



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **EXECUTIVE** will be held in David Hicks 1 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40 1BN on **THURSDAY 29 JUNE 2023 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 21 June 2023

Note: Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in accordance 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://youtube.com/live/LkSOdVzygMY?feature=share>

This meeting will be filmed for inclusion on the Council's website. Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council's control.

Our Vision
<i>A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business</i>
Enriching Lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion excellent 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 enable healthy choices for everyone. • Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of. • Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.
Providing Safe and Strong Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people. • Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care. • Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish. • Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all.
Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future. • Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy. • Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity. • Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.
Delivering the Right Homes in the Right Places
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future. • Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, 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, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes.
Keeping the Borough Moving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways. • Tackle traffic congestion and 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 in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links.
Changing the Way We Work for You
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be relentlessly customer focussed. • Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around our customers. • Communicate better with customers, 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.
Be the Best We Can Be
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice. • Embed a culture that supports ambition, promotes empowerment and develops new ways of working. • Use our governance and scrutiny structures to support a learning and continuous improvement approach to the way we do business. • Be a commercial council that is innovative, whilst being inclusive, in its approach with a clear focus on being financially resilient. • Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough. • Establish a renewed vision for the Borough with clear aspirations.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE EXECUTIVE

Stephen Conway	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Housing
Prue Bray	Deputy Leader and Children's Services
Rachel Bishop-Firth	Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty
Lindsay Ferris	Planning and Local Plan
Paul Fishwick	Active Travel, Transport and Highways
David Hare	Health and Wellbeing and Adult Services
Sarah Kerr	Climate Emergency and Resident Services
Clive Jones	Business and Economic Development
Ian Shenton	Environment, Sport and Leisure
Imogen Shepherd-DuBey	Finance

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
1.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence.	
2.		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING To confirm the Minutes of the Executive meeting on 21 March 2023 and the Extraordinary Executive Meeting held on 20 April 2023.	7 - 26
3.		DECLARATION OF INTERESTS To receive any declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests, other registrable interests and any non-registrable interests relevant to any matters to be considered at the meeting.	
4.		STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER To receive a statement from the Leader of the Council.	
5.		PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of the Executive Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Council or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions	

5.1 None Specific Chas Hockin asked the Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways the following question:

Question:

Can the Council explain what has happened to all the money taken incorrectly by car parking machines on Bank Holidays? Will it be refunded to users (who can easily be traced) and what plans do the council have to ensure that if charges are made on Bank Holidays in the future the machines will not take them?

5.2 None Specific Jim Frewin asked the Executive Member for Finance the following question:

Question:

At the May full Council meeting leaders past and present strongly emphasised a compassionate council and compassionate budget yet in the budget Wokingham introduced fees for families who suffer the death of a baby, infant or child. Services that were previously free. Will the Executive show some compassion for families in these circumstances and revert these services to being free of charge?

6. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

To answer any member questions

A period of 20 minutes will be allowed for Members to ask questions submitted under Notice

Any questions not dealt with within the allotted time will be dealt with in a written reply

6.1 None Specific Gary Cowan has asked the Leader of the Council the following question:

Question:

As the law says in the provisions of the 2011 Localism Act that and I quote "A decision-maker is not to be taken to have had, or to have appeared to have had, a closed mind when making a decision just because:

(a) the decision-maker had previously done anything that directly or indirectly indicated what view the decision-maker took, or would or might take, in relation to a matter, and (b) the matter was relevant to the decision." The government provided an explanation in plain English of what the change in the law means: 'Under S25 a Member will be able to express strong opinions and even tell people that he or she intends to vote in a particular way, without fear of a challenge based on bias or predetermination.'

This would suggest that the existing Constitution supported by this Lib Dem Administration, supported by the Conservatives is in fact illegal. Would you agree that the Administration has acted illegally and continues to do so by its support to the constitution that implies that pre determination is matter that can be referred to the Standards Board.

Matters for Consideration

7.	None Specific	CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP POLICY	27 - 48
8.	Finchampstead North; Finchampstead South; Wokingham Without	FINCHAMPSTEAD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN	49 - 142
9.	None Specific	REVENUE MONITORING 2022-23 - OUTTURN	143 - 160
10.	None Specific	CAPITAL OUTTURN 2022/23	161 - 178
11.	None Specific	CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY	179 - 194
12.	None Specific	WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL TREE STRATEGY	195 - 294
13.	Barkham	DEVELOPMENT OF TWO NEW WOKINGHAM SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED SCHOOLS	295 - 324
14.	None Specific	ST CRISPIN'S LEISURE CENTRE CONSULTATION	325 - 332
15.	None Specific	PROCUREMENT STRATEGY FOR THE PURCHASE AND DISTRIBUTION OF WHEELED BINS IN THE BOROUGH	333 - 342
16.	None Specific	TERM MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS FOR REACTIVE & PLANNED MECHANICAL WORKS	343 - 356
17.	Emmbrook	TOUTLEY EAST DEVELOPMENT - RESIDENTIAL DELIVERY MODEL	357 - 384
18.	None Specific	CORPORATE BUILDING CLEANING SERVICES	385 - 394
19.	None Specific	LOCAL SUFFICIENCY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE The Executive may exclude the press and public in order to discuss the exempt information contained in this agenda Item and to do so it must pass a resolution in the following terms:	395 - 468

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for agenda item 19 on the grounds that this item involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended).

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Executive may exclude the press and public in order to discuss the exempt information contained in agenda Items 16, 17, 18 and 19 and to do so it must pass a resolution in the following terms:

That under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for agenda item 16, 17, 18 and/or 19 on the grounds that these items involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act (as amended) as appropriate.

A decision sheet will be available for inspection at the Council's offices (in Democratic Services and the General Office) and on the web site no later than two working days after the meeting.

CONTACT OFFICER

Priya Patel	Head of Democratic and Electoral Services
Tel	07902 402031
Email	priya.patel@wokingham.gov.uk
Postal Address	Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 21 MARCH 2023 FROM 7PM TO 8.40PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Stephen Conway (Vice-Chair), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Prue Bray, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, David Hare, Sarah Kerr, Ian Shenton and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Apologies:

Councillor Clive Jones

99. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 16 February 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

100. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The following declarations of personal interest were made by Executive Members in relation to agenda item 113: Shareholders Report. These Members did not participate or vote on this item.

- Councillor Prue Bray as a non-executive director of Berry Brook Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.
- Councillor Stephen Conway as a non-executive director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd
- Councillor David Hare as a non-executive director of Optalis Ltd.

Councillor Rachel Bishop-Firth declared a personal interest in agenda item 107: Delivering the Ukrainian/Afghan Refugee Resettlement Government Grant, on the grounds that her family were hosting a Ukrainian family.

101. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

In the absence of the Leader, the following statement was made by the Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing, Councillor Stephen Conway:

'This is not the last Executive meeting of the municipal year - we have arranged a special meeting in April to help progress the Finchampstead and Twyford Neighbourhood Plans. But I want to take this opportunity to record my thanks to those whose work has helped residents and businesses of the borough in a very challenging year. I want to start by thanking my executive colleagues and the senior officers who have supported them, for their hard work and commitment throughout the year.

I should like to extend my thanks to non-executive councillors of all parties for their work on council committees and working groups, and to all officers of the council for their dedicated service to the community. I should also like to express my gratitude to all our external partners for their important contributions to making life better for our residents, particularly the town and parish councils, voluntary and charitable sector, health care providers, police, fire service, educators, and the Youth Council, which I met this afternoon to get the representatives' input into our Young Person's Housing Strategy.

This year has been a tough year for many of our residents and local businesses, with a cost-of-living crisis and interest rate rises, putting up mortgage costs. It has been a challenging year for the council, too - tougher than anyone can remember. We have faced double-digit inflation, increased demand for services, shortfalls in anticipated income, and significant increases in interest rates that make council borrowing more expensive to service. The government gave us a small amount of additional core funding that no-where near covered inflation, let alone met the cost of increased demand for services.

In such difficult circumstances, other councils have effectively gone bankrupt, leading to deep cuts in services and much higher council tax. But by taking tough decisions on income generation and savings, Wokingham have been able to produce a sound, forward-looking, and compassionate budget, which supports those in the greatest difficulties.

We can all be proud of this achievement and many more too numerous to list this evening.'

102. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited members of the public to submit questions to the appropriate Members.

102.1 Paul Stevens asked the Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan the following question:

Question:

A recent report from the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) says Reading has 140 brownfield sites, 126.35 hectares, sufficient for 10,124 houses – the largest housing capacity in the county. It also claims that across Berkshire there are 359 such sites across the county, which would be sufficient to build at least 21,000 homes! This is more than enough to solve local housing need. In contrast Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) have listed only 25 sites on their Brownfield Register, 21 of which are already under construction. Are WBC engaged in any discussions across the wider Berkshire area about sharing housing need, in particular, regarding using Brownfield sites, such as those identified by the CPRE?

Mr Stevens was unable to attend the meeting, it was agreed that a written response would be provided, and is included below:

Answer:

Brownfield land registers provide a list of previously development land that the local planning authority considers to be appropriate for residential development, having regard to the following nationally set criteria:

- 0.25 hectares or able to deliver at least 5 dwellings or more;
- Suitable in planning terms (when considered against national and local planning policies);
- Available (the landowner / promoter has expressed an intention to sell or develop the land and there are no known impediments to it being delivered),
- Achievable (development is likely to start within 15 years).

It is important to note that sites identified in registers include those with planning permission and those that are already allocated in local plans for housing. This represents the vast majority of sites and capacity in registers, with new opportunities promoted by landowners being only a small proportion.

The information you quote does not draw a distinction between sites with planning permission, those which are already allocated, and those which offer potential new capacity.

Reading Borough Council's current brownfield land register includes 142 sites. Of these 81 have planning permission or a pending planning application. Of the remaining 61, 41 sites are already allocated within the Reading Local Plan, leaving only 20 sites as having potential new capacity. The indicated minimum capacity of these 20 sites is assessed by Reading Borough Council as 324 homes.

A similar situation exists for the registers of the other Berkshire local authorities with the vast majority of identified sites already having planning permission or being allocated for housing within local plans. In the case of Bracknell Forest Council, there are no sites identified which do not already have planning permission or are adopted or draft allocations within their local plan.

Turning to the question of engagement, we do engage with other local authorities on planning policy matters, including housing need and supply, and we will continue to do so.

It is misleading however, to suggest that there are substantial opportunities to redistribute housing needs between local authorities. All local authorities are having to carefully consider the role of undeveloped, greenfield land in planning to meet the future need for housing.

The potential of the vast majority of available brownfield land is already known and accounted for in guiding how much greenfield land may be needed for development in future and is informing discussions accordingly.'

102.2 Ian Pittock asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Question:

The previous Conservative administration had a proposal for the Pinewood site in Wokingham Without. This consisted of rebuilding the sports facilities on one half of the site and building houses on the other half. About 4 years ago, I and Lindsay Ferris as LibDem Councillors met with Wokingham Without Parish Council to assure them that should the LibDems lead Wokingham Borough Council, we would not build houses on the Pinewood site and that we would at least offer a much longer lease than they currently had. As he is now the Executive Member with responsibility for the Local Plan Update in the LibDem led Partnership administration, can Councillor Ferris confirm that our promises to Wokingham Without Parish Council still stand?

Answer:

Pinewood has never been promoted into the local plan process, nor has the land been assessed for its potential suitability for development within the local plan process.

What might be causing a misunderstanding is that separate to the allocation of land for development, the local plan Revised Growth Strategy Consultation (2021) included a proposal to identify Pinewood as a site for self-funded regeneration.

The purpose of the proposal was to set a positive planning framework to support investment into improving the site and buildings, which I'm sure we would all agree are of varied quality. Setting a positive planning framework would assist proposals to improve facilities, with existing planning policy restricting what is supported in principle.

In summary, I fully acknowledge that Pinewood is home to highly valued community facilities. The site has not been promoted for housing development and there are no proposals for housing development in the emerging local plan.

Matters of property and leases do not come under planning or the local plan, however I understand that a new long term lease of the Pinewood site has been agreed in principle and is with solicitors to complete.

Supplementary Question:

Is the lease for the complete site?

Answer:

Yes, the lease is for the complete site, I believe it is for 30 years. We had a tour of the site in late 2022, with a number of councillors in attendance. We asked them if they would be interested in potentially taking on the site, they said that they were in discussions on the lease.

102.3 Chas Hockin asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

In relation to the proposed changes to refuse collection, it is suggested that 99% of kerbside properties could accept a wheeled bin. I live in a row of 4 terraced houses built in the 1980's. Whilst I, as I live on one end of the row have no problem with wheeling a bin from my back door to the kerb, the two houses in the middle will have difficulty. There is a path from the rear of their gardens to the front of the houses, but it would be very difficult for the current residents – one with a young child and the other an elderly person – to wheel their bins the length of the garden and along an overgrown, uneven path. It is also not practical to wheel the bins through their houses. Will these residents be exempt from having a wheeled bin?

Answer:

We recognise that here will be properties in the borough which cannot accommodate a wheeled bin and a full survey will be undertaken to assess suitability. In terms of your specific enquiry a site visit would be conducted to discuss further with the residents to establish accessibility. If it is determined that a wheeled bin would not be suitable then the properties would remain on a bag collection.

Supplementary question:

Do the new proposals fit with new national guidelines, which include up to six different bins. Will Wokingham Borough Council be implementing this?

Answer:

We don't quite know yet, expecting to know soon. We will need to see if further separation of items is mandatory.

102.4 Tim Holton has asked the Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure the following question:

Question:

Why should residents bother responding to consultations when, in the case of waste collections, you ignore 76% of those who responded indicating they did not like a proposal to change to fortnightly waste collections.

Answer:

I am afraid that your question contains inaccuracies. Firstly, our proposal is to continue weekly collections, with food waste every week and recycling and residual waste taking turns in an alternating pattern. Secondly, just 26% of those who responded to the consultation indicated they did not like the proposal, while 24% liked it, 43% found it acceptable, and 7% were neutral. To characterise the latter 50% as not liking it is fallacious as they had the option to tick "don't like" but did not do so. They made that choice for a reason and their choice should not be misrepresented, and overall, there was a clear majority in favour.

The aim of a consultation is to assess views and inform the decision-making process to ensure the best outcome for the council and residents. It is not a referendum and views expressed are unlikely to be unanimous.

The consultation on waste outlined the council's financial position and the questions gave 4 options to agree or disagree with the proposals. The council must make savings of more than £25 million over the next three years due to a continued reduction in government funding and rising costs, particularly supporting those most in need. Continuing with weekly collections would increase costs and not improve our response to the climate emergency, which the council has declared.

Supplementary Question:

Will a decision be deferred until a debate is undertaken at Council?

Answer:

The Executive is the decision making body, as far as Waste is concerned.

102.5 Andy Bailey has asked the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan the following question:

Question:

Where residential planning proposals are predicated on 20 minute communities with adjacent employment zones and the inference being that employees will live within a short walk or cycle route, how is success or otherwise measured? Is there any assurance that these 'perceived benefits' are/will actually be delivered? How are they tracked, reported on and how are developers held accountable for delivery?

Mr Bailey was unable to attend the meeting, it was agreed that a written response would be provided, which is included below.

Answer:

One of the objectives of planning is to provide residents with opportunities to access nearby facilities, including schools, shops, public transport, and employment opportunities, and to walk and cycle wherever possible. This is sometimes referred to as a '20 minute neighbourhood.'

However, the 20-minute neighbourhood means different things in different locations. Within more rural areas, towns and villages, this also includes being able to travel by bus or car to facilities. Providing or upgrading key walking and cycling routes such as via the greenways project, of course, often facilitate more active travel for shorter journeys.

Experiences from both Wokingham Borough and elsewhere show that where new direct, high-quality routes are provided they are well used by residents as an alternative to private vehicles. These routes also have various health, environmental and other benefits.

There has been significant investment in improved bus services and upgrades to highway infrastructure secured as part of the new developments to assist mobility and travel across the borough. Although as we are all aware, Covid impacted on bus patronage generally, new bus services and routes continue to receive patronage, particularly when well-advertised and timed to start with a level of occupations within a new development.

Of course, one of the ways any member can find out for themselves how well a bus route, cycleway, new greenway or pedestrian route is used, is to travel, cycle or walk it for themselves.

The delivery of each of these types of improvement is secured through planning policies, conditions and legal obligations attached to planning permissions. These are enforceable by WBC, with stages triggered by a certain phase of development.

Progress is also tracked by reviewing developments as they progress. The Council has dedicated officers for example, to ensure developers delivering the Strategic Development Location's comply with conditions and legal obligations, including management and maintenance.

If the member has any further issues of detail they wish to raise, officers will be pleased to assist and can be contacted directly. If you start with Mr Corrigan in the Planning team, if he doesn't know the answer, he'll point you in the direction of someone who does.

103. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

In accordance with the agreed procedure the Chairman invited Members to submit questions to the appropriate Members

103.1 Gary Cowan has asked the Leader of the Council the following question: Question:

As the law says in the provisions of the 2011 Localism Act that and I quote "A decision-maker is not to be taken to have had, or to have appeared to have had, a closed mind when making a decision just because:

(a) the decision-maker had previously done anything that directly or indirectly indicated what view the decision-maker took, or would or might take, in relation to a matter, and (b) the matter was relevant to the decision." The government provided an explanation in plain English of what the change in the law means: 'Under S25 a Member will be able to

express strong opinions and even tell people that he or she intends to vote in a particular way, without fear of a challenge based on bias or predetermination.’

This would suggest that the existing Constitution supported by this Lib Dem Administration, supported by the Conservatives is in fact illegal. Would you agree that the Administration has acted illegally and continues to do so by its support to the constitution that implies that pre determination is matter that can be referred to the Standards Board.

Answer:

Thank you for your question.

Firstly, let me say, that I do not agree that the Council has acted illegally. I will try to explain why, it is a complex issue, forgive me if the answer is long.

The WBC Member Code of Conduct, to which I believe you are referring in the final paragraph of your question, is based almost in its entirety on the Local Government Association’s (LGA) Model Code of Conduct and was agreed by full Council on 22 July 2021. You are correct that bias and predetermination are not explicitly mentioned in the Code of Conduct. However, the Code’s provisions on declarations of interest are relevant to predetermination and are about ensuring councillors do not take decisions where they or those close to them stand to lose or gain improperly.

The rules around predetermination are complex which is why the Government at the time (in 2011/12) brought in Section 25 of the Localism Act to clarify matters.

The concept that a councillor, as a decision-maker, should approach a decision with an open mind remains a key principle of public law. The Localism Act does not abolish predetermination as such; instead it provides a protection from challenge by identifying specific behaviour which cannot be regarded as evidence of a closed mind. The use of the words “just because” in the Act limit that protection to things the councillor has done or said to indicate what view he or she took, or would or might take. The purpose of clarifying the law is to ensure councillors can be involved in “campaigning, talking with constituents, or publicly expressing views on local issues” without “fear of being accused of bias or facing legal challenge”. However, the Act does not prevent a challenge based on bias or predetermination arising from other factors.

Evidence of personal bias arising, for example because a member would be personally affected by a decision they are making, would still lead to an unsound decision vulnerable to challenge and could lead to a Member Code of Conduct complaint. Neither does the Localism Act remove the requirement to ensure that decisions are reasonable in the legal sense. This means that, at the time a decision is made, the Council should be able to demonstrate that all relevant matters have been taken into account and that irrelevant considerations have not influenced that decision. Consultation responses, equality impact assessment and in the case of planning, all material considerations, should have been put forward and discussed at a meeting before a decision is taken, whatever prior indication an individual member may have given regarding his or her views on a particular matter. The rules were developed to ensure that councillors came into council discussions – on, for example, planning applications – with an open mind.

Supplementary Question:

In 2011, Wokingham Borough Council appeared in court, and the charge was against the developer, cutting down trees. The judge ruled that Wokingham Borough Council had

acted illegally. If that was the case, should not the Council remove or amend the Constitution so that it is compliant with the judge's order?

Answer:

I am not familiar with that particular case, so I am not able to comment. I will provide you with a written reply.

104. MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION:

105. PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE COLLECTION METHODOLOGY AND CONTAINMENT OF WASTE IN THE BOROUGH

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that the proposals would lead to single use plastics being removed from waste operations. The green waste bags would be retained until the government's position was clear, any further investment in wheeled bins would not be prudent at this time.

It was anticipated that residual waste would be reduced, by diversion into recycling schemes. This in turn would reduce waste management costs and increase the borough's recycling rate, which currently stood at 54%.

The public consultation carried out yielded a significant majority who liked or found the change to be acceptable.

The Executive felt that the strategy was well established and would lead to significant savings of in excess of £1m a year. The proposals had been considered and commented upon by Overview & Scrutiny. From a carbon reduction perspective, the proposals were sound. The Executive noted that 85% of councils operated alternative waste collections. It was noted that garden waste collection would continue unchanged.

RESOLVED: that the Executive:

i) Approved the proposed change of policy from weekly blue bag collection to Alternate Weekly Collection (general refuse collected one week, recycling collected the next week, with retained weekly food waste collection)

ii) Approved the introduction of wheeled bins for the containment of refuse from the summer of 2024.

iii) Approved the utilisation of funds from the Waste Equalisation Reserve Fund to support the purchase and distribution of wheeled bins.

iv) Noted the petition submitted by Cllr Norman Jorgensen which sought the retention of weekly waste collection and noted the comments made by the O&S Management Committee at the meeting on 22 February 2023

REASON FOR DECISION

The report sets out how the Council intends to tackle financial pressures and drive forward its waste minimisation, diversion, recycling and carbon reduction commitments. Following the results of the second waste strategy consultation, it is proposed that Alternate Weekly Collections be introduced in Wokingham, with wheeled bins rolled out for containment of refuse.

106. BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN PILOT PROJECT

The Executive noted that the UK was exceptionally nature depleted, in comparison to the rest of the G7 countries. The proposals in this report mandated developers to achieve a biodiversity net gain, in a bid to reverse nature depletion. A target of a 10% gain had been set by the government.

The Executive welcomed the comments of Overview & Scrutiny, which were valuable and pertinent and would be supported. Executive members thanked Overview and Scrutiny members for their work to formulate the recommendations contained in the supplementary paper.

RESOLVED: that the Executive;

- 1) Approved the implementation of an ecological enhancement scheme at Ashenbury Park which will generate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) units, including the required capital expenditure of £201,190 and the establishment equalisation reserve to manage the ongoing maintenance costs.
- 2) Delegated authority to the Director of Place and Growth (in consultation with the Director of Resources and Assets and the Executive Member for Environment) to approve the implementation of further ecological enhancement schemes which will generate Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) units, including the required capital expenditure up to £300,000 in 2023/24.
- 3) Noted the transfer of management responsibilities at Ashenbury Park from the Council's Grounds Maintenance contractor to the Council's Countryside Service in order to facilitate the ongoing ecological enhancement scheme.
- 4) The Executive also endorsed the recommendations proposed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee as follows, that;
 - i) officers ensure that there was clear communication with residents and community groups about the aims of the Biodiversity Net Gain pilot project in Ashenbury Park and the expected outcomes;
 - ii) design work on the pilot project proceeded, but no physical works to take place on site until the public consultation has been completed, evaluated and reported - consultation to include an option with no changes to Ashenbury Park;
 - iii) officers explored potential mitigations relating to the financial risks and outcomes relating to the project;
 - iv) noted Scrutiny Members' concerns about the potential negative impact on communities if Biodiversity Net Gain projects are not linked to the areas which are taking new housing development;
 - v) receive a map showing the proposed pilot project site within Ashenbury Park (included with the agenda papers);

- vi) officers provide a briefing for all Members on the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain into the planning process and the specific pilot Biodiversity Net Gain project in Ashbury Park.

REASON FOR DECISION

To secure Executive approval for the initial expenditure required to implement the ecological enhancement scheme at Ashbury Park in Woodley and to inform the Executive of the underlying commercial approach to the sale of the Biodiversity Net Gain units generated by the project.

107. PROCUREMENT OF TREE MAINTENANCE FRAMEWORK CONTRACT

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport & Leisure reported that tree maintenance had been carried out on an ad hoc basis to date, this contract would ensure that a procurement framework was in place for this work.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the procurement of a four year Tree Maintenance Framework Contract.

REASON FOR DECISION

Officers require Executive approval to set up an internal framework to allow officers to procure routine, urgent and emergency tree works required for Highways, Public Open Space and Housing land.

A framework contract would allow the Operational Tree Management team to ensure the required procurement process is followed and value for money is delivered through an agreed schedule of rates without causing a delay to the delivery of service.

108. CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EXECUTIVE

The Executive thanked the Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee and officers for all of their work on developing these recommendations.

RESOLVED that the Executive approved the officers' responses to the recommendations in the report and requested that the Inclusion Cross Party Working Group considered these alongside action planning.

REASON FOR DECISION

The Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 2 November 2022, received a presentation from the Hardship Alliance about the cost of living crisis and how this was affecting children and young people in the borough. The recommendations contained in the report were agreed following a robust discussion about the difficulties being faced by families in the borough due the adverse economic situation.

109. TACKLING POVERTY STRATEGY: YEAR 1 ACTION PLAN

The Executive Member for Equalities, Inclusion and Fighting Poverty reported that the Tackling Poverty Strategy was centred around supporting communities. Strong progress

had been made across the last few months to further the work embedded in the strategy, particularly in terms of addressing the challenges of the Cost of Living Crisis.

One of the themes of the strategy included supporting those on lower incomes, this had included distributing energy saving government grant funding to support residents. Immediate help such as blankets, draft excluders, alternative forms of heating food for those who did not have conventional ovens. Energy saving advice and help to reduce fuel bills.

Significant investment had been made to ensure that residents knew where to seek help and support. This had included training frontline staff to provide advice and a booklet packed with advice for residents on how and where to seek support.

The close partnership working between Wokingham Borough Council and hardship alliance partners had been invaluable to the delivery of the strategy and to the response to the Cost of Living Crisis.

RESOLVED that the Executive noted the progress made in delivering on the Tackling Poverty Strategy during the first year.

REASON FOR DECISION

This report presents an update on the first year's delivery of the Tackling Poverty Strategy, giving an overview of many of the initiatives that have supported the residents in poverty across the borough. It was an essential aspect of the work undertaken to make Wokingham borough inclusive and a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.

110. COVID MEMORIAL WOODLAND

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that this report had secured cross party support and proposed an area for quiet contemplation and to reflect and remember those who were lost during the pandemic.

The Executive asked that the sculpture or structure planned for this space be developed in conjunction with the relevant officers with responsibility for arts and culture.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

1. Approved that the Covid Memorial Woodland will be located in the South East corner of Rooks Nest Farm.
2. Approved the implementation of a Covid Memorial Woodland, which will generate Biodiversity Net Gain units, including the required capital expenditure of £254,000 and the establishment equalisation reserve to manage the ongoing maintenance costs.

REASON FOR DECISION

The Covid Memorial Woodland will provide an opportunity for the Council to support the community and residents with an area to reflect and remember those who were lost during the pandemic whilst supporting the Council's tree planting target. In addition to contributing to Carbon Sequestration targets of the Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), delivery of

the Covid Memorial Woodland will build further on the Council's commitment to reach Tree Cities of the World status.

111. OFFICER RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PREFERRED REGISTERED PROVIDERS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chair invited the Chair of the Preferred Registered Providers Task and Finish Group, Councillor Shirley Boyt, to introduce the report.

Councillor Shirley Boyt reported that there were multiple reasons as to why this work was initiated but mainly to address the disparity of service level being received by social housing tenants as opposed to HRA tenants. The work had been well supported by officers.

The Chair thanked Councillor Shirley Boyt and other members and officers in developing the recommendations contained in the report.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) Approved the Officers' responses to the Recommendations of the Preferred Registered Providers Task and Finish Group, set out in subsection 1.6 of the report;
- 2) Noted the report of the Preferred Registered Providers Task and Finish Group, contained as Annex A to the report.

REASON FOR DECISION

The Preferred Registered Providers Task and Finish Group was established by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 25 May 2022. The Group has met on 7 occasions and has engaged with a range of stakeholders including the Executive Member for Housing, tenants of social housing, the Association of Retained Council Housing, and the Tenant and Landlord Improvement Panel. The Group surveyed tenants of Preferred Registered Providers (PRPs), and received over 165 responses which helped to provide a snapshot of the concerns and issues of our residents.

The report and Recommendations of the Preferred Registered Providers Task and Finish Group were presented to the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 March 2023, and the Committee resolved that the Group's 12 Recommendations to the Executive, as amended, be approved.

112. DELIVERING THE UKRAINIAN/AFGHAN REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT GOVERNMENT GRANT ALLOCATION

Councillor Rachel Bishop-Firth declared a personal interest in this agenda item, on the grounds that her family were hosting a Ukrainian family.

The Deputy Leader and Executive Member for Housing reported that this was a good news story. This scheme devised by the government was designed to ease pressure on housing stock. Essentially 17 new homes would be developed in the borough to home refugees/asylum seekers from specific countries. As refugees were able to eventually move to their own property, these homes would become available for general use, increasing the borough's housing stock.

It was noted that the government had prescribed that the scheme would only apply to refugees from specific countries, namely Afghan and Ukrainian refugees.

RESOLVED that the Executive noted the Government grant allocation to Wokingham Borough Council and proposal to deliver 17 homes as part of the Ukrainian and Afghan resettlement scheme and approved:

- (1) The release of up to £2m commuted sums (developer contributions for affordable housing) to be used in conjunction with the £3.1m grant allocation for the purchase of the 17 properties;
- (2) That the properties go into either the Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”) and £3.7m of borrowing be undertaken within the HRA, or into Loddon Homes Limited (“LHL”) with a loan of £3.7m; with authority to be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader for the Council to determine and approve the end landlord and the borrowing terms;
- (3) The delegation of authority to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader for the Council and Executive Member for Housing to approve the transfer of commuted sums up to the value of £2m to support the purchase of each property.

REASON FOR DECISION

To mitigate against housing pressures on local authorities, the Government has provisionally allocated grant to those most affected by the Ukrainian refugee and Afghan resettlement programmes. This grant allocation has been allocated to Wokingham Borough Council based on part funding of 17 properties to help mitigate against the additional housing pressures. This report seeks approval to ensure that the funding allocation can be delivered effectively in Wokingham Borough within the restricted timescales and ensure that ownership of the properties are retained for housing other priority cohorts in the longer term, as per the Government’s guidance on this funding stream.

113. OFFICER RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE LOCAL CYCLING, WALKING AND INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways thanked members and officers for developing these recommendations and further for agreeing to consider individual schemes going forward.

The Chair invited the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, Councillor Alistair Neal to introduce the report. Councillor Alistair Neal reported that the Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan was a live document, members had met twice to develop recommendations. He thanked officers for their support with this work.

The Chair thanked members and officers for their work on this, further examples of Overview and Scrutiny benefiting policy formulation.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) Approved the Officers' responses to the Recommendations of the Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan Task and Finish Group, set out in subsection 1.6 of the report;
- 2) Noted the report of the Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan Task and Finish Group, contained as Annex A to the report.

REASON FOR DECISION

The Local Cycling, Walking and Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) Task and Finish Group was established by the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 29 November 2022, whilst their Terms of Reference were agreed at the meeting of the Committee held on 23 January 2023. The Group has met on 2 occasions, and has engaged with Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways, a WSP consultant and the Transport Planning Team Manager. Due to time constraints, the Group were only able to review the main LCWIP report, whilst the related appendices were not considered by the Group, such as early outline maps and designs.

The report and Recommendations of the LCWIP Task and Finish Group were presented to the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 March 2023, and the Committee resolved that the Group's 14 Recommendations to the Executive, as amended, be approved.

114. LOCAL CYCLING AND WALKING INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure reported that the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) enabled a long term approach to developing strategic active travel connections between key destinations. The LCWIP had been the subject of two public engagement exercises. It was a live document which would be regularly reviewed.

The Executive were pleased to receive the report and thanked officers and the Executive Member for all their work on this strategy.

RESOLVED that the Executive agreed to adopt the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan as the Council's strategic plan for Active Travel over the next 10-15 years.

REASON FOR DECISION

The report presents the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) with a view to the council adopting it as the strategic plan for Active Travel over the next 10-15 years. The LCWIP enables a long-term approach to developing strategic active travel connections between key origins/destinations and forms a vital part of the Government's strategy to make walking, wheeling and cycling the natural choices for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey.

Getting more people to walk and cycle will help respond to the [Climate Emergency](#), tackle congestion on our roads and achieve the ambition of our [Corporate Delivery Plan](#) to make Wokingham Borough a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business.

115. OFF STREET CAR PARK CHARGES

The Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways reported that the last rise in off street car park charges had been five years ago. The previous administration had not kept pace with rising costs and this now needed to be addressed. The Council was facing the worst financial pressures in decades.

RESOLVED that the Executive;

- 1) Considered the objections received to the proposed Traffic Regulation Order in respect to off-street parking charges;
- 2) Agreed to the increases to the parking charges as detailed in revised Appendix 1 which was circulated as supplementary paper 3;
- 3) Agreed to proceed with the making of the Wokingham Borough Council (Various Off-Street Borough Car Parks) (No. 1) Order 2023 TRO in accordance with the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and the Local Authorities Traffic Order Procedures 1996; and
- 4) Instructed the Assistant Director for Highways & Transport to inform those who have responded to the consultation accordingly.

REASON FOR DECISION

To recommend to the Executive following the end of the objection period that having reviewed all objections there are no material reasons to alter the proposals and to approve the increases to the off-street, car parking charges as detailed in the report.

116. MOVING TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT

The Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport and Highways reported that the application process for local authorities had been published by the Department of Transport. Traffic studies had been completed and 11 main sites had been identified and selected, which included school streets. If the Council's submission was successful, traffic restriction powers would be granted in June 2023.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- 1) Noted that the Local Highway Authority has applied to the Department of Transport for a Designation Order that would enable them to undertake enforcement in respect of Moving Traffic contraventions.
- 2) Agreed to the Civil Enforcement of moving traffic restrictions powers granted by the Department of Transport to be used to enforce contraventions at the sites detailed in Appendix A as well as any additional sites across the borough which are deemed suitable.
- 3) Agreed to setting the fee banding structure for penalty charge notices issues by APNR at level 2 which is the same as set for civil parking enforcement.
- 4) Agreed to the creation of a new post within the Council's Parking Services to support the service in the delivery of its statutory duties under the TMA 2004 and

- 5) Noted that further public consultation in accordance with the relevant statutory guidance must be carried out before moving traffic enforcement can be implemented in respect of further locations/restrictions which are outside of those detailed in Appendix A.
- 6) Where further sites were proposed for enforcement of moving traffic offences, authorise the Director for Place and Growth to commence consultation on those proposals in accordance with the relevant statutory guidance and, where no objections are received in response, proceed with implementation.
- 7) Approved the procurement approach of these goods/ service/ works via a direct award via CCS Framework RM6099 - Transport Technology & Associated Services to Marson Holdings who NSL are part of to align to the current contract.

REASON FOR DECISION

To provide the Executive with details of the Moving Traffic contraventions powers that if granted can be used to enforce traffic controls which are enabled through Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) and the correct signing and lining and included the following, driving through a 'No Entry' sign; turning left or right when instructed not to do so; entering yellow box junctions when your exit was not clear; driving where motor vehicles were prohibited; and driving a private vehicle on a route for buses only and to seek approval to implement these powers.

Implementing these powers will assist with the Councils commitment to improve air quality through reduced traffic congestion and will encourage behavioural shift towards sustainable travel choices by keeping junctions and cycle lanes clear of obstructing vehicles and improve bus reliability.

117. CLIMATE EMERGENCY POSITION PAPER

The Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Residents Services reported that she was pleased to see the linkages being made between Climate Emergency and social systems and in particular impacts on low income groups. Tackling the climate emergency would have positive impacts on the health and quality of life of residents.

The report presented an update on climate work, including two key schemes that would be launched in Spring 2023. Both schemes would enable residents to decarbonise their homes, reduce their energy bills and address the cost of living crisis.

The Executive welcomed the report and thanked the Executive member and officers for their work.

RESOLVED that the Executive noted the status of Wokingham Borough Council climate emergency work, in particular the two key schemes that will be launched in Spring 2023.

REASON FOR DECISION

Climate change affects every member of our community, particularly the most vulnerable people. Tackling the climate emergency will have positive impacts on the health and quality of life of our residents. This paper presents an update on our climate work,

including two key schemes that will be launched in Spring 2023. Both schemes will enable our residents to decarbonise their homes, reduce their energy bills and address the cost-of-living crisis.

118. SHAREHOLDERS REPORT

The following declarations of personal interest were made by Executive Members in relation to this agenda item. These Members did not participate or vote on this item.

- Councillor Prue Bray as a non-executive director of Berry Brook Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd.
- Councillor Stephen Conway as a non-executive director of Loddon Homes and WBC Holdings Ltd
- Councillor David Hare as a non-executive director of Optalis Ltd.

Councillor Imogen Shepherd-DuBey chaired this agenda item.

RESOLVED that the Executive noted:

- 1) The Housing companies' budget and operational position for December 2022,
- 2) The Optalis budget and operational position update for December 2022.

REASON FOR DECISION

The purpose of the report is to ensure awareness and transparency of the financial performance of the Council Owned Companies.

This page is intentionally left blank

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF
THE EXECUTIVE
HELD ON 20 APRIL 2023 AT 7.00 - 7.08 PM**

Committee Members Present:

Councillors: Clive Jones (Chair), Stephen Conway (Vice-Chair), Rachel Bishop-Firth, Prue Bray, Lindsay Ferris, Paul Fishwick, David Hare and Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

Apologies:

Councillors Ian Shenton and Sarah Kerr.

119. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Lindsay Ferris declared a personal interest in agenda item 122: Twyford Neighbourhood Plan, as a member of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group prior to becoming an Executive Member. He advised that he would leave the meeting room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Stephen Conway declared a personal interest in agenda item 122: Twyford Neighbourhood Plan, as he had been involved in working on the Neighbourhood Plan prior to joining the Council as an elected member in 2018. Given that a number of years had passed since his involvement, he would remain present for the consideration of this item.

120. STATEMENT FROM THE LEADER

The Leader advised that he would not be giving a statement as it would not be appropriate to do so during the pre-election period.

The Leader did however pass on his thanks to all officers of the Council, in particular; directors, assistant directors and senior managers who had worked extremely hard during the last year to support the administration.

121. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions submitted from the public on this occasion.

122. MEMBER QUESTION TIME

There were no questions submitted from Members on this occasion.

123. TWYFORD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Councillor Lindsay Ferris declared a personal interest in agenda item 122: Twyford Neighbourhood Plan, as a member of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group prior to becoming an Executive Member. He advised that he would leave the meeting room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Stephen Conway declared a personal interest in agenda item 122: Twyford Neighbourhood Plan, as he had been involved in working on the Neighbourhood Plan prior to joining the Council as an elected member in 2018. Given that a number of years had passed since his involvement, he would remain present for the consideration of this item.

Councillor Lindsay Ferris left the meeting room for the consideration of this item.

The Executive were keen to support and facilitate this neighbourhood plan. It was noted that the cost of the referendum would be covered by government grant.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- i) Accepted the modifications recommended by the Independent Examination into the Twyford Neighbourhood Plan (as set out in Enclosure 1) and for the modified plan to proceed to referendum;
- ii) Agreed that the Twyford Neighbourhood Plan, as modified in accordance with the recommendations of the Independent Examiner, meets the basic conditions and complies with the provisions of Paragraph 8 (1) (a) (2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Localism Act 2011);
- iii) Agreed to publish the 'Decision Statement' as set out at Enclosure 2 of the report;
- iv) Authorised the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan, to agree minor factual and consequential modifications necessary to the Twyford Neighbourhood Plan, the Decision Statement, and other supporting documents prior to the referendum;
- v) Agreed the referendum be organised and conducted in the Twyford neighbourhood area. The Executive were keen to facilitate and support the progress of this neighbourhood plan. It was noted that the cost of the referendum would be covered by government grant.

124. RUSCOMBE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - SUBMISSION CONSULTATION AND FUTURE EXAMINATION

The Executive Member for Planning and the Local Plan reported that the report sought approval to consult on the updated draft Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan submitted by Ruscombe Parish Council in March 2023 and to procure an independent examiner who would subsequently examine the updated draft Plan. The Executive noted that government grant could be utilised to help cover the costs of this work.

RESOLVED that the Executive:

- i) approved a six week consultation on the draft Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan (Enclosure 1: Ruscombe Draft Neighbourhood Plan); and supporting information.
- ii) agreed to appoint an examiner to independently examine the draft Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan, delegating the appointment and submission of the examination documentation to the Director of Place and Growth in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning and Local Plan.

Agenda Item 7.

TITLE	Corporate Sponsorship Policy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To secure Executive approval for implementation of the Corporate Sponsorship Policy and to inform the Executive of the commercial ambition for the council to generate income through sponsorship opportunities.

The subsequent sponsorship projects will contribute to the Council's ongoing revenue targets.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive adopt this policy to enable the Council to provide a support structure and governance for this opportunity to allow services to explore new revenue streams through sponsorship agreements and in certain circumstances to assist local business to market their services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION TO THE POLICY

Sponsorship provides important funding to support the costs of services provided by projects and assets owned or managed by the Council, but it can also provide access to valuable expertise and in-kind support in areas where the Council may not have the skills or resources itself. It also allow the Council to provide marketing opportunity for local business.

Wokingham Borough Council has had some success in achieving sponsorship over the years albeit in relatively modest amounts, most notably roundabout sponsorship, but it can be uncoordinated across the organisation.

Sponsorship is much more than advertising, although there will be an element of branding as part of any sponsorship package. Sponsorship is about building a long-term partnership, promoting the values of the respective organisations, and about brand development.

This policy seeks to clarify the process of seeking sponsorship and create a mind-set in the organisation to be more proactive and receptive to sponsorship opportunities, to plan more effectively and to benefit more fully from existing and future corporate relationships.

The Council welcomes all opportunities to work in partnership with organisations which are aligned with the Council's strategic priorities and core values including local business.

The policy will introduce clear guidance, governance and processes for officers to follow in order to market, value and contract sponsorship agreements. As the council considers wider policies such as in respect of the climate emergency and/or pay arrangements, amendments will be considered to ensure our approach aligns to this work.

If approved, the policy can be implemented straight away and the Commercial Team will support service sot embed this activity, with the support of Finance and Legal as required.

OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

To ensure that:

- The Council optimises all suitable opportunities to engage with appropriate external organisations to secure commercial sponsorship for its assets, events, and programmes
- The Council's reputation is adequately protected in sponsorship agreements it enters into
- Constructive collaboration and best value for the Council and sponsor is achieved through all sponsorship negotiations
- A consistent approach to sponsorship is implemented across the Council
- Sponsorship is recorded, monitored and audited across all the Council's services
- The Council is protected from claims of inappropriate dealings or relationships with sponsors.

The recommendation is that the Executive adopt this policy as it enables the Council to provide a support structure and governance around an income generation opportunity, that will allow services to explore new revenue streams through sponsorship.

BACKGROUND

Due diligence has been undertaken to ensure that sufficient governance is in place with regards to the constitution, financial regulations and equality, diversity and inclusion considerations.

“Sponsorship” is defined as an agreement between the council and an external organisation, where the council receives money or a benefit for a council activity, event, or initiative from an organisation which in turn gains publicity or other benefit from the council.

The Policy applies if the Council uses an agency to search, negotiate and/or negotiate sponsorship on behalf of the council.

This policy would not normally apply to:

- Partnership arrangements with other public or statutory bodies to exercise functions jointly and share the cost.
- Concessions to sell food, drinks, or other products at events or from locations where the organisation pays the council for the concession and the concession is let competitively.

Donations to a council or activity run by the council where the donor seeks no credit, publicity, or benefit in return

The principles of the policy:

The Council welcomes all opportunities to work in partnership with organisations which are aligned with the Council’s strategic priorities and core values. However, the Council will not put itself in a position where it might be said that such a partnership has, or might, or may be thought to have:

- Influenced the Council or its officers in carrying out its statutory functions
- Received better terms from the Council in any business or other agreement as a result of a sponsorship discussion
- Aligned the Council with any organisation which has, in the Council’s reasonable opinion, conducted itself in a manner which conflicted with the Council’s values.

Officers should not consider association with any sponsor who:

- Might create a negative impression of the council or bring the council into disrepute in the minds of the public
- Is in financial or legal conflict with the council
- Is a lobby or pressure group or political party
- Promotes religious activities (unless an alliance is appropriate to the sponsored activity. For example, the sponsorship is in connection with a religious or community event supported by the council)
- Promotes or is involved in tobacco, pornography, weaponry, or similar activities
- Discriminates against people based on gender or gender reassignment, race, ethnicity, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, age, or religion/belief
- Might compromise the council’s duty of behaving impartially and independently, especially when exercising regulatory functions (e.g., deciding planning, building control or licensing applications).
- Has not passed trademark/financial checks

The above list is not exhaustive and the council must retain the right to decline sponsorship from any organisation which the council considers inappropriate. Officers should seek clarification from the relevant director or the legal team if unsure whether a sponsorship may be considered within the above categories.

Should the Council in the future consider its wider approach to matters such as those impacting the climate emergency and/or standard/minimum pay levels, this policy will be reviewed and where necessary revised to align to such standards and requirements.

Support will be provided by the Commercial Team to assist officers and members to assess the suitability of a sponsor.

Due diligence should be carried out at all sponsorship levels, to include:

- Companies house and/or credit check (Business Services)
- Sourcing the sponsor's EDI (Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion) policy (Officers)
- Any other relevant information pertaining to the sponsor's suitability (Officers/Commercial/Business Services)

An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed.

BUSINESS CASE

Roundabout sponsorship currently generates £27K per annum with no dedicated resource and minimal marketing. As well as actively promoting the sites currently on the register, there are other roundabouts that could be added, with the potential of increasing this income to circa £60K in the short-term. We have expanded this review to look at other assets across the borough, partly based on research and partly through demand from services, such as libraries and country parks. The case to take a proactive approach to selling sponsorship is backed up by these statistics as well as case studies from other councils that have demonstrated a profitable business model. A total income projection for year-one is £80K.

Overall, our research has concluded that there is an opportunity to develop the income stream and take a proactive approach to creating productive partnerships with businesses seeking exposure and/or affiliation. We would work with each service to create a policy document to direct sponsorship to appropriate businesses and setting a framework for governance.

Subject to approval, sponsorship opportunities would initially include:

- Roundabouts
- Events
- Library assets
- Parks and open spaces
- Sports and sporting facilities
- Newsletters
- Council vehicles

Other benefits from sponsorship sales include:

- Enhanced customer experience
- Cost saving

- Increased reach/awareness
- Brand synergy
- Business relationships

Key risks of this policy not being adopted would be:

- Loss of revenue and cost savings that would be achieved from sponsorship and traded services.
- Progression of sponsorship across various services would be impacted.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	(£50k) will be included in future revenue monitoring as opportunities are confirmed	No funding required – income generation opportunity	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	TBC		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	TBC		

Other Financial Information

The Policy provides a structure and process to identify and progress income generation opportunities where aligned to the councils wider strategic and operational priorities. As opportunities are progressed they will be included in Revenue monitoring and future MTFP budget setting processes.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Engaged with:

- Strategy, Insight and Inclusion
- CEM
- Digital and Web
- Legal
- Finance
- Procurement and Contracts

Public Sector Equality Duty

EQIA has been carried out and signed off by the Inclusion team.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

N/A

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

Contact Lyndsey Evans

Service Commercialisation

Telephone Tel: 0118 974 3732

Email lyndsey.evans@wokingham.gov.uk

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

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

INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship is much more than advertising, although there will be an element of branding as part of any sponsorship package. Sponsorship is about building a long-term partnership, promoting the values of the respective organisations, and about brand development. Sponsorship provides important funding to support the costs of services, projects and assets owned or managed by the Council, but it can also provide access to valuable expertise and in-kind support in areas where the Council may not have the skills or resources itself.

Wokingham Borough Council has had some success in achieving sponsorship over the years albeit in relatively modest amounts, most notably roundabout sponsorship, but it remains piecemeal and uncoordinated across the organisation.

Purpose

This policy seeks to clarify the process of seeking sponsorship and create a mind-set in the organisation to be more proactive and receptive to sponsorship opportunities, to plan more effectively and to benefit more fully from existing and future corporate relationships.

This policy applies to Wokingham Borough Council. References to “the Council” throughout this policy means Wokingham Borough Council.

This policy outlines principles that must be followed when the Council is contemplating entering into an arrangement for its services, facilities or activities to be sponsored.

Scope

This policy applies when the Council is the recipient of sponsorship as opposed to when the Council is providing sponsorship to a third party.

Objectives

To ensure that:

- The Council optimises all suitable opportunities to engage with appropriate external organisations to secure commercial sponsorship for its assets, events, and programmes
- The Council’s reputation is adequately protected in sponsorship agreements it enters into
- Constructive collaboration and best value for the Council and sponsor is achieved through all sponsorship negotiations
- A consistent approach to sponsorship is implemented across the Council
- Sponsorship is recorded, monitored and audited across all the Council’s services
- The Council is protected from claims of inappropriate dealings or relationships with sponsors.

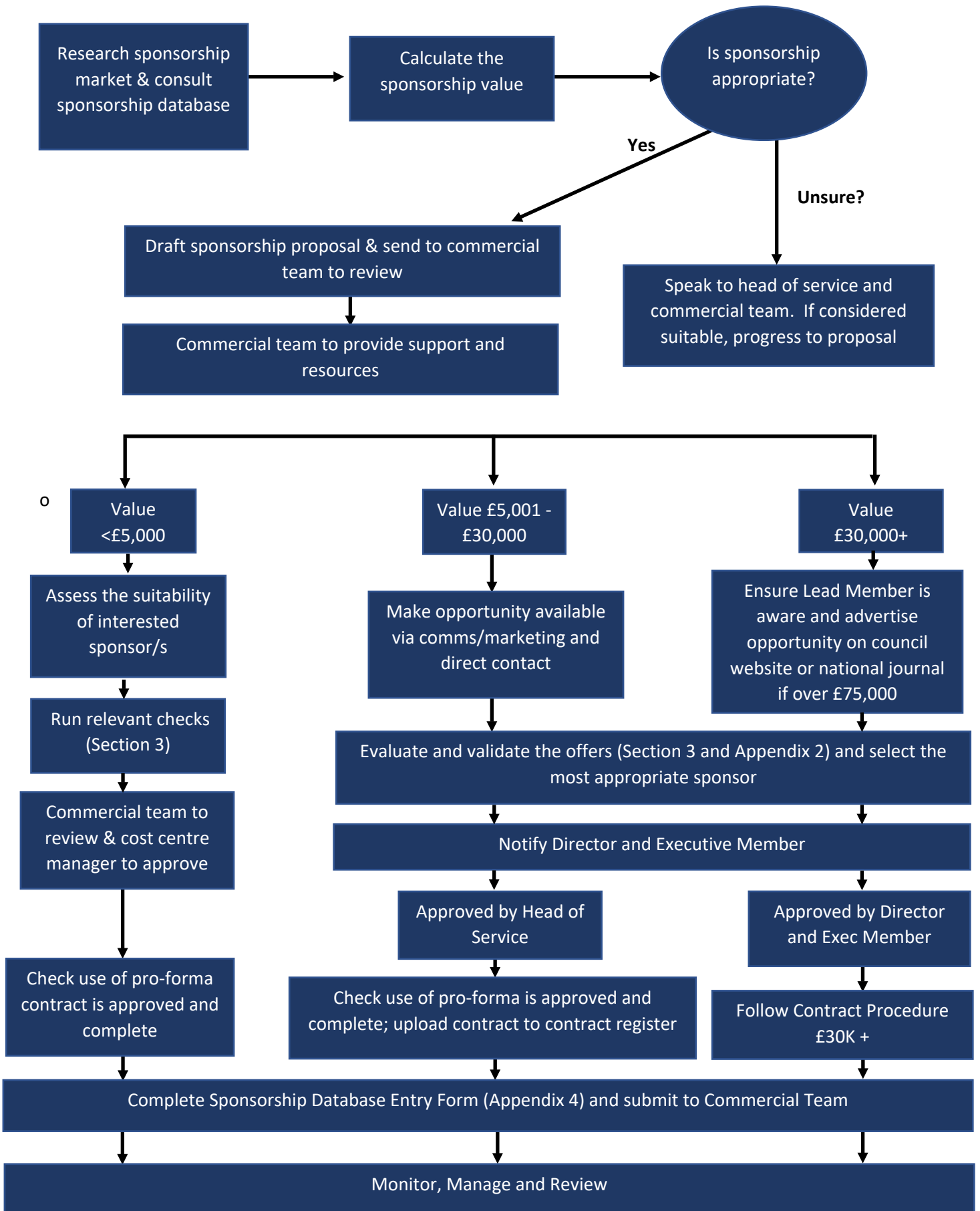
Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
SPONSORSHIP PROCESS	3
CONTRACT PROCEDURE - £30,000+	4
SPONSORSHIP POLICY	5
Principles	5
Appropriate Sponsors.....	6
APPLYING THE POLICY	7
1. Finance Regulations.....	7
2. Corporate Ownership	7
3. Seeking or Accepting Sponsorship (Validation)	7
4. Sponsorship Value	8
5. Authorisation to Agree Sponsorship Deals	9
6. Use of Sponsor’s Logo/Branding.....	9
7. Documenting Sponsorships	9
8. Monitoring and Reviewing the Sponsorship.....	10
9. Co-ordination.....	10
10. Marketing the Sponsorship Opportunity.....	10
11. Contacts and Links	11
APPENDICES	12
Appendix 1 - Calculating Sponsorship Value	12
Appendix 2 – Evaluating Sponsors.....	13
Appendix 3 – Marketing the Sponsorship Opportunity.....	14
Appendix 4 – Sponsorship Database Entry Form.....	15
Appendix 5 – Sponsorship Authorisation	16

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

SPONSORSHIP PROCESS



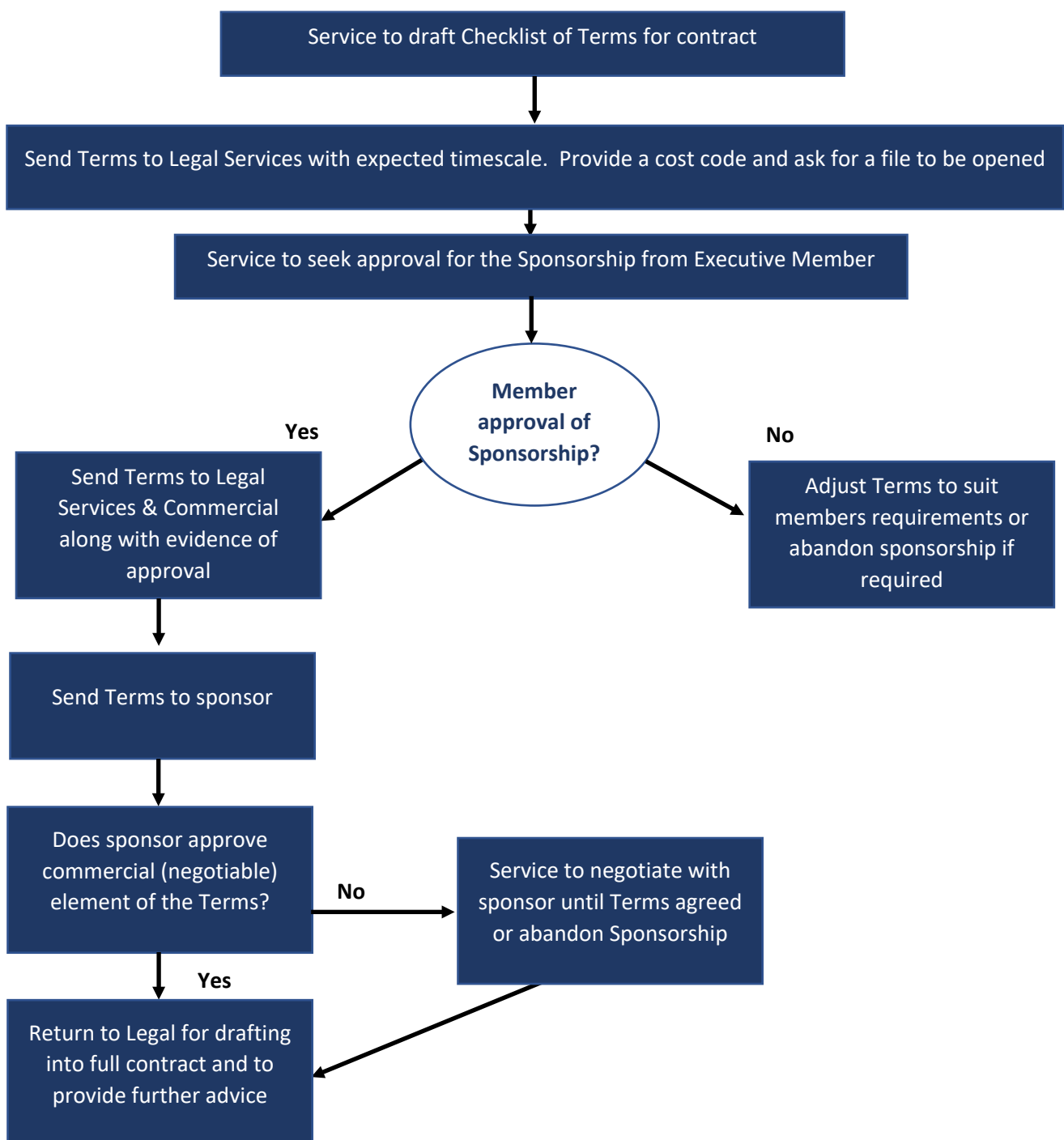
Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

CONTRACT PROCEDURE - £30,000+

Sponsorships below £30,000 can be self-managed through use of the appropriate pro-forma. Services must check with their AD that they are authorised to do so.

Sponsorships with an aggregate value of £30,000 or above must be checked by Legal Services, who will decide on the correct form of documentation – use of the pro-forma or a bespoke contract. The proposed sponsor must have agreed to the principles of the sponsorship and key terms before this process begins.

The Commercial team can support through this process.



Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

SPONSORSHIP POLICY

Principles

The principles that must be adhered to are:

Principle 1: The Council may only enter into sponsorship arrangements when it is appropriate and in its best interest to do so.

Principle 2: Sponsorship agreements may only be entered into when it is lawful to do so and does not breach other Council objectives or policies.

Principle 3: Sponsorship opportunities must support or further the Council's objectives and priorities.

Principle 4: Sponsorship must represent value for money and any benefits conferred on the sponsor must be proportionate to the value of the sponsorship.

Principle 1: the Council may only enter into sponsorship arrangements when it is appropriate and in its best interest to do so

The Council should only accept sponsorship where it is appropriate to do so and so long as its ability to exercise its statutory functions impartially and with integrity will not be compromised by the arrangement.

This rule is particularly relevant to:

- (a) the types of services, facilities and activities that may be considered as appropriate for sponsorship; and
- (b) the types of sponsors that the Council may align itself with in the delivery of a service, facility or activity.

Principle 2: Sponsorship agreements may only be entered into when it is lawful to do so and does not breach other Council objectives or policies

The Council must act in accordance with statutory requirements, within the parameters of the law and in accordance with its objectives and policies

In most circumstances, the Council will only be able to enter into a sponsorship agreement if the agreement facilitates or is conducive, incidental, necessary or expedient to the exercise of an express power such that an ancillary power can be relied on

Principle 3: Sponsorship opportunities must support or further the Council's objectives and priorities

The Council must assess a sponsorship proposal considering the purpose for which the particular service, facility or activity to be sponsored is used or is being developed or the particular activity to be sponsored is being undertaken.

Indicators that will demonstrate that a sponsorship proposal will further the Council's objectives or priorities include:

- sponsorship will enable the Council to expand the scope or influence of a project so that it is more effective, in other words, the Council will be able to better discharge its functions;
- sponsorship will allow the Council to communicate with difficult to reach or different audiences;
- sponsorship will foster innovation and allow the Council to exercise its functions in a way that might not otherwise have been conceived of or possible if the Council did not have the benefit of the sponsor's knowledge and expertise or funding;
- sponsorship will support the Council engagement with key stakeholders.

Private: Information that contains a small amount of sensitive data which is essential to communicate with an individual but doesn't require to be sent via secure methods.

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

The Council will ensure that any sponsorship arrangement with a Sponsor will not contain any material constraints on the Council's objectives and priorities and will not compromise its activities.

The Council will also ensure that the sponsorship agreement complies with relevant legislation including the Equality Act 2010.

Principle 4: Sponsorship must represent value for money and any benefits conferred on the sponsor must be proportionate to the value of the sponsorship

The value of the sponsorship opportunity must be assessed and offers to sponsor only accepted if they are commensurate with this value.

Appropriate Sponsors

The Council welcomes all opportunities to work in partnership with organisations which are aligned with the Council's strategic priorities and core values.

The Council will not enter into sponsorship arrangements that may, or may be perceived to, have a detrimental impact on the Council's ability to discharge its functions impartially or may put the Council's reputation at risk.

The Council will not put itself in a position where it might be said that such a sponsorship has, or might, or may be thought to have:

- Influenced the Council in carrying out its statutory functions in order to gain favourable terms from the Council in any business or other agreement
- Personally benefitted individual Council employees or Councillors, their friends or family;
- Aligned the Council with any organisation that conducts itself in a manner which conflicts with or undermines the Council's values, strategic priorities, aims and objectives
- Aligned the Council with any organisation that promotes messages relating to public controversy and sensitivity, and/or is a controversial organisation that is likely to cause widespread or serious offence to members of the public on account of its services, products or values
- Limited the Council's ability to carry out its functions fully and impartially

Additionally, Services should not consider association with any sponsor who:

- Discriminates against people based on including but not limited to gender or gender reassignment, race, ethnicity, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, age, or religion/belief
- Promotes religious activities unless the sponsorship is in connection with a religious community event supported by the council
- Promotes gambling or other activities that are not aligned to the Council's values
- Has not passed validation checks
- Is in financial or legal conflict with the Council
- This list is not exhaustive and may be updated from time to time as appropriate

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

APPLYING THE POLICY

1. Finance Regulations

Sponsorships must be entered into in accordance with the Financial Regulations in the Constitution. Officers must ensure that their Finance Business Partner is aware of sponsorship discussions from the outset and that finance regulations are adhered to. [Constitution - Wokingham Borough Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](http://modern.gov.co.uk)

Sponsorship arrangements are subject to VAT. At all times follow the latest advice from HMRC. The latest information or queries can be checked via VATQueries@wokingham.gov.uk.

2. Corporate Ownership

The Commercial Team own this policy and essential register of sponsorship, although it will be the responsibility of each service to maintain the data held on file.

The commercial team will be on hand to advise and support sponsorship proposals as well as providing the necessary framework and controls. The process will vary according to the level of sponsorship on offer (reference the process map for more information), but broadly the responsibilities are set out in the table below, all of which will be supported by commercial as required.

Critical Steps	Responsibility
Marketing / promotion of sponsorship opportunity	Commercial and services in conjunction with CEM (Communication, Engagement and Marketing)
Enquiry/lead validation checks	Service
Draft proposal	Service
Initial review and valuation check	Commercial
Seek authorisation	Service
Submit proposal to sponsor	Service
Contracts	Commercial supported by legal
Invoicing	Service
Activation and account management	Service
PR	CEM / service
Update sponsorship register	Commercial
Monitor and ongoing review	Commercial and Service

Process map outlining ownership can be found at [sponsorship process V2.pdf](#)

3. Seeking or Accepting Sponsorship (Validation)

Council officers looking for suitable sponsorship for an activity must:

- Identify appropriate market sectors and organisations within those sectors
- Refer to the sponsorship database
- Assess the suitability of potential sponsors (refer to Principle 1 and 4 – Appropriate Sponsors)
- Be able to demonstrate using a clear evaluation that any sponsorship package provides best value to the Council
- Write a full proposal and calculate the net worth of the sponsorship to both council and sponsor, by comparing the costs to the Council with the total sponsorship value (see Appendix 1 – Calculating Sponsorship Worth)
- Seek appropriate advice and authorisation commensurate with the value of the sponsorship

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

In identifying a sponsor, the Council will generally seek to consider the appropriate balance of the commercial offer, the strategic fit of the sponsor and their plans for activation of the rights on offer.

It is essential that a potential sponsor is sufficiently vetted including information about its associated businesses, other activities or interests and financial position so that a complete picture can be established and a proper assessment of the sponsor is carried out prior to any arrangement being formalised. These checks should continue during the currency of the sponsorship agreement.

Support will be provided by the Commercial Team to assist officers and members to assess the suitability of a sponsor.

Due diligence should be carried out for all potential sponsors, to include:

- Is the company legitimate? Has there been any negative PR or consistently poor reviews? Do we work with them elsewhere in the organisation and what is that experience? (desk research)
- Are they financially sound? Companies House and credit check (Business Services)
- No legal conflict with the Council (Legal Services)
- Compliance with finance regulations and to ensure there is no money outstanding to the council (Finance Business Partner/Accounts Receivable)
- Is their Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy and reputation in line with WBC policy? (review Sponsor's policy, if in doubt refer to Insight, Strategy and Inclusion team)
- Any other relevant information pertaining to the sponsor's suitability (Officers/Commercial/Business Services)

4. Sponsorship Value

The total value of any sponsorship opportunity to the Council and the sponsor must be fully calculated, checked with the commercial team and appropriately recorded in writing.

The total monetary value of a sponsorship contract is the total monetary value of the contract and/or equivalent sponsorship-in-kind value over the whole term of the contract. Added value goods or services should be calculated by the Service and checked by the Commercial team.

A sponsorship contract with a total ascertainable monetary value exceeding £5,000 must be recorded in the Council's Contracts Register.

In all cases, where a sponsorship deal is valued at more than £5,000 officers must be able to demonstrate that other potential sponsors have been approached or that the deal arranged represents the best value the Council is able to obtain where others have not been forthcoming.

For sponsorship deals valued over £30,000 the opportunity must be advertised on the Council's website.

Sponsorship opportunities over £75,000 must be advertised in a national journal or other appropriate location.

Agreements below this value will still need to demonstrate that they have been properly negotiated, for instance, by keeping file notes of meetings or discussions.

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

5. Authorisation to Agree Sponsorship Deals

Sponsorships valued at £5,000 or under can be agreed by the relevant cost centre manager unless there are any special circumstances which make a second authorisation desirable e.g., if the issue might be politically sensitive, or the sponsor has requested unusual conditions.

The sponsorship agreement for deals valued between £5,001 and £30,000 must be agreed and countersigned by the relevant section or Head of Service (or Director if the Head of Service has carried out the arrangements).

The relevant Executive Member and Assistant Director/Director should also be notified in advance and authorise all sponsorship deals valued above £30,000.

If an officer wishes to vary the procedure outlined in this policy, sponsorship deals valued between £5,000 and £30,000 should be agreed by relevant Head of Service and notified to the relevant Executive Member. Opportunities valued over £30,000 should be agreed by the relevant Director and approved by the Executive Member. Any request for a variation must be set out and agreed in writing.

6. Use of Sponsor's Logo/Branding

CEM must be consulted in advance of agreeing to any branding or publicity.

