



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of an **INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION** will be held in First Floor 11 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **TUESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2022 AT 11.30 AM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage'.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 7 November 2022

Note: Non-Committee Members and members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in line with the Council's Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be watched live using the following link:
<https://youtu.be/9C4HjNXi3wc>

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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business

Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

For consideration by

Lindsay Ferris, Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan

Officers Present

James McCabe, Senior Planning Officer (Growth and Delivery)

Callum Wernham, Democratic & Electoral Services Specialist

IMD NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	
IMD 2022/15	Finchampstead North; Finchampstead South; Wokingham Without	WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO THE FINCHAMPSTEAD DRAFT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN CONSULTATION	5 - 26

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Agenda Item IMD15

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2022/15

TITLE	Wokingham Borough Council Response to the Finchampstead Draft Neighbourhood Plan Consultation
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan - Lindsay Ferris
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	15 November 2022 FF11 at 11:30am
WARD	Finchampstead North; Finchampstead South; Wokingham Without;
DIRECTOR / KEY OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Steve Moore

PURPOSE OF REPORT (Inc Strategic Outcomes)

To agree Wokingham Borough Council's formal response to the Finchampstead draft Neighbourhood Plan (Regulation 16) consultation.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan agrees that Wokingham Borough Council submits the comments contained in Enclosure 1 as this Council's response to the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan Draft Submission Plan.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Neighbourhood development plans (commonly referred to as neighbourhood plans) allow communities to help shape how development is managed in their area and work alongside strategic planning policies set out in the council's local plans.

Neighbourhood plans can set out more detailed policies and can also choose to allocate sites for development, however neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, nor undermine those strategic policies¹.

Finchampstead Parish Council has prepared a neighbourhood plan covering their parish. The parish council has consulted residents and other interested parties on the scope and content of the plan.

The parish council submitted the neighbourhood plan and supporting information to the council in August 2022. Executive agreed, on 29 September 2022, that the neighbourhood plan could progress to consultation². In line with the regulations governing the neighbourhood plan process, the council has publicised the plan for six

¹ National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021), paragraph 29

² Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan – Regulation 16 Consultation and Future Examination, Examination Executive report, available at:

<https://wokingham.moderngov.co.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AllId=35700>

weeks and invited representations on the plan's content. Consultation began on Wednesday 12th October 2022 and ends Wednesday 23rd November 2022.

In the same way as any other stakeholder, the consultation provides the council the opportunity to consider the plan and submit representations. As set out in the recommendations to the Executive report, the council's comments would be agreed through the Individual Executive Member Decision process, which is the purpose of this report.

The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan contains a number of policies on issues including housing; settlement separation; the natural and historic environment; retail facilities; business and commercial development; transport; and design. The submission draft Plan proposes to allocate two sites for development comprising a total of 4 dwellings. It also proposes to allocate areas of land as Local Green Space, which if accepted would protect them from inappropriate forms of development.

In line with best practice, officers have regularly engaged with the parish council during the plan making process. Matters raised by officers have generally been addressed but there remain a few issues where it is recommended the council responds to the consultation, to bring them to the examiner's attention and consideration.

The primary focus of the recommended response is to record the council's support for the plan seeking to allocate land for residential development and acknowledge that the indicative housing requirement for the parish will be met in full.

Representations are also recommended regarding Policy IRS1: 'Protection and enhancement of Local Green Spaces' which seeks to designate 13 areas of land as Local Green Space (LGS). The council does not consider that four of these proposed LGS are sufficiently justified in their current form. It is recommended the remaining nine areas are supported.

Further representations are recommended regarding Policy IRS3: 'Conservation and enhancement of the historic character of the area'. Additional information and evidence would be needed to justify the classification of locally valued heritage assets as sought by the policy.

Additionally, representations are recommended regarding Policy ES1: 'Environmental standards for residential development'. This policy seeks to introduce requirements of developments at different scales, part of which has now been superseded by updates to building regulations and therefore no longer reflects best practice. Other minor modifications are recommended to assist clarity.

Finally, minor modifications are recommended to policies GS1, GA2 and Chapter 5 – Appropriate Housing Development. Policy GS1 seeks to designate a Green Gap, Green Wedge, and two further important areas of separation within the parish in order to introduce additional measures to prevent the coalescence of settlements and other built up areas.

The full recommended response is set out in Enclosure 1 to this report.

Background

Neighbourhood development plans, more commonly referred to simply as neighbourhood plans, allow communities to help shape how development is managed in their area. Neighbourhood plans work alongside strategic planning policy set out in the council's local plans. They can set out more detailed policies for their area. 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.

Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies³.

