely to have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA must demonstrate that adequate measures will be put in place to avoid or mitigate any such effects. Such measures must be agreed with the council and Natural England. To assist the council in carrying out a Habitats Regulations Assessment, the applicant will be required to provide such information as the council may reasonably require for the purpose of the assessment. Development proposals for larger residential development may need to undertake an air quality assessment of the likely significant effects on the SPA and other habitats sites. Applications for non-residential development will be considered on a case by case basis.

Zones of influence

3. Where Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) mitigation measures are required for residential development proposals, a consistent approach will be taken regarding mitigation, based on the following zones of influence, as measured in a straight line distance from the SPA boundary, and as defined in the Policies Map:
 - a) 0-400m;
 - b) 400m-5km; and
 - c) 5km-7km.
4. Within the 0-400m zone, mitigation is unlikely to be capable of protecting the integrity of the SPA. Development proposals for a net increase in dwellings within this zone will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated through a Habitats Regulations Assessment that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA.
5. Within the 400m-5km and 5km-7km zone, development proposals for a net increase in dwellings will be supported which secure the SANG and SAMM standards set out below.

SANG Standards

6. The provision of SANG will meet the following standards and arrangements:

- a) Within the 400m – 5km zone a minimum of 8 hectares of SANG land (after discounting to account for current access and capacity) will be provided per 1,000 new occupants.
 - i. Development proposals of net 9 dwellings or fewer will not be required to be within a specified distance of SANG land provided a sufficient quantity of SANG land is in place to cater for the consequent increase in residents.
 - ii. Development proposals of 10 or more net dwellings will need to be within the catchment of a specified SANG and a sufficient quantity of SANG land must be in place to cater for the consequent increase in residents.
 - iii. Development proposals for a net increase of fewer than 50 dwellings will be required to provide financial contributions towards strategic SANG facilitated by the council subject to available capacity, or towards SANG facilitated by a third party landowner.
 - iv. Development proposals for a net increase of more than 50 dwellings are expected to provide their own bespoke SANG.
- b) Development proposals for a net increase of more than 50 dwellings within the 5-7km zone may be required to provide mitigation measures based on a combination of SAMM and the provision of SANG to a lower standard than within the 400m - 5km zone. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis in consultation with Natural England and, where appropriate, a Habitats Regulations Assessment may be required to ascertain whether the proposal could have an adverse effect on the SPA.
- c) Development proposals for non-residential development will be assessed on a case by case basis.

Development proposals which wish to rely on SANG in third party ownership must demonstrate that this has been agreed and secured with the landowner and that there is sufficient capacity in the correct location to mitigate the proposal.

SAMM contributions

7. A developer contribution will be made towards the SAMM Project for each net additional dwelling. This will provide an SPA wide wardening and education service and monitor the effectiveness of the avoidance and mitigation measures and visitor pressure on the SPA.

Loss of SANG

8. There is a presumption against the loss of SANG land for other uses. The loss of SANG will only be accepted where the applicant can demonstrate that sufficient alternative avoidance measures for all relevant submitted and/or approved plans and projects within the borough taking account of Natural England's advice on SANGs.

- 14.24 The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area is designated under European Directive 79/409/EEC because the heathland habitat supports the important species of ground nesting birds: Dartford warbler, nightjar and woodlark.
- 14.25 Natural England has advised that residential development around the SPA boundary is likely to have a significant effect (alone or in combination with other plans or projects) on the integrity of the SPA through associated recreation activity of the heaths and air pollution. Whilst none of the SPA is situated within Wokingham Borough, Natural England advise that all residential developments within 5km and larger residential developments proposing 50 dwellings or more within 7km may impact on the integrity. The zone of influence therefore extends into the southern half of Wokingham Borough.
- 14.26 The available evidence indicates that beyond the immediate area around the SPA, effective mitigation can be achieved by a combination of providing additional suitable areas for recreation (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace or SANG) together with access management of the heaths themselves (Strategic Access Management and Monitoring or SAMM).
- 14.27 Residential development means development which provides permanent accommodation including units falling with Use Class C3 (dwelling houses) and houses of multiple occupation (Use Classes C4 and sui generis), units of residential accommodation falling within Use Classes C1 and C2, Gypsy and Traveller pitches and student accommodation. Policy NE3 will apply to development proposals as set out below:
- One or more net new homes falling within Use Class C3 (dwellings houses) and houses of multiple occupation (C4 and sui generis);
 - One or more net new Gypsy and Traveller pitches;
 - One or more net new student accommodation; and
 - One or more net new units of ancillary staff residential accommodation.
- 14.28 Proposals falling within Use Classes C1 (Hotels) and C2 (Institutions) will be assessed on a case-by-case basis in consultation with Natural England.

Zones of influence

- 14.29 Within the zones of influence, a Habitats Regulations Assessment will be required to identify measures that avoid, as a first step, and mitigate any adverse effects.
- 14.30 Effects from residential developments within 400m of the SPA boundary are unlikely to be capable of being avoided or mitigated. Residential developments beyond 400m which provide or contribute to appropriate SANG and SAMM measures, in accordance with Policy NE3 and the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy, are likely not to have adverse effects on the integrity of the SPA.

Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace

- 14.31 The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy establishes the necessary proximity of SANG to a proposed development.

- 14.32 Development proposals for less than net 10 dwellings do not need to fall within a certain distance, provided that sufficient SANG is in place to mitigate the increase in residents. Proposals for 10 or more net dwellings will need to be located within the catchment of a specified SANG that has sufficient capacity. The council is supporting planned and anticipated developments from small sites by providing strategic SANG capacity.
- 14.33 Larger developments of 50 or more dwellings will normally be expected to provide their own SANG as part of the development. All Strategic Development Location allocations are required to provide SANG as a key aspect of their masterplan. All relevant standards recommended by Natural England should be met, including a financial contribution towards SAMM.
- 14.34 Where a large allocation requiring a bespoke SANG has been subdivided into smaller sites for development, developers will be encouraged to work with one another to secure an overall solution. Where this is not possible the option remains for these sites to provide an off-site SANG or purchase SANG capacity from third party providers. The release of strategic SANG to support large or unplanned developments could jeopardise the SANG capacity required to support the Local Plan Update. This would put planned development at risk of not being able to meet the Habitats Regulations and gain planning permission. The council therefore reserves the right not to provide available SANG capacity if the proposal is considered to undermine the council's SPA avoidance and mitigation strategy and/or the delivery of allocated development sites.
- 14.35 Non-residential development could also have a significant effect upon the integrity of the SPA. This could either be from linked trips including recreational use of the SPA or from workers employed close to the SPA using the area during breaks (especially lunch time). Consequently, proposals for non-residential development will also need assessing to determine whether they are likely to have a significant effect upon the SPA. Where non-residential proposals include avoidance and mitigation measures, the likely significant effects upon the SPA will have been addressed. This will be assessed on a case by case basis and in consultation with Natural England. All applications for non-residential development that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA will need to be subject to Habitats Regulations Assessment.

Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM)

- 14.36 Developer contributions towards the SAMM project fund SPA wide bird monitoring measures to ensure adverse visitor impacts are avoided and that SANGs function effectively, as well as monitoring the overall efficacy of SANGs in the borough. Natural England acts as the host for the SAMM project. Further information, including the SAMM tariff is available on the council's website.

Policy NE4: Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows

1. Development proposals should protect and incorporate existing trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows and ensure they are well integrated within the public realm, in a suitably landscaped setting.

2. Development proposals should ensure the existing pattern of fields, hedges and hedgerows, woodland, trees, watercourses, water bodies, underlying topography and other landscape features are retained and that the design of the scheme is integrated into the landscape.
3. The design and layout of new development should:
 - a) Provide sufficient space to enable existing trees to thrive by maintaining adequate root protection areas and space for the trunk and branches to grow;
 - b) Ensure buildings are carefully sited to limit excessive shading to residential properties;
 - c) Provide appropriate buffer zones around woodlands, including semi-natural ancient woodlands, planted ancient woodland sites, orchards, hedgerows and individual trees;
 - d) Provide enhanced and additional tree and hedgerow planting wherever possible, but particularly where there are opportunities to restore or develop habitat and landscape links between woodlands and hedgerows and between these features and other landscape or habitat features such as river corridors;
 - e) Maximise opportunities for planting urban trees, shrubs and hedges within streets and greenspace to create rich urban landscapes; and
 - f) Proposals must also demonstrate sufficient rooting volume of soil, irrigation and drainage for trees to thrive in the long term.
4. Development proposals that are likely to affect trees, irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees), hedges or hedgerows either on-site or nearby, should:
 - a) Assess the health of all trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows affected, describing and assessing their value and the potential impact of the development as part of an Arboricultural Impact Assessment submitted with a planning application;
 - b) Provide an appropriate Arboricultural Method Statement, including a Tree Constraints Plan and Tree and Woodland Protection Plan; and
 - c) Ensure all tree and hedge/hedgerow protection measures are in place prior to works commencing on site, commensurate with any pre-commencement planning conditions.
5. The loss, threat or damage to any tree, woodland, hedge or hedgerow of visual amenity, heritage or nature conservation value, will not be permitted unless all the following criteria are met:
 - a) The development proposal has been designed to avoid, reduce or minimise impact; and

b) Mitigation measures are incorporated as part of a development proposal, that provide equivalent character, visual amenity, heritage value, as well as habitat connectivity.

6. The natural capital of sites should be protected. Any trees, woodland, hedges or hedgerows that are damaged as a result of the construction process should be reported and replaced with indigenous tree species and native hedgerow species, by agreement with the council. The developer must bear all associated costs.