The publicity or on-site branding agreed with a sponsor should be proportionate to the value of the sponsorship. The Council's involvement in the event should not be obscured by credit to the sponsor. It is most unlikely that it will ever be appropriate to agree a deal with a sponsor where they have sole branding rights and the Council is not entitled to any publicity itself, or the Council's branding is unreasonably restricted. If such a deal is exceptionally agreed, it should be approved by the service Director and Executive Member. The limitations on the Council should also be noted on the sponsorship database.

The following wording, or alternative wording as advised by CEM, is to be used alongside sponsorship content or editorial. "Sponsorship is not a way for any company or organisation to be viewed favourably by the Council in any other business arrangements they might be a party to. The Council does not endorse or recommend any advertiser or sponsor. Any organisation wishing to sponsor a Council owned product or service must adhere to this policy and the Council's Terms and Conditions for Sponsors."

7. Documenting Sponsorships

All sponsorship deals should be documented between the Council and the sponsor as follows:

Sponsorships with a value under £30,000 are to be documented by a pro-forma contract supplied by Legal Services and available from the Commercial Team. The pro-forma will be reviewed by Legal Services annually or more frequently in the case of major legislation changes. The service AD will be able to advise on whether the use of a pro-forma is approved, if not, a waiver must be sought.

Sponsorships with a value over £30,000 must be checked with Legal Services using the Terms Checklist. Legal Services will make the decision on the best contract form, either using the pro-forma or as a bespoke agreement.

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

Sponsorship arrangements can be complex, involving a combination of cash sponsorship, in kind benefits, and provision of services. Officers should be aware that although the value to the Council in cash may be relatively low, the combined value might well take the deal over the thresholds.

Additionally, whilst the value of the sponsorship arrangements to a particular service may be low, if another service also has an arrangement with that company, the combined value to the Council may cross a threshold. It is therefore particularly important that officers maintain accurately the central database, which will be owned by the commercial team who will be able to advise on duplication and take appropriate advice from legal, finance and procurement on whether this presents a risk.

Contracts should clearly document the invoicing structure for the sponsorship and payment terms and the responsible officer should ensure that invoicing is timed to allow for payments to be received in line with the terms of the contract.

8. Monitoring and Reviewing the Sponsorship

For the duration of the sponsorship term, the service must ensure that the project progresses in accordance with the agreed project plan, and that all expenditure is properly incurred and recorded and all claims for funds are made by the due date.

It is recommended that the service meets or engages with the sponsor at regular intervals and maintains communication throughout the sponsorship period to develop good client relationships and ensure that all the benefits of the sponsorship are realised for both parties.

An internal assessment of the sponsorship after the event or at agreed review periods should be carried out and any relevant findings noted on the sponsorship database.

Retain all documentation on file for audit purposes for either six years or twelve years if the sponsorship agreement was signed as a Deed or for the term of the sponsorship agreement if longer.

9. Co-ordination

A central database will be maintained, capturing all sponsorship deals concluded.

The commercialisation team will act as custodians of the database but individual officers who arrange sponsorship are responsible for the accuracy of their entries on the database. A note against out-of-date entries must be made but left on the database so that the audit trail is complete.

A standard form for database entries, for completion electronically, is available as Appendix 4. All sponsorships, whether in-kind or financial transactions, must be recorded here to avoid duplication and to ensure transparency.

Once a sponsorship deal is agreed, the relevant cost centre budget should be updated by contacting Business Services.

10. Marketing the Sponsorship Opportunity

For larger scale projects or events, the marketing campaign should be planned well ahead to attract suitable sponsors and ensure a fair playing field as well as allowing the time necessary for approvals and legal agreements to be completed.

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

Internal resource is in place to support business engagement - through the Commercial team and Economic Development. They can advise on the best course of action to reach appropriate audiences and avoid conflict.

Campaign content must be approved and managed through the Communication, Engagement and Marketing Service (CEM).

11. Contacts and Links

The commercial team must be made aware of sponsorship discussions from the outset and can provide support and advice on all aspects of a sponsorship agreement. commercial@wokingham.gov.uk

All communication with the legal service is via: SharedLegalSolutions@wokingham.gov.uk

All publicity surrounding a sponsorship agreement must be signed off by CEM, who can also support in marketing the sponsorship opportunity CEM@wokingham.gov.uk

Finance Regulations/Constitution: [Constitution - Wokingham Borough Council \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](http://modern.gov.co.uk)

Contracts Register: <https://procontract.due-north.com/ContractsRegister>

Companies House: [Get information about a company - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Calculating Sponsorship Value

It is essential to calculate the value of a sponsorship to ensure that the price asked for is fair and justifiable.

Sponsorship is a partnership between the Council and a sponsor. It requires sincere interest in the sponsor's objectives and how you can help them achieve goals. The more you listen to your sponsors, the better equipped you will be to create custom solutions and value them appropriately.

Some benefits are easy to calculate. For example, 40 complimentary tickets, which would normally sell for £10 are worth £400 to a sponsor (even though the tickets may cost the Council nothing if they are for an event which is unlikely to sell out). Other values to include are:

- Staff costs (Council staff time and ad-hoc support)
- Direct costs of delivering the event or programme, such as room hire, publicity, materials etc.
- Value of including the sponsor's logo on print or online marketing materials, based on the number of people likely to view - Digital Services or CEM may be able to provide this information

The monetary value of other benefits is more subjective and will depend on the sponsor, their reason for sponsorship, their level of need to access the audience/market, and therefore the value they place on benefits.

A few practical steps to valuing sponsorship are:

1. Create an inventory to include all tangible assets
2. Calculate the value of each asset
3. Determine and list the brand alignment value based on your understanding of the sponsor's objectives e.g., corporate social responsibility, increased brand awareness, synergy between the brand and the audience for the event/programme
4. List the alignment values to the Council outside of the financial value
5. Apply price adjusters – increase or decrease the value according to brand alignment and other values that cannot be financially assessed, such as:

 Alignment with for the sponsor's business objectives/target audience

  Market conditions

 Alignment with the Council's core objectives, strategy, or policy

The commercial team can provide support and advice in valuing sponsorship agreements.

If a sponsor negotiates and offers a lower sum than the package is worth, it is good practice to reduce the package proportionately but in tandem with the sponsor. Understand which assets are most valuable to them and re-assess the proposal taking into consideration the actual cost to the Council.

The final valuation exercise should be recorded & signed using the Sponsorship Database Entry Form.

Ensure that the sponsor understands exactly what is included in their sponsorship package before finalising, even fine details such as the size of logo that will be permitted on each platform.

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

Appendix 2 – Evaluating Sponsors

The financial value of the sponsorship must be set by the Council. See Appendix 1- Calculating Sponsorship Worth for more information on valuing sponsorships.

In all instances where an offer of sponsorship is made to the Council by more than one organisation, all potential sponsors should be evaluated through a fair and equal process that ensures that the chosen sponsor offers best value to the Council.

The officer managing the sponsorship should form an evaluation team, consisting of at least one other key member of staff relevant to the event. The team should use an agreed evaluation criteria to select a sponsorship offer and document this evaluation in the Sponsorship Database.

The overall financial value (including added value), corporate fit with the Council's objectives and the compatibility to the programme or event are the key criteria.

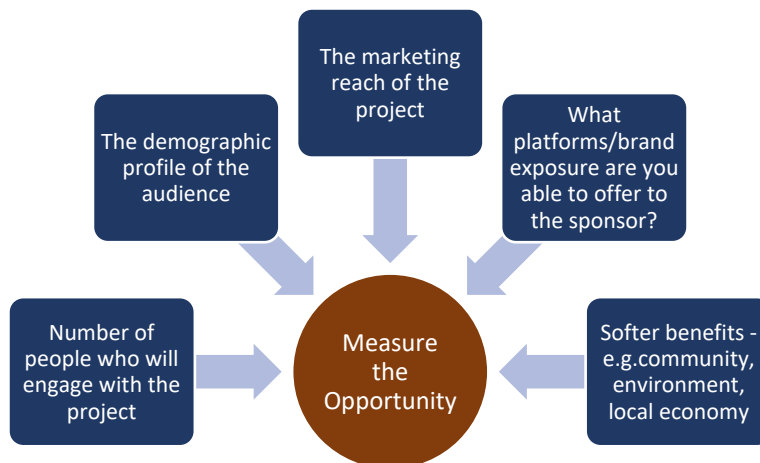
Other benefits by way of goods, services or knowledge share must be carefully evaluated to ensure they are useful and/or offer savings to the Council.

If the selected sponsor isn't the highest overall financial value to the Council, this must be justified and documented on the sponsorship database.

Appendix 3 – Marketing the Sponsorship Opportunity

Quantify the Offer

Understand exactly what the project can offer to a sponsor. This could be exposure to a large volume of people, or to a smaller targeted audience or simply an alignment with a theme that speaks to the values of their business. The offer should be about the benefits that will appeal to a sponsor, not the general benefits of the project to residents or WBC (Wokingham Borough Council).



Identify the Target Market

Using the data that has been collated, identify the market sectors that are most likely to benefit from an association with the project. This will help to attract the right brands to align with the project.

Understanding the target market will make it easy to identify the best way to reach them. This may be through a blanket 'call to action' via social media or press release for example, or by direct contact with individual businesses.

Plan the Campaign

CEM should be engaged from the outset and they can advise on the best course of action to reach appropriate audiences. If they cannot directly run a campaign, they will be on hand to check the copy and ensure it remains on brand and appropriate.

Capture Data and Measure Results

Sponsorship can bring lasting relationships which can develop to provide mutual benefit and added value to residents. Post-event evaluation is essential to ensure the sponsor is kept informed and involved and to modify future sponsorship arrangements to maximise the benefits.

Case studies and soundbites from successful sponsorships can be used, with consent, to attract new sponsors.

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

Appendix 4 – Sponsorship Database Entry Form

Please complete and return to commercial@wokingham.gov.uk; SharedLegalSolutions@Wokingham.gov.uk and Business Services Business.Services@wokingham.gov.uk

A copy of all documentation and approvals should be included including a PDF/jpeg copy of the signed contract which will be sent to legal services.

SPONSOR COMPANY DETAILS	
Company Name	
Trading Name (if different)	
Nature of Business	
Registered Company Number	
Registered Company Address	

SPONSOR'S CONTACT DETAILS	
Contact Name	
Contact Number	
Contact Email Address	

SPONSORSHIP INFORMATION	
Activity Sponsored	
Date/s of Sponsorship	
Benefits to Sponsor	e.g., Logo on website
Costs of Delivering the Sponsorship	
Total Value of Sponsorship	
Benefits to Council	e.g., financial contribution £ Goods/services £
Total Value to Council	
Actual Value to Council	= Total value to Council less costs

COUNCIL INFORMATION	
Service	
Cost Centre	
Service Officer Name	
Head of Service Name	
Other Service Contacts/Comments	

Wokingham Borough Council – Sponsorship Policy and Procedure

Appendix 5 – Sponsorship Authorisation

Attach a copy of the draft sponsorship proposal and evidence of how sponsor suitability was assessed including all engagement where appropriate with:

- Legal
- Finance Business Partner
- Business Services
- Commercialisation
- Exec member
- Other parties as appropriate

If this sponsorship was selected over other sponsorship opportunities, please attach the evaluation documentation.

Cost Centre Manager £5,000 and under

Name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: --/--/----

Comments: _____

Head of Service or Director/AD Between £1,001 - £30,000

Name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: --/--/----

Comments: _____

Director/Executive Member - £30,000+

Name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: --/--/----

Comments: _____

Name: _____

Signed: _____ Date: --/--/----

Comments: _____

TITLE	Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	Finchampstead North; Finchampstead South; Wokingham Without;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framaliccio
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan - Lindsay Ferris

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The report considers the findings of the examination of the submission Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan, prepared by Finchampstead Parish Council and volunteers, and the modifications recommended by the independent Examiner. If those modifications are accepted, approval for the plan to progress to a public vote at referendum is sought. If one or more recommendations are not accepted, the reasoning must be subject to 6-week period of consultation.

The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan if made (adopted) will become part of the development plan and be used alongside the Wokingham Borough Council's local plans to guide decisions on planning applications.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive

- 1) Accepts the modifications recommended by the Independent Examination into the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan (as set out in Enclosure 1) and for the modified plan to proceed to referendum;
- 2) Agrees that the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan, as modified in accordance with the recommendations of the Examiner, meets the basic conditions and complies with the provisions of Paragraph 8 (1) (a) (2) of Schedule 4B to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Localism Act 2011);
- 3) Agrees to publish the 'Decision Statement' as set out at Enclosure 2 of this report;
- 4) Authorises the Director of Place and Growth, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning and Local Plan, to agree minor factual and consequential modifications necessary to the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan, the Decision Statement, and other supporting documents prior to the referendum;
- 5) Agrees the referendum be organised and conducted in the Finchampstead neighbourhood area.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Finchampstead Parish Council (“the Parish Council”) has produced a draft Neighbourhood Plan (“the Plan”) to help shape how development is managed in their area. The Plan, which is available on the Wokingham Borough Council’s (“the Council”) website¹, 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.

In accordance with the regulations governing neighbourhood planning, the Council carried out a six-week consultation on the submission version of the draft Plan between 12 October and 23 November 2022 to invite comments. A total of 51 responses were received from various stakeholders.

An independent examiner was appointed in consultation with the Parish Council to test whether the Plan met the basic conditions and other requirements of legislation, and to recommend whether the Plan could proceed to referendum. The report of the Examiner was received in May 2023.

The Independent Examiner concludes that, subject to inclusion of a number of recommended modifications, the Plan meets the basic conditions set out in the legislation and can proceed to referendum. The majority of modifications are minor amendments to policy wording. However, the Examiner has recommended the deletion of the two proposed housing allocations (totalling 4 dwellings) and the deletion of two proposed areas of separation.

The Examiner also concludes that the boundary for the purposes of the referendum on the Plan should be the boundary of the designated Neighbourhood Area for the Plan.

Process dictates that the Council must now formally decide what action to take based on the Independent Examiner’s recommendations. In collaboration with the Parish Council, it is recommended that the Independent Examiner’s recommended modifications are accepted in full and that the modified Plan should proceed to referendum. Each of the recommended modifications is set out in a draft Decision Statement (see Enclosure 2).

It is anticipated that the referendum would take place on 7 September 2023 and, if successful, Full Council approval will be needed to formally ‘make’ (adopt) the plan.

Once made, the Plan will form part of the statutory development plan for the borough and thereby carry significant weight in the determination of planning applications and appeals in or affecting Finchampstead Parish. At this time, the Parish Council will benefit from receipt of 25% of the revenues from the Community Infrastructure Levy arising from the development that takes place in their area. This reflects a 10% increase on the 15% available to parish councils where there is no neighbourhood plan in place.

BACKGROUND

Neighbourhood Planning

¹ <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=631590>

Neighbourhood planning was introduced through the Localism Act 2011 and is a means for local communities to take the lead on preparing local planning policy, to sit alongside the Council's planning policies, helping to shape how new development is managed in their area. Communities prepare Neighbourhood Development Plans (often referred to as Neighbourhood Plans) to set out specific planning policies which help shape and guide development in their area.

The broad stages in producing a neighbourhood plan are as follows:

- 1) Designating a neighbourhood area
- 2) Preparing a draft neighbourhood plan
- 3) Pre-submission publicity & consultation
- 4) Submission of a neighbourhood plan to the local planning authority
- 5) Submission draft plan consultation
- 6) Independent examination
- 7) Referendum
- 8) Bringing the neighbourhood plan into force

The Parish Council took the decision to produce a neighbourhood plan in 2019. Since then, stages 1-6 have been completed. This report considers the findings of the examination into the submission draft Plan, the modifications recommended by the Examiner, and if acceptable, seeks approval for the Plan to proceed to referendum (stage 7).

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan Examination

The submission version of the Plan was published for consultation between 12 October and 23 November 2022. The Plan is available on the Council's website². 51 representations were received during the consultation period.

An independent examiner was appointed in consultation with the Parish Council to review whether the submission version of the Plan met the basic conditions and other required legislation and to recommend whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. The basic conditions include:

- Having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State it is appropriate to make the Plan.
- The making of plan contributes to the achievement of sustainable development.
- The making of the Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area.

The Examiner's report was received on 2 May 2023 (see Enclosure 1)

Analysis of Issues

The Examiner's key recommendations are:

- The Plan meets the relevant legal requirements and basic conditions subject to acceptance of the recommended modifications set out in their report.

² <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=631590>

- That the Plan, as modified, should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area.
- Deletion of the two proposed housing site allocations, comprising a total of four dwellings at 'Land rear of 6-8, The Village', and 'Broughton Farm, Heath Ride' concluding the allocations not to be justified on the basis of the submitted evidence.
- Deletion of proposed policy AHD1 'Development outside of development limits', concluding that its focus is more limited in scope than local and national policy and that elements of the policy should be repositioned into policy AHD2 to provide a single and clear policy on where development will and will not be supported. It was also recommended that detailed elements relating to Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area mitigation be repositioned to policy IRS5 which addresses biodiversity matters.
- Deletion of proposed policy AHD3 'Green space and landscaping', concluding that the policy sets out a process rather than being a land use policy.
- Deletion of proposed policy AHD5 'Affordable Housing', concluding that this unnecessarily repeats existing local policy requirements.
- Deletion of proposed policy AHD7 'Caravan and mobile home site', concluding that it relates solely to matters that are controlled under separate legislation
- Modifications to proposed policy GS1 'Key gaps between settlements' to delete the two identified Areas of Separation. The Examiner concluded that these areas are strategic in nature owing to the uncertainty of the emerging LPU and their impact on a future development strategy, and that the policy wording and identification of the areas is imprecise and does not have sufficient clarity. The Examiner concluded that the proposed 'Green Wedge' and 'Green Gap' are appropriately justified and therefore retained.
- Modifications to IRS1 'Protection and enhancement of local green spaces' to delete four of the proposed Local Green Spaces (LGS), concluding that these represent extensive tracts of land contrary to national policy and guidance relating to LGS. The 10 other local green spaces were considered to be justified.

In addition to the above, the Examiner also recommended modifications to other policies within the Plan, mostly to add further clarity and precision. The Plan, as recommended to be modified, would still contain 21 policies to help guide development within the parish. For example, this includes a strong policy relating to the achievement of a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain in advance of this becoming a mandatory national requirement. The Plan also designates 8 areas of Local Green Space which the Examiner has concluded to be of demonstrable importance to the local community and which will be protected for their recreational use. Therefore, it is considered that the Plan, despite the Examiner's recommended modifications, contains many positive aspects which would add genuine value to the decision making process within the Parish.

Options and Next steps

The Council has the choice whether or not to accept each of the Examiner's recommendations. Where recommendations are not accepted, legislation requires consultation to be undertaken on the reasons and for these to be considered before proceeding. Guidance suggests that a new examination focused on the specific areas may be appropriate.

Officers have reviewed each of the Independent Examiner's recommendations and justification, and it is recommended that Executive accept the recommendations of the Examiner in full, to ensure the Plan would meet the basic conditions. Details of each of the recommendations is set out in the proposed Decision Statement, attached as Enclosure 2 to this report.

In coming to this view, it is noted that Officers advise there is scope to disagree with the Examiner's conclusion regarding policy GS1 and the approach to areas of separation. Here the Examiner's principal concern was that the identified areas take on strategic importance in the absence of any certainty in the overall spatial strategy within the parish through the emerging LPU. The Examiner was also concerned that the areas did not have spatially defined boundaries which, in their view, would be insufficiently clear or precise to allow consistent application. Officers note that neighbourhood plan Examiners and Planning Inspectors have come to different views on the concept of identifying gaps. For example, the submission version of our Core Strategy included a number of defined gaps. The Inspector deleted this policy, with the adopted plan instead including a policy referring to locations where settlement separation must be considered. More recently, Inspectors examining the emerging Bracknell Local Plan have issued a post hearing letter which indicates they likewise propose the deletion of the defined gaps.

Officers and the Parish consider that the approach taken by the Plan to identify areas of settlement sensitivity within the submitted policy is consistent with the approach taken through local plan examinations, in particular with our own Core Strategy, and that the areas of separation would be fully implementable. Notwithstanding, recognising the significant work that has gone into progressing the plan to this point, as well as the Examiner's acknowledgement that this policy area can be revisited through a future review of the Plan, it is recommended that the Examiner's modifications are accepted.

Accepting the recommendations in full would mean that no further consultation on the Plan is required and the Plan as modified, may proceed to a public vote through a referendum. A referendum version of the Plan and supporting documents would be prepared to enable this process. Whilst the Decision Statement includes details of factual and consequential changes necessary to the Plan, delegated authority is requested to allow further minor changes should this be necessary.

If the recommendation is accepted, it is anticipated that the referendum would take place on 7 September 2023.

Should more than half of those voting do so in favour of using the Plan to guide future planning decisions, the Plan must be adopted through a resolution of Full Council. At this time, it will become part of the development plan.

BUSINESS CASE

Need for the decision

In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 (as amended), the Council must make changes to the Plan necessary for it to meet the basic conditions and must arrange for a referendum to take place. This should be undertaken within a 5-week period of receiving the Examiner's report, unless agreed otherwise with the Parish Council.

Risks

The Examiner has recommended modifications to ensure the Plan meets the basic conditions. If the Council agrees that these modifications are necessary but did not implement them, the Plan would be at risk of legal challenge on the basis it does not meet the legal requirements.

There is a possibility that the community will reject the Plan through the referendum. This is the democratic right of residents. The positive engagement and consideration of the views of respondents that has taken place over a number of years in producing the Plan helps to mitigate this risk.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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 (2023/24)	£10,000 estimate (referendum)	Yes. The Council is able to access government grant to cover costs once the date for a referendum is set.	Revenue
Next Financial Year (2024/25)	Nil	Not applicable	Not applicable
Following Financial Year (2025/26)	Nil	Not applicable	Not applicable

Other Financial Information

The Council will be required to fund the examination and referendum of a neighbourhood plan up front. However, once a referendum is successfully arranged the Council can obtain grant funding from government of £20,000 (per referendum) to assist in covering the costs. Based on costs experienced with other neighbourhood plans, the combined costs of the examination and referendum are unlikely to exceed £20,000.

Once a neighbourhood plan is made (adopted), the parish councils will benefit from receipt of 25% of the revenues from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) arising from the development that takes place in their area. This reflects a 10% increase on the 15% available to parish councils where there is no neighbourhood plan in place.

The 10% gain for the parish is a 10% loss for the Council. The exact amount is currently unknown but is thought to be modest. CIL spend is also generally undertaken in conjunction with the Parish meaning the financial impact on the authority may be small

Legal implications

None envisaged. The preparation of the Plan has been undertaken in accordance with the governing legislation, and found compliant in this respect by the Examiner.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty
Equalities Assessment Form is set out in Enclosure 4 to this report. In addition, it should be noted that the Examiner was satisfied that the consultation and publicity undertaken meets regulatory requirements.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*
The Plan includes policies which provide additional detail to complement policies in the Core Strategy (2010) and Managing Development Delivery (MDD) (2014) local plans. Specific policies include maximising opportunities for walking and cycling, protecting and enhancing existing green infrastructure assets and sustainable design and construction.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
[National Planning Policy Framework](#)
[Planning Practice Guidance: Neighbourhood Planning](#)
[Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan: submission plan](#)
Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan Post Examination Tracked Change version – available on request (policyandplans@wokingham.gov.uk)

Enclosure 1: Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan Examination Report
Enclosure 2: Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan Decision Statement
Enclosure 3: Equalities Assessment

Contact James McCabe	Service Place Commissioning
Telephone Tel: 0118 908 8333	Email james.mccabe@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2038

A report to Wokingham Borough Council on the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan

**Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
BA (Hons) M.A. DMS M.R.T.P.I.**

Director – Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited

Executive Summary

- 1 I was appointed by Wokingham Borough Council in November 2022 to carry out the independent examination of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 20 December 2022.
- 3 The Plan includes a range of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. There is a very clear focus on safeguarding the character of the parish. It also proposes the designation of a Key Local Gap, Green Wedges, and a package of local green spaces.
- 4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been actively engaged in its preparation.
- 5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report, I have concluded that the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum should coincide with the neighbourhood area.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
2 May 2023

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Finchampstead Development Plan 2022-2038 (the 'Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan has been submitted to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) by Finchampstead Parish Council (FPC) in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 and its updates in 2018, 2019 and 2021. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative plan, or a potentially more sustainable plan except where this arises as a result of my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.
- 1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope. Any plan can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted Plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to be complementary to the adopted development plan. It has a clear focus on maintaining the character and appearance of the neighbourhood area and safeguarding the existing separation between its various settlements.
- 1.6 Within the context set out above, this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the neighbourhood area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by WBC, with the consent of FPC, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both WBC and FPC. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles, I have over 35 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level. I am a chartered town planner and have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service.

Examination Outcomes

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan as submitted proceeds to a referendum; or
 - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
 - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Sections 7 and 8 of this report.

Other examination matters

- 2.6 In examining the Plan I am required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
 - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
 - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan complies with the three requirements.

3 Procedural Matters

3.1 I have considered the following documents during the examination:

- the submitted Plan;
- the Basic Conditions Statement;
- the Consultation Statement;
- the Environmental Report (August 2022);
- the HRA Screening Statement (August 2022);
- the Proposed Sites for Additional Housing Topic Paper;
- the Local Green Spaces Topic Paper;
- the Separation of Settlements Topic Paper;
- FPC's responses to the clarification note;
- WBC's responses to the clarification note;
- the representations made to the Plan;
- the adopted Core Strategy (2010);
- the adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014)
- the emerging Local Plan Update (LPU);
- the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021);
- Planning Practice Guidance; and
- relevant Ministerial Statements.

3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 20 December 2022. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular. The visit is covered in more detail in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.16 of this report.

3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations made to the submitted Plan, I was satisfied that the Plan could be examined without the need for a public hearing. In coming to this conclusion, I took account of the detailed nature of many of the comments made on the Plan and the level of detail in the Plan and its supporting documents. In combination this gave me a useful and a comprehensive insight into the views which were made.

4 Consultation

Consultation Process

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become part of the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations, 2012 FPC has prepared a Consultation Statement. The Statement sets out the mechanisms used to engage all concerned in the plan-making process. It also provides specific details about the consultation processes that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (February to March 2021 and October to November 2021). It captures the key issues in a proportionate way and is then underpinned by more detailed appendices. It is a good example of a Consultation Statement.
- 4.3 The Statement sets out details of the comprehensive range of consultation events that were carried out in relation to the initial stages of the Plan. They included:
- the Parish Council Website (including a dedicated section on the Plan);
 - the Finchampstead Future Facebook page;
 - the use of posters/flyers located on community boards;
 - the display of a banner at California Crossroads;
 - the availability of hard copy documents (such as draft plans);
 - the use of surveys and questionnaires;
 - the presentations to local societies and clubs;
 - the use of drop-in sessions;
 - the information in the Parish Magazine;
 - the information in the Parish Council newsletter;
 - the attendance at Finchampstead Village Fete;
 - the local press coverage; and
 - the various exhibition stands.
- 4.4 The Statement also provides details of the way in which FPC engaged with statutory bodies. I am satisfied that the process has been proportionate and robust.
- 4.5 An associated report to the Statement provides specific details on the comments received during the first pre-submission consultation process from statutory bodies and the wider community. It identifies the principal changes that worked their way through into the submission version. This process helps to describe the evolution of the Plan.
- 4.6 I am satisfied that consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation.

- 4.7 From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that FPC sought to engage with residents, statutory bodies and the development industry as the Plan has been prepared.

Representations Received

- 4.8 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by WBC and ended on 23 November 2022. This exercise generated comments from the following organisations:

- Vortal Homes
- First West Homes
- Transport for London
- British Horse Society
- Washington Trust
- Jo He Developments Ltd
- Berkshire Gardens Trust
- Marrons (on behalf of several residents)
- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire Integrated Care Board
- Nine Mile Ride Industries
- Bewley Homes
- Defence Infrastructure Organisation
- Mrs S Cole (ET Planning)
- TA Fisher and Son (ET Planning)
- Finchampstead Parish Council
- Catesby Estates
- Elivia Homes (Southern)
- Thames Water
- Wokingham Borough Council
- TA Fisher and Son (Woolf Bond Planning)
- National Grid
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Sport England
- Surrey County Council
- Paul Newman Property Consultants Limited
- Berkshire Archaeology

- 4.9 25 representations were also received from residents/local councillors.

- 4.10 I have taken account of the various representations as part of the examination of the Plan. Where it is appropriate to do so, I make specific reference to the individual representations in Section 7 of this report.

5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

The Neighbourhood Area

- 5.1 The neighbourhood area consists of the parish of Finchampstead. Its population in 2011 was 11,990 persons living in 4,748 houses. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 12 March 2019. The parish boundaries extend in the south to Hampshire, in the north to the town of Wokingham and from Eversley in the southwest to Crowthorne and Sandhurst in the east.
- 5.2 Finchampstead has no single centre and consists of four settlements and two other significant but informal built areas as follows:
- an extensive area centred on the California Crossroads where Nine Mile Ride (B3430) crosses the B3016, referred to in the development plan as 'Finchampstead North';
 - the 'old village' in the south of the parish, around the junction of Jubilee Hill and Longwater Road;
 - the 'ribbon' settlement along the A321 running south along the eastern edge of the parish (and which joins with Crowthorne in the administrative area of Bracknell Forest Council);
 - the significant new settlement emerging at Finchwood Park as part of the Arborfield Strategic Development Location;
 - the development along the A327 Reading Road in the extreme south-west of the parish from the Tally Ho Public House and Eversley Bridge up to New Mill Lane; and
 - the small area around St James Church and the Queens Oak Public House, linked to the 'old village' by St James' Church Conservation Area and Memorial Park.
- 5.3 The remainder of the parish is predominantly in use for agricultural or forestry purposes. Previous sand and gravel extraction along the boundary with the River Blackwater has resulted in a large nature reserve (Moor Green Lakes). Further nature reserves at Manor Farm and Fleet Hill are currently under development. The National Trust land at the Ridges and Simons Wood creates recreational opportunities. The neighbourhood area also includes the California Country Park. It dates to the 1930s when it was an amusement park. It is now mostly woodland with a lake, a wetland area Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), camping park, visitor centre and café.

Development Plan Context

- 5.4 The Core Strategy was adopted in January 2010. It sets out the basis for future development in the Borough up to 2026. Policy CP9 comments that the scale of development proposals in the Borough must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility. It advises that development proposals (in addition to the strategic development locations in Policies CP18-21) within development limits will be acceptable in a hierarchical series of development locations. The modest development locations include Arborfield

Garrison, and Finchampstead North. The limited development locations include Arborfield Cross and Finchampstead. Policy CP18 identifies Arborfield Garrison as a strategic development location for the delivery of approximately 3500 homes.

- 5.5 The Core Strategy is underpinned by the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDDLDP). It was adopted in February 2014 and includes a series of development management policies and allocates sites for residential development. Policy SAL03 identifies land to rear of 216b-242a Nine Mile Ride, Finchampstead North for the delivery of around 40 dwellings (site FI140). Part of this site has now secured planning permission for up to 32 homes.
- 5.6 The following other policies in the MDDLDP are particularly relevant to the Finchampstead Plan:
- Policy CC03 Green Infrastructure, Trees, and Landscaping
 - Policy CC04 Sustainable Design and Construction
 - Policy CC09 Development and Flood Risk
 - Policy TB05 Housing Mix
 - Policy TB06 Development of Private Residential Gardens
 - Policy TB15 Major Town and Small Town /District Centre Development
 - Policy TB21 Landscape Character
 - Policy TB23 Biodiversity and Development
 - Policy TB24 Designated Heritage Assets
 - Policy TB26 Buildings of Traditional Local Character and Areas of Special Character
- 5.7 WBC is preparing a new Local Plan that will replace the existing Core Strategy and MDD Local Plan in due course. The new plan, known as the Local Plan Update (LPU), will cover an extended period. This was envisaged to be up to 2037/38 in the last stage of consultation but is now likely to be for a longer period. Consultation has taken place on an Issues and Options (2016), a draft Plan (2020) and a Revised Growth Strategy (2021). A detailed timetable for the continued preparation of the LPU will be published in Spring 2023 once WBC has assessed the implications of the national consultation exercise on proposed changes to national planning policy.
- 5.8 The submitted Plan has been prepared within its wider development plan context. In doing so it has relied on up-to-date information and research that has underpinned previous and existing planning policy documents in the Borough. This is good practice and reflects key elements in Planning Practice Guidance on this matter.

Unaccompanied Visit

- 5.9 I visited the neighbourhood area on 20 December 2022. I approached the parish from Hartley Witney and Eversley to the south. This allowed me to understand its relationship with the surrounding landscape and its connection with the strategic highway network.
- 5.10 I looked initially at Finchampstead Village. I saw its overall attractiveness. I saw the relationship between the school, the King George VI Playing Fields and the Memorial

Hall and Sports Club. I saw that the War Memorial was in a prominent position by the Playing Fields. I saw the location of the proposed housing allocation in this part of the parish.

- 5.11 I then looked at Finchampstead Church both from the inside and the outside. I paid particular attention to the proposed local green space. I then took the opportunity to walk along White Horse Lane so that I could look at the proposed Area of Separation as identified in the Plan. I saw the scale and nature of the landscape to the north of White Horse Lane. I also experienced the tranquillity of this part of the parish.
- 5.12 I then drove to California Crossroads. I saw the rather complicated highways arrangements and the way in which the commercial services were located around the crossroads. I also saw the extensive use of the facilities during the lunchtime period. From the crossroads I walked to the proposed Gorse Ride Woods local green space (LGS). I saw the way in which it was located within the surrounding residential areas.
- 5.13 I then drove to the California Country Park. I saw its scale and the range of static chalets and the touring park.
- 5.14 I then looked at the proposed Green Wedge on either side of the B3016. I saw that the area to the west of the road (Sand Martins Field) was largely open with some trees, and that the area to the east of the road (Washington Fields) had a significant tree cover in its southern part and had a common boundary with the rear of houses in Foxcote to the east. I then walked through to Sandhurst Road and looked at the proposed Local Key Gap which straddles the road. I saw that it was heavily-wooded except for the parcel of land occupied by Silverstock Manor (to the north of the road).
- 5.15 I then looked at the two National Trust sites off the B3348 (Wellingtonia Avenue) proposed as LGSs. I saw that Simon's Wood was more formal and enjoyed an off-road car park. I saw that the parking for The Ridges was more informal with areas alongside the north of the highway. I then looked at the proposed LGS at Moor Green Lake, off Lower Sandhurst Road. I saw that its character was defined by the lakes to the north of the Blackwater River.
- 5.16 I left the neighbourhood area and headed to Wokingham. This helped me to understand the way in which the parish related to this much larger urban area to the north.

6 The Neighbourhood Plan and the Basic Conditions

6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted Plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped considerably in the preparation of this section of the report. It is a well-presented and informative document. It is also proportionate to the Plan itself.

6.2 As part of this process, I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the Basic Conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:

- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area;
- be compatible with European Union (EU) obligations and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); and
- not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

6.3 I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings.

National Planning Policies and Guidance

6.4 For the purposes of this examination the key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued in July 2021.

6.5 The NPPF sets out a range of core land-use planning issues to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following elements are particularly relevant to the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan:

- a plan led system – in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the adopted Core Strategy and the MDD Local Plan;
- delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
- building a strong, competitive economy;
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
- taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
- highlighting the importance of high-quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings;
- safeguarding the natural environment of the neighbourhood area and its biodiversity; and
- conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

- 6.6 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 13 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.
- 6.7 In addition to the NPPF, I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and ministerial statements.
- 6.8 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance in general terms subject to the recommended modifications included in this report. It sets out a positive vision for the future of the neighbourhood area. It sets out to consolidate its retail facilities on the one hand whilst safeguarding the separation of its various settlements on the other hand. The Basic Conditions Statement maps the policies in the Plan against the appropriate sections of the NPPF.
- 6.9 At a more practical level, the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraph 16d). This matter is reinforced in Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph ID:41-041-20140306 indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise, and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.10 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. Many of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan has regard to national policy.

Contributing to sustainable development

- 6.11 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the way in which the submitted Plan contributes towards sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. The submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes policies for residential development (Policies AHD1-2) and for employment development (Policies TC1-5). In the social dimension, it includes a policy on local green spaces (Policy IRS1) and to promote a range of house types and tenure (Policies AHD3 and 5). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built, and historic environment. It has specific policies on the rural character of the parish (Policy D2), heritage assets (Policy D3) and to ensure the ongoing separation of the built elements of development from each other (Policy GS1). FPC has undertaken its own assessment of this matter in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan

- 6.12 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in the Borough in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.13 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to the existing development plan context. In addition, it has sought to respond to the emerging approach in the LPU and the indicative housing figure provided by WBC. The Basic Conditions Statement helpfully relates the Plan's policies to policies in the development plan. Subject to the recommended modification in this report, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 6.14 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons explaining why an environmental report is not required.
- 6.15 In order to comply with this requirement FPC commissioned an Environmental Report for the Plan. The Report (August 2022) is both thorough and well-constructed. It addresses a series of environmental matters and the way in which the policies in the Plan would impact on the parish.
- 6.16 The Report considers a series of reasonable alternatives to the strategy set out in the Plan. Section 6 assesses the environmental implications of the following growth options:
- Option 1: No additional allocations in the Plan;
 - Option 2: Land rear of 6-8 The Village (5F1014) for the development of two dwellings;
 - Option 3: Broughton Farm, Heath Ride (5F1016) for the development of two dwellings;
 - Option 4: Land south of Reading Rd (5F1023) for the development of ten dwellings; and
 - Option 5: Maximum growth (Options 2, 3, and 4) delivering a combined total of 14 dwellings.
- 6.17 Section 10 of the report draws the following conclusions based on the options:
- the Plan proposes low growth at sites close to the Parish's pre-existing settlements. The promoted small-scale sites are considered likely to integrate with minimal impacts in relation to the SEA themes. No significant effects are considered likely in implementation of the Plan, though some minor effects are considered likely;
 - minor negative effects are considered likely in relation to the land, soil, and water SEA theme due to the small-scale loss of greenfield land in part at the allocation sites, though it is noted that the spatial strategy performs well by prioritising lower quality land for development;

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan – Examiner's Report

- minor positive effects are considered likely in relation to the biodiversity, community wellbeing, and transportation SEA themes. This largely reflects the Plan's policy provisions which seek to protect community assets (including ecological networks), enhance active travel opportunities, and improve resident safety; and
- given the low-impact spatial strategy and policy mitigation provided by the plan, broadly neutral effects (no significant deviation from the baseline) are concluded in relation to the climate change and flood risk, historic environment, and landscape SEA themes.

6.18 In the round, the Report takes a positive approach to the environment in the neighbourhood area. I comment about the way in which the Environmental Report has addressed future housing development on the parish in Section 7 of this report.

Habitat Regulations Assessment

6.19 FPC commissioned a separate Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan. It was published in August 2022. The HRA report is both thorough and comprehensive. It takes appropriate account of the significance of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) and the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

6.20 The Assessment concludes that the Plan has set out detailed policy regarding the need for net new dwellings to provide Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) contributions. In addition, it advises that WBC has confirmed that the two allocations proposed in the Plan (totalling four dwellings) could be accommodated within the strategic SANG capacity in the Borough. On this basis the Assessment considers that an adequate policy framework will be in place to ensure no adverse effects on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA either alone or in combination with other plans or projects

6.21 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of neighbourhood plan obligations.

Human Rights

6.22 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. In addition, there has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. Based on all the evidence available to me, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

Summary

- 6.23 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report, I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. It makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that they have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 The modifications focus on the policies themselves given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended modifications to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 In general terms I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the neighbourhood area. The wider community and FPC have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in their Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda. Some of the recommended modifications comment about the way in which the submitted Plan has sought to add value to the emerging policy approach in the LPU.
- 7.4 The Plan has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance (ID:41-004-20190509) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land. Annex U includes a series of non-land use projects.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies on a thematic basis. Where necessary I have identified the inter-relationships between the policies.
- 7.6 For clarity this section of the report comments on all policies whether or not I have recommended modifications in order to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

The initial section of the Plan (Sections 1-4)

- 7.8 The initial parts of the Plan set the scene for the range of policies. They do so in a proportionate way. The Plan is presented in an effective fashion. It makes good use of well-selected maps. A very clear distinction is made between the policies and the supporting text. It also highlights the links between the Plan's objectives and its resultant policies.
- 7.9 Section 1 addresses the background to neighbourhood planning. It comments about how the Plan has been prepared and how it will be used. It also includes a map of the neighbourhood area (Figure 3). It also explains how the neighbourhood plan process overlaps with the wider development plan.
- 7.10 Section 2 provides a very effective snapshot of the parish and includes an interesting and extensive range of information. It has a clear focus on the range of settlements, its rural heritage and the aptly-described coming of suburbia after 1945. Key elements of this analysis have underpinned the development of policies in the Plan.

7.11 Section 3 of the Plan comment about the Vision and the objectives of the Plan. The Vision is as follows:

‘Our vision is to embrace the need for change and to meet the expanding needs of a growing population, whilst protecting those important things that have attracted generations of people to choose Finchampstead as a place to live and raise their families.’

7.12 Section 3 also comments on a series of process and basic conditions issues. Paragraph 3.4 and Figure 4 identify the neighbourhood area. Paragraph 3.5 describes the Plan period.

7.13 Section 4 of the Plan comments about sustainability and the concept of sustainable development. It does so in a very effective way. It draws specific attention to the way in which FPC has sought to provide a local interpretation of sustainable development in the parish.

7.14 The remainder of this section of the report addresses the policies in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of this report.

7.15 The Plan addresses a comprehensive range of policies. Some have broad ambitions and are important elements in setting out a spatial strategy for the neighbourhood area. Others are more related to detailed development management issues. Certain policies in the submitted Plan are also affected by the policies in the emerging LPU. On this basis, I address the Plan’s policies under specific themes. This will allow the report to address issues on a thematic basis and then apply the findings to the individual policies. Wherever possible I have attempted to retain the topics and themes as included in the Plan. The headings (and the respective policies) used in this report are as follows:

- Policies which contribute towards a spatial strategy for the neighbourhood area (ES1, AHD1, AHD2, GS1 and IRS1);
- Employment policies (TC1-5);
- Social/community policies (AHD4-7);
- Traffic related policies (GA1/2); and
- Development Management policies (AHD3 D1-3, IRS2-6).

Policies which contribute towards a spatial strategy for the neighbourhood area.

- 7.16 This section of the report addresses Policies ES1, AHD1, AHD2, GS1 and IRS1 in the Plan. Individually and collectively, they set out key principles for future development in the neighbourhood area. In effect they set out to establish a spatial strategy for the neighbourhood area. Policies AHD1 and 2 provide specific commentary on the distribution of development in the parish within the Plan period. Their combined effect would be to concentrate new development within development limits (the principal built up areas). This approach would help to deliver sustainable development by consolidating the existing relationship between the location of housing and the location of retail, commercial and community facilities. The way in which FPC has approached this matter has a significant degree of overlap with the emerging LPU. For the purpose of preparing the neighbourhood plan WBC provided FPC with an indicative housing figure. That approach has underpinned the way in which the Plan has addressed housing growth. However, within this context there are unresolved matters in relation both to the scale and nature of new development needed in the Borough and the appropriateness or otherwise of proposed development sites in the parish. These matters have been raised in some of the representations to the Plan from the development industry.
- 7.17 The supporting text in Section 5 of the Plan sets out the background to these matters. In summary it comments/advises on the following matters:
- the historic development of houses in the parish and how this may affect the nature and location of new housing;
 - the housing needs of the parish (in Annex D Housing Needs Assessment);
 - an assessment of the local housing market (in Annex E – Estate Agents survey);
 - the Plan’s approach to site selection (Proposed Sites for Additional Development Topic Paper);
 - the Plan’s support for the proposed housing sites in the Draft LPU (January 2020) and the additional sites in the Revised Growth Strategy (2021);
 - the Plan’s own proposal to support the development of two additional housing sites (Broughton Farm, Heath Ridge, and Land to the rear of 6-8 The Village, Finchampstead);
 - the Plan’s support for an extension to the Development Limits to at 31/33 Barkham Ride and at Greenacres Farm; and
 - the Plan’s desire for the emerging LPU to remove the area of land to the rear of 216b to 242a Nine Mile Ride from the development limits.
- 7.18 The selection of the two specific sites proposed in the Plan is also addressed in the Environmental Report (the details of which are set out in Section 6 of this report). It assesses a series of alternative growth scenarios.
- 7.19 In addition the broader issue of the scale and location of new development is addressed in Policy GS1 which proposes gaps between settlements. Based on their size and scale, the gaps would fulfil similar but slightly different functions. This is reflected in the titles of the gaps. As with Policies AHD1 and 2 this policy has generated

significant commentary from the development industry. On the one hand, the gaps have been proposed to reflect the distinction between the rural and urban parts of the parish and the distinctive gaps between the different pockets of urban development. On the other hand, the proposed gaps would have a consequential impact on the availability of land in the parish for new development.

7.20 Finally the Plan also proposes a package of local green spaces in Policy IRS1. Paragraph 103 of the NPPF indicates that policies for managing development within a local green space should be consistent with those for the Green Belt. This is an important issue in the neighbourhood area given the number of proposed LGSs and their sizes. In addition LGSs should be capable of enduring beyond the end of the Plan period. As such decisions on their designation will have important implications for the overall spatial strategy of the parish.

7.21 Policy ES1 sets out environmental standards for residential development. Whilst the policy will have important implications for the local delivery of the development management system, I will address its contents in this part of the report. This acknowledges that its focus is more general (on environmental standards and building efficiency) rather than on specific design matters.

Policy AHD1 Development outside the development limits

7.22 This policy addresses development proposals outside the development limits. It offers support for rural workers dwellings in the countryside. It also sets out a policy approach towards Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG)

7.23 As submitted the policy has a rather disjointed format. This is evident in the following areas:

- its focus is on a very limited type of development;
- it fails to address the range of housing outside the development limits which would otherwise be supported by national and local policies;
- it reads out of context unless read with Policy AHD2 which comments much more positively about development which will be supported within development limits and within the strategic development location (SDL);
- the comments on SANG are very detailed matters which would sit more comfortably with the development management policies; and
- the policy comments about SANG but does not comment about Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) contributions. Whilst a neighbourhood plan can decide to address whatever it sees fit, these matters are so closely connected that it would be unreasonable to address the one without the other.

7.24 In these circumstances I recommend that the policy as submitted is deleted. As part of this process, I recommend that the first part of the policy is repositioned into Policy AHD2. This will provide a single and clear description about where development will and will not be supported in the parish. I also recommend that the SANG/SAMM elements of the policy are repositioned into Policy IRS5.

Delete the policy

Policy AHD2 Development within the development limits

- 7.25 This policy sets out to focus new development in the neighbourhood area in the identified development limits. The second part of the policy comments that development within the Finchwood Park area of the Arborfield SDL will be encouraged. It also comments that opportunities to provide higher residential development densities within this area of the SDL than those envisaged in the Core Strategy and Arborfield SDL Supplementary Planning Document will be supported, where appropriate, in order to optimise the efficient use of land.
- 7.26 I have recommended that the initial element of Policy AHD1 should be relocated into this policy. This approach will allow a single policy to set out a spatial strategy for future development in the parish. I will address this matter within the round taking account of national policy and the way in which the submitted Plan has sought to be complementary to the contents of the emerging LPU.

The approach taken and the way in which it meets the basic conditions

- 7.27 The submitted Plan has been developed in a challenging context. The existing development plan dates to 2010 and 2014. Whilst WBC has made significant process on bringing forward the LPU (by way of the Issues and Options 2016, a draft Plan 2020 and a Revised Growth Strategy 2021) the level of housing needed in the Borough and its location has yet to be examined and agreed. WBC has indicated that it will prepare a detailed timetable for the continued preparation of the Plan in Spring 2023 once it has assessed the implications of the potential national changes in the plan preparation process.
- 7.28 The matter is further complicated as development industry has submitted comments (including potential development options) in relation to the emerging LPU and the submitted neighbourhood plan.
- 7.29 In this broader context FPC has made significant progress in developing its Plan. Nevertheless, I am not satisfied that the approach which has taken on future housing development meets the basic conditions for the following reasons:
- the Plan has attached too much weight and significance to the overall level and distribution of housing growth as currently set out in the LPU;
 - the Plan does not specifically propose the allocation of the sites included in the parish in the LPU;
 - in any event that Plan does not propose any detailed guidance about the development of the sites in the LPU;
 - the alternative options in Environmental Report are very restricted and the approach taken has been influenced by the way in which the Plan has addressed the proposed housing sites in the LPU;
 - the two specific housing sites promoted in the submitted Plan are insufficiently justified and fail to address the factors which have caused earlier planning application on those sites to be refused planning permission. I have noted the

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan – Examiner’s Report

comments which have been made on the Plan about the lack of clarity about the extent to which the two sites concerned are intended to be allocated. I have taken account of FPC's response to the clarification note which advised that its intention was to allocate the two sites. For the purpose of this report, I refer to them as the allocated sites.

I comment on these matters in more details in the following sections of this report

- 7.30 The submitted Plan has sought to follow the approach taken up to this point in the LPU. Nevertheless, the outcome as set out in the submitted Plan is neither evidence-based nor appropriate. In particular, the implication is that the sites concerned will eventually be included in the LPU and that others will not. This approach may have been acceptable if the Local Plan was more advanced and had been examined. However, that level of certainty does not currently exist. Indeed, at this point WBC has not determined a detailed timetable for the submission and examination of the LPU. In these circumstances, the relationship between the submitted Plan and the emerging LPU does not fully have regard to national guidance on this matter in Planning practice guidance (ID: 41-009-20190509). This is a product of the stage of the production of the two plans rather than the clear willingness locally to ensure that the two plans are complementary in their contents and approaches.
- 7.31 In a related fashion, the submitted Plan has not provided any detail on the potential development of the sites currently identified in the emerging LPU in the parish. Plainly that would have been an onerous task. However, it would have presented an opportunity for FPC to address new housing development in the parish in the round and to develop specific policies for sites which it intended to allocate in the Plan.
- 7.32 The approach taken in the Plan translates into the Environmental Report. Overall, its assessment of the impact of the Plan's policies in the environment is very good. However, its assessment of reasonable alternatives (Section 5 of the Environmental Report) is very limited. The identified five options include one for no growth. Option 5 would deliver the highest level of growth but is restricted to 14 dwellings. This limited assessment of alternative options acknowledges (in paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4 of the Report) that the proposed sites in the emerging Local Plan had already been considered as strategic commitments.
- 7.33 In its response to the clarification note FPC comments that it is satisfied that it has addressed the full range of sites which have come forward in the consultation exercises and discussions which took place during the plan preparation process. I am satisfied that this has been the case. Nevertheless, the Environmental Report does not comment about the range of sites which have been promoted by the development industry. As such it does not provide any assurance that all reasonable alternatives have been assessed. Similarly, it does not offer any guidance about how sites have been considered and then pursued or not pursued in the plan-making process.
- 7.34 The Proposed Sites for Additional Housing (Edition 2) Topic Paper comments about the two small sites proposed in the submitted Plan as follows:

'5F1014 Land rear of 6-8 The Village - This is a very small location within the Finchampstead Village Development Limit. It has been previously promoted as a location for two units of Affordable or Social Housing. Such a development in this location would have no material impact on the wider community.'

5F1016 Broughton Farm, Heath Ride - This is a very small location to the rear of properties fronting Heath Ride and comprises an area of grass and gravel with several outbuildings, and a disused piggery. Although outside of the Finchampstead North development Limit (and will remain so), it is arguably a 'brownfield' site, and a small development here would be in context with other existing housing along Heath Ride and would have no material impact on the wider community.'

- 7.35 I have taken account of the Plan's commentary on these sites and assessed them against my own observations during the visit. It would not be unusual for sites to be allocated in a plan where earlier technical issues (and which resulted in the refusal of planning applications) have been resolved. However, in the round, I am not satisfied that the Plan has properly addressed the detailed implications which would arise from the development of the two sites. Indeed, the more detailed appraisal of the sites in the Topic Paper comments about the planning history associated with both sites without any assessment of the way in which future development proposals would be able to address the issues which resulted in earlier proposals to be refused planning permission. In addition, the detailed appraisal advise as follows:

'5F1014 The Village:

- *An agent has promoted the site and provided land ownership details. The site is in multiple ownership with some unresolved ownership issues. There are no housebuilders/developers on board. There are covenants affecting the site and this would need to be investigated further.*
- *No assessment has been made for the achievability of the site, as the site's suitability has not been assessed.*
- *No assessment has been made for the developability of the site, as the site's suitability has not been assessed.*

5F1016 Broughton Farm:

- *The site lies just outside the settlement of Finchampstead North and development would fail to achieve a satisfactory relationship to the existing settlement, forming an illogical protrusion. The site is backland in nature and accessed from Heath Ride, an unadopted track that is unmade with numerous potholes. The site is not considered to be suitable for residential development.*
- *The site lies just outside the settlement of Finchampstead North and it is considered that development would fail to achieve a satisfactory relationship to the existing settlement, forming an illogical protrusion.'*

- 7.36 Taking account of all the evidence, I am not satisfied that the Plan has made a compelling case for the allocation of the two sites in the Plan.

The recommended modifications

- 7.37 Based on these conclusions, I recommend a package of recommended modifications. In general terms they are designed to ensure that the Plan has regard to national policy and is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan. The basic conditions test for any neighbourhood plan is against the adopted development plan. I have taken account of Planning Practice Guidance ID: 41-009-20190509 which comments about circumstances where a neighbourhood plan is being prepared at the same time as an emerging local plan. WBC and FPC have sought to ensure that the submitted Plan and the emerging LPU can proceed in a complementary fashion. However, the submitted Plan has made a series of strategic statements which are neither justified by the local evidence nor by the stage reached by the emerging LPU. I recommend elsewhere in this report that FPC considers a review of the housing elements of any 'made' Plan once the LPU has been adopted. Plainly at that point the strategic delivery of housing in both the Borough and the parish will be much clearer.
- 7.38 I recommend that the two allocations in the Plan are deleted from the text in the Plan for the reasons set out in paragraph 7.29.
- 7.39 I recommend that the supporting text about the changes to the development limits in relation to Barkham Ride are deleted.
- 7.40 Also I recommend that wider modifications are made to the supporting text to address the comments in this report and to reflect the recommended modifications to Policies AHD1 and AHD2.
- 7.41 I recommend that the policy comments in a general way about how new development will be concentrated within development limits and that development outside the development limits will only be supported where it complies with national and local planning policies. This approach will ensure that development takes place in sustainable locations which are near retail, commercial and community facilities. In this context, it will take an approach to development which is based on existing development plan policies. On this basis it will not address at this stage any development which may be promoted in the parish in the adopted version of the LPU.

Replace the policy with:

'Development proposals within the Development Locations will be supported where they comply with Policy TB06 of the Managing Development Delivery Plan and with Policy D3 of this Plan.

Development proposals within the Finchwood Park area of the Arborfield Strategic Development Location will be supported. Proposals which would provide higher residential development densities within Finchwood Park than those envisaged in the Core Strategy and Arborfield SDL Supplementary Planning Document will be supported, where they comply with other design and layout criteria which apply to this site.

Development proposals outside the Development Locations will only be supported where they are in accordance with national and Borough planning policies.'

Replace Sections 5.1 to 5.4 of the Plan with the text set out in Appendix 1 of this report.

Policy GS1 Key Gaps between settlements

- 7.42 This policy has two related parts. The first comments that within Local Key Gaps and Green Wedges as defined on 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.
- 7.43 The second part comments that 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. The Plan identifies two important areas of separation: the first is the area between Finchampstead North and the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area. The second is the area identified between Arborfield Garrison SDL and the residential development fronting Reading Road.
- 7.44 This policy is underpinned by the Separation of Settlements Topic Paper. It sets out the Plan's approach to this matter. I have taken account of the information presented. However, there is a degree of inconsistency between the contents of the Topic Paper and Policy/Figure 7. This is not unusual as the policy in the Plan has commented and assessed the information in its evidence base. For clarity this report comments on the proposed Local Key Gaps, the Green Wedges and Areas of Separation as shown in the policy and on Figure 7.
- 7.45 I looked at the various proposed designations carefully during the visit. As the Topic Paper comments I saw the way in which they sought to reflect and safeguard the existing distribution of built development in the parish and to prevent the coalescence of the different settlements.
- 7.46 Based on all the information available to me, including my own observations, I am satisfied that the proposed Green Wedge is entirely appropriate and meets the basic conditions. In specific terms I am satisfied that it is local in scale and properly identifies an important green wedge of land to the east and west of Finchampstead Road (B3016). In addition, the parcels of land concerned are clear and well-defined. Their definition in the Plan will allow the residential development off Finchampstead Road to remain distinctive from the residential development off Nashgrove Lane to the west.
- 7.47 Based on all the information available to me, including my own observations, I am similarly satisfied that the proposed Local Key Gap (based around Sandhurst Road) is entirely appropriate and meets the basic conditions. In specific terms I am satisfied that it is local in scale and properly identifies an important key gap to the east and west of Sandhurst Road. In addition, the parcels of land concerned are clear and well-defined. The definition of the Key Gap in the Plan will safeguard a clear and distinctive break in built development which exists between Nine Mile Ride to the south and the railway

line to the east. Whilst Sandhurst Road runs through this tract of land it does not inherently detract from the openness and attractiveness of the area.

7.48 The proposed Local Key Gap includes Silverstock Manor to the north-east of Sandhurst Road. Whilst the accommodation on the site is modest, the overall land holding is significant. I have considered the detailed comments on this matter received from the owner of the Manor. On the balance of the evidence available to me, I am satisfied that it is appropriate for the Manor to be included within the Local Key Gap. I have reached this conclusion for two principal reasons. The first is that the Gap needs to be considered in the round and the exclusion of the residential curtilage would fragment its overall effectiveness. The second is that the format of the policy does not necessarily prevent development coming forward in the proposed Gap which responds positively to the ambitions of the wider policy.

7.49 Figure 7 shows two proposed Areas of Separation. The policy itself also describes their general location. Specific parcels of land are not defined within either of the two proposed areas on Figure 7 beyond an indicative jagged line. This element of the policy has attracted representations from the development industry.

7.50 I sought FPC's comments about the extent to which the proposed Areas of Separation would be a strategic rather than a local matter. I also sought its comments about how the policy would be applied consistently. In relation to the first matter FPC commented that:

'Core Strategy Policy CP11 is the strategic policy relating to development in the countryside. The overall aim of Policy CP11 is to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. The FNDP is clear that there are strong local perceptions that 'informal areas of habitation' exist within the parish irrespective of their having no formal 'settlement designation' through the adopted development plan. The Important Areas of Separation identified on Figure 7 and associated policy wording in GS1, are intended to add additional localised detail to CP11. The proposed areas of separation are therefore considered to be non-strategic in nature, providing a local context. Their identification would not necessarily preclude development provided the location and design of development would not lead to the separate identities of built-up areas being unacceptably compromised.'

7.51 In relation to the second matter FPC commented that:

'Policy CP11 has the aim of protecting the separate identity of settlements and maintaining the quality of the environment. Policy GS1 and Figure 7 simply highlight two areas where these aims are of particular importance in the parish area, which adds local interpretation of the strategic policy aim. Implementation is straightforward. In essence, by identifying the Important Areas of Separation, this matter will be duly noted and considered by WBC when assessing planning applications. The fact that boundaries are not identified does not inhibit appropriate assessment and indeed the group are aware that some plans take a similar approach to settlement separation, i.e., listing areas of sensitivity without a policies map designation.'

7.52 I have considered these responses very carefully. On the balance of the evidence available to me I am not satisfied that the proposed Areas of Separation are justified and therefore meet the basic conditions. I have reached this judgement for the following reasons:

- the proposed designation of areas of separation has not been considered in the round with the overall future strategy for the neighbourhood area. In this context there is a clear relationship with the conclusion which I have reached on Policies AHD1 and ADH2. In the absence of any certainty of the overall future strategy for the parish in the LPU the designation of areas of separation could take on a strategic importance for future development in the parish;
- whilst the intention of the policy to add local value to Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy is entirely appropriate in principle, the submitted policy offers little further clarity beyond the contents of that Policy CP11;
- this matter is further reinforced as the policy has not sought to define the spatial boundaries of the proposed areas of separation; and
- the lack of any spatial definition of the Areas will not bring the clarity and precision required by the NPPF for a neighbourhood plan. The lack of any spatial definition will not allow WBC to apply the intended approach with any consistency throughout the Plan period.

7.53 I recommend that the policy element relating to the Areas of Separation is deleted and that the proposed Areas of Separation are removed from Figure 7. I also recommend consequential modifications to the supporting text. As with other policies, this matter could be addressed in any future review of the Plan in due course.

7.54 The policy proposes an identical approach for the Key Local Gap and the Green Wedges. Whilst they fulfil slightly different functions, I am satisfied that the policy is written in a general and non-prescriptive fashion which will allow it to be applied as necessary to the designated areas. Nevertheless, I recommend modifications to the policy so that it explicitly comments about the identification of the Key Local Gap and the Green Wedges and so that it can be applied in an equally effective way in both locations.

Replace the policy with:

‘The Plan identifies Key Local Gaps and Green Wedges on Figure 7.

Development proposals should respond positively to the identification of the key local gaps and green wedges. Development proposals will be supported where it can be demonstrated that they would not unacceptably affect the function of the gap or wedge, and/or not unacceptably reduce the physical and visual separation of settlements, or distinct parts of a settlement concerned.’

Delete the Important Areas of Separation from Figure 7.

Replace Section 7 of the Plan with the text set out in Appendix 2 of this report.

Policy IRS1 Local Green Spaces

- 7.55 This policy proposes the designation of a package of local green spaces (LGS). It is underpinned by the information in Annex J (Local Green Spaces Assessment).
- 7.56 The proposed LGSs range from the area around St. James Church (LGS1), to the Memorial Park at Finchampstead (LGS8) to a range of country parks and nature reserves. The details in the Assessment include the extent to which the proposed LGSs meet the criteria for designation in the NPPF. In the round, the Assessment has addressed this important matter in a very thorough and robust fashion.
- 7.57 WBC has commented to the designation of four of the proposed LGSs. In relation to LGS1 (St James Church, Finchampstead) it comments about the details of the proposed boundaries and the overlap with the designated Conservation Area. In relation to LGS 5 (Simons Wood), 7a (Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve) and 9 (The Ridges) it comments about the size of the proposed LGSs. I address these four proposed LGSs in paragraphs 7.60 to 7.74 of this report. I raised these matters in the clarification note together with my own question about the size of proposed LGS 4 (California Country Park and Longmoor Bog).

The other proposed LGSs

- 7.58 On the basis of all the information available to me, including my own observations, I am satisfied that the other proposed LGSs comfortably comply with the three tests in the NPPF. In several cases they are precisely the type of green space which the authors of the NPPF would have had in mind in preparing national policy.
- 7.59 In addition, I am satisfied that their proposed designation would accord with the more general elements of paragraph 101 of the NPPF. Firstly, I am satisfied that the designations are consistent with the local planning of sustainable development. They do not otherwise prevent sustainable development coming forward in the neighbourhood area and no such development has been promoted or suggested. Secondly, I am satisfied that the LGSs are capable of enduring beyond the end of the Plan period. They are an established element of the local environment and have existed in their current format for many years. In addition, no evidence was brought forward during the examination that would suggest that the proposed LGSs would not endure beyond the end of the Plan period.

LGS1 St James Church, Finchampstead

- 7.60 I looked at this parcel of land during the visit. I saw that it was focused on the Church and the green spaces which provide its context (including the burial area).
- 7.61 Whilst there is an overlap with the conservation area, I am satisfied that the proposed LGS bring added and specific value. I am also satisfied that it meets the three tests in paragraph 102 of the NPPF.

General comments on the size of LGSs4, 5, 7a and 9

- 7.62 The LGS Topic Paper and FPC's response to the clarification note acknowledge that national policy provides no definitive guidance on the size of a LGS which would be

'local in character' or 'an extensive tract of land'. It is commonly accepted that this analysis is a matter of judgement both for the qualifying body (here FPC), the local planning authority (here WBC) and the appointed independent examiner. Plainly these are the four largest proposed LGSs in the parish. FPC acknowledges that they are at the higher end of LGSs which have been considered to meet the LGS criteria elsewhere in England.

- 7.63 I am satisfied with the accuracy of FPC's comments that the four LGSs are self-contained parcels of land and that they are not realistically capable of being subdivided to create smaller parcels of land.
- 7.64 For the avoidance of doubt in each case I am satisfied that the four proposed LGSs are within reasonably close proximity to the communities which they serve and that they are demonstrably special to the local community and hold a particular local significance. I am also satisfied that they meet the more general requirements as set out in paragraph 101 of the NPPF. Their proposed designation as LGSs would be entirely consistent with the local planning of sustainable development. Similarly, I am satisfied that they are capable of enduring beyond the end of the Plan period. On this basis the following commentary focuses solely on the size of the proposed LGSs and on a site-by-site basis. The comments are based on my own observations of the four areas during the visit.

LGS4 California Park and Longmoor Bog

- 7.65 The proposed LGS is approximately 40 ha in size. It consists of a clearly-defined public open space. It contains valuable heaths and woodland which are typical characteristics of the area. It contains the Longmore Bog SSSI with special board walk access for observers of flora and fauna. The Park also includes an extensive car park and a small holiday park.
- 7.66 The Country Park is owned by WBC. WBC does not object to its designation as LGS.
- 7.67 I have taken account of all the information on this matter. As I mentioned earlier the importance of the Country Park within the parish and in the surrounding parishes is clear. However, I have concluded that in the context of the third criterion in paragraph 102 of the NPPF that it is an extensive tract of land. On this basis I recommend the deletion of the proposed LGS.

Delete LGS4

LGS5 Simons Wood

- 7.68 The proposed LGS is approximately 30 ha in size. It is owned and managed by the National Trust. It consists of diverse woodland and heathland surrounding natural water courses into a large Heath Pond. The site is used for informal recreation. In the main this is walking although horse riding is permitted in some areas. There are circular walks commencing from the car park accessed at Wellingtonia Avenue.
- 7.69 I have taken account of all the information on this matter. As I mentioned earlier the importance of the Wood within the parish and in the surrounding parishes is clear.

However, I have concluded that in the context of the third criterion in paragraph 102 of the NPPF that it is an extensive tract of land which is different to the scale of other proposed LGSs which are widely acknowledged to be local in character. On this basis I recommend the deletion of the proposed LGS.

Delete LGS5

LGS7a Moor Green Lakes

- 7.70 The proposed LGS is approximately 35 ha in size. The site is owned by Cemex UK Ltd and is managed by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership and the Moor Green Lakes volunteer group. It is located adjacent to the Blackwater River with the Blackwater Valley path running to the south. It is an attractive nature reserve. It has a car park and is accessible by public rights of way with informal paths within the reserve. The reserve includes open water with islands, woodland, and meadow areas around the Moor Green lakes with access all-round the lakes. It is peaceful and remote and has an attractive and informal character.
- 7.71 I have taken account of all the information on this matter. As I mentioned earlier the importance of the Lakes within the parish and in the surrounding parishes is clear. In this case its importance is highlighted by its importance for wildlife and the commendable work undertaken by volunteers. However, I have concluded that in the context of the third criterion in paragraph 102 of the NPPF that it is an extensive tract of land. On this basis I recommend the deletion of the proposed LGS.