Where a community wants to take up the opportunities offered by neighbourhood plan, legislation enables two types of organisations to lead it:

- a parish or town council; or
- a neighbourhood forum.

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan

Finchampstead Parish Council has prepared a neighbourhood plan covering their parish. The parish council has worked with other members of the community who are interested or affected by the plan.

The parish council has consulted residents and other interested parties on the scope and content of the neighbourhood plan. Consultation methods and community engagement activities used when preparing the plan include (but were not limited to) a survey questionnaire to residents, public meetings, information in parish newsletters distributed to all households in Finchampstead parish, social media campaign, a dedicated Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan newsletter, and dedicated page on the Finchampstead Parish Council website. Further information is contained in the Consultation Statement supporting the submitted Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan.⁴

Having prepared its neighbourhood plan, the parish submitted the Plan with supporting information to Wokingham Borough Council in August 2022. Under the regulations governing the preparation of neighbourhood plans, the council is required to publicise the plan for a minimum of 6 weeks and invite representations to be made. On 29 September 2022, Executive agreed that the neighbourhood plan could progress to consultation. Consultation began on Wednesday 12 October and ends Wednesday 23 November 2022.

The consultation provides the council, with the opportunity to make representation on the neighbourhood plan's content, including supporting or objecting to any specific policies or proposals. As set out in the recommendations to the 29 September 2022 Executive report, any comments are to be agreed through the Individual Executive Member Decision process, which is the purpose of this report.

³ National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021), paragraph 29

⁴ Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan – Consultation Statement, available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=631587>

In responding to the consultation, the council can ensure the independent examiner fully considers those issues that may have implications when making decisions on planning applications. These issues can then be appropriately addressed by an appointed examiner through the examination process.

Business Case (including Analysis of Issues)

Neighbourhood plans are required to be in general conformity with the strategic planning policies contained within the Local Plan. Officers have regularly engaged with the parish council in accordance with the council's legal duty to assist bodies preparing neighbourhood plans and in accordance with the council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement. Matters raised by officers through this engagement have largely been addressed and reflected in the submitted draft neighbourhood plan, but there remain a few issues where it is recommended the council responds to the consultation to bring them to the examiner's attention and consideration.

The neighbourhood plan contains policies on issues including housing; settlement separation; the natural and historic environment; retail facilities; business and commercial development; transport; and design. The submission draft Plan proposes to allocate two sites for development comprising a total of 4 dwellings. It also proposes to allocate areas of land as Local Green Space, which if accepted would protect them from inappropriate forms of development.

The full recommended response is set out in Enclosure 1 to this report. The following is a summary of the recommended response to the key issues.

Policy / section	Comment summary
Policy ES1: Environmental standards for residential development	Suggested amendments to bring in line with recent updates to building regulations, to improve clarity, and to highlight that the LPU requirements regarding climate change still need to be subject to viability testing.
Chapter 5: Appropriate Housing Development	Confirmation of the position regarding indicative housing requirement. Confirmation of WBC's view that the plan allocations and policies meet this requirement in full and thereby satisfy the requirements of paragraph 14 of the NPPF (allowing the parish to benefit from a 3 year rather than 5 year land supply for 2 years from adoption). To improve clarity, it is recommended that the sites the plan proposes to allocate are incorporated into a specific policy rather than supporting text. Additionally, minor typographical updates to policy prefix in this chapter are suggested.
Policy ADH1: Development outside development limits	Suggested amendments to remove the policy wording regarding Thames Basin Heath SPA mitigation to a more relevant policy, and to make it less prescriptive.
Policy GS1: Key Local Gaps, Green Wedges and other important areas to maintain the separation of settlements	Minor suggested amendments to structure and wording to aid clarity as well as correcting figure reference. Suggested amendments are also made to the key associated with figure 7 to aid clarity.
Policy IRS1: Protection and enhancement of Local Green Spaces	Concerns expressed to the evidence and methodology used to justify the inclusion of some areas of land for Local Green Space (LGS) designation. Support raised for the remaining areas proposed for designation through the plan.
Policy IRS3: Conservation and enhancement of the historic character of the area	Suggested amendments to policy wording to ensure proper regard is had to non-designated heritage assets in the absence of detailed evidence proposed through the plan to protect specific assets.
Policy IRS5: Ecologically important areas and Biodiversity	Suggested amendments to policy wording for clarity and to ensure consistency in net gain requirements. Additionally, minor amendments to supporting text for additional clarity and to future proof the policy approach.
Policy GA2: Reduction in car usage with safe personal mobility options	Minor amendment to ensure WBC is engaged when works to improve the Rights of Way network are proposed.