- 14.37 Trees, woodlands, hedges and hedgerows make a valuable contribution to the borough's natural environment and biodiversity. Not only are they important ecological assets, but they also form a significant part of the visual character of towns, villages and the countryside, helping to define the landscape and distinctive character of the borough. Some have heritage value as 'keepers of time and place' and for the fine historical grain they bring to our countryside, villages and towns. Individual trees are an important component of the character of many parts of the borough, particularly within Conservation Areas, helping to reinforce a landscape structure and framework for new development.
- 14.38 The borough benefits from areas of mature woodland, including ancient woodland; from ancient, veteran and notable trees. Urban areas benefit from hedges and rural areas from many hedgerows. There are also tree-lined routes, many of which are important historically, for example the historic straight rides around Finchampstead. Imposing tree-lined roads like Wellingtonia Avenue in Finchampstead are an excellent example of the important contribution trees can make to the character of the area. The Landscape Character Assessment sets out some of the history of the land within the borough, including its role as part of the wider Windsor Great Forest.
- 14.39 Urban hedges, trees and other planting form a green link from the countryside into towns and villages, particularly along Green Routes and can be important habitat corridors and stepping stones for wildlife. The removal and severing of woodland, hedges, hedgerows and trees must be avoided to guard against habitat fragmentation.
- 14.40 Woodlands, trees and hedgerows are key features within rural and urban environments and provide a range of ecosystem services, including trapping pollution, flood mitigation, reducing surface water run-off, carbon sequestration and helping to mitigate the effects of climate change. The integration of trees, woodlands, hedges and hedgerows into wider green and blue infrastructure networks, as part of well-designed development, can also assist in reducing urban heat island effects, improve air quality, provide shade and contribute positively to landscape character and amenity value.
- 14.41 Policy NE4 requires the retention and conservation of existing trees woodland, hedges and hedgerows and ensure opportunities for restoration, enhancement and management are realised wherever appropriate. Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows should be protected and preserved, and additional planting will be encouraged as part of new development, to further enhance the natural environment, landscape and heritage.
- 14.42 Existing trees, woodland and hedgerows will need to be surveyed and assessed in accordance with the requirements of British Standard (5837:2012) and should be incorporated into the layout of development proposals at an early stage in the design process. The design of development proposals

should allow sufficient space for the natural development of a tree, particularly the predicted height, canopy spread and root development for each species. The design should provide sufficient protection for above and below ground constraints, including the protection of roots and soil structure as a priority.

- 14.43 Development pressures around trees and areas of woodland have served to highlight the importance of protecting the borough's existing woodland. Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) will be used to protect specific trees, groups of trees, areas of trees and woodlands. Constructive dialogue with developers will help to ensure protected trees are safeguarded from development and managed in accordance with good arboricultural practice, with full regard to public amenity, ecological and historical interests.
- 14.44 Irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodlands, ancient or veteran trees cannot be recreated once lost. Their unique character and the rich habitats they provide should be carefully protected and any loss or deterioration through development should be avoided. Where development may have an impact upon ancient woodland or veteran trees, the Natural England and the Forestry Commission's latest Standing Advice on Ancient Woodland and Veteran Trees and its associated Assessment Guide will be used. Notable trees are the ancient and veteran trees of the future, so they too should be retained and conserved on development sites in a manner commensurate with their status.
- 14.45 The council's Tree Strategy (2023) sets out a 10 year strategy for the management of trees in the borough. This includes the conservation and enhancement of existing trees, promoting tree planting and providing information on the benefits of trees, which together support wider ambitions to mitigate the impacts of climate change. The Action Plan supports new tree, woodland and hedgerow planting on both public and private land, in addition to guidance on the management of street trees and others owned by the council. The Tree Strategy should therefore be used to inform development proposals that may affect trees, woodland or hedgerows.

Policy NE5: Landscape and design

1. Development proposals will be supported where they adopt a landscape led approach which protects and enhances the character and distinctiveness of landscapes using the most up-to-date landscape studies (including the Landscape Character Assessment and Design Guide and any successor document).
2. Development proposals should be demonstrably informed by, and respond to, the distinctive characters set out in the Landscape Character Assessment and other relevant assessments, which provide an understanding of the valued characteristics, features and quality of local landscape character areas.
3. Development proposals should be accompanied by a landscape and visual impact assessment. The level of information provided should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed and should be sufficient to allow an informed assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development.
4. Landscape schemes should be set within an overall masterplan for the proposed development, and should:

- a) Include a structural tree, hedge and shrub planting schedule;
 - b) Incorporate landscape spaces, public realm and green and blue infrastructure to achieve a sense of place, improve health and wellbeing and mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change;
 - c) Incorporate effective built form and landscape transitions for rural-urban transition areas; and
 - d) Set out a long-term landscape establishment and management plan, which prescribes and protects planting and its sustainability.
5. Development proposals on or in proximity to a Green Route will only be supported where existing trees, hedgerows and hedges are retained in depth and contribute to the improvement of Green Routes through landscape schemes, including tree and hedge planting.

- 14.46 The borough's high-quality diverse landscape character with its rich cultural and natural heritage contributes to the enjoyment and overall quality of life of everyone living, visiting or passing through. Understanding this distinctive character and using this as a positive tool in accommodating necessary change will ensure that the inherent qualities and valued features of the borough's landscape will continue to be appreciated. Policy NE5 applies to both development proposals in urban and countryside locations, including those in the Green Belt.
- 14.47 The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) forms the primary document in relation to the understanding of the valued characteristics, features and quality of the landscape character areas of the borough. The LCA should be the starting point for all development proposals. The LCA should be used in conjunction with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and the most up to date Borough Design Guide and local plan policies to produce high quality development that actively contributes towards place making and sustainable development.
- 14.48 Development proposals should be accompanied by an appropriate landscape assessment carried out in accordance with guidance from the Landscape Institute and IEMA. Depending on the scale and nature of the proposals this will either be a formal Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) typically as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or less formally as a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). Regardless of the scale of the assessment, it should address both the potential landscape effects and also the potential visual effects that may result from the development. Detailed development proposals will then be expected to respond positively to this assessment to ensure they conserve and enhance landscape character by strengthening a sense of place.
- 14.49 Landscape schemes should reinforce existing landscape character and provide suitable opportunities for new planting of trees, woodland, urban hedges and hedgerows. Species selection should be appropriate for the site conditions such as soil type and micro-climate and there is a preference for native species, especially in the countryside or on the countryside edge. When selecting species and sources of trees, due regard must be had to the expected impacts of climate change, genetic variability, disease and biosecurity. Paving, street furniture, lighting and other hard landscape features will need to be integrated into more urban schemes but it is important to avoid street clutter.

- 14.50 It is essential that all new development provides a high quality environment and appropriately considers the layout, siting and function of buildings, spaces and landform of the landscape, as well as the materials and hard and soft landscaping. New planting should support and enhance the public realm, green infrastructure and ecological networks, maximising opportunities for achieving net gains in biodiversity. Development proposals should therefore take into account an area's capacity to change, as part of acknowledging and assessing cumulative effects.
- 14.51 An integrated approach is required to ensure tree planting and hedgerows in new development proposals connect with the existing landscape framework and support ecological activity. Avenue tree planting, feature trees at key points and groups of trees in public open spaces can help to create inviting spaces and places. Proposals located in, or adjacent to, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs) will be expected to contribute to the objectives of the BOA through suitable soft landscaping in the form of trees, hedgerows, woodland, meadow planting and other features. Other suitable measures to enhance different habitats, including woodland, grassland, heathland and hedgerow are identified in the Wokingham Borough Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).
- 14.52 It is essential that developments include detailed proposals for the establishment of landscape planting (including trees, hedges and shrubs), and also their long-term management. Development proposals must include measures to ensure: sufficient soil volume; soil protection and amelioration; drainage and watering; plant staking and protection. Great care should be taken to ensure that the right plant is planted in the right way and in the right place according to the best available information and guidance.

Green routes

- 14.53 Many routes into and through the borough's settlements are lined with trees and other vegetation that together make a significant contribution to the environmental character of the borough. These Green Routes include, amongst others: Nine Mile Ride, Finchampstead Road, Easthampstead Road, Barkham Road, Eversley Road, London Road and Wargrave Road.
- 14.54 Green Routes were introduced as part of the Managing Development Delivery Document local plan (2014). Green Routes continue to play an important role by:
- Improving the character and appearance of an area, making them more attractive places to walk or cycle within, which in turn improves health and well-being;
 - Providing a network of wildlife corridors that help to join up different habitat areas and support local biodiversity;
 - helping to mitigate against the effects of Climate Change by shading and cooling the local environment; and
 - Facilitating carbon sequestration, reducing air pollution improving air quality.
- 14.55 It is important to retain and enhance Green Routes by protecting and managing existing trees and other vegetation, ensuring a high-quality streetscape, including hard and soft landscaping and well-designed signage. Additional planting, or other measures to improve green routes, particularly areas between existing green routes, will be supported. It should be noted that all Green Routes have the ability to be improved and enhanced.
- 14.56 The council intends to continue to encourage the expansion of the borough's Green Route Network, looking for enhancement wherever possible. It is proposed to designate the recently constructed North

Wokingham Distributor Road, Wokingham, Eastern Relief Road, Shinfield and Hatch Farm Way, Winnersh as new Green Routes, as well as the Nine Mile Ride Extension at Finchampstead, given their important role in connecting Strategic Development Locations with existing settlements.

Policy NE6: Valued landscapes

1. The following areas, as defined on the Policies Map, are designated as valued landscapes in recognition of their distinctive character to the borough's landscape.
 - Alexander Pope;
 - Bearwood and Barkham;
 - Billingbear;
 - Bowsey Hill;
 - Farley Hill;
 - Forest and Rides;
 - Haines Hill;
 - Remenham Chalk;
 - Ridge and Rivers;
 - Riseley Woods;
 - River Blackwater;
 - River Loddon;
 - River Thames.
2. Development proposals located within or affecting a valued landscape should have particular regard to the following attributes:
 - a) Landscape quality (condition);
 - b) Scenic quality;
 - c) Rarity;
 - d) Representativeness;
 - e) Conservation interests;
 - f) Recreation value;
 - g) Perceptual aspects; and
 - h) Associations.
3. Development proposals affecting Valued Landscapes will only be supported where they protect, and where appropriate, integrate with and/or enhance the special features, characteristics and qualities of the landscape, unless the benefits of the development in that location clearly outweigh the harm.