Delete LGS7a

LGS9 The Ridges

- 7.72 The proposed LGS is approximately 30 ha in size. It is owned and managed by the National Trust. It consists of diverse woodland and heathland surrounding natural water courses into Spout Pond and down to the Blackwater from the Ridges. It is used for informal recreation. In the main this is walking although horse riding is permitted in some areas. There are circular walks together with a 'Ridges Ramble' for residents.
- 7.73 I have taken account of all the information on this matter. As I mentioned earlier the importance of The Ridges within the parish and in the surrounding parishes is clear. It also operates in a complementary way to Simons Wood (as proposed as LGS5). However, I have concluded that in the context of the third criterion in paragraph 102 of the NPPF that it is an extensive tract of land. On this basis I recommend the deletion of the proposed LGS.

Delete LGS9

- 7.74 I appreciate that the judgements which I have reached on the four proposed LGSs will be a disappointment to FPC. Nevertheless, for clarity I confirm that the recommended modification is a matter-of-fact assessment of the spaces against the criteria. It has no bearing on the effectiveness or robustness of the way in which the four spaces are maintained and made available to the public by their respective owners.

The policy itself

- 7.75 Neighbourhood plan policies on the designation of LGSs are underpinned by paragraph 103 of the NPPF. In effect individually plans select LGSs and then apply the national policy to the identified sites. The submitted policy generally fulfils this function. However, its second element goes beyond the matter-of-fact approach taken in the NPPF. I recommend a modification to remedy this matter which repositions the second element of the policy into the supporting text. For clarity I recommend that the proposed LGSs are listed in the policy. As submitted the policy causes the reader to look at a separate document (Annex J) to identify the LGSs

Replace the policy with:

‘The Plan designates the following areas as local green spaces:

[List LGS 1,2,3,6,7a,8,10,11,12 and 13 with their respective site names]

Development proposals within the designated local green spaces will only be supported in very special circumstances.’

At the end of the supporting text in paragraph 8.1.1 add: ‘Policy IRS1 identifies the local green spaces and sets out a policy to ensure that development is only supported within their identified areas in very special circumstances. Any change that would impact upon the Local Green Spaces must consider the need to retain and respect the value placed upon the spaces by the local community.’

Modify Figure 9 to reflect the recommended deletion of some of the proposed LGSs.

Policy ES1 Environmental Standards for residential development

- 7.76 This policy sets out a general approach towards environmental standards for new residential development. In general terms it approaches this matter in a positive and constructive fashion. It takes a non-prescriptive approach.
- 7.77 I recommend a package of modifications to ensure that the policy can be applied clearly and consistently throughout the Plan period as follows:
- shifting the focus of the policy from one which offers support to proposals to one which sets out the requirements which they should meet;
 - ensuring that the approach in the policy reflects recent updates to Part L of the Building Regulations;
 - clarifying the additionality clauses in the first two criteria;
 - clarifying that the requirement for carbon neutral homes is dependent on site-specific circumstances and the commercial viability of taking such an approach; and
 - ensuring an appropriate distinction between policy and supporting text.
- 7.78 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will assist in delivering the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

Replace ‘will be supported provided they’ with ‘should’

Replace the first criterion with: ‘The achievement improvements beyond those as defined in Part L of the Building Regulations 2021 for minor residential developments or satisfy any higher standard that is required under new national planning policy or Building Regulations will be supported.’

Replace the second criterion with: ‘In addition, major residential development should be designed to achieve carbon neutral homes where this is both practicable and viable.’

Delete the final part of the policy.

At the end of the second paragraph of 4.2 add the deleted final part of the policy.

Employment policies

- 7.79 This section of the report addresses Policies TC1-5.
- 7.80 The policies carefully reflect the type of employment which already exists in the neighbourhood area. Policies TC1 and 2 comment about general employment. Policies TC3-5 comment about retail development. In their different ways the five policies will contribute to the delivery of the economic dimension of sustainable development in the neighbourhood area.

Policy TC1 Supporting business

- 7.81 This policy addresses a series of potential development proposals within development locations but outside Core Employment Areas, those in the countryside, those involving working from home.
- 7.82 In general terms the policy takes an appropriate approach to this matter. In addition, it takes account of public comments about encouraging planned economic regeneration, with a preference being for new enterprise to be located on brownfield sites, and on existing business estates. Small local retail was the most favoured option closely followed by small business start-ups and artisan crafts.
- 7.83 Within this overall context I recommend modifications to the sub-components of the policy so that they would have the clarity and precision required by the NPPF. In the first part of the policy the recommended modifications ensure that the policy and the criteria are worded in the plural. I recommend the deletion of the first criterion in the second part of the policy. As submitted, it does not relate to the wider context of the policy. In any event Broadband is addressed elsewhere in the policy.
- 7.84 I recommend the deletion of the third part of the policy (new buildings in the countryside). As submitted its approach does not have regard to national policy. In any event any recommended rewording of the policy would simply result in a policy which repeated national and local planning policies on this issue.
- 7.85 Finally, I recommend detailed modifications to the wording of the fourth part of the policy. Whilst they ensure that it has the clarity required by the NPPF they do not alter the thrust of the submitted approach.

In part 1a replace 'It is' with 'they are'

In part 1b replace 'It does' with 'they do'

Delete part 2a.

Delete part 3.

In part 4 replace 'Development which facilitates' with 'Development proposals which would facilitate'

Policy TC2 Supporting business

- 7.86 This policy has a much sharper focus than Policy TC1. It comments that development will be supported where it contributes to the safeguarding and retention of employment and enterprise in the existing Core Employment Area (and as proposed to be refined by the LPU) at Hogwood Industrial Estate and its planned extension, in accordance with economic needs.
- 7.87 I recommend detailed modifications to the wording of the policy so that its purpose is clear. I also recommend that the final sentence is deleted and repositioned into the supporting text. This acknowledges that it comments about the way in which the policy would be implemented rather than functioning as a land use policy.
- 7.88 I also recommend that the policy title is revised so that it more properly explains its role. This would also have the effect of no longer having two policies with the same title.

Replace the policy with: ‘Development proposals which contribute to the safeguarding and retention of employment and enterprise uses in the existing Core Employment Area at Hogwood Industrial Estate and its planned extension will be supported.’

At the end of the second paragraph of section 10.3 add: ‘This expansion could provide relocation opportunities for any units removed from Greenacres industrial site.’

Replace the policy title with: ‘Supporting Core Employment Areas’

Policy TC3 Retail development -California Crossroads

- 7.89 This policy comments about the retail facilities at California Crossroads. I saw the importance of the retail facilities to the local community during the visit. I saw both the range of retail facilities and the rather complicated highway layout.
- 7.90 The policy comments that California Crossroads local centre should be supported and strengthened by maintaining its predominately Class E(a) retail uses to ensure its vitality and viability and that it continues to be the focus of local community. It comments that development proposals that protect and enhance this role and function will be supported. The improvement of the public realm is identified as a priority in the policy.
- 7.91 I recommend detailed modifications to the wording of the policy so that it has the clarity and precision required by the NPPF. The recommended modifications also make an important distinction between the retail use element in the first element and the second part which comments more broadly on improvements to the public realm.

Replace the policy with:

‘Development proposals at the California Crossroads local centre which would consolidate and strengthen its predominately Use Class E(a) and allow it to continue to be the focus of local community will be supported.’

Development proposals which would improve the public realm at the California Crossroads local centre will be supported.'

Policy TC4 Retail development - Finchwood Park

- 7.92 The policy comments that the development of the Finchwood Park Neighbourhood Centre in accordance with outline planning permission 181194 will be supported by maintaining its predominately Class E(a) retail uses in order to serve the new Finchwood Park community and ensure its vitality and viability.
- 7.93 In its response to clarification note FPC acknowledged that there was no direct need for the extant planning permission to be referenced in the policy. I recommend accordingly. I also recommend that the planning permission is referenced in the supporting text.

Replace the policy with: 'Development proposals at Finchwood Park Neighbourhood Centre which would maintain its predominately Class E(a) retail uses and serve the new Finchwood Park community will be supported.'

At the end of the second paragraph of 10.4 add '(181194)'

Policy TC5 Protection of retail facilities

- 7.94 This policy comments that proposals which provide for the retention of retail premises will be supported. It then comments that proposals that result in the loss of day-to-day shopping facilities will be discouraged unless the existing retail use is demonstrated to be no longer viable through evidence that genuine sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the facility at a reasonable value have been undertaken.
- 7.95 I recommend that the policy is modified in two ways. The first is to revise the wording in the initial part of the policy so that it more closely relates to the development management process. As submitted, the policy refers to proposals which would retain retail uses. In these circumstances development will not have taken place. The second is to capture the second sentence in a separate part of the policy. This will more clearly identify the separate elements of the policy

Replace the policy with:

'Development proposals which would consolidate the provision of retail uses and/or which assist with the retention of retail premises will be supported.'

Proposals that result in the loss of day-to-day shopping facilities will be not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that the existing retail use is no longer viable.'

At the end of paragraph 10.4 (as a separate paragraph) add: 'The second part of Policy TC5 comments about the way in which development proposals that would result in the loss of shops will be determined. The element of the policy on viability will be considered against evidence supplied with individual proposals that genuine sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the facility at a reasonable value have been undertaken.'

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan – Examiner's Report

Social/community policies

- 7.96 This section of the report comments on Policies AHD4-7.
- 7.97 In their different but related ways the four policies comment on the specific needs of people in the parish. FPC should be congratulated for grappling with these issues in such a comprehensive fashion. In the round the policies will contribute to the delivery of the social dimension of sustainable development.

Policy AHD4 Independent living, care, and accommodation for vulnerable people

- 7.98 This policy comments that development proposals for independent living housing accommodation for older residents for care homes and vulnerable communities will be supported if they comply with Policy TB09 of the MDD Local Plan and Policy H9 of the emerging LPU.
- 7.99 The policy takes a positive approach to this matter. I recommend that its format is simplified and that its reference is only to the policy in the MDD Local Plan. This will bring the clarity and precision required by the NPPF.

Replace the policy with: ‘Development proposals for independent living housing accommodation for older residents will be supported where they comply with Policy TB09 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.’

Policy AHD5 Affordable Housing

- 7.100 This policy comments that proposals for new housing must contain a proportion of affordable housing in accordance Core Strategy Policy CP5 and Policy H5 of the emerging LPU.
- 7.101 Plainly this is an important matter. However, there is no need for a neighbourhood plan to repeat or to restate existing local policies. Similarly whatever policy might eventually appear in the LPU will become part of the development plan. Given that the submitted policy brings no added value to the existing WBC approach I recommend that it is deleted, along with the supported text.

Delete the policy.

Delete section 5.7.

Policy AHD6 Provision for gypsy and travellers’ communities

- 7.102 The substance of the policy comments that the expansion of existing gypsy and traveller sites will be supported, subject to a series of criteria. The initial part of the policy comments that the retention of existing traveller sites in the parish will be supported. The final part of the policy comments that pitches will be supported at the sites as identified in the emerging LPU, providing the criteria in the substantive part of the policy are satisfied. I recommend other modifications to the policy so that it retains its broader ambition of safeguarding the existing provision for gypsy and travellers’ communities in the parish.

7.103 I recommend that the first part of the policy is deleted given that the retention of existing sites would not normally require planning permission. I also recommend that the final part of the policy is deleted. There is no need for the neighbourhood plan to offer its support to further sites which may come forward in the emerging LPU. Those sites would be underpinned by the relevant policy in that plan.

7.104 Finally I recommend associated modifications to the supporting text. As submitted the text has a hybrid format. Part of its content directly relates to the policy and part relates to how it would be applied. Part of its contents address the strategic identification of traveller sites across the Borough. The recommended modifications retain the former and remove the latter elements.

Replace the policy with:

‘Development proposals which would result in the loss of existing Gypsy and Traveller sites and pitches will not be supported unless it is clearly demonstrated that:

- **the 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**
- **it is clearly demonstrated that there is no need for such pitches in the Borough.**

The expansion of existing Gypsy and Traveller sites will be supported, where the following criteria are satisfied:

- **there is a demonstrable need for additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches within the neighbourhood area;**
- **the proposed occupiers are Gypsies and Travellers;**
- **where appropriate, proposals include appropriate landscaping to mitigate their impact on the surrounding landscape; and**
- **the proposals include the provision of or enhancement to the links to community facilities/services or contributions to upgrading roads and pathways in and around the site as appropriate.’**

Replace the supporting text (paragraph 5.8) with:

‘A full analysis of Gypsy and Traveller provision was undertaken by WBC in September 2017. This identified that approximately 17% of the total borough provision was located within the parish of Finchampstead. These locations are listed in Annex H Gypsy and Traveller Sites.

In January 2020 the WBC Local Plan Update included proposed allocations for Gypsy and Traveller pitches at two sites within Finchampstead. These two sites were retained in the Revised Growth Strategy consultation in November 2021. The first is an additional four pitches at Land to the rear of 166 Nine Mile Ride. The second is for five pitches at Tintagel Farm, Sandhurst Road. Planning permission has since been granted for the extra pitches to the rear of 166 Nine Mile Ride. If the two additional sites are included in the adopted version of the Local Plan their development will be

determined by the relevant policy in that Plan. Policy AHD6 seeks to establish a positive context within which proposals for the expansion of the existing sites can be considered and determined. It requires any such proposals to meet a series of criteria.'

Policy AHD7 Caravan and mobile homes sites

- 7.105 This policy supports maintaining the number of caravan and mobile home sites that existed in January 2020. It also offers support for the expansion of the number of homes within a current sites where both the site as current and any proposal for expansion within the boundary is fully compliant with the Mobile Homes Act 2013 as revised in March 2015. The text advises that there is only one registered caravan and touring site in the parish at California Chalet and Touring Park in California Country Park, and has approximately 44 touring caravan and camp pitches, two log camping pods and a range of chalets. It also advises that the Park has a small shop
- 7.106 Whilst I can understand the reasoning behind including the policy, it relates simply to revisions within the layout of an existing registered caravan park. As the policy confirms such matters are controlled under separate legislation. On this basis, I recommend the deletion of the policy and the associated supporting text.

Delete the policy.

Delete the supporting text (paragraphs 5.9.1 and 5.9.2).

Traffic related policies

7.107 This section of the report addresses Policies GA1 and GA2.

7.108 Their ambition is that development proposals should assist in improving the environment and contributing towards a reduction in the use of private cars.

Policy GA1 Improve environment and health from traffic pollution

7.109 This is a general policy. It identifies a series of factors with which development proposals should comply on traffic and health-related matters.

7.110 I recommend that the opening part of the policy is reconfigured to achieve two effects. The first will allow the policy to be applied on a proportionate basis. Plainly a proposal for a domestic extension will have a very different effect on the highway network than one for major residential development. The second shifts the focus of the policy to one which sets out the requirements for new development rather than commenting about what will be supported. The submitted approach has the potential to result in unintended consequences.

7.111 The various criteria in the policy are both appropriate and distinctive to the neighbourhood area. However, I recommend a modification to the second criteria. It acknowledges that whilst the planning system can seek to protect the character of the rural highway network through the location of development, it cannot directly control the use of the network, including 'rat running' as described in the policy.

Replace 'Developments will be supported where they:' with 'As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should'

In the second criterion replace 'Protect the rural lane network from increased traffic flows, especially as 'rat-runs' whilst protecting their historic nature from urbanisation in the process' with 'Respect the rural lane network and their historic character'

Policy GA2 Reduction in car use with safe personal mobility options

7.112 This policy has a similar format to that of Policy GA1. In this case its focus is on measures to secure a reduction in car use with safe personal mobility options.

7.113 I recommend the same modification to the opening part of the policy as relates to Policy GA1 and for the same reasons.

Replace 'Developments will be supported where they:' with 'As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should'

Development Management policies

- 7.114 This section of the report addresses Policies AHD3, D1-3 and IRS2-6.
- 7.115 This section deals with a range of policies which will have an impact on day-to-day planning applications in the parish. They will contribute significantly to the way in which development proposals are assessed.
- 7.116 The policies will also provide detailed guidance to developers as they prepare planning applications. This will particularly apply to Policies D1-3, IRS3 and IRS5.
- 7.117 In the round a consideration of the effectiveness of this batch of policies will be an important element of any future review of the Plan.

Policy AHD3 Green space and landscaping

- 7.118 This policy comments about the need for landscaping details to be provided for future major development in the parish.
- 7.119 As submitted the policy sets out a process to be followed rather than a land use policy which identifies the requirements for a landscaping scheme. In these circumstances I recommend the deletion of the policy.

Delete the policy.

Policy D1 Building Heights

- 7.120 This policy comments that the development of three-storey (and above) housing will generally only be supported within the area of the SDL (that part within Finchampstead Parish) and the Gorse Ride regeneration area.
- 7.121 I am satisfied that the approach to three-storey building in the areas identified is appropriate. However, I recommend that the policy clarifies the Plan's expectations elsewhere in the neighbourhood area. This will provide a more rounded effect.

Replace the policy with: 'Building heights should reflect the character and appearance of the parish. The development of 3 storey (and above) housing will only be supported within the area of the Strategic Development Location (that part within Finchampstead Parish) and the Gorse Ride regeneration area.'

At the end of the final paragraph of Section 6.1 add: 'Policy D1 addresses this important matter. The general expectation is that three-storey houses will only be supported within the Strategic Development Location. Nevertheless, there may be circumstances elsewhere in the parish where well-designed three storey houses may be appropriate. The policy applies to proposals for new three-storey houses. Proposals to add an additional storey to an existing house will be considered on their individual merits taking account of the potential impact of the development in the immediate locality.'

Policy D2 Preserving the rural character of the parish

- 7.122 This policy continues the design theme. In this case it comments that any development proposals should be located and designed to maintain the separation of settlements and to complement the relevant landscape characteristics through compliance with a series of criteria.
- 7.123 In general terms I am satisfied that the policy takes an appropriate approach to this matter. Unlike the specific approach in Policy GS1 it is general and non-prescriptive in its effect.
- 7.124 I recommend that the opening element of the policy is reconfigured so that it more closely describes its effect. In doing so the wording allows the policy to be applied in a proportionate way. As submitted the policy has a universal effect and fails to acknowledge that different proposals will have individual impacts (or none) on the rural character of the parish. I also recommend detailed modifications to some of the criteria so that their language more comfortably flows on from the opening element of the policy (as modified).

Replace the opening element of the policy with: ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should be located and designed to maintain the separation of settlements and to complement the characteristics of the landscape in the immediate locality through:’

In the third criterion replace ‘Use’ with ‘The use’

Replace the fourth criterion with ‘The use of street trees.’

Replace the fifth criterion with: ‘The protection of existing street trees.’

Policy D3 Infill, Small Plot Development and Development of residential gardens

- 7.125 This policy sets out a series of design criteria for new residential development (including land within the curtilage, or the former curtilage, of private residential gardens).
- 7.126 In general terms I am satisfied that the policy meets the basic conditions. However, I recommend a modification to the opening element of the policy so that the policy sets out a series of requirements for such developments rather than offering support subject to a series of criteria. I recommend consequential modifications to the wording of the various criteria so that they correspond with the revised opening element.
- 7.127 I also recommend the deletion of the final element of the policy which comments that all the criteria need to be met. This is an unnecessary statement given that the development plan should be read and implemented as a whole.

Replace the opening element of the policy with: ‘Development proposals for new residential development that includes land within the curtilage, or the former curtilage, of residential gardens should:’

In the first criterion replace the opening element with: ‘make a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms of:’

In the second criterion replace ‘application site provides’ with ‘provide’

Replace the third criterion with: ‘incorporate an access which meets appropriate highway standards.’

Replace the fourth criterion with ‘not lead to unacceptable tandem development.’

In the fifth criterion replace ‘The design and layout’ with ‘incorporate a design and layout that minimises’

In the sixth criterion replace ‘The development provides’ with ‘provide’

In the seventh criterion delete ‘The proposal does’

In the eighth criterion replace ‘The development is’ with ‘be located’

Delete the final element of the policy (in bold)

Policy IRS2 Protection of Outstanding Views

- 7.128 This policy has a focus on protecting identified outstanding views. It is underpinned by the information in Annex K.
- 7.129 I am satisfied that the outstanding views have been appropriately identified in the annex. The details of the views and their importance has not been challenged during the consultation process.
- 7.130 I recommend modifications both to the policy and to the supporting text so that the policy will be able to be applied with consistency in the development management process throughout the Plan period. The first part of the modified policy sets out the way in which development proposals should take account of the identified views. The second part of the modified policy sets out the implications for proposals which do not respond positively to the outstanding views. I recommend that the process elements of the policy are repositioned into the supporting text. This acknowledges that their purpose is to describe how the policy would be applied.

Replace the policy with:

‘The design, layout, scale, and massing of development proposals should take account of the outstanding views shown in Annex K.

Development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on the outstanding views will not be supported.’

At the end of the supporting text at 8.2 add: ‘An assessment of views to and from all new development within the distinctive view areas as illustrated in Annex K should accompany planning applications which may affect the integrity of the outstanding views. The re-modelling of the local topography, through cut and fill, could adversely impact on the landscape character. Therefore, new development should be adapted to

the site contours through the consideration of both near and distant views of the development from the principal public vantage points showing existing landscaping and that proposed to be established after 10 years (based upon assessment for rate of vegetation growth). Where appropriate details of how those areas to be retained for open space and/or woodland will be managed in the future should be included with planning applications.'

Policy IRS3 Protection and enhancement of the historic character of the area

- 7.131 This policy comments that 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. It also comments that 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.
- 7.132 The policy draws attention to a series of heritage assets as identified in section 8.3.1 of the Plan.
- 7.133 In general terms the policy takes an appropriate approach to this matter. In the round I am satisfied that the non-designated heritage assets identified in the Plan are appropriate in general terms and are distinctive to the neighbourhood area. I recommend modifications to the policy so that it more clearly draws attention to the proposed non-designated heritage assets (in paragraph 8.3.1) and has regard to national policy on such assets (Section 16 and paragraph 203 of the NPPF). I also recommend that the assets as listed in Section 8.3.1 of the Plan are shown on a map (or maps) in the Plan.

Replace the second sentence of the second part of the policy and the third part of the policy with:

'Development proposals should protect or enhance the historic character of the area which includes but is not limited to the sites identified in paragraph 8.3.1 of the Plan (as shown on Figure [insert number]).

The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset in the neighbourhood area should be taken into account in determining related planning applications. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be taken having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.'

Include an additional figure (or figures) in the Plan to show the location of the assets listed in paragraph 8.3.1.

Policy IRS4 Informal green spaces

- 7.134 This is a general policy which offers support to a range of proposals which would enhance the provision of open and green space.

- 7.135 I recommend that the opening part of the policy is reconfigured to achieve two effects. The first will allow the policy to be applied on a proportionate basis. Plainly a proposal for a domestic extension will have a very different effect on the need for green space than one for major residential development. The second shifts the focus of the policy to one which sets out the requirements for new development rather than commenting about what will be supported. The submitted approach has the potential to result in unintended consequences.
- 7.136 Otherwise I am satisfied that the series of objectives in the policy is entirely appropriate and reflects the character and appearance of the neighbourhood area.

Replace the opening element of the policy with ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:’

Policy IRS5 Ecologically-important areas and biodiversity

- 7.137 This is a wide-ranging policy on ecology and biodiversity. In general terms it addresses the relevant matters in an appropriate fashion. Nevertheless, I recommend a series of detailed modifications to ensure that the policy has the clarity and precision on the biodiversity agenda at both national and local level.
- 7.138 I recommend that the fourth part of the policy is deleted and repositioned into the supporting text. This acknowledges that it describes the information needed to be submitted with planning applications rather than operating as a land use planning policy. I also recommend that the first paragraph of the supporting text is modified so that it more clearly describes its intention and sets the scene for the wider policy approach.
- 7.139 I recommend that the policy is broadened so that it incorporates the element of Policy AHD1 which I have concluded would sit best within this policy in the wider context of the Plan.
- 7.140 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will provide a comprehensive parish-based dimension to national and local planning policies on this matter.

Replace the first part of the policy with: ‘Development proposals should conserve and enhance the natural environment and green spaces of the area, specifically biodiversity areas set out in Figure 23 and the TVERC Survey 2019 (Annex M TVERC Report) wherever practicable.’

Replace the second part of the policy with: ‘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 in accordance with saved policy NRM6 of the South-East Plan and policy CP8 from Wokingham BC’s Core Strategy to 2026.’

Replace the opening component of the third part of the policy with: ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:’

In the detailed criteria in the third part of the policy replace/delete the wording as follows:

Replace the first criterion with: ‘They will not have an unacceptable impact on local biodiversity or the network of sites designated as of importance for nature conservation, as evidenced through a robust specialist 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.’

Delete the third, fourth and fifth criteria.

Replace the sixth criterion with: ‘They provide a net gain of at least 10% over base value using a robust metric. Where a loss of biodiversity on site is demonstrably unavoidable, development will only be acceptable if off site compensation measures are secured to ensure the creation of like-for-like or better distinctiveness habitats so a minimum 10% gain of biodiversity overall is achieved.’

In the eighth criterion delete ‘Ensure that’ and replace ‘mitigation’ with ‘compensation’

In the ninth criterion replace ‘Take’ with ‘They take’

In the tenth criterion replace ‘Conserves’ with ‘They conserve’

In the eleventh criterion replace ‘Contain’ with ‘They contain’

Delete the fourth part of the policy.

Add a new element at the end of the policy to read: ‘All development which would result 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 that no adverse effect will occur through secured avoidance and/or mitigation measures if required.’

Replace the first paragraph of section 8.5.1 with: ‘Policy IRS5 comments about the significance of the natural environment in the parish. It seeks to ensure that development proposals do not result in the loss or deterioration of habitats, including woodlands, habitats of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity and local wildlife sites. It encourages opportunities to create links between natural habitat and wider biodiversity improvements.’

At the end of section 8.5.1 add: ‘Policy IRS5 takes a comprehensive approach to this matter. As appropriate to the proposal concerned, planning applications should 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 the

development proposal. The survey should 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, taking account of the requirements of any associated licence from Natural England.'

Policy IRS6 Trees

- 7.141 This policy comments in a general way on trees. Its focus is that development proposals should seek to retain mature or important trees, groups of trees or woodland on site. It also offers advice to proposals which would have a direct or indirect effect on trees.
- 7.142 The supporting text helpfully sets the context for the policy. It comments that tree cover in Finchampstead is 39% of the land area, has been developed over many decades, and is the highest of any parish in the Borough. It advises that there is wide diversity in species, including the iconic Wellingtonias.
- 7.143 The policy is well-considered. However, I recommend that the second and sixth elements, and the final section which refers to BS5837: 2012 are repositioned into the supporting text. This reflects that they describe how the policy would be applied (and the details to be submitted in planning applications) rather than being land use policies.

Delete parts 2 and 6 of the policy and the final paragraph.

After the supporting text in paragraph 8.5.2 add parts 2 and 6 and the final paragraph of the submitted policy (in that order)

Other matters - General

- 7.144 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly as a result of my recommended modification to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan as a result of the recommended modifications to the policies. This could extend to changing policy numbers as a result of the recommended deletion of some of the policies. It will be appropriate for WBC and FPC to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

Modification of general text (where necessary) to achieve consistency with the modified policies.

Monitoring and Review

- 7.145 Earlier parts of this report have drawn attention to the relationship between the submitted Plan and the emerging LPU. In addition, several of the recommended modifications in this report are based around the current uncertainty about the contents of the LPU.

- 7.146 Section 3.5 of the Plan comments in a general fashion about how a made Plan would be monitored. Given the importance of the adoption of the LPU on the planning policy context in both the Borough and the parish I recommend that Section 3.5 of the Plan is expanded so that it provides guidance to residents and the development industry about the way in which the Parish Council will respond to the adoption of the LPU.
- 7.147 The language used acknowledges that in the same way that there is no requirement for a parish council to produce a neighbourhood development plan there is no requirement for a parish council to review a made neighbourhood development plan. Nevertheless, the recommended wording has been designed to recognise that where there is a conflict between different elements of the development plan the conflict must be resolved in favour of the policy which is contained in the last document to become part of the development plan. Plainly a review of a made Plan will have the ability to keep its contents up to date and aligned to the LPU within the Plan period.

Replace Section 3.5 with:

'The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan has been designed to operate concurrently with the emerging Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU). This will assist in ensuring a close relationship between Borough and parish-based planning policies.

The Plan is a response to the needs and aspirations of the local community as they are currently understood. However, it is acknowledged that current challenges and concerns are likely to change over the Plan period (up to 2038).

In its capacity as the qualifying body, the Parish Council is responsible for maintaining and periodically revisiting the Plan to ensure its continued relevance and to monitor delivery. It will monitor the effectiveness of the Plan mainly through an assessment of the way in which its policies are applied locally through the development management process and at appeal. If it becomes clear that certain policies need revising the Parish Council will assess the need for a partial review of the Plan.

Any neighbourhood plan operates within the wider context provided by national planning policy (currently the 2021 version of the NPPF) and local planning policy (currently the Core Strategy and the MDD Local Plan). The Parish Council will monitor and assess the implications of any changes to national or local planning policy on the Plan throughout the Plan period. Where necessary it will consider the need for a partial review of the Plan.

The eventual adoption of the Local Plan Update by the Borough Council could bring forward important changes to local planning policy. In this context the Parish Council will assess the need or otherwise for a full or partial review of the neighbourhood plan within six months of the adoption of the Local Plan Update.'

8 Summary and Conclusions

Summary

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2038. It is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community.
- 8.2 Following the independent examination of the Plan, I have concluded that the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood development plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.

Conclusion

- 8.3 On the basis of the findings in this report I recommend to Wokingham Borough Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum.

Referendum Area

- 8.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the designated neighbourhood area. In my view, that area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved by the Borough Council on 12 March 2019.
- 8.5 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth and efficient manner.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
2 May 2023

Appendix 1

Finchampstead NDP

Replace Sections 5.1 to 5.4 of the Plan with:

Background to existing residential development

Finchampstead is a semi-rural parish with four areas of settlement designated as Development Locations and two other Informal built areas ([see 1.2 'Key Definitions Figure 2'](#)) in designated 'Countryside' (see also 'Section 2.1 Introducing Finchampstead - The Parish')

Topographically, the area is sub-divided roughly east to west by an escarpment which falls away to the south offering extensive views over the River Blackwater Valley and its nature reserves. Those discrete areas of residential settlement therefore enjoy extensive green and pleasant surroundings, as described in the Landscape Character Assessment, but these are coming under increasing pressure as more development land is sought.

Finchampstead was the focus of significant suburban style housing during the 1970s and 1980s (see Section 2.4 Introducing Finchampstead - The coming of suburbia). After then, the rate of new house- building dropped dramatically and amounted to only 107 in the period 2011 to 2019. This has been characterised by very small-scale housing schemes built in infill, or back-land or redevelopment of a couple of units where one previously existed.

In the late 2010s, the identification of a Strategic Development Location at the former Arborfield Garrison has led to another significant increase in housebuilding. This is due to the release of a large tract of former Ministry of Defence land for development. It will deliver 1,500 dwellings which will be an increase of around 30% in the parish since 2018. This will have a very considerable impact on the nature of Finchampstead. The new community (Finchwood Park) will require time to consolidate and mature.

Local housing market

To gain additional understanding of the local housing market, a survey was commissioned involving four of Wokingham's long-established estate agents, actively doing business in the parish. The responses are set out in [Annex E Estate Agents Survey](#). The findings confirm that Finchampstead is predominantly an area that attracts people wanting to buy family homes set in a semi-rural location. What it generally lacks in amenities (found more extensively in Wokingham and Crowthorne) it compensates for with a pleasant and safe environment in which to raise a family.

Demand for family accommodation accounts for approximately 80% of all the estate agents' enquiries. The property built in Finchampstead since the 1970s has generally catered for this market. Provision for first-time buyers and retirees in Finchampstead however, is more limited and demand for this type of accommodation (typically, one and two bed dwellings) accounts for only a combined 20%. The absence of proximate high street services and facilities was cited as a major factor in this. Wokingham and Crowthorne are considered to offer a better choice for first time buyers and retirees. It would also be fair to say that limited or no suitable housing has been built in Finchampstead, to accommodate these two groups of buyers. The

same is true with regards to the provision of affordable homes and socially rented accommodation.

Finchwood Park and the planned regeneration of Gorse Ride will provide a broad range of new build properties for both first time buyers and families as well as options for affordable and socially rented accommodation.

The emerging Local Plan Update

Wokingham Borough Council is preparing a Local Plan Update. Once adopted it will replace the existing Core Strategy and the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan. It has progressed through the following stages

- Issues and Options Consultation (August-September 2016). Its focus was early opinion gathering on a range of high-level issues;
- Spatial Options Consultation: Right Homes, Right Places Consultation (November 2018-February 2019). Its focus was to provide opportunity to comment on the suitability of land promoted across the borough for potential development. In addition, some high-level opinions were sought;
- Draft Local Plan Consultation (February-April 2020). The consultation set out a full set of draft policies, including the spatial strategy directing the location of future development and supporting allocations. The consultation included a full suite of policies intended to assess and manage the impact of development; and
- A Revised Growth Strategy was published in November 2021.

In May 2023 the Borough Council was awaiting the outcome of national consultation on proposed changes to national policy. Once this matter becomes clear it will publish a timetable for the submission and examination of the Plan.

The Parish Council has sought to ensure that the development of the neighbourhood plan proceeded at a similar time as the development of the Local Plan update. However, the neighbourhood plan is now at a far more advanced stage. As part of the preparation of the Plan, the Parish Council considered the way in which it could reflect the proposed housing allocations in the parish in the emerging Local Plan update. It also considered the allocation of two additional housing sites. However, as an outcome of the examination, the Plan takes a neutral position on the identification of new housing opportunities in the parish. It will be a matter for the Local Plan Update to consider as it addresses the wider opportunities and challenges in the Borough.

Nevertheless, this Plan notes and supports the following sites as identified in the Draft Local Plan Update (January 2020):

- 5F1001 Tintagel Farm, Sandhurst Road 5 Units (Gypsy & Traveller);
- 5F1015 Land rear of 166 Nine Mile Ride 4 additional Units (Gypsy & Traveller); and
- 5F1024 Jovike, Lower Wokingham Rd 15 homes.

Similarly, the Plan notes and supports the following additional proposed development allocations as identified in the Revised Growth Strategy (November 2021):

- 5F1003 31/33 Barkham Ride 70 homes (net);

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan – Examiner’s Report

- 5F 1004 Green Acres Farm, Nine Mile Ride 100 homes; and
- 5F1028 Westwood Cottage, Sheerlands Road 10 homes.

The approach taken in the Plan

In this context the Plan sets out a strategy which supports development within the Development Locations where they comply with Policy TB06 of the Managing Development Delivery Plan and with Policy D3 of this Plan.

The Plan also supports the ongoing development within the Finchwood Park area of the Arborfield Strategic Development Location. It also supports proposals which would provide higher residential development densities within Finchwood Park than those envisaged in the Core Strategy and Arborfield Supplementary Planning Document.

Notes:

1. The wording in italics are the headings for the various sections.
2. The Parish Council can number the various sections as it sees fit.

Appendix 2

Finchampstead NDP

Replace Section 7 of the Plan with:

Background

Finchampstead is a semi-rural parish and it is the overriding concern of residents that it stays that way. The parish has no single centre. It includes several distinct settlement areas, each with their own sense of place, identity, and community. The strength and character of the neighbourhood area is in its greenness and community rather than the physical aspects of the settlements.

Some settlements are clearly separated while others have been linked by ribbon development. Nevertheless, even where this has occurred, there is still a perception of ‘different place’ between the settlements. It is the strong wish of the community that green gaps between the individual settlements around the Parish, which give it its semi-rural nature, should be protected, and maintained. This was clearly expressed in the public consultation in November 2019.

There is also a wider local concern that without explicit policy protections, gaps between smaller settlements will disappear by ‘creepage’ and the Parish may eventually be consumed into an urban continuum linking Wokingham Town with Bracknell to the east and Sandhurst and Crowthorne to the south and now Arborfield and Barkham to the west and north.

The Plan uses the terms ‘Key Local Gaps’ and ‘Green Wedges’ to describe locations within the Parish that represent the last remaining green space between Development Locations or other informal built areas ([see ‘Key Definitions’](#)). In most cases, they represent the ‘ground level’ view when travelling along a road, giving a sense of departing from one settlement, passing through countryside, and then arrival at another settlement. The sense of distinct place and community exists notwithstanding that some settlements may not have full 360-degree separation when viewed from an aerial perspective. The fact that two settlements may be linked via development that occurs elsewhere than along the route being travelled does not detract from the visual value of the ‘gap’ to local residents.

Wokingham Borough Council designations

Of key significance is the definition/designation of ‘countryside’ and ‘settlement’ in the existing development plan and emerging Local Plan Update ([Annex F Definition/designation of ‘countryside’ in the local plan update](#))

Most of Finchampstead Parish in terms of area is designated as ‘Countryside’. Development Locations (or Settlements) are separately designated. The Strategic Development Location at Arborfield includes the emerging new developments at Finchwood Park, which will eventually comprise part of the new Garden Village at Arborfield Garrison to provide a new settlement partly in the parish.

To maintain the separation of settlements, the Plan makes a general presumption of sustainable development being supported within the existing Development Locations as defined by the Borough Council, but development not being permitted outside of those

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan – Examiner’s Report

boundaries (in the areas defined as countryside). However, both presumptions will be guided by policies within this Plan and in accordance with other policies in the development plan. ([Annex F Definition/designation of 'countryside' in the local plan update](#))

The local perspective of settlements and the spaces between them

For the purposes of this Plan, settlements have been identified in line with local perceptions of place and community. Four 'Settlements' are formally defined as Development Locations. The protection of some specific spaces against harmful development is now critical to the preservation of the last actual or perceived green gap between settlements and need to be fully protected.

As part of the preparation of the Plan, the Parish Council considered the way in which it could address proposed Areas of Separation between Finchampstead North and the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area, and between Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location and the residential development fronting Reading Road. However, as an outcome of the examination, the Plan no longer addresses Areas of Separation. The appropriateness or otherwise of such an approach either generally or within the parish will be a matter for the Local Plan Update to consider as it addresses the wider opportunities and challenges in the Borough.

The overall purpose of Policy GS1 is to guide development away from areas around and between parts of settlements, which maintain the distinction between the countryside and built-up areas. The approach will also prevent the coalescence of adjacent places. The policy recognises the important function that these parcels of land have as gaps which preserve the distinct character of the surrounding areas.

Notes:

1. The wording in italics are the headings for the various sections.
2. The Parish Council can number the various sections as it sees fit.

Wokingham Borough Council

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan Decision Statement

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended), Wokingham Borough Council has a statutory duty to assist communities in the preparation of neighbourhood development plans and orders and to take plans through a process of examination and referendum. The Localism Act 2011 (Part 6 chapter 3) sets out the Local Planning Authority's responsibilities under Neighbourhood Planning.
- 1.2 This statement confirms that, following an independent examination, Wokingham Borough Council accepts the Examiner's proposed modifications and now confirms that the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan will proceed to a Neighbourhood Planning referendum.
- 1.3 This Decision Statement and the Examination Report can be viewed on the Council's website. Hard copies of these documents can be inspected at the following locations:

Wokingham Borough Council Shute End Wokingham Berkshire RG40 1BN	Monday to Friday:	9am to 5pm
Finchampstead Library FBC Centre (Finchampstead Baptist Church) Gorse Ride North Finchampstead Wokingham Berkshire RG40 4ES	Mondays: Tuesdays: Wednesdays: Thursdays: Fridays: Saturdays: Sundays:	2pm to 5pm 2pm to 5pm 9.30am – 1pm and 2pm to 5pm 2pm to 5pm 9.30am – 1pm and 2pm to 5pm 9.30am – 12.30pm Closed

2. Background

- 2.1 On 12 March 2019, Wokingham Borough Council designated the area of Finchampstead Parish for the purpose of preparing a Neighbourhood Plan in accordance with Part Two of the Town and Country Planning (England), Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012.
- 2.2 Following the submission of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan to the Council, the plan was publicised and representations were invited for a 6 week period in accordance with the regulations. The publicity period ended on Wednesday 23 November 2022.
- 2.3 Wokingham Borough Council appointed an independent examiner, Mr Andrew Ashcroft BA (Hons) MA, DMS, MRTPI, in November 2022 to review whether the Plan meets the Basic Conditions and to make recommendations regarding whether the plan should proceed to referendum.

- 2.4 The Examiner's Report concludes that, subject to making the modifications recommended therein, the Plan meets the basic conditions set out in the legislation and should proceed to a Neighbourhood Planning referendum. It concludes that the boundary for the purposes of the referendum on the Plan should be the boundary of the designated Neighbourhood Area for the Plan.

3 Decision and Reasons

- 3.1 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 requires the local planning authority to outline what action to take in response to the recommendations of an examiner made in a report under paragraph 10 of Schedule 4A to the 1990 Act (as applied by Section 38A of the 2004 Act) in relation to a neighbourhood development plan.
- 3.2 Having considered each of the recommendations made by the Examiner in their Report, and the reasons for them, the Council in consultation with Finchampstead Parish Council has decided to accept the modifications to the draft plan. Table 1 below outlines the alterations made to the draft plan under paragraph 12(6) of Schedule 4B to the 1990 Act (as applied by Section 38A of 2004 Act) in response to each of the Examiner's recommendations. **Bold, and underline** has been used to show added text and ~~strikethrough~~ to show removed text. The reasons set out have in some cases been paraphrased from the Examiners report for conciseness. The recommendations have been set out in the order they appear within the Examiner's Report. This statement should be read alongside the Examiner's Report.
- 3.3 In addition to the modifications recommended by the Examiner, the Local Planning Authority is also authorised to correct minor errors that may have been missed so far [Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Schedule 4B section 12(6)]. Minor typographical corrections are set out in Table 2.
- 3.4 If a Local Planning Authority is satisfied that, subject to the modifications being made, the Neighbourhood Plan meets the legal requirements and basic conditions then it can proceed to Referendum. The Council has considered whether to extend the area in which the referendum is to take place. Like the examiner, the Council has decided that there is no reason to extend the Neighbourhood Plan area for the purpose of holding the referendum.
- 3.5 To meet the requirements of the Localism Act 2011 a referendum which poses the question 'Do you want Wokingham Borough Council to use the neighbourhood plan for Finchampstead parish to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area?' will be held in the parish of Finchampstead.
- 3.6 The Executive of Wokingham Borough Council agreed on 29 June 2023 that the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed through referendum to take place on 7 September 2023.

Table 1 – Examiner’s recommended modifications to the plan

No.	Policy / Plan section	Examiner Recommendation	Reason	Action Taken
1	Policy AHD1: Development outside of Development Limits	That the policy is deleted	<p>Its focus is on a very limited type of development which fails to address the range of housing outside the development limits which would otherwise be supported by national and local policies.</p> <p>Additionally, it reads out of context unless read with Policy AHD2 which comments much more positively about development which will be supported within development limits and within the strategic development location (SDL).</p> <p>The detailed SANG elements would sit more comfortably with the development management policies and should also address Strategic Access</p>	Recommendation accepted.

111

			Management and Monitoring (SAMM).	
2	Policy AHD2: Development within Development Limits	<p>Amend the policy as follows:</p> <p>New dDevelopment proposals should be contained within the Development Locations <u>will be supported where they and must comply with MDD Policy TB06 of the Managing Development Delivery Plan and emerging policy (Local Plan Update January 2020) and with Policy D3 of this p</u>Plan</p> <p>Development <u>proposals</u> within the Finchwood Park area of the Arborfield Strategic Development Location will be encouraged supported. Proposals which would Opportunities to provide higher residential development densities within this area of the Strategic Development Location Finchwood Park than those envisaged in the Core Strategy and Arborfield SDL Supplementary Planning Document will be supported, where appropriate, they comply with other design and layout criteria which apply to this site. in order to optimise the efficient use of land.</p> <p>Development proposals outside the Development Locations will only be supported where they are in accordance with national and Borough planning policies.</p> <p>Replace sections 5.1 to 5.4 with the text set out at Appendix 1 of the Examiner Report.</p>	<p>To ensure that the Plan has regard to national policy and is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the existing development plan. The Examiner has concluded that the Plan contains a series of strategic statements which are not justified by the local evidence nor by the stage reached in the emerging LPU.</p>	<p>Recommendations accepted.</p> <p>Recommendation accepted with exception of an updated Figure 5 retained</p>
3	Policy GS1: Key Local Gaps between settlements	<p>Amend the policy as follows:</p> <p><u>The Plan identifies Key Local Gaps and Green Wedges on Figure 7.</u></p> <p>Within Key Local Gaps, Green Wedges as defined on FIGURE 6, dDevelopment proposals should respond positively to the identification of the key local gaps and green wedges. Development proposals will</p>	<p>The Examiner has concluded that the proposed Areas of Separation are strategic in nature owing to the uncertainty of the emerging LPU and their</p>	<p>Recommendations accepted.</p>

		<p><i>be supported where it can be demonstrated that it they would not adversely unacceptably affect the function of the gap or wedge, and/or not unacceptably reduce the physical and visual separation of settlements, (or distinct parts of a settlement concerned.) either within or adjoining the borough. 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: The area identified between Finchampstead North and the Finchampstead Church Conservation Area; The area identified between Arborfield Garrison SDL and the residential development fronting Reading Road.</i></p> <p>Replace section 7 with the text set out at Appendix 2 of the Examiner Report</p> <p>Delete the Important Areas of Separation from Figure 7.</p>	<p>impact on future development strategy. He has also considered the policy wording and identification of the areas is imprecise and does not have sufficient clarity.</p>	
4	<p>Policy IRS1: Protection and enhancement of Local Green Spaces</p>	<p>That LGS4, LGS5, LGS7a, and LGS9 are deleted from the plan and amended as follows:</p> <p><i>Local Green Spaces have been identified in the FNDP as set out in Annex J – Designated Local Green Spaces and are recognised as important to the local community and as such are designated as Local Green Spaces.</i></p> <p><u>The Plan designates the following areas as local green spaces:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>LGS1 – St James’ Church including part of the conservation area, Church Lane, Finchampstead</u> • <u>LGS2 – Warren Wood Country Park, Warren Lane, Finchampstead</u> • <u>LGS3 – Burnmoor Meadow, Longwater Road, Finchampstead</u> • <u>LGS6 – Shepperlands Farm, Park Lane, Finchampstead</u> • <u>LGS8 – Finchampstead Memorial Park and Leas field The Village, Finchampstead</u> 	<p>To delete those proposed LGSs that are concluded to represent ‘extensive tracts of land’ contrary to national policy and guidance.</p> <p>To remove elements of the submitted policy which go beyond the matter of fact approach to LGS in the NPPF and reposition in supporting text.</p>	<p>Recommendations accepted.</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>LGS10 – FBC/Gorse Ride Playing Fields, Gorse Ride North, Finchampstead</u> • <u>LGS11 – The Moors, Waverley Way, Finchampstead</u> <u>LGS12 – Woodmoor play area, Woodmoor, Finchampstead</u> • <u>LGS13 – Gorse Ride Woods play area, Whittle Close, Finchampstead</u> <p><i>Any change that would impact upon the Local Green Spaces must take into account the need to retain and respect the value placed upon the spaces where possible.</i></p> <p><i>Development proposals within on the designated Local Green Spaces will only be permitted supported in very special circumstances and in accordance with national policy and guidance.</i></p> <p>Modify Figure 9 to remove the deleted LGSs</p> <p>At the end of the supporting text in paragraph 8.1.1 add:</p> <p><u>Policy IRS1 identifies the local green spaces and sets out a policy to ensure that development is only supported within their identified areas in very special circumstances. Any change that would impact upon the Local Green Spaces must consider the need to retain and respect the value placed upon the spaces by the local community.</u></p>		
5	Policy ES1: Environmental Standards for residential development	<p>Amend policy ES1 as follows:</p> <p><i>Development proposals for residential development will be supported provided they should meet the following environmental standards:</i></p> <p><i>1. Minor residential developments will additionally be expected to achieve The achievement at least a 19% improvement in the dwelling emission rate over the target emission rate, as defined within improvements beyond those as defined in Part L of the Building Regulations Approved Document Part L 2013 2021 for minor</i></p>	To shift the focus of the policy from one which offers support to proposals to one which sets out the requirements which they should meet. To clarify the additionality clauses in the first two criteria and that the requirement for carbon	Recommendations accepted with the exception of the wording ‘will be supported’ at the end of clause 1 which will not be incorporated to ensure the policy

		<p>residential developments or satisfy any higher standard that is required under new national planning policy or Building Regulations will be supported.</p> <p>2. In addition, Major residential development will additionally be expected to should be designed to achieve carbon neutral homes where this is both practicable and viable.</p> <p>3. Conversions to residential and extensions to existing dwellings of 500sqm of residential floorspace (gross) or more, should achieve or seek to achieve 'excellent' in domestic refurbishment as defined in the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method https://www.breeam.com/</p> <p>4. Provision is made for charging for electric vehicles in all domestic dwellings where garages or vehicle parking spaces are provided</p> <p>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.</p> <p>At the end of the second paragraph of 4.2 add: <u>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.</u></p>	<p>neutral homes is dependent on site-specific circumstances and viability. And finally to ensure an appropriate distinction between policy and supporting text.</p>	<p>reads correctly as a whole.</p>
6	Policy TC1: Supporting business	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p>1. Development proposals for small employment uses or a mix of uses within Development Locations but outside Core Employment Areas will be supported provided:</p> <p>a. It is They are appropriate to the character of the area; and</p> <p>b. It does They do not have an unacceptable impact on nearby residential uses, other employment uses and other uses, including</p>	<p>To provide clarity and precision as required by the NPPF. Removal of the first criterion in the second part of the policy as it does not relate to the wider context of the policy. Deletion of the third part</p>	<p>Recommendation accepted.</p>

		<p><i>impacts caused by traffic movements, noise, emissions, hours of operation and lighting.</i></p> <p><i>2. Proposals for commercial use within the countryside will be supported where evidence is provided of the genuine need for the proposed business use and where:</i></p> <p><i>a. broadband connectivity, will be supported.</i></p> <p><i>b. They allow existing buildings to be appropriately converted</i></p> <p><i>c. Existing buildings that are to be replaced or converted are of permanent and substantial construction</i></p> <p><i>d. Such redevelopment of existing buildings is well designed and proportionate in scale, respecting the character of the rural setting.</i></p> <p><i>3. Developments in the countryside which propose new buildings for non-agricultural purposes will not generally be supported. Exceptions may be allowed for well-designed new buildings on previously developed land which are proportionate to the use and respect the character of the rural setting.</i></p> <p><i>4.3. Development proposals which would <i>facilitates</i> facilitate home working, including fast broadband connectivity, will be supported</i></p>	of the policy as this is not considered to have regard to national policy.	
7	Policy TC2: Supporting Business	<p>Replace the title of Policy TC2 with 'Supporting Core Employment Areas'</p> <p>Amend the policy as follows:</p> <p><i>Development proposals which will be supported where it contributes contribute to the safeguarding and retention of employment and enterprise uses in the existing Core Employment Area (as defined in Wokingham Borough Council Local Plan Update) at Hogwood Industrial Estate and its planned extension will be supported., in accordance with economic needs. Alternative commercial opportunities could be available at Hogwood Lane expansion for any units removed from Greenacres industrial site.</i></p> <p>At the end of the second paragraph of section 10.3 add:</p>	To avoid two policies with the same title and so that wording which comments on how the policy would be implemented, rather than being land use policy in itself, is repositioned into supporting text for improved clarity.	Recommendations accepted.

		<u>This expansion could provide relocation opportunities for any units removed from Greenacres industrial site.'</u>		
8	Policy TC3: Retail development – California Crossroads	<p>Amend the policy as follows:</p> <p><u>Development proposals at the California Crossroads local centre should be supported and strengthened by maintaining which would consolidate and strengthen its predominately Use Class E(a) retail uses, to ensure its vitality and viability and to continue to be the focus of local community and allow it to continue to be the focus of the local community will be supported.</u></p> <p><i>Development proposals that protect and enhance this role and function will be supported. The <u>which would</u> improvement of the public realm at the California Crossroads local centre is a priority will be supported.</i></p>	To provide clarity and precision as required by the NPPF and to make an important distinction between the retail use elements in the first part and second part which comments more broadly on public realm.	Recommendations accepted.
9	Policy TC4: Retail development – Finchwood Park	<p>Amend the policy as follows:</p> <p><i>The d<u>Development proposals of the at Finchwood Park Neighbourhood Centre in accordance with the Outline Consent 181194 is supported by which would</u> maintaining its predominately Class E(a) retail uses in order to <u>and</u> serve the new Finchwood Park community and ensure its vitality and viability <u>will be supported.</u></i></p> <p>At the end of the second paragraph of 10.4 add: <u>(181194)</u></p>	So that unnecessary reference to extant planning permission within the policy is repositioned into supporting text.	Recommendations accepted.
10	Policy TC5: Protection of retail facilities	<p>Amend the policy as follows:</p> <p><u>Development Pproposals that provide for the retention which would consolidate the provision of retail uses and/or which assist with the retention of retail premises will be supported.</u></p>	So that wording is more closely related to the development management process and presentational changes to more clearly identify the	Recommendations accepted.

		<p><i>Proposals that result in the loss of day-to-day shopping facilities will not be discouraged supported unless it can be demonstrated that the existing retail use is demonstrated to be no longer viable through evidence that genuine sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the facility at a reasonable value have been undertaken.</i></p> <p>At the end of paragraph 10.4 add:</p> <p><u>The second part of Policy TC5 comments about the way in which development proposals that would result in the loss of shops will be determined. The element of the policy on viability will be considered against evidence supplied with individual proposals that genuine sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the facility at a reasonable value have been undertaken</u></p>	separate elements of the policy.	
11	Policy AHD4: Independent Living, Care and Vulnerable Housing	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p><i>Development proposals for independent living housing accommodation for older residents for Care Homes and Vulnerable communities will be supported provided that where they comply with Wokingham Borough Council Policy MDD TB09 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan. and emerging policy H9 (Wokingham Borough Council Local Plan Update January 2020)</i></p>	To simplify its format and refer only to adopted policy for precision.	Recommendations accepted.
12	Policy AHD5: Affordable Housing	That the policy is deleted	To remove unnecessary repetition of existing local policies.	Recommendation accepted.
13	Policy AHD6: Provisions For Gypsy and Traveller Communities	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p><u>Development proposals which would result in the loss of existing Gypsy and Traveller sites and pitches will not be supported unless it is clearly demonstrated that:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>the 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</u> 	To better reflect the ambition of the policy to safeguard existing provision for Gypsy and Traveller sites, and remove reference to those sites that may come forward in the emerging	Recommendation accepted, with the exception of the wording 'it is clearly demonstrated that' at the beginning of the

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>it is clearly demonstrated that there is no need for such pitches in the Borough</u> <p><i>Within the parish, the retention of existing lawful Gypsy and Traveller sites in their current use will be supported. The expansion of existing <u>Gypsy and Traveller</u> sites will be supported, where the following criteria are satisfied:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>There is a demonstrable need for additional Gypsy and Traveller pitches within the FNDP <u>neighbourhood</u> area and proposals comply with relevant policies of the FNDP.;</i> 2. <i>It can be evidenced the proposed occupiers are Gypsies and Travellers.;</i> 3. <u>Where appropriate, proposals include Mitigations are made for any visual impact of the development by appropriate landscaping to mitigate their impact on the surrounding landscape; and.</u> 4. <i>There is <u>the proposals include the</u> provision of or enhancement to the links to community facilities/services or contributions to upgrading roads and pathways in and around the site as appropriate.</i> <p><i>Gypsy and Traveller pitches will be supported at the sites as identified in the emerging Local Plan Update, providing the above criteria are satisfied and subject to compliance with relevant policies in the development plan.</i></p> <p>Replace the supporting text (paragraph 5.8) with:</p> <p><u>'A full analysis of Gypsy and Traveller provision was undertaken by WBC in September 2017. This identified that approximately 17% of the total borough provision was located within the parish of Finchampstead. These locations are listed in Annex H Gypsy and Traveller Sites.</u></p> <p><u>In January 2020 the WBC Local Plan Update included proposed allocations for Gypsy and Traveller pitches at two sites within</u></p>	<p>LPU. Suggested amendments to supporting text to remove reference to the strategic identification of sites which will be for the LPU and to focus specifically on how the policy will be applied.</p>	<p>second bullet point under the first part of the policy. Omitted due to unnecessary repetition of wording in the opening part of the policy.</p>
--	--	---	---	--

		<p><u>Finchampstead. The first is an additional four pitches at Land to the rear of 166 Nine Mile Ride. The second is for five pitches at Tintagel Farm, Sandhurst Road. Planning permission has since been granted for the extra pitches to the rear of 166 Nine Mile Ride. If the two additional sites are included in the adopted version of the Local Plan their development will be determined by the relevant policy in that Plan. Policy AHD6 seeks to establish a positive context within which proposals for the expansion of the existing sites can be considered and determined. It requires any such proposals to meet a series of criteria.'</u></p>		
14	Policy AHD7: Caravan and Mobile Home Sites	That the policy is deleted.	To reflect that requirements regarding layout of existing registered caravan parks is controlled by separate legislation.	Recommendation accepted.
15	Policy GA1: Improve environment and health from traffic pollution	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p><i>Developments will be supported where they</i> <u>As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Demonstrate plans to integrate with arterial routes in a way that does not impede traffic flow, make pinch-points worse or create additional pinch- points leading to unacceptable congestion</i> 2. <i>Protect the rural lane network from increased traffic flows, especially as 'rat-runs' whilst protecting their historic nature from urbanisation in the process. Respect the rural lane network and their historic character. These include Barkham Ride, Commonfield Road, Park Lane, Whitehorse Lane, Dell Road and Lower Sandhurst Road/Ambarrow Lane</i> 3. <i>Support safe active travel connections and routes between settlements, schools, green spaces and support services such as doctors and dentists and local retail outlets.</i> 4. <i>Give new routes bridleway status so they can be used by all non-motorised users and remain in perpetuity, (except for</i> 	<p>Amendments to the opening part of the policy to ensure it is applied on a proportionate basis.</p> <p>Amendments to criterion 2 to recognise that development cannot directly control the use of the network.</p>	Recommendations accepted.

		<p>where doing so would compromise other non-motorised uses of such a path).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Provide adequate off-road parking to avoid access restrictions on the urban and rural roads 6. Offer protected movement for cycling to and from public transport points 7. Demonstrate effective planning to mitigate noise and air pollution from traffic. 		
16	Policy GA2: Reduction in car usage with safe personal mobility options	<p>Amend the opening section of the policy as follows:</p> <p>Developments will be support where they As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:</p>	To ensure the policy is applied on a proportionate basis.	Recommendation accepted
17	Policy AHD3: Green areas and landscaping	That the policy is deleted.	The policy sets out a process to be followed rather than a land use policy which identifies the requirements for a landscaping scheme.	Recommendation accepted
18	Policy D1: Building heights	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p><u>Building heights should reflect the character and appearance of the parish.</u> <i>The development of 3 storey (and above) housing will generally only be supported within the area of the Strategic Development Location (that part within Finchampstead Parish) and the Gorse Ride regeneration area.</i></p> <p>At the end of the final paragraph of section 6.1 add:</p> <p><u>Policy D1 addresses this important matter. The general expectation is that three-storey houses will only be supported within the Strategic Development Location. Nevertheless, there may be circumstances</u></p>	To clarify the Plan's expectations elsewhere in the neighbourhood area.	Recommendation accepted

		elsewhere in the parish where well-designed three storey houses may be appropriate. The policy applies to proposals for new three-storey houses. Proposals to add an additional storey to an existing house will be considered on their individual merits taking account of the potential impact of the development in the immediate locality.		
19	Policy D2: Preserving the rural character of the parish	Amend policy as follows: <i>Any As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should be located and designed to maintain the separation of settlements and to complement the relevant characteristics of the landscape characteristics in the immediate locality through:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Locating structures where they will be viewed against existing built form and wherever possible, development should deliver enhancements to the landscape character.</i> 2. <i>Retaining the proportion, scale and the space between the main residential buildings on each residential plot with reference to the built vernacular of the neighbourhood area and conservation of traditional boundary treatments.</i> 3. <i>The Use Use of appropriate plant species in a comprehensive landscape scheme with appropriate boundary treatments to integrate with the rural character.</i> 4. <i>The use of S use of street trees should be a feature of all new developments.</i> 5. <i>Any plans for development should provide The protection to of existing street trees.</i> 	Amendment to the opening element of the policy to ensure it more closely describes its effect and allows the policy to be applied in a proportionate way. Resulting amendments to ensure the language more comfortably flows on from the opening element of the policy as modified.	Recommendations accepted
20	Policy D3: Infill, Small Plot Development and Development of Private Residential Gardens	That policy D3 is amended as follows: <i>Development proposals for new residential development that includes land within the curtilage, or the former curtilage, of private residential gardens will only be supported where should:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The proposal makes Make a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms of:</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>The relationship of the existing built form and spaces around the buildings within the surrounding area:</i> 	Modification to the opening element of the policy so that it sets out a series of requirements for such developments rather than offering support subject to a series of criteria. Additional consequential	Recommendations accepted.

		<p>b. A layout which integrates with existing landscape features and the surrounding area, with regards to the built-up coverage of each plot, building line(s), rhythm of plot frontages and parking areas, especially in those locations listed in Annex I Roads with “Rides” Characteristics</p> <p>c. Existing pattern of openings and boundary treatments on the site frontage:</p> <p>d. Providing appropriate hard and soft landscaping, particularly at site boundaries. This includes features such as the variety of trees, hedges and hard standing/lawn etc.</p> <p>e. Compatible compatibility with the general building height within the surrounding area:</p> <p>f. The materials and elevational detail are of high quality and where appropriate distinctive and/or complementary; and</p> <p>g. The arrangement of doors, windows and other principle architectural features and their rhythm between buildings.</p> <p>2. The application site pProvides a site of adequate size and dimensions to accommodate the development proposed in terms of the setting and spacing around buildings, amenity space, landscaping and space for access roads and parking.</p> <p>3. The process includes Incorporate an access, which meets appropriate highway standards.</p> <p>4. The proposal does nNot lead to unacceptable tandem development.</p> <p>5. The Incorporate a design and layout that minimises exposure of existing private boundaries to public areas and avoids the need for additional physical security measures.</p> <p>6. The development pProvides biodiversity net gain and would not have an adverse impact on the biodiversity through the fragmentation of blocks of gardens, which together, or in Association with adjacent green spaces or deemed to make an important contribution to biodiversity and the wider green infrastructure network.</p>	<p>modifications to the wording of the various criteria so that they correspond with the revised opening element.</p>	
--	--	--	---	--

		<p>7. The proposal does not prejudice the satisfactory development of the wider area.</p> <p>8. The development is Be located within a Development Location (see section 2.1)</p> <p>Development must meet all of the above criteria in order to be supported.</p>		
21	Policy IRS2: Protection of Outstanding Views	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p>Development proposals will be required to demonstrate that it does not have an adverse impact on the landscape setting in particular the outstanding views shown in Annex K Outstanding Views.</p> <p>An assessment of views to and from all new development within the distinctive view areas as illustrated in Annex K should accompany a planning application wherever relevant.</p> <p>Re-modelling of the local topography, through cut and fill, could adversely impact on the landscape character. Therefore, where acceptable, development should be adapted to the site contours rather than the site adapted to the development through:</p> <p>1. Consideration of both near and distant views of the development from the principal public vantage points showing existing landscaping and that proposed to be established after 10 years (based upon assessment for rate of vegetation growth).</p> <p>2. Details, where appropriate, of how those areas to be retained for open space and/or woodland will be managed in the future.</p> <p><u>The design, layout, scale and massing of development proposals should take account of the outstanding views shown in Annex K.</u></p> <p><u>Development proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on the outstanding views will not be supported.</u></p>	Modification so that the policy will be able to be applied with consistency in the development management process throughout the Plan period. The first part of the modified policy sets out the way in which development proposals should take account of the identified views. The second part of the modified policy sets out the implications for proposals which do not respond positively to the outstanding views. I recommend that the process elements of the policy are repositioned into the supporting text. This acknowledges that their purpose is to describe how the policy would be applied.	Recommendation accepted

		<p>At the end of the final paragraph of section 8.2 add:</p> <p><u>An assessment of views to and from all new development within the distinctive view areas as illustrated in Annex K should accompany planning applications which may affect the integrity of the outstanding views. The re-modelling of the local topography, through cut and fill, could adversely impact on the landscape character. Therefore, new development should be adapted to the site contours through the consideration of both near and distant views of the development from the principal public vantage points showing existing landscaping and that proposed to be established after 10 years (based upon assessment for rate of vegetation growth). Where appropriate details of how those areas to be retained for open space and/or woodland will be managed in the future should be included with planning applications.</u></p>		
22	Policy IRS3: Conservation and enhancement of the historic character of the area	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p><i>“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.</i></p> <p><i>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. Locally valued heritage assets have been identified in the FNDP as follows and development proposals should protect and enhance them where possible.</i></p> <p><i>• 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.</i></p> <p><u>Development proposals should protect or enhance the historic character of the area which includes but is not limited to the sites</u></p>	To more clearly draw attention to the proposed non-designated heritage assets (in paragraph 8.3.1) and so the Plan has regard to national policy on such assets.	Recommendations accepted

		<p><u>identified in paragraph 8.3.1 of the Plan (as shown on Figure [insert number]).</u></p> <p><u>The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset in the neighbourhood area should be taken into account in determining related planning applications. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be taken having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.</u></p> <p>Create a map showing the location of the assets listed in section 8.3.1</p>		
23	Policy IRS4: Implement strategy to preserve the identity of Finchampstead Parish through informal green spaces.	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p><u>As appropriate to their scale, nature and location</u> D<i>development</i> P<i>proposals will be supported when they make provision to achieve the following objectives</i> <u>should:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Preserve the semi-rural look and feel of the Parish with its surrounding natural open environment.</i> 2. <i>Preserve the distinctive character and appearance of the Parish countryside with varied landscapes and outstanding views.</i> 3. <i>Preserve the topological features of the landscape that distinguish it as part of the Blackwater Valley and Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Areas.</i> 4. <i>Protect and where possible, enhance the green spaces of the Parish, both general and specific, through protected special areas, green gaps between settlements, green corridors, diverse flora and community spaces.</i> 5. <i>Specify tree and hedgerow planting to reinforce and reflect local biodiversity in the Parish</i> 6. <i>Retain informal green gaps along the Parish access roads and other small areas of natural green space, as outlined in Annex S Rights of Way Network with adjoining Parishes.</i> 	To allow the policy to be applied on a proportionate basis and so that it sets out requirements for new development rather than what will be supported which may have led to unintended consequences.	Recommendation accepted

		<p>7. Retention and potential expansion of the green corridors through the extensive rights of way network (Annex R Rights of Way Network with adjoining Parishes) and enclosure hedgerows to retain and enhance the outstanding views east, south and west within the Parish.</p>		
24	Policy IRS5: Ecologically important areas and Biodiversity	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <p><i>Development proposals should seek to protect conserve and enhance the natural environment and green spaces of the area, specifically biodiversity areas set out in Figure 23 and the TVERC Survey 2019 (Annex M TVERC Report) wherever possible practicable.</i></p> <p><i>The Plan area abuts the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), specifically Bramshill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Any All development within the zones of influence for the SPA must abide with 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 in accordance with saved policy NRM6 of the South-East Plan and policy CP8 from Wokingham BC's Core Strategy to 2026.</i></p> <p><i>Development will only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• It They will not have an adverse unacceptable impact on local biodiversity or the network of sites designated as of importance for nature conservation using an, as evidenced through a robust specialist 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.</i> <i>• there are no alternatives with less harmful impacts.</i> 	<p>To ensure that the policy has the required clarity and precision which reflects the biodiversity agenda at both national and local level. To incorporate the element of Policy AHD1 that would sit more appropriately within IRS5 and to ensure that elements which do not operate as a land use planning policy are repositioned to supporting text.</p>	<p>Recommendation accepted</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 They provide 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 there is no net loss of biodiversity, through the creation of like-for-like or better distinctiveness habitats so a minimum 10% gain of biodiversity overall is achieved. • Ensure that all water courses and ditches are protected from any contamination or interruption to natural flow • Ensure mitigation Compensation through suitable alternatives of any loss of bird nesting habitat • They Take 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 • They Conserve the environment for nocturnal species, through the avoidance of lighting and mitigating the impact of external lighting likely to increase night-time human presence. • They Contain 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. <p>Ensure that all species protected by law, including bats, badgers and others named at the time are subject to an ecological survey or</p>		
--	--	--	--	--

		<p><i>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.</i></p> <p><u>All development which would result 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 that no adverse effect will occur through secured avoidance and/or mitigation measures if required.</u></p> <p>Replace the first paragraph of section 8.5.1 with:</p> <p><u>Policy IRS5 comments about the significance of the natural environment in the parish. It seeks to ensure that development proposals do not result in the loss or deterioration of habitats, including woodlands, habitats of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity and local wildlife sites. It encourages opportunities to create links between natural habitat and wider biodiversity improvements.'</u></p> <p>At the end of section 8.5.1 add:</p> <p><u>Policy IRS5 takes a comprehensive approach to this matter. As appropriate to the proposal concerned, planning applications should 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 the development proposal. The survey should 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,</u></p>		
--	--	--	--	--

		<u>taking account of the requirements of any associated licence from Natural England.'</u>		
25	Policy IRS6: Trees	<p>Amend policy as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Development proposals should seek to retain mature or important trees, groups of trees or woodland on site.</i> 2. <i>Residential or commercial development proposals that involve the removal or loss of a tree or group of trees should be accompanied by a tree survey and tree protection plan, impact assessment and a method statement. Where this is needed it must be supplied with a planning application and is part of the validation process.</i> 3. <i>Proposals should clearly identify the trees, the constraints and root protection areas, any trees to be removed, and state how the health of the trees on the site and those influencing from neighbouring sites including the highway will be protected during demolition and construction, including that of installing utilities, drainage and landscaping.</i> 4. <i>Where removal of a tree or group of trees of recognised importance is proposed, a replacement of similar amenity value should be provided on the site.</i> 5. <i>Wherever appropriate, the planting of additional trees should be included in new developments, particularly local species that are in keeping with the character of the area and appropriate to the site/ground conditions. Planting that contributes to the biodiversity of the area and supports green corridors is particularly encouraged.</i> 6. <i>Proposals should be accompanied by an indicative planting scheme to demonstrate an adequate level of sustainable planting can be achieved.</i> <p><i>All proposals under this policy must meet British Standards 5837:2012 (Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations) or any future amendment or replacement of this.</i></p>	To ensure that wording which describes how the policy would be applied is appropriately repositioned into supporting text.	Recommendation approved.