Next Steps

Once the consultation has closed, all representations and associated documents will be sent to an appointed examiner who will consider the plan.

There is no prescribed timeframe in which examination should take place. The examiner will decide whether the examination takes place in the form of a public hearing or, as is most common, via written representations.

Where considered necessary, the examiner will recommend amendments required for the plan to satisfy the basic conditions and will conclude whether or not the plan can proceed to a referendum.

Following receipt of the examiner's recommendations, the council will come to a formal view on whether the plan meets the basic conditions and, if so, will be responsible for arranging and undertaking the referendum.

If more than half the votes cast support the plan, the council must adopt it through a resolution of Council. At this point it would become part of the statutory development plan, and so carry significant weight when making decisions on planning applications and appeals.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Yes	n/a
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	n/a	n/a
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	n/a	n/a

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

No financial implications arise as a result of submitting representations to this consultation.

Cross-Council Implications

No cross-council implications arise as a result of this consultation exercise.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equalities Impact Screening Report was produced and published as an enclosure to the report for Executive on 29 September 2022.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Director – Resources and Assets	No comments provided.
Monitoring Officer	No comments provided.
Leader of the Council	No comments provided.

List of Background Papers
Enclosure 1: WBC Response

Contact James McCabe	Service Delivery and Infrastructure
Telephone No Tel: 0118 908 8333	Email james.mccabe@wokingham.gov.uk

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PART A: Contact Details	
Name:	James McCabe
Are you responding as a:	<input type="checkbox"/> Resident in Wokingham Borough <input type="checkbox"/> Resident outside the Borough <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Authority <input type="checkbox"/> Statutory Body <input type="checkbox"/> Councillor / Clerk <input type="checkbox"/> Society / Community Group <input type="checkbox"/> Business / Agent <input type="checkbox"/> Landowner / Developer <input type="checkbox"/> Other interested party Please specify
Job title / role (if applicable):	Principal Planning Policy Officer
Responding on behalf of:	N/A
Organisation name (if applicable):	Wokingham Borough Council
Address:	Wokingham Borough Council Civic Offices Shute End Wokingham
Postcode:	RG40 1BN
Email address:	james.mccabe@wokingham.gov.uk
	<p>If you would like to be notified of Wokingham Borough Council's decision whether to 'make' the Plan (to bring it into legal force), please tick the box below.</p> <p>Yes, please notify me <input type="checkbox"/></p>

PART B

Please use as many or as few comments boxes as you wish.

Comment 1

To which part of the Neighbourhood Plan does your representation relate?

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	N/A	Policy Reference:	Policy ES1: Environmental standards for residential development
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

Please give details of your reasons for support/opposition, or make other comments in the box below, including any specific changes you wish to see to the Plan. Please be as precise as possible.

The council fully supports the principle of encouraging sustainable development. It is noted that policy ES1 seeks to bring forward wording that was consulted upon as part of WBC's Draft Local Plan Update (LPU) (2020). WBC has commissioned further climate change evidence as part of the emerging LPU which will inform policy development moving forward. Currently the proposed requirements within the Draft LPU have not been subject to whole plan viability testing.

In terms of the specific policy requirements, given the introduction of the interim Future Homes Standard, the requirement for 19% uplift against Part L 2013 has now been superseded. The interim Future Homes Standard is delivered via updates to Building Regulations Part L (conservation of fuel and power) which came into force on 15 June 2022 (the '2021 standards'). The updated requirements of Part L ensure new homes built from 15 June 2022 (subject to transitional arrangements) produce 31% less carbon emissions compared to the 2013 standards. ES1 1. should therefore be updated to reflect current practice.

Additionally, Part 1 and part 2 of the policy contain the word 'additionally' which isn't considered necessary given each part sets out requirements for a specific scale of development.

Part 3 requires residential conversions or extensions that are 500sqm or greater to achieve desired BREEAM standards. This wording mirrors wording contained within the Draft Local Plan Update (2020). WBC has considered its own proposed LPU policy further, and considers 500sqm to be a high threshold such that extensions / conversions of this scale are unlikely to be commonplace within the borough or Finchampstead parish in particular. We recommend the policy is amended to remove reference to this threshold and, to recognise that achieving the required standard will not be feasible on all scales of development, suggest the policy should instead encourage the use of this BREEAM assessment, rather than it being a requirement of all relevant development proposals.

The final part of the policy sets out that financial contributions to offsite provision may be considered in certain circumstances. WBC has previously advised the group that no formal mechanism currently exists for calculating or securing financial contributions for carbon reduction purposes. The LPU intends to introduce a carbon offset fund, but no such fund is currently in place. Therefore, it will be difficult, if not impossible for deliver these contributions until such a time as a formal mechanism is introduced.