14.57 All landscapes are important, but some will have particular value and exhibit specific attributes and characteristics that lift them above the rest. The NPPF highlights the importance of protecting and enhancing valued landscapes as part of enhancing the natural and local environment.

- 14.58 The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) advise that a range of factors can help in the identification of valued landscapes, including landscape quality (condition), scenic quality, rarity, representativeness, conservation interest, recreational value, perceptual qualities and historical associations.
- 14.59 The council has undertaken an assessment of the borough's landscapes, the Landscape Character Assessment, which analyses how these factors contribute to their value. This was used to inform an assessment of potential areas as valued landscapes. Following this assessment, the council has identified 13 valued landscapes based on them holding particularly valued attributes which would benefit from additional protection. The valued landscape areas are defined on the Policies Map and are shown in Appendix I. Development proposals affecting these areas should be assessed for their landscape and visual impact, noting the GLVIA guidance and having particular regard to the specific features, characteristics and qualities of the relevant valued landscape or landscapes.
- 14.60 Development proposals within or otherwise affecting valued landscapes must carefully consider and take account of the important landscape attributes and characteristics. Development will normally only be supported where these are protected. Where development is deemed appropriate, it should appropriately respond to the landscape through location, layout and high quality design.
- 14.61 The exercise to identify valued landscapes will not identify localised areas. Policy NE6 should be applied to any other valued landscape identified through other mechanisms.

Policy NE7: Sites of Urban Landscape Value

1. Sites of Urban Landscape Value are defined on the Policies Map.
2. Development proposals within or affecting Sites of Urban Landscape Value will only be supported where they demonstrate that they:
 - a) Retain and enhance the special landscape features and qualities that make the site valuable to the character, townscape and urban form;
 - b) Minimise the visual impact of the development site on the Sites of Urban Landscape Value; and
 - c) Protect, manage and enhance the sites' capacity for informal recreation.

- 14.62 Across the borough, there are a number of open and undeveloped areas within settlements that make an important contribution to local character, amenity and landscape. Some of these areas also play an essential role by supporting biodiversity for habitats and species, as well as providing communities with opportunities for informal/formal recreation. These areas are known as Sites of Urban Landscape Value (SULV). Four SULVs were designated in the Managing Development Delivery Document (MDD) local plan (2014).
- 14.63 A review of previously adopted SULV has been undertaken to consider changes since their original identification. The review also considered whether any additional SULVs might be justified, with the

outcome identifying two new areas at Woosehill Meadows and at Cantley Park, Wokingham. The SULVs are shown in Appendix J.

- 14.64 The SULVs form part of the setting and identity of the settlements of Earley, Wokingham and Woodley. They are primarily open spaces interspersed with and bounded by mature trees and include individual landscape features such as ponds, woodlands and hedgerows. Each SULV provides an important area of informal open, green space, alongside recreational opportunities and valuable habitats, which can enhance biodiversity. Together these complimentary roles within a built-up context, are sufficiently important to warrant protection and enhancement.
- 14.65 Development proposals within or affecting SULVs shall respect the special local character and the important landscape, wildlife and recreational amenity of the SULVs. Consideration should also be given to views within, into and from the SULVs. Proposals should be of a high standard of design that is in character with and integrated into the landscape, to minimise any visual impact. Development proposals should be supported by a Landscape and Visual Assessment to demonstrate this.

Bulmershe, Woodley

- 14.66 The combination of playing fields, open space with associated tree cover, woodland and allotments provides an open and undeveloped space between the settlements of Earley and Woodley. The character of this SULV is greatly enhanced by the presence of a strong tree and shrub screen on the rear boundaries of and within the gardens of properties on the east side of Pitts Lane and Church Road as well as the mature woodland within High Wood to the south. The boundary of the previous SULV designation has been amended to remove a small area following the completion of 10 dwellings at the rear of Pitts Lane¹⁷.

South Lake, Woodley

- 14.67 The lake of South Lake is considered an important landscape feature within this SULV as it dominates the site with mature trees surrounding the margins of the lake. The SULV has a distinctly urban character, as the well-used footpaths are never far from the adjacent residential area, although these views are often limited by intervening trees. The mature vegetation within the site and mix of tree species provides a parkland type character and creates some seclusion from the adjacent urban area. The boundary of the previous SULV designation has been amended to include a small area of land to the north-west, improving the relationship between the South Lake SULV and the adjacent Bulmershe SULV.

Maiden Erlegh Lake, Earley

- 14.68 This SULV is within the residential settlement of Earley and consists of a lake within a wooded setting. The extensive woodland is visually significant locally and provides a wooded backdrop to the surrounding properties and the adjacent playing fields. The residential properties do not exert a high urban influence over the SULV due to the high woodland cover and restrictions to various parts of the site for ecological reasons, leaving parts of the site feeling secluded and natural.

¹⁷ Appeal decision ref. APP/X0360/A/11/2148730/NW.

Joel Park, Wokingham

- 14.69 This SULV is of a semi-rural character and is dominated by mature trees and vegetation especially within Joel Park itself which has high ecological value. The SULV has two distinct areas which are Joel Park and the land around St Paul's Church and are separated by Reading Road. St Paul's Church is prominently sited on high ground with its spire forming a focal point in distant views, from either direction along Reading Road and which makes an important visual contribution to the wider SULV in long views from the north. The open setting of the SULV separates the Church from the surrounding built up areas and is a key element in its visual significance.

Woosehill Meadows, Emmbrook

- 14.70 Woosehill Meadows SULV is identified due to its value as an important landscape resource and its relationship to the Emm Brook. The SULV is surrounded by parkland and associated vegetation giving which provides strong sense of place in an urban area. Groups of mature trees are located within the site, enhancing the character of the area and providing a wooded backdrop when viewed from the surrounding residential areas, a key element in its visual significance.

Cantley Park, North Wokingham

- 14.71 Cantley Park SULV is identified as a valuable landscape resource, providing parkland type planting and significant landscape features including large, dominant specimen trees that contribute towards the area's character and distinctiveness within the urban setting. The site is also a valuable resource for formal and informal recreation, which is well-used by local residents and visitors. The mature trees within the site and around the boundaries greatly enhance the character of the SULV and provide a characteristic wooded backdrop.

12

Design, Heritage and the Built Environment

12. Design, Heritage and the Built Environment

- 12.1 In planning, design is the process of devising the physical form of development to create successful places. The NPPF is clear that creating high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places should be a fundamental outcome of the planning and development process. Simply put, good design is inseparable from good planning and should be at the heart of every proposed development.
- 12.2 Design is not just about how a development looks but is also about how well it works and meets the needs of users and responds to constraints which may be present.
- 12.3 Good design sets a positive context for the development of successful places and sustainable communities. Good design can respect and provide a strong sense of place, encourage walking, cycling and other healthy behaviours, and contribute to more vibrant and vital public places.

Policy DH1: Place making and quality design

1. All new development must be of high-quality design to endure over the lifetime of the development and create a strong sense of place. A development proposal will be considered of high quality design where it achieves the following design principles:

Context

- a) Reinforces or creates a positive sense of place and local distinctiveness through design that reflects and enhances the local natural, cultural and historic character of the area;
- b) Does not prejudice by way of design and layout, the comprehensive development of a wider opportunity;
- c) Where relevant, takes an integrated approach to placemaking which allows people to safely and conveniently access the services they need within and beyond the site;

Identity

- d) Respects and enhances the local, natural and historic character of the area, paying particular attention to siting, layout, urban grain, rhythm, density, height, scale, bulk, massing, proportion, enclosures, materials and detailing;
- e) Embraces opportunities for innovative design and new technologies, where appropriate, which sympathetically complement or contrast with the character and appearance of an area;

Built form

- f) Provides a layout and form that delivers energy efficient buildings in accordance with Policy CE1;
- g) Optimises the efficient use of land, with higher development densities provided in town centres and other sustainable locations;

Movement

- h) Provides safe and easy access and movement for pedestrians, cyclists, public transport, cars and service vehicles. The layout of a site must be connected, permeable, legible and inclusive, with good natural surveillance and maximise opportunities for, and prioritisation of, active and sustainable travel in accordance with Policies C1, C2, and C3;
- i) Delivers secure and conveniently located cycle parking facilities, public transport infrastructure (where relevant), and well-considered vehicle parking (including factors such as their location and ease of access for users) where this is required, including suitable Electric Vehicle charging points, that accords with the requirements of Policies C5 and C6 and which minimises the visual impact of the parking arrangements;
- j) Provides service access to commercial uses which makes efficient use of space, is well integrated with other land uses, and ensures highway safety;

Nature

- k) Retains, protects and integrates existing natural features including trees and hedgerows, water bodies, and landscape features;
- l) Includes appropriate new landscaping and green infrastructure as an integral part of the proposal, maximising opportunities to deliver diverse ecosystems and biodiverse habitats and strengthens wildlife corridors in a manner consistent with achieving net biodiversity gain in accordance with Policy NE2;
- m) Pay particular attention to ensuring new streets are tree-lined in a manner that enhances identity and the attractiveness of active travel routes;
- n) Where appropriate, incorporates SuDS that have been considered by the applicant early in the design process and that are well integrated into development layout, in accordance with Policy FD2;

Public spaces

- o) Delivers streets and public spaces that are attractive, particularly at the pedestrian level, incorporating features of visual interest (including public art) wherever possible. Streets and public spaces must be designed to be functionally inclusive with the ability to be managed for the long term;
- p) Provides sufficient levels of high-quality, usable private and public amenity space which is clearly delineated through the incorporation of high-quality soft and hard boundary treatments;
- q) Creates safe spaces that are designed to encourage positive social interaction and to discourage crime and disorder, and the fear of crime. Places with strong levels of natural surveillance and active frontages are expected;

Uses

- r) Creates places that foster active healthy lifestyles in accordance with Policy HC1;
- s) Includes a suitable mix of uses, depending on the scale and location of the development;
- t) Delivers places that are accessible to all, including people of all ages, those with disabilities, and other vulnerable members of the community;

Homes and buildings

- u) Provides acceptable standards of amenity, privacy and daylight for occupiers, and does not unacceptably affect the amenity of the locality or surrounding properties in accordance with Policy DH2;
- v) Provides good quality internal environments with adequate space for users. In the case of residential buildings, this should include adaptable spaces suitable for home working and compliance with internal space standards as set out at Policy H1;
- w) Makes the most efficient use of land and existing buildings. New development should be designed to be adaptable, so that, wherever possible, it can be used with flexibility over time;

Resources

- x) Minimises energy demand and maximise energy efficiency in accordance with Policies CE1, CE2 and CE3;
- y) Provides adequate measures for the storage of waste, including recycling waste bins, in a manner that is integrated into the proposal to be conveniently located for occupants and for collections, and to minimise visual impact;
- z) Maximises opportunities to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated or unstable land;

Lifespan

- aa) Uses high quality materials and external finishes that are durable and will weather attractively.
2. Masterplans and Design Codes will be required for larger and more complex developments to agree an overall vision and strategy for a development as a whole, which demonstrates a comprehensive and inclusive approach to design.