		After the supporting text in paragraph 8.5.2 add parts 2 and 6 and the final paragraph of the submitted policy (in that order).		
--	--	---	--	--

Table 2 – Minor modifications

Note – this table will be added to as further typographical errors, and minor consequential updates are made post the Executive decision and prior to finalising the Referendum documentation

Change proposed	Paragraph / section	Reason for change
<p>Title of the plan revised as follows:</p> <p><i>Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2038 Edition 4</i> <u>Referendum Version</u></p>	Title page	For improved clarity
<p>Updated Figure 2 and figure title amended as follows:</p> <p><i>Figure 2 - Parish Development Locations (outlined in brown / black outline) and other Informal built areas (outlined in orange)</i></p>	Figure at the end of section 2.2	Consequential update for consistency with updated figure 5 and to provide additional clarity.
<p>That the examiner’s recommended wording is amended as follows:</p> <p><i>1. The achievement of improvements beyond those as defined in Part L of the Building Regulations 2021 for minor residential developments or satisfy any higher standard that is required under new national planning policy or Building Regulations.</i></p>	Policy ES1	Typographical correction to add missing word from Examiner’s recommended text
<p>Updated Figure 5 and figure title amended as follows:</p> <p><i>Figure 5 - Proposed locations for development locations in the emerging Local Plan Update locations. Sites 1 (5F1016) & 2 (5F104) are additional to those in the emerging LPU.</i></p>	Figure at section 5.3	Consequential updates to reflect the examiner’s recommended deletion of the two proposed site allocations
<p>Supporting text amended as follows:</p> <p><i>In addition to the above, although building on residential gardens will not be generally supported, the FNDP will allow an exception for smaller opportunities for replacement, frontage infill and sensitively planned ‘back-land’ development within the Development Locations (see section 2.1) and which does not interfere with Outstanding Views’, areas designated as ‘Key Local Gaps’ or designated as</i></p>	2 nd paragraph of Section 5.6	Consequential update to reflect examiner’s modifications to section 5.4.

132

<p><i>Local Green Spaces. The criteria for such development are set out in Policy D3. An estimate for the potential for 'Windfall' development within the parish has been set out in section 5.4 above.</i></p>		
<p>Figure title amended as follows:</p> <p><i>Figure 8 7 – Ariel Aerial view showing semi-rural nature of the Parish</i></p>	Figure at Section 8	Typographical correction and consequential numbering updated to reflect Examiner's modifications
<p>Supporting text amended as follows:</p> <p><i>The sites identified considered as for Local Green Space designation are set out in the FNDP document 'Finchampstead Parish Council Sites submitted for Local Green Space designation in the consultation on the Local Plan Update Nov-January 2021/22 and the accompanying Topic Paper – Local Green Spaces. The following map and site key identifies those areas that have been submitted for protection by the Parish Council and the FNDP are designated as Local Green Space in this Plan. More detailed information on the site boundaries can be viewed in the Topic Paper – Local Green Spaces.</i></p>	6 th paragraph of Section 8.1.	Factual updates to reflect the outcome of the Examination and for conciseness and clarity.
<p>Figure title amended as follows:</p> <p><i>Figure 9 8 – Recommended Local Green space designations areas in the Neighbourhood Development Plan</i></p>	Figure at Section 8.1	Consequential updates to reflect examiner's recommendations
<p>Addition to supporting text as follows:</p> <p><u>The above assets are indicated in Figure 9 below.</u></p>	End of section 8.3.1	Consequential addition to introduce Examiner's recommended new Figure.
<p>Supporting text amended as follows:</p> <p><i>Outline consent has also been granted for an extension of Hogwood Industrial Estate extending to no more than 500m² (WBC Consent No. 181194)</i></p>	1 st sentence of second paragraph of section 10.3	Factual update given 500m ² restriction related to the retail element of the permission, not employment use.
<p><i>Development proposals at the California Crossroads local centre which would consolidate and strengthen its predominately Use Class E(a) function and allow it to continue to be the focus of the local community will be supported.</i></p>	Policy TC3	Typographical correction to add missing word from Examiner's recommended text

<p>Development proposals which would improve the public realm at the California Crossroads local centre will be supported.</p>		
<p>Wording amended as follows:</p> <p>These Green Spaces are integral to the values of the Parish communities and a summary is set out below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. St James' Church including part of the conservation area, Church Lane, Finchampstead (LGS1) • 2. Warren Wood Country Park, Warren Lane, Finchampstead (LGS2) • 3. Burnmoor Meadow, Longwater Road, Finchampstead (LGS3) 4. California Country Park and Longmoor Bog, Nine Mile Ride, Finchampstead 5. Simons Wood, Wellingtonia Avenue, Finchampstead • 6. Shepperlands Farm, Park Lane, Finchampstead (LGS6) 7. Moor Green Lakes Nature Reserve, Lower Sandhurst Road, Finchampstead • 8. Finchampstead Memorial Park and Leas field The Village, Finchampstead (LGS8) 9. The Ridges, Finchampstead • 10. FBC/Gorse Ride Playing Fields, Gorse Ride North, Finchampstead (LGS10) • 11. The Moors, Waverley Way, Finchampstead (LGS11) • 12. Woodmoor play area, Woodmoor, Finchampstead (LGS12) • 13. Gorse Ride Woods play area, Whittle Close, Finchampstead (LGS13) <p>The detailed case for designation for each of these is set out in the accompanying Topic Paper – Local Green Spaces.</p>	<p>Annex J</p>	<p>Consequential updates based on examiner's recommended deletions of LGS area. LGS references provided, and bullet points rather than numbering used, to assist clarity.</p>

This page is intentionally left blank

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form: Initial impact assessment

If an officer is undertaking a project, policy change or service change, then an initial impact assessment must be completed and attached alongside the Project initiation document.

EqIA Titular information:

Date:	12 April 2023
Service:	Place and Growth (Delivery & Infrastructure)
Project, policy or service EQIA relates to:	Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan
Completed by:	James McCabe (Growth and Delivery Team, Principal Planning Policy Officer)
Has the EQIA been discussed at services team meeting:	Yes
Signed off by:	Trevor Saunders Assistant Director Planning
Sign off date:	12 April 2023

1. Policy, Project or service information:

This section should be used to identify the main purpose of the project, policy or service change, the method of delivery, including who key stakeholders are, main beneficiaries and any associated aims.

What is the purpose of the project, policy change or service change, its expected outcomes and how does it relate to your services corporate plan:
Finchampstead Parish Council has produced a draft Neighbourhood Plan to help shape how development is managed in their area. The Plan contains policies on issues including housing; settlement separation; the natural and historic environment; retail facilities; business and commercial development; transport; and design. It also proposes to allocate areas of land as Local Green Space. The post examination Plan does not include any site allocations.
This report considers the findings of the examination of the submission Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan, the modifications recommended by the Independent Examiner, whether these should be accepted, and if so, seeks support for the modified plan to proceed to a public vote through a referendum. Once adopted, the neighbourhood plan will become part of the development plan for the Finchampstead area. Holding a referendum

is required by the Regulations governing the neighbourhood plan process. The referendum will be undertaken in line with Regulations governing that process.

Should more than half of those voting do so in favour of the Plan at the referendum, Wokingham Borough Council must 'make' (adopt) the Plan through a resolution of Full Council. Once made, the Plan will form part of the statutory development plan (alongside Local Plans) and be used in the determination of planning applications and appeals in or affecting Finchampstead Parish.

Outline how you are delivering your project, policy change or service change. What governance arrangements are in place, which internal stakeholders (Service managers, Assistant Directors, Members ect) have/will be consulted and informed about the project or changes:

The consultation framework for the preparation of the Plan has been undertaken in accordance with the council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement. This involved sending emails/letters to a number of individuals, organisations, councillors and internal officers. Advertising and further information will be placed on the council's website and publicised through social media.

Stakeholders including the Assistant Director of Planning and Director of Place and Growth have been engaged through the Corporate Leadership Team. Specialists from Growth and Delivery have also engaged with members of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Planning Steering Group and Finchampstead Parish Council and provided policy advice and technical support throughout the Plan's preparation.

Outline who are the main beneficiaries of the Project, policy change or service change?

The Plan has been produced by Finchampstead Parish Council (the qualifying body) with the advice and support of officers in the council's Growth and Delivery team, communities and stakeholders. The purpose of neighbourhood planning is to enable local communities to help shape how development is managed in their area. The main beneficiaries are residents and local businesses within Finchampstead Parish.

The Independent Examiner was also satisfied that consultation and publicity undertaken on the Plan had met the regulatory requirements.

The Plan, once made, will be used by Wokingham Borough Council to help determine the suitability of planning applications within the area, and to help defend any appeals against the refusal of planning permission.

Outline any associated aims attached to the project, policy change or service change:
--

The purpose of a neighbourhood plan is to enable communities to help shape how development is managed in their area.
--

2. Protected characteristics:

There are 9 protected characteristics as defined by the legislation:

- Race
- Gender
- Disability
- Gender re-assignment
- Age
- Religious belief
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy/Maternity
- Marriage and civil partnership:

To find out more about the protected groups, please consult the EQIA guidance.

3. Initial Impact review:

In the table below, please indicate whether your project, Policy change or service change will have a positive or negative impact on one of the protected characteristics. To assess the level of impact, please assign each group a Positive, No, Low or High impact score:

For information on how to define No, low or high impact, please consult the EQIA guidance document.

If your project is to have a positive impact on one of the protected groups, please outline this in the table below.

For details on what constitutes a positive impact, please consult the EQIA guidance.

Protected characteristics	Impact score	Please detail what impact will be felt by the protected group:
Race:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.
Gender:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.
Disabilities:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.
Age:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.
Sexual orientation:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.
Religion/belief:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.
Gender re-assignment:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.
Pregnancy and Maternity:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.

Protected characteristics	Impact score	Please detail what impact will be felt by the protected group:
Marriage and civil partnership:	None	Based on the scope of this project, no negative or positive outcomes have been identified. All stakeholders were consulted in the preparation of the plan. Arrangements for the referendum will ensure fair access for the stakeholders who are being engaged.

Based on your findings from your initial impact assessment, you must complete a full impact assessment for any groups you have identified as having a low or high negative impact. If No impact, or a positive impact has been identified, you do not need to complete a full assessment. However, you must report on this initial assessment and it must receive formal approval from the Assistant Director responsible for the project, policy or service change.

Initial impact assessment approved by....

Trevor Saunders

Assistant Director, Planning

Date:....12/04/2023

141

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 9.

TITLE	Revenue Monitoring 2022-23 - Outturn
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

Report the revenue outturn position of the Council for 2022/23 financial year highlighting the effective management of the Council's finances to ensure value for money for council tax payers, housing tenants and schools.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive is asked to:

- 1) note the outturn position of the revenue budget and the level of balances in respect of the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Dedicated Schools Grant.
- 2) agree the General Fund carry forward requests of £317k as set out in Appendix B to the report. This request is lower than in the previous year where carry forwards were £667k.
- 3) note general fund balance as at 31 March 2023 is c£9.1m, this balance remains in line with the reasonable level of balances set out in the general fund reserves policy statement as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is to allow the Executive to note and consider the financial outturn for 2022/23 for the Council's net revenue expenditure, its General Fund Balance (GFB), the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The Executive has agreed to consider Revenue Monitoring Reports on a quarterly basis.

At the end of the financial year 2022/23, the General Fund (Revenue) is reporting a total spend of £161.98m; the Housing Revenue Account has an adverse variance of £240k and Dedicated Schools Grant an in-year adverse variance of £3.3m against a net planned spend of £171.8m.

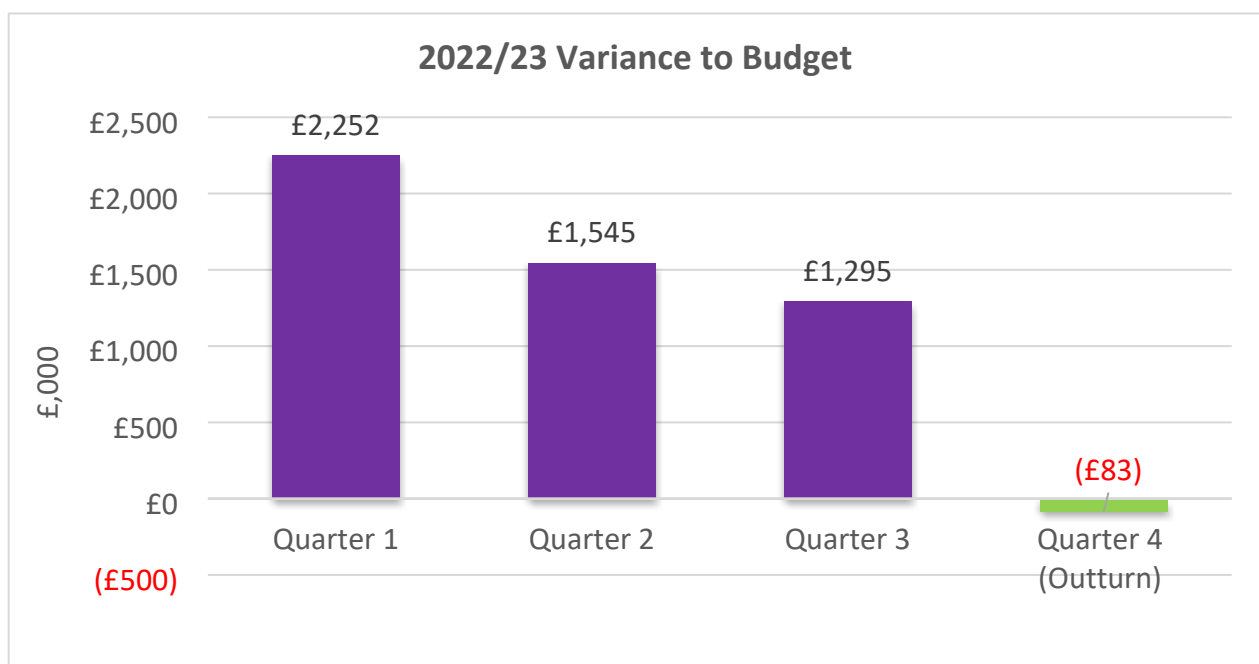
The following table shows the breakdown by directorate for the General Fund (Revenue). **The overall variance (actual spend less budget) was (£83k) favourable.**

Table 1

	End of Year Position		
	Budget	Actual	Net over /

Department			(under)
	£,000	£,000	spend £,000
Adult Social Care	61,971	61,673	(298)
Chief Executive	12,398	11,967	(431)
Children's Services	38,808	40,002	1,194
Place & Growth	47,015	46,701	(314)
Resources & Assets	1,870	1,636	(234)
Net Expenditure	162,062	161,979	(83)

2022/23 has been a challenging year with high inflation, rising interest rates, shortages of workforce and delays to goods and services impacting the wider cost of living and our services. Therefore, financial monitoring and governance remains to be of high importance to support delivery of the Council's objectives. Throughout the year, the financial position has been monitored closely and reported in the quarterly Executive reports. Significant work has been undertaken in 2022/23 to manage the Council's budget from a potential significant overspend of £2.25m reported in quarter one to an outturn position of an £83k underspend. This is highlighted below in the improved financial position for outturn compared to previous reported positions.



Details of the outturn position and variances are in the main body of the report and also shown in Appendix A.

Following the year-end closing process, the Council's General Fund Balance (GFB) is estimated to be c£9.1 million. This balance remains in line with the reasonable level of balances set out in the general fund reserves policy statement as part of the Medium Term Financial Plan.

In relation to school budgets, these are funded through a direct grant from Central Government known as the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is used to fund individual schools through an agreed formula, costs associated with Early Years Services, support for children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), and to fund relevant statutory support services. At the time of budget setting, an in-year pressure of £3.9m was identified due to reported pressures within the High Needs Block. This year the DSG reports an in year adverse variance of £7.2m against a net income of £167.9m – this represents 4.3% of the total income, and an adverse movement of £3.3m against the position projected at the time of budget setting.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) reports an overall overspend of £0.24m. The overspend is predominantly as a result of additional maintenance expenditure caused by the cost of living crisis and increasing material costs. The HRA reserve balance as at the 31 March 2023 is £1.08m, shown in Appendix D.

BACKGROUND

General Fund

Comparing the actual spend vs the approved budget, table 1 shows the outturn position for 2022/23 by Directorate. Further details are shown in Appendix A.

Table 1

Department	End of Year Position		
	Budget	Actual	Net over / (under) spend
	£,000	£,000	£,000
Adult Social Care	61,971	61,673	(298)
Chief Executive	12,398	11,967	(431)
Children's Services	38,808	40,002	1,194
Place & Growth	47,015	46,701	(314)
Resources & Assets	1,870	1,636	(234)
Net Expenditure	162,062	161,979	(83)

Material areas of favourable / adverse variances include;

Adult Social Care

Underspend of £0.3m. The continued impact of growing demand and hospital discharge is causing some pressures to market costs and volumes and continues to be closely monitored. Delivery of savings is slightly ahead of target supporting a small underspend for the service. In addition, careful management of agency staffing levels and some delays in recruitment have led to some underspends on staffing.

Chief Executive

The underspend on the Chief Executive directorate of £0.431m is as a result of vacancies and delayed recruitment across the directorate, £0.18m of additional income from the Registrars service and a £0.17m prior year refund on the Archives joint arrangement.

Children's Services

Overspend of £1.19m for the year. Significant budget pressure from rising numbers of children in care / care leavers (placements / permanence overspend of £880k), along with recruitment challenges have driven budget pressure within social care. Home to School Transport budgets have overspent by £1.1m through the impact of both rising demand and cost inflation. The overall budget impact experienced across the service has in part been mitigated by reserves held and management action on discretionary spend.

Place & Growth

Underspend of £0.3m. Predominantly as a result of £0.9m underspend on waste disposal. £0.3m overspend Highways and Transport from an overspend/less than budgeted income in relation to parking and reduced spend on highways maintenance. £0.3m overspend from a combined overspend on Housing and favourable outturn position in Planning and Environment and Safety.

Resources & Assets

The directorate shows an underspend of £0.234m. The main forecast variances include an income shortfall in leisure of £0.5m, this is an on-going risk as the service rebuilds following the pandemic and encounters further income loss as a result of hardship pressures. There are vacancies of £0.074m as a result of delayed recruitment in the Internal audit service and the pay award of £0.3m is to be funded from Corporate Inflation. These are offset against a saving of £0.96m on interest on balances as a result of the recent changes in interest rates on investments and delaying/curtailing capital spend where practicable.

Carry Forwards

The Executive are asked to approve the general fund carry forwards, requests totalling £317k are set out in Appendix B to the report. This request is lower than in the previous year where carry forwards were £667k.

General Fund Balance

General Fund balances at 31 March 2023 are c£9.1m. The estimated balance reported in quarter three to the Executive was c£7.7m. The reason for difference is in relation to favourable movements in service variances of c£1.4m achieved in the last quarter.

The General Fund balance is held to provide a general contingency for unavoidable or unforeseen expenditure as well as providing some stability for longer term planning particularly in uncertain economic times. Professional guidance from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy recommends a minimum general fund reserve of 5% of net expenditure. This equates to a recommended level of c£7.9m set out in the general fund reserves policy statement in the Medium Term Financial Plan. This is within our current general fund balance.

The Statement of General Fund balance is shown in Appendix C.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) reports an overall overspend of £0.24m. The overspend is predominantly as a result of additional maintenance expenditure caused by the cost of living crisis and increasing material costs. The HRA reserve balance as at the 31st March 2023 is £1.08m, shown in Appendix D.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)

Schools are funded through a direct grant from Central Government known as the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). This is used to fund individual schools through an agreed formula, costs associated with Early Years Services, support for children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND), and to fund relevant statutory support services. This year the DSG reports an in year adverse variance of £7.2m against a net income of £167.9m – this represents 4.3% of the total income, and an adverse movement of £3.3m against the position projected at the time of budget setting. Shown in Appendix E.

The overspend on the DSG relates to ongoing pressure on the High Needs Block, spend above budget driven largely by continuing increases in the number of children and young people with EHCPs, increasing complexity of need, and demand for specialist placements. An ambitious programme of work is underway, as set out in the Safety Valve agreement between WBC and the Department for Education, that drives forward system wide changes in order to deliver a balanced budget by 2028/29. The Safety Valve Agreement brings funding of £20m from the DfE subject to successful delivery of programme milestones. An initial payment of £8m was received in March 2023.

As at 31st March 2023, the DSG balance will be a deficit of £9.17m made up of the in year deficit of £7.2m, the brought forward deficit of £10.04m, partially offset by £8m Safety Valve funding.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	£161.98m	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	As per MTFP	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	As per MTFP	Yes	Revenue

Other Financial Information

Effective monitoring of budgets is an essential element of providing cost effective services and enables any corrective action to be undertaken, if required. Many of the budgets are activity driven and can be volatile in nature.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
None

Public Sector Equality Duty
Public Sector Equality is considered during the business cases before spend is committed.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
N/A - This is a report of past performance

List of Background Papers
<p>Appendix A – Revenue summary Appendix B – List of carry forwards Appendix C – General fund balance Appendix D – HRA summary Appendix E – DSG Schools block summary</p>

Contact Stu Taylor	Service Finance
Telephone 07525 804116	Email stu.taylor@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

REVENUE MONITORING REPORT March 2023

GENERAL FUND SUMMARY

Department	End of Year Position			Comment on major areas of estimated over / (underspend)
	Budget	Actual	Net over / (under) spend	
	£,000	£,000	£,000	
Adult Social Care	61,971	61,673	(298)	The continued impact of growing demand and hospital discharge is causing some pressures to market costs and volumes and continues to be closely monitored. Delivery of savings is slightly ahead of target supporting a small underspend for the service. In addition careful management of agency staffing levels and some delays in recruitment have led to some underspends on staffing.
Chief Executive	12,398	11,967	(431)	The underspend on the Chief Executive directorate of £0.431m is as a result of vacancies and delayed recruitment across the directorate, £0.18m of additional income from the Registrars service and a £0.17m prior year refund on the Archives joint arrangement.
Children's Services	38,808	40,002	1,194	Within social care, rising demand from children in care / care leavers (placements / permanence overspend of £880k) along with recruitment challenges have driven budget pressure. Home to School Transport budgets have overspent by £1.1m through the impact of both rising demand and cost inflation. The overall budget impact experienced across the service has in part been mitigated by reserves held and management action on discretionary spend.
Place & Growth	47,015	46,701	(314)	The current cost of living crisis has resulted in the volume of waste being collected dropping resulting in a reduction in expenditure on waste disposal. While the level of planned and reactive highways maintenance works was reduced to help with the lower than budgeted level of car park income received. Some overspend on Temporary Accommodation costs within Housing have been offset by a favourable outturn position for Planning and a greater than budgeted use of commuted sums within Environment and Safety.
Resources & Assets	1,870	1,636	(234)	The directorate shows an underspend of £0.234m. The main forecast variances include an income shortfall in leisure of £0.5m, this is an on-going risk as the service rebuilds following the pandemic and encounters further income loss as a result of hardship pressures. There are vacancies of £0.074m as a result of delayed recruitment in the Internal audit service and the pay award of £0.3m is to be funded from Corporate Inflation. These are offset against a saving of £0.96m on interest on balances as a result of the recent changes in interest rates on investments and delaying/curtailing capital spend where practicable.
Net Expenditure	162,062	161,979	(83)	

This page is intentionally left blank

GENERAL FUND SUMMARY - 2022/23 CARRY FORWARDS

Directorate	Budget Description	Reason for Carry Forward	Amount £000
Chief Executives	Customer Delivery	A special item was approved for £52k in 2022/23 for staffing costs in the Customer experience team. Due to staff vacancies this cost was covered by the service in 2022/23. However this funding is required in 2023/24 as there is a need to continue the delivery of the Customer Experience Learning programme and supporting activities. It is compulsory for all officers to attend the training that this funding supports. Without this funding delivery of the programme will cease, and the benefits and culture development around becoming a more customer centric organisation will not be realised. These costs will not be able to be covered from future budgets.	52
Chief Executives Total			52
Place and Growth	Staff budget - Town Centre Development Officer - 1 fte. 2 yr fixed term contract	A special item was approved for £45k per year in 2021/22 and 2022/23. The 2022/23 allocation has not been fully spend and therefore we are looking to carry this unspent amount forward for use in 2023/24. The special item was approved for the Town Centre Development Officer post and will be used for this purpose in 2023/24.	26
Place and Growth	Highways & Transport - Services - Specialist	We received additional grant funding from Department for Transport (DfT) which we had to spend first, we have not spent the full amount yet as we are still awaiting guidance on LTP development from DfT.	150
Place and Growth	Community Heritage & Green Infrastructure	Balance of 2022/23 Special Item £45k for 12 month contract for Ecology Officer, caused by vacancy period in 2022/23.	45
Place and Growth	Climate Change	This relates to a special item of £90k that was awarded for 2 posts in 2022/23 however it was not utilised in full due to periods of vacancy. As a result of this we had to appoint new staff on a fixed term contract basis to allow us to complete the work required. These contracts go beyond March 24 where funding was previously due to end. This carry forward will therefore cover the period beyond March 2024.	29
Place and Growth	Enforcement & Safety	This is required in order to fund the provision of Public Protection Partnership support for activities including environmental health issues and air quality monitoring. There is currently no budget in 2023/24 to cover this support, which the executive members are keen for us to continue with, and therefore a carry forward request of £40k is being submitted given the 2022/23 underspend in the Enforcement & Safety Service.	40
Place and Growth	Planning	Planning records from 1948-2004 are on microfiche at Shute End. The Land Registry will be digitising records from 1977-2004 at nil cost (from 2004 planning applications have been scanned and added to the web site on receipt). Carry forward request to pay for digitising of fiches dating between 1948-1977. The fiches are on acetate, they are old and deteriorating. Digitisation will enable remote access, save space in the office and facilitate more efficient working.	27
Place and Growth Total			317
2021/22 Carry Forward Requests Total			369

This page is intentionally left blank

Estimated General Fund Balance - 31st March 2023

Note	£,000	£,000
1 Estimated General Fund Balance (as at 31/3/2022)		(£9,026)
<u>Supplementary Estimates</u>	£0	
		£0
<u>Service Variance</u>		
Adult Social Care & Health	(£298)	
Chief Executive	(£431)	
Children's Services	£1,194	
Resources and Assets	(£234)	
Place and Growth	(£314)	
		(£83)
Estimated General Fund Balance 31/3/2023		(£9,109)

Notes

1. General balance as at 31/03/22 is estimated pending completion on the 2021/22 statement of accounts.

This page is intentionally left blank

REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2022/23

Report Date: March 2023

Service	End of Year Position			Details of Year end Variances
	Current Approved Budget	Actual	Net over / (under) spend	
	£,000	£,000	£,000	
Housing Revenue Account				
Capital Finance				
Expenditure	4,837	4,762	(75)	Capital financing costs have been lower than budgeted as a result of changing interest rates and repayment levels.
Income	(20)	(30)	(10)	
Net	4,817	4,732	(85)	
Fees & Charges / Capital Finance Charges				
Expenditure	97	123	26	
Income	(85)	(102)	(17)	
Net	12	21	9	
HRA General Management				
Expenditure	2,036	2,014	(22)	Additional staff related costs
Income	(87)	(126)	(39)	
Net	1,949	1,888	(61)	
HRA Housing Repairs				
Expenditure	3,905	4,180	274	Additional expenditure resulting from maintenance pressures caused by the cost of living crisis and increasing costs.
Income	(130)	(196)	(66)	
Net	3,775	3,984	208	
HRA Housing Services				
Expenditure	2,234	2,474	239	Rent collection includes previous years arrears, less voids and less right to buy sales. A greater number of Loddon and Berry Brooke properties accounts for the higher than forecast transfer of funds to them.
Income	(17,917)	(18,001)	(84)	
Net	(15,683)	(15,528)	155	
Sheltered Accommodation				
Expenditure	350	377	27	
Income	(531)	(544)	(13)	
Net	(181)	(168)	13	
Subtotal Excluding Internal Recharges	(5,310)	(5,070)	240	
Internal and Capital Charges	5,310	5,310	(0)	
Total	0	0	240	

Housing Revenue Account Reserves	£,000	£,000
HRA Reserves as at 31st March 2022		(1,323)
Planned Spend	0	
Net Variance	240	
2022/23 Forecast Net Spend against Reserves		240
HRA Reserves as at 31st March 2023 (Forecast)		(1,083)

This page is intentionally left blank

REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2022/23

Report Date: March 2023

Service	End of Year Position			Comment on major areas of estimated over / (underspend)
	Current Approved Budget	Actual	Net over / (under) spend	
	£,000	£,000	£,000	
Dedicated Schools Grant Central School Services Block				
Expenditure	995	994	(1)	
Income	(995)	(995)	0	
Net	0	(1)	(1)	
Early Years Block				
Expenditure	11,289	11,363	74	Balance of £50k held in reserves for EY Hardship Fund as agreed with Schools Forum
Income	(11,289)	(11,413)	(124)	
Net	0	(50)	(50)	
High Needs Block				
Expenditure	29,642	32,893	3,251	Ongoing increasing number of children & young people with an EHCP, coupled with challenges around sufficiency of local provision; outturn £544k higher than forecast due to higher than anticipated costs for those pupils Educated Other than at School (EOTAS) and increased costs to support pupils in mainstream e.g. Alternative Provision (AP)
Income	(25,779)	(25,660)	119	
Net	3,863	7,233	3,370	
Schools Block				
Expenditure	129,842	129,826	(16)	
Income	(129,842)	(129,842)	0	
Net	0	(16)	(16)	
Total	3,863	7,166	3,303	

159

TOTAL Income	(167,905)	(167,910)	(5)
TOTAL Expenditure	171,768	175,076	3,308
	3,863	7,166	3,303
Deficit Brought Forward	10,040	10,040	
Safety Valve Funding		(8,040)	
Cumulative Deficit as at 31/03/23	13,903	9,166	

This page is intentionally left blank

TITLE	Capital Outturn 2022-23
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Finance - Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To inform members of the capital programme outturn for 2022/2023, seek approval for the relevant budget carry forwards and demonstrate effective and safe use of our resources to deliver service improvements and service continuity through capital investments.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive is asked to:

- 1) note the outturn position of the capital programme for 2022/23 as summarised in the report below and set out in detail in appendix A;
- 2) approve and note the proposed carry forwards in the capital programme as set out in Appendix B.
- 3) note and approve the Quarter 4 budget adjustments to the 2022/23 capital programme which include;
 - a) An additional £63,081 budget for fit out costs for Ryeish Green Learning Disability Accommodation. This is funded in full by a ring-fenced contribution from NHS Berkshire.
 - b) An additional £77,000 budget for works on Dinton Barn is required to meet the latest costs of the project following a recent procurement tender process. This is funded in full from the SANG maintenance reserve.
 - c) An additional £121,607 budget towards Winnersh Farm SEN School. This is funded in full from Reading Borough Council and is a contribution towards abnormal costs identified in the project.
- 4) approve the capital funding and the expenditure budget of £956,000 for the purchase of four properties as part of the single homelessness accommodation programme (SHAP). This will be funded from S106 developer contributions (£150,000), ringfenced grant (£359,408) and the remainder from HRA borrowing (£446,592).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report informs the Executive of the final position of the Council in delivering its capital programme for the financial year 2022/23. The Executive have previously agreed to consider capital monitoring reports on a quarterly basis and this report highlights the capital outturn as at the year end (31 March 2023).

As highlighted the Medium Term Financial Plan for 2023/24, the Council face significant financial challenges, in terms of both its revenue and capital resources. It is therefore

essential that the capital programme is closely reviewed to assess the assuredness of funding sources and if there have been any changes in service requirements. The Council on the other hand must recognise that capital investment plays an important role in providing new and enhanced services for our residents. In 2022/23 a total capital investment of £67 million was made across the Council, delivering various new facilities and significant improvements to existing assets. The total underspend across the capital programme was c£51 million. Many of the savings were identified throughout the year as part of the capital programme review and included in the 2023/24 budget setting process. There are different types of savings, of which, some will not result in additional funding being available to be used elsewhere. For example, where projects were to be self funded from cost reductions or income generation. Many savings were identified throughout the year and factored into the financial funding envelope available for the medium term financial plan (2023/24 onwards).

The table below shows the financial summary for 2022/23.

		£'million
Capital programme approved at Council (Feb 2022)	a	123.2
Budget rephased from prior years (existing projects)	b	288.2
Budgets movements in year	c	28.6
Current approved budget	d = a + b + c	440.0
Actual capital expenditure in 2022/23	e	66.6
Carry forward into future years (2023/24 onwards)	f	322.1
Forecast variance (underspend) / overspend	g = (e+f) - d	(51.3)

As of 31 March 2023, there are £(51.3m) in savings across the capital programme identified. Some savings relate to projects that were to be self-funded through cost reductions or income generation and therefore the saving reflects the reduction in the need to spend and doesn't result in funding to be available to be used elsewhere. Where savings on projects which are funded from unringfenced funding such as grants, capital receipts, community infrastructure levy, these savings have been factored into the funding envelope available for the medium term financial plan (2023/24 onwards). A breakdown of the material (savings) / overspends by directorate include;

	£'million
<u>Adult Social Care</u>	
Community equipment – saving identified from utilising other budgets and receiving one off funding from Health.	(£0.11m)
<u>Chief Executive's Office</u>	
IT - Hardware (mobile phone replacements). <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£0.08m)
Optalis IT kit windows 10 upgrades	(£0.05m)

<u>Children's Services</u>	
Matthews Green (St. Cecilia CofE Primary School) - efficiency savings throughout life of the projects (design + procurement). <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.85m)
Schools Condition Maintenance – programme delivered.	(£0.30m)
New Arborfield Primary - efficiency savings throughout life of the projects (design + procurement). <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.27m)
Bohunt Secondary School - contingency budget held for post completion costs not required. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.19m)
School Kitchens - reduction in number schools due to academisation. <i>Reported in Q2 capital monitoring (Oct'22)</i>	(£0.13m)
Schools Access - reduction in need for minor works programme. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.05m)
Primary Strategy - expansion schemes at Loddon and Highwood completed with savings. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.05m)
<u>Housing Revenue Account (HRA)</u>	
Housing Repairs & Adaptions for Disabled - plans for spend reduced to match available funding. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.25m)
<u>Place & Growth</u>	
Winnersh Triangle Parkway - A projected overspend on this scheme has previously been reported at £1.3m due to the car park foundations and scheme re-design following the discovery of a conflicting underground trunk water main. The resolution of this major technical issue has proven to be considerably more costly than originally anticipated due principally to the inevitable time delays and because the Council had contractually committed to the scheme with the main contractor, whereby significant works were underway and material had been ordered, including the main steel structure. The Council is pursuing options for the recovery of costs to mitigate the overspend.	£2.9m
Shinfield Eastern Relief Road – historic budget held for passporting developer funding to University of Reading no longer required.	(£7.68m)
Land Acquisition for Major Road Schemes - budget not required. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£7.3m)
Managing Congestion and pollution - reinvested in active travel and bus priority for 23/24 onwards (via the MTFP) <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£4.8m)
SCAPE Major Road Schemes- schemes near completion including shared costs due to work carried out by others. <i>Reported in Q2 capital monitoring (Oct'22)</i>	(£3.9m)
Payment of commuted sum to WHL - current projects completed. <i>Reported in Q2 capital monitoring (Oct'22)</i>	(£3.9m)
Warren House Embankment Stabilisation. <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£3.0m)

Greenways. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£2.1m)
Wokingham Town Centre Environmental Improvements. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£1.4m)
Highways Infrastructure Flood Alleviation Schemes. <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£1.3m)
Bridge Strengthening - Earley Station Footbridge. <i>Options for site being to be revaluated and if required a new bid will be submitted in a future year. Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.9m)
Completed Road Schemes Retention - No further liabilities identified	(£0.7m)
Public Rights of Way Network. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.6m)
Electric Vehicle (EV) Charge Points - Budget reduced to match government grant approved. <i>Reported in Q2 capital monitoring (Oct'22)</i>	(£0.46m)
Transport corridor improvements (Shepherds Hill to Thames Valley P+R) - works focusing on Sutton Seed Roundabout. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.43m)
A329(M) & Drainage (Central Reserve Concrete Barrier and Carriageway). <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£0.35m)
A329 - Wokingham Borough Cycle Network <i>Previous Q3 carry forward now identified as a saving</i>	(£0.18m)
Permanent & Portable Variable Message Signs (PVMS) Project - trail ended with costs less than planned. <i>Reported in Q1 capital monitoring</i>	(£0.10m)
Street lighting column structural testing - less requirement following borough-wide LED street lighting replacement project. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.02m)
<u>Resources & Assets</u>	
WBC Holdings Ltd – budget held to provide capital loans no longer required.	(£5.19m)
Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - former Marks & Spencer's Site - Options for site being to be revaluated and if required a new bid will be submitted in a future year. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£3.0m)
Redesigning use of WBC assets to generate future income. <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£1.4m)
Corporate Contingency released to offset additional pressures identified in quarter four.	(£1.23m)
3G provision in the Earley and Lower Earley area to be reassessed.	(£0.8m)
Bulmershe Leisure Centre Redevelopment – savings identified across project budgets.	(£0.33m)
IT / System related projects (server rooms, software and Councillors laptops). <i>Reported in capital programme review paper (Jul'22)</i>	(£0.17m)
Outdoor gyms x 3 locations - scheme reviewed and now cancelled. <i>Reported in Q3 capital monitoring (Jan'23)</i>	(£0.08m)

Town Centre Regeneration - Alexander House Refurbishment – now occupied.	(£0.06m)
Total	(£51.3m)

Some of the savings identified are self – funded schemes which means the savings can't be used elsewhere. Where savings are funded from unringfenced grants or borrowing, these funds have been reinvested to fund other schemes in the 2023/24 medium term financial plan.

Further information can be found in Appendix A.

Recommendation Two - Carry Forwards

As part of the monthly monitoring of the capital programme, the profiling of expenditure is reviewed and where required, a more realistic profile of the expenditure over the life of the project will be updated. Appendix B provides a list of the capital carry forwards identified in the last quarter of the year. Previous carry forwards have been presented and approved by Executive each quarter. Over the full financial year, a total of £322.1m of carry forwards have been identified. £284.9m were identified at quarter three, meaning a further £37.2m have been identified in the last quarter of the financial year. These projects will be reprofiled across the next three financial years.

The carry forwards in the capital programme relate to budget envelopes for projects at different stages. Some budgets in the capital programme are held as placeholders with the detailed viable project business cases, including timelines, still to be developed and approved. Some budgets carry forward are contingency budgets and some budgets have been reprofiled as part of the medium term financial plan. There are also a number of projects that have started and have commitments which will continue into the new financial year.

As part of the Councils enhanced financial monitoring, carry forwards will be analysed in more detail during quarter one to ensure value for money on all capital projects, this includes reviewing the need, the timing and how we procure goods and services. Any variations to the carry forwards will be reported to Executive.

The Executive are asked to approve and note the proposed quarter four carry forwards in the capital programme as set out in Appendix B;

Recommendation Three - Quarter Four Budget Adjustments

The Executive are asked to note and approve the following budget adjustments; Adjustments to the 2022/23 capital programme:-

- Increase in capital programme for fit out costs for Ryeish Green Learning Disability Accommodation (flats) of £63k, funded by a ring-fenced contribution from NHS West Berkshire. Additional cost pressures were identified in the project during the year and the Council secured additional funding to cover these. Project included fixtures and fitting (including some specialist), landscaping and Sensory Room equipment.

- An additional £77,000 budget for works on Dinton Barn is required to meet the latest costs of the project following a recent procurement tender process. This is funded in full from the SANG maintenance reserve. Construction works are due in 2023/24.
- An additional £121,607 budget towards Winnersh Farm SEN School. This is funded in full from Reading Borough Council and is an agreed contribution towards abnormal costs identified in the project.

Recommendation Four - Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP)

Wokingham Borough Council has been chosen as one of 21 local authorities to deliver the young people's element of SHAP. The grant allocation to the Council (£359,408) is intended to support the acquisition of 4 properties for young people aged 18-25 at risk of homelessness. This grant allocation is expected to pay for up to 40% of the capital costs, with local authorities meeting the remaining costs. With the grant allocation, this leaves the Council with an investment required of £596,592 which would be funded by a mix of borrowing (through the Housing Revenue Account) and through the use of s106 commuted sums for affordable housing. The Council would be looking to release up to £150,000 in developer contributions for affordable housing.

The Council have also been award revenue grant to support the running costs for the first three years at a value of £143,907 (average of £47,969 per year). The Council's partner, Two Saints, has been commissioned to deliver the revenue support as they also deliver support for the Council's other Housing First properties. The households will receive intensive Housing First support through the recruitment of 1 x Housing First Coordinator, commissioned through Two Saints. The properties would be let on assured shorthold tenancies for a maximum period up to 3 years to mirror the revenue funding support available. Decisions to extend this support will be looked at closer to the time in line with revenue funding availability (including any extension of grant support).

The Government expects property acquisition to be the quickest route and conditions of funding require the properties to have exchanged contracts by May 2024. The Council is seeking to acquire the 4 properties on the open market within the required timescales.

Profiling the current need for provision for young people aged 18-25 currently at risk of homelessness in the Borough shows that over the last 2 years up to April 2023 there were 8 x 18-25 year olds with a Chaos Index score of 30 or higher. The Chaos Index is a measurement used to identify chaotic people with multiple needs who require additional support. A score of 30 or higher identifies those who are unable to sustain a tenancy without tailored support and is the benchmark to qualify for Housing First support. In the 2 years up to April 2023, the Council only had 8 voids that could be used for this provision at a time when demand for this stock is increasing with 5 additional care-leavers from March 2023 to April 2023 and the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs) increasing from 28 to 41 from Summer 2022 to Summer 2023. This project funds 4 x self-contained 1-bed apartments with wraparound support for 7 residents. The remaining 3 dwellings will be sourced through the Council's existing stock or its RP partners.

All properties would be let on Social Rents (around 50-60% of market rent). This is a stipulation of the grant agreement. The business model covers all the costs of purchasing

the properties and making them habitable. We have assumed that the properties will not pay stamp duty and are exempt from Right To Buy but are awaiting the release of the SHAP chapter in the Affordable Homes Programme 2021-2026.

A detailed financial model has been undertaken with support from our HRA consultants, Housing Finance Associates Ltd. This has looked at the expected rental income vs the capital financing costs (interest and borrowing repayment). The financial summary is set out below;

	£
Total Scheme Costs	£956,000
<i>Funded by;</i>	
S106 developer contributions	£150,000
Ringfenced grant	£359,408
HRA Borrowing (Balance)	£446,592
Borrowing Payback Period	38 Years
Net Present Value	£110,599

BACKGROUND

Capital Expenditure

In February 2022, the Council approved the Capital Programme of £123m for 2022/23. During 2022/23 a further £317m was added to the programme through a mixture of carry forwards from 2021/22 and in year budget movements. During the year, officers' identify carry forwards into future years based on latest profile of project spend. The carry forwards are agreed by Executive on a quarterly basis. Throughout 2022/23 the Council has invested in the following key areas.

MTFP category	Expenditure 2022/23 £m
Roads & Transport	£25.3m
Investment and Regeneration	£24.8m
Children Services and Schools	£7.7m
Internal Services	£4.1m
Environment	£2.7m
Adult Social Care	£2.0m
Total	£66.6m

The Council has continued to deliver its ambitious capital programme, which contribute to meeting its strategic priorities set out in the Community Vision 2021 to 2025, these are:-

- Enriching Lives
- Safe, Strong Communities
- A Clean and Green Borough
- Right Homes, Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- Changing the way we work for you

Capital Funding

The Council funds its capital expenditure from government grants, developer contributions, capital receipts and borrowing. It is a key requirement that all capital expenditure needs to be funded. Availability of resources to fund this expenditure continues to be in short supply and (as with expenditure) it is essential that these resources are recorded, monitored and allocated to achieve best value for the council and its local tax payers. This includes maximising the use of developer contributions and capital grant funding to reduce the need to borrow, and thus the cost of such borrowing, which will fall upon the local taxation requirement. All borrowing is sustainable, prudent and affordable.

The table below shows for 2022/23 by type of funding, the budget and actual funding. Wherever possible, the Council will aim to utilise funding such as unringfenced grants and developers' contributions before using borrowing as shown in the table below where the £32.0m underspend has been saved on borrowing.

Funding	Working Capital Budget £m	Actual Spend £m	Funding Variance £m
	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>b-a</i>
Borrowing	£54.7m	£22.7m	(£32.0m)
Developer contributions	£26.2m	£13.7m	(£12.5m)
Capital grants	£22.1m	£15.4m	(£6.7m)
Capital receipts	£7.2m	£7.1m	(£0.1m)
Contribution from reserves	£7.7m	£7.7m	£0.0m
Total capital funding	£117.9m	£66.6m	(£51.3m)

Note - Working capital budget is calculated as:- approved budget less carry forwards into 2023/24.

Net Indebtedness

When the Council has to borrow, this is at the most opportune time and based on the need to borrow and not in advance based on the proposed expenditure plans. Thus the Council will use its internal balances at times to defer the borrowing requirement until the market offers the best rates and lowest costs.

When considering the external debt, this should be offset by the level of cash investments the Council, which gives the level of net indebtedness of c£132 million, as shown in the table below:

As at 31 March 2023	£m
Total external debt (including HRA)	£182m
Less total cash investments	(£50m)
Net indebtedness	£132m

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	£66.6m	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	As per the MTFP	As per the MTFP	Capital
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	As per the MTFP	As per the MTFP	Capital

Other Financial Information

In the context of the overall pressure on funding we will continue to review and reconsider all elements of the capital programme in respect of reducing costs and ensuring alignment to the councils strategic priorities throughout 2023/24.

Robust monitoring is carried out on a monthly basis and reported to CLT. Quarterly monitoring reports are also reported to the Executive

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

None

Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality assessments are carried out as part of each capital project

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

The capital programme includes projects which help achieve our priorities in relation to climate change.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

None

List of Background Papers

Appendix A - Capital outturn report 2022/23
Appendix B - Approval of carry forward budgets

Contact Mark Thompson	Service Business Services
Telephone Tel: 0118 974 6555	Email mark.thompson@wokingham.gov.uk

CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT MARCH 2023

Directorate	Current Approved Budget £,000	Outturn £,000	Carry Forwards £,000	(Under) / Overspend £,000	Major Areas Of Forecast Overspend / (Underspend)
Adult Social Care & Health	14,652	2,024	12,512	(116)	(£0.11m) saving DFG Community Equipment
Chief Executives Office	6,944	1,759	5,050	(134)	(£0.08m) underspend IT - Hardware (mobile phone replacements) (£0.05m) underspend IT - Optalis IT Kit Windows 10 upgrade
Children's Services	24,759	7,722	15,184	(1,853)	1. (£0.85m) saving Matthews Green (St. Cecilia CofE Primary School) and (£0.27m) saving New Arborfield Primary - efficiency savings throughout life of the projects (design + procurement) 2. (£0.30m) saving Schools Condition Maintenance 3. (£0.19m) saving Bohunt Secondary School - contingency budget held for post completion costs not required. 4. (£0.13m) underspend School Kitchens - number of schools covered by arrangement has reduced leading to a reduced spend requirement in current & future years 5. (£0.05m) underspend Schools Access - Minor works programme dependant on the needs of specific children but nothing on horizon 6. (£0.05m) underspend from completed primary strategy expansion schemes (Loddon/Highwood)
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	39,726	16,199	23,278	(249)	1. (£0.25m) Housing (Tenants Services) - in line with reserve availability
Place & Growth 571	162,086	27,603	97,846	(36,638)	1. £2.9m overspend on Winnersh Triangle Parkway - unforeseen issues caused by the Thames Water Main. 2. (£7.68m) saving Shinfield Eastern Relief Road - budget which was previously held for passporting developer contributions to University of Reading no longer required. 3. (£7.3m) Land Acquisition for Major Road Schemes - budget not required. 4. (£4.8m) Managing Congestion and pollution - to be reinvested in active travel and bus priority for 23/24 onwards (via the MTFP) 5. (£3.9m) SCAPE Major Road Schemes - near completion including shared costs due to work carried out by others. 6. (£3.9m) Payment of commuted sum to WHL - current projects completed. 7. (£3.0m) Warren House Embankment Stabilisation. 8. (£2.1m) Greenways. 9. (£1.4m) Wokingham Town Centre Environmental Improvements 10. (£1.3m) Highways Infrastructure Flood Alleviation Schemes. 11. (£0.9m) Bridge Strengthening - Earley Station Footbridge 12. (£0.7m) Completed Road Schemes Retention - No further liabilities 13. (£0.6m) Public Rights of Way Network 14. (£0.46m) Electric Vehicle (EV) Charge Points - Budget reduced to match government grant approved. 15. (£0.43m) Transport corridor improvements (Shepherds Hill to Thames Valley P+R) - works focusing on Sutton Seed Roundabout. 16. (£0.35m) underspend A329(M) & Drainage (Central Reserve Concrete Barrier and Carriageway).
Resources & Assets	191,839	11,304	168,200	(12,335)	1. (£5.19m) underspend WBC (Holdings) Ltd Loan / WBC (Housing) funding sources 2. (£3m) underspend Wokingham Town Centre Regeneration - former Marks & Spencer's Site - Construction & refurbishment - Options for site being to be revaluated and if required a new bid will be submitted in a future year 3. (£1.4m) underspend Redesigning use of WBC assets to generate future income 4. (£1.23m) underspend Corporate Contingency released to offset additional pressures identified in quarter four. 5. (£0.80m) underspend 3G Pitch at Earley 6. (£0.33m) underspend Bulmershe Leisure Centre Redevelopment - Tiling issues resolved, further roof safety works continue 7. (£0.17m) underspend in IT / System related projects (server rooms, software and Councillors laptops) 8. (£0.08m) underspend Outdoor gyms x 3 locations - schemes cancelled 9. (£0.06m) Underspend Town Centre Regeneration - Alexander House Refurbishment 10. (£0.05m) underspend Boxing gym in Peach Place
Total	440,006	66,612	322,070	(51,325)	

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix B - List of proposed rephasing of projects in Quarter 4 into future years

Working closely with the services across the Council, the following table highlights the changes to the rephasing of the capital programme since Quarter 3.

Project	Amount £	Reprofiled to		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Carry forward position reported at Quarter 3	284,940,751	206,115,025	55,573,300	23,252,426

Since Q3, the following projects have been identified to be reprofiled to be spent in future years

Adult Social Care & Health

Older people's dementia home	111,385	111,385	0	0
Learning disability service transformation – Ryeish Green flats	53,929	53,929	0	0
Adult social care - maintenance & refurbishment	44,205	44,205	0	0
Initial options works for ASC - Highwood bungalow	15,479	15,479	0	0
Modification and improvement works to 124 Loddon Bridge road	7,010	7,010	0	0
Westmead Day Centre - replacement of water heater & associated asbestos works	4,754	4,754	0	0
Total - Adult Social Care & Health	236,761	236,761	0	0

Chief Executive's Office

IT - enhancement, security & infrastructure	2,347,393	2,347,393	0	0
IT - digital tools, website content management, intranet refresh	460,881	460,881	0	0
Wokingham library relocation and improvements	92,418	92,418	0	0
Twyford library enhancement project	72,396	72,396	0	0
Woodley library - library offer phase 1 (including decarbonisation works)	26,123	26,123	0	0
Total - Chief Executive's Office	2,999,211	2,999,211	0	0

Children's Services

Schools led enhancement - various schools	1,535,607	1,535,607	0	0
Multifaceted placement hub	1,390,000	1,390,000	0	0
Winnersh Farm SEN school	631,827	631,827	0	0
Addington school: additional intake – feasibility & construction	547,447	547,447	0	0
St. Cecilia CofE primary school (Matthews Green school / Community centre)	369,371	369,371	0	0
Arborfield primary <i>Including furniture, fixings equipment & technology & moving to new school site</i>	347,601	347,601	0	0
Capita one system	336,186	336,186	0	0
Satellite SEND provision – old Farley Hill school site	244,340	244,340	0	0
Bulmershe xomprehensive timber curtain walling replacement	239,206	239,206	0	0
Sixth Form expansion	219,406	219,406	0	0
Secondary school expansion programme <i>Piggott, Emmbrook & St Crispin's secondary schools</i>	197,095	197,095	0	0
School kitchens	129,931	129,931	0	0
Children with disabilities equipment	123,527	123,527	0	0
Addington school expansion - furniture, fixings equipment & technology	108,691	108,691	0	0
Schools urgent maintenance - various small projects	104,258	104,258	0	0
Schools buildings condition and compliance surveys	100,000	100,000	0	0
Bohunt secondary school	99,222	99,222	0	0
School mechanical & electrical condition surveys	69,970	69,970	0	0
Shinfield West primary school - Furniture, Fixings & Equipment	66,064	66,064	0	0
Alder Grove primary	61,661	61,661	0	0
Loddon primary school	39,254	39,254	0	0

Project	Amount £	Reprofiled to		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Special educational needs website development	22,792	22,792	0	0
Children in care website upgrade	21,155	21,155	0	0
Foundry school - furniture, fixings & equipment	19,829	19,829	0	0
Care leaver accommodation <i>Purchase of 6 new 1 bed flats at Broad Street Walk, Wokingham</i>	18,500	18,500	0	0
Healthy pupil capital fund - various schools	17,855	17,855	0	0
Schools access works	17,000	17,000	0	0
Primary strategy - furniture, fixings, equipment & technology	11,489	11,489	0	0
Statutory legal fees for school land transfers - various schools	10,246	10,246	0	0
Care leaver supported accommodation: renovation costs of Seaford Court	10,000	10,000	0	0
WBC residential children's home project	10,000	10,000	0	0
Wheatfield Pri. Sch (Winnersh Farm) - furniture, fixings & equipment	1,296	1,296	0	0
Seaford Court development	865	865	0	0
Basic needs primary programme	245	245	0	0
Purchase of laptops for looked after children in care	162	162	0	0
Total - Children's Services	7,122,099	7,122,099	0	0

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

Improvement works at Grovelands Park	799,839	799,839	0	0
Purchase of council houses	170,933	170,933	0	0
Total - Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	970,772	970,772	0	0

Place & Growth

SCAPE / Land acquisition <i>Post construction works for Arborfield Bypass, Winnersh Relief Road, Barkham Bridge, North Wokingham Distributer Road, South Wokingham Distributer Road (Eastern Gateway) & Nine Mile Ride Extension</i>	3,842,325	3,842,325	0	0
Strengthening approach embankments to bridges	584,133	584,133	0	0
Traffic signal upgrade programme	545,685	545,685	0	0
Mandatory disabled facility grants - various small projects	532,300	532,300	0	0
Shinfield eastern relief road	500,000	500,000	0	0
Wokingham borough cycle network <i>Bader way design & build contract to construct Bridge for phase 3</i>	468,589	468,589	0	0
Structures VRS	437,676	437,676	0	0
Borough wide non SDL play area enhancement projects <i>including Shinfield, Twyford and Winnersh Play Areas</i>	325,622	325,622	0	0
Toutley highways depot modernisation <i>Early stages of project, majority of spend in next financial year</i>	310,347	310,347	0	0
Electric vehicle charge points	300,000	300,000	0	0
Bridge strengthening	225,000	225,000	0	0
Byways	165,368	165,368	0	0
Carbon capture via the planting of 250,000 new trees	151,949	151,949	0	0
Earley station footbridge <i>Options to be approved construction unlikely until next financial year</i>	149,999	149,999	0	0
Dinton storage barn	147,289	147,289	0	0
Greenways <i>Land owner agreement delays and public consultations delays</i>	143,379	143,379	0	0
Sports provision to serve North & South SDL's	131,659	131,659	0	0
Local cycling and walking infrastructure plans	108,400	108,400	0	0
The Ridges - repair and stabilise closed road	101,252	101,252	0	0
Highways carriageways structural maintenance & Wokingham highways investment strategy (WHIS)	95,050	95,050	0	0

Project	Amount £	Reprofiled to		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Street lighting - LED project	79,615	50,614	29,001	0
Dinton activity centre project	61,333	61,333	0	0
Car parks - pay & display machines	59,780	59,780	0	0
California crossroads <i>Delivery not expected to begin until Easter 2023</i>	55,186	55,186	0	0
Planning & public protection partnership (PPP) - system replacement	48,446	48,446	0	0
Pedestrian network improvements - Hurricane Way	44,712	44,712	0	0
Urgent works to the memorials in 2 x open cemeteries and 2 x closed cemeteries	35,029	35,029	0	0
New bus stops and shelters - North Wokingham SDL	29,217	29,217	0	0
Highway drainage schemes	28,806	28,806	0	0
Cantley park destination play	26,596	26,596	0	0
Food waste collection	21,759	21,759	0	0
Wokingham biodiversity capital projects	21,277	21,277	0	0
Street lighting column structural testing	20,000	20,000	0	0
Air quality monitoring	20,000	20,000	0	0
Southlake dam crest reparation	18,000	18,000	0	0
A327 Cycleway`	14,432	14,432	0	0
California country park destination play area project	13,668	13,668	0	0
California country park - scout hut	12,450	12,450	0	0
PROW ramp and fencing - Wokingham road	9,900	9,900	0	0
Gypsy, Roma, Traveller - additional pitches	9,730	9,730	0	0
Ashenbury Park, landfill	2,897	2,897	0	0
Pedestrian Link	2,798	2,798	0	0
Gipsy lane footbridge feasibility	1,854	1,854	0	0
Shinfield footpath resurfacing works	410	410	0	0
Transport corridor improvements - Shepherds Hill to Thame Valley Park, park & ride	26	26	0	0
Total - Place & Growth	9,903,942	9,874,941	29,001	0

Resources & Assets

Community investment <i>Fund for Commercial and Housing opportunities, future strategic opportunities being developed.</i>	5,004,415	5,004,415	0	0
Capital construction inflation costs	5,000,000	5,000,000	0	0
Renewable energy infrastructure projects <i>Business cases for Solar investment being developed, schemes to progress in future years.</i>	1,500,000	1,500,000	0	0
Central contingency	997,950	997,950	0	0
Barkham Solar Farm <i>Delays to the programme have occurred due to delay in securing planning permission and negotiations over connection to the grid.</i>	963,640	963,640	0	0
Wokingham town centre regeneration - excluding residential phase	888,497	888,497	0	0
Wokingham town centre regeneration - former Marks & Spencer's site	781,785	781,785	0	0
Carnival pool area redevelopment <i>Future requirements of Town Centre Regeneration schemes to be determined including highways improvements.</i>	692,674	692,674	0	0
Wokingham town centre regeneration - Peach place development - completion works / incentives	526,872	526,872	0	0
Energy reduction projects	521,752	521,752	0	0
Strategic property and commercial assets (investment fund)	356,890	356,890	0	0
Commercial property site initial design work	206,228	206,228	0	0
Commercial portfolio - improvement to WBC commercial properties	201,217	201,217	0	0

Project	Amount £	Reprofiled to		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Support services energy reduction schemes	131,539	131,539	0	0
Leisure centre refurbishments	103,653	103,653	0	0
Bulmershe leisure centre redevelopment	100,000	100,000	0	0
New server room at Waterford House	80,000	80,000	0	0
Cantley tennis LED lighting	47,275	47,275	0	0
Dinton Pastures - changing places toilets	34,725	34,725	0	0
Cantley park - changing places toilets	34,168	34,168	0	0
Contract register	30,000	30,000	0	0
Cantley park enhancement	21,058	21,058	0	0
Shute end accommodation moves & refurbishment	18,838	18,838	0	0
Residential development feasibility	16,227	16,227	0	0
Re-roofing waterford house & chimney repairs	14,123	14,123	0	0
Improved air-conditioning at shute end offices	11,564	11,564	0	0
IT systems for management of commercial properties	9,833	9,833	0	0
Replace life expired control panel in Shute end offices boiler house	8,305	8,305	0	0
Woodley library – carbon neutrality feasibility study	7,000	7,000	0	0
Emmbrook junior school - replacement of single glazed windows & doors	5,650	5,650	0	0
Montague park community facility	5,461	5,461	0	0
Technology forge cloud implementation	3,000	3,000	0	0
Total Resources & Assets	18,324,338	18,324,338	0	0

Further reprofiling into future years	39,557,123	39,528,122	29,001	0
--	-------------------	-------------------	---------------	----------

Since Q3, some of the projects which were previously identified as carry forwards in future years are now needed in 22/23 and the previous carry forward has been reduced by the following;

Adult Social Care & Health

Mosaic modernisation reimplementation	(170,000)	(170,000)	0	0
Adult social care accommodation transformation <i>Options to be developed to meet statutory obligation to house people with Learning disabilities or transitioning from Children's to Adult Social Care</i>	(63,597)	(63,597)	0	0
Learning disability outreach and overnight respite centre - Loddon Court	(62,174)	(62,174)	0	0

Chief Executive's Office

Library offer	(7,445)	(7,445)	0	0
---------------	---------	---------	---	---

Children's Services

Alder Grove Primary <i>Furniture, Fixings Equipment & Technology (Shinfield West - Silver Meadow)</i>	(48,493)	(48,493)	0	0
Arborfield / Barkham Primary school <i>Furniture, Fixings Equipment & Technology</i>	(24,393)	(24,393)	0	0
Special Education Needs (SEND) Investment Programme / Sufficiency	(585)	(585)	0	0

Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

Gorse Ride Regeneration Project	(6,970)	(6,970)	0	0
---------------------------------	---------	---------	---	---

Place & Growth

Completed Road Schemes Retention <i>Previous Q3 carry forward now identified as a saving</i>	(705,902)	(705,902)	0	0
A329 - Wokingham Borough Cycle Network <i>Previous Q3 carry forward now identified as a saving</i>	(179,000)	(179,000)	0	0
Integrated transport schemes	(117,435)	(117,435)	0	0
Coppid Beech park & ride	(58,965)	(58,965)	0	0
Land Acquisition for Major Road Schemes <i>Future requirements to deliver SCAPE road infrastructure including post construction procedures completed road schemes</i>	(15,332)	(15,332)	0	0

Project	Amount £	Reprofiled to		
		2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Public Rights of Way Network - Loddon Long Distance path <i>Land owner agreement delays</i>	(3,675)	(3,675)	0	0
Resources & Assets				
3G Pitch at Earley <i>Previous Q3 carry forward now identified as a saving</i>	(763,000)	(763,000)	0	0
Renewable energy infrastructure projects <i>Previous Q3 carry forward identified for 25/26 needs to be brought forward to 23/24 as a carry forward</i>	0	262,226	0	(262,226)
Infrastructure to enable Toutley East development <i>Delay in obtaining outline planning consent.</i>	(128,805)	(128,805)	0	0
Property Maintenance and Compliance - General	(72,176)	(72,176)	0	0
Project spend reprofiled back to into 2022/23	(2,427,946)	(2,165,720)	0	(262,226)
Total reprofiling into future years	322,069,928	243,477,427	55,602,301	22,990,200

This page is intentionally left blank

TITLE	Customer Experience Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Operating Office - Sally Watkins
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Climate Emergency and Resident Services - Sarah Kerr

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The draft Customer Experience strategy requires Executive approval as it sets out the direction and focus around improving the experience Wokingham customers have when they interact with the Council.

The strategy aligns to the strategic outcomes within the Council Plan - 'Changing the way we work for you' and 'Being the best we can be'. It also aligns to the Equality Plan.

This report outlines the proposal for the Executive to consider, before onward public consultation. Following consultation, a final draft will be produced for Executive sign off.