Taking the above into account, we recommend that Policy ES1 is updated as follows (additions in ***italics, bold and underlined*** and deletions shown as ~~struckthrough~~):

"Development proposals for residential development will be supported provided they meet the following environmental standards:

1. Minor residential developments will ***be encouraged to achieve improvements beyond the***~~additionally be expected to achieve at least a 19% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over the target emission rate, as defined~~ within Building Regulations Approved Document Part L ~~2013~~ 2021 or satisfy any higher standard that is required under new national planning policy or Building Regulations.
2. Major residential development will ~~additionally~~ be expected to be designed to achieve carbon neutral homes.
3. Conversions to residential and extensions to existing dwellings of 500 sqm of residential floorspace ~~(gross) or more, should achieve or seek~~ ***are strongly encouraged*** to achieve 'excellent' in domestic refurbishment as defined in the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method <https://www.breeam.com/> ***or equivalent recognised appropriate standard***
4. Provision is made for charging for electric vehicles in all domestic dwellings where garages or vehicle parking spaces are provided

These standards should be achieved as a minimum unless it can be demonstrated that exceptional circumstances exist. Where on-site achievement is not viable or practical, appropriate financial contributions to offsite provision may be considered."

Comment 2

To which part of the Neighbourhood Plan does your representation relate?

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	Chapter 5 Appropriate Housing Development	Policy Reference:	N/A
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

Please give details of your reasons for support/opposition, or make other comments in the box below, including any specific changes you wish to see to the Plan. Please be as precise as possible.

WBC provided Finchampstead Parish with an indicative housing requirement of 53 dwellings over the plan period 2022 – 2038. This figure excludes the housing being directly delivered by a local plan i.e. strategic site allocations, windfall development, and strategic policies. For clarity, the indicative housing requirement has been calculated as follows:

- Average small site windfall completions within Finchampstead Parish over the previous 15 years equated to 3 dwellings per annum (rounded up);
- Rolling this forward over the 16 year plan period (2022-2038) = 48 dwellings (3x16);
- An additional 10% flexibility = 5 dwellings (rounded);
- Total Indicative Housing Requirement = 53 dwellings

The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan (FNDP) seeks to allocate two sites for development which together comprise 4 additional units, as set out at paragraph 5.4.3. These units are in addition to those allocations within the adopted local plan and those proposed through the emerging LPU. WBC supports the FNDP approach to allocating specific, non-strategic sites for residential development. Notwithstanding, WBC consider that it would provide additional clarity if these sites were set out definitively in their own policy. It is recommended that a new policy titled 'AHD1 – Allocated Housing Sites' be added (and subsequent policies within this section be renumbered accordingly) along the following lines:

"The sites listed below, and defined on Figure 5, are allocated for residential development:

- 1. Broughton Farm (5FI016) – 2 units**
- 2. Land rear of 6-8 The Village – 2 units"**

Overall, WBC considers that the policies and allocations within the FNDP would meet and exceed the indicative housing requirement of 53 dwellings in accordance with paragraph 14b) of the National Planning Policy Framework. Towards the requirement of 53 dwellings, the plan proposes allocations for a total of 4 dwellings. It also includes policy wording to support increased density within the Strategic Development Location, policy relating to infill development, and other specific policies which together comprise a positive framework for enabling sustainable development over the plan period to meet and exceed the remaining requirement of 49 dwellings.

It is also recommended that in section 5.7 'Social Housing', a reference is made to First Homes, which is a specific discounted market sale housing product that meets the definition of 'affordable housing' in planning terms. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) requires that a minimum of 25% of all affordable housing units should be delivered as First Homes to be secured through developer contributions.

Finally, it appears there has been a drafting error in the Policy acronyms within this chapter. References to 'ADH' should be updated to 'AHD' to reflect the chapter title.

Comment 3

To which part of the Neighbourhood Plan does your representation relate?

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	N/A	Policy Reference:	ADH1: Development outside development limits
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

Please give details of your reasons for support/opposition, or make other comments in the box below, including any specific changes you wish to see to the Plan. Please be as precise as possible.

Policy ADH1 concerns development outside of development limits as defined by Core Strategy Policy CP9 and updated by MDD Policy CC02. Areas outside of development limits are designated countryside as per adopted policies. One exception to this in ADH1 is rural workers dwellings.