12.4 A sense of place is about ensuring that development responds in a holistic way. The Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission notes that new development should be designed to fit into the life and texture of the place where it occurs and should also aim to be an improvement of that place. In that context, Policy DH1 seeks to ensure that all new development across Wokingham Borough is of the highest possible design quality.

12.5 For new development to comply with Policy DH1, the National Design Guide, and be of the highest possible design quality, applicants should demonstrate a positive response to the following 10 characteristics of a well-designed place:

- Context;
- Identity;
- Built form;
- Movement;
- Nature;
- Public spaces;
- Uses;
- Homes and buildings;

- Resources;
- Lifespan.

12.6 The principles of the National Design Guide and other national design guidance, including Secured By Design will be supplemented through the use of more detailed local design guidance. These include the council's Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document, Neighbourhood Development Plans and other documents such as Village Design Statements and Conservation Area Appraisals.

Policy DH2: Safeguarding amenity

1. Development proposals must ensure there are no unacceptable impacts on the amenity of existing or future occupiers. This includes the impact of individual development or, cumulatively, in combination with other development.
2. Development proposals should be sensitively designed and provide measures to avoid and/or mitigate against existing or potential impacts, in terms of:
 - a) Loss of privacy and overlooking;
 - b) Unacceptable overshadowing and a loss of daylight/sunlight;
 - c) Visual intrusion, dominance or undue sense of enclosure, or an overbearing impact or harmful loss of outlook;
 - d) Noise, vibration and disturbance;
 - e) Artificial light pollution;
 - f) Odour, dust and fumes; and
 - g) Crime or the perception of unsafe environments.
3. Development proposals that would generate regular movements of HGVs and commercial traffic in residential areas must demonstrate how the impacts of noise, vibration, dust and fumes will be minimised in both the construction and operational phases.
4. Where necessary and appropriate, to protect the amenity of neighbouring occupiers planning conditions will be used to restrict hours, area(s) and the type(s) of use or operation.

12.7 It is important that development proposals do not lead to an unacceptable quality of environment for those living or working nearby. All new development should create a high-quality environment for those who will use or occupy new buildings and spaces. Policy DH2 seeks to ensure that standards of amenity are protected. Other policies in the Local Plan Update contribute towards protecting amenity by setting out the approach to specific issues, such as noise and air pollution.

12.8 The design, scale, siting and orientation of buildings should be carefully considered regarding daylight sunlight and overshadowing. Development proposals should take account key principles in the Borough Design Guide, in addition to any best practice guidance, such as the 'BRE site layout planning for daylight and sunlight, a guide to good practice' (2011) (or any successor document) to avoid a significant loss of light within habitable rooms and the overshadowing of public or private outdoor amenity areas. Designs

should actively reduce opportunities for unacceptable impacts with due consideration given to more sensitive habitable rooms such as bedrooms and the most usable areas of private outdoor amenity space.

- 12.9 The layout of new development should ensure that parking areas, delivery/service areas, refuse and cycle storage and any ventilation/extraction equipment are sited appropriately with any necessary sound insulation that may be required. Internal layouts should be carefully designed to minimise noise disturbance within and between different residential units.

Policy DH3: Shopfronts

1. Development proposals for new shopfronts or alterations to existing shopfronts will be supported where:
 - a) They maintain or create an active frontage;
 - b) They respect the character, materials, design, scale and proportions of the building, frontages and/or local area; and
 - c) They retain, protect or integrate important architectural or historic features on existing buildings. Historic features should where necessary be restored and not concealed.

Security measures should be well designed and integrated with the frontage.

- 12.10 Shopfronts make an important contribution to the character and quality of an area and its public realm and should therefore contribute to creating attractive and safe places. An active frontage is a street façade which provides active visual engagement between a use or service and people on the street. This is most readily achieved through full transparent glazing allowing views into the unit and creative window displays which provide visual interest. Large sections of blank wall and signage which obscures views into the interior of a unit will be discouraged.
- 12.11 Building façades may include surviving historical or architectural features or details which enhance the character of the building. These are often unique, add visual interest to a shopfront and contribute to the distinctive character of the local area. Existing features should be retained and restored as applicable, for example during refurbishment earlier decorative features can be uncovered and incorporated into new proposals.
- 12.12 Security measures should not compromise the appearance of the shopfront, any historical features, the building as a whole or the character of the wider street scene. Solid external shutters can reduce the attractiveness and perceptions of safety in shopping streets after dark and where shutters are installed at a later date than the shopfront, protruding shutter boxes are visually obtrusive. Every effort should be made to incorporate internal shutters, preferably of metal lattice which maintain visibility into the shop window and allow the shutter box to be hidden inside the shop window.

- 12.13 It is noted that the changes to the Use Class Order now mean buildings used for retail purposes can change to other uses (such as restaurants, offices, or residential) without planning permission, that could have an impact on the function of shop fronts. However, conversions to alternative uses which require operational development will still be expected to maintain an active frontage that respects the appropriate character of the centre and/or primary shopping area. This also allows for natural, active surveillance, that enhances safety and security of the centre.

Policy DH4: Advertisements and signage

1. Development proposals for advertisements and signage will be supported where:
 - a) The design, including materials, size, colour, noise, lettering amount and type of text, illumination and luminance, and location of the advertisement respects the scale and character of the building on which it is situated and the surrounding area, especially in the case of a heritage asset or within a conservation area;
 - b) They will not have a harmful impact on the amenity of adjoining uses, and
 - c) They will not have a detrimental effect on public and highways safety.

The cumulative impact of advertisements and signage will be taken into account, and a proliferation that detrimentally affects visual or aural amenity, or a cluttered street scene will not be acceptable.

- 12.14 Advertisements and signage are common features, in particular in retail and commercial areas and play a role in providing information and helping to identify uses and occupiers. However, adverts and signage can be unattractive if poorly sited and designed. The management of advertisements and signs is therefore important to protect the quality, character and appearance of the street scene and local distinctiveness.
- 12.15 To maximise the positive aspects of advertisements and signage, careful consideration will be given to the size, location, materials, details, and method of illumination of proposals together with their impact on architectural features and especially heritage assets.
- 12.16 In areas such as town and district centres where advertisements and signage are more prevalent, it is important to avoid visual clutter. A balance therefore needs to be met between commercial requirements and the impact on the environment, public safety and amenity.

Policy DH5: The historic environment

1. Designated heritage assets, including Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Conservation Areas and Registered Parks and Gardens, are irreplaceable resources that, subject to their significance, should be conserved for the benefit of future generations.

2. Development proposals should conserve and, wherever possible, seek to enhance, the archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interest of all heritage assets, including the contribution made by their setting. This will be achieved through:
 - a) Identifying and understanding the heritage assets that may be affected by the proposed works, at an early stage in the design process;
 - b) Supporting works that secure the sensitive use, enjoyment, conservation and/or enhancement of heritage assets and their settings, particularly in relation to designated assets identified as being at risk; and
 - c) Retaining and/or incorporating existing features or details of historic or architectural interest and/or design quality into the scheme through the sensitive design of development.
3. Where development proposals have the potential to affect a heritage asset and/or its setting, a heritage assessment should be prepared in a level of detail proportionate to the asset's importance. This assessment should be submitted as part of a planning application and should describe the significance of the heritage asset and its setting, before assessing the potential impact of the proposal on its significance.
4. Development proposals that would cause substantial harm to, or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm, or where all the following criteria apply:
 - a) The nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site;
 - b) No viable use of the heritage asset can be found through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation;
 - c) Conservation by grant-funding or another form of not-for-profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
 - d) The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.
5. Where a development proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, clear and convincing justification will need to be provided to demonstrate the public benefits of the proposal that could not otherwise be achieved. The level of public benefit must outweigh any harm to a designated heritage asset.
6. Local Historic Parks and Gardens and Areas of Special Character are included on the Policies Map. All non-designated heritage assets are identified and recorded on the council's website.
7. Development proposals should demonstrate how the traditional, historical, local and special character of a building, area, park or garden and its setting has been preserved and enhanced. This will enable an assessment of the degree of harm to, or loss of, non-designated heritage assets, balanced against their significance, the positive contribution made by the development and the extent to which any harm can be justified or mitigated.