RECOMMENDATION

The Executive to approve the draft Customer Experience strategy, for onward public consultation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strategy addresses several 'pain points' for our customers that were identified through more robust and frequent gathering of feedback, over the last 12 months. Feedback and input has been gathered from the workforce, residents, businesses, partners and Community groups to inform the content and design of the strategy – including the Equality Forum, CLASP and the Youth Council.

We know that people have inconsistent customer experiences when they interact with the Council – there are pockets of excellence, but the customer experience is not owned by everyone. The strategy outlines the vision and ambition around improving a more consistent customer experience.

Summary of considerations for this decision:

- It is a 5-year strategy, Wokingham Council does not currently have a Customer Experience Strategy that sets direction or areas of focus for improvement
- The strategy aligns to the Council Plan around 'Changing the way we work for you' and 'Being the best we can be'. It also aligns to the Equality Plan
- Within the strategy the Customer Charter defines the type of experience customers should receive when they interact with the Council

- The strategy drives the use of Customer data and insight as part of driving a more customer centric culture based on a foundation of continuous improvement across the Council
- Savings could be realised as a result of better customer experiences, reducing the cost of failure and avoidable demand, and channel shift to improved digital services
- The term 'customer' refers to anyone that interacts with the Council – it is terminology that will be tested again during public consultation
- The format has been designed in a way that makes it easy for people to understand – an Easy Read version will also be available

BACKGROUND

We know that people have inconsistent customer experiences when they interact with the Council – there are pockets of excellence, but the customer experience is not owned by everyone.

There is no current customer strategy meaning there is a gap in vision and ambition around ensuring a more consistent customer experience, that supports the strategic outcomes in the Council Plan.

We have gathered feedback and input from the workforce, residents and community groups, and they tell us that there are 4 things that make a difference to how they feel about their overall experience:

- Feeling listened to
- Being able to get what they need
- Trusting in the council to spend money wisely
- Feeling valued as a customer

The strategy addresses what customers have told us by setting the direction around 3 key areas of focus:

1. Being insight driven - Putting people at the heart of our services by listening to what they tell us, so we can better understand customer needs and priorities
2. Being outcome focused - Making sure services deliver value for money, and are designed to help customers achieve the right outcomes
3. Continuously improving - Getting the basics right and use customer feedback to inform service design in line with changing customer needs and expectations.

Key success indicators are defined for each area of focus. As part of the strategy's supporting action plan, specific customer experience KPI's are being developed with Services to be included within the quarterly monitoring report.

Equality, diversity and inclusion is the golden thread throughout the strategy. It reflects the aims of our Equality Plan to ensure we develop the right level of insight from all of our communities to inform service design.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	Costs contained within existing directorate budgets.	Costs contained within existing directorate budgets.	Contained within existing budgets, any further financial expenditure would be addressed via the Medium Term Financial Plan process.
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Costs contained within existing budgets, any further financial expenditure would be addressed via the Medium Term Financial Plan process.	Costs contained within existing directorate budgets.	Contained within existing budgets, any further financial expenditure would be addressed via the Medium Term Financial Plan process.
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Costs contained within existing budgets, any further financial expenditure would be addressed via the Medium Term Financial Plan process.	Costs contained within existing directorate budgets.	Contained within existing budgets, any further financial expenditure would be addressed via the Medium Term Financial Plan process.

Other Financial Information

Improving the customer experience and reducing repeat customer contact should result in savings for the council. Savings are included in the MTFP(23/24 OFP budget) for the Customer Excellence OFP programme and this strategy should assist in delivery of those savings.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Formal public consultation.

Engagement with service areas to ensure the strategy is embedded across the organisation and is used to inform service plans.

The strategy will come back to the Executive following stakeholder consultation, consideration of the feedback and any amendments to the strategy in September 2023.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Public sector equality duty completed.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

Provision of improved and accessible Digital services that act as an enabler for reducing Customer travel to offices and more efficient and effective ways of working.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

N/A

Contact Jackie Whitney	Service Customer, Change, Digital and IT
Telephone	Email jackie.whitney@wokingham.gov.uk



Customer Experience Strategy 2023 - 2028





Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Wokingham Borough
Council



Stephen Conway
Leader of the Council
Liberal Democrat
Member for Twyford
Ward

**We want to
put people at
the heart of
everything we do.**

Introduction

Our purpose is to provide value for money public services to the people of Wokingham Borough, to support them in leading happy and healthy lives. To do this we must design services that meet the needs of our residents and businesses, and make sure they are accessible to all.

Our Council Plan sets out a number of priorities that we are focusing on to improve outcomes for our communities. *Changing the way we work for you* is built on a foundation of being relentlessly customer focused. The experience our residents and communities have when they interact with us is important, and ownership of experiences should be Council wide.

Working with our partners we are committed to making it easier for customers, residents and businesses to get the services and support they need. Our focus is on the basics: improving the experience people have when they contact us. To do this we need to better understand our community's needs and work to improve lives through services designed with residents in mind.

Despite the challenges we face, we are ambitious, committed to and passionate about delivering improvements as well as striving for fully accessible and efficient services.

This Customer Experience strategy has been developed with customers, residents and partners. They told us what matters to them and the things that make a difference to how they feel about their overall experience. We have used this insight to set out what we need to achieve and what we will do to get there. The promises within our Customer Charter underpin the strategy alongside some key principles - listen more, take steps to understand our communities needs and act on feedback so we continuously improve.

We want to be the best we can be. We will take steps to nurture and develop colleagues across our organisation so that customers have a better experience when they contact us.

We know we have work to do. Our commitment is to work with our partners and communities to achieve the right outcomes in the right way and become more of a listening Council. We will keep an eye on how we are doing by regularly asking for feedback and tracking progress against targets set out in this strategy.

To find out more about Our priorities, take a look at the [Council Plan](#)

Using customer feedback to change the way we work and improve the customer experience



Our purpose is to serve our customers and the community.

We want to make interacting with us easy and a positive experience. We recognise the need to become more consistent in our approach, and more supportive when customers access our services.

Customers access a wide range of services and we know that the experience will differ depending on the service needed and how it is accessed, for example online, face to face or over the phone. Customers have told us that there are 4 things that make a difference to how they feel about their overall experience:

- Feeling listened to
- Being able to get what they need
- Trust in the Council to spend money wisely
- Feeling valued as a customer

We know from customer and community feedback that we have work to do to improve. Our ambition over the next 5 years is to improve the experience our customers have when they interact with us. To do this, we will work to get the basics rights, but to also regularly gather feedback to fully understand what our community needs and how we can improve their experiences. This information will inform action, and by regularly listening to feedback, will help us to keep a track on how we are doing.

Thank you to all of our residents, businesses, partners and community groups for their input and support in the creation of this strategy.

Our customer vision

To put our customers and community at the heart of all we do.



Our ambition

To get the basics right, and improve the experience customers have when they interact with us so that they:

Feel listened to

Are able to get what they need

Trust in the Council to spend money wisely

Feel valued as a customer



DRAFT

Customer charter

Our Customer Charter was created with input from customers and will be embedded across the Council, and with our partners. We will use it to measure how we are doing and where we need to improve.

We are committed to continually improving the way we work. We want to make it easy for customers to interact with us, and to have a positive experience when they do.



Equality, diversity and inclusion we want to make sure no one is left behind



We recognise the diversity of the communities we serve and want to build strong relationships with them and understand their needs and priorities.

We are proud to serve Wokingham's communities and recognise the growing diversity of the borough. Our vision is for all our customers, so we want to remove any barriers by delivering services that work for all, and by making sure our services are accessible.

We will engage with people and listen to feedback so that we can learn, build trust, strengthen collaboration and develop knowledge to inform service design. We will also look to adapt our methods of communication to meet the needs of our communities.

As a Council we want to celebrate diversity and inclusion within our work, continuously educate ourselves and strive for equality.

To find out more about how we are tackling inequality, take a look at our [Equality Plan](#)

Our strategy in summary

3 key areas of focus:

Be data driven -

Putting people at the heart of our services by listening to what they tell us, so we can better understand customer needs and priorities.



Be outcome focused -

Making sure services deliver value for money, and are designed to help customers achieve the right outcomes.

Continuously improve -

Getting the basics right, and use customer feedback to inform service design in line with changing customer needs and expectations.





Be data driven

Putting people at the heart of our services by listening to what they tell us, so we can better understand customer needs and priorities

We will



Give customers the ability to share feedback when they interact with us, across all contact channels



Use data to develop a better understanding of customer needs to shape the way services are delivered



Actively focus on areas where customer feedback identifies a need for improvement, and put actions in place to fix



Key success indicators:

- Performance is measured against customer experience and meeting their needs
- Feedback and data is used to target customer journeys for improvement
- Robust tracking of equality data to support decision making and inform service design



Outcome focused

Making sure services deliver value for money, and are designed to help customers achieve the right outcomes

We will



Take ownership of customer experiences within service areas, and work to deliver improvements in service efficiency



Develop performance indicators for each service area, and measure outcomes against the Customer Charter



Deliver services with partners to maximise the right skills, and support the right outcomes for customers



Key success indicators:

- All services have Customer Experience performance measures, with service improvements focused on the right outcomes for customers, and delivering value for money
- Customer contact channels are easy and cost effective, with support to self help wherever possible by using online services
- A community led approach, with services co-delivered with partners to achieve the right outcomes, in the right way, at the right time



Continuously improve

Getting the basics right, and use customer feedback to inform service design in line with changing customer needs and expectations.

We will



Improve our website to make sure digital services are centred around the needs of our customers



Share insight from customer complaints and learn lessons to avoid repeat mistakes



Improve the way we communicate with our customers by focusing on the language that we use



Drive a customer focused culture through training and reflections on performance, to make sure learning is applied



Key success indicators:

- A website that is accessible, easy to use and has increased levels of customer satisfaction
- Complaints are resolved quickly, without the need to escalate through formal processes
- All of our workforce attends customer experience and equality training, and understand the role they play in improving the customer experience
- Workforce plans at service level to ensure we are recruiting, developing and retaining the talent we need to support improvements in the customer experience

Strategy summary

Our customer vision

To put our customers and community at the heart of all we do.

Our ambition

To get the basics right, and improve the experience customers have when they interact with us so that our customers:

- Feel listened to
- Are able to get what they need
- Trust in the Council to spend money wisely
- Feel valued as a customer

3 key areas of focus

Be data driven

Putting people at the heart of our services by listening to what they tell us, so we can better understand customer needs and priorities.

Continuously improve

Getting the basics right, and use customer feedback to inform service design in line with changing customer needs and expectations.

Be outcome focused

Making sure services deliver value for money, and are designed to help customers achieve the right outcomes.

Our customer charter

Support and care for people as individuals.

Be responsive, friendly and helpful.

Be open, honest and manage expectations.

Make it easy for you to interact with us.

Strive to get it right first time, and build on successes.

Listen, learn and work as one team to resolve issues.

Our values

Customer focused

One team

Taking ownership

Being ambitious

To find out more about 'Our Values', take a look at our [Council Plan](#)

DRAFT



TITLE	Wokingham Borough Council Tree Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 June 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth - Giorgio Framaliccio
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

To seek Executive approval to adopt the Wokingham Borough Council Tree Strategy.

The strategy links with the Core Strategy, Climate Emergency Action Plan, Wokingham Biodiversity Action Plan, Borough Design Guide, Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019) and Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (2004).

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive approves the adoption of the Wokingham Borough Council Tree Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In July 2021, officers were given Executive approval to develop a Tree Strategy. Between November 2021-September 2022 cross-party member working groups, internal and external stakeholders consultation workshops and mapping surveys were carried out to support the development of the Draft Tree Strategy which, in October 2022, was approved for an 8-week public consultation. Feedback from the consultation has been collated and reviewed by Officers and fed into a revised Tree Strategy. Officers are now seeking Executive approval to adopt the revised Tree Strategy.

The purpose of the strategy is to provide improved direction to the management and maintenance of trees across the Borough as a whole, taking into consideration the Council's legal obligations as a tree owner. The strategy supports Wokingham Borough Council with standards and goals to ensure it continues to care for its tree assets and complies with its legal duty of care and statutory responsibilities. It takes the risks and benefits into account, sets out the Council's aspirations for increasing tree planting, whilst continuing to protect existing trees for the benefit of future generations.

This report seeks approval to adopt the Tree Strategy which has gone through stakeholder engagement and an 8-week public consultation.

The financial implications of adopting the strategy are minimal and include only the costs for Digital Solutions to convert the revised document into an accessible format before publishing on Wokingham.gov.uk.

BACKGROUND

In Jul 2021, in response to Target 18 'Carbon sequestration by design' of the Climate Emergency Action Plan, officers were given Executive approval to begin Phase 1 of the Tree Project which included the production of a Tree Strategy.

In November 2021, an early engagement survey was published on Wokingham Engage to provide opportunity for internal and external stakeholders including Members, Town and Parish Councils, community groups and residents to have early input into the strategy development.

In January 2022, the results of the early engagement survey were collated into a report for Overview & Scrutiny review. Following selection of an external consultant to write the strategy, a cross-party working group meeting took place in March 2022 to steer the criteria of the Strategy.

In February 2022, Officers attended the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group meeting to provide an update on the Tree Strategy and Tree Project. Subsequently, in March 2022 a report was submitted to Overview and Scrutiny by the Tree Protection and Biodiversity Task and Finish Group. The report and recommendations have been reviewed by Officers and considered throughout the development of the Draft Tree Strategy.

In May 2022, consultation workshops were held at Shute End with the following internal and external stakeholders: Wokingham Borough Operational Tree Officers, Wokingham Borough Trees and Landscape Team, Planning Policy Team, Planning Regulation Team, Development Management Team, Estates, Green and Blue Infrastructure, Countryside Services, Cleaner and Greener, Highways, Flood & Drainage, Climate Emergency Officers, Woodland Trust and Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association. Feedback from the consultation workshops have been taken into consideration and internal officer engagement has been sought throughout the strategy development.

In October 2022, the Executive approved an 8-week public consultation for the Draft Tree Strategy which was published on Wokingham Engage. The standard consultation period was extended from 6 weeks to 8 weeks to allow additional time over the festive period for residents, Members and other stakeholders to respond.

Notification of the consultation was communicated via press releases, newsletters, online surveys, direct email contact and social media.

The public consultation, which was held in the form of an online survey through Wokingham Engage provided opportunity for Members, residents, internal and external stakeholders to share their views on the contents of the Draft Tree Strategy. Paper copies were available on request through Customer Service and Library teams. Residents requiring support in completing the survey were also able to request this through WBC Customer Service. Feedback from the consultation was collated and reviewed by Officers and an external consultant before being worked into a revised strategy.

BUSINESS CASE

Wokingham Borough Council currently have a policy in place for the Ongoing Maintenance of Council Owned Trees and a Tree Inspection Framework for Council Trees. In July 2021, officers were given Executive approval to develop a Tree Strategy to guide WBC's approach in the management and maintenance of trees across the borough as a whole. The Draft Tree Strategy that was developed has been subject to stakeholder engagement and an 8-week public consultation.

During the consultation, a total of 131 responses were received from Wokingham Residents, Borough Councillors, Town and Parish Councils and volunteer/ community groups.

The consultation was formatted into two sections:

- Section 1 included questions relating to the general principles of adopting a Tree Strategy; the timeframe the strategy covers and the aims and objectives of the Tree Strategy.
- Section 2 included more detailed questions around the contents of the draft strategy; surveys that have been completed, legislation and the strategy Action Plan.

In addition to selecting answer choices between Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree or Strongly disagree, each question provided the opportunity for additional comments to be made. Additional comments received have been reviewed and collated into appropriate amendments within the revised Tree Strategy. Below are some of the key statistics received from the consultation:

- 75% Strongly agreed or Agreed that 10 years is an appropriate period for the strategy to cover.
- 72% Strongly agreed or Agreed that the environmental and socio-economic benefits of trees have been taken into consideration.
- 71% Strongly agreed or Agreed that the Tree Strategy is clear on the purpose of a tree preservation order (TPO), the process of applying for one and the procedure following a breach.
- 68% Strongly agreed or agreed that relevant existing and emerging WBC plans and policies have been considered.
- 68% Strongly agreed or Agreed the Tree Strategy sets clear expectations and guidance around appropriate hedgerow planting.
- 66% Strongly agreed or Agreed that the relevant national legislation on trees and woodlands have been considered. A further 30% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement however on review of the individual comments for this question, those who were neutral in their response advised that they were not aware of the relevant legislation. Further detail has been added to the Legal Framework section.
- 61% Strongly agreed or Agreed that the Strategy recognises the risks of pests and diseases to council-owned trees and outlines sufficient measures to reduce this risk.
- 61% Strongly agreed or Agreed that the Strategy respects and places enough importance on selecting the right species when planting trees.

- 60% Strongly agreed or Agreed that the Tree Strategy is clear on the evidence required for issues relating to council-owned trees and subsidence. A further 32% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.
- 46% agreed that appropriate survey work had been completed. A further 36% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement. To account for this, further detail on the Canopy Cover Survey and Tree Report's that were completed as part of the strategy development has since been added to the strategy.

The revised strategy has assessed how the borough will manage its responsibilities to trees and woodlands under statutory legislation and Council policies and taken into account the feedback and comments made as part of the public consultation.

Key areas within the strategy that have had amendments following the public consultation are:

- Strategy Objectives
- Legal Framework
- Tree Report & Canopy Cover Survey
- Value of Trees
- Management and maintenance of trees on Council owned land
- Tree Planting
- Risks and Biosecurity
- Action Plan

Considerations and amendments that have been built into the revised Strategy are summarised in the accompanying document: Tree Strategy Consultation Revisions.

The continued stakeholder engagement through the development of the Draft Tree Strategy and the 8-week public consultation, has provided opportunity for internal and external stakeholders to have input in Wokingham Borough Council's approach in the management and maintenance of trees across the borough.

An Action Plan, which includes short, medium- and long-term goals has been included within the Strategy and adapted based on the consultation feedback. However, any actions within the strategy will only be undertaken when the opportunity, funds and resources become available.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	Approximately £1000 (approximate costs associated with converting the final document and appendices into an accessible format ready for publication on wokingham.gov.uk)	Yes	Capital. The financial implications raised in this report can be contained within existing budgets. The cost for publishing the Tree Strategy have already been included within the previously approved Tree Project budget. As part of the previously agreed Tree Project budget, £26,000 of Capital Invest to Save funds were approved to support the development and publication of the Tree Strategy.
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	N/A	
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	N/A	

Other Financial Information

The financial implications raised in this report can be contained within existing budgets as part of the previously agreed Tree Project budget of £26k to develop and publish a Tree Strategy. Implementation of the Tree Strategy Action Plan will be accommodated within existing funding sources/budgets, or will only be undertaken when additional funds and resources become available. Officers will continue to identify and apply to appropriate grant funding opportunities to support the implementation of the strategy Action Plan.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

8-week public consultation already carried out on Draft Tree Strategy and amendments have been included in the revised Tree Strategy.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An initial equality impact assessment has been carried out and has not identified any negative impact to the proposal.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

The Tree Strategy takes into consideration the benefits that suitable management and maintenance of existing trees and planting of additional trees will have on the carbon sequestration targets set out within the Climate Emergency Action Plan. Climate Emergency Officers have been involved in the development of the Strategy.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

Tree Strategy
Tree Strategy Appendix A: Tree Report
Tree Strategy Appendix B: Canopy Cover Survey
Tree Strategy Appendix C: TPO Process
Tree Strategy Appendix D: Hedgerows for Screening and Wildlife in Wokingham
Exec Report: Tree Strategy Consultation Revisions

Contact Laura Buck

Service Place

Telephone

Email laura.buck@wokingham.gov.uk

Page	Relevant Section	Feedback	Solution	Actioned
All	All	Feedback received regarding 'stock' photos and request to include photos of Wokingham Borough Trees instead.	Officers working with WDVTA to use photos collected from across the Borough	Y
5	Strategy Objectives	Strategy should encourage and support individuals and local voluntary environmental organisations to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the treescape.	New objective added to page 5 and additional action plan goal included to support this.	Y
9	Legal Framework	The additional protection to veteran and ancient trees within the NPPF should be highlighted in section 3d) National Planning Policy Framework and guidance	Additional paragraph added to page 9 section 3d to reflect this.	Y
10	Legal Framework	Residents raised that there was limited information found on Circular 36/78 Trees and forestry and requested further detail on this document.	Further detail added to the origin of 'Circular 36/78 Trees and forestry'.	Y
11	Legal Framework	Strategy to reference / acknowledge ELMS. A good proportion of the land in Wokingham borough is agricultural and some of the fastest mechanisms to increase tree cover may turn out to be to work with the agricultural community once ELMS is up and running. The strategy should acknowledge this and allow itself room to adopt such new priorities.	Strategy has been adapted to include details and benefits of ELMs for landowners/farmers to investigate schemes available to them. Links to further Government guidance on ELMs has been included.	Y
19	Tree Report & Canopy Cover Survey	46% agreed that appropriate survey work had been completed however a further 36% neither agreed or disagreed with this statement. To account for this, it was agreed that further detail on the Canopy Cover Survey and Tree Report's that were completed as part of the strategy development should be added to the strategy.	More key statistics from the BlueSky survey have been included. Page 19 has been clearly separated into two summaries for: Tree Survey (Bluesky NTM) and Canopy Cover. Borough level (WBC land) and Borough level (all land) canopy cover maps to be included and reference made to the full canopy cover survey carried out in summer 2022.	Y
20	Value of Trees	Greater emphasis should be made to the shading and cooling benefits of urban trees and how urban trees should be incorporated into the designs of developments at an early stage.	Further detail added regarding these benefits in Section 6. Value of Trees.	Y

22	Value of Trees	Further consideration to be given to the benefits of incorporating SuDS in designs.	Further detail added to page 22.	Y
23	Value of Trees	Feedback received regarding the 11 boundary trees listed in the 'WDVTA Commemorative and Special Inventory'.	Text in the Strategy written by T&L currently states 'Trees are mentioned as boundary markers in various Anglo-Saxon charters. It is not known whether any such trees survive in Wokingham although this is unlikely, if they do, they would be confined to the longer- living species such as yew and oak.' It is not known if the 11 trees listed by WDVTA meet this criteria and therefore changes to this section have not been made.	N
25	Value of Trees	Greater detail to be included regarding the previous work carried out by WDVTA and partnership working.	Included reference to the Diamond Jubilee work carried out in partnership with WDVTA	Y
32	Management and maintenance of trees on Council owned land	Veteran trees are the most likely to contain a broad range of species, particularly those involved in the recycling of dead and decaying wood. There needs to be a clearer policy on saving dead wood. it may be that public safety requires some branches to be cut out, but these should be left on the ground around the tree. It would be good to have the policy of retaining most wood waste from aboricultural work on all trees in public open spaces (not street trees) and let the materials decay naturally. Very little discussed on the maintenance of decaying and dead wood. Retained dead wood is highly important for the biodiversity and function of saproxylic organisms that are in significant decline worldwide but especially in Europe. If dead trees need to be cut down for safety reasons then the dead wood should be left to lie not "tidied up" for aesthetic reasons, or at least left as log piles and should definitely not be sold for firewood.	The Council aims to retain safe, sizeable wood from trees that have been pruned or felled in safe habitat piles, where appropriate. Additional paragraph added to page 32.	Y

34	Management and maintenance of trees on Council owned land	A link to the 2022 Association of Tree Officers Trees and Telecommunication Guidance report https://www.ato.org.uk/images/ATO-Trees-and-Telecoms-2022-web.pdf should be included in the strategy to cover current best practice for balancing the needs of tree retention, planting and pruning with telecommunication equipment siting.	Additional paragraph added to page 34 in relation to telecoms and guidance that will be followed in accordance with ATO. Link provided for further detail.	Y
49	Tree Planting	Examples of volunteer groups already doing relevant tree work are WDVTA, Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers, Friends of Ruscombe Woods, Friends of Highwood, Woodley, Earley Environmental Group, Freely Fruity all of which the council does already support in one way or another.	There are many volunteer and community groups supporting planting initiative across the Borough and as these can change, it is not considered appropriate to include a list of the known groups. WBC is supportive of local volunteer groups and will continue to work with groups who are interested in the planting, monitoring and maintenance of trees across the borough. This has been covered in the Action Plan and as an additional sentence on page 49.	Y
53	Hedgerows and Hedge Planting	Hedge trees or standards within hedges needs to be much more prominent in the strategy. These trees have a very high biodiversity net gain as well as significant aesthetic value. They are included right at the end of section 5, but it looks, feels and reads as a 'last minute inclusion'.	The section on hedges in the Strategy is not a last minute inclusion and 68% strongly agreed or agreed that the Strategy sets clear expectations and guidance around appropriate hedgerow planting. It is not recommend not moving its position in the Strategy as it is linked to Section 13. Before it on tree planting. There is also an additional Appendix in relation to hedgerow planting guidance and a short-term action plan to update the guidance.	N
55	Risks and Biosecurity	Further detail to be included regarding specific species related tree disease issues on prevalent borough species	Greater detail included within page 55 and reference made to the Tree Inspection Frequency.	Y

58-60	Action Plan	Greater detail requested for goal timeframes.	Included a timeframe range for Short, Medium and Long-term goals.	Y
58-60	Action Plan	<p>The Tree Council is referenced with respect to their guidance on the management of ash die back. However they should be included as a stakeholder.</p> <p>WBC does have a Tree Warden network, which should be working with the Council and helping them achieve some of their goals. They should be asked to help achieve the first two goals listed, as well as helping to water (where practical) newly planted trees and report on problems. There should be a Goal of "Enlisting more Tree Wardens and working more closely with them". The Strategy is an opportunity to include and promote the voluntary role of Tree Wardens within the Borough.</p>	<p>The Tree Council has not been directly involved in the development of the strategy and therefore inclusion as a Stakeholder would not be appropriate. Comments regarding the utilisation of existing tree wardens and enlisting further volunteers to the scheme have been noted and included within the Action Plan.</p>	Y

Wokingham Borough Tree Survey

Trees and woodlands in the Wokingham borough help create a quality of place and life that attracts people to live, study, visit and work in the area. As part of the green infrastructure, trees provide the backdrop to our towns and villages.

Trees and woodlands are an essential feature of the Wokingham landscape with many veteran and ancient trees and woodlands creating the 'story of the place'; indeed, the importance of trees, particularly the oak is recognised by the acorn and oak leaf that form the Town's heraldic charge.

While it is generally understood that trees provide a range of benefits understanding and rationalising those benefits is often difficult. Wokingham Borough Council as part of the tree strategy project commissioned an assessment of the tree stock within the borough to ascertain the value of these benefits and to inform on the numbers, condition and diversity of the tree asset across the borough both within their ownership and across the broader land area of towns, villages and parishes.

Two surveys were undertaken during the summer of 2022. These surveys included an assessment of the borough's tree coverage in general using the desk based i-Tree canopy assessment online tool and a ground survey collecting specific tree information across Council ownership across various random locations within each parish.

i-Tree Canopy Cover Assessment

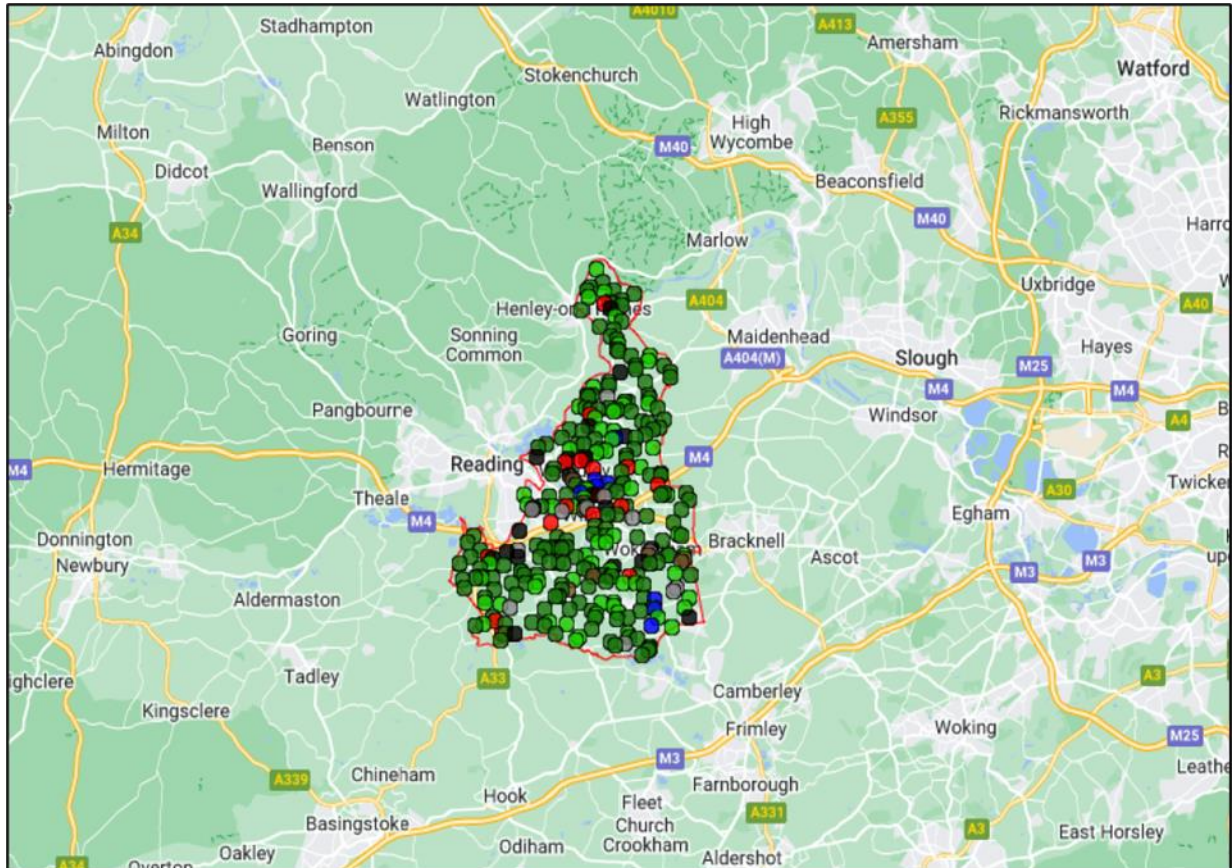
i-Tree is a state-of-the-art, peer-reviewed software suite from the USDA Forest Service that provides urban and rural forestry analysis and benefits assessment tools. i-Tree tools can help strengthen forest and tree management and advocacy efforts by quantifying forest structure and the environmental benefits that trees provide.

i-Tree canopy is a desk-based assessment using aerial imagery to randomly select location points within the borough, each location point is then assessed as to the ground cover identifying whether it is a tree/shrub, grass/herbaceous, impervious building, impervious road, impervious other, soil/bare ground or water.

The collected data is then automatically analysed by the built-in algorithm to produce an overview of the tree canopy coverage, the amount of carbon sequestered per annum and its value rationalised in monetary terms to the borough, the data also highlights the total amount and value of the stored carbon asset. Further information is also provided on the amount of surface runoff that is intercepted and the monetary saving this provides to the borough.

The i-Tree canopy survey for Wokingham assessed 301 sample points across the borough for their ground cover, a plan of the various points is shown below in Fig.1.

Fig.1 – Location plan of all i-Tree sample points across Wokingham borough

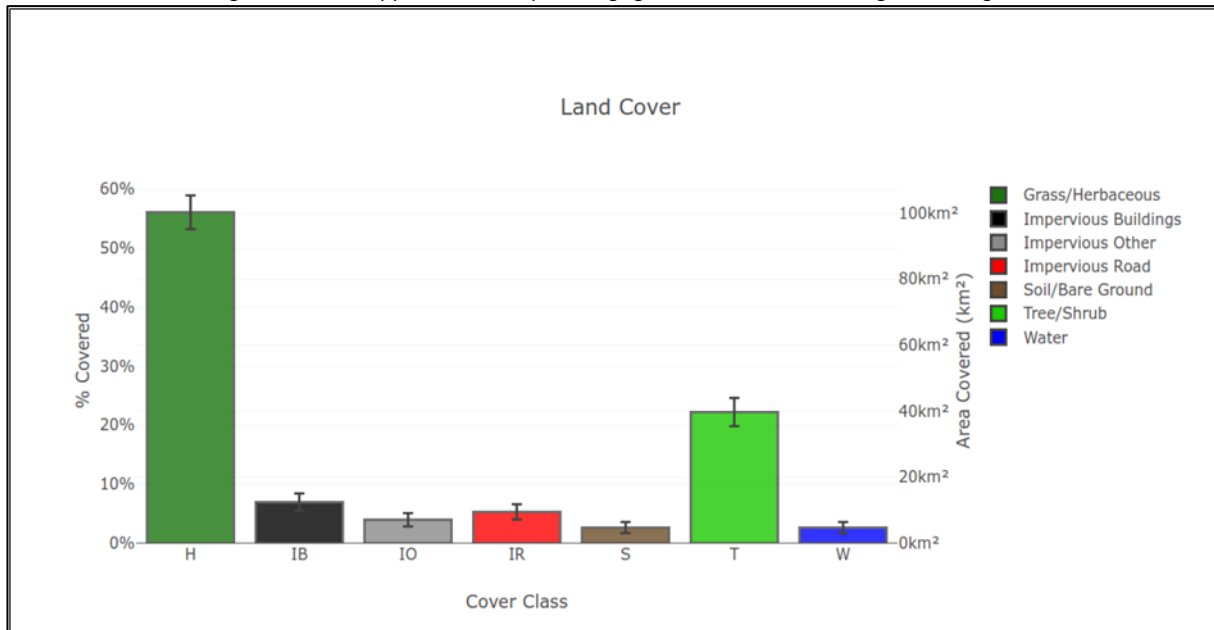


In summary the assessment of the borough indicates that approximately 22% of the borough landmass is under tree or shrub canopy Fig.2 and Fig.3. The average tree canopy cover is 16% in England (Treeconomics, 2017), it is therefore clear that Wokingham borough has an above average tree canopy.

Fig.2 – i-Tree Canopy breakdown of percentage ground cover class in Wokingham borough

Abbr.	Cover Class	Description	Points	% Cover ± SE	Area (km ²) ± SE
H	Grass/Herbaceous		169	56.15 ± 2.86	100.39 ± 5.11
IB	Impervious Buildings		21	6.98 ± 1.47	12.47 ± 2.63
IO	Impervious Other		12	3.99 ± 1.13	7.13 ± 2.02
IR	Impervious Road		16	5.32 ± 1.29	9.50 ± 2.31
S	Soil/Bare Ground		8	2.66 ± 0.94	4.75 ± 1.68
T	Tree/Shrub		67	22.26 ± 2.40	39.80 ± 4.29
W	Water		8	2.66 ± 0.94	4.75 ± 1.68
Total			301	100.00	178.80

Fig.3 – i-Tree Canopy breakdown of percentage ground cover class in Wokingham borough



The canopy of Wokingham provides an annual carbon sequestration Fig.4. of over 12 kilo tons of carbon which would have a value of over £3 million, in total the current tree asset stores over 305 Kilo tons of Carbon with a value of over £77 million.

Fig.4 – i-Tree Canopy sequestered carbon from the tree canopy in Wokingham borough

Description	Carbon (kt)	±SE	CO ₂ Equiv. (kt)	±SE	Value (GBP)	±SE
Sequestered annually in trees	12.18	±1.31	44.66	±4.81	£3,081,265	±331,907
Stored in trees (Note: this benefit is not an annual rate)	305.86	±32.95	1,121.48	±120.80	£77,382,117	±8,335,428

Currency is in GBP and rounded. Standard errors of removal and benefit amounts are based on standard errors of sampled and classified points. Amount sequestered is based on 0.306 kt of Carbon, or 1.122 kt of CO₂, per km²/yr and rounded. Amount stored is based on 7.685 kt of Carbon, or 28.178 kt of CO₂, per km² and rounded. Value (GBP) is based on £253,000.00/kt of Carbon, or £69,000.00/kt of CO₂ and rounded. (Metric units: kt = kilotonnes, metric kilotons, km² = square kilometers)

Further benefits Fig.5 indicate that the tree canopy intercepts and prevents over 985 mega litres of rainwater runoff, this has a value of over £1.5 million per annum.

Fig. 5 – i-Tree canopy hydrological benefits of tree canopy in Wokingham borough

Abbr.	Benefit	Amount (Ml)	±SE	Value (GBP)	±SE
AVRO	Avoided Runoff	985.91	±106.20	£1,528,052	±164,598
E	Evaporation	5,563.00	±599.23	N/A	N/A
I	Interception	5,591.58	±602.31	N/A	N/A
T	Transpiration	15,993.78	±1,722.81	N/A	N/A
PE	Potential Evaporation	13,964.68	±1,504.24	N/A	N/A
PET	Potential Evapotranspiration	10,856.37	±1,169.42	N/A	N/A

Currency is in GBP and rounded. Standard errors of removal and benefit amounts are based on standard errors of sampled and classified points. Hydrological Estimates are based on these values in Ml/km²/yr @ £/Ml/yr and rounded:
 AVRO 24.771 @ £1,549.90 | E 139.773 @ N/A | I 140.491 @ N/A | T 401.850 @ N/A | PE 350.868 @ N/A | PET 272.771 @ N/A (Metric units: Ml = megaliters, km² = square kilometers)

The assessment also indicates that approximately 56% of the land is covered by grass or bare earth. While much of this is utilised for agricultural production, changing land use by only a small percentage through woodland creation and tree planting could provide significant benefits to the borough and help the Council's goal of addressing the climate emergency.

The Council recognises that while planting woodlands can sequester large amounts of carbon, many of the extra benefits that trees can provide, for example reduction in air pollution and reduction in surface water runoff, are found in our urban areas. As such while technically more challenging to accomplish, it is recognised that where resources allow increased tree planting in our towns and villages should be a goal of the tree strategy.

Tree Condition Survey

The purpose of the tree survey was to ascertain the number of trees within the borough, the makeup of the 6 main tree species and their general condition. This data was collected through a desk-based analysis and a ground truthing survey of random plots within the borough. The various survey datasets are provided in the tables and charts Fig.7 and Fig.8.

Desk based assessment

The desk-based survey utilised the BlueSky's National Tree Map™ (NTM™), a detailed dataset derived from high quality aerial imagery. The NTM™ dataset provides a unique, comprehensive database of location, height and canopy/crown extents for every single tree 3m and above in height. The dataset for Wokingham Borough was analysed to provide the following information:

- The number of trees identified on the NTM as being within WBC including both council and privately owned trees.
- The number of trees from NTM within the ownership of WBC.
- Number of trees within each parish including both WBC and privately owned trees.
- Number of trees from NTM within each parish under WBC ownership.

Fig.6 – Breakdown of tree numbers by parish across both private and WBC ownerships

Parish name	Number of trees		
	WBC-owned land	Privately-owned land	Total land
Arborfield and Newland CP	1537	35464	37001
Barkham CP	3969	20473	24442
Charvil CP	3746	6596	10342
Earley CP	9740	29510	39250
Finchampstead CP	10225	90855	101080
Remenham CP	908	30337	31245
Ruscombe CP	508	11798	12306
Shinfield CP	7031	32768	39799
Sonning CP	969	14031	15000
St. Nicholas, Hurst CP	9118	47945	57063
Swallowfield CP	3533	43255	46788
Twyford CP	2368	7640	10008
Wargrave CP	2352	58762	61114
Winnersh CP	5188	15172	20360
Wokingham CP	11744	37462	49206
Wokingham Without CP	6964	37493	44457
Woodley CP	11453	19467	30920
Total	91353	539028	630381

Analysis of the NTM dataset Fig.6 has identified that WBC are responsible for approximately 91,000 trees with a further 540,000 being within private ownership. The total number of trees within the borough is indicated to be over 630,000.

The results for the breakdown of trees in each parish shows that the spread of trees across each parish is not evenly distributed. This is quite common in relation to land use and to the socio-economic classification of areas; with less trees often being found in the heavily developed urban centres and areas with a lower socio-economic base, the numbers of trees generally increase in suburbia as more undeveloped space is available. Many trees are generally found within the wider rural setting.

The information will help to inform the Council of its tree planting goals to target in part those areas that have significantly fewer trees than those that are already well treed. It is the increase in tree and canopy cover within these lower treed areas that will generally provide the largest socio-economic improvements and the financial benefits highlighted in the i-Tree canopy survey.

Plot survey

By using the NTM data as a basis; a series of sample plots were created across the borough, these were targeted to capture sites within the Council's ownership containing the largest number of trees. The survey consisted of 102 survey plots (50m x 50m) located across the Council's ownership with 6 plots in each of the 17 parishes. The following data was collected for each tree within the plot:

- Tree species
- Tree age
- Tree condition – physiological and structural
- Tree fungus / pest / disease



Image 1: Sample plot selection

Tree Species

The tree survey identified that the most prevalent trees found within WBC ownership across the borough was oak and ash, as can be seen in Fig.7 and Fig.8 Understanding the makeup of the tree asset is important in terms of identifying risk and ensuring that any new tree planting is designed to be resilient.

Figure 7. The 6 most prevalent tree species identified in the tree survey

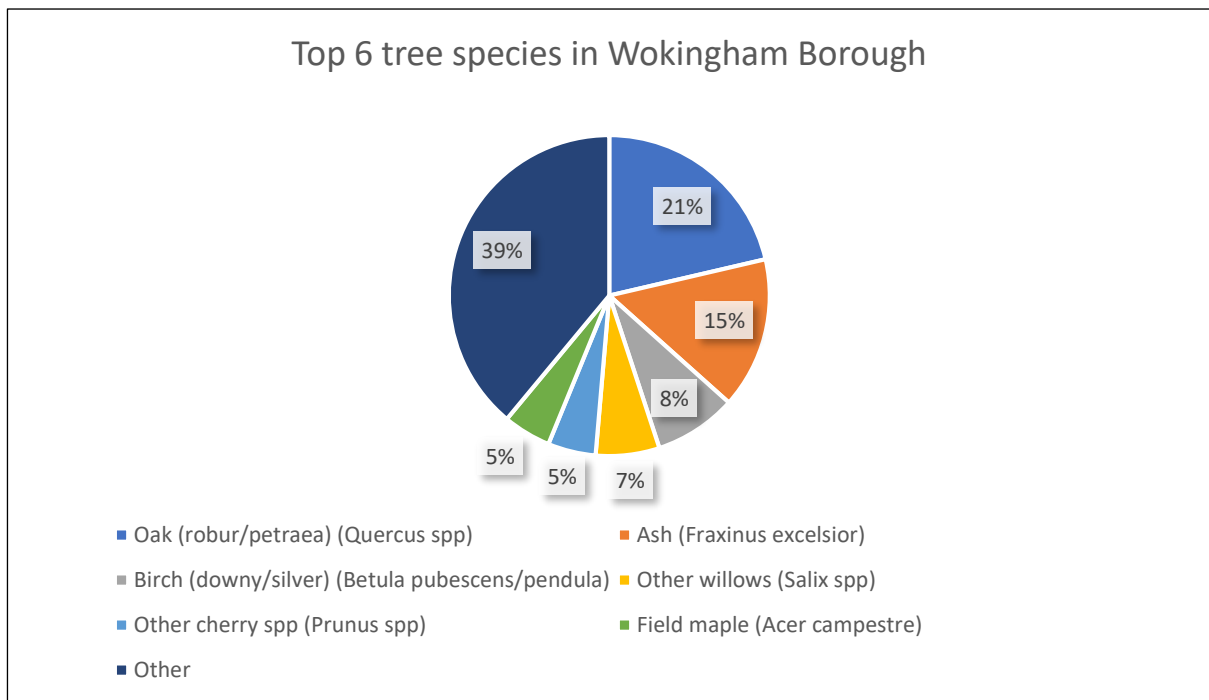


Figure 8. Extrapolated number of each of the top 6 species tree against the number of trees in NTM desk-based analysis.

Species	Tree count	Tree count scaled up to NTM
Oak (robur/petraea) (<i>Quercus</i> spp)	336	19513
Ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>)	240	13938
Birch (downy/silver) (<i>Betula pubescens/pendula</i>)	131	7608
Other willows (<i>Salix</i> spp)	101	5866
Other cherry spp (<i>Prunus</i> spp)	76	4414
Field maple (<i>Acer campestre</i>)	76	4414
Other	613	35600
Total	1573	91353

Over the last few years, it has become increasingly apparent that the UK is becoming increasingly affected by various tree pathogens that have the potential to cause widespread impacts to our trees and woodlands.

The most significant of these currently is the *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* fungus that causes ash dieback (ADB). This fungus is of particular significance in our broadleaf woodlands where it has the potential to significantly affect the timber yield in commercial hardwood production. It has significant relevance in terms of our landscape often found in roadside verges and hedges as well as planted in our town and cities. As the fungal infection progresses with the ash, the tree becomes increasingly weakened with dead branches and sparse crowns becoming obvious, a link between ADB and *armillaria* spp (honey fungus) has also increased concern in relation to the potential for windthrow to occur.

Concern is so great that The Tree Council have issued guidance on the identification of this infection and on its management. Understanding the potential impact and risk this infection poses are crucial to WBC from both their climate emergency tree planting goals and from a health and safety point of view. ADB has the potential to impact our trees in the manner that Dutch elm disease, caused by the fungus *Ophiostoma novo-ulmi*, ravaged our trees in the 1970's. Widescale felling may be required, especially across the highway network to ensure these routes remain safe. Understanding the potential number of trees this may affect will allow the Council to plan and budget for such work in the future.

Further detail on the number of ash trees by parish can be found in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Number of Ash trees on WBC owned land per parish

Ownership	Parish	Tree count (all species)	Ash count estimate for WBC land
WBC-owned land	Arborfield and Newland CP	1537	235
	Barkham CP	3969	606
	Charvil CP	3746	572
	Earley CP	9740	1486
	Finchampstead CP	10225	1560
	Remenham CP	908	139
	Ruscombe CP	508	78
	Shinfield CP	7031	1073
	Sonning CP	969	148

	St. Nicholas, Hurst CP	9118	1391
	Swallowfield CP	3533	539
	Twyford CP	2368	361
	Wargrave CP	2352	359
	Winnersh CP	5188	792
	Wokingham CP	11744	1792
	Wokingham Without CP	6964	1063
	Woodley CP	11453	1747
	All	91353	13938

Tree age

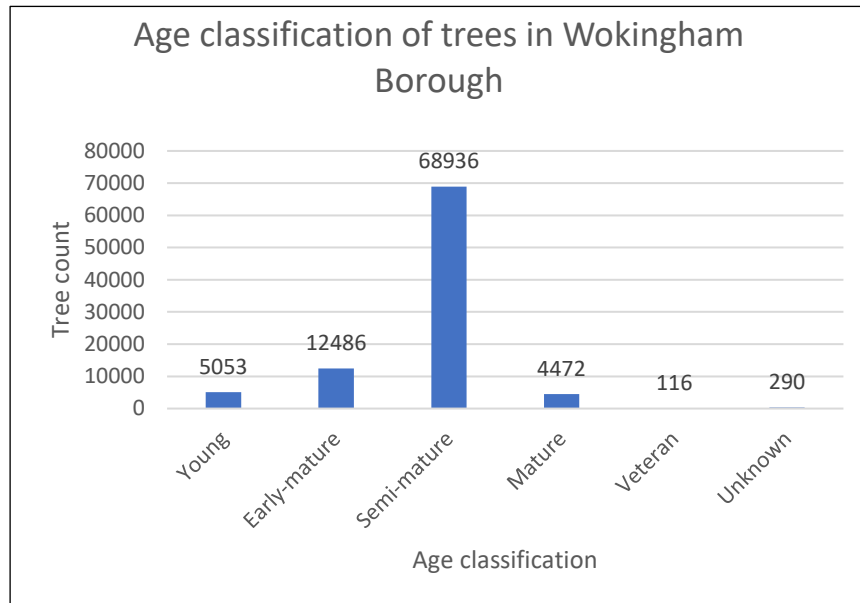
It is generally understood that to have a sustainable and flourishing urban forest you require a diverse age structure, trees will grow, decline and die at different rates and times dependant on a variety of factors including but not limited, to species, environment and climate.

To achieve continuity of trees and woodlands within a landscape it therefore stands to reason that the trees and woodlands must be replaced as fast as they are lost; however, if we simply only plant a new tree every time one is removed or dies, we will slowly lose the age diversity we find in a well-developed urban forest. To ensure continuity of tree canopy cover we must therefore ensure that the age structure of our urban forest is such that we have most tree numbers across the young, early mature and semi mature age classes with lower numbers of mature, veteran and ancient trees.

The sample plot survey, see Fig 10, indicates that Wokingham has many semi-mature trees in comparison to the other age classifications. While at first this appears to be in line with the previous statements regarding a sustainable urban forest the profile, in Wokingham it does highlight a level of risk.

Semi mature trees are required to ensure mature trees develop in the future however these trees are regularly viewed as less important when considering land for development or where highway renewal schemes are undertaken, these trees often do not have the prominence in the landscape that larger mature trees provide and as such they are often removed. This diminishes the available tree stock that can reach the levels of maturity where the greatest number of ecosystem services are provided.

Figure 10. Bar chart indicating the number of trees in each age class

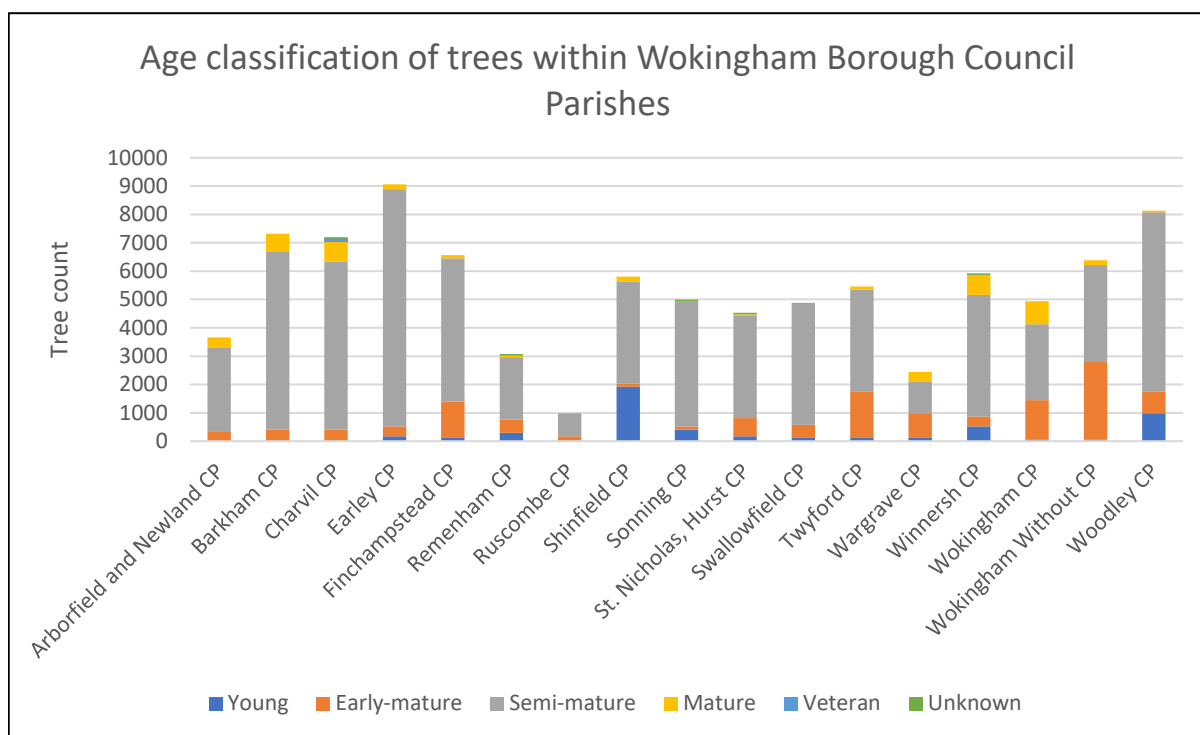


The results indicate that WBC’s Tree Planting goal in line with the Climate Emergency Action Plan would go a significant way to addressing the potential risk of decline in the number of mature trees within the borough. It also highlights the importance of both ensuring those newly planted trees are maintained to full establishment and the importance that semi-mature trees play in the developing urban forest.

The extrapolated data from the tree survey against the NTM dataset indicates the statistical presence of 116 Veteran trees within the borough, however the local veteran tree group Wokingham and District Veteran Tree Association have been systematically surveying trees in the borough as part of the Woodland Trust Ancient Tree hunt. This volunteer survey has identified the presence of over 8.5k trees within the borough which it has identified as being ancient or veteran trees. It is recognised that ancient and veteran trees are a significant visual and ecological asset that requires great care and protection. WBC have recognised this within the tree strategy and seek to formally protect these important trees where circumstances and resources allow.

The chart found at Figure 11. provides a breakdown of the age structure of the WBC owned tree cover in each Parish scaled up to the number of trees within the NTM dataset. This data can be used in conjunction with the tree planting potential plans to identify and target those areas most in need of new planting subject to resource availability.

Figure 11. Age structure of WBC owned trees within each parish.



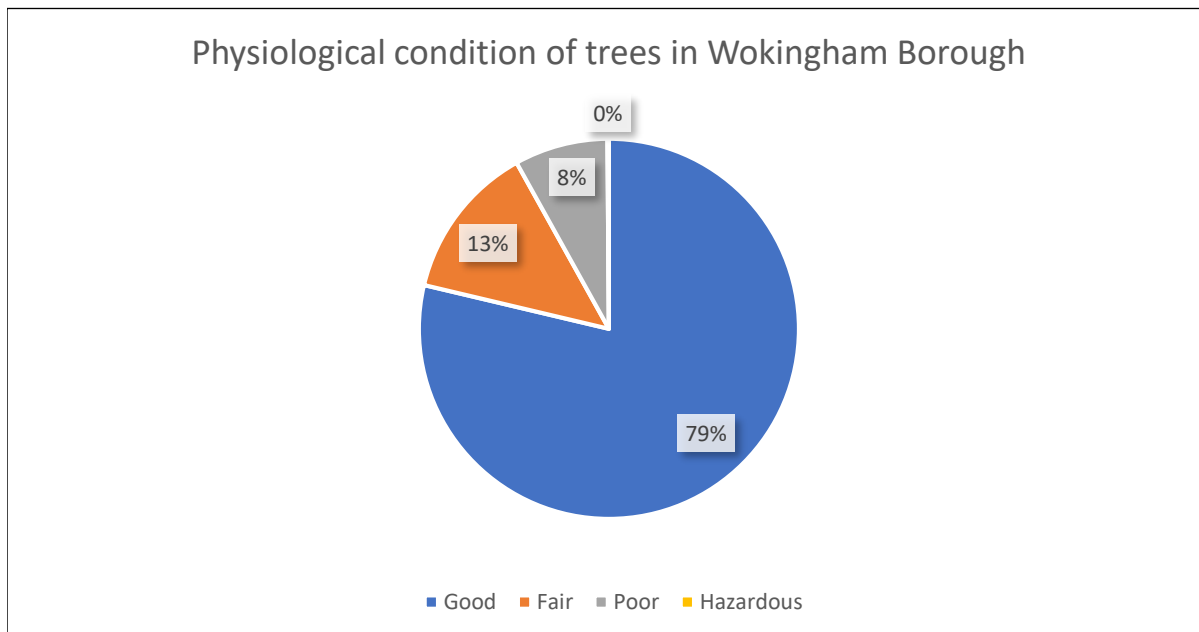
Tree condition

During the plot survey each tree was assessed for both its physiological condition and that of its structural condition. This information again is important to planning and maintaining a resilient and sustainable urban forest. Physiological condition considers the abiotic and biotic factors that may be affecting the health of a tree. Understanding the relationship, a tree has with its natural surroundings and how these may affect the trees health are important to ascertain whether remedial action should be taken to address significant issues or in some cases whether a tree can be left to its own devices.

Visual cues such as thinning canopies, small leaves, prolific production of epicormic growth, wilting and premature leaf loss can all be evidencing a tree is under stress. Stresses may be caused by the environment such as through extreme changes to our climate such as the summer drought conditions of 2022 or through the impact of human actions such as use of herbicides or road salt. Trees that are under such stresses are often more prone to infection by fungal pathogens such as the previously mentioned *Hymenocyphus fraxineus*.

The results of this element of the survey can be found in the chart below Fig 12. In general, the surveyed trees were in a good physiological condition with only a small percentage falling into the fair or poor category. This indicates that most of the tree asset is in a healthy condition, considering the large bias in age classification toward semi mature the future may be positive for seeing many trees developing into maturity, this may however also rely on sufficient resources to both maintain and protect these trees.

Figure 12. Breakdown by percentage of the physiological condition of trees within WBC

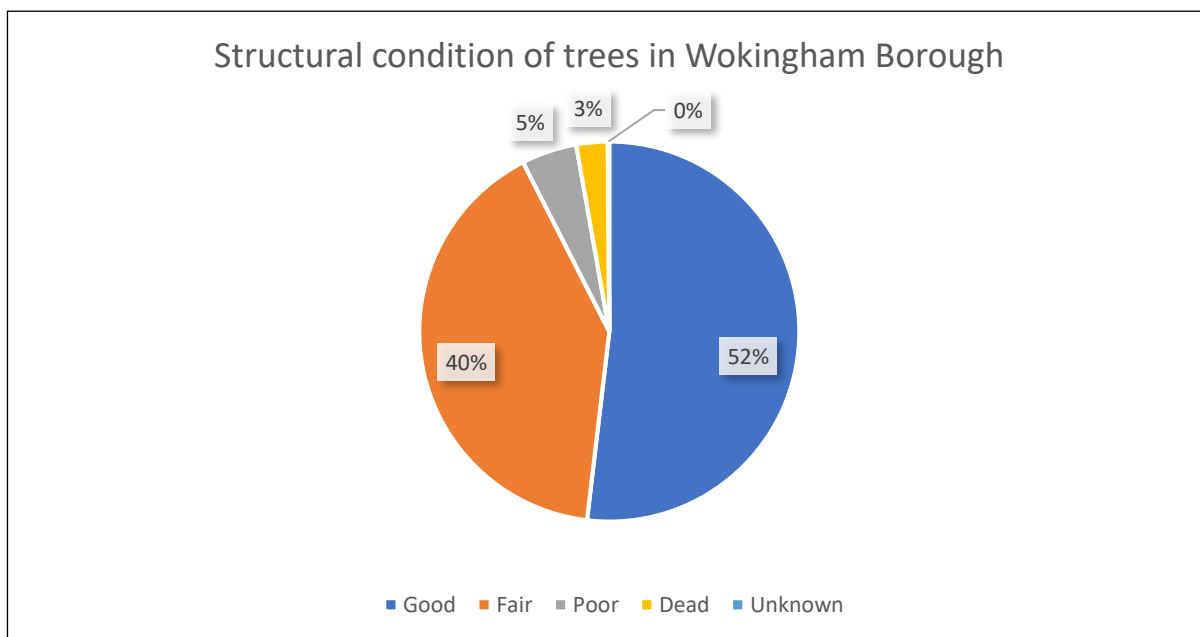


The second element of tree condition is that of its structure, this comprises of both natural elements, such as the growth habit of a particular tree species e.g., the propensity of a Norway maple *Acer platanoides* to produce included unions which can later lead to branch failures, from the action of weather, e.g., storm damage or from the actions of humans, e.g., mechanical damage to tree roots from inconsiderate trenching or sub-standard tree works.

The results of this element as indicated in Fig 13. below, are still broadly positive; however as significant proportion of trees are identified as being within the fair category. This seeming decrease in the condition of the tree stock is however not a significant issue. Most trees found in our towns and cities will be affected in some way through specific growth traits as previously mentioned or through some form of mechanical damage via either natural or human interaction which will have caused damage to the tree.

The low numbers of trees in a poor or dead condition highlight the quality of condition the trees bring to the borough. Had the results indicated a significant percentage of trees of being in a poor structural condition, this would highlight a potential significant liability for the Council, it should be noted however that these percentages are derived from a physical survey of trees extrapolated against the NTM dataset – which indicates that WBC have approximately 91k trees under their responsibility, if around 8% of these are in a poor or dead condition this still equates to over 7k trees that may require some action to ensure the tree is in a safe condition that poses little or no risk to the public or property.

Figure 13. Breakdown by percentage of the structural condition of trees within WBC.



Pathogens

The pressure on the borough’s trees has never been higher from pest and disease. Nationally we are seeing the increase in foreign pests and diseases. Some of these pests and diseases have been present in the UK for many years while others are more recent. While some of these pests and diseases are endemic and well understood others are less so. It is however recognised that pests and diseases have the potential to significantly impact both tree health and safety; and some may also affect the health of the local population.

While undertaking the tree survey several pests and diseases were identified, see Figure 14. and 15. Dutch elm disease (DED) was identified 30 times across the borough, while this is now endemic across the UK the impact is clear in the decline and death of many of our elm trees. The disease generally affects the semi mature elm growing from original root stock of trees that were infected and either died or were removed in the last 40 years. The survey indicated the presence of 30 trees with the infection which when extrapolated against the NTM indicates there are around 1750 trees within the borough that have DED. As the trees succumb to the disease they are at increased risk of branch and stem failure posing a risk to highways, property and people.

Ash dieback caused by the fungus *Hymenocyphus fraxineus* is perhaps of more relevance than DED as this fungal infection as previously noted has the potential to cause the rapid decline and death of our mature ash trees. This has the potential to dramatically and suddenly change the view of our landscapes and woodlands while also placing a significant burden and liability on the local authority resources. It is recommended by the Tree Council that all local authorities undertake surveys of their trees to identify the presence of both ash trees and the prevalence of the disease, the Tree Council provide a useful guidance note with the recommended approach for the management of ADB based on a 4-tier classification system.

Regarding the potential of pest and disease to also affect the health of the residents of the borough the survey identified 1 tree with Oak processionary moth, the caterpillars of this moth and their nests contain fine hairs which can cause severe skin irritation and affect breathing if inhaled.

Significant infestations of the oak processionary moth may place a significant burden on the local authority with a requirement to undertake nest removal and the use of pesticides to kill the moth and caterpillars. The use of such chemicals however is nonselective in the various moth (*Lepidoptera spp*) they affect, given the importance of the ancient and veteran trees that are found within the borough and the ecological communities they support, it is important to identify and address infestations an early stage.

Fig 14. Overview of the most common identified pests within the tree survey.

Pests	Tree survey count	Tree count scaled up to NTM
Dutch elm disease (<i>O. novo-ulmi</i>)	30	1742
Oak processionary moth (<i>Thaumetopoea processionea</i>)	1	58
Other	1	58
None	1541	89495
Total	1573	91353

Fig 15. Overview of the most common identified pests within the tree survey.

Fungus	Tree survey count	Tree count scaled up to NTM
Ash bracket (<i>Innonotus hispidus</i>)	1	58
Ash dieback (<i>Hymenoscyphus fraxineus</i>)	75	4356
Other	1	58
None	1496	86881
Total	1573	91353

This page is intentionally left blank



Wokingham Borough Council TPO Process Flow Chart

- 1) TPO inquiry received, from staff member, Councillor, or member of the public; Go to 2. If the request is considered urgent, then request will automatically be included within TPO priority meeting process (see point 5) undertaken by emails and TEAMS.
- 2) Link to WBC guidance on requesting a TPO form will be emailed out, or posted, as required. [Application to Include trees under a Tree Preservation Order.](#)
- 3) Completed TPO Request form received by WBC Tree Officers.
- 4) Completed TPO Request form sent to monthly TPO prioritisation meeting.
- 5) TPO Request assessed and rated for priority at TPO Prioritisation meeting (attended by T&L team manager who has delegated authority to make TPOs, Snr Tree Officer and Tree Officer, as available). TPOs are assessed against Government Guidelines. Three possible outcomes:
 - a. **Priority Red** are the TPOs that will be prioritised for service during the period ahead. TPO requests that are assessed as Priority Red will be made and served by Tree Officer at the earliest opportunity.
 - b. **Priority Amber** are the TPOs that will be worked on during the next period if there is resource to do this.
 - c. **Priority Green** are those that will not be prioritised. Those who have requested TPOs that have been allocated to Priority Green receive a response explaining why the TPO request has not been prioritised. They are advised that if they become aware of new and updated information, then they are at liberty to put in a new request which will be considered.

Where relevant, other Officers, e.g. planning officers, enforcement officers, WBC Landscape Architects may attend the TPO Prioritisation Meeting, or their opinion is sought either before or after the meeting, to input specialist and/or site-specific knowledge and information.

- 6) Where a TPO is to be served there will be two outcomes:
 - a. Comments received? **Yes** - go to 7, **No** - go to 8.
 - b. TPO challenged on point of law? **Yes** – go to 11, **No** - go to 12
- 7) Letter sent to those who have commented/objected telling them that their opinions will be considered in the light of Government guidance when the TPO is confirmed, if it is confirmed.
- 8) TPO considered in the light of comments or lack thereof. TPO to be confirmed? **Yes** – go to 9, **No** – go to 10
- 9) TPO confirmed as served or modified. Finish.
- 10) TPO rescinded. Finish.
- 11) TPO sent to Court. Court decides – Finish.
- 12) Letter to challenger confirming invalid challenge. Go to 11

Further details and guidance on the TPO process can be found on Wokingham.gov.uk.

This page is intentionally left blank

Hedgerows for Screening and Wildlife in Wokingham

Hedges form an essential part of the structure of the landscape. They are important for biodiversity conservation in their own right but also because they link woodland habitats & form wildlife corridors. The physical structure, species mix & composition of hedges changes from region to region & even between the different landscape character areas in the Borough. This Guidance Note is a simple guide to planting hedges in Wokingham & will assist in the design & planting of new hedgerows in the Borough.

SPECIFICATION

Ground Preparation:	Ground to be thoroughly de-compacted by hand, if necessary, prior to planting.
Size of stock:	Transplants 45-60cm tall or whips 60-90cm tall as appropriate to the species selected. Hedgerow standard trees should be half standards under-planted with shade tolerant hedge species. Trees spaced at 6 to 15 m intervals as appropriate.
Form:	Bare root or pot grown as appropriate for each species.
Type:	Certified local provenance.
Density:	For most hedges double staggered row, generally 'notch planted', 0.33 metres apart at 0.33 metre centres (this works out at 6 plants per linear metre). Hedgerow standards should be 'pit planted' (where appropriate) at 6-15m centres.
Support and protection:	Protection (rabbits & deer) – individual Tubex tree shelters of appropriate size, staked & secured or stock fencing around new trees & rabbit proof wire at base.
Establishment:	For 2 years after planting, maintain an area of 1m ² weed-free around each new plant, either by hand (where replanting hedges & which will appropriately preserve remnant field-layer plants) or by another weed control regime appropriate to the circumstances.
Maintenance:	Any plants that die or become diseased within 5 years of planting must be replaced to the above specification. Watering of hedge to ensure establishment of all plants to be carried out as required.
Plant Specification:	All whips to be young trees without feathered growth, 0.6–1.2m high. All transplants to conform to BS 3936: Part 1:1992 and to be no less than 2 years old. All trees and shrubs to be delivered to site clearly labelled with botanical name. For specification of hedgerow standard trees see WBC advice note on 'Tree planting in Wokingham'. Holly to be pot-grown ensuring establishment.
Standard trees:	Where standard trees are required tree species should be left uncut to grow through the hedge, at least one every 6m, with existing standard trees incorporated into the new hedge wherever possible. Standard trees planted either side of gateways encourages the use of hedges as natural networks by birds, bats, dormice, etc.