ADH1 also includes requirements around the provision of mitigation regarding the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA). Appropriate mitigation will apply equally to sites both within and outside development limits, with the key trigger being proximity to the TBH. Therefore, it may be preferable for this element of policy ADH1 to sit elsewhere, potentially IRS5: Ecological green space biodiversity or a new separate and appropriately titled policy. This would avoid any suggestion that residential dwellings that aren't for rural workers may nevertheless be acceptable outside of development limits merely by providing appropriate Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), which is not the intention of policy ADH1.

The policy wording itself is prescriptive around the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) or contributions to strategic SANG. Furthermore, it does not refer to contributions to Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM), which is also part of the agreed framework for mitigation with Natural England, as is recognised elsewhere in the plan (e.g. section 8.5.1). It is recommended that the policy instead focuses on development proposals passing an assessment, rather than setting out the mitigation required for which there is already an established framework. WBC recommends the following wording is included in a relevant policy within the plan:

All development resulting in a net gain in dwellings or other recognised pathway to likely significant effects, alone or in-combination, on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA must provide sufficient information to allow assessment of the effect and demonstrate how, through secured avoidance and mitigation measures if required, no adverse effect will occur.

Comment 4

To which part of the Neighbourhood Plan does your representation relate?

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	N/A	Policy Reference:	Policy GS1: Key Local Gaps, Green Wedges and other important areas to maintain the separation of settlements
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

Please give details of your reasons for support/opposition, or make other comments in the box below, including any specific changes you wish to see to the Plan. Please be as precise as possible.

WBC supports the content of 'Policy GS1 – Key Local Gaps, Green Wedges and other important areas to maintain the separation of settlements'. However, the policy wording incorrectly references the relevant figure within the plan, would benefit from some minor grammatical modifications, and some numbering / indentation would provide additional clarity to readers of the plan. Therefore, it is suggested that the following minor updates be made to the policy (additions in ***italics, bold and underlined*** and deletions shown as ~~struckthrough~~):

1. Within Key Local Gaps, ***and*** Green Wedges as defined on ~~FIGURE 6~~ ***Figure 7***, development will be supported where it can be demonstrated that it would not adversely affect the function of the gap or wedge, and not unacceptably reduce the physical and visual separation of settlements (or distinct parts of a settlement) either within or adjoining the borough.

2. Development proposals will be supported where they do not result in the joining of informal built areas in the countryside with defined settlements or with each other. This includes the following areas (~~AS ILLUSTRATED ON FIGURE 6~~ ***as illustrated on Figure 7***):

- a)** The area identified between Finchampstead North and the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area;
- b)** The area identified between Arborfield Garrison SDL and the residential development fronting Reading Road."

Additionally, the key to Figure 7, which aids the interpretation of policy GS1, is located on page 36 of the FNDP. It is recommended that the following edits are made to this key for additional clarity to aid decision makers:

- The Green Wedge identified within the key actually depicts the Local Green Gap referred to as 'Land either side of the A321, north of the junction with Nine Mile Ride'. This adds potentially confusion and should be updated;
- Reference to 'Local Key Gap' should be amended to 'Key Local Gap' for consistency of terminology throughout the plan;
- The key for 'Existing settlement boundaries' should include the orange shading present in Figure 7 itself, to distinguish this from 'County Boundary' within the key;
- 'County boundary' should be amended to 'Borough Boundary' for accuracy, as while the county and borough boundary are contiguous in places – e.g. where it borders Hart in Hampshire to the south – the eastern-most section borders Bracknell Forest within the same county (Berkshire) as Wokingham borough.

Comment 5

To which part of the Neighbourhood Plan does your representation relate?

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	N/A	Policy Reference:	Policy IRS1: Protection and enhancement of Local Green Spaces
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

Please give details of your reasons for support/opposition, or make other comments in the box below, including any specific changes you wish to see to the Plan. Please be as precise as possible.

Policy IRS1: Protection and enhancement of Local Green Spaces (LGS) must be in general conformity with paragraphs 101 to 102 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which states, in particular, that designation of land as LGS should be used to protect green areas of particular importance to the community. Paragraph 102 of the NPPF sets out the following criteria, which areas of green space are required to meet inclusively:

- a) *in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves;*
- b) *demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and*
- c) *local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.*

It is important to only identify areas of LGS that are supported by robust evidence with community support demonstrated for each individual area proposed to be designated.

Of the 13 areas proposed for designation as LGS in the FNDP, 8 were proposed for designation by WBC in the Local Plan Update Revised Growth Strategy (2021) consultation. The assessment of the proposed sites (along with other nominated areas) is set out in the Local Green Space Topic Paper (November 2021)¹. Barring some minor amendments in some cases, the boundaries of the areas proposed in the FNDP are the same as those assessed in the Topic Paper.