- 12.17 The NPPF defines the historic environment as “all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time, including all surviving physical remains of past human activity, whether visible, buried or submerged, and landscaped and planted or managed flora”.
- 12.18 All heritage assets should be protected in a manner appropriate to their significance. A heritage asset is defined as a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions because of its heritage interest. This includes both designated heritage assets and non-designated heritage assets. Non-designated heritage assets are those identified by the council as local planning authority (including local listing) and in made neighbourhood development plans. The heritage interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.
- 12.19 Wokingham Borough contains a number of designated heritage assets, including Grade I, II* and II Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Conservation Areas and Registered Parks and Gardens. There are also a number of non-designated but locally important heritage assets, including Locally Listed Heritage Assets, which incorporates both those assets previously referred to as Buildings of Traditional Local Character, along with Areas of Special Character, and Local Historic Parks and Gardens (previously recorded in the HER and mapped in the Landscape Character Assessment 2019).
- 12.20 Local heritage plays an essential role in building and reinforcing a sense of local character and distinctiveness. A record of locally listed heritage assets is set out on the council's website, including the council's suggested method for promoting a building, monument or location for designation.
- 12.21 Other heritage assets, that are not locally or nationally designated, may be identified by the council, as making a positive contribution to the historic character and distinctiveness of the borough, through the assessment of development proposals. These heritage assets may be recognised as meeting the local or national designation requirements and steps will be taken to formalise their designation status.
- 12.22 The council will seek to ensure that non-designated heritage assets are identified, retained and enhanced. Any impact on their significance should be addressed during the planning application process. The degree of harm to, or loss of, non-designated heritage assets will be assessed and balanced against their significance, the positive contribution made by the development and the extent to which any harm can be justified or mitigated.
- 12.23 The objective of conserving and enhancing the special qualities of the borough's historic environment can be achieved by ensuring that development proposals recognise and respect the significance and individual identity and fabric of buildings and historic parks and gardens, and the sense of place. Development proposals affecting a heritage asset, and/or its setting shall pay special attention to:
1. Retaining and conserving original and/or historic architectural features both external and internal¹⁸ features, finishing and plan form of the heritage asset;
 2. Lighting, signing and advertisements, including fascias, to ensure they do not detract from the architectural or historic quality of the building or the character or appearance of a Conservation Area¹⁹;

¹⁸ Internal features apply only to Listed Buildings and Scheduled Monuments.

¹⁹ Wokingham Borough Council maintains a program of Conservation Area Appraisals

3. The scale, proportions, design, workmanship and materials of development proposals in relation to the existing heritage asset;
4. Understanding the, sometimes complex, relationship between historic buildings and their surroundings; and
5. Retaining original or historic park and garden or landscape features.

12.24 Development proposals affecting heritage assets should include a proportionate level of supporting information to identify the significance (heritage interest) of the asset and to convey the exact nature of the proposals, and their impact on that significance. This should also include mitigation that is proportionate to both the impact on and the significance of the heritage asset, and where possible positive opportunities to conserve and enjoy heritage assets. Where loss is unavoidable and justified, an exercise recording this loss and advancing knowledge should be undertaken (noting that the ability to record historic evidence is not a consideration in deciding whether an application will be granted permission). Supporting information should include:

1. Detailed survey drawings and plans, elevations and sections;
2. Use of appropriate references such as, for designated assets, the National Heritage List for England (NHLE) (maintained by Historic England) and, for both designated and non-designated assets, the Berkshire Historic Environment Record and the Berkshire Historic Landscape Character Assessment (maintained by Berkshire Archaeology), or other relevant information held in a public record office; and
3. For assets of archaeological interest, an appropriate desk-based assessment; and, where necessary, a field evaluation; and draw upon specialist expertise and guidance as appropriate.

12.25 Care should be taken to understand and assess the implications of development on the setting of heritage assets and of development within the setting of assets, drawing on Conservation Area Appraisals where relevant. Where a development proposal is permitted that would result in harm to, or the loss of, the significance of a heritage asset, developers will be required to record and advance the understanding of the significance of that asset, in a manner appropriate to its importance and proportionate to the impact, and to make that evidence publicly accessible.

Policy DH6: Archaeology

1. Development proposals should be accompanied by a detailed archaeological assessment where:
 - a) The development has the potential to affect a scheduled monument or a non-designated heritage asset of archaeological interest;
 - b) The site is within or in proximity to an Area of High Archaeological Potential, or
 - c) The site is within a location where archaeological remains are known or suspected to exist.
2. The archaeological assessment should be in the form of a desk-based study that explains the significance of any archaeological remains, using suitable references such as the Historic

Environment Record and, where necessary, a field evaluation. The assessment must explore and explain any likely impact of development upon the archaeological remains.

3. Development proposal should take appropriate measures to protect any archaeological remains by preservation in situ. Where an assessment of archaeological potential demonstrates this is not justified or proportionate, applicants will be responsible for the excavation, recording and archiving of remains.

12.26 The council will work with Berkshire Archaeology, developers and their heritage consultants to ensure that the appropriate level of archaeological evaluation, as well as measures to protect and preserve remains are undertaken. This will be assessed on a site-by-site basis and the level of preservation will be appropriate to the significance of the remains.

12.27 Where archaeological remains cannot be preserved in-situ, people undertaking development should record their significance and make this publicly accessible, by depositing any evidence with the relevant Historic Environment Record (Berkshire Archaeology) and depositing any remains in local museums. The cost of recording and depositing any remains will rest with the developer.

Policy DH7: Equestrian development

1. Equestrian development proposals will be supported in principle, as a means of boosting the rural economy, provided it has been demonstrated all the following criteria have been met:
 - a) The scale and intensity of the proposed development, including any subdivision of field(s) and earthworks, is compatible with the site's location and satisfactorily relates to existing field accesses, tracks and bridleways;
 - b) The proposal includes the re-use of existing building(s) wherever practicable and viable;
 - c) The location of new buildings, stables, yard areas and associated facilities respect the amenities of surrounding occupiers;
 - d) Site layout, highways and parking arrangements demonstrate safe access and egress for horse boxes, delivery vehicles and specialist waste collection vehicles; and
 - e) Estimated trip generation rates are provided to assess the impact on local highways, including from feed/hay deliveries, livery visitors including owners and farriers.

Where the proposed development is located in the Green Belt, it will additionally be expected to accord with Policy SS6.

12.28 Equestrian activities are popular in Wokingham Borough and include licensed riding establishments, livery yards, stables and associated facilities for public, private and domestic use. People considering development proposals should carefully consider natural surveillance, site security, vehicle access and animal welfare.

- 12.29 The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids (DEFRA, 2017)²⁰ sets out the living standards to be afforded to all equine species. Any submission should include detailed information to demonstrate that the DEFRA Code of Practice has been followed. The Code stipulates that each animal requires approximately 0.5 to 1.0 hectares (or 1.25 to 2.5 acres) of suitable quality outdoor land, for grazing, socialising and exercising. Stabling and outdoor shelters should be provided in accordance with the DEFRA Code of Practice. For the safety and security of the animals, stabling should be sited in close proximity to the main dwellinghouse and/or grooms' accommodation.
- 12.30 The conversion of stables, grooms' accommodation and any associated buildings/stores to residential use will be strongly resisted, to prevent the incremental degradation of the countryside and protect against the formation of substandard residential accommodation.
- 12.31 Where necessary, permissions will be subject to legal agreements to restrict the use of stables, grooms' accommodation, and any associated buildings/stores, to prevent future conversion to standalone residential use and to tie the proposed equestrian use to the residential accommodation in perpetuity.

²⁰ [Code of practice for the welfare of horses, ponies, donkeys and their hybrids \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/622222/code-of-practice-for-the-welfare-of-horses-ponies-donkeys-and-their-hybrids.pdf)

13

Healthy and Safe Communities

13. Healthy and Safe Communities

- 13.1 A key part of the vision of the Local Plan Update is to focus on the needs of communities. This includes achieving healthy and safe places which facilitate social interaction through the provision of places to meet and be active. It also means ensuring people are not subject to the adverse effects of some land uses and traffic, such as pollution.

Policy HC1: Promoting healthy communities

1. Vibrant, healthy and safe communities will be promoted through a high-quality environment with local services to support health, social and cultural wellbeing and help contribute to reducing deprivation and inequalities in the borough.
2. Development proposals should consider impacts on the health and wellbeing of new and existing residents, by including measures that contribute to healthier communities and reduce inequalities. This includes the creation of high quality, active, safe and accessible places.
3. Development proposals will be supported where they:
 - a) Contribute to the health and wellbeing priorities of the borough, including those outlined in the Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Wokingham Health and Wellbeing Strategy (and any other successor or associated document);
 - b) Support the provision of new or improved health facilities, in consultation with the borough's Health and Wellbeing Board, Integration Partnership, the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care Board and NHS England; and
 - c) Protect existing health facilities in line with Policy HC2: Community Facilities.
4. Residential development proposals of 10 dwellings or more, or non-residential development proposals of 1,000 m² or greater gross internal area must include a Health Impact Assessment (HIA).

- 13.2 The built and natural environment has a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of individual people and communities. It can strongly influence behaviour, including travel patterns and physical activity levels as well as social connectivity. Places should therefore support healthy lifestyles, including opportunities to interact socially, in a safe and accessible environment.

- 13.3 Through the planning process, development proposals can positively improve quality of life, with new development presenting a valuable opportunity to provide new spaces and places that promote, encourage, and influence healthy behaviours. An objective across policies in the Local Plan Update is to improve health and wellbeing by protecting and promoting the health and wellbeing of communities, including through the quality of housing, tackling climate change, and access to community facilities.

The creation of healthy environments for people of all ages is therefore a key consideration through the planning process.

- 13.4 Wokingham's Health and Wellbeing Board oversees local health and care needs and influences the planning and commissioning of services. It brings partners together including NHS, BOB Integrated Care System and Board representatives, Healthwatch, local authority executive members, the voluntary sector and public health. The Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets strategic priorities which are: reducing the differences in health between groups of different people, supporting individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to healthy lives, help families and children in early years and promoting good health and wellbeing for all children, younger people and adults.
- 13.5 Consideration must be given to the priorities and actions identified in the Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Wokingham's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and any other successor or associated document. Information and data in the Wokingham Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and borough profiles can provide a starting point.
- 13.6 Health Impact Assessments (HIA) are a useful tool that can help to identify the likely health impacts of development proposals and set out measures to improve health outcomes and address negative effects and inequalities. The scope of a HIA will vary depending on the size and location of the development. HIAs for developments of 100 homes or more should include details of the engagement undertaken with relevant local health and community stakeholders. Information gathered through this engagement will help to identify, address and mitigate any impacts.