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

CHOICE OF SPECIES FOR DIFFERENT HEDGES/HEDGEROWS

Countryside Hedges: Some of our hedges are ancient, dating from very early plantings of stock-proof boundaries, or were the thin belt of trees and shrubs left over when woodland was originally cleared to make fields. They tend to be very rich in species, mainly because of their antiquity. Simpler hedges, mainly of hawthorn & blackthorn, tend to be the more recent ones, planted as common land was enclosed within the last 200 years. Except on the most sandy soils the following species should be used:

Shrub / hedge plants

50% Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
23% Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)
5% Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)
5% Field Maple (*Acer campestre*)
5% Hornbeam (*Carpinus betula*)
5% Holly (*Ilex Aquifolium*) shade tolerant so good under hedgerow trees

with:

1% each of Dog rose (*Rosa canina*), Field rose (*Rosa arvensis*), wild service (*Sorbus torminalis*) guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*), yew (*Taxus baccata*), oak (*Q. robur*) and ash (*F excelsior*) transplants, (7% of total

Hedgerow standard trees

Oak (*Quercus robur*) half standards or larger (70% of total standards)
Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) half standards or larger (30% of total standards)

River Floodplains: Hedgerow mixtures in the floodplains of the Thames, Loddon and Blackwater rivers can be similar to those for the open countryside. However, in damper areas the species mix can be tweaked to include hedgerow standards of large species trees requiring damp conditions e.g.

Willows (*Salix* species such as the large trees *S. fragilis* and *S. alba* or the smaller, more shrubby *S. caprea* and *S. cinerea*) but not to be planted near buildings.

Black poplar (*Populus nigra var. betulifolia*) only confirmed local stock.
Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*)

Designed Formal Landscapes: Most such hedges are designed for formal landscapes and use a limited number of plants to form single species clipped, formal, hedgerows. Suitable species are as follows: beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), yew (*Taxus baccata*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), box (*Buxus sempervirens*). Mixes of these species can be used to form 'tapestry hedge mixes' which are rich in texture with colours which change throughout the year but which need only minimum maintenance. A relatively low maintenance tapestry hedge, requiring only one or two cuts per year can be achieved by planting 33% each of yew, hornbeam and beech.

Choice of species: Some other species are favoured for their quick establishment & rapid growth. However, they are often poor in terms of their nature conservation benefits or look out of place in the landscape. An example of such a species is Leyland cypress (*Cupressocyparis leylandii*) which is often cited in formal High Hedges complaints. Its use is generally discouraged. On the other hand, Yew (*Taxus baccata*), makes an exceptional formal hedge, the finest of all green architecture. Yew is not as slow growing as is popularly believed & a hedge of 6 feet can be achieved in five or six seasons if the ground is well prepared. Where berries are required to encourage fruit eating birds, then both male and female plants must be planted.





**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Tree Strategy





TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	4
2. Summary	6
3. Legal framework	6
4. Local Plan.....	14
5. Wokingham environment	19
6. Value of trees.....	23
7. Ancient and veteran trees	31
8. Management and maintenance of trees on council-owned land	34
9. Tree Preservation Orders.....	43
10. Subsidence	47
11. Developer responsibilities	50
12. Replacement tree-planting - council land.....	55
13. Tree-planting	56
14. Hedgerow and Hedge planting	63
15. Risks and biosecurity	65
16. Action plan.....	68

WDVTA stands for the Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association

1. INTRODUCTION

Main principle

Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason

Tree strategies are a plan for the management of trees in a specific area, this includes tree planting and felling. This strategy provides Wokingham Borough Council with a set of standards and goals to ensure it continues to care for the trees of the borough. It takes the risks and benefits into account, setting out the Council's aspirations for increasing tree numbers and canopy cover, whilst continuing to protect existing trees for the benefit of future generations.

Purpose:

The Council recognises the positive impact trees have on the environment and the lives of people who live in and visit the borough. Trees provide multiple benefits, which include improvements in human health and well-being, biodiversity and carbon capture.

When the term 'tree' is used in this strategy, it refers to all forms of trees, including saplings, mature trees, veterans, hedgerows, orchards and woodlands.

This document will provide a useful resource to anyone interested in conserving and enhancing the trees of our borough. It seeks to provide additional guidance and detail to

support policies in the Council's decision-making process to ensure that Climate Emergency Plan goals are achieved.

The strategy is designed to cover the next 10 years and includes short-, medium- and long-term goals, including achieving the required standards to gain recognition as a Tree City of the World.

Aims:

- To promote awareness of the value of trees in our environment.
- To interpret the policy framework on trees at international, national and regional levels to help define the Council's responsibilities.
- To set out Council policies to enable us to conserve and enhance the Wokingham Borough treescape.

Objectives:

The Tree Strategy will provide the Council with a framework to help manage its tree assets and to achieve the following objectives:

- Conserve and enhance the tree resource in terms of quality and numbers.
- Promote public safety through appropriately resourced tree inspection and maintenance programmes.
- Fulfil the Council's legal obligations as a tree owner by addressing safety and major nuisance issues.

- Help inform residents of our legal obligations relating to trees and manage enquiries and expectations appropriately.
- Help establish sustainable management programmes for Council woodland utilising external funding from central government agencies.
- Promote and increase the current level of tree-planting on public and private land to address the recent decline of individual trees.
- To contribute to the 2030 carbon-neutral target and to mitigate the potential effects of ash dieback and other potentially harmful diseases.
- Help improve air quality, mitigate climate change, increase biodiversity, improve residents' health and well-being, and provide the socio-economic benefits that trees provide.
- Provide guidance to developers on how the Council expects tree-planting to be integrated into the design and construction of development proposals.
- Encourage and support individuals and local voluntary environmental organisations to contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of the treescape.

The success and effective implementation of the goals and ambitions of the strategy are subject to adequate financial and staffing resources being made available, along with full support from Councillors and Senior Management.

© WDVTA

2. SUMMARY

As part of the development of the Council's emerging Tree Strategy, consultations have been held with the following internal and external stakeholders:

Internal stakeholders:

- Wokingham Borough Operational Tree Officers
- Wokingham Borough Trees and Landscape Team
- Planning Policy Team
- Planning Regulation Team
- Development Management Team
- Estates
- Green and Blue Infrastructure
- Countryside Services
- Cleaner and Greener
- Highways
- Flood & Drainage

External stakeholders:

- Woodland Trust
- Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA)

© WDVTA

3. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

There are many laws which protect the environment and govern or guide the way some parts of the landscape are managed. These laws help ensure the country is an attractive place to live, work and visit. There is now an increasing focus on law to help protect biodiversity (wildlife) and ensure sustainable uses of the land.

Many of these laws have been in place for decades, including the Town and Country Planning Act (1947 + 1990) ([link](#)), the Occupiers' Liability Act (1957 + 1984) ([link](#)), the Forestry Act (1967) ([link](#)), the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (1976) ([link](#)), the Highways Act (1980) ([link](#)), the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006), Agriculture Act (2020) ([link](#)), the Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) ([link](#)), and more recently the Environment Act (2021) ([link](#)).

Whilst legislation to help protect the environment has been in place for many years, the government has more recently acknowledged that our way of living is having a significant impact on the environment. These impacts are not only on local environments within the UK but also



on a global scale. The single greatest impact on the environment is that of humans, and as such the government has sought solutions to address changes in the climate caused by use of fossil fuels in every sector of human activity, from transport and development to farming and fashion.

In January 2018, the government released 'A Green Future', a 25-year plan setting the goal to improve the environment so that the next generation inherits an environment that is of better quality than that which we have today.

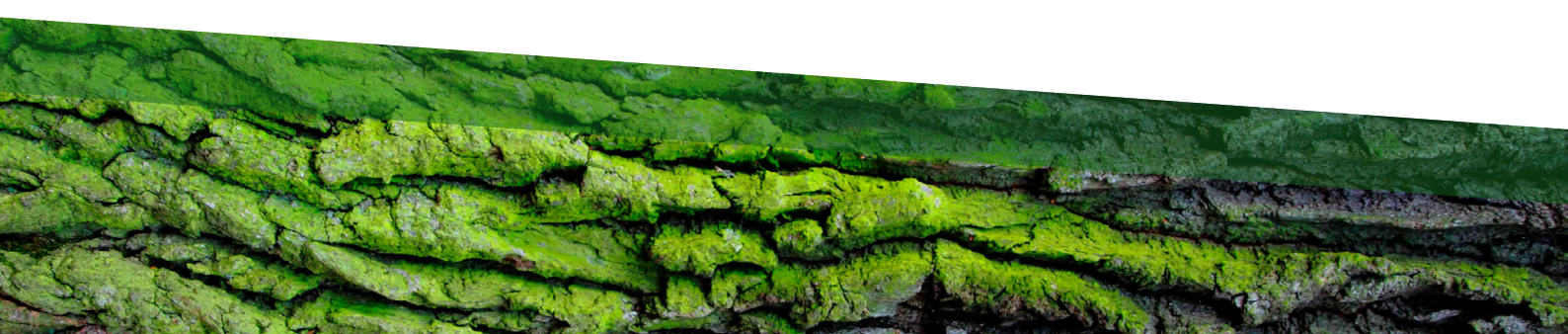
The approach is underpinned by a commitment to increasing natural capital, the stock of natural environment assets that deliver a range of benefits for people and wildlife. Section 6 of the Strategy expands on The Value of Trees.

Trees and woodland feature prominently in the Plan, including increasing woodland in England in line with the government aspiration of attaining 12% cover by 2060, and focusing on woodland to maximise its many benefits.

To facilitate the government's goals, several documents have been produced which this strategy takes into consideration. These include:

a) The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

This Act came into force in October 2006. Section 41 (S41) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) list has been drawn up by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee as required by the Act. **Section 40** of the NERC Act places a duty on public authorities in England, in exercising their functions, to have regard to the purposes of conserving. The act does not limit the requirement to have regard to conserving biodiversity to any specific functions so then such functions would include waste management, highways works and maintenance, planning decision making and policy making. Paragraph 40(iii) states that 'Conserving biodiversity includes, in relation to a living organism or type of habitat, restoring or enhancing a population or habitat'. Of course, trees, particularly native species, must be considered to be both wildlife and wildlife habitat for the purposes of the Act. Follow this [link](#) to view NERC Act 2006.



b) The Localism Act 2011

This Act has placed a greater emphasis on the sub-national, local and neighbourhood levels' roles in planning and in the decisions about designations of local green spaces, including woodland, for community use. Importantly the duties to conserve, restore or enhance biodiversity (including trees and woodland) under the NERC Act (2006), (see above), apply to parish councils as well as to the borough council. A consequence of this is that, although there is no duty under the Localism Act for parish councils to produce a Strategy like The London Environment Strategy required by paragraph 225 of this Act; it is a duty of the parish council to consider 'restoring or enhancing a population or habitat' under Section 40(3) of the NERC Act. This includes trees and woodland. Follow this [link](#) to view the Localism Act 2011.

c) Agriculture Act 2020

The update of the Agriculture Act has provided a mechanism where financial assistance for farmers must provide 'Public Goods', the Commons Library briefing from December 2020 (follow this link for the [Agriculture Act 2020 briefing paper](#)) provides within chapter 3.1 (clauses 1-6) an example in table 1 of the envisaged benefits that the Act will provide through the Public Goods. Clause 1(a) suggests the act will incentivise tree planting to capture

© WDVTA

ammonia emissions and to protect sensitive habitats from agricultural nitrogen deposition which can damage them. Follow this [link](#) to view the Agriculture Act 2020.

d) National Planning Policy Framework and guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied and reinforces the importance of sustainable development. The Framework demonstrates its contribution not only to the environment, but to economic and social agendas health. It states that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused by the Local Planning Authority, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists. In addition, the NPPF states that an approved Community Forest Plan may be a material consideration in preparing development plans and in deciding planning applications.

Further detail is set out in the government's planning practice guidance (PPG). Follow this [link](#) for NPPF guidance. The PPG provides an online resource of detailed policy guidance that sits alongside the Framework.

In addition, the National Design Guide illustrates how well-designed places can be made more beautiful, healthier, greener and more enduring. The guide complements the PPG and covers thematic areas. Consideration is given to trees and landscape within several areas such as public spaces, nature, homes and buildings, and movement. Follow this [link](#) for the National Design Guide.

e) Defra Forest Policy

Defra published its latest Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement in March 2013. This also incorporated its response to the Independent Panel on Forestry. It affirms the government's commitment to protecting trees, woods and forests. Follow this [link](#) to view the Defra Forest Policy.

f) Natural Environment White Paper

The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature, published in 2011, recognises that a healthy, properly functioning natural environment is the foundation of sustained economic growth, prospering communities and personal well-being. It makes the case for the economic valuation of the services natural systems provide to our society, and for these values to be properly accounted for in economic decision making across all government departments. Follow this [link](#) to view the paper.

g) Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services

Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services, published in 2011, has as its mission to halt overall biodiversity loss; support healthy, well-functioning ecosystems; and establish coherent ecological networks, by providing better habitat for nature for the benefit of wildlife and people.

In line with the UK Forest Standard Guidelines, conservation of biodiversity is an essential part of Wokingham Borough Council's Tree Strategy. Biodiverse woodlands and urban forests are not only more resilient to a range of external factors such as pests, diseases and climate change but provide a wider range of green infrastructure benefits. Follow this [link](#) to view the Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem.

h) Circular 36/78 Trees and forestry

This document issued by the DOE in 1978 consolidates advice on trees and forestry and the preservation of trees and woodlands.

- It enshrines Local Authority powers to plant and protect trees and a duty to make provision for them when granting planning permissions.
- It advises on the treatment of trees and forestry in plans and on staffing for, and public involvement in, proposals relating to trees.
- It describes the purpose and scope of Tree Preservation Orders. Follow this [link](#) for link for the Councils guidance on protected trees.

This publication has now been rescinded and is superseded by a number of further documents; the detail contained however is still relevant with much of the information enshrined in law.



i) UK Forestry Standard

The UK Forestry Standard sets out the criteria and standards for the sustainable management of all forests and woodlands in the UK. The Forestry Commission employs the Standard in the management of its own forests, and private forests receiving grant aid must be managed in accordance with the Standard. Follow this [link](#) for the UK Forestry Standard.

Eight areas of activity are covered by the Standard:

- General forest practice
- Biodiversity
- Climate change
- Historic environment
- Landscape
- People
- Soil
- Water

j) Local plans

Local plans are prepared by the local planning authority (LPA), usually the Council or the national park authority for the area. LPA's have a statutory duty to prepare and review Local Plans for their area. The NPPF states that the planning system should be genuinely plan-led. Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area and a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities. Wokingham Borough Council has produced a development plan which comprises several documents, including the Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan. Wokingham Borough Council are in the process of producing a Local Plan Update (LPU) which is expected to go to Public Inquiry in 2023. This will replace the current Local Plan which comprises the Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plans. See Section 4 of the strategy for further detail on the Local Plan. This [link](#) will take you to the Wokingham Borough Council Local Plan Update webpage.



k) Neighbourhood plans

Neighbourhood planning gives communities the opportunity to prepare a vision for their neighbourhood and help shape the development and growth of their local area. Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to plan for the types of development to meet their community's needs and where the ambition of the neighbourhood is aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area. This includes opportunities to prepare policies that help protect valued areas of green space and influence the design and type of new development.

Wokingham Borough currently has two adopted neighbourhood plans: Shinfield, and Arborfield & Barkham, which include planning policies and guidance relating to localised matters in their area, such as trees and hedgerows.

Policies within a neighbourhood plan provide additional detail to strategic policies covered in the local plan.

Follow this [link](#) to view Wokingham Borough Council Neighbourhood Plans.

l) Climate Emergency Action Plan

The UK was one of the first countries to ratify the Paris Agreement on limiting greenhouse gas emissions to levels that prevent global temperatures from increasing to more

© WDVTA

than 2°C above the temperature benchmark.

Following a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, advice was given stating the 2°C target was too high and a lower target of 1.5°C should be the limit. The publication of the report triggered several councils across the world to declare a climate emergency.

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. The motion committed Wokingham Borough Council to produce a Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) within six months, to report the actions that the Council will take to achieve its target and to set up a cross-party working group to monitor progress. With the publication of this CEAP, all these commitments are now in place.

The Council's CEAP can be found using the following [link](#).

m) Environmental Land Management schemes

The agricultural transition period in England means a shift in agri-environmental policy, away from EU Common Agricultural Policy and towards English future focused Environmental Land Management (ELM).

There are 3 new schemes that will reward environmental land management:

- Sustainable Farming Incentive
- Local Nature Recovery
- Landscape Recovery

These schemes are intended to support the rural economy while achieving the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan and a commitment to net zero emissions by 2050. Through these schemes, farmers and other land managers may enter into agreements to be paid for delivering the following:

- clean and plentiful water
- clean air
- thriving plants and wildlife
- protection from environmental hazards
- reduction of and adaptation to climate change
- beauty, heritage and engagement with the environment

Further details on Environmental Land Management Schemes can be found on [Gov.uk](#)

4. LOCAL PLAN

Local Plans are statutory documents prepared by an LPA in consultation with its community and other stakeholders. The document sets out a long-term vision and a policy framework to guide how future development is managed in the area, including the location, amount and type of new development, and supporting infrastructure. Once in place, local plans become part of the statutory development plan.

The development plan for Wokingham Borough includes the Core Strategy (adopted 2010) and the MDD (adopted 2014) which govern how development will occur in the borough until 2026. Work is underway on a new Local Plan Update (LPU) that will guide the long-term development of the borough. Once adopted, the LPU will replace the Core Strategy and MDD.

The Council's local plan must continue to consider changes to national planning policy and guidance.

This includes the current standard approach for calculating the number of homes each local authority must plan for.

The Core Strategy sets out a list of goals which includes a desire to protect the character of the borough by maintaining/improving the built/natural environment while mitigating the effect of new development on the environment.

Policy CP1 on Sustainable development seeks to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and to provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes.

Policy CP3 sets out the general principle of development, including ensuring proposals:

- Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life; have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or watercourses.
- contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping.

By following this [link](#), further detail can be found on the Councils Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.

This document provides further detail to the policies contained within the Core Strategy which ensure the borough's unique ecology, landscape, heritage and environment will be protected and, where possible,

¹ Right Homes, Right Places - Draft Local Plan Public Consultation (February 2020 - March 2020)

enhanced so that Wokingham Borough's strength of character prevails in these times of change.

The MDD contains Policy CC03 on Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping requires that, which includes the following detail:

- Development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieve the following criteria within scheme proposals:
- Provide new or protect and enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development,
- Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside.
- Protect and retain existing trees, Landscaping, tree-planting, hedges and other landscape features,
- Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.
- Policy TB21 on Landscape Character requires that:
- Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, Including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues.
- Proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

© WDVTA

The Council recognises the value that existing and new trees add to any development. To help ensure that important assets such as trees are retained in development, the Council has put forward several policies within the draft LPU. The draft LPU was subject to public consultation in February 2020¹, and included the following:

Policy NE3: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

1. Trees, woodland and hedgerows are important visual and ecological assets in towns, villages and the countryside. To retain and provide local character and distinctiveness in the landscape, trees (including ancient or veteran trees), woodland, ancient woodland and hedgerows are of particular significance. Development proposals should:
 - a) Ensure existing trees, hedgerows and other landscape features are protected, and where possible enhanced, as an integral part of the development,
 - b) Retain the existing pattern of fields, hedgerows, woodlands, trees, watercourses, water bodies, underlying topography and other landscape features,
 - c) Provide appropriate buffer zones around woodlands, including semi-natural ancient woodlands, planted ancient woodland sites, orchards, hedgerows and individual trees.
2. The loss, threat or damage to any tree, woodland or hedgerow of visual, heritage or nature conservation value will only be acceptable where:
 - a) Development proposals have sought to avoid, reduce or minimise impact,
 3. b) Mitigation measures, such as structural tree planting are incorporated as part of the development proposals providing equivalent scale, canopy cover, habitat connectivity and character. Development proposals that would result in the loss or deterioration of woodland, ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees will only be permitted if there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.

Policy NE4: Development and Existing Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

1. Development proposals that may affect a tree, woodland or hedgerow should:
 - a) Assess the health of all trees, woodland and hedgerows affected, including describing and assessing their value and the potential impact of the development on them as part of an Arboricultural Impact Assessment
 - b) Incorporate existing woodland, trees and hedgerows and ensure integration into the public realm within a suitable landscape setting,
 - c) Ensure the layout of new developments provide sufficient space to enable trees to grow and thrive, including maintaining adequate root protection areas and limiting excessive shading to residential properties.
 - d) Ensure appropriate tree protection measures are in place prior to development commencing on site as part of an Arboricultural Method Statement, including a Tree Constraints Plan and Tree Protection Plan and actively monitor tree protection throughout the construction process.

Valued Landscape Topic Paper

This paper provides background evidence and justification for Wokingham Borough Council's designation of valued landscapes as per Policy NE6 of the Draft Local Plan. The paper, a draft version of the paper can be viewed by following this [link](#), sets out the relevant legislation, policy guidance, appeals and case law and details the methodology used for discovering and defining valued landscapes across the Borough. It is intended that this paper will inform the development of the LPU and will demonstrate how the Council's LPU process and policies will seek to conserve and enhance the borough's valued landscapes in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework 2021.

Once finalised the Topic Paper will assist the Council's Development Management and Planning Enforcement teams in the assessment, prioritisation, determination and defence of planning decisions.

Work on discovering and defining the borough's Valued Landscapes combined with the Council's most recent Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (2019), and the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment (2004) offers an objective assessment and description of the borough's landscapes. The strategic Valued Landscape assessment and the Landscape Character Assessment provide an evidence base to help formulate

policies for the LPU and will help guide decision-making around development and the management of future change. They are designed to be used both as a positive tool to guide new development or land uses in a way that understands and responds to local variations in landscape character and to protect and enhance the special qualities and local distinctiveness of Wokingham's landscapes. Taking into consideration the main strategy principle of 'Right Tree, Right Place, Right Reason', using the LCAs, Wokingham Borough Council's tree and landscape and ecology officers will develop a 'tree palette' which will provide a useful tool to support developers, residents, community groups and landowners in making informed decisions on which trees would be most suitable for the borough landscape characteristics. Work is already underway to develop the tree palette and completion of it has been included as a short-term goal on the strategy action plan.

The emerging Local Plan Update also contains several other linked policies including NE1 and NE3-NE7 which consist of policies relating to NE1: Biodiversity and Nature Conservation, NE3: Trees, woodland and hedgerows, NE4: Development and existing trees, woodland and hedgerows, NE5: Landscape and Design, NE6: Landscape Character, Value and Green Routes and NE7: Sites of Urban Landscape Value.

The LPU will guide where and how growth will take place in the borough. The Council must plan for more

housing, which is always a complex and controversial subject. They will also plan for new employment, schools, roads, parks, shops and community facilities necessary to create places people want to live, work and do business.

The LPU will interact with themes to include the aforementioned natural environment policies, to ensure that any development should optimise unit density, while also consistently achieving quality design which provides sufficient space to allow the integration or juxtaposition of trees and woodland within development in a sustainable manner. The integration of existing trees and good landscape planning for enhanced contributions will reinforce or even sometimes create the sense of place and local distinctiveness.

Additional information on the emerging LPU can be found by following this [link](#).

Further to the above aims of the local plan and Core Strategy, MDD and emerging LPU, this strategy seeks to provide additional detail to support policies within the local plan and provides further weight and guidance in the Council's decision-making process to ensure that Climate Emergency Plan goals are achieved.

5. WOKINGHAM ENVIRONMENT

Borough Design Guide

Adopted in 2012, the Borough Design Guide, is a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which augments planning policies in the Development Plan Document (DPD), in this case, the Wokingham Borough Core Spatial Strategy (January 2010) (Core Strategy). The Borough Design Guide is an important material consideration in the determining of planning applications and elaborates on policies in the Core Strategy, explaining how they will be interpreted and applied to common topics and forms of development.

The Borough Design Guide has been prepared to help deliver the vision and objectives of the borough. The overall aim of the guide is to enhance the quality of development and make sure proposals are of the highest quality of design. That means inclusive, safe, harmonious, welcoming, sustainable places that are well related to the surroundings.

The Borough Design Guide can be viewed by following this [link](#).



Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)

The current Wokingham Borough BAP covers the period 2012-2024, and aims to build on the achievements and successes of the previous BAP.

The overall aims of the Wokingham Borough BAP are to:

- raise awareness of the issues impacting on local biodiversity.
- outline targets and actions which will enhance biodiversity in the borough.
- encourage and support community engagement; enabling local action to deliver targets.
- encourage management practices sympathetic to wildlife, promoting “good practice” and providing guidance.
- ensure policies are in place for the protection, management and enhancement of the local wildlife resource.

The BAP aims to contribute to and build on biodiversity delivery at a county level. This includes progressing actions in the following Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs): Blackwater Valley; Chilterns Escarpment; Thames Basin Heaths; Loddon Valley South; Loddon Valley Gravel Pits; Waltham Woodlands and Parkland; Ashley and Bowsey Hills.

The Wokingham Borough Biodiversity Action Plan can be found by following this [link](#).

© WDVTA

Tree stock

Between May-July 2022, an assessment of the Borough trees was carried out to ascertain the numbers, condition and benefits of trees across the Borough using a variety of data systems and in person site surveys.

Data was initially collected through a desk-based survey using the BlueSky's National Tree Map™ (NTM™), a detailed dataset derived from high quality aerial imagery providing the location of all trees across the borough along with a derived canopy and approximate tree height.

The dataset for Wokingham Borough was analysed to provide the following information:

- The number of trees identified on the NTM as being within WBC including both council and privately-owned trees.
- The number of trees from NTM within the ownership of WBC.
- Number of trees within each parish including both WBC and privately-owned trees.

- Number of trees from NTM within each parish under WBC ownership.

Analysis of the NTM dataset identified that WBC are responsible for approximately 91,000 trees with a further 540,000 being within private ownership. The total number of trees within the borough is indicated to be over 630,000.

By using the NTM data as a basis; a series of sample plots were created across the borough where an on-site survey was carried out. The sample plots were targeted to capture sites within the Council's ownership containing the largest number of trees. The survey consisted of 102 survey plots (50m x 50m) located across the Council's ownership with 6 plots in each of the 17 parishes. Understanding the makeup of the tree asset is important in terms of identifying risk and ensuring that any new tree planting is designed to be resilient.

The data that was captured through the desktop BlueSky's National Tree Map™ (NTM™) and sample site surveys can be found within Appendix A².

² Tree Report - Appendix A

Canopy Cover

Between May-July 2022, an assessment was also conducted of the borough's trees using the i-Tree Canopy model. This internationally renowned and peer reviewed system again uses high quality aerial imagery and requires an operator to assess the vegetation within several sample plots; this may simply be grass, trees and shrubs, water, or impervious surfacing e.g., a road. The data gathered through this survey indicates that approximately 22% of the borough landmass is under tree or shrub canopy. The average tree canopy cover is 16% in England³, it is therefore clear that Wokingham borough has an above average tree canopy. The results of the i-Tree Canopy survey indicate that the borough's trees currently provide annual carbon sequestration of over 12 kilo tons of carbon (1 ton of CO₂ is the equivalent driving 2482 miles in a family car)⁴.

The cost of attenuating this amount of CO₂ would be in the region of £3 million³ annually. In total the current tree asset stores over 305 Kilo tons of Carbon with a value of over £77 million. Further benefits indicated that the tree canopy intercepts and prevents the over 985 mega litres (million litres) of rainwater run off; an Olympic swimming pool holds approximately 2.5 mega litres of water. Wokingham's trees therefore intercept the equivalent of 394 Olympic swimming pools per year. This has a value in terms of savings to water companies of over £1.5 million per annum.

The full results of the canopy survey can be found at Appendix A⁵.

The data collected through the Tree Survey and Canopy Cover Survey will be used by Officers to identify areas with low canopy cover that would benefit from new planting within WBC land.

³ <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/tree-canopy-cover-leaflet/>

⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator>

⁵ Tree Report - Appendix A

6. VALUE OF TREES

Environmental

Trees benefit our environment in the following ways:

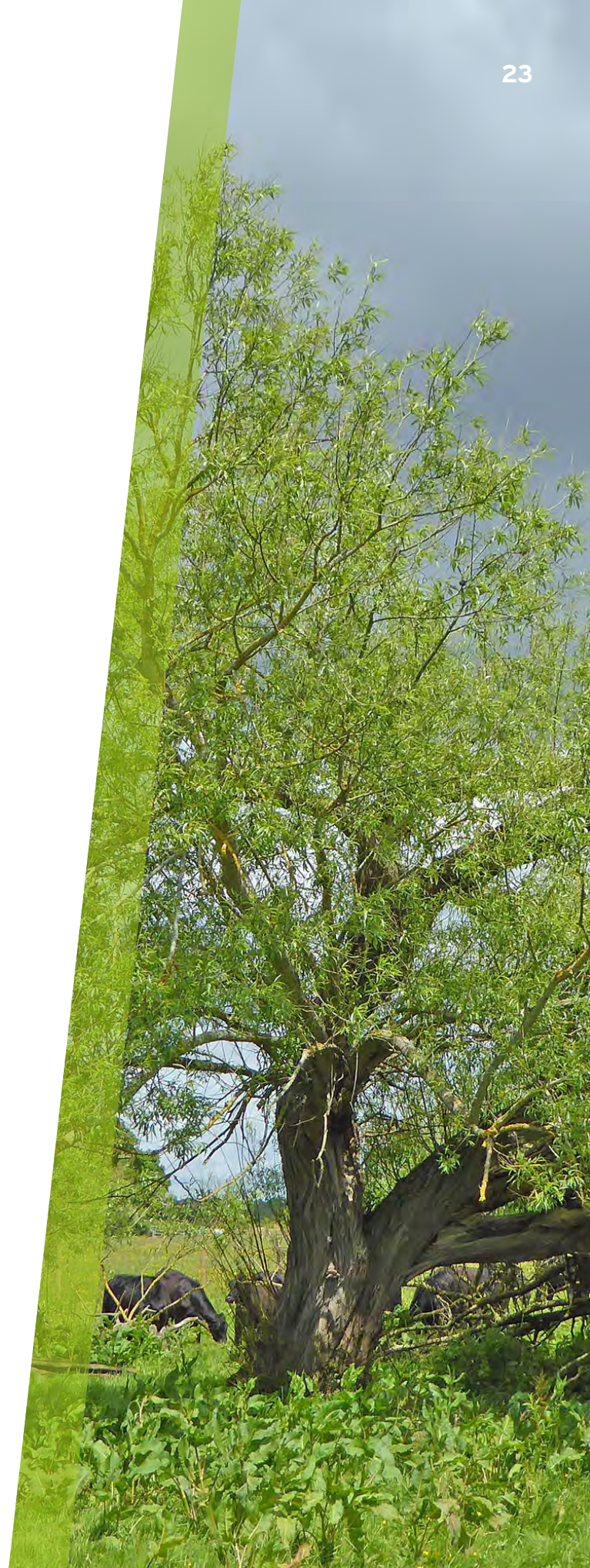
Improving air quality

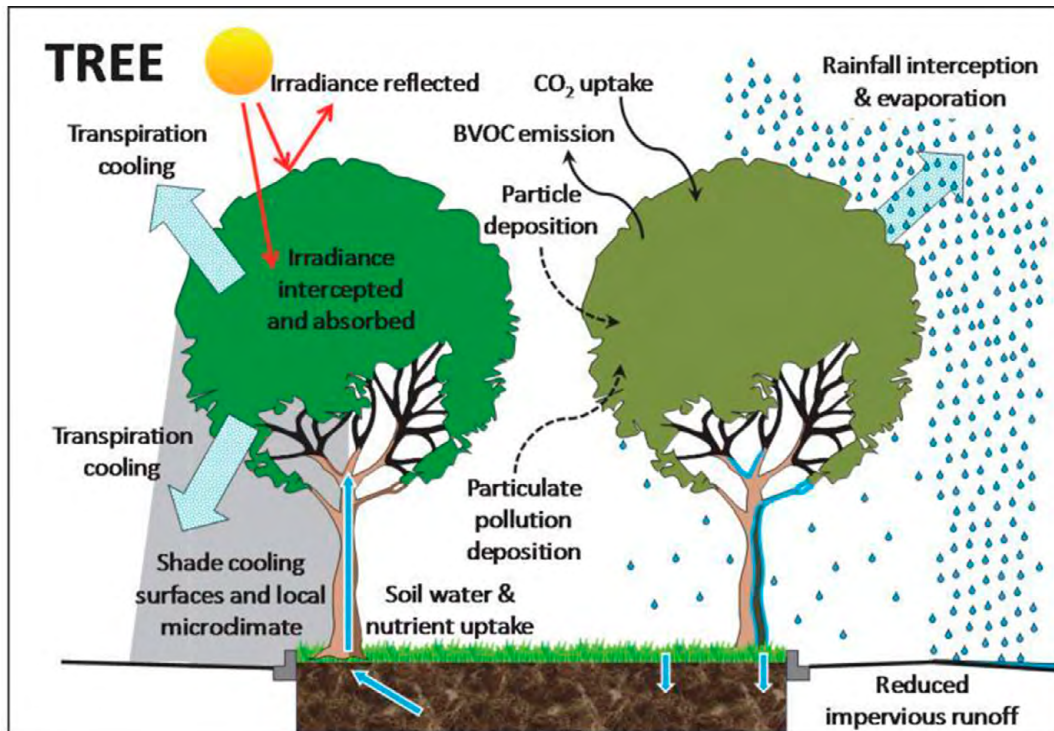
Trees are effective agents in enhancing air quality by producing oxygen (via the process of photosynthesis), and through the capture of urban pollutants e.g., sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide and lead and other heavy metals. Some air pollutants such as dust, ash, pollen and smoke are absorbed by leaves and bark or are temporarily intercepted from the air and washed into the ground or collected by drainage system filters.

Urban cooling

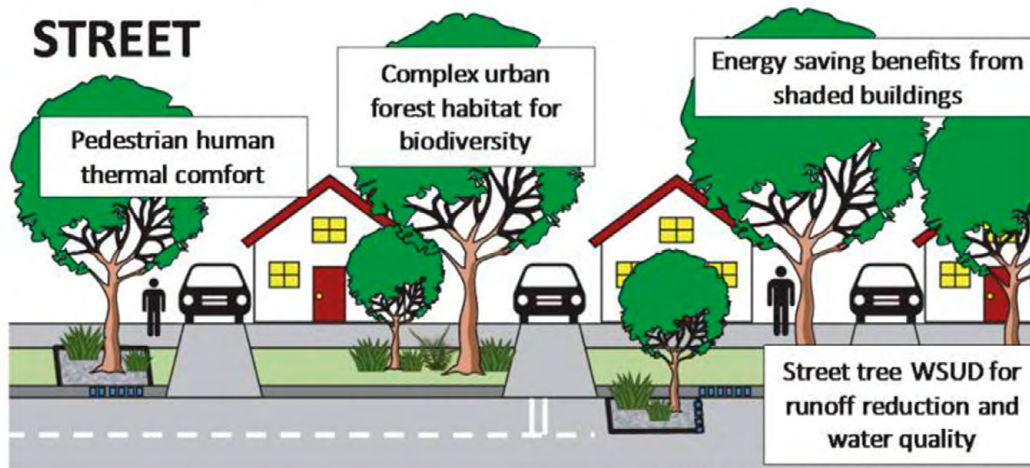
As summer temperatures increase through climate change, the importance of trees and other vegetation in reducing the 'urban heat island effect' through shading and evapotranspiration during the day and cooling the built environment at night-time has become ever more apparent. In the winter, trees lower wind speeds, reducing heat loss from buildings and offering shelter to pedestrians and cyclists. This is true of deciduous trees as well as evergreens. Deciduous trees also have the advantage of allowing more light into dwellings and gardens in winter.

© WDVTA

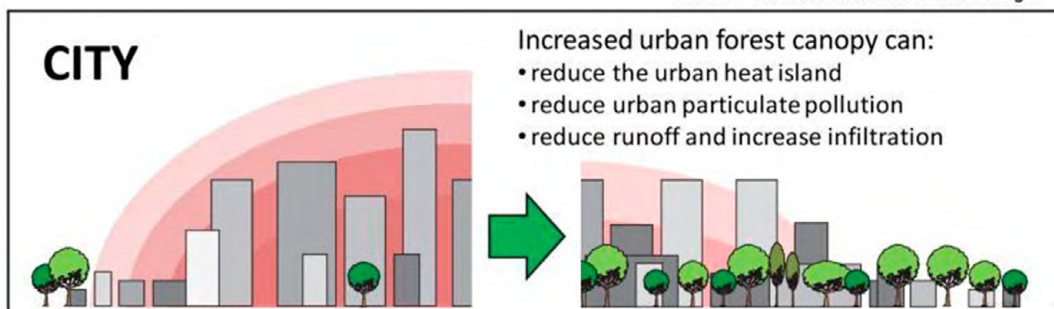




BVOC = Biological volatile organic compounds



WSUD = Water Sensitive Urban Design



Livesley, S. J. et al., 2016. The Urban Forest and Ecosystem Services: Impacts on Urban Water, Heat, and Pollution Cycles at the Tree, Street, and City Scale. *Journal of Environmental Quality*, Volume 45. <https://access.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>

The solar heating of impervious surfaces with high heat capacity and thermal conductivity (such as concrete) absorb and re-emit the sun's heat more than natural landscapes. Trees have demonstrated the capacity to increase urban albedo (the measure of the reflectivity of a material) when compared to dark tarmac meaning they decrease atmospheric temperature; vegetated surfaces also have lower radiative temperatures when compared with impervious surfaces with the same albedo. Extensive tree coverage in a city can deliver significant benefits to outdoor human thermal comfort and result in lower heat stress.⁶

Climate change mitigation

Trees play a crucial role in mitigating climate change⁷. Over a year, a mature tree can remove approximately 22kg of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, whilst the soil in the tree's root protection area can also provide durable carbon stores⁸.

Reducing noise and calming traffic

Trees can help reduce noise pollution through the absorption of sound waves muting noises from building façades, mitigating the impacts of, poorly designed, canyonised street configurations. There is evidence that roadside trees significantly increase a driver's perception of spatial edge⁹. The evidence for a positive impact on driver behaviour is so compelling that the Department for Transport (DfT) has reported several schemes aimed at using tree-planting to lower speeds and thereby reduce the number and severity of road accidents¹⁰.

⁶ Salmond, J. A. et al., 2016. Health and climate related ecosystem, services provided by street trees in the urban environment. *Environmental Health*, Volume 15. [link](#)

⁷ Oke, T.R. (1989). The micrometeorology of the urban forest. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London B* 324: 335–349.

⁸ European Environment Agency: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/articles/forests-health-and-climate-change/key-facts/>

⁹ Rosenblatt, J., Kweon BS. and Maghelal, P. (2008) The street tree effect and driver safety. *ITE Journal on the Web*, 69-73.

¹⁰ Clark, J. and Matheny, N. (2009). The Benefits of Trees. *Arborist News* 18(3), 12-18.



The document 'Psychological' traffic calming by Kennedy et al., (2005)¹¹ produced for the DfT provides details of scheme on the C419 at Latton in Wiltshire. This scheme re-engineered a former trunk road through the village, incorporating buildouts with the planting of an avenue of trees. Traffic surveys both before and after having indicated a substantial decrease in the proportion of drivers exceeding 40mph; while in part this is attributable to the reduction in speed limit, it is not considered that this alone would result in more than a 3mph reduction in speed. It is envisaged that as the trees mature and the parking bays utilised more frequently, this will result in further speed reductions as the traffic flow is constrained by the perception of a narrowing of the road.

Sustainable urban drainage and bioremediation

Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) are designed to manage stormwater locally (as close to its source as possible), to mimic natural drainage and encourage its infiltration, attenuation, and passive treatment. There is an expectation on developers to design and instal suitable systems for managing storm water.

SuDS are designed to both manage the flood and pollution risks resulting from urban runoff and to contribute

¹¹ ISBN 0968-4107 Author J Kennedy, R Gorell, L Crinson, A Wheeler and M El Pages 40 Reference TRL641. <https://www.trl.co.uk/publications/trl641>

wherever possible to environmental enhancement and place making. The multi-functionality and multiple benefits of SuDS should always be considered. Developers shall design SuDS to incorporate natural solutions where possible; landscape tree planting and habitat creation is expected to be incorporated in such solutions.

Trees play a vital role in reducing the rainwater runoff from hard surfaces that is associated with flash flooding. They slow down the quantity and rate of runoff by intercepting rainwater with their foliage and by the active process of evapotranspiration, taking water from the soil in drier periods and improving its ability to absorb more during times of spate. In addition, their roots help stabilise soils and improve soil porosity.

Fine tree roots also reduce runoff by aiding the infiltration of rainwater into soil and rock strata.

It is understood that several tree species have the ability to ameliorate soil and water conditions by absorbing, processing, or neutralising a wide range of pollutants in a process known as bioremediation.

Biodiversity

Urban trees and woodlands are intrinsic to biodiversity through their contribution to creating green corridors, enhancing the ecological permeability of the built environment. Trees provide habitat and a food source for a wide variety of flora and fauna species, both in densely built-up areas as well as urban woodlands. Some trees are more important than others in providing habitat, food and shelter to other wildlife dependent on their species, age, location and other circumstances. For example, a single mature oak tree can support up to 500 different species of flora and fauna¹².

Woodlands in the borough provide some of the most important habitats in Wokingham. All woodlands are subject to a measure of protection under the Forestry Act 1967 (as amended). The Forestry Act 1967 provides mechanisms that control tree removal through the use of felling licences, further detail can be found by following this [link](#). Many of the borough's woodlands are also protected by Tree Preservation Orders.

¹² Mitchell, R.J.; Bellamy, P.E.; Ellis, C.J.; Hewison, R.L.; Hodgetts, N.G.; Iason, G.R.; Littlewood, N.A.; Newey, S.; Stockan, J.A.; Taylor, A.F.S. (2019). Oak-associated biodiversity in the UK (OakEcol). NERC Environmental Information Data Centre. (Dataset).

<https://doi.org/10.5285/22b3d41e-7c35-4c51-9e55-0f47bb845202>

The ancient woodlands of the borough are irreplaceable habitats and are subject to strong protection when considering development proposals under the government's NPPF (2021). On behalf of the government Natural England and the Forestry Commission have produced guidance on how planning should approach ancient trees and woodlands. The 'ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions' guidance can be found by following this [link](#).

Health and well-being

Urban trees can help build stronger community cohesion and enhance how safe and healthy people feel. Most people prefer to live and work amongst greenery, recognising the value of their own local treescape and greenspaces, particularly in built-up and densely populated areas. Within green spaces, trees provide inviting areas for exercise, providing shade, reducing the risk of skin cancer and heat-related health problems. A rich and diverse treescape has also been shown to help reduce stress and contribute to other health benefits as well as reducing the recovery times of patients in hospital¹³.

Socio-economic

As the awareness of the benefits of trees increases, social demand for trees has never been greater. Trees help to create welcoming areas within our town centres,

encouraging people to visit and stay for prolonged periods, using shops and restaurants, whilst workers who have views of trees feel happier, aiding increased performance. Trees also help to provide a sense of place and community and provide an educational resource through community orchards and the Forest Schools programme.

The presence of well-managed trees encourages shoppers to spend more time in a business district, and research has shown¹⁴ they will travel a greater distance to visit that centre, ultimately stimulating the local economy.

Cultural heritage trees in the borough

Trees are mentioned as boundary markers in various Anglo-Saxon charters. It is not known whether any such trees survive in Wokingham although this is unlikely, if they do, they would be confined to the longer-living species such as yew and oak.

The borough is the setting for several trees that, when their age is assessed, would appear to have first grown in the early modern or Tudor period. However, the earliest documented trees are part of woodlands that appear on the 1607 Description of the Honor of Windsor, a series of maps, plans and illustrations showing the Royal Forest. These detailed early maps show woodlands, such as Hazelden's copse (now Hazleton's

copse ancient woodland in Arborfield), that are still recognisable in the modern landscape. The copse was protected by a woodland TPO in 1971 and again in 2019, this time including all species of trees.

Parkland trees appear in many locations throughout the borough, even where the parkland itself no longer exists or has been subject to development and landscape changes over the years. Such trees can be large in girth, and therefore old, and may date from the late medieval or early modern period. Examples of such trees are oaks and chestnuts and oaks at Ravenswood Park, and oaks now standing in open countryside north of Barkham Manor.


In later centuries, trees were planted for ornamental or aesthetic reasons or grew up along new boundary features as the Royal Forest was enclosed. A good example of this category are the numerous trees lining the historic straight rides built for Queen Anne (regnant 1702-1714) and later for King George III (regnant 1760-1820). The rides centre around Finchampstead and Crowthorne and many of these trees (mostly oaks) appear to be contemporary with the rides. Also, in Finchampstead is the iconic Wellingtonia Avenue. Here, 111 *Sequoiadendron giganteum* trees form an avenue along over a kilometre of straight ride (with 88 TPO trees and a further 23 trees in the care of the

National Trust). The ride was laid out by John Walter III of Bearwood Manor in memory of the Duke of Wellington, the hero of Waterloo. Whilst this avenue is probably the finest such avenue in the land, there is a far more prominent wellingtonia avenue at Spencers Wood. This avenue marks the entrance to the former Wellington Court House, now replaced by more modern housing. Sitting on the high clay ridge that marked the western extent of the medieval Forest of Windsor, this significant avenue is a substantial landmark visible from half of Berkshire. A more bucolic setting for a wellingtonia avenue is in the greenbelt east of Wargrave, where stately wellingtonias line the driveway of Yeldall Manor. An example of an institutional avenue is the planting of wellingtonias which flank the main entrance of Bearwood Manor. This large imposing building was for generations the home of the Walter family, proprietors of the London Times, but is now a private school - Reddam House.

Commemorative trees have been planted in the borough since at least the reign of Queen Victoria. A sycamore was planted in honour of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in the grounds of St Sebastian's Primary School on Nine Mile Ride. Sadly, the tree, planted in 1897, was removed on health and safety grounds around the time of Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

¹³ Ewert A, Chang Y. Levels of Nature and Stress Response. *Behav Sci (Basel)*. 2018 May 17;8(5):49

¹⁴ Wolf, K.L 2014 City Trees and Consumer Response in Retail Business Districts (pp. 152-172)



Another example of a royal commemorative planting is an English oak, brought from Windsor Great Park, and planted in 1937 at the King George V playing field in Farley Hill to commemorate the coronation of King George VI.

Although, like the commemorative sycamore at St Sebastian's, the lives of all trees are finite, there is always a good reason for planting trees. So, unlike Percy Shelley's memorial to Ozymandias, the 'lone and level sands' of the south of the district, the clay band in the centre and the chalk of the north are not empty; they are generously clothed in silvan plantings to replace those commemorative trees that have been lost.

At the time Queen Victoria's sycamore was felled in St Sebastian's, 60 oaks were planted across the borough for the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. This was a joint project between WBC and WDVTA and details of the plantings can be found by following this [link](#). All 60 trees were subject to a 5 year maintenance plan and a 10 year review carried out by WDVTA concluded that 55 of these trees are doing well, 4 have been replaced and just one is giving concern and will be monitored. One of these graces a garden in the grounds of the Council offices at Shute End. The Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations have provided further opportunities for royal commemorative planting. Which, in line with The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) initiative, will continue during the planting season and up until the end of the Jubilee year.

7. ANCIENT AND VETERAN TREES

Definition of veteran and ancient trees

An ancient tree is one that has passed beyond maturity and is old, or aged, in comparison with other trees of the same species.

It will have all or most of the following characteristics:

- a) Biological, aesthetic or cultural interest, because of its great age.
- b) A growth stage that is described as ancient or post-mature.
- c) A chronological age that is old relative to others of the same species.

The term 'veteran tree' describes a tree that has survived the 'rigours of life' and, irrespective of chronological age, shows signs of ancientness. To qualify as a veteran, the tree should show sufficient signs of ancientness, for example: crown retrenchment and signs of decay in the trunk, branches

or roots, exposed dead wood and fungal fruit bodies, etc. According to the current distinction, a tree can be a veteran without necessarily being very old. Thus, if a tree has the physical characteristics of an ancient tree but is not ancient in years compared with others of the same species, it is classed as veteran but not ancient.

In this document 'veteran' is used throughout to describe all trees that have sufficient markedly ancient characteristics, irrespective of chronological age. The term 'ancient' is applied specifically to trees that are ancient in years.

It is important to note that there are many definitions of the terms 'ancient tree' and 'veteran tree' including a planning definition which can be found in the current (2021), NPPF, see Section 3. The definition in the NPPF has changed with subsequent updates of that document; so, where Town and Country Planning is involved (and this includes local plans, development management, enforcement and the making and enforcing of TPOs), the most recent definition of the terms will be used.

Natural England and the Forestry Commission on behalf of the government have produced the standing advice - Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions which can be found following this [link](#). The standing advice refers to the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory (ATI) as the starting point for investigating possible impacts on ancient trees from planning decisions. The Standing advice also refers decision makers to Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory and to Natural England's wood pasture and parkland inventory on their Magic map system. These are all the best starting points when assessing impacts of development or even wildlife conservation works on ancient and veteran trees, ancient woodland and wood pasture and parkland respectively.

Ancient and veteran trees are a valuable natural asset important for:

- biodiversity value as a result of significant wood decay, and the habitat created from the ageing process is valuable for rare and threatened wildlife.
- carbon capture and storage.
- contributing to the seed bank
- cultural and historical value
- landscape and aesthetic value.

Over 180,000 trees have been recorded by the Woodland Trust on their Ancient Tree Inventory, many of which can be found in Wokingham, the data base can be viewed following this [link](#).

By using the ATI data and alongside Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association (WDVTA), the Council will encourage the proper management of ancient and veteran trees as well as succession planting in line with current best practice and guidance.

© WDVTA



WDVTA have carried out surveys on and recorded most of Wokingham boroughs finest trees, including many notable, ancient and veteran trees. The WDVTA database can be found by following this [link](#). No inventory is ever complete - absence from this database should not be taken as evidence that any tree is not of value or is not ancient or veteran. Similarly, presence on this database should not be taken as proof that a tree is ancient or veteran. Each tree should be assessed on its merits in light of the characteristics associated with it at the time of the decision-making process.

The management of ancient and veteran trees is a specialised and evolving discipline within the field of arboriculture. Making management plans for such trees requires significant knowledge and experience and is usually beyond the capabilities of more junior staff. Given this, and should adequate expertise and resourcing be available, the Council will record, map and produce management prescriptions for all Council-owned notable, ancient and veteran trees. Data from the ATI and WDVTA records will be used as well as data from regular inspections by officers.

Useful links:

- [English Heritage](#)
- Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association ([link](#))
- [Woodland Trust](#)
- [Ancient Tree Forum](#)

8. MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF TREES ON COUNCIL-OWNED LAND

Woodlands, SANGS, nature reserves and country parks

The Countryside Service team currently manage approximately 549.35 hectares of Council owned land in Wokingham. These consist of the following categories of open spaces:

- SANGS (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space) - 144.24 hectares
- Nature Reserves - 181.51 hectares
- Dinton Pastures Country Park - 182.6 hectares
- California Country Park - 41 hectares

Within these, Countryside Service manage approximately 100 hectares of woodland across the following sites:

- Aldermoors
- Heathlake
- Highwood
- Pearmans Copse
- Keephatch
- Millennium Arboretum
- The Moors
- Warren Wood
- The Grove
- Rooks Nest Wood
- Nores Hill Wood

© WDVTA

Council-owned woodlands and country parks each have a management plan or statement in place to ensure the sites are managed effectively and appropriately to achieve their overall purpose. The plans differ site to site – specific information can be sought on relevant management plans by contacting the Countryside Service team via email at countryside@wokingham.gov.uk.

More information on Council-owned woodlands, country parks, nature reserves and SANGS managed by Countryside Service can be found by following this [link](#).

Landowners are encouraged to develop woodland management plans for privately owned woodlands and those owned by other community or public bodies. The Council also supports positive conservation management measures for woodlands which are identified as local wildlife sites and encourages private landowners to develop their own woodland management plans. If you wish to discuss this further or seek advice regarding woodland conservation management measures, contact the Council's ecology officers at ecology@wokingham.gov.uk.

Public open spaces

Other public open spaces owned by Wokingham Borough Council such as parks, recreation grounds and verges are managed by the Cleaner and Greener team.

Specific information or queries relating to how these areas are managed can be sought by contacting the team via email at cleanerandgreener@wokingham.gov.uk.

Highways and Street Trees

The Council will prune trees for the following reasons only: where there is a risk to public safety; to abate an actionable nuisance; to mitigate the risk of building subsidence; routine maintenance, and in accordance with good arboricultural practice.

The Council will aim to respond to urgent reports of trees obstructing the public highway within two hours.

Requests for management of dangerous trees can be registered by using this [link](#).

If you are reporting an urgent issue that requires immediate attention, call 0118 974 6000 and select the 'Highways' option.

An urgent issue is defined as something that is very likely to present an imminent threat to life or serious injury or serious damage to property

Operational Tree Management Team

The Council has a dedicated Operational Tree Management Team that carries out inspections and arranges required maintenance on Council-owned trees, including those in public open spaces, verges and along the adopted highway to maintain public safety or the health of the tree. While an inspection framework procedure is followed to minimise the risk that trees pose to people and infrastructure, it may occasionally be necessary for residents to report non-urgent tree enquiries.

Non-urgent tree enquires should be reported via the interactive map by using this [link](#): Non-urgent Tree Enquires Interactive Map and with the following supporting information:

- The exact location of the tree - please select the nearest road and use the location information box to direct us to the tree(s).
- The nature of the problem.
- Photo(s) showing the problem (if possible) and the location of the tree).

The Council aims to respond to non-urgent tree enquires within 28 days.

A map which indicates the roads and verges maintained by Wokingham Borough Council can be found by following this [link](#).

Tree inspections

Appropriate and effective tree inspection procedures should ensure that changes in tree condition are noted and, where necessary, addressed before any tree becomes hazardous and death or injury to persons or damage to property occurs. The Council's tree inspection procedures consider a range of criteria, including species, age, size, health and condition, location, site usage, hazard risk and landscape and ecological value.

The tree inspection programme aims to balance the management of trees for public safety with the ecological and landscape value of trees. Both management objectives are important, but the nature and use of each site normally dictates which one should take precedence. Different management prescriptions may therefore be applied depending on the tree's location.

When managing trees for public safety reasons, only the minimum work required to remove the danger shall be undertaken. This will ensure that the multiple benefits of trees are retained.

Trees are best inspected from mid-summer through to autumn. However, the scale of the Council's tree resource dictates that inspections should continue throughout the year.

Procedures

The Council employs tree inspection procedures that provide information to minimise risk to the public and property. Such procedures are considered reasonable, proportionate to the level of risk at a particular location, recognise the benefits of the trees and are acceptable in legal terms, meaning they follow industry recommendations and codes of practice and take account of case law involving tree failures and subsequent injury and death.

Informal observations about trees which are put forward by members of the public, site officers and other organisations will be acted upon. Informal Observations are when a member of the public passes by a tree whilst going about their day-to-day routines and observe a condition or feature which requires further action. An example of this would be a split in the stem, a hanging broken branch or perhaps a new or intensified fungal infection.

© WDVTA

The Council also provides the following two-tier approach to tree inspection:

Formal inspections - carried out periodically by Council staff who regularly frequent sites as part of their routine work. Basic tree inspection training is provided for such staff.

Detailed inspections - carried out by appropriately qualified and knowledgeable arboricultural specialists. Such inspections are carried out at regular intervals and dovetail with the programme of formal inspections. They are commissioned on the basis of being commensurate with the level of risk identified at a given location. Detailed inspections will consider the biological, pathological and biomechanical aspects of tree health and stability along with other considerations such as the effects of weather and site disturbance.

The nature and frequency of such inspections are programmed to respond to the criteria detailed above and the size and distribution of the Council's tree assets.

For further information, the Council's Tree Inspection Framework can be found [here](#): Trees and pruning - Wokingham Borough Council.

© WDVTA

Tree maintenance

The Council will prune trees for the following reasons only:

- Where there is a risk to public safety.
- Abate an actionable nuisance.
- Mitigate the risk of building subsidence.
- Routine maintenance, and.
- For accordance with good arboricultural practice.

Where possible, trees subject to pruning will retain their natural form. Where work is required, this will be limited to the removal of dead wood, lifting of the crown and sympathetic crown reduction to ensure the tree retains its natural branch structure.

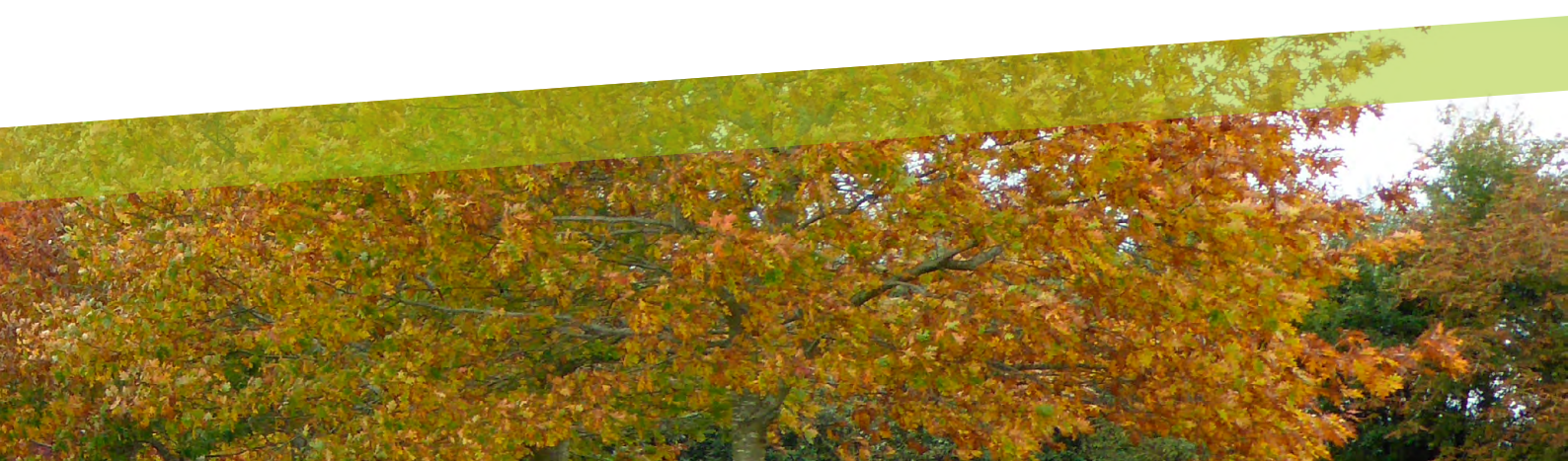
Dead wood can continue to provide valuable habitat for wildlife. When pruning works are carried out by the Council to trees on public open spaces, country parks and verges (or where suitable space allows) wood will be retained in habitat piles to encourage saproxylic organisms and support biodiversity. Where it is safe to do so, it is beneficial for wildlife to retain as much as possible within the green space to decompose naturally.

The Council has a programme of inspections from which necessary remedial works are generated and carried out. This is supported by an online facility for reporting dangerous trees. In addition, requests are periodically made by residents for tree-pruning, and these are managed by the Operational Tree Team, with non-urgent issues being investigated within 28 days. The Council applies strict criteria for when pruning is deemed necessary.

The relevant guidance to the process involved can be found here: [Tree pruning criteria](#).

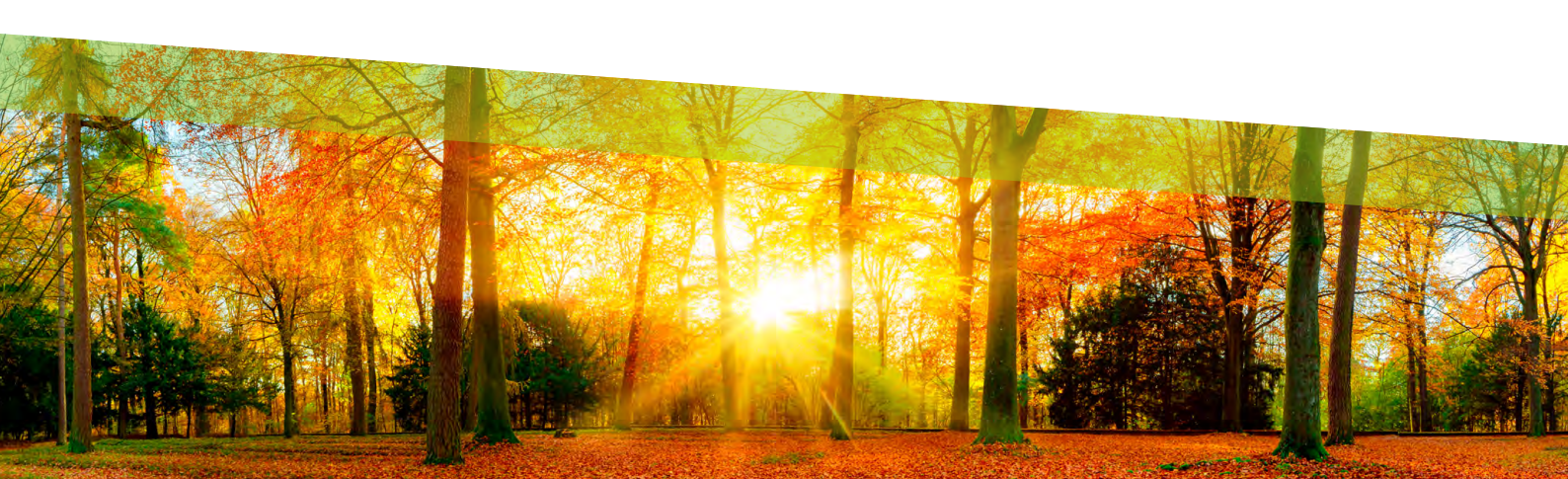
To ensure an impartial and judicious service is provided to all its residents, the Council will only prune trees for the following reasons:

- Abate an actionable nuisance: such as where trees come into conflict with buildings and light structures. In common law there is something termed a 'nuisance', which can be defined as a matter which is an unreasonable and substantial interference on the use and enjoyment of a person's property. We only act when a tree causes a legal nuisance to a property.
- Public safety: to ensure statutory clearance over the highway, footway, cycle lanes and public rights of way.
- For a matter to qualify and be actionable as a nuisance in law, it must be a serious matter.
- Mitigate the risk of building subsidence: where risk trees have been identified on shrinkable clay soil. Each case will be dealt with individually.
- Ensure the optimum functionality of street lighting and CCTV cameras (in accordance with pruning standards). Where remedial works are advantageous to the tree or tree stock and are in accordance with good arboricultural practice.
- To ensure clarity and manage customer expectations, the Council will highlight some of the reasons frequently used to justify pruning that are considered beyond its responsibility.



To help ensure an impartial, reasonable and transparent service the Council will not prune trees in request to allay or resolve the following issues:

- **Branches overhanging properties:** residents have the right to exercise their right under common law to prune back branches on their property boundary; all arisings must be disposed of at their own effort or expense; pruning must only be carried out following discussion with a Council arboriculturist and completed to the standard set out in BS3998 (2010) Tree Work Recommendations.
- **Interference with satellite, television or other media reception:** there is no legal right to television reception and the Council (or any tree owner) has no legal obligation to remove or prune trees to improve reception; when positioning a new satellite receiver, residents are recommended to carefully consider existing trees and their potential for growth to avoid problems in the future.
- **Branches and/or limbs in physical contact with telephone wires:** telephone wires are plastic coated - faults on the line are very rarely caused by contact with branches; residents will be encouraged to contact their service provider to address any faults or interference experienced with their phone line.
- **Excessive leaf fall:** this is a seasonal problem generally localised to a short period of the year. Residents are expected to clear any undesirable leaf litter falling on their properties themselves or at their expense; leaf litter on publicly owned footways and highways will be addressed by the borough's Street Cleansing contractors.
- **Fruit fall:** this is a seasonal problem generally localised to a short period of the year. Residents are expected to clear any undesirable fruit falling on their properties themselves or at their expense; fallen fruit on publicly owned footways and highways will be addressed by the borough's Street Cleansing contractors as notified.



- Problems associated with pollen.
- Excreta caused by insects or birds: honeydew (aphid excreta) and bird droppings are not recognised in law as a 'legal nuisance'; hazards on the footway can be addressed by contacting Street Cleansing to notify them of the problem; measures to address the problems associated with honeydew can be made by residents by regular car washing, covering or parking in an alternative location.
- Obstruction of view: there are no rights associated with maintaining trees in accordance with maintaining views in British law.

For further information, the Council's Policy for Ongoing Maintenance for Council-owned trees can be found [here](#): Trees and pruning - Wokingham Borough Council.

Tree Removal

Trees will only be removed where there is a risk to public safety or significant damage to property or in line with good arboricultural practice (for example to reduce crowding and allow other, better trees to thrive).

Publicly owned trees are a valuable resource for the people of Wokingham. Therefore, the removal of publicly owned trees will be resisted wherever possible.

The Council will not normally fell a healthy tree; however, there are some circumstances where this may be necessary where supported by evidence from suitably qualified and experienced professionals:

- Address public safety concerns.
- Mitigate building subsidence.
- Abate an actionable nuisance, whereby a tree is interfering with land or property owned by a third-party.
- Reduce the risk of the spread of pests and disease.
- Where the highway and/or footway condition determine that retention is unsustainable.
- Where an approved planning application or essential development works requires tree removal.





These decisions are carefully considered by Wokingham Borough Council's Tree and Landscape and Operational Tree Management teams following consultation with residents and other stakeholders wherever possible.

In relation to the siting of telecommunication equipment, the Council will follow guidance laid out by the Association of Tree Officers in this [link](#) which covers current best practice for balancing the needs of tree retention, planting and pruning.

© WDVTA

9. TREE PRESERVATION ORDERS

Overview and aims of Tree Preservation Orders

A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is made by an LPA (usually the borough, district or county council) to protect specific individual trees, a particular area or group of trees or to protect a woodland from deliberate or permissive damage and destruction.

The legislation is usually applied to those trees that are important for the amenity of the area although 'it may sometimes be appropriate to proactively make Orders as a precaution'¹⁵. A TPO makes the felling, lopping, topping, uprooting or otherwise wilful damage of protected trees without the permission of the LPA a criminal offence.

The legislation is a part of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and is administered following the Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012. Further information on the Act can be found following this [link](#).

Tree officer's role in TPO process

The Council employs a specialist tree officer to administer Tree Works Applications for trees protected by TPO and Section 211 notifications for tree works in conservation areas. This officer is currently assisted, two days a week, by a consultant.

The specialist tree officer undertakes the relevant consultations and assesses the detail provided within the application. A site visit will be undertaken where necessary and a decision made.

Decision letters are signed off on authority delegated to the Trees and Landscape team manager under the Council's scheme of delegation.