Additionally, WBC no longer has any objection to the inclusion of ‘Local Green Space 13 – Gorse Ride Woods play area, Whittle Drive’ which was not proposed for designation as part of the Revised Growth Strategy consultation. It is recognised that this area of green space is to be retained as per the approved plans relating to the regeneration scheme in the area around Gorse Ride (application reference 202133). It is however recommended that the FNDP recognises the need to review this designation once the development is completed and improvements to the area of green space have been made.

Therefore, within this policy context, there are 4 areas proposed for LGS designation in the plan which have been assessed by WBC through the Topic Paper and concluded to have insufficient value under the criteria. These are discussed below:

Local Green Space 1: St James’ Church and part Conservation Area (Reference LGS059 in the WBC assessment) – the site comprises the grounds of St James’ Church and a small green situated within the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area. Since WBC’s assessment, the proposed LGS boundary has been

¹ The covering report can be found here: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/planning-policy-information/revision-growth-strategy-consultation/?assetdet91f252ff-550d-4cfa-a838-92ef2cb5f83c=609649&categoryesct91f252ff-550d-4cfa-a838-92ef2cb5f83c=10784> and Finchampstead parish specific assessments here: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/planning-policy-information/revision-growth-strategy-consultation/?assetdet91f252ff-550d-4cfa-a838-92ef2cb5f83c=609653&categoryesct91f252ff-550d-4cfa-a838-92ef2cb5f83c=10784>

modified to omit the residential curtilage of numerous dwellings. Previously, this would have, in effect, required very special circumstances to be demonstrated by those homeowners should they have sought permission to carry out household development, which would not have been proportionate or justified. This alteration is welcomed.

WBC broadly understands and agrees with the intention of protecting the Conservation Area. However, whilst the nominated area does contain some features / buildings with historical value and interest, this is only one aspect of the guiding principles for LGS designation at NPPF paragraph 102. We would question the appropriateness of including such a large extent of the Conservation Area within the proposed LGS designation, as the Development Plan and national policy already provide a suitable framework for managing any development proposals in Conservation Areas and for assessing the impact of development on heritage assets and their setting. Further, in its current form, the inclusion of some land within the extent of the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area covers some boundaries which are less clearly defined on the ground.

We would suggest that it would be more appropriate for the small green and the grounds of the St James' Church to be identified as two separate Local Green Space designations as this would ensure that their boundaries are more clearly defined.

Local Green Space 5: Simon's Wood (Reference LGS065a in the WBC assessment) – the site comprises Simon's Wood, an area of land owned by the National Trust, comprising a substantial amount of natural and semi-natural greenspace which is situated to the south of Finchampstead North. Whilst Simon's Wood is a significant area of green space used for recreational and ecological resource, WBC's own assessment of the site concluded it was not local in character. It also concluded the area constituted an extensive tract of land as its boundaries are less clearly defined, primarily as it is surrounded by an extensive network of agricultural fields which are isolated from the recognised settlements of Finchampstead North and Pinewood (Crowthorne) and are typical of the characteristics of open countryside. The National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance is clear that the blanket designation of open countryside adjacent to settlements will not be appropriate.

While WBC acknowledges the area is valued by local residents, there is insufficient clarity regarding the extent of public access and how boundaries have been defined, which have not been fully addressed in the latest updates to the LGS topic paper. As a result it is unclear how this proposed LGS is defined on the ground, and therefore how this specific area demonstrates the criteria set out in national planning policy. This would cause some difficulties in terms of decision making when implementing the policy, which we would invite the Examiner to consider.

Local Green Space 7a: Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve, Lower Sandhurst Road (which comprises a smaller area of LGS reference LGS69b in the WBC assessment) – the site comprises several parcels of land, most of which are privately owned and designated countryside. Whilst the site may have rights of way through it, they are not necessarily open access and there is no guaranteed public access beyond that of the formal rights of way. The WBC assessment concluded that the site is not considered to be local in character and would constitute an extensive tract of land as Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve forms part of a wider network of lakes to the east and west. Further, the boundaries of the proposed Local Green Space are less clearly defined, primarily as the network of lakes continue to the east and south, and due to their further encroachment into the open countryside and extension into the administrative areas of Bracknell Forest and Hart District. The site would therefore represent the designation of open countryside adjacent to settlements, which is considered inappropriate in national planning policy and guidance.

Additionally, the LGS topic paper supporting the FNDP refers to adjacent sites 7b and 7c being subject to future consideration once minerals extraction works have ceased there. The fact that these additional extensive areas are also being considered for designation, further undermines the conclusion the area is local character, and not extensive.