Policy HC2: Community infrastructure

New Facilities

1. Development proposals for the provision of new or extended community facilities will be supported where there is an identified present or future need, and should be:
 - a) Of a suitable nature and scale to meet identified needs, be compatible with the character of the area and be sufficiently flexible to meet changing needs over time;
 - b) Designed to accommodate a range of community uses, where appropriate. The co-location of facilities, including access for appropriate organisations and the local community will be strongly encouraged;
 - c) Accessible by the community and promote social inclusion; and
 - d) Provided as part of a large residential schemes where development increases demand beyond current capacity, or generates a newly arising need.
2. New community facilities must be supported by appropriate arrangements to secure the future management and maintenance of the facility.

Existing Facilities

3. Existing community facilities should be retained, improved and enhanced.

4. Development proposals that result in the loss of a community facility or service will only be supported where detailed and robust evidence has been provided to demonstrate one or more of the following is met:

- a) It would lead to the significant improvement of an existing facility, or the replacement of an existing facility of equal accessibility and convenience for the local community, with equivalent or improved facilities;
- b) It has been demonstrated and determined that the facility no longer meets the needs of the local community;
- c) It would provide better outcomes for the community outweighing the loss of the existing facility; or
- d) It is no longer economically viable.

- 13.7 Community facilities are vital in creating and shaping new and existing communities. They enable multiple needs to be met, such as cultural needs, specialist provision, health and wellbeing outcomes and opportunities for co-location of key stakeholders to support community cohesion. Facilities, such as meeting places, healthcare, libraries, local shops, cultural buildings, public houses, places of worship, sports venues and youth provision, form a vital part of the quality of life for residents. There are a variety of community facilities across the borough that form an essential part of local settlements and provide centres to meet a community's day to day needs and support sustainable, cohesive and integrated communities.
- 13.8 Existing services must be protected as much as possible, whilst making sure that they are 'fit for purpose'. It is important that facilities keep pace with new development so that the needs of both existing and new communities continue to be met. New development can put additional pressure on infrastructure and may create the need for new facilities and local services.
- 13.9 It will important to ensure that the future management maintenance of facilities is secured. Appropriate arrangements will be sought in line with Policy SS15: Securing Infrastructure.
- 13.10 It is the council's strong preference that key infrastructure, including community facilities, is passed to the council or relevant parish/town council. A commuted sum will be required to cover the cost of maintenance over an appropriate length of time, which will be dependent on the type of infrastructure. Infrastructure will only be adopted once the council is satisfied it has been delivered to standard and once an appropriate commuted sum has been paid.
- 13.11 Where infrastructure is not passed to the council or the relevant parish/town council, and is instead maintained by a private management company, the council will need to be satisfied that arrangements are in place prior to first occupancy to management and maintenance of the infrastructure in the long-term. This will include an agreed specification and maintenance schedule (as a minimum to the council's standard), with funded inspections during the implementation phase of development, the securing of sufficient funding to cover the interim costs of maintenance, repairs to, and replacement of equipment, during the establishment and initial period of the management company, and permanent and meaningful resident representation on the company board.

- 13.12 To promote social inclusion and wider public health benefits, including more active lifestyles, new facilities should be sustainably located for the community it intends to serve, particularly for access by pedestrians and cycles. Development proposals that seek to enhance community facilities will generally be supported, unless evidence shows it risks undermining the viability of an existing valued facility. Community uses can also be vulnerable to development pressure for other uses. Although the retention of existing community uses is strongly supported, there may be situations where the community use is no longer required/viable.
- 13.13 To justify the loss or redevelopment of a community facility for a non-community use, the following should be provided:
- Evidence of continued marketing for at least 12 continuous months, demonstrating there is no longer demand for the facility;
 - Evidence that other service providers and the community have been consulted to confirm there is no need for the facility; and
 - Evidence of suitable alternative facilities of a similar size, function, accessibility and adaptability in the local area that is able to meet the day to day needs of the community.
- 13.14 The nomination of a facility as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) is one way of identifying a building or land use that is important to the local community. Once listed as an ACV the local community will be informed if listed for sale within a five year period, allowing the community to enact a Community Right to Bid, and a period of six months to determine whether they can raise the finance to purchase the asset. A list of ACVs is available on the council website. If a facility is listed as an ACV, or the application is pending, it will be taken into consideration as part of the planning application process.

Policy HC3: Local Green Space

1. Local Green Space as shown on the Policies Map, or in made neighbourhood development plans, will be protected from inappropriate development, unless very special circumstances are demonstrated.
2. Development proposals on Local Green Space should be compatible with the area's designation.
3. Development proposals for facilities associated with the recreational use of a Local Green Space will normally be supported provided there are no unacceptable adverse impacts on the areas use or function.

- 13.15 Local Green Space is a national designation, referred to in the NPPF, which aims to protect green areas or spaces which are demonstrably special to a local community and hold a particular local significance. In order to be designated as a Local Green Space, the space must be:
- In reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;

- Demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquility or richness of wildlife; and
- Local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

- 13.16 Designating land as Local Green Space should also be consistent with the local planning of sustainable development and complement investment in sufficient homes, jobs and other essential services.
- 13.17 The sites designated within the Local Plan Update were put forward by the community representatives and through consultations information the preparation of the plan. Each nominated area was assessed against the national requirements to determine their suitability²¹. The proposed Local Green Spaces are shown in Appendix K.
- 13.18 Development proposals on Local Green Spaces for inappropriate development will not be supported, except where very special circumstances are demonstrated. Guidance on appropriate development is set out in the NPPF and aligns with policy regarding Green Belt.
- 13.19 When assessing a development proposal, a key consideration will be whether the development proposal is compatible with the reasons the Local Green Space was found suitable for designation.

Policy HC4: Open space, sports, recreation and play facilities

Existing Facilities

1. Existing open space, sports and recreation and play facilities will be protected, maintained and where possible enhanced.
2. Development proposals on existing open space, sports and recreation and play facilities will only be permitted where one or more of the following is met:
 - a) An assessment has been undertaken which clearly shows the open space, facilities or land are surplus to requirements and alternative facilities are available within a reasonable distance;
 - b) It can be demonstrated that alternative facilities of equivalent or superior quality and quantity will be provided in an accessible and suitable location;
 - c) The development proposal is for alternative sport and recreational provision, the needs and benefits of which outweigh the loss of the current or former use; or
 - d) It is ancillary to the main use of the site and enhances its function.

New Facilities and Residential Development

3. Development proposals for open space, sport and recreation and play facilities will be encouraged and supported, in line with other policies in the Local Plan Update and Sport

²¹ For further information see the Local Green Spaces Assessment (2024)

England guidance. New open space, sports, recreation and play facilities should be well related to the communities they serve and should, where possible, promote their dual use by being co-located with other community uses, such as schools.

4. Development proposals for residential development involving a net increase in the number of dwellings, will be required to provide or contribute to the provision of open space, sport and recreation and play facilities and must demonstrate how they meet the standards in the table below.

Type	Borough standard (ha per 1,000 population)
Parks and public gardens	1.1
Natural/ semi natural greenspace (excluding country parks*)	2.84
Amenity greenspace	0.98
Provision for children and young people (Neighbourhood Equipped Areas of Play; Local Equipped Areas of Play; Local Areas of Play)	0.25
Civic Space	0.01
Outdoor sports facilities	1.44
Cemeteries/ Burial grounds**	14.4 grave plots per 1,000 population
Allotments	0.39
Type (indoor sports)	
Borough standard (m² per 1,000 population)	
Sports hall (4-badminton court) including indoor bowls (2 rinks) and Health & Fitness gyms (20 stations)	65.43
Swimming pool	8.26
Activity halls	41.31
* Where Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) also meets the definition of natural greenspace it can also count towards this provision, i.e., at least 2.84ha per 1,000 population of the SANG could also contribute towards the natural greenspace standard and vice versa.	
**Assumes a grave plot can accommodate 2.5 burials on average.	

5. Open space, sports, recreation and play facilities should be provided on-site. Where this is not possible or achievable, a financial contribution will be sought towards off-site provision.
6. Clear arrangements for the long-term future maintenance and management of public open spaces should be provided and agreed with the council during the early stages of the planning process. New public open spaces created as part of development should be transferred to

the council or by agreement, to the relevant parish/town council for adoption once it has been designed and implemented to a suitable standard. Financial contributions will be secured from the developer through a Section 106 legal agreement towards the maintenance of public open spaces for up to a 30-year period.

- 13.20 The NPPF recognises the importance of access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sports and recreation, to the health and well-being of all. This includes access to a wide range of open space, sporting, leisure and play facilities. As well as improving and maintaining our quality of life, these features provide a wide range of benefits including biodiversity, green infrastructure and visual amenity.
- 13.21 Wokingham Borough has a wealth of open space and outdoor recreation facilities, including additional provision delivered through new developments. Existing open spaces, sports and recreation and play facilities will be protected. Development proposals that result in the loss of these facilities will need to demonstrate that the proposal is either ancillary to the main use of the site and enhances its function, provides a community benefit or that alternative provision of equal or better value will be provided.
- 13.22 New development must include the open space, sport and recreation and play facilities required to meet the needs of both existing and future communities. This can provide opportunities to provide, protect and enhance new and existing public open space (including cemeteries and burial grounds), indoor and outdoor play, sport and recreational facilities, either through on site measures or by contributing to off-site facilities. Development proposals will be expected to provide public open space on site in the first instance. In some cases, for example, small sites where the site cannot physically provide or appropriately accommodate open space, indoor or outdoor play or sport and recreational facilities on site, a financial contribution will be sought to fund offsite provision.
- 13.23 The Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities Assessment and Standards provides detailed background information on how current standards are calculated. The Open Space, Sports and Recreation Strategy (or any successor document) provides detailed guidance on the application of the standards set out in Policy HC4, benchmark outline specifications for types of open space and sports facilities, and detailed guidance on delivery requirements. The most recent and up-to-date studies should be utilised by applicants to inform their development proposals.
- 13.24 Outdoor play space has a valuable role to enliven, inspire and educate our children and young people. The Play Space Design Guide supports the Borough Design Guide and Open Space, Sport and Recreation Strategy by providing guidance and specific requirements for the design of play spaces, to help raise the quality of playable space. Proposals for recreational facilities should also consider the potential that such features may have for attracting crime and anti-social behaviour.
- 13.25 Arrangements for the long-term management and maintenance of new public open spaces should be considered by the developer in the early stages of development proposals and will be secured through a Section 106 legal agreement as part of the planning process. In the first instance, new public open spaces created as part of development should be transferred to the council or by agreement, to the relevant parish/town council for adoption once it has been designed and implemented to a suitable standard and after an agreed initial period of maintenance. The use of Private Management companies would only be agreed by the council in exceptional circumstances, which the developer would need to provide information to justify at that time.