Guidance notes for applying to the Council to protect a tree with a TPO

A TPO protects trees and woodlands. The term 'tree' is not defined within the Act, nor does the Act limit the application of TPOs to trees of a minimum size, species or type. Fruit trees, for example, may be included in a TPO provided it is in the interests of amenity to do so and they are not currently used for fruit production.

¹⁵ Tree Preservation Orders and trees in conservation areas Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 36-010-20140306, Revision date: 06 03 2014

The dictionary defines a tree as a perennial plant with a self-supporting woody main stem, usually developing woody branches at some distance from the ground and growing to a considerable height and size. But for the purposes of the TPO legislation, the High Court has held that a 'tree' is anything which ordinarily one would call a tree. In woodland the High Court has concluded that saplings, seedlings and even 'a shoot emerging from an acorn' are trees and are therefore protected by a woodland TPO. The Act does not define the term 'woodland'. In the Secretary of State's view, trees which are planted or grow naturally within the woodland area after the TPO is made are also protected by the TPO. This is because the purpose of the TPO is to safeguard the woodland unit which depends on regeneration or new planting and, in woodland, this includes 'future trees' in the words of one High Court judge.

The Act does not define 'amenity', nor does it prescribe the circumstances in which it is in the interests of amenity to make a TPO. This is a matter of fact and judgement.

The Council will continue to use TPOs to protect selected trees and woodlands if their removal would have a significant impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public. In line with government guidance, the Council will continue, at times, to consider whether it appropriate to proactively make TPOs as a precaution¹⁶.

The Council will continue to ensure that a degree of public benefit before making or confirming TPOs. Trees,

or at least a significant part of them, should therefore normally be visible from a public place, for example, from a public road or footpath. However, in some circumstances, the inclusion of other trees may be justified. The public benefit afforded by the tree may be current or foreseeable as a future benefit because of a change of circumstances: for example, tree growth or land being opened up to the public through development allowing views of the tree that did not previously exist. Orders may also be served on trees where new evidence supports inclusion because of increased biodiversity benefits in the case of newly discovered bat roost for example. The Council will continue to consider such trees for protection by TPO.

The Council will continue to consider a range of characteristics when making and confirming TPOs¹⁷.

The Council will also continue to consider other factors, such as the importance of trees as a wildlife habitat or for their role in carbon capture attenuation as part of its decision-making process; however, these factors alone would not normally be sufficient to warrant a TPO unless a rare species for example was found to be using the tree as habitat¹⁸. The Council will not consider trees that are dead, or dangerous as suitable for a TPO unless work to trees can be carried out to make them safe and sustainable in the longer term.

The Council recognises the special circumstances regarding ancient and veteran trees, and - further details

can be found in Section 7 These are trees, often of significant age and often of substantial size that may have a range of defects, diseases or fungal infections that would otherwise preclude a tree from the protection of a TPO. However, however, their importance within the landscape, and for the great ecological benefits they offer in terms of habitat and as a seed source will be given weight when considering these categories of trees as candidates for TPO. Each case being assessed on its merits. Notable trees are often veteran or ancient trees in waiting and good examples of notable trees will be assessed in a similar way to ancient and veteran trees.

The Council has a power to consider any tree for protection by TPO¹⁹ and will continue to consider, each case on its merits. The process commences with submission of a standard TPO request form which is then initially assessed by the tree officer. The request will be considered as soon as possible and where resources allow. This information in conjunction with the tree officer's advice will progress through the TPO Prioritisation Committee (which includes all tree officers and any other officer with relevant local site

or specialist knowledge). Where the decision is made to make a TPO, this will be signed off (under the Council's scheme of delegation) by the Trees and Landscape Team Manager, or any other Team leader in planning or enforcement or senior managers in the T&L Manager's absence.

The Council will assess trees for the suitability of a TPO using criteria described in government guidance.

Process of applying for a TPO

A request for a TPO should be made to the Council on a TPO request form and should include the following details:

- a) A map clearly showing the area of trees or location of an individual tree that you wish to be considered for protection, if possible, include a photograph of the tree or trees.
- b) The reason(s) why you wish the tree(s) to be considered for protection.

A request for a TPO can be made by anyone, and you do not have to be the owner of the tree.

¹⁶ Tree Preservation Orders and trees in conservation areas Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 36-010-20140306, Revision date: 06 03 2014.

¹⁷ Tree Preservation Orders and trees in conservation areas Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 36-008-20140306

¹⁸ Although see the statutory duty to have regard to the purposes of biodiversity in the NERC Act (2006) for example.

¹⁹ Town and Country Planning Act 1990 paragraph 198(1) Power to make tree preservation Orders

Breach of a TPO

The Council will continue to take reports of TPO breaches seriously, all reports will be assessed and action taken where warranted.

A report of a possible TPO infringement may be received by the Council in whichever form the informers wish to make them but the more information that is volunteered by informers the better the Council are precluded by law²⁰ from requesting information such as photographs of suspects undertaking the work, but the public may provide such evidence if they want. Investigations are governed by the Council's Local Planning Enforcement Plan and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (1984).

While the Council will accept anonymous reports, we prefer reports from members of the public with whom we can correspond with by email or talk to on the telephone. This is because eyewitness testimony through a qualifying call provides better details of location and what works have been carried out. The Council does not disclose the identity of informants as it considers this information exempt from Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Reports are investigated in line with the Wokingham Local Planning Enforcement Plan ([link](#)).

Investigations are led by any suitable officer but in practice this means

a Planning Officer, a Planning Enforcement Officer, a Tree Officer or the Trees and Landscape team manager. This depends on the caseload and availability of officers and on the technical complexity of each case. Where enforcement cases are not led by a Tree Officer then a Tree Officer gives technical support to the case officer leading.

Additional technical support is provided by other officers and the Council's legal department as required.

The Council understands that there may be various circumstances where proceeding to a criminal prosecution may not be in the public interest. Criminal prosecutions are expensive, and there is not always a guarantee that costs will be awarded. It is also noted that the level of evidence required to secure conviction is high, the same as for any other criminal offence.

There will be occasions where the level of resource required to prove a case to the level required in a courtroom far outweighs the harm caused to the public amenity, for example, some minor pruning works undertaken without permission. In such circumstances, the Council may choose to follow alternative processes, including the use of Simple Cautions, warning letters, negotiated agreements for remedial works or replacement planting, or the use of tree replacement notices.

²⁰ Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000

10. SUBSIDENCE

What is subsidence?

Subsidence, in simple terms, is the sinking of the ground. There are a variety of causes, both natural (changes in soil moisture) and man-made (mining etc.).

Subsidence usually occurs as a result of the shrinkage of clay soils due to changes in the level of moisture held within the soil matrix. This change is more pronounced during periods of prolonged dry weather.

Properties built on shrinkable clay soils are prone to the effects of soil shrinkage, and where the soil volume decreases to the extent that the property foundation is no longer able to support the weight of the property, damage will occur. Damage is often identified as diagonal cracking through walls and around windows and doors.

While the process of soil moisture loss is natural and is of a seasonal nature, it is often exacerbated by other factors. Trees, for example can have a significant effect. Trees create movement of water through the ground by drawing it up through their vascular systems. This flow of water helps transport the nutrients required for growth. All tree species move quantities of water daily. The movement of large volumes of water by trees can significantly exacerbate the effects changes in soil moisture levels have on surrounding structures.

© WDVTA





Trees can therefore have a significant impact in relation to subsidence.

The Council is clear that whilst trees can affect properties through the action of subsidence, their other qualities and attributes need to be considered when deciding how to manage each particular subsidence case and what remedial actions should be taken.

Before the Council will consider action in relation to trees within its ownership and protected trees, see Section 9. The Council will require evidence to be provided by the affected party or their insurers.

The Council will require the following evidential tests to be met:

- Were the buildings foundations adequate in the first place?
- Have drainage issues been ruled out?
- Has damage occurred that is consistent with subsidence damage?
- Have live roots from the tree encroached under the foundations that are damaged?
- Was the damage from the adjacent tree foreseeable?
- Is the tree subject to protection by a TPO?
- Are there alternatives to tree removal or management (underpinning for example)?

© WDVTA

It is a common practise for insurers to carry out an investigation of the damage prior to a claim being made to a tree owner. The insurer will often undertake a variety of investigations which may include:

- Drainage survey: identifying defects that may result in rainwater or wastewater washing away soils supporting foundations.
- Ground level and crack monitoring over a period usually 3-6 months (but preferably 12 months) - to establish seasonal movements indicative of subsidence events.
- Soils plasticity: higher clay content soils are more plastic i.e., shrink more readily when they dry out. Soils with high levels of montmorillonite, smectite or vermiculite are particularly prone to shrink and swell as water content changes.
- Foundation type and depth: was the foundation constructed to the appropriate specification?
- Arboricultural report: what trees are present, and are they within the influencing zone of the damage?

Once this evidence has been collected, the affected party should contact the Council's Customer Services team who will allocate the case to the appropriate officer. The

Council will then investigate the case following the Joint Mitigation Protocol of the London Tree Officers Association. This protocol provides a detailed process with timelines in which to investigate and decide on the most appropriate solution for managing the trees and addressing the damage. Further reading on the Joint Mitigation Protocol²¹ can be found by following this [link](#).

Where a tree implicated in subsidence is subject to a TPO or is of particular importance in terms of public amenity or historic or cultural value, the Council will undertake a Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees (CAVAT)²² valuation to help inform the decision-making process. Greater detail on CAVAT can be found by following this [link](#).

CAVAT assesses the tree against set criteria, including public amenity and other benefits and gives it a monetary value. The CAVAT valuation can then be used in decision-making, weighing a monetised public benefit against the cost of rectifying the damage. Particularly in cases where the proposed action includes tree removal, CAVAT can thereby be used to help agree suitable remediation and tree retention where the benefits equal or are greater than the costs.

²¹ <https://www.ltoa.org.uk/resources/joint-mitigation-protocol>

²² <https://www.ltoa.org.uk/documents-1/capital-asset-value-for-amenity-trees-cavat>

11. DEVELOPER RESPONSIBILITIES

Over the years a raft of policies and legislation has been created to achieve the government's objectives and to influence how citizens interact with trees, see Sections 3 and 4 of the Strategy. More recently the government has recognised the value of trees and their importance in helping address the climate emergency.

The importance of trees and the value they provide is recognised in various planning legislation, policy and guidance (see Sections 3, 4 and 6).

The Council has been given duties and powers to help ensure that development is undertaken in a manner which helps protect and enhance the local and natural environment.

The Council is clear that developers have a role to play in taking full responsibility for the land they control and their developments. The Council is clear that developers should in line with planning and arboricultural policy, guidance and best practice place trees at the forefront of the survey, assessment, design, construction and management process.

All development should consider existing trees at the earliest stage. The Council requires all development affecting trees (including off-site trees) to be supported by a tree survey that accords with BS5837 BS 5837:2012²³. Early engagement between developers and arboricultural specialists is key to informing the development process and ensuring the retention and protection of significant trees and woodlands, and those with potential to become significant as they grow (including category C trees) within the layout and detailed design of the development. This is in line with existing CS and LP policies and proposed new policies NE3, NE4 and NE5 of the draft.

Consideration must also be given to the existing and proposed location of all utilities and services within the development to ensure they do not conflict with any retained trees, or any proposed new trees as they grow. The Council will require that developers give trees the appropriate amount of available soil, moisture and space to thrive and ensure that they are located a suitable distance from properties. This will result in a robust and sustainable landscape. The revised NPPF 2021 advocates the inclusion of trees within new streets (paragraph 131) and a high-quality integral landscape scheme is required by MDD Local Plan Policy CC03.

Therefore, a scheme of landscape works, and management will be required for all significant developments, integrated into the overall development scheme design and will need to demonstrate how it incorporates structural tree-planting in the public realm and especially in the street scene.

Achieving a sustainable landscape is paramount to any development if government's objectives are to be met. The Council will continue to seek the protection of both existing and newly planted trees on development sites. This may include the use of TPOs, Article 4 Directions and removal of permitted development rights where appropriate, particularly for sites where the protection of notable, veteran or ancient trees, ancient woodland or wood pasture is an important consideration

Biodiversity net gain and the Green Bond

Current government planning policy for biodiversity and geological conservation interests is set out in the NPPF, -2021. For biodiversity offsetting, the most relevant principles and policies in the NPPF are:

'The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible, contributing to government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.' (Para 174(d))

'When determining planning applications, ... if significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternate site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.' (Para 180)

'... development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists' (Para 180[c])

The Defra biodiversity metric is a habitat-based approach used to assess an area's value to wildlife. The metric uses habitat features to calculate a biodiversity value.

²³ British Standard 5837 (2012) Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction - Recommendations

The biodiversity metric can be used by:

- ecologists or developers carrying out a biodiversity assessment.
- developers who have commissioned a biodiversity assessment.
- planning authorities who are interpreting metric outputs in a planning application.
- communities who want to understand the impacts of a local development.
- landowners or land managers who want to provide biodiversity units from their sites to others.

Wokingham Borough Council, as the, LPA will be applying the biodiversity net gain (BNG) assessment process to planning applications in line with current regulations and local plan policy.

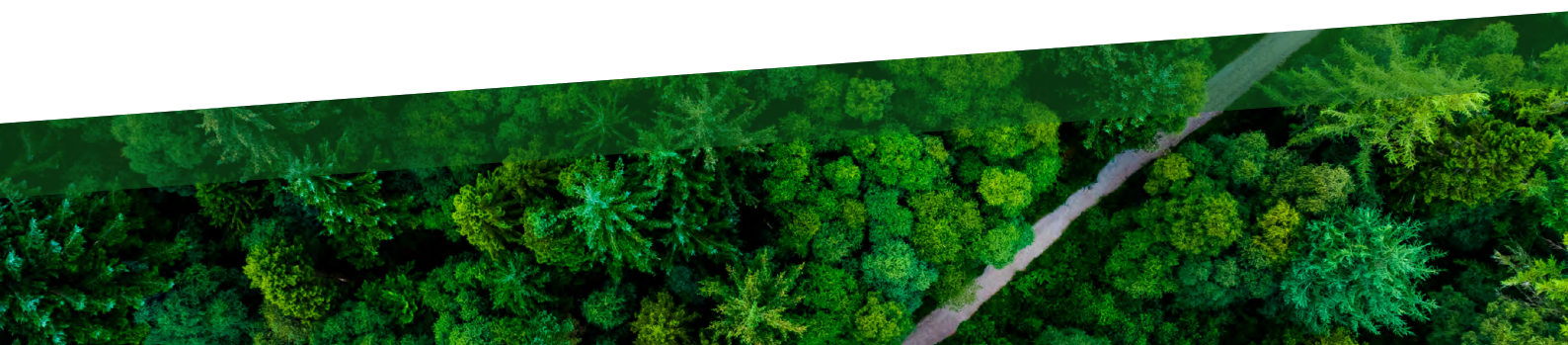
The Council will use the Defra metric in making a BNG assessment and expect developers to provide the baseline record of all hedgerows, scrub and woodland - individual trees will be incorporated using the tree calculator tool.

Developers are expected to integrate trees and woodlands into their schemes and should understand that the calculator does not allow the

post-development scenario to trade between broad habitat categories, (e.g., baseline units of woodland to be compensated by post-development units of grassland), except in justified and exceptional circumstances.

Where an exceptional circumstance is thought to apply, the developer must justify the trade between broad habitat categories that results in a gain in woodland habitat/units with reference to the BAP and LNRS priorities/targets/objectives/aims. Further, the Council understands the benefits that tree-planting can bring and, as such, recommends that all tree-planting projects are assessed using a BNG calculator (regardless of whether they are part of development or not). The Council is committed to the environment and will assist landowners, where possible, in recognising and registering the BNG value of their tree-planting projects where these are in line with the Tree Strategy/BAP/LNRS and wider Landscape Character Assessment objectives.

The Environment Act contains a new BNG condition for planning permission. At present this is not mandatory but is expected to be made law in late 2023 through amendments to the Town and Country Planning Act.



Developers will need to measure the biodiversity gains using the associated metric to ascertain the existing wildlife value of the area prior to development.

This information will then be used to inform the development layout and the level of mitigation required. It is a requirement of the bill that all development must see an enhancement to biodiversity by a minimum of 10%, this can be either on-site or off-site.

The update to the Wokingham Borough Council LPU mirrors the 10% minimum increase in biodiversity for all development.

The Council will expect developers to take this requirement into consideration and ensure the development protects and enhances the habitats of a proposed site first and foremost and only offset any development when there is a suitable planning reason to do so.

Developers will be encouraged to finance their projects using the principles of the green bond. Green bonds (also known as climate bonds) are fixed-income financial instruments (bonds) which are used

to fund projects that have positive environmental and/or climate benefits.

They follow the Green Bond Principles (GBP) stated by the International Capital Market Association (ICMA), and the proceeds from the issuance of which are to be used for the pre-specified types of projects.

The GBP seek to support issuers in financing environmentally sound and sustainable projects that foster a net zero emissions economy and protect the environment.

Developer Replacement Planting- Developers: trigger for obligation & level of contribution

Wokingham Borough Council understands the importance of trees within all development but the Council understands that, in some circumstances, tree removal is justified. The Council is, however, committed to improving the environment for everyone and, as such, expects any development to provide replacement trees in line with local and national guidance.

© WDVTA



Wokingham Borough Council expects all developers to integrate important existing trees within their designs. Except in the case of wholly exceptional reasons and where a suitable compensation strategy exists, any development which would result in the loss of ancient woodland, ancient trees or veteran trees will not be permitted. While meeting the above requirements, developers are also reminded that replacement planting should meet the compensation and enhancement requirements of the proposed 10% minimum BNG, which is likely to come into force in late 2023. This requirement is mirrored within the Wokingham Borough Council LPU.

Wokingham Borough Council understands that in some circumstances such replacement planting and enhancement may not be possible on the site itself. In such cases, the Council will require the developer to provide off-site tree-planting in compensation. Where the developer does not have suitable land for such planting, the Council may negotiate compensatory payments under S106 agreement to provide enhancements elsewhere.

Obligations in respect of trees will be required where either:

- new planting is required on public land to mitigate the impact of a development; or,
- where trees covered by categories A, B and C of BS 5837 (Trees in relation to construction) are felled as part of a development, and replacement planting is required on public land.

Tree-planting will either take place on open ground or be integrated into areas of hard landscape such as pavements and car parking areas. Where planting can take place directly into open ground, the contribution will be significantly lower than where the planting is in areas of hard landscape. This is due to the need to plant trees located in areas of hard standing in a substantial engineered tree pit (or alternative) with drainage.

All tree-planting on public land, whether developer funded or not, will be undertaken by the Council to ensure a consistent approach and level of quality, and to reduce the likelihood of new tree stock failing to survive through lack of weed control or watering. See also Sections 12, 13 and 14 of the strategy.

Ensuring developers are held accountable for their commitments is reliant on sufficient financial and staffing resources being made available to the relevant departments, along with full member support for their execution.

12. REPLACEMENT TREE-PLANTING - COUNCIL LAND

Replacement tree-planting

Where it is necessary for the Council to fell trees, we will commit to providing a replacement tree as close to the location of the felled tree as practicable, and during the next planting season (November - March).

A sign will be placed in the original location of the felled tree detailing that the tree will be replaced, subject to resources.

Replacement ratio

Replacement stocking levels:

- Street trees 1:1
- Commemorative 1:1
- Parks and gardens 2:1
- Countryside sites 3:1
- Broadleaf/mixed woodland mainly aimed at biodiversity/amenity 1100 or 1600 stems per hectare (3m and 2.5m spacing, respectively) with 20% open ground for recreation and / or biodiversity depending on aims and objectives.
- Conifer plantations restocking at 2m spacings with 20% open ground depending on aims and objectives.

Natural regeneration

Natural regeneration is the process by which areas are restocked by trees that develop from seeds that fall, or are buried by animals or birds, and germinate in situ. This method provides trees that are well adapted to their environment, minimises soil disturbance, ensures that the seeds are all local provenance, and once fully matured, provides a more natural habitat. Natural regeneration will only be considered an acceptable approach if there is a programme of monitoring and, if necessary, recourse to protection or selective restocking based on the monitoring observations.

13. TREE-PLANTING

Right tree, right place, right reason

Evidence of the positive contribution that trees make to society is extensive and increasing the number and quality of trees we encounter can enrich our lives. Trees are directly associated with a range of benefits such as cooling, flood mitigation, aesthetic impact or as a wildlife habitat, see Section 6. Tree species selection can, therefore, have a profound impact on the delivery of benefits to the people of the borough because of issues such as potential size, longevity, suitability for wildlife, etc.

The Council will continue to select appropriate trees which are sustainable and will provide maximum benefits for biodiversity and aesthetics amongst other criteria. An important objective of species selection will be to improve the resilience of tree populations to both known and unknown threats. Consideration will be given to ensuring that the species selected are appropriate, sustainable, and that the locations and micro-climates chosen for planting will encourage the long-term survival of the trees planted so that they fulfil their growth potential. Choice of tree species will aim to maximise the contribution to ecosystem services, will allow for climate change, and will avoid problems associated with poor species choice.

The Council will favour the selection of native tree species that naturally have high benefit for wildlife and indigenous cultural resonances in poetry, art, music, literature, etc. In special circumstances and where non-native species are appropriate the Council will follow tree species selection guidance as set out in Tree Species Selection for Green Infrastructure by Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG). This has information for over 280 species of trees with detail on their potential size and crown characteristics, natural habitat, environmental tolerance, ornamental qualities, potential issues to be aware of, and notable varieties. It provides the Council with clear, robust information to enable appropriate species selection and will aid the diversification of the urban forest.

Planting a diverse range of tree species will allow resilience in the tree population. Where there is a monoculture of trees, the vulnerability of the tree population to a complete and rapid wipe-out by a pest or disease is greatly heightened. This risk can be reduced by paying greater attention to diversifying the gene pool of trees being planted by avoiding clonal propagation and in some instances, featuring both native and non-natives suitable to the different types of urban and rural settings.

Use this [link](#) to download the full document Tree Species Selection for Green Infrastructure - TDAG.

Tree-planting and the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP)

In order to address the Council's Climate Change Emergency status and in line with the Council's CEAP, the Council will undertake an ambitious program of new tree-planting and projects with the aim of increasing carbon sequestration and biodiversity across the borough, and thereby contributing to the goal of being carbon-neutral by 2030. Carbon sequestration is a process whereby the trees draw CO₂ from the atmosphere and store it. Wokingham Borough Council's initial CEAP was approved by council in January 2020 and outlines the steps that will be taken to achieve net zero carbon by 2030. Within the action plan, a target was set to carry out an ambitious tree planting project to increase carbon sequestration by greening the borough. In July 2021, the Council was given executive approval to begin Phase 1, and the project commenced in September 2021. Central to this programme of new tree-planting is the Council's partnership with the Woodland Trust. Through the Emergency Tree Fund, its support of the project is central to its realisation. In addition, many officers across the Council are collaborating with the Green Infrastructure Special Project Manager to bring this project to fruition.

© WDVTA

To reach the target and by using data produced through the tree report and canopy cover surveys, see Appendix A, council officers will work to identify potential planting sites across the borough. A collaborative approach is essential to reach the tree-planting ambitions, with assistance provided to the Council from councillors, community groups, volunteers, town and parish councils, schools, and private projects. WBC is supportive of local volunteer groups and will continue to work with groups who are interested in the planting, monitoring and maintenance of trees across the borough.

Informed by ecosystem services analysis and working with local stakeholder groups, Wokingham Borough Council will undertake tree-planting on suitable Council-owned sites, with a focus on the conversion of land into woodland, orchards and hedgerows. The Council will also encourage and support planting on school grounds, privately owned sites, town and parish council land and estates owned or managed by other public bodies in the borough. The planting programme will also deliver the socio-economic benefits

that trees provide in a peri-urban environment and benefit the environment through an increase in biodiversity, heat island cooling and softening of the landscape as well as helping strengthen community cohesion, see Section 6.

Tree-planting schemes implemented as part of this project will consist of bare-root UK- and Ireland -sourced and grown native seedlings, transplants and whips.

The planting project would not be achievable without the generous assistance from the Woodland Trust, whose Emergency Tree Fund has provided a £300,000 grant to help support tree purchase, tree protection, ground preparation and planting costs.

Tree-planting on the adopted highway and verges

When planting along the highway and verges, consideration will be given by the Council to the long-term suitability of each planting location. This will involve assessing the location of service runs, the proximity of the site to buildings and existing

© WDVTA



infrastructure, visibility splays and ensuring adequate drainage, growing space and quantity and quality of the growing medium.

See Section 13: 'Residents' requests for planting on Council-owned land' for further information.

Along the adopted highway verges, new or replacement street trees will generally be nursery half-standard (HS) or standard (Std) trees measuring approximately 1.5m-2m at the time of planting. Suitable trees will be selected for transport corridors, with tolerance to salt and air pollution.

Tree species prone to epicormic growth issues shall be avoided alongside the highway verge due to their potential to block visibility splays and obstruct footways and cycleways. Similarly, species with brittle failure characteristics, for example, poplar and willow, will be avoided except in exceptional circumstances or where already present.

What is most important when selecting the right tree for the right place is considering the size of the tree at maturity and the species appropriateness for the location. The tree must be able to grow freely

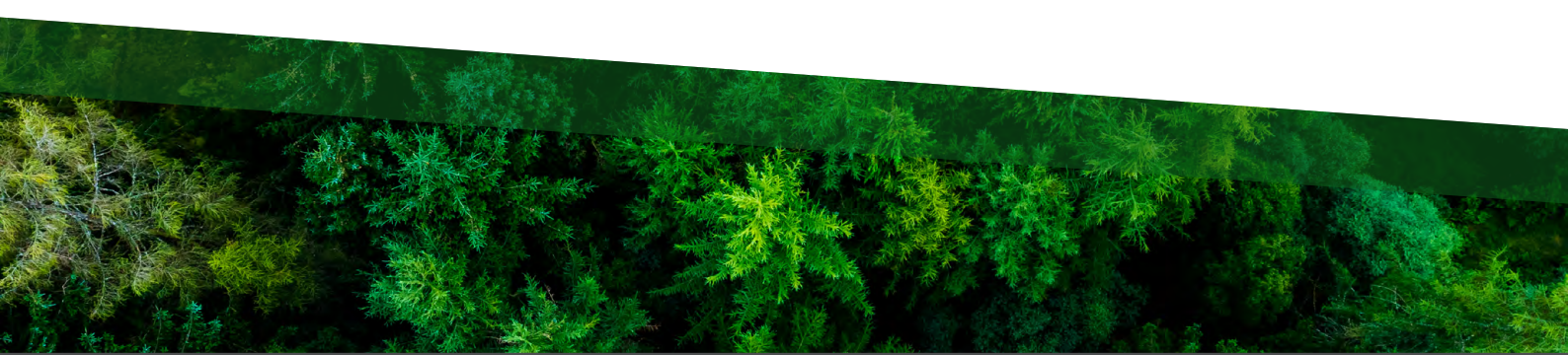
without affecting the integrity of the highway, highway infrastructures such as bus shelters, utility services, or buildings (including both above and below ground impacts).

Trees, planted on the highway verge, will require an area of mulch around the base of the tree, up to 1m in diameter and 50-75mm thick, to help suppress weeds and retain moisture.

Species selection for highways, new developments and open spaces

Choosing the right tree is essential, whether it's a replacement tree or a new tree to be planted on the highway, a new development or within an open space.

In all cases, all tree replacements should seek to improve BNG (see Sections 11, 12 and 13) with a greater emphasis on natives or native cultivars wherever possible. However, it is important to consider non-natives and exotic species in some scenarios to ensure that the tree population remains resilient to future biotic and abiotic threats or for other reasons for example as a result of aesthetic considerations.



Using guidance from the Tree Species Selection for Green Infrastructure – TDAG (see Section 13), council officers will work to produce a refined list of trees that are typically better suited to the difficult conditions found within urban areas and adjacent main streets.

Avoidance of invasive alien species

The Council will adhere to and follow guidance and best practice in avoiding the planting of invasive alien species.

Young tree maintenance of new or replacement street trees

Replacement or new street trees planted by the Council on Council-owned verges or alongside the adopted highway will be subject to a five year establishment period, where the Council will be responsible for watering at a frequency necessary to ensure the establishment and survival of all trees that form part of a planting scheme. The guidance in BS 8545:2014²⁴ – Recommendations' will be followed where appropriate.

As part of the ongoing establishment of newly planted trees, where required over the early maintenance period, tree guards, stakes, and ties will be replaced, formative pruning will be carried out, the planting pit will be kept free of weeds and rubbish, and mulch will be replaced as necessary.

To help address sun scorch, additional watering is likely to be required during periods of abnormally hot or dry weather. Water, at a rate of 20 measured litres, will be applied to each tree, once a week, between March and October, for three years, minimum. In exceptionally dry, hot, or windy weather, this will increase to two to three times a week.

Further guidance on young tree establishment can be found at Arboricultural Association Young Tree Establishment Guide ([link](#)) and The Woodland Trust Guidance ([link](#)).

Residents' requests for planting on Council-owned land

The Council is committed to increasing the number of trees and, importantly, the amount of canopy cover provided by trees across the borough. Tree canopy cover provides many environmental and health benefits, for example: the greater the canopy coverage, the more CO₂ is absorbed²⁵, rainfall intercepted²⁶, and shelter provided.

The Council has significant plans to increase tree cover but also understands that residents may wish to be involved. In recognition of this the Council will welcome suggestions for the planting of new trees within Council-owned open spaces and country parks.

Residents will need to provide the following:

- The location where the trees are to be planted.
- Tree species suggestion (for a list of suitable species, refer to Tree Species Selection for Green Infrastructure) ([link](#)).
- Number of trees to be planted.

Once a request is received, Wokingham Borough Council will undertake several checks to ensure the following

- The licensing process for undertaking tree-planting.
- The location of underground and aerial services.
- Public liability insurance.
- Selecting the right species and variety (right tree and right location).
- Suitability of the location suitability.

Any planting approved for Council-owned sites -will be carried out during the earliest opportunity and in the planting season, which runs from November to March each year.

Requests for street tree and verge planting are slightly more complex.

It is essential that trees planted next to roads offer minimal risk to the health and safety of the public and do not interfere with utilities such as water pipes, electricity supplies or telephone wires. The Council will be stringent on when and where new street trees may or may not be planted. Consideration for planting trees will only be given within verges where the following apply:

- The proposed location has a minimum of 8 cubic metres of accessible soil for the tree's root system to establish.
- The centre point of the proposed tree location must be a minimum of 2m from any utility services.
- The tree must be located a minimum of 3m from the carriageway edge and be of a species that is compact - other larger growing tree species can be considered in areas where they are able to grow unimpeded and without the requirement for excessive pruning to prevent carriageway encroachment.

If the suggested location is unsuitable, the Council will respond by explaining why a tree cannot be planted.

²⁴ British Standard 8545 (2014) Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape: Recommendations

²⁵ Nowak, D.J., and D.E. Crane. 2002. Carbon storage and sequestration by urban trees in the USA. *Environmental Pollution* 116(3):381-389.

²⁶ Yang, B., Lee, D.K., Heo, H.K. et al. The effects of tree characteristics on rainfall interception in urban areas. *Landscape Ecol Eng* 15, 289-296 (2019).



Where a location is deemed appropriate, the Council will confirm the location has been added to the tree-planting list. Approved requests received before 30 September will normally be planted in the next available planting season. This is usually between November and March.

Please note that, currently, all tree-planting on Council land, including highways, will be carried out or supervised by the Council or its representatives. It is not practicable (for legal and insurance reasons) and therefore not permissible for residents to source and plant trees on Council land without Council approval. It is essential that trees are planted in appropriate locations and are sourced from approved suppliers as this ensures a consistent approach to tree quality and suitability.

The Council will develop a process to allow residents to make requests for new street tree and verge planting. The process will require cross organisation involvement however, once established, it will allow resident to put street and verge locations forward, with requests being reviewed within an agreed timeframe.

Guaranteeing delivery of all tree-planting targets, both on the Council's and residents' land, is reliant on appropriate financial and staffing resources being made available to the relevant departments, along with full member support for their implementation.

© WDVTA

14. HEDGEROW AND HEDGE PLANTING

Wokingham Borough Council recognises that formal town and garden hedges and agricultural hedgerows have many benefits:

- Hedgerows are generally inexpensive to create and long-lasting, providing significant wildlife and environmental benefits.
- Hedgerows can provide excellent dispersal, migration and foraging routes for wildlife including dispersal routes for woodland plants.
- A well-managed hedge can be a feature of great beauty and interest while offering privacy and security.
- The use of hedges can provide significant ecosystem benefits to residents in locations where a tree is impractical but where a hedge can offer a similar canopy volume and leaf area. For example, mitigation of road noise and aerial pollution.
- A hedge can provide a useful barrier: reducing the impact of weather, creating shade, deflecting and dissipating wind and intercepting rainfall, reducing surface runoff.
- A hedge can also provide health benefits, acting as a significant filter of harmful particulates and dust.

The Council also understands that many of the problems associated with hedges occur because fast-growing plants have been used for quick results, producing hedges that are difficult to maintain and have become too large for their location. It is therefore important to consider the species of hedge plants used and the purpose of the hedge.

The Council will expect hedges to be considered within all new developments as part of the wider landscape master plan, including use in public open spaces and, for property boundaries wherever possible.

In most circumstances, the Council will expect hedgerow planting to utilise native species. When hedgerows are located on public open spaces and adjacent to roads, hedgerow species will be chosen to be diverse and hardy as this will reduce the maintenance costs and allow the hedge to be retained for the long term once established.



Appendix D has been developed by the Councils Tree and Landscape officers to provide guidance on appropriate species for new hedge and hedgerow planting, with species selection being suitable to soil type and landscape character as well as providing structural habitat and fruit and nectar for native insects, bird and mammals. Written in 2017, it is a simple guide to planting hedges in Wokingham and provides assistance in the design and planting of new hedgerows in the Borough. However, in order to keep the guidance relevant, it is recognised that an update would be beneficial. A short-term goal to update the guidance will be implemented as part of the strategy Action Plan.

Where appropriate, new hedgerows should be planted in two staggered rows 33cm apart (six plants per metre). Minor species can be planted in small, single species groups or randomly within larger blocks of hawthorn.

Where space allows, the Council welcomes hedge planting to be incorporated alongside trees due to the additional ecosystem services this can provide, for example wildlife corridors. Where trees are appropriate within a hedgerow scheme, some tree species should be left uncut to grow through the hedge at approximately 6m intervals to be allowed to mature, with new nursery standard trees incorporated into a new hedge wherever possible.

© WDVTA

15. RISKS AND BIOSECURITY

Pests and diseases

New pest and diseases that are critical to the national economy are often addressed by the government who may provide funding or control services to reduce any impact. However, the Council should also ensure adequate resources are available to control and contain outbreaks of known pests and diseases on Council-owned land. The Council should also continue to ensure proportionate resources are dedicated to addressing pest and disease that are affecting privately owned trees for example the Council may need to identify and deal with ADB affected ash trees that are at risk of falling onto the highway, resourcing notifications to landowners under powers bestowed by the Highways Act 1980.

Over the last few decades, the UK has experienced increasing threats to plant biosecurity as increased global trade acts as a pathway for the arrival of new organisms, with impacts potentially exacerbated by climate change. This has been highlighted by the increasing number of plant disease and pathogen outbreaks, most notably in relation to trees. Such examples include Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), Horse Chestnut Bleeding Canker (*Pseudomonas syringae* pv. *aesculi*),

Phytophthora ramorum and *P. kernoviae* affecting large populations of trees, Oak Processionary Moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*), with its associated threat to human health; and in wider Europe the introduction and spread of *Xylella* (*Xylella fastidiosa*) and Canker Stain of Plane (*Ceratocystis platani*) are examples of recent high profile biosecurity failures.

The Council will prioritise adequate resources in a timely fashion to deal with such threats, especially when these are related to the health of the tree stock and may also present serious public health issues. The Council will continue to liaise closely with the Forestry Commission on issues of biosecurity and trees and inspections of Council owned trees known to be affected by pests and diseases will be carried out in accordance with the Councils Tree Inspection Frequency Framework. Further information on the Tree Inspection Framework can be found on page 38.

The cumulative impact of climate-induced stress and of any associated changes in the impact of pests on the trees is uncertain in the medium to long term, but new pests, diseases and pathogens are appearing. Currently the Trees and Landscape team maintains awareness of these and will, in partnership with other teams, update staff of any further developments.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity measures are not required to be onerous or over-complicated. They generally follow examples of horticultural and arboricultural best practice.

The Council will seek to adhere to the following biosecurity measures during its operations:

- Prevent the spread and transmission of pests and diseases by regularly disinfecting and cleaning tools following pruning works.
- Regularly monitor newly planted trees in the first three years following planting to ensure that latent pathogens, such as *Xylella fastidiosa subsp. multiplex* (a bacterial plant pathogen) are not present.
- Whilst respecting native habitats, increase the species and genetic diversity of the borough's tree stock and avoid planting monocultures, whilst ensuring that any new planting is suitable for current climatic conditions, and as far as reasonably practical, plant tree species that are resilient to climate change. The Council will only plant tree stock and plant material that has met the requirements of the European Union's and United Kingdom's plant passport systems, and, where possible, source UK-grown tree stock or tree stock and plant material that has been the subject of a quarantine period.

- Comply with the requirements of statutory plant health notices.
- Report any tree pests or pathogen of concern via Forestry Research's tree TreeAlert web-based reporting system.

Climate change

It is now recognised and accepted by reputable experts that climate change is happening, and that man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are the main cause. It is predicted that temperatures could rise by as much as 3-5°C by the end of the century. The government now recognises climate change as 'the greatest long-term challenge facing the world today'.

The UK is projected to get warmer, more so in summer than in winter. Changes in projected summer mean temperatures are expected to be greatest in the south and south-east. Using climate modelling, the overall annual rainfall is not expected to change a great extent, but the overall trend will be for winter rainfall to increase and summer rainfall to decrease. Increased evapotranspiration in trees will be driven by the warmer temperatures in the summer months, a by-product being increased summer drought conditions. With the increase in the effects of climate change, due to higher global greenhouse gas emissions, the rate over time, these changes will increase, and the scale of these changes will be even greater.

Globally, woodland ecosystems play a key role in addressing climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, producing oxygen, retaining water and reducing atmospheric temperatures through transpiration. On a local level, trees and woodlands have an important role to play in mitigating climate change through the absorption and temporary storage of carbon dioxide, intercepting and reducing airborne particulates as well as reducing the effects of climate change by providing shade, cooling and soaking up water and helping to reduce the impacts of flooding. Trees also provide a source of wood, which is a low-energy construction material and a regenerative, short carbon-cycle, energy resource. It is therefore essential that the Council sustains and enhances this vital resource.

Native, naturalised and non-native trees

The Council currently plants a wide range of native, naturalised, and non-native species. Wherever possible, the Council will favour the use of native and non-invasive naturalised trees. However, it is accepted that the use of non-native tree species may, on occasion, be required.

A diverse range of tree species and the avoidance of monoculture planting will help to create a more resilient and robust tree stock, which is then better placed to withstand the predicted impact of climate change.

Planting provenance

In general, suppliers will be required to grow stock produced from British-origin seed sources. With adaptability to climate change in mind, and only where there is extremely robust scientific evidence supporting the introduction and guarding against the introduction of invasive and pest tree and other species, there may be a preference to select seeds from European continental provenance. In such cases, demonstrable biosecurity measures will have to be in place involving effective quarantine procedures and certification of imported material.

16. ACTION PLAN

SHORT-TERM GOALS (1-2 YEARS)	
GOAL	ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4,000 trees to be allocated to residents via the Garden Forest Scheme by 2023. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design and implement a process for residents to apply for and collect a free tree to plant in their garden. Round 1: Applications were received at the end of January 2022. Trees to be available for eligible applicants at the start of 2022 planting season. Round 2: Application window to open for the second round of the scheme in Autumn 2022, with the aim for eligible applicants to collect their tree before the end of the 2022/23 planting season.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver small-scale woodland, hedgerow and orchard planting on Council owned land in existing parks and opens spaces sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify sites for small-scale woodland, hedgerow and orchard planting on Council estate in existing parks and opens spaces. This small-scale planting can be deployed with shorter time scales than larger afforestation schemes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a tree palette of suitable species. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using the TDAG guidance and taking into consideration the landscape characteristics of Wokingham, officers will develop a palette of tree species appropriate for planting along the adopted highway, verges and public open spaces as a basis to provide recommendations for the Council and public when carrying out tree planting schemes.

MEDIUM-TERM GOALS (3-5 YEARS)	
GOAL	ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create new woodland that will increase the number of trees in the borough to improve carbon capture, BNG and canopy cover. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the planting potential maps produced through the Tree Report and Canopy Cover Survey and by working with relevant WBC stakeholders, identify areas of Council-owned (greater than 5ha) that would be suitable for woodland planting, focussing on high carbon capture potential sites and opportunities for Biodiversity Net Gain schemes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support residents wishing to plant trees on Council-owned land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal departments to work together to design a process to support residents to request to either plant a tree or have a tree planted on Council-owned land, including along the adopted highway. • To develop a criterion for applications to be considered and produce guidance on when applications will be reviewed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WBC Tree Inspections Framework to be updated and implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspection zone maps to be produced, outlining the appropriate frequency of inspection.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve Tree City of the World status. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions to be carried out based on Tree City of the World requirements.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Seed Collection programme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design a programme to support and encourage local seed collection to supply to nurseries to encourage the growth of locally sourced species.

MEDIUM-TERM GOALS (3-5 YEARS)	
GOAL	ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree Strategy interim review. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A five year review of the Tree Strategy to take place to ensure strategy contents remain relevant and achievable in-line with current best practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review TPO process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update TPO process, subject to available tree officer resource and in line with current best practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve collaborative working with local volunteer groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design and implement a process for existing and potential community groups to collaborate in tree planting, maintenance, management and monitoring. • WBC is supportive of the Tree Council's Tree Warden Scheme and will continue to support existing tree wardens and encourage further collaborative working with WDVTA to support enlisting of further Tree Warden volunteers across the Borough.

LONG-TERM GOALS	
GOAL	ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase canopy cover. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the canopy cover data produced through the Tree Report and Canopy Cover Survey to identify areas that would benefit new tree-planting and implement planting schemes to achieve an increase in canopy cover. • Undertake a ten-year canopy cover review.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tree Strategy Review and Update 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A ten-year review of the Tree Strategy should take place to ensure the strategy remains relevant and achievable in line with current best practice.



TITLE	Development of Wokingham's Two New Special Educational Needs Schools.
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday 29 th June 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers, Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council - Stephen Conway, Executive Member for Children's Services - Prue Bray

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INCLUDING STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to update the Executive on plans for the provision of two new Special Educational Needs schools within the Borough and agree the proposed terms of the lease of the site to the Department for Education (DfE).

The proposal will help the Council meet its statutory duties to Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs. It will provide high quality, local special school places at a lower cost than alternative out of borough schools and with reduced transport costs.

As part of the provision of the two new schools, leases for the school sites (owned by Wokingham Borough Council) to the DfE are required and are contractual with the DfE for the delivery of the schools. It is proposed each lease will be for 125 years (standard term for an Academy lease). As it exceeds the Director's delegation under paragraph 11.3.6(e), the approval of any leases for Council owned land for a duration longer than 20 years is an Individual Executive Member Decision under paragraph 5.5.1(f)

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) Confirm their support for the development and provision of **two** new Special Educational Needs School at Rooks Nest Farm in Finchampstead (as per the Officer's recommendation having reviewed this site against all available sites in WBC ownership)
- 2) Give delegated authority to the Executive Member for Children's Services to approve the lease of these sites to the DfE for use as a Special Educational Needs school on their model Heads of Terms (a copy is in **Appendix A**) and delegate, under 5.4.3 [which applies to all delegations to officers and individual members below] powers to the Director of Resources and Assets, in conjunction with the Leader of the Council, to complete the lease.
- 3) Approve a supplementary estimate of £1.5m for the infrastructure and abnormal costs associated with the delivery of the two new SEND schools. Working with

the DfE, the Council will aim to minimise these costs where possible. Any costs will be funded from the approved capital contingency budget.

- 4) Subject to the DfE approval of WBC's bid to self-deliver the free school capital projects, give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Children's Services, to approve the capital development of both schools (5.1.9.2 (b) re Virements over £500k) and the procurement and awarding of the construction works through a competitive procurement process, details to be presented and approved by the Strategic Procurement Board (SPB).
- 5) Give delegated authority to the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Children's Services, to run the presumption exercise (along with the DfE) to select and enter into leases with a Trust (or Trusts) to manage both schools.
- 6) Give delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Executive Member for Finance, to approve the infrastructure costs and abnormalities (not funded by the DfE) when these are known.
- 7) To agree that the whole of the Rooks Nest Farm site, which has previously been promoted to the Local Plan Update for residential use with an estimated residential land value of £19.25M, will now not be used for residential use, with the residential land value estimation to be foregone and that the previous promotion of the site for residential development will be withdrawn from the Local Plan Update process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks approval for the development of **two** new DfE funded and approved Special Schools (for children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) at **Rooks Nest Farm**, and the terms of the lease with the Department for Education for use of this site.

The new schools will help the Council meet its statutory duties to Children and Young People with Special Education Needs. It will provide high quality, local special school places at a lower cost than alternative out of borough independent and non-maintained special schools (INMSS) and with reduced transport costs.

One school will be a special free school, for 100 pupils which includes 12 places at post 16 (4-19yrs) for children with needs related to Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) who could not have their needs met in mainstream schools.

The second school will be a special free school, for 100 pupils which includes 8 places at post 16 (4-19yrs) for children with a range of cognitive disabilities including Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD), Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD), Multi-Sensory Impairments (MSI) and Autism Spectrum Conditions who could not have their needs met in mainstream schools.

Having these two special free schools in Wokingham provides several benefits to the borough, not least the positive impact on children, young people and their families in relation to having access to additional in-borough provision.

The capital cost of the schools will be funded by the DfE; in previous Free School rounds there has been the opportunity for the capital development process to be delegated to the Local Authority. This would be our preferred option in this case as it will give the Local Authority autonomy to make timely decisions without the need to refer back to a third party. An Academy Trust will be appointed by the DfE to run the schools. Revenue funding will come from existing budgets via the Council's High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), through a combination of top slice (recoupment) and direct payment).

Rooks Nest Farm has been identified as the most suitable site for both schools, taking into account availability, site conditions, transport links, local infrastructure and service provision. Feasibility work will be undertaken to confirm the location of the schools within the site, and to prepare initial designs. The site will be subject to a long lease to the Department for Education, proposed at 125 years at nil rent. The terms of the lease need to be approved by the Executive as the proposed length of lease is longer than 20 years.

If the project does not proceed then the Council will need to meet its statutory responsibilities and will continue to provide SEN provision through its existing arrangements. Currently around 33% of pupils with EHCPs are educated out of borough and this proportion is higher for pupils with ASD and SEMH needs; these placements in particular are made up of a high proportion of expensive out of borough independent specialist provision. With a more balanced mix of local provision, many of these placements could be made closer to home, providing better outcomes at lower cost. This also has a knock-on impact on pupils who need to access their education outside of their local community with longer journey times and increased spend on SEN Home to School Transport.

Subject to approval by the Executive, a planning application for the two new SEND schools will be submitted in the new year, once the Trust for each school is selected. The DfE's aim is for the schools to be opened in September 2026.

BACKGROUND

September 2022 report

The report “Special Education Needs and Disability Sufficiency and Safety Valve Programme” to Wokingham’s Executive on 29/9/22 established both a range of issues leading to growing pressure on the High Needs Block budget and actions to reduce spend, while maintaining or improving the quality of provision. The actions included:

- 1.) The submission of a proposal by the Director of Children’s Services in consultation with the lead member for Children’s Services to the DfE for two new Special Free Schools in the borough in October 2022;
- 2.) Supports the recommendation to utilise two sites (part of Rooks Nest Farm, Barkham and part of Gray’s Farm, south of Wokingham) owned by the Council for the provision of two new Special Free Schools and note that the disposal of these sites would be subject to a further Executive decision;
- 3.) Notes the ongoing preparatory work for participation in the national “Safety Valve” intervention programme from September 2022.
- 4.) Notes the development work in progress for further projects to increase special needs provision in the borough.

A copy of this report is attached in **Appendix B**.

Department of Education Funding - New Free Special Schools

Two bids were submitted to the DfE’s latest wave of special free school applications in October 2022 and Wokingham was successfully awarded funding for 2 new SEND Schools in March 2023. A copy of the Bid Offer is in **Appendix C**.

On the 9th May 2023 the DfE officially opening the bidding process for proposers to run all the 33 Free schools that were approved nationally, with the release of their ‘How to apply’ Guidance and publications of each schools’ specifications

The application window will close on the 31st August 2023, with assessments of bids anticipated in October and a final decision to receive ministerial sign off in January 2024. Final decisions on site locations will add significant value to the information we are able to share with proposers and should ensure higher quality bids.

BUSINESS CASE

The 2022 Executive report envisaged the new Free Special Schools being delivered at Rooks Nest Farm and Gray’s Farm. Since the DfE’s approval and awarding of funding, Officers have carried out a review of WBC’s assets to ensure that the sites identified continue to provide the most suitable (in terms of size and location, and deliverable in terms of construction logistics and site constraints) for delivering the two new SEND schools.

The WBC assets identified and reviewed as possible locations for one or both of the schools are:

- Gray's Farm (alongside the proposed sports hub)
- Rooks Nest (locating both schools on the same site)
- Toutley East Field (in lieu of the Care Home)
- Winnersh Farm (adjacent to Oak Tree SEND School)

Appendix D shows location and site plans for each of the options.

Due to the specialist status of the school and the extensive catchment area, which is likely to include pupils from outside the Borough, Children's Services has confirmed there is no need for one or both of the schools to be in a specific location within the Borough. As the designations of the schools differ, there is also no concern that there would be any adverse impact from the schools being in the same location. In reviewing the proposed location of the schools, consideration was given to the ease of access for pupils travelling to and from school and it was noted that having two schools next to each other will enable efficiencies in transporting pupils from home to school. Plus providing two SEND schools in the same location, each with 100 pupils, is no greater than the pupil numbers of a standard primary school (average 240 pupils).

To meet the Department for Education standards, each school site is required to be circa 2ha in size plus transport infrastructure. All of the sites under consideration could accommodate a SEND school, however the developable area of the site at Winnersh Farm only just meets the DfE size requirements meaning that there is less flexibility for any requirements for any additional indoor or outdoor areas, e.g. future extensions, sports facilities and car parking.

A summary of the opportunities and constraints for each of the sites reviewed is detailed in the table in **Appendix E**.

Recommendation

Each of the alternative sites has been considered in detail, and taking into account, availability, site conditions, transport links, local infrastructure and service provision it is recommended that two new Special Education Needs and Disability schools are both located on the Rooks Farm site.

- 1.) Rooks Nest Farm, Finchampstead (SEMH)
- 2.) Rooks Nest Farm, Finchampstead (SLD)

Appendix F provides a plan of the Rooks Nest site. It is envisaged that both SEND schools will be located in Field 1, however this will be subject to further technical assessment and site surveys. Part of the Rooks Nest site (Field 4) is to be used for the provision of the Barkham Solar Farm and the Covid Memorial Wood. The use of this land is not impacted by the recommendation to site both schools at Rooks Nest Farm.

The Executive are also requested to note that the Rooks Nest Site has previously been promoted to the Local Plan update and if WBC had secured residential in line with the

Revised Growth Strategy (270 dwellings) then the value of the land would have been circa £19.25m (based on £2.5m per developable hectare equating to 7.7 ha to deliver the 270 dwelling allocation at a density of 35 dwellings per hectare). The land value could be greater still if WBC were to pursue delivery through a Joint Venture approach, rather than merely selling the site with the benefit of outline planning permission.

School 1: Rooks Nest Farm school (SEMH) proposal details:

The current proposal is:

- **Special Free School Opening September 2026**, for 100 pupils (4-19yrs), designated for children with needs related to Social Emotional and Mental Health problems.
- **Places to be allocated to** Wokingham Borough Council
- **School to be built** on land Rooks Nest Farm; in previous Free School rounds there has been the opportunity for the capital development process to be delegated to the Local Authority, but in this round this remains to be confirmed and it may be that the construction phase is DfE led. Capital costs to be (largely) met by DfE, revenue costs come from commissioning school's DSG (child funding directly from LAs and place funding via top slice from WBC's DSG – see below for balancing mechanism)
- **Expected revenue funding mechanism:** Place funding (currently £10K per place) will be funded from Wokingham's HNB budget allocation. Individual pupil 'top-up' funding will be met from LAs commissioning places (mainly WBC, but potentially also other LAs if Wokingham does not take up all the places). Place funding for any non-WBC pupils will be balanced out through the DfE's annual import/export adjustment.
- **A Trust running the school** to hold a contract with DfE.
- **Designation:** Designated for children with needs related to Social Emotional and Mental Health problems (SEMH)
- **Trust designates:** the DfE will launch of competition for a Trust/Proposer Group to run the proposed school. The school specification, will be published on the local authority's website and by the DfE
- **School to grow** year by year to 100 pupils
- **The aspiration** is that this will become the school of choice for those local children who would otherwise go to high cost independent or non-maintained special schools.

School 2: Rooks Nest Farm School (SLD) proposal details:

The current proposal is:

- **Special Free School Opening September 2026**, for 100 pupils (4-19yrs), designated for children with a range of cognitive disabilities who could not have their needs met in mainstream schools.
- **Places to be allocated to** Wokingham Borough Council
- **School to be built** on land at Rooks Nest Farm; in previous Free School rounds there has been the opportunity for the capital development process to be delegated

to the Local Authority, but in this round, this remains to be confirmed and it may be that the construction phase is DfE led. Capital costs to be (largely) met by DfE, revenue costs come from commissioning school's DSG (child funding directly from LAs and place funding via top slice from WBC's DSG – see below for balancing mechanism)

- **Expected revenue funding mechanism:** Place funding (currently £10K per place) will be funded from Wokingham's HNB budget allocation. Individual pupil 'top-up' funding will be met from LAs commissioning places (mainly WBC, but potentially also other LAs if Wokingham does not take up all the places). Place funding for any non-WBC pupils will be balanced out through the DfE's annual import/export adjustment.
- **A Trust running the school** to hold a contract with DfE.
- **Designation:** Pupils with Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD), Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD), Multi-Sensory Impairments (MSI) and Autism Spectrum Conditions.
- **Trust designates:** the DfE will launch of competition for a Trust/Proposer Group to run the proposed school. The school specification, will be published on the local authority's website and by the DfE.
- **School to grow** year by year to 100.
- **The aspiration** is that this will become the school of choice for those local children who would otherwise go to high cost independent or non-maintained special schools.

Costs

The DfE will fund the construction of the SEND schools. However, the DfE will not fund "abnormal" costs associated with site and ground conditions. This is following scenarios in the past where the DfE have been gifted sites by other local authorities for the construction of schools which have not been suitable for any other uses due to their ground conditions and the DfE has been left with significant costs relating to site mitigation and remediation. Site surveys will be undertaken and areas of known contamination, flood risk and noise impact will be avoided.

The Executive are requested to approve a supplementary estimate of £1.5m for the infrastructure and abnormal costs associated with the delivery of the two new SEND schools. Working with the DfE, the Council will aim to minimise these costs where possible. Any costs will be funded from the approved capital contingency budget.

The DfE has confirmed that sprinklers are now fitted to all DfE SEND schools so they will be included in the construction budget and funded by the DfE.

The DfE builds all SEND schools to their 'Output Specification S21' which embeds net zero carbon in operation and climate resilience. A copy of the DfE technical annex 2J is in **Appendix G**.

Land Value

The part of the site identified for the two schools has an Existing Use Value of £200,000 as farmland (£20k per acre based on 10 acres (4ha)). If this part of the site was developed for residential use, then the value of this part of the site would be circa £10,000,000 (capital receipt based on site developed for residential, at £2.5m per hectare assuming no abnormal ground conditions, encumbrances on title etc). This increase in land value represents the financial contribution from Wokingham Borough Council to the delivery of the school.

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)	£1m for construction of highway access. £500,000 risk pot for abnormal costs.	The costs will be funded through the approved capital contingency budget.	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other Financial Information

Capital Funding

Capital costs of the school build will be met by the DfE following the successful bid(s) made to the Wave Funding round for Free Special Schools.

The Executive is requested to approve a supplementary estimate of £1.5m for the infrastructure and abnormal costs associated with the delivery of the two new SEND schools. Working with the DfE, the Council will aim to minimise these costs where possible. Any costs will be funded from the approved capital contingency budget.

Revenue Funding

For the pupils with an EHCP intended for these schools, revenue costs of their education will be met from the WBC High Needs Block. That will be the case whether the schools are built or not. However, by having good quality, local provision, the revenue costs associated with educating those pupils will be lower, and transport costs associated with ensuring they can access education will also be reduced.

Based on the assumed unit cost of £60k per annum for each pupil placed outside the borough, savings to the High Needs Block are projected to be approx. £4.7m per annum by 2030-31, once both schools are full. In addition, transport savings are estimated at around £1.2m p.a. by 2030-31, when comparing the average cost of transporting pupils to special schools out with the borough compared to those travelling to local schools.

It is proposed that entries to the school are phased over a period of 3 years. The detailed projected annual impact on the HNB and the Home to School Transport budget in the period leading to full use of 190 places by Wokingham Borough Council in 2030-31 is shown at **Appendix H** and summarised below:-

Revenue Savings	Unit Cost Per Pupil	Pupil Nos.	Per annum
Average INMSS placement	£60,000	190	£11,400,000
Equivalent Special School placement Average in borough special school	£35,000	190	£6,650,000
Revenue Saving to High Needs Block			£4,750,000
Average transport cost – out of borough	£16,000	190	£3,040,000
Average transport cost - in borough	£9,300	190	£1,767,000
Revenue Saving to General Fund	£6,700	190	£1,273,000

[1] Based on average cost of nearest equivalent - an Oak Tree School Placement

[2] Based on average cost of an Addington School Placement

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

An initial public consultation has been undertaken in April 2023 to set out Wokingham's broad plans for establishing new SEND provision, including the two new special schools. This results of this will establish whether there is support for the proposed developments and whether the Council has prioritised the right plans. This current consultation does not include the location of specific sites within its scope.

Subject to the approval of the Executive, further public consultation on the detailed proposals for the individual SEN schools at Rooks Nest Farm will be undertaken jointly with the Department of Education and the Academy Trusts selected before the submission of a planning application. Public consultation will be carried out as part of the planning application process.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Initial Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for both schools. This identified no low or high negative impacts on any groups.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

The design of the school building will be built to the design specification required by the Department for Education which embeds net zero carbon in operation and climate resilience. By providing SEN provision within the Borough this will reduce the distance pupils are required to travel.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

n/a

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Sarah Morgan	Service Commercial Property
Telephone 07801 664 394	Email sarah.morgan@wokingham.gov.uk
Contact Katie Meakin	Service Commercial Property
Telephone 07715 238500	Email katie.meakin@wokingham.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix A: Heads of Terms

It is proposed that the site for the school be leased to the Department for Education based on their EFA model of a 125-year Free School Lease at a peppercorn rent. The basis of these terms is set out on the Government website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-schools-utcs-and-studio-schools-model-lease>.

Appendix B: Special Education Needs and Disability Sufficiency and Safety Valve Programme report dated 29/9/22.



Executive report
SEND Sufficiency pa

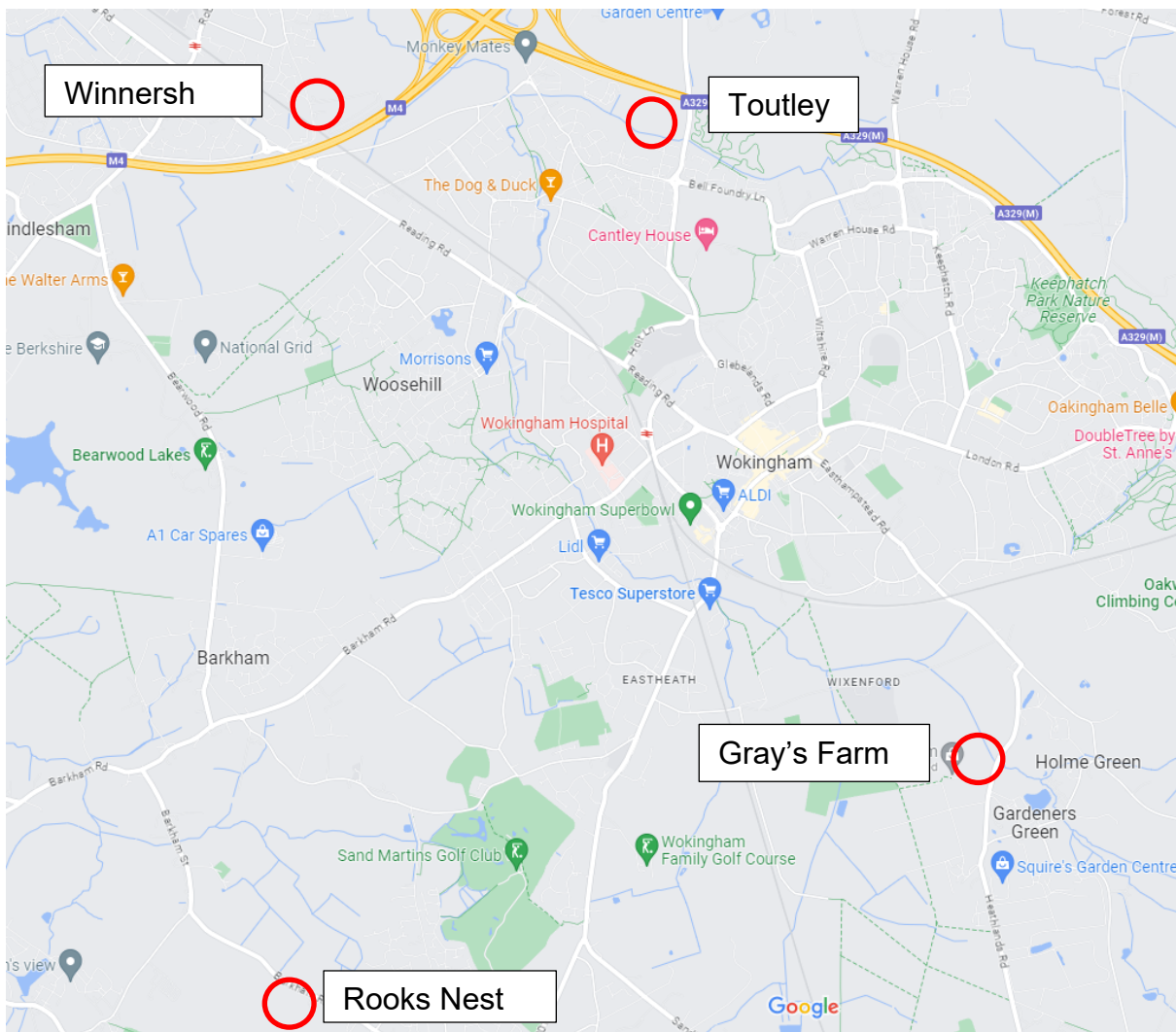
Appendix C: Bid Offer

The DfE's offer (when they invited expressions of interest from local authorities) can be summarised as:

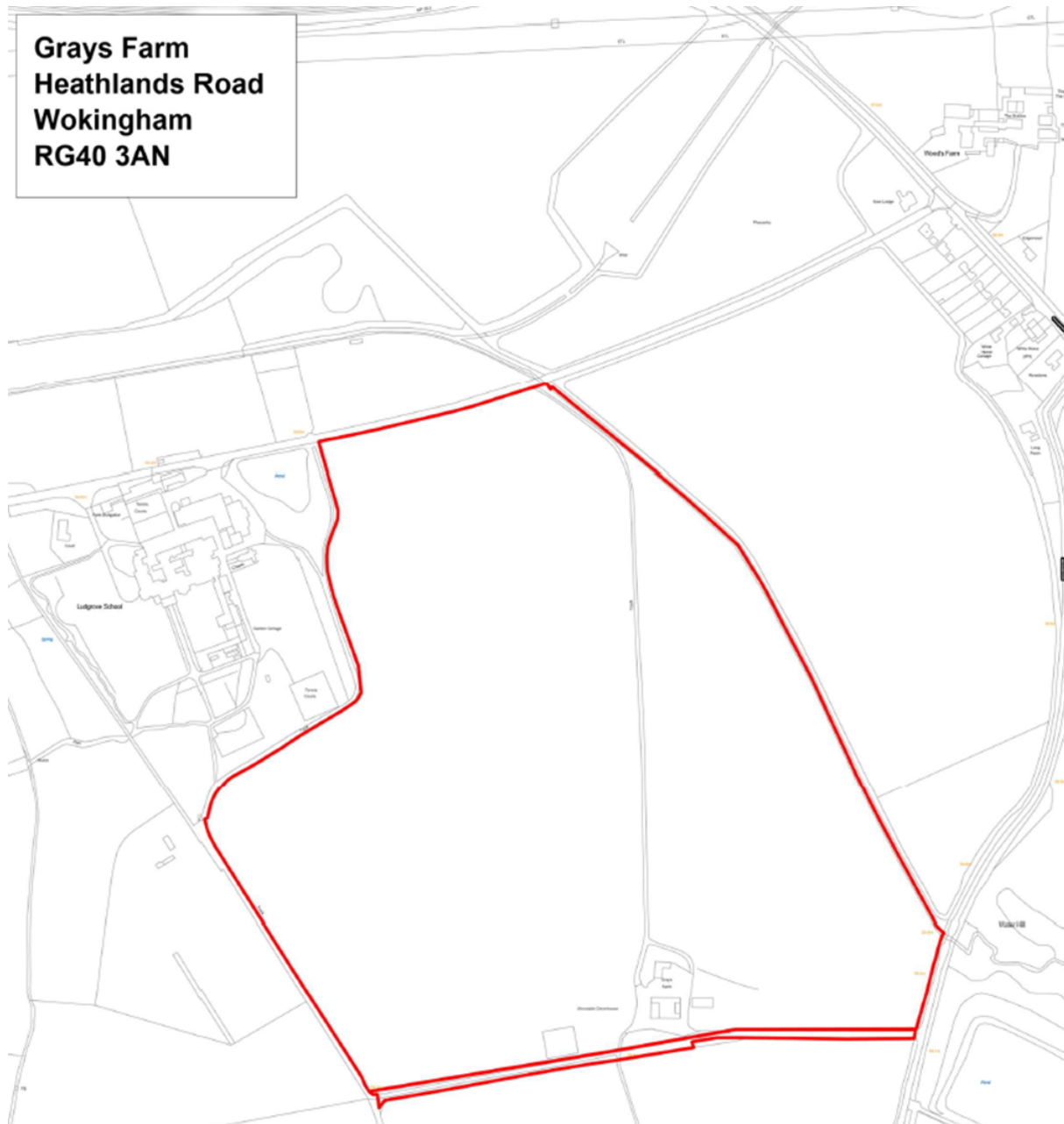
- School to be a Free Special School, built by the DfE on land provided (for free / at a peppercorn rent) by the local authority.
- Sponsor to be appointed by the DfE, but after recommendations by the successful bidder, to operate to a specification written by the successful LA.s
- Scheme depends on the successful councils underwriting revenue costs, by providing guarantees concerning future use, and place and pupil funding.
- While the DfE will build the school, they expect local authorities to pay for abnormal site related development costs. This might be for such matters as ground conditions, flood mitigation or access issues (a non-exclusive list).
- Under the standard DfE funding model for state funded Special Schools, Place funding (£10K per place) comes directly from the DfE, but is top-sliced from the host local authority's HNB budget (the host being the LA within which the school is sited), and pupil funding comes from local authorities commissioning places for individual children. The DfE's "import / export" adjustments (based on £6K per child or young person taking up a funded place) to the HNB ensure that LAs do not suffer because they import children or benefit from being an exporter by adjusting each council's core HNB budget to reflect the balance of in and out of borough local authority place funded provision and usage. Additionally host local authorities receive £4K per place for each child or young person taking up a funded place in their area, irrespective of the child's home local authority.