Local Green Space 9: The Ridges, The Ridges and Wellingtonia Avenue (Reference LGS065b in the WBC assessment) – the site comprises Finchampstead Ridges, an area of land owned by the National Trust, comprising a substantial amount of natural and semi-natural greenspace which is situated to the west of Pinewood (Crowthorne). Whilst Finchampstead Ridges are a significant area of green space used for recreational and ecological resource, WBC's own assessment of the site concluded it was not local in

character. It also concluded the area constituted an extensive tract of land as its boundaries are less clearly defined, primarily as this area of green space is surrounded by an extensive network of agricultural fields which are isolated from the recognised settlements of Finchampstead North and Pinewood (Crowthorne) and are typical characteristics of the open countryside. The National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance is clear that the blanket designation of open countryside adjacent to settlements will not be appropriate.

While WBC acknowledges the area is valued by local residents, there is insufficient clarity regarding the extent of public access and how boundaries have been defined, which have not been fully addressed in the latest updates to the LGS topic paper. As a result it is unclear how this proposed LGS is defined on the ground, and therefore how this specific area demonstrates the criteria set out in national planning policy. This would cause some difficulties in terms of decision making when implementing the policy, which we would invite the Examiner to consider.

Comment 6

To which part of the Neighbourhood Plan does your representation relate?

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	N/A	Policy Reference:	Policy IRS3: Conservation and enhancement of the historic character of the area
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

Please give details of your reasons for support/opposition, or make other comments in the box below, including any specific changes you wish to see to the Plan. Please be as precise as possible.

WBC broadly supports the approach to identifying heritage assets within the plan area and seeking to conserve and/or enhance these as appropriate. National policy and guidance is clear that heritage assets must be conserved commensurate with their status and encourages new development which preserves their special qualities. The NPPF particularly focusses on the significance of heritage assets.

Introductory text to policy 'IRS3 – Conservation and enhancement of the historic character of the area' at section 8.3.1 lists a range of 'areas of historical interest'. This list does not differentiate which are designated assets and which are not but may be proposed to be recognised through the plan as locally designated assets. Some examples, such as Poor Ridge Cottage, is already locally listed as a Building of Traditional Local Character by WBC and therefore benefits from policy protection via the existing local plan and national policy (see here for the full list: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allid=443924>). For those areas which do not already benefit from national or local designated status, the plan does not contain supporting justification for their being locally listed via the FNDP process.

Further, policy IRS3 states that: "*Locally valued heritage assets have been identified in the FNDP as follows and development proposals should protect and enhance them where possible.*" However, the policy itself does not list any assets. Overall, it is therefore not clear how far this policy adds value to existing policies.

Amendments and reordering which might help address this issue are suggested below (additions in ***italics***, ***bold and underlined*** and deletions shown as ~~struckthrough~~):

"The historic environment and any designated heritage assets in the Parish and their settings, both above and below ground, will be conserved and enhanced for their historic significance, their setting and their importance to local distinctiveness, character and sense of place.

Proposals for development of sites associated with heritage assets must take account of the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage assets. ***Development proposals will need to demonstrate how they protect or enhance the historic character of the area*** and specifically with reference to the ***which includes but is not limited to sites listed in section 8.3.1 of the FNDP.***

Development proposals affecting, either directly or indirectly, Locally valued heritage assets identified on the Local Planning Authority's local list (or future updates to this) or that are identified through the decision making process have been identified in the FNDP as follows and development proposals should protect and enhance them where possible ***must have regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.***

~~• Development proposals will need to demonstrate how they protect or enhance the historic character of the area and specifically with reference to the sites listed in section 8.3.1 of the FNDP.~~

Comment 7

To which part of the Neighbourhood Plan does your representation relate?

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	8.5.1	Policy Reference:	IRS5: Ecologically important areas and Biodiversity
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

Please give details of your reasons for support/opposition, or make other comments in the box below, including any specific changes you wish to see to the Plan. Please be as precise as possible.

The first paragraph of section 8.5.1 is phrased in such a way as to make it acceptable for SANG to be created which leads to a net deterioration of habitats of principal importance, which is not considered to be the intention. It is recommended that this be rephrased to appropriately refer to biodiversity net gains.

Additionally, the first paragraph mentions ‘biodiversity areas’ which is a term used in Policy IRS5 where they are defined by reference to Figure 23 of the FNDP. WBC supports this reference, but would recommend that the FNDP explicitly recognises that this figure is a snapshot in time of a living list of sites and that development proposals should make their assessment in relation to that living list.