Policy HC5: Environmental protection

1. Development proposals will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that individually, or cumulatively in combination with other schemes, they do not have an unacceptable impact, either during the construction phase, or when completed, on:
 - a) Human health, well-being or safety;
 - b) Residential and public amenity;
 - c) The quality of land, including soils and the subsurface;
 - d) Air and Water quality (including surface water and groundwater); and
 - e) Other sensitive receptors, including the natural environment.
2. Development proposals should demonstrate how an assessment of all potential environmental risks has been undertaken.

- 13.26 The planning system has an important role in directing the location of development to ensure it does not give rise to pollution or other hazards. Pollution can be anything that affects the quality of land (including soils and the subsurface), air or water, that may have an adverse impact on human health, the natural environment or public amenity. Examples of pollution may include but are not limited to, noise, vibration, light, air quality, radiation, gas emission or the degradation of soil and water resources from their natural state.
- 13.27 Pollution, both new and historic, can have a considerable impact on the local environment and on the health, well-being and quality of life enjoyed by individuals and communities. The impact of both new and existing sources of pollution should be taken into consideration when considering the location of development. Development proposals which place sensitive receptors (such as new housing, a school or nursery) in proximity to the source of pollution, would not be considered appropriate where the sources of pollution cannot be satisfactorily mitigated.
- 13.28 The council is committed to protecting existing areas of land of good environmental quality and, where possible, reducing adverse effects on the natural environment through changes in activities or from new development. Development proposals should seek to maintain existing areas of land of good environmental quality and improve quality where possible. Opportunities for such improvements should be incorporated at the design stage or through a development's operation. This will be achieved through the combination of avoiding any additional impacts to, and the minimisation and mitigation of historic pollution on, all proposed sites. All development proposals shall take into account the most up-to-date, relevant best-practice guidelines.

Policy HC6: Air pollution and air quality

1. Development proposals should maintain, and where possible improve air quality.
2. Development proposals should consider the prevailing air quality and potential impacts upon air quality arising from airborne particulates, dust and odour associated with the construction and operation of a proposal (including vehicular traffic).
3. Air Quality Assessments can demonstrate how prevailing air quality and potential impacts upon air quality have been considered and how air quality will be maintained at an acceptable standard through avoidance and mitigation measures. Development proposals are likely to require an Air Quality Assessment where:
 - a) The site is located within an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA);
 - b) The development has the potential to impact on air quality within an AQMA either on its own or in combination with other development;
 - c) It has the potential to impact on the implementation of Air Quality Action Plans or Local Air Quality Strategies, either on its own or in combination with other development;
 - d) The site is located within or close to an urban area that is known to experience higher levels of airborne particulates from vehicle emissions;
 - e) The site is within proximity to a source of air pollution which could present a significant risk to human health, protected species, or irreplaceable habitats; or
 - f) The type of development would mean its occupiers would be particularly sensitive to air pollution, such as schools, health care establishments or specialist accommodation.

- 13.29 Poor air quality is recognised as a significant environmental health risk that contributes to chronic illnesses, with air pollution now attributed to reducing average life expectancy. Air pollution is not only harmful to human health, productivity and wellbeing, it also harms the natural environment, from individual plant and animal species to wider habitats and entire ecosystems.
- 13.30 Air pollution in the borough primarily relates to pollutants emitted from road transport vehicles, and specifically chronic exposure to nitrogen dioxide (the annual mean). Other pollutants of concern include particulates PM10 and fine particulate matter (PM2.5) along with those specified in the National Air Quality Strategy. The National Air Quality Strategy stipulates that all local authorities must assess air quality in their area and submit an Annual Status Report including progress implementing Air Quality Action Plans and Local Air Quality Strategies. Development proposals will be expected to have regard to the latest available strategy.
- 13.31 Local Authorities have a duty to work towards achieving national air quality objectives. In areas where residents are exposed to pollutants in excess of specified limits, Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) are declared. The annual Air Quality Action Plan describes the pollution reduction measures required, including targets and progress. AQMAs can be revoked where there is sufficient confidence that all objectives are being met.

- 13.32 Three AQMAs have been declared in the borough at the time of writing. The M4 AQMA covers an area along the route of the M4, as it transects Wokingham encompassing adjacent properties and part of the A329 where it passes under the M4. The two other AQMAs relate to specific urban areas, the crossroads in Twyford village centre and Wokingham town centre.
- 13.33 Developers will be expected to take air quality matters into consideration when considering and preparing development proposals. Promoting the use of public transport, and active travel alternatives to private vehicles, and providing services and amenities close to new development will help to reduce carbon emissions and air pollution.
- 13.34 Where it is identified that a development proposal will result in a harmful increase in emissions, measures should be identified to mitigate this increase. Mitigation measures could include the revised design of the proposal or a low emissions strategy, comprising a package of measures to reduce transport related emissions. A low emissions strategy will be specific to individual developments and is dependent upon the exact nature and location of the site. Other mitigation methods may include, but are not limited to, planting green roofs/walls, placing residential accommodation at higher levels within mixed used property developments, or using specific types of paving that absorb NO₂. In some exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary for the developer to fund mitigation measures elsewhere within the borough, to offset any increase in pollutant emissions arising from the proposed development.

Policy HC7: Light pollution

1. Development proposals that include outdoor lighting should be sensitively designed and appropriately located to avoid obtrusive light, such as excessive glare and intrusive light spillage, and protect the amenity of immediate and wider neighboring residential properties (both existing and proposed).
2. Development proposals that include outdoor lighting should submit a Lighting Appraisal in accordance with current guidance from the Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP) (or similar body), national guidance and British Standards. Lighting schemes should adopt the minimum level of luminance to adequately serve the needs of end users.
3. All reasonable steps should be taken to avoid obtrusive light, including sky glow, on sensitive receptors such as wildlife corridors, Local Wildlife Sites and protected species. Where avoidance is not possible, adverse impacts must be identified and mitigated.

- 13.35 Where it is used appropriately, artificial lighting can help to provide an accessible, safe and secure environment. Planning decisions should limit the impact of light pollution to protect local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and wildlife.

- 13.36 Lighting must be of a level suitable for its purpose, and it is important that there are no significant adverse impacts on the amenity of the surrounding area. It is acknowledged that some activities may require more intensive lighting, such as industrial and commercial sites, railway stations, car parks, and some community and sports facilities, such as floodlit sports pitches.
- 13.37 The Institute of Lighting Professionals (ILP) Guidance Note 1²² for the reduction of obtrusive light (2021) identifies forms of obtrusive light which may cause nuisance to others, or adversely affect fauna and flora, as well as waste energy and financial resources. This includes:
- Sky glow: the brightening of the night sky;
 - Glare: the uncomfortable brightness of a light source when viewed against a darker background; and
 - Light spill: the spilling of light beyond the boundary of the area being lit, inclusive of light intrusion where this causes a nuisance to others.
- 13.38 Wokingham Borough includes rural areas which are highly sensitive to light pollution which could affect the perceptual landscape of the countryside including its tranquility and dark skies. Light pollution can also contribute towards sleep deprivation and associated health problems.
- 13.39 Artificial light can also adversely affect ecosystems including (both direct and indirect, from reflection/glare off man-made and natural surfaces) insects, avian, aquatic, riparian and nocturnal wildlife. Well-designed development proposals can ensure the positioning of lighting respects and maintains the connectivity of wildlife corridors and habitats.
- 13.40 If artificial light is required as part of a development proposal, it should be carefully considered at the design stage to ensure it is appropriately sited and proportionate to serve the end user, so that only the necessary amount of light is included. Only development proposals that do not result in significant adverse impacts to peoples' amenity, the natural environment or public health and safety will be supported. Lighting must be appropriate to the character of an area and avoid impacts of obtrusive light on sensitive receptors. Illuminating into the UV spectrum should be avoided and where possible lighting should illuminate within a 'warm red' range.
- 13.41 ILP Guidance Note 1 identifies zones for outdoor lighting control including natural, rural, suburban and urban areas. Table 10 below sets out the lighting environment expected within each of these zones. Lighting Appraisals should be assessed in accordance with the zone a development is sited within and the likely potential impact on peoples' health or quality of life, and well as biodiversity. Where an area that is proposed to be lit lies within visual distance of the boundary between two zones, the obtrusive light values of the most rigorous zone shall apply.

²² [Guidance Note 1 for the reduction of obtrusive light 2021 | Institution of Lighting Professionals \(theilp.org.uk\)](https://www.theilp.org.uk/guidance-note-1-for-the-reduction-of-obtrusive-light-2021/)

Table 10: ILP Environmental Zones for Exterior Lighting Control.

Zone	Lighting Environment	ILP examples of types of environmental zones
E1 Natural	Dark (SQM 20 to 20.5)	Relatively uninhabited rural areas, National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty etc
E2 Rural	Low distinct brightness (SQM ~15 to 20)	Sparsely inhabited rural areas, village or relatively dark outer suburban locations
E3 Suburban	Medium distinct brightness	Well inhabited rural and urban settlements, small town centres of suburban locations
E4 Urban	High distinct brightness	Town/city centres with high levels of night time activity.