Regarding the policy wording itself, there are aspects which are negatively worded which would benefit from a change of emphasis. There is some repetition in the bullet points and some areas of internal inconsistency, for example Bullet points 3 and 4 have a tension between them as 3 allows for 4 to not be achieved because enhancement is provided off-site. It would therefore benefit from some rationalising and potentially splitting out into those elements related to Thames Basin Heaths mitigation, which could comprise their own policy as discussed under ADH1, and those relating to separate ecological matters.

Further, the policy as drafted allows for loss of biodiversity onsite providing compensation measures are secured offsite which ensure no net loss overall. This is at odds with other areas of the policy requiring 10% net gain. In order to avoid situations where only the minimum offsite compensation is secured, the requirement for 10% net gain should be consistently extended all schemes providing either onsite or offsite compensation / improvements.

Finally, the ‘like for like’ reference in Biodiversity Net Gain guidance is typically used in reference to the habitat distinctiveness score, so it is recommended this terminology be used within the policy wording for additional clarity.

Suggestions to this effect are provided below (additions in ***italics, bold and underlined*** and deletions shown as struckthrough):

“Development proposals should conserve and enhance the natural environment and green spaces of the area, specifically ~~Development proposals should seek to protect and enhance biodiversity areas set out in Figure 23 and the TVERC Survey 2019 (Annex M TVERC Report) wherever possible.~~

The Plan area abuts the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), specifically Bramshill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). ***All development resulting in a net gain in dwellings or other recognised pathway to likely significant effects, alone or in-combination, on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA must provide sufficient information to allow assessment of the effect and demonstrate how, through secured avoidance and mitigation measures if required, no adverse effect will occur.*** ~~Any development within the zones of influence for the SPA must abide with consistent with saved policy NRM6 of the South-East Plan and policy CP8 from Wokingham BC’s Core Strategy to 2026.~~

Development will ***may be supported where*** ~~only be permitted~~ if it can be demonstrated that:

- it will not have an adverse impact on local biodiversity or ***the network of s***Sites designated as of importance for nature conservation, ***as evidenced through a robust specialist*** using an independent survey report, which is supported by the Borough's Ecological Adviser. ***The assessment should consider impacts on the site and on connections between sites important for biodiversity***
- there are no alternatives with less harmful impacts.
- ~~appropriate mitigation measures or, as a last resort, compensatory measures either on site or off site and in accordance with Environment Bill 2021~~
- ~~measures can be provided to achieve a net enhancement to the site's biodiversity.~~
- ~~Development proposals should conserve and enhance the natural environment and green spaces of the area, specifically:~~
 - ~~Ensure that there is no loss of biodiversity and will normally ***it*** provides a net gain of at least 10% over base value ***using a robust metric***. Where there is likely to be a loss of biodiversity ***on site is demonstrably unavoidable***, development will only be acceptable if mitigation ***off site compensation*** measures can be put in place ***are secured*** to ensure ***the creation of like-for-like or better distinctiveness habitats so*** there is no net loss ***a minimum 10% gain*** of biodiversity ***overall***, through the creation of like-for-like habitats~~
 - ~~Ensure that all water courses and ditches are protected from any contamination or interruption to natural flow~~
 - ~~***It e***Ensures mitigation ***compensation*** through suitable alternatives of any loss of bird nesting habitat~~
 - ~~***It t***Takes any opportunities to protect, enhance and extend wildlife corridors between existing open spaces and habitats as a means of mitigating the impacts of development on biodiversity~~
 - ~~***It c***Conserves the environment for nocturnal species, through the avoidance of lighting and mitigating the impact of external lighting likely to increase night-time human presence.~~
 - ~~***It c***Contains measures that will help to mitigate the impacts of, and adapt to, climate change with reference and adherence to the Wokingham Borough Council Climate Change action plan.~~

Ensure that all species protected by law, including bats, badgers and others named at the time are subject to an ecological survey or assessment which accompanies a development proposal. The survey is to be undertaken at an appropriate time of year for the relevant species and must include proposals for the measures that will be taken by way of appropriate mitigation to minimise and compensate for any likely impact the development may have on them, in accordance with the requirements of the licence from Natural England.”

Comment 8

To which part of the Neighbourhood Plan does your representation relate?

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	N/A	Policy Reference:	Policy GA2: Reduction in car usage with safe personal mobility options
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

Please give details of your reasons for support/opposition, or make other comments in the box below, including any specific changes you wish to see to the Plan. Please be as precise as possible.

WBC supports the approach of development proposals protecting existing active travel routes and supporting their improvements / expansion where practicable. One minor observation is that point 6 of policy GA2, which refers to working with adjoining parishes, should also refer to working with Wokingham Borough Council. WBC has oversight of rights of way matters including a statutory duty to maintain a Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

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