Policy HC8: Noise pollution

1. Development proposals must demonstrate how noise impacts have been addressed, to protect sensitive receptors, including existing and proposed dwellings.
2. The noise impact of the proposed development must be assessed. Where there is no adverse impact (no observed effect level), noise pollution will not be a material consideration.
3. Where there is an adverse effect (ranging from the lowest observed adverse effect level to a significant observed adverse effect level), then the following approaches must be taken in the order listed:
 - a) The development layout must be reviewed. Where this results in there no longer being an adverse impact then design and mitigation measures should be incorporated accordingly;
 - b) Where there is still an adverse impact, the internal layout must be reviewed. Where this results in there no longer being an adverse impact, then design and mitigation measures should be incorporated accordingly;
 - c) Where there is still an adverse impact, physical mitigation measures such as barriers/mechanical ventilation must be considered. Where this results in there no longer being an adverse impact, these measures should be incorporated accordingly;
 - d) Where there is still an adverse impact and the development falls within the significant observed adverse effect level, then planning permission will normally be refused.
4. Adverse impacts on sensitive environmental receptors, such as wildlife corridors, should be avoided or comprehensively mitigated where avoidance is not possible.

13.42 Excess noise and vibration can have a harmful impact on sensitive receptors and lead to a loss of amenity in the immediate area of the source of noise pollution. It is important that the location of

development proposals do not negatively impact the amenity of existing and future occupiers. Development proposals may, however, provide opportunities to make improvements to the acoustic environment.

- 13.43 The existing use of a site or area should be considered as part of development proposals, particularly when additional development may include sensitive receptors. The number of noise and vibration occurrences, duration and time of day will all be considered. Where existing noise and vibration levels in an area are unsuitable for residential development or other uses, the applicant should provide evidence of existing levels of environmental noise and propose suitable mitigation within the new development to ensure a good standard of amenity for future occupiers. Otherwise, the development is unlikely to be supported.
- 13.44 Development proposals should aim to meet the internal and external noise standards for residential developments set out in Table 11.

Table 11 Internal and external noise standards.

Room	Time	Noise Level (dB LAmax)
Bedrooms	Night (23.00-07.00)	30 Individual noise events should not exceed 45dB LAmax during the night time
Living Rooms	Daytime (07.00-23.00)	35
Outside amenity space	Daytime (07.00-23.00)	50-55 Balconies will need to meet the same standard unless it is clear they are not intended to be an outdoor living area

- 13.45 These levels are based on Table 4 of BS8233:2014 Guidance on sound insulation and noise reduction for buildings. Where development sites are affected by a non-steady noise source, commercial or industrial noise, or noise that does not follow a typical diurnal pattern, the acceptability of noise levels will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Where noise is of a continuous and/or tonal nature, this should be 5dB below background noise levels.

Policy HC9: Contaminated land and water

1. Development proposals on or near sites which are known, or suspected to be potentially contaminated, or proposals for sensitive land uses, will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the following sensitive receptors would not be exposed to levels of potential contamination that would give rise to unacceptable risks or harm to health, or other adverse impacts:
 - a) People; including future or existing occupiers or neighbours of development;

- b) The natural environment; including but not limited to areas of ecological value such as Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- c) Property; including future or existing dwellings or businesses;
- d) Water bodies; including both surface water and groundwater bodies; and
- e) Any other sensitive receptors as identified on a case-by-case basis.

2. A preliminary assessment should be undertaken, which includes:

- a) Details of any historic contamination;
- b) The extent, scale and nature of the potential contamination;
- c) The potential risks to human health, property, nature conservation, water quality or other receptors; and
- d) Any preventative, mitigation or remedial measures and supporting assessments.

3. Development proposals must demonstrate how any pollution arising from previous land uses or from the proposed development itself can be sufficiently mitigated.

Contaminated Land

- 13.46 The NPPF supports the use of previously developed land, which can enable development in sustainable locations. However, in the presence of contaminated land, it is important that the health and quality of life of existing and future occupiers is not put at risk.
- 13.47 For existing land uses, part 2a of the Environmental Protection Act (1990) provides a risk-based approach to the identification and remediation of existing land uses, including contaminated land, where the assessed risk is at an unacceptable level. Building regulations also provide a further set of requirements.
- 13.48 The Wokingham Borough Council Contaminated Land Strategy (2019-2024) sets out how the council intends to manage those sites and the potential risks arising, to protect the health of those living and working in the borough. Following remediation, as a minimum, land should not be capable of being determined as 'contaminated land' under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act (1990).
- 13.49 The council has a duty under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to investigate land for possible contamination and, where necessary, to use legislative powers to ensure that any risks highlighted are minimised to an acceptable level. Although Wokingham Borough has never been a heavily industrialised area, there are parts of the borough with a legacy of potentially contaminated land. Sources of contamination are not restricted to sites where there has been an obvious contaminating land use in the past. Sites which appear to be uncontaminated, and sites not known to have undergone any specific historic industrial use may still contain sources of contamination.
- 13.50 For land to be considered "Contaminated land" there must be a 'pathway' linking a 'source' of contamination to a 'receptor'. Together, these three components are known as a 'Contaminant Linkage'. Where the risk posed by a site is considered to be significant, then the land is considered contaminated.

- 13.51 The presence of contaminated land can present risks to human health and the environment; however, development presents an opportunity to mitigate these risks successfully. Where a site is affected by ground contamination and, as a result of development a 'Contaminant Linkage' is created, the responsibility for mitigating against this and ensuring the development is safe lies with the developer/landowner.

Contaminated Water

- 13.52 Development proposals that include or are adjacent to a watercourse must protect or enhance its function, setting and biodiversity as set out in Policy FD3: River Corridors and Watercourses.
- 13.53 Surface water and groundwater resources can be put at serious risk through development and other human activity. Examples include, but are not limited to, land-fill activities, petrol stations and farming activities. Sufficient measures should be in place to protect the quality of water for a given development, where appropriate.
- 13.54 New development should also consider the presence of aquifers; an underground layer of water-bearing permeable rock. In the north-west of the borough where chalk is exposed along the River Thames, the Environment Agency has designated the bedrock as a 'Principal Aquifer', with bordering areas of 'Secondary Aquifer A'. The dip in the borough's geology towards the south-east means that the Principal Aquifer continues under these 'Secondary A' Aquifers and under the London Clay. Should piling be used for high rise developments, these underlying aquifers should be considered. Deep penetrative foundations risk creating preferential pathways or connected aquifers, in both cases potentially resulting in vertical mobilisation of surface contamination.
- 13.55 Source Protection Zones (SPZs) define areas which are considered to form the catchments to both public and private water supplies. There are ten SPZs relating to public water supplies that are located either fully or partially within the borough. These consist of five 'inner' and four 'outer' SPZs and one Total Catchment Zone. SPZs are designated relative to the time it would take for contamination to travel to the point of extraction. It is important to mitigate any contamination on sites in SPZs and, where possible, direct development that may involve contaminative installations to areas of the lowest risk. Where appropriate, the council will liaise with the Environment Agency and water companies in relation to development that affects surface and ground waters.

Policy HC10: Odour, fumes, and dust

1. Development proposals must demonstrate how the impacts of odour, fumes, and dust have been addressed to protect sensitive receptors, including existing and proposed dwellings and other sensitive land uses during both construction and operational phases. Factors such as the direction of prevailing winds and the location of and proximity to neighbouring sensitive receptors including housing, should influence the site layout and design of development.
2. Development proposals that are likely to result in unpleasant odours, fumes and dust must be carefully designed to include on-site mitigation and actively reduce impacts on nearby land

uses. This includes development proposals that would intensify or substantially alter an existing industrial or agricultural use.

3. Proposals for new residential development must consider odour, fumes, and dust emitted from existing land uses and implement appropriate mitigation to protect the amenity of future occupiers.

- 13.56 Some land uses, including those associated with certain agricultural and industrial uses and sewage treatment works, can impact upon those who live or work in surrounding areas, through exposure to unpleasant odours, fumes, and dust. In certain circumstances the submission of an Odour Assessment will be required at application stage and an Odour Improvement Works Plan may be required as part of a planning condition.
- 13.57 Where new development would be sited in proximity to pre-existing industrial and agricultural land uses, it should not prejudice the existing commercial operations. Development proposals should be carefully designed to mitigate against odour, fumes and dust arising from the pre-existing land use.
- 13.58 Mitigation measures may include buffers and landscaping or mechanical plant and extract ventilation systems, though it is acknowledged that the form of mitigation required will vary substantially between developments and will therefore need to be agreed on a case-by-case basis.
- 13.59 Where appropriate, planning conditions restricting hours of use/operation will be imposed to help protect the amenity of neighbouring occupiers. This applies both to proposals for new development resulting in unpleasant odour, fumes, and dust and for new development proposed to be located near to an existing land use whose operation generates odour, fumes, and dust.

14

Monitoring Framework

14. Monitoring and Implementation

- 14.1 Monitoring allows an understanding of whether the policies within Local Plan Update policies are working as intended and if they are effective. Monitoring is critical in ensuring the successful delivery and to shape the development of any future planning policies.
- 14.2 The council will work jointly with stakeholders to deliver the Local Plan Update. This will include partnership working with both public agencies and the private sector and is necessary to ensure development progresses in a manner consistent with the spatial strategy and related policies.
- 14.3 The Monitoring Framework set out in Appendix J sets out how the performance of policies will be assessed. The indicators will be used to:
- Check the effectiveness of policy and whether it is being implemented as expected;
 - Report on whether development targets are being met;
 - Assess the timely delivery of key infrastructure set out in the plan and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan;
 - Assess where policies are not being implemented and analyse why; and
 - Identify policies that may require early review due to implementation issues or changes in national policy.
- 14.4 The results of monitoring will be included in the annual Authority Monitoring Report (AMR).



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