Appendix D: Location and site plans

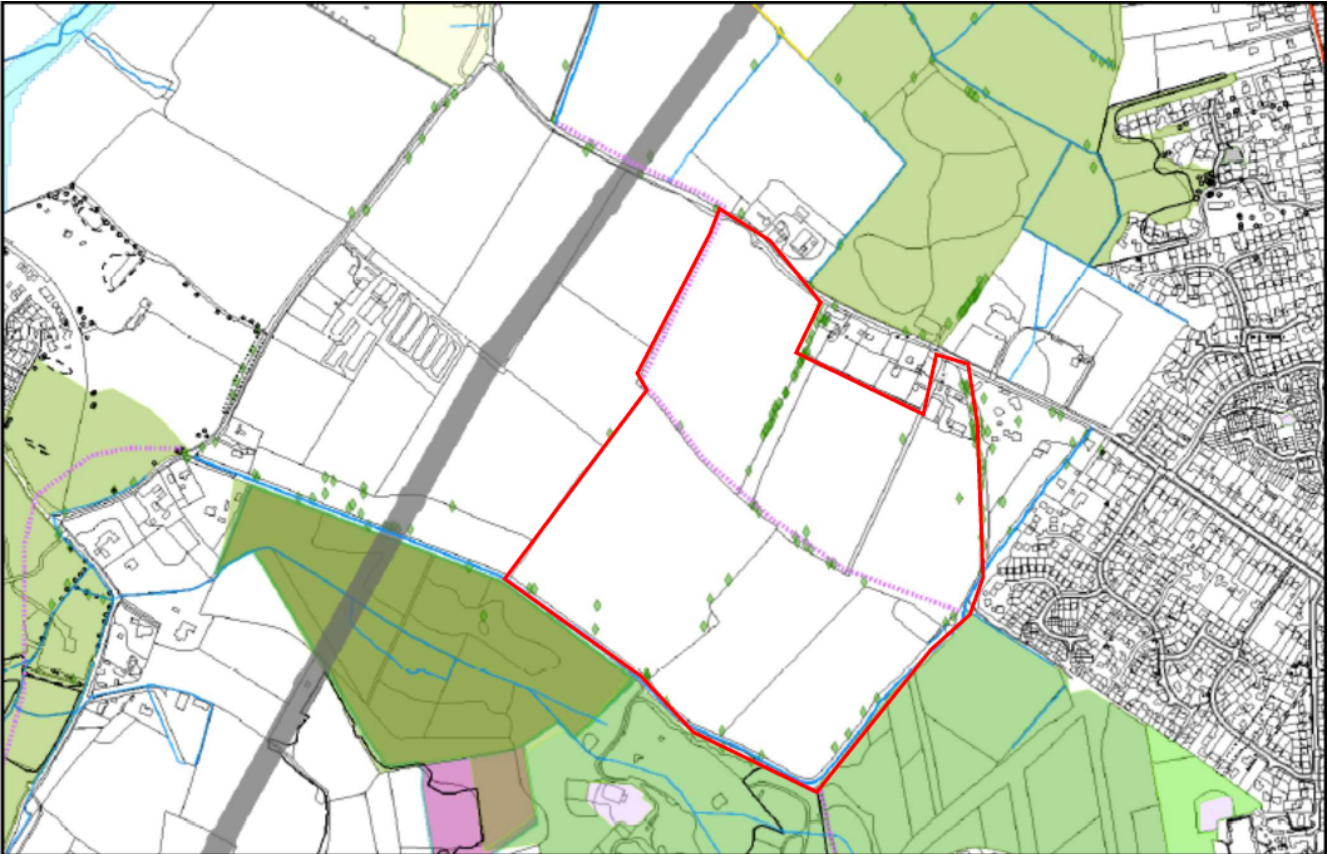
Location Plan - for all four sites



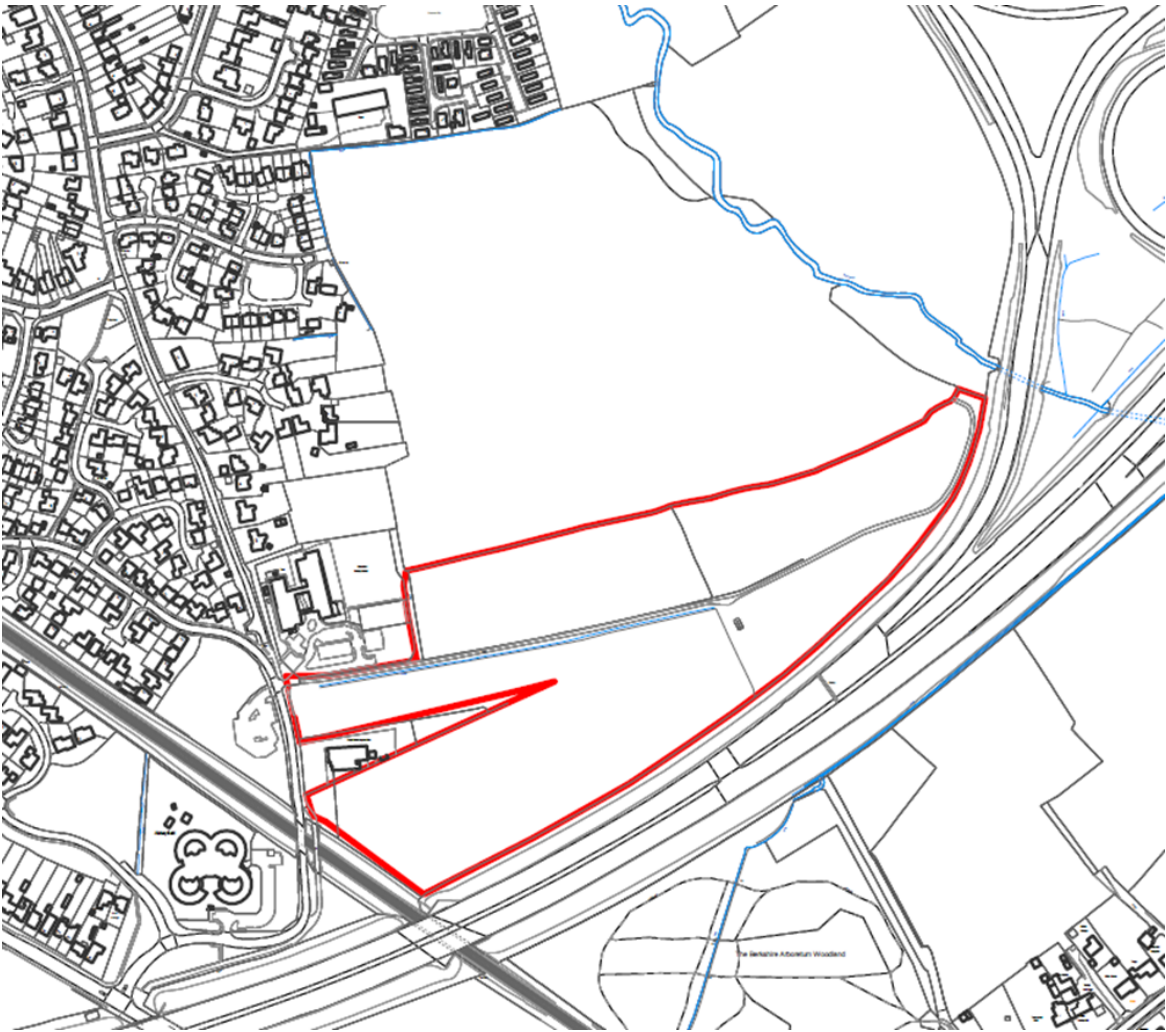
Gray's Farm



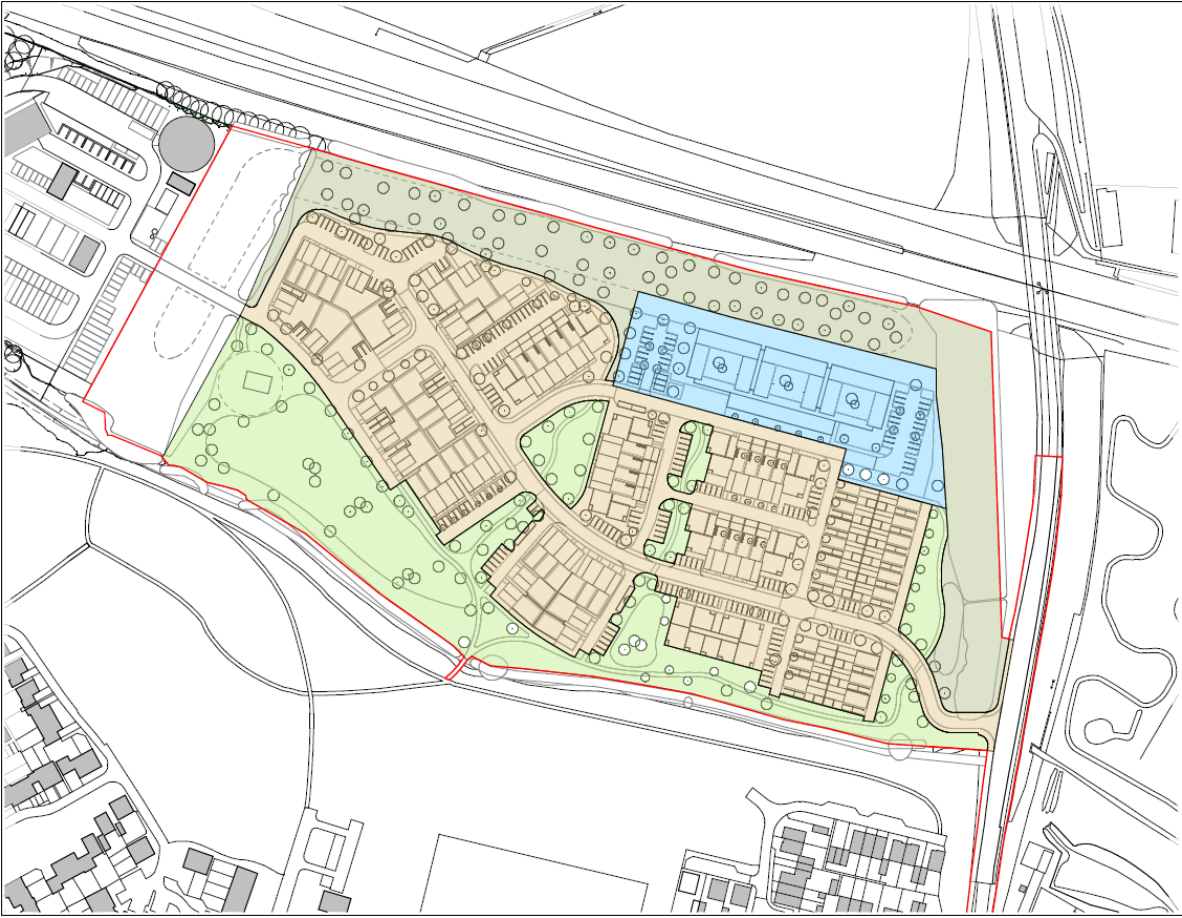
Rooks Nest



Winnersh Farm



Toutley East



Appendix E: Site Appraisal Review

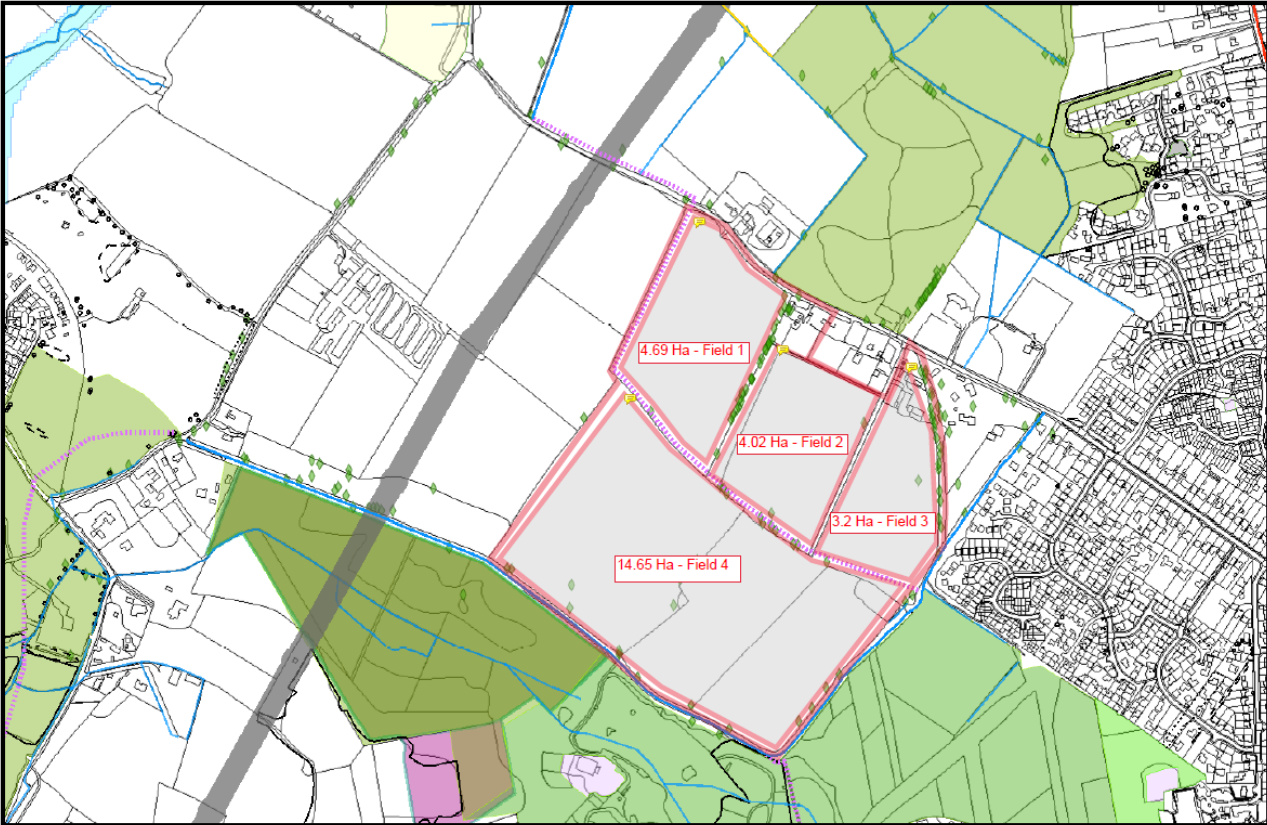
Gray's Farm	
<p>Gray's Farm is located in the south of the borough, adjacent to the Wokingham South Wokingham SDL. It is currently leased from WBC on a 1-year renewable lease, and is used as a PYO fruit farm. The site is located in countryside outside the settlement boundary of Finchampstead. It has been promoted in the Local Plan Update for outdoor and indoor sports and community facilities use. Vehicular access to the site is via Heathlands Road, although it is proposed that any future development on this site will be linked with a pedestrian/cycle link from the SDL.</p>	
Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If it were feasible and supportable, in planning terms, to accommodate both the proposed sports hub and SEND school on this site, there may be an opportunity to share the use of some facilities (e.g. playing pitches, parking, access road etc). This could offer opportunities for both short break activities and potentially post 16 internships. - There may also be an opportunity to share construction and infrastructure costs as well as risk. - If not all of the site is required for the provision of the sports hub, a SEND school would make good use of the remaining land. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is not yet known what area is required for the sports facilities here, and therefore whether the site is large enough to provide for both the proposed sports hub and a SEND school. - Until the proposals for the sports hub have been finalised and Sports England funding secured, there is uncertainty around the deliverability of the sports hub and this could impact on the deliverability of the SEND school - Based on existing assessments by the sports hub project team, there are concerns about the access to and from the site in regard to the width of the road, and the capacity of the local junctions to cope with additional traffic. Highway improvements, cycle and pedestrian links may be required. - The site is also currently being investigated to establish whether the northern parts of the site are available and suitable to provide some additional flood attenuation for the South Wokingham Distributor Road. Use of this part of the site has the potential to offer a significant cost reduction for the SWDR but would further constrain the available land for the SEND school.

Rooks Nest Farm	
<p>Rooks Nest Farm is located in the south of the borough on the northern edge of Finchampstead. The site is outside of the settlement boundary, and although it has no formal allocation for development in the local plan, the previous Exec report identified this site as one of the sites to be included in the application for DfE funding for a SEND school. The site is accessed via Barkham Ride.</p>	
Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both schools could be located on this site - this would result in significant cost savings on the infrastructure provision. - There are potential time and cost savings to the design and planning process by submitting the dual school proposal as a single application. - Option to create an educational hub. - Potential management and admin savings across the two schools (but only if both run by the same Trust). - Large site which could accommodate two schools as well as the land required for the Barkham Solar Farm and the Covid Memorial Wood. Developable land is 11.9ha, however it is envisaged both schools could be sited in Field 1 which is 4.69ha (see Appendix F). The remaining use of site is not determined however options could include woodland extension, solar farm extension, allotments or farmland. - The school entrance would not be in a residential area, so less conflict at busy times. - Opportunity exists to link the site to existing local bus service network by providing bus stops at the site frontage - The existing footway at Barkham Ride presents opportunity to connect the site to the existing pedestrian network without the need for costly and invasive highway works. - Local infrastructure allows access from all parts of the Borough, with good transport links from all directions including the A327. - Opportunity for development on remainder of the site which could offset the costs associated with the infrastructure and abnormals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of best and most versatile agricultural land – this will to be justified by the community benefit. - Potential capital receipt of circa £10m if the land allocated for the two SEND schools was sold for residential (based on £1m per acre assuming no abnormal ground conditions, encumbrances on title etc).

Winnersh Farm	
<p>The Winnersh Farm site is located on unused green space on the eastern boundary of Winnersh, adjacent to the M4 motorway. The site is outside of the settlement boundary and has no formal allocation for development in the local plan but was identified as a site for 250 new houses in the draft local plan update (2020). The Oak Tree SEND school is currently being developed on part of the site and is due to open in September 2023.</p>	
Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This site is currently promoted to the local plan process for inclusion as a housing site. The testing process for the Local Plan Update (LPU) has already judged the site to be suitable for development. - The highway authority previously raised no objection to significant scale residential development on the site. - Connection to sustainable modes of transport is via Reading Road and Winnersh rail station - Political support for SEND provision on this site been unanimously positive to date. - Option to create an educational hub with existing Wheatfield Primary School and SEND school. - Management of SEND schools could be shared across the whole site (executive head and shared admin staff), but only if both run by the same Trust. - Site access already in place and some surveys undertaken (reduction in costs, risk and time). - There remains potential for some development on the remainder of the site to off-set the infrastructure costs and abnormalities associated with the school. - this site may be easier/quicker to progress than Gray's Farm and Rooks Nest Farm as some of the infrastructure is in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The developable area of the site (1.89ha) only just meets the DfE size requirements to accommodate a SEND school, meaning less flexibility for any requirements for any additional indoor or outdoor areas, e.g. future extensions, sports facilities and car parking. - Site located close to motorway – design needs to take into account proximity to the motorway (noise and air quality impacts). The noise from the motorway may have an adverse effect on some of the pupils due to their additional needs. - A third school in close proximity will increase trip-rates at peak times to potentially unsustainable levels particularly as most will come by bus or car rather than walk. - Access to and from site restricted by left turn only from Woodward Close onto Reading Road which may result in traffic on surrounding local roads and the North Wokingham Distributor Road. - Planning constraints include a large, protected oak in the centre of the site, an ancient hedgerow to the northern boundary requiring a 5m buffer zone (reducing the developable site area to 1.89ha), ground contamination and a likelihood of bats. - Potential capital receipt of circa £5m if the land allocated for the SEND school was sold for residential (based on £1m per acre assuming no abnormal ground conditions, encumbrances on title etc). - The funding from the OPE and Land Release Fund will be withdrawn if a SEND school is constructed instead of residential or care home. - If the site is used for a SEND school use, then money spent to date on promotion and design of the site for residential use will be unable to be recouped.

Toutley East	
<p>The Toutley East site is located in Matthewsgreen, within the North Wokingham SDL and has recently secured planning permission for residential development and a care home. The care home programme is currently under review and subject to a decision on the care home the site is available immediately.</p>	
Opportunities	Constraints
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site available immediately subject to a decision on the care home. - Site sits within settlement limits as part of the North Wokingham Strategic Development Location. Principle of development on the site has already been established as acceptable. - Infrastructure costed and surveys already undertaken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site located close to motorway – design needs to take into account proximity to the motorway (noise and air quality impacts). The noise from the motorway may have an adverse effect on some of the pupils due to their additional needs. - Potential capital receipt of circa £5m if the land allocated for the SEND school was sold for residential (based on £1m per acre assuming no abnormal ground conditions, encumbrances on title etc) - Risk of planning delays are high due to the requirement of consultation with the Environment Agency.

Appendix F: Rooks Nest Farm



Appendix G: Technical Annex 2J

Technical Annex 2J provides the minimum requirements for sustainability. It responds to the demands of Climate Change and aims to mitigate the effects and recognise adaptations required in educational establishments for a changing environment. This document focuses on the path to reduce carbon emissions within the DfE estate to zero.



FE-OS_Annex_2J-Sustainability-A-C03.pptx

Appendix H: High Needs Block Budget

The HNB budget allocation is set by the DfE, as part of overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) funding received by the Council and has not kept pace with increasing costs. Consequently, there is a significant, and still increasing, deficit on the HNB. While the HNB deficit cannot currently be funded from the General Fund under statutory override regulations in place, longer term removal of that protection brings significant financial risk to the Council. The approved Safety Valve agreement in place between Wokingham Borough Council and the DfE sets out ambitious plans to deliver financial sustainability for the DSG and a balanced in year position by 2028/29. Delivery of increased specialist, local provision for our most vulnerable children and young people is key to the success of that programme, with successful milestones unlocking a total of £20m additional Safety Valve funding from the DfE.

Regular reporting on the Safety Valve Programme will include the benefits and outcomes of the 2 new schools proposed.

Managing growth

The Safety Valve programme will introduce a range of different interventions between 2023-29 designed to address increasing demand and the two new special free schools form a part of that package of measures. A number of these measures are designed to reduce demand for EHC Plans through earlier intervention and this will impact on demand for special school places; it is therefore essential that the viability of these school proposals are 'stress tested' within the 'mitigated' growth models factoring in the impact of Safety Valve.

Table D1 below sets out the projected growth in the number of WBC pupils with EHCPs allowing for the impact of the Safety Valve programme according to types of provision. This shows significant expansion of specialist provision (including but not limited to the new Free Schools) and a major reduction in the use of INMSS.

Table D1 – ‘Mitigated’ Projections for total number of WBC pupils with EHCPs by provision type							
Jan	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	% Increase 2018-23
Mainstream schools / academies	746	806	835	842	869	897	20%
Resourced Provision / SEN Units	60	65	84	85	88	92	53%
Maintained special schools / academies	326	379	424	462	534	608	87%
NMSS or independent schools	145	130	87	78	51	24	-83%
Hospital schools or Alternative Provision	61	66	73	74	77	80	31%
Post 16	361	390	404	408	424	441	22%
Other	97	103	102	78	65	50	-48%
Total number of EHCPs by placement type	1,796	1,939	2,009	2,027	2,108	2,192	
ANNUAL GROWTH		8%	4%	1%	4%	4%	

The tables below show how needs can be met, with the two new schools enabling the area to reduce reliance on INMSS provision (the figures below factor in non-WBC pupils and are therefore higher than those in Table D1 above).

Table D2 Planned Expansion of Wokingham’s Local Special School Provision:

Planned Places September	Actual 2022	Planned 2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Chiltern Way	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64	64
Addington School	262	276	303	303	303	303	303	303	303
Oak Tree	0	24	59	69	75	75	75	75	75
New Free School 1 (SEMH)					25	50	75	95	95
New Free School 2 (Cognitive Needs)					25	50	75	95	95
Special School Total	326	364	426	436	492	542	592	632	632

Table D3 – Projected Future EHCPs by Provision Type – Mitigated Scenario:

The planned expansion of existing special schools alongside the development of the two new Special Free Schools would enable Wokingham to achieve the following mix of provision in the coming years. The total number of EHCPs in the mitigated scenario is considerably lower than the figures set out the ‘unmitigated’ projections earlier in this report but even in this scenario there is no question that the new schools will be required.

Jan	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Mainstream schools or academies	299	315	360	492	641	746	806	835	842	876	911
Resourced Provision or SEN Units	47	54	58	60	64	60	65	84	85	88	92
Maintained special schools or special academies	260	264	275	283	326	326	379	424	437	484	533
NMSS or independent schools	68	72	81	89	86	145	130	87	78	51	24
Hospital schools or Alternative Provision	11	20	54	39	55	61	66	73	74	77	80
Post 16	163	166	207	216	235	361	390	404	408	424	441
Other	19	43	43	91	81	97	103	102	103	107	111
Total number of EHCPs by placement type	867	934	1,078	1,270	1,488	1,796	1,939	2,009	2,027	2,108	2,192

Financial benefit

The principles behind special school funding (and other commissioned places for children and young people) are that commissioned places at state sector schools receive 'Place' funding of £10K per child in a Special School provided by host local authorities and 'Top-Up' funding is paid for each child or young person on a school's roll (rates are variable depending on need and are funded by the Local Authority making the placement). An import / export adjustment ensures that local authority payments are balanced. Places in the Independent and Non-Maintained Special School (INMSS) sectors do not receive place funding – all costs are met from what would be Top-Up in the state sector. Reduced reliance on very high cost INMSS sector will help reduce pressure on the High Needs Block (HNB). Local provision will also reduce the burden on the Home to School Transport Budget.

319 Using projections based on current spending the likely impact of the new schools is set out in the table below. This is based on all the new school places taking the place of alternative high cost placements; given that all existing local specialist capacity is full this is not an unreasonable assumption. For the investment in the schools to be effective it is critical that cost per place (Place funding plus Top-Up) is kept below the level of the alternative placement options (particularly independent & non-maintained special schools (INMSS)) that would otherwise have to be used.

For this exercise a range of scenarios have been projected using different figures for the cost of alternative placements. The current average across all INMSS placements is £60k per child per year but this varies enormously; the average figure for ASD and SEMH placements in INMSS and Specialist Post 16 settings is in fact over £163k but this factors in a number of very high cost placements that are likely out of scope for the new schools, so the more conservative estimates of impact are applied here. Therefore a range of scenarios have been modelled using a range of alternative provision costs as follows:

Scenario 1 - Based on the assumed unit cost of those pupils placed out with the borough due to lack of capacity in WBC special schools of £60K p.a. for projected future placements, savings to the High Needs Block are projected of approx £4.7m p.a. by 2030-31, once both schools are full.

Scenario 2 - Based on unit costs of alternative provision of £50K p.a. for projected future placements, savings to the High Needs Block are projected of £2.8.m p.a. by 2030-31, once both schools are full.

Scenario 3 - Based on unit costs of alternative provision of £40K p.a. for projected future placements, savings to the High Needs Block are projected of £1m p.a. by 2030-31 once both schools are full.

2 FREE SCHOOLS - SCENARIOS FOR COSTS AND SAVINGS												
	YEAR OF IMPACT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10 YEAR TOTAL
		2026/27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	2034-35	2035-36	
A	Place Cost per place	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	10000	
B	No of Places - Both Schools	50	100	150	190	190	190	190	190	190	190	
C	Total Place Funding	£ 500,000	£ 1,000,000	£ 1,500,000	£ 1,900,000	£ 1,900,000	£ 1,900,000	£ 1,900,000	£ 1,900,000	£ 1,900,000	£ 1,900,000	
D	WBC Pupils on roll - School 1	25	50	75	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	
E	WBC Pupils on roll - School 2	25	50	75	95	95	95	95	95	95	95	
F	Top-Up Costs - School 1	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	£ 25,000	
G	Top Up Costs - School 2	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	£ 20,000	
H	TOTAL COST TO WBC (C +(d*f)+(e*g))	£ 1,625,000	£ 3,250,000	£ 4,875,000	£ 6,175,000	£ 6,175,000	£ 6,175,000	£ 6,175,000	£ 6,175,000	£ 6,175,000	£ 6,175,000	£ 52,975,000
I	Basic Entitlement Rate	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	-£ 4,000	
J	Basic Entitlement Total (B*H)	-£ 200,000	-£ 400,000	-£ 600,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	
K	Import Export Adjustment per place	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	-£ 6,000	
L	NON WBC Pupils on roll	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
M	IMPORT EXPORT ADJUSTMENT TOTAL (K*L)	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	£ -	
N	Effective Value of Import Export adjustment plus basic entitlement (J+M)	-£ 200,000	-£ 400,000	-£ 600,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	-£ 760,000	
O	TOTAL COST TO WBC (H+N)	£ 1,425,000	£ 2,850,000	£ 4,275,000	£ 5,415,000	£ 5,415,000	£ 5,415,000	£ 5,415,000	£ 5,415,000	£ 5,415,000	£ 5,415,000	£ 46,455,000
Scenario 1												
P	Comparator Place Unit Costs	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	£ 60,000	
Q	TOTAL COST OF COMPARATOR PROVISION	£ 3,000,000	£ 6,000,000	£ 9,000,000	£ 11,400,000	£ 11,400,000	£ 11,400,000	£ 11,400,000	£ 11,400,000	£ 11,400,000	£ 11,400,000	£ 97,800,000
R	SCENARIO 1 SAVING	£ 1,575,000	£ 3,150,000	£ 4,725,000	£ 5,985,000	£ 5,985,000	£ 5,985,000	£ 5,985,000	£ 5,985,000	£ 5,985,000	£ 5,985,000	£ 51,345,000
Scenario 2												
P	Comparator Place Unit Costs	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	£ 50,000	
Q	TOTAL COST OF COMPARATOR PROVISION	£ 2,500,000	£ 5,000,000	£ 7,500,000	£ 9,500,000	£ 9,500,000	£ 9,500,000	£ 9,500,000	£ 9,500,000	£ 9,500,000	£ 9,500,000	£ 81,500,000
R	SCENARIO 2 SAVING	£ 1,075,000	£ 2,150,000	£ 3,225,000	£ 4,085,000	£ 4,085,000	£ 4,085,000	£ 4,085,000	£ 4,085,000	£ 4,085,000	£ 4,085,000	£ 35,045,000
Scenario 3												
P	Comparator Place Unit Costs	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	£ 40,000	
Q	TOTAL COST OF COMPARATOR PROVISION	£ 2,000,000	£ 4,000,000	£ 6,000,000	£ 7,600,000	£ 7,600,000	£ 7,600,000	£ 7,600,000	£ 7,600,000	£ 7,600,000	£ 7,600,000	£ 65,200,000
R	SCENARIO 3 SAVING	£ 575,000	£ 1,150,000	£ 1,725,000	£ 2,185,000	£ 2,185,000	£ 2,185,000	£ 2,185,000	£ 2,185,000	£ 2,185,000	£ 2,185,000	£ 18,745,000

To have a significant impact on the overall HNB spend, it is essential that the new Free Schools are able to cater for pupils who would otherwise be placed in an INMSS setting. A key risk is that the school does not become the school of choice and that children and young people who should be placed there, in fact continue to be placed at Independent Special Schools (with the agreement of the Local Authority or through Tribunal decisions); the school needs to be well promoted to the local community of parents of children with SEND. For the financial impact to be effective depends on (a) the Trust creating a school that does offer flexible and high-quality places that are popular and do meet needs and (b) robust (and well resourced) processes to resist unnecessary high cost placements.

Home to school transport spend will also be reduced. On the basis of the average cost of transporting a child out of the borough is in the order of £16k, but only £9K within the borough, the potential savings per year would be:

SEN TRANSPORT SAVINGS	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial Year	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	Projected over 5 years
WBC Pupils on roll - School 1	25	50	75	95	95	
WBC Pupils on roll - School 2	25	50	75	95	95	
TOTAL PUPIL Nos.	50	100	150	190	190	
Average Transport Cost out of Borough	£16,000	£16,000	£16,000	£16,000	£16,000	
Average Transport Cost In Borough	£9,300	£9,300	£9,300	£9,300	£9,300	
Full Year Revenue Saving to General Fund per pupil	£6,700	£6,700	£6,700	£6,700	£6,700	
TOTAL TRANSPORT SAVING	£195,000	£530,000	£865,000	£1,161,000	£1,273,000	£4,024,000

* Number on roll from September each year therefore saving calculated as part year impact in each financial year until school(s) full

Current and Future needs

Growth in the number of children and young people with EHCPs has accelerated over the period 2018 to 2023 with the total numbers more than doubling and there has been a 21% increase in the last year alone.

	Jan	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Increase 2018-23
Total number of EHCPs		867	934	1078	1270	1488	1796	107%
Annual Growth			8%	15%	18%	17%	21%	

There has been significant growth in comparator areas but not at the pace of Wokingham's increases – the table below sets out the change between 2018-22 (2023 figures are not yet available for other areas)

	Wokingham	South East	England	Statistical Neighbours
Total across all ages	14.5%	11.1%	10.3%	12.5%

Within this overall growth, WBC's increasing number of EHCPs for particular categories of need are particularly stark with SLCN, SEMH, and ASD rising particularly quickly between 2018-23 with increases of 201%, 155% and 106% respectively (there have been large increases in other needs but these have lower volumes, so the growth is less significant).

	Jan	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Increase 2018-23
Autistic Spectrum Disorder		343	374	442	515	583	706	106%
Social, Emotional and Mental Health		156	170	215	253	322	398	155%
Speech, Language and Communications needs		61	69	80	116	157	184	201%
Moderate Learning Difficulty		96	91	97	120	135	166	73%
Severe Learning Difficulty		77	89	96	99	94	105	37%
Physical Disability		50	50	53	58	61	75	50%
Other Difficulty/Disability		4	4	6	14	42	49	1118%

Table A3 - Total number of EHCPs by primary need								
	Jan	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Increase 2018-23
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty		33	35	38	37	35	38	15%
Hearing Impairment		23	26	26	29	27	34	47%
Specific Learning Difficulty		20	21	20	19	23	29	45%
Visual Impairment		2	3	3	8	7	8	315%
Multi- Sensory Impairment		2	2	2	2	2	3	34%
Total number of EHCPs		867	934	1078	1270	1488	1796	107%

It is notable that these significant increases in volumes of pupils with EHCPs have NOT seen corresponding expansion in local state-funded specialist provision (special schools or resourced SEN provision) – see Table A4 below. The increasing volumes of pupils with EHCPs have largely been catered for within mainstream schools and increasingly in independent and non-maintained special schools. Is it increasing use of this latter category or provision that is particularly driving the increasing spending patterns.

Table A4 - Total number of EHCPs by provision type								
	Jan	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Increase 2018-23
Mainstream schools / academies		299	315	360	492	641	746	149%
Resourced Provision / SEN Units		47	54	58	60	64	60	28%
Maintained special schools / academies		260	264	275	283	326	326	25%
NMSS or independent schools		68	72	81	89	86	145	113%
Hospital schools or Alternative Provision		11	20	54	39	55	61	455%
Post 16		163	166	207	216	235	361	121%
Other		19	43	43	91	81	97	411%
Total number of EHCPs by placement type		867	934	1078	1270	1488	1796	
			8%	15%	18%	17%	21%	

Source data: 2018 to 2022 – SEND2 returns. 2023 SEND2 data set, prior to submission date still subject to minor amendments.¹

¹ [Special educational needs in England: January 2022 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england-january-2022)

Comprehensive work has been carried out projecting growth in Wokingham's number of EHC Plans in the coming years as part of the Safety Valve programme. These projections modelled several potential scenarios based on historical trends, benchmarking with regional and statistical neighbours and local intelligence. These Projections do factor in ONS population projections but not Local Plan modelling of increased population in specific localities.

The projections below are 'unmitigated' – that is they assume previous trends continue without additional intervention such as the new SEN Free Schools. The forecasting approach used provides confidence intervals – lower, medium, and upper – which allows for the inherent uncertainty in any modelling and provide a range of likely outcomes.

With this rate of increase and no new provision to meet needs, the financial impact on the local area would be severe and would lead to a catastrophic financial deficit in the High Needs Block of £96.6m by the end of 2028/29 with around 2,800 EHCPs. Projected growth is particularly focused on children and young people with EHCPs for ASD and SEMH, with corresponding continuing pressures on their HNB budgets.

Agenda Item 14.

TITLE	St Crispin's Leisure Centre Consultation
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Environment, Sport and Leisure - Ian Shenton

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

Executive approval for a public consultation on the future use of St Crispin's Leisure Centre.

RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation must be clear and specific and state exactly what the decision is and must be directly supported / referable to the Background section. Format of recommendation is as follows.

That the Executive:

1. Approve a public consultation on the future of St Crispin's Leisure Centre, including an option of closing the leisure centre, and considering all potential options for the future use of the site. Note that a report will be brought back to Executive following the consultation recommending the next steps.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive approval is required for a public consultation to take place over the future use of St Crispin's Leisure Centre.

The leisure centre has seen a decline in numbers since re-opening post pandemic particularly in our over 60s demographic and the opening of Wokingham Leisure Centre has also had an impact on member use resulting in a request to review the use of the centre for the future including potential alternative uses as detailed below.

As part of the review a full public consultation is required to specifically seek views on the potential closure of the centre and the impact that could have on users and the wider community. It will also consider potential future uses of the site if the decision is made to repurpose the site.

A full and open consultation requires that potential options are considered, and the potential benefits and impacts set out for public consideration.

It is proposed that a consultation will take place from July until the end of August 2023 for a period of 8 weeks, both in person and face to face, through a series of planned dates through various communication channels. This will include engagement with current centre users and members as well as local residents and other stakeholders.

As part of the review, post consultation all considerations will be evaluated and reviewed for potential future proposals.

BACKGROUND

The council established its community vision in 2020 with the ambition for Wokingham Borough to be a great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business. Linked to this overarching vision, physical activity and sports play a fundamental role in supporting the physical and emotional well-being of the Borough's people and communities as is also explicitly recognised in the Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

There has been significant investment within indoor and outdoor Leisure provisions across the Borough totally £52.9M supporting residents' health and wellbeing and access to facilities.

Furthermore, the very significant health benefits of physical activity are universal, from the very young to the elderly - helping to raise achievement in schools, enabling self-care for those with long-term conditions and helping to prevent mental and physical illness.

The existing Sports and Leisure service is progressing through a remodelling review and that includes setting out some conditions of how the council will repurpose its service in the future to a more active well-being service – not just a focus on leisure centres but a more active well-being service cited in the community.

This requires a shift into community activity with a clear focus on health intervention and prevention. Resources will be redirected from built facilities into a future model that helps address more health inequalities across the borough.

Following the opening of the new Wokingham Leisure Centre and a review of usage post pandemic, it has been recognised that member numbers are decreasing.

It has been proposed that a full review is undertaken to determine the future of the centre, this will include considering potential alternative uses for the site and land to make the best financial and community use of this town centre asset.

As part of a review a public consultation is proposed to take place, this will specifically seek views on the potential closure of the centre and the impact that could have on users and the wider community with an objective to how to mitigate potential impacts on specific groups and users.

Key stakeholders:

- St Crispin's Leisure Centre members.
- Clubs and other organisations who have regular bookings.
- Astro turf pitch users.
- Squash league / club members.

- St Crispin’s School (shared user of site and access)
- Residents and businesses in close proximity to the centre.
- Wescott and Westende schools (after school and breakfast clubs).
- SHINE members using St Crispin’s Leisure Centre.
- Wokingham town residents (Norreys, Wescott, Emmbrook and Evendons wards).
- Other stakeholders as identified through the consultation and Equalities Impact Assessment.

Future options for the use of the centre and mitigations will be shared as part of the consultation, informing future proposed decisions.

BUSINESS CASE

A review has taken place looking at usage numbers pre and post pandemic, as shown below there has been a decrease in all areas of use within the centre. It is also recognised that with the opening of Wokingham Leisure Centre we have seen members relocate to the new centre.

Activity	Feb 20	Feb 23
Fitness Members	1,260	967
Exercise Classes	850	785
Junior Exercises	46	43

OPTIONS

Officers have undertaken a high-level options appraisal for the site. A summary of this review is below.

Option	Opportunity	Constraints
Retain site for the use of the Leisure Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Retains leisure facilities for local residents. * WBC manages and maintains external envelope. Currently in good condition and expected to last for next 20yrs. * Would allow use of leisure centre as polling station to continue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Use of facilities have declined since Covid and the opening of Carnival Leisure Centre. *St Crispin’s School has raised safety concerns over the shared vehicle access. *St Crispin’s School has raised safeguarding concerns over shared use of public parking and facilities located within the school grounds.
Closure and transfer land to St Crispin’s School (The Circle Trust)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Transfer of land would enable the school to increase pupil yearly intake and would support the provision of much needed additional secondary school places in the Borough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Loss of WBC asset with potential for other use or capital receipt. *Loss of leisure facility for local residents.

	<p>*Provides additional car parking for the school.</p> <p>*Protects the school's green space, including playing fields (as to expand would require development on existing playing fields).</p> <p>*Additional accommodation - particularly changing rooms and smaller activity rooms</p> <p>*Secure environment for students.</p> <p>*New sports hall budget would not be required.</p> <p>*WBC's liability for the building will end when it is transferred to The Circle Trust.</p> <p>*Transfer would support provision of needed additional school places in the borough.</p> <p>* Would allow use of leisure centre as polling station to continue.</p>	<p>*Closure of the Leisure Centre would result in there being no publicly owned squash courts in the Borough.</p> <p>*Planning application required - special justification will need to be demonstrated for the loss of the community facility.</p>
Use for other service	<p>* Potential for use to provide SEND Resource Unit.</p> <p>*Potential to be used as a Community Hub space.</p> <p>*Potential for use by another service not identified.</p> <p>* Would allow use of leisure centre as polling station to continue.</p>	<p>*Site size not appropriate for Care Home.</p> <p>*St Crispin's School has existing right of use of facilities.</p> <p>*Planning application - change of use required.</p> <p>*Existing safety and safeguarding concerns over the shared use of the site and the shared vehicular access would continue.</p>
Disposal of site with or without planning for residential development	<p>* Potential for small development.</p> <p>*Site in good location, close to local amenities, schools and transport links.</p> <p>*Potential for Keyworker Housing.</p>	<p>*Existing safety concerns and safeguarding concerns over the shared use of the site and the shared vehicular access would continue.</p> <p>* Formation of new access from London Road may prove difficult for highway safety reasons and impact on veteran trees.</p>

		<p>*St Crispin's School has existing right of use of facilities for sports and examinations.</p> <p>* Planning application required - special justification will need to be demonstrated for the loss of the community facility.</p> <p>*Site would need to be promoted in LPU.</p> <p>*Capital budget required for planning application.</p> <p>* Current use of leisure centre as polling station would not be able to continue.</p>
Demolish the buildings and mothball site until land values increase and/or a service need identified	*Site retained by WBC for future use or disposal for capital receipt.	<p>*St Crispin's School has existing right of use of facilities for sports and exams.</p> <p>* Initial capital outlay would be required for demolition and long-term security costs while the site is vacant.</p> <p>* Current use of leisure centre as polling station would not be able to continue</p>

Should the centre not be retained as a leisure facility there are alternative provisions for residents within the Borough and neighbouring authorities;

- Wokingham Leisure Centre @Carnival Hub which is in close proximity offering all leisure provisions.
- Wellington Health and Fitness Club – Leisure and squash provisions.
- Berkshire County Sports Club - Offering squash provision.
- Bracknell Leisure Centre – Leisure and squash provisions.
- University of Reading Squash Club - Squash provision.

TIMESCALES

If the recommendation to launch a public consultation is approved, it is proposed to carry out an 8-week consultation to run until August 23.

This would allow the consultation to run partly during the school holiday and partly in term-time, which would be beneficial as leisure centre usage varies between school holiday and non-school holiday periods and so, by covering both, a wider range of users will access the facility during the consultation.

This consultation would be widely publicised and accessible, shared across all social media platforms, promoted in the councils email newsletters and the local media. Drop-in events will be held at the leisure centre to provide opportunities to discuss options with council staff.

Potentially affected groups will be engaged directly during the consultation to ensure specific issues can be raised and fully considered.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	nil		

Other Financial Information

None at this stage.

Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s)

Potential and contractual and change of use implications.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Full public consultation with all key stakeholders over a 8 week period online/face to face and targeted user group sessions.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Yes

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Not applicable at this stage (consultation).

Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session

Not applicable

List of Background Papers

Contact Susan Bentley/Peter Kilkenny

Telephone 07590993510

Service Resource and Assets

Email susan.bentley@wokingham.gov.uk
Peter.kilkenny@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

TITLE	Procurement strategy for the purchase and distribution of wheeled bins in the borough
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Place and Growth – Giorgio Framalico
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Environment and Leisure - Cllr Ian Shenton

PURPOSE OF REPORT

The report sets out how the Council intends to procure and distribute wheeled bins to properties in the borough from mid-2024. Approval to change the way waste and recycling is collected in the future was given by the Executive on 21 March 2023. This report specifically focuses on the decision to procure wheeled bins and not to revisit the 21 March approval.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- i) Approve the proposed procurement strategy of proceeding to 'open tender' to purchase and distribute wheeled bins in the borough.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 21 March 2023, a decision was approved to change the way waste and recycling is collected in the future including the introduction of wheeled bins. This paper is seeking the Executive's approval to the approach to procure the purchase and distribution of wheeled bins.

In April 2023, the attached procurement strategy was approved by the Procurement Board and clearly outlines the options appraisal, objectives, finances and reasoning for the preferred procurement route.

This report solely sets out the proposal to procure and distribute wheeled bins via an 'open tender' process. This is the most appropriate procurement option to ensure the Council obtains value for money, as there is a higher level of competition between suppliers and will result in more competitive bids being submitted. The opportunity is also advertised to a wider audience in order to attract more suppliers in the market to submit a tender for the work.

Any delay to this procurement decision would have financial implications for the Council of c.£35k to c.£70k given that the cost of plastic continues to rise. In addition, the Council is aware that due to new responsibilities on local authorities set out in the Environment Bill, numerous other local authorities are also seeking to containerise waste and are also embarking on the process of bin purchase. This increase in demand is likely to affect supply and has the potential to delay operational delivery of the waste collection change.

BACKGROUND

In March 2023, the Executive approved a report to change the way waste and recycling is collected in the borough including the introduction of wheeled bins. The approval included the expenditure of £1.50m on the purchase and distribution of wheeled bins to properties in the borough.

In April 2023, Procurement Board (an internal senior officer group purposed with the review and officer approval of procurement strategies for high value goods and services) approved the attached strategy to purchase and subsequently distribute wheeled bins across the borough, the process of which will begin shortly, with distribution being completed by summer 2024.

Analysis of Issues

As part of the decision to change the waste collection service, it was agreed that residents will be provided with wheeled bins for storage of residual waste. The process of procuring the wheeled bins must begin shortly in order for the new waste changes to go live in summer 2024.

There are a number of options that have been considered, which have been carefully assessed to ensure the best value for money for the borough. In light of this, the 'open tender' procedure has been put forward as the most suitable procurement approach for the Council to take. Further details are outlined in Appendix 1.

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 2023/24 (Year 1)	Cost of £1.50m for purchase a delivery of wheeled bins (Capital)	Proposal to fund all costs including implementation costs and wheeled bins from the Waste Equalisation Fund.	Capital
Following Financial Year 2024/25 (Year 2)	(£0.150m) 'repayment'		Revenue

Following Financial Year 2025/26 (Year 3)	(£0.150m) 'repayment'		Revenue
---	-----------------------	--	---------

The funding of £1.50m for the purchase of wheeled bins and associated distribution to properties in 2023/24 was approved in March 2023. It has also been agreed to utilise funds from the existing waste equalisation fund to finance the purchase of the wheeled bins.

The 'repayment' of the £1.50m will take place over a 13-year basis at £150k per annum.

Other Financial Information
The £1.5m is part of an overall £1.96m total implementation cost identified in the report to Executive on 21 March 2023 and to be funded from identified reserves.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
Stakeholder consultation and consideration has been fully assessed through the approved March 2023 report.

Public Sector Equality Duty
An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and contained within the March 2023 report.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible through leading by example as well as by encouragement. This proposal will help reduce carbon and single use plastic and support the goal of the Borough reaching carbon neutral by 2030.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
No Part 2

List of Background Papers
Appendix 1: Wheeled Bin Procurement Strategy

Contact Richard Bisset	Service Place and Growth
Telephone 0118 9746000	Email richard.bisset@wokingham.gov.uk

Appendix 1: Procurement Strategy:



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

PROCUREMENT STRATEGY/OPTIONS ANALYSIS

In accordance with the Procurement and Contracts Rules and Procedures (PCRP) (see section 3.1.1): a formal procurement strategy is required for any procurement with a total value above £50,000. The level of approval required for the procurement strategy depends on the type of procurement and total ascertainable value of the contract, as indicated in the table below. Procurement Strategies, requiring Level 2 and 3 approvals, are also subject to review by Procurement Strategic Board (SPB).

State “YES” in the applicable box at either Level 1, Level 2 or Level 3:

1. Level of Approval

Type of Procurement	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3	
	Assistant Director & Director Approval		Executive Approval (NOTE: subject to Procurement Strategic Board Review)		Full Council Approval (NOTE: subject to Procurement Strategic Board Review)	
Goods and Services	£50k – £500k		> £500k	X	Annual Value >£5m or TAV >£25m (if capital >£15m)	
Schedule 3 Services	£50k – £663,540 (VAT inclusive)		> £663,540 (VAT inclusive)			
Works	£50k – £5,336,937 (VAT inclusive)		> £5,336,937 (VAT inclusive)			

2. Project Information

Officer completing this form – name, position and department / Service area	Richard Bisset, Head of Public Realm, Environment and Safety
Project / Contract Title	Introduction of Wheeled Bins (Goods)
Project / Contract Description	Currently general waste is collected via blue bags but as part of a public consultation exercise (Oct – Dec 2022) feedback has shown that the use of wheeled bins would be acceptable to residents. In March 2023, the Council’s Executive approved the proposed change to the waste collection service from 2024. The approval includes the introduction of wheeled bins for the containment of refuse. Around

	67,000 black wheeled bins (mostly 180 litre but some 240 litre and 140 litre) are required to be purchased and then delivered to residents' homes.
Expected Start Date & Duration	The expected start date for wheeled bin procurement (July 2023) will take place after Executive approval in June 2023. It is proposed that the bins are delivered in the Summer of 2024.
Any Extension/s Allowed	No
Total Annual Value	c. £1.5m (c.£1.250m for purchase of bins and c.£250k for delivery of bins to properties). One off cost.
Total Ascertainable Value <i>(proposed contract term, including any allowed extensions x annual value)</i>	c. £1.5m
Procurement Advice <i>This section is to be completed by Procurement</i> <i>Summary of the advice, including the type of procedure, and if the PS is for setting up of DPS or framework agreement. Attached / append any written advice previously provided, if appropriate.</i>	The recommendation is to procure this contract via Open competitive process which is the recommended route by procurement as is the best route to achieve competition in the market and potential savings, especially due to the volume of bins we require to purchase. By not using the Framework we will also not have to pay the 1% rebate that ESPO charge and now that the timelines allow for us to procure competitively, this is the recommended route.
If procurement is for software, specify outcome of your consultation with IMT and/or Business Change	N/A
Previous Contract Duration	N/A
Previous Contract Value	N/A
Sign off <i>To be completed by Procurement – name and signature of the Procurement Specialist providing the advice</i>	Abi Culton – Senior Procurement Specialist
Date <i>To be completed by Procurement – date signed off by Procurement</i>	14.04.2023

Finance Advice <i>This section is to be completed by Finance</i> <i>Confirm budget availability and add any comments relevant to the budget.</i>	There is £1.5m available for the purchase of wheeled bins which is funded from the Waste Equalisation Fund.
---	---

<p><i>In circumstances, where there is more budget allocated than required for each procurement outcome:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Impact on revenue budgets will be discussed with Finance BP</i> • <i>Capital provision may be reduced in line with the procurement outcome</i> 	
<p>Source of Funding <i>(revenue/capital or specified other)</i></p>	Waste Equalisation Fund – Approved via Executive in March 2023
<p>Sign off <i>To be completed by Finance – name and signature of the Finance Team providing the advice</i></p>	Asher Stanford – Finance Business Partner
<p>Date <i>To be completed by Finance – date signed off by Finance</i></p>	18/04/23

3. Project Justification

Link to Service or Corporate Objectives

There are a number of objectives that this proposal contributes to including:

Wokingham Borough Corporate Delivery Plan 2020 – 2024:

A Clean and Green Borough

We will work with our partners to:

- Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future.
- Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity.

What we will do:

- Deliver against our Climate Emergency Action Plan and ensure becoming carbon neutral is given due weight through all our strategies and decision making

What will success look like:

- Residents change their behaviours to do more to tackle climate change and the Council is seen as setting a positive example.
- The Borough is recognised as a flagship authority in addressing the causes and impacts of climate change.
- Increased recycling and a reduction in general waste produced by each household.

Climate Emergency Plan 2020

Furthermore, the Climate Emergency Plan 2020 stipulates that the utilisation of single use plastic needs to be reduced across all Council activities and an action plan developed.

Overall Wokingham Borough Council's recycling performance is good with over 50% recycled, however over 55% of the blue bag contains material that could be recycled or reused via the kerbside recycling schemes or Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC's). Coupled with the financial elements there is a real need now to capture as much recycling as possible in order to drive forward progress with the climate change action plan.

Borough wide Surveys/ Public Consultation results

In 2021 and 2022 a borough wide waste management surveys were carried out to understand what the most important factors are to residents, acceptability of changing the collection service and introduction of wheeled bins for refuse. The results are as follows:

Overwhelmingly residents stated that environmental concerns were highest to address.

- 86% of respondents are willing to recycle more.
- 54% of respondents felt that environmental benefits are most important.

From October 2022 to December 2022, a more detailed second public consultation was undertaken and over 9,000 responses were received which showed:

- 74% were neutral, accepted or liked the proposed change
- 78% were neutral, accepted or liked wheeled bins for refuse

Therefore, there is now an expectation that the Council enacts this requirement and makes changes to services.

A full Equality Impact Assessment for the introduction and use of wheeled bins has been undertaken in conjunction with the Equality Team.

- **Project Specific Objectives, Appraisal of Options and Project Timetable**

Project Specific Objectives:

The introduction of wheeled bins for refuse will realise a number of benefits which is tied into the new collection service including:

- Generate a saving of more than £0.50m in 2024/25, rising to c.£1.05m to £1.50m from 2025/26
- Increasing the boroughs recycling rate by 10%
- Saving 2,500t of carbon each year

In addition, the following benefits will be realised by introducing wheeled bins:

Reduction in street cleansing complaints

Currently waste is collected in blue bags that are delivered to all households on an annual basis. The use of blue bags does lead to an increase of litter from animal attacks when they are presented by residents and this causes an environmental and visual impact to the local area. Containment within a wheeled bin would significantly reduce this problem and improve the street scene therefore reducing complaints. There is a strong desire by respondents to the 2022 public consultation for wheeled bins for the containment of rubbish with over 78% neutral or in favour of wheeled bins.

Reduction in the amount of general waste

The use of wheeled bins also reduces the amount of rubbish collected. Currently residents can purchase more blue bags if they run out of their annual supply and there is no limit in place as to how many blue bags can be put out for collection. The containment of refuse within a wheeled bin, with the lid shut, is a definitive answer and it is tested method to minimise waste whilst maximising recycling.

Health and Safety

From a safety perspective, wheeled bins will reduce the instances of strikes and cuts to the collection operatives. Although injuries are infrequent, the occurrence of sharp objects such as knives/ broken glass poses a real danger. In 2022 an operative was taken to hospital following a deep laceration to the lower leg caused by a broken vase. Although the operative was wearing the correct PPE, the glass penetrated the operatives leg so deeply that he required eleven stitches and four days off work. Containment of this material within a wheeled bin would reduce these instances occurring and make a safer working environment.

Timescales:

The expected timescales are as follow:

Activity	Date
Approval from Executive to proceed with the collection change and introduction of wheeled bins	21 March 2023
Approval from Procurement Board for the purchase of wheeled bins	27 April 2023
Approval from Executive for the purchase of wheeled bins	29 June 2023
Procurement tender	July - September 2023
Contract Awarded	September 2023
Mobilisation	Autumn 2023 – Summer 2024
Bins are delivered and rolled out to resident's properties	Summer 2024
Go live with wheeled bin collections	Summer 2024

Appraisal of Options

Option 1 – Do not proceed with procurement of these goods – rejected

Benefits / Positives	Risks / Negatives / Disadvantages
	Failure to procure bins would not allow the effective and efficient collection of rubbish as set out in the waste strategy.

Option 2 – Run an open competitive tender – recommended

Benefits / Positives	Risks / Negatives / Disadvantages
The best option for receiving value for money as there is a higher level of competition between suppliers, which may result in more competitive bids being submitted and the opportunity is advertised more widely that may attract more suppliers in the market to submit a tender for the work	The process will take slightly longer to complete due to being over the GPA threshold and having to be advertised internationally – but timelines now allow for us to run this process

The contract would be under WBC's terms and conditions	
WBC would have full control of the procurement activity	
No fee is required to be paid, as there is with frameworks	
The procurement will be relatively simple as if for the procurement of goods and can be evaluated 100% on price	

Option 3 – Use a corporate contract already available – Veolia waste management collection – rejected

Benefits / Positives	Risks / Negatives / Disadvantages
	Looked at the option of procuring the bins directly through Veolia who currently manage the waste collections. But wheeled bins are not included within the original contract so would require to be a variation of the contract and due to the value of the bins this variation is unable to be made via the contract as would be in breach of the procurement regulations, therefore this option has been rejected.

Option 4 – Call-off from a third-party framework agreement ([ESPO Framework](#)) – rejected

Benefits / Positives	Risks / Negatives / Disadvantages
Maximum rates already agreed and by running a call off from the Framework will encourage further competition amongst the suppliers so further price reductions may be achieved	Must use ESPO agreements terms and conditions rather than WBC's standard terms and conditions
Would reduce the time and costs involved with the procurement as the requirement has already been competitively tendered against set requirements	ESPO collect a 1% retro rebate from the suppliers directly, so the costs quoted will be higher to include this charge
The framework is compliant with procurement legislation	

Recommended option – Option 2 – Run an open competitive tender

Reasoning: Running an open competitive tender is our best option for receiving value for money. Now that the wheeled bins are not required until May 2024, we have time to procure the bins via a competitive process. The ESPO framework would charge 1% rebate to the suppliers on the framework and this fee would not be in place if the process is run ourselves. Also the evaluation process for this tender would be very straightforward as we can evaluate 100% on price if specified correctly in the specification.

Cost Benefit Analysis

The cost of the project amounts to £1.5m which is divided into:

- Cost of wheeled bins – c.£1.25m - The estimated cost for the wheeled bins is £18 per unit.
- Cost of delivery to properties – c.£250k - The estimated cost for delivery is £4 per property.

These costs have been estimated by carrying out some market research looking at the prices per bin on a framework and speaking with suppliers directly.

It has been calculated that the collection change project will realise annual savings in the region of:

- £0.50m in 2024/25, rising to c.£1.05m to £1.50m from 2025/26

The overall business case has been approved through both Overview & Scrutiny and Executive in March 2023.

Contract Management

The Contract will be overseen by Wokingham Borough Council's Waste Section which will be divided into:

- Procurement and delivery of wheeled bin to Wokingham Borough Council
- Distribution of wheeled bins to properties in the borough

There will be contracts in place for both these parts which will be overseen by the Waste Collection and Disposal Manager. The contract will include clauses for late/missed delivery.

The bins will be distributed to properties during the summer ready for 'go live' in summer 2024.

TITLE	Term Maintenance Contracts For Reactive & Planned Mechanical Works
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 th June 2023
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Business and Economic Development- Clive Jones

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report to is to invite the Executive to approve the commencement of a tender process to appoint a mechanical term maintenance contractor.

The Procurement Business Case needs to be approved by the Executive as the values of the works (services contract) are estimated to exceed the values of work as detailed in section 13 of the constitution requiring Executive approval (services contract over £500K in value).

The contract value is £1.75M over the total duration (Total Ascertainable Value). This value is for a 3 year initial term with 4x12month extensions (£250k per annum).

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive.

- 1) Approves the undertaking of a competitive tender process for a new term maintenance contract(s) for Reactive and Planned Mechanical Works;
- 2) Delegates authority to the Director of Resources and Assets to implement the recommended procurement approach.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Wokingham Borough Council has a legal requirement to maintain its property portfolio in a safe and serviceable condition. This includes a total of 142 sites, consisting of Corporate Sites (including Shute End), Optalis Sites (including Suffolk Lodge), Leisure Centre Buildings and commercial buildings. In addition Operational Property provide maintenance and statutory compliance for schools under a traded service agreement, to both Academy School and Maintained Schools.

The Council has an existing contract with a third party to deliver reactive and planned mechanical maintenance services. This existing contract will terminate 31st July 2023.

Having considered the options, it is recommended to Executive to undertake a competitive tendering process for a new term contractor for reactive and planned

mechanical works. The contract will be for an initial 3-year term, with the provision of 4 extensions (+1+1+1+1years) with the commencement date of the 1st August 2023.

The contract value is £1.75M over the total duration (Total Ascertainable Value). This value is for a 3 year initial term with 4x12month extensions (£250k per annum).

Executive approval for this procurement is required due to the value of the contract works (above £500,000 in value).

BACKGROUND

Wokingham Borough Council has an obligation under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure a safe workplace for staff and members of the public accessing our properties. The properties managed by Operational Property include a total of 142 Sites, consisting of Corporate Sites (including Shute End), Optalis Sites (including Suffolk Lodge), Leisure Centre Buildings, commercial buildings and maintained and academy schools.

The Council's property department co-ordinates reactive repairs, statutory compliance inspections and planned projects for the council. The Council has used term maintenance contractors since 1998 to carry out reactive and statutory servicing. Operational Property has chosen this delivery model to use specialist contractors due to the nature of the works as it reduces the overall overhead costs.

BUSINESS CASE

Provide concise information setting out:

- The business case for the decision including evidence of need;
- Any options that have or are being considered;
- What the risks associated with the decision are;
- Any timescales associated with the decision;
- What the expected outcomes are.

The current term maintenance contract terminates on 31 July 2023 and a new contract is required to enable the Council to deliver this statutory service.

A number of procurement options were considered for this contract. A summary of these options are set out below, with further detail included in Procurement Strategy Options Appraisal. :

Option 1 – Do not proceed with procurement of this service / works – Rejected.

If this service is not provided the council will be at risk of closing services and a high health and safety risk to staff and members of the public. This will eventually lead to a reduction in utilisation of property assets.

Option 2 – Run competitive tender – recommended.

Due to education properties being part of the portfolio, there is requirement for specific suppliers to manage safeguarding and health safety implications whilst working within school environment. A competitive tendering process also offers the overall better value for money by testing the market.

Option 3 – Combine with existing Tenant Services contract – Rejected.

There are significantly different skill and knowledge requirement for commercial premises, including school settings, as opposed to maintenance of residential properties (through Tenant Services). As such it is not deemed that the same contractor could perform both functions.

Option 4 – Third party framework agreement or a Dynamic Purchasing System – Rejected

The management costs of frameworks are considered prohibitive and recharging to end customers was problematic. The framework agreements are not considered sufficiently flexible for a small local authority.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that we proceed with a Competitive Tender process, with the intention to appoint one specialist Mechanical Term Maintenance contractor.

In order to align with the potential implementation of The Schools Bill White Paper we are planning to tender a 3-year initial term contract with the provision of 4 extensions (+1+1+1+1years) with the commencement date of the 1st August 2023.

It is recommended that authority is delegated to the Director of Resources and Assets to implement the recommended procurement approach.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	Yes	Revenue

Other Financial Information

State clearly and concisely any other financial implications which are not included in the table above eg the impact on budgets if the decision is not approved. If no implications state 'none'

The contract provides no formal contract value commitment and is purely based on reactive demand. High value replacement of equipment and installation are subject to specific capital funding, out of scope of this contract. The costs associated within this contract have existing approved budgets and re-tendering of this contract is within the existing approved budgets,

If the procurement of this contract was not approved, there would be longer-term budget pressures due to longer-term maintenance requirements on buildings that were not being addressed efficiently and in the shorter term.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation
None

Public Sector Equality Duty
No negative impact upon persons with protected characteristics identified.

Climate Emergency – <i>This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030</i>
This contract will allow building to be efficiently maintained aligning with the council energy policy.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
The procurement strategy contains exempt information by virtue of paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the LGA Act 1972 (as amended)

List of Background Papers
Procurement Strategy Options Appraisal

Contact Chris Morland, Paul Simmons	Service Commercial Property
Telephone	Email chris.morland@wokingham.gov.uk, paul.simmons@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

TITLE	Toutley East Development - Residential Delivery Model
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday 29 th June
WARD	Emmbrook
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Leader of the Council

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Toutley East Development and business case for the delivery of the residential element of the development, as required by the Executive decision of July 2022.

The report identifies that the current delivery model for the care home no longer presents value for money to the Council and its residents and the Executive is therefore requested to pause the delivery of the care home at the Toutley East site, whilst alternative models of delivery for the care home are considered.

In terms of the residential delivery the Executive is advised that further market testing will be undertaken on the Disposal and Joint Venture delivery models to ascertain value for money and risk exposure. Whilst the Cost Plus and Direct Delivery models provide greatest potential for profit, it is not intended to pursue these models as they will significantly increase the Council's exposure to debt and associated risk during a time of market volatility. Further market testing will also be undertaken to ascertain the costs and values of energy efficient residential development in excess of current policy and building regulations, up to and including Net Zero Carbon development.

Section 12.1.5.9 of the Constitution requires that the disposal of land or buildings of a higher value than £150,000 are subject to the approval of Executive. The Toutley East site has a value higher than £150,000.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) Agrees to the cessation of the construction of a care home as part of the Toutley East strategic masterplan as previously approved, whilst the viability of alternative delivery models for the care home are explored.
- 2) Approves the development of the land for residential including the provisions for affordable housing and Community Infrastructure Levy as set out in this report
- 3) Notes that further market testing will be undertaken on the costs and values of energy efficient residential development in excess of current policy and building regulations, up to and including Net Zero Carbon design, to input into the delivery model decision.
- 4) Notes the risks and opportunities of the delivery options for the residential development of the land and approves that further market testing will be

undertaken on the Disposal and Joint Venture models to ascertain Value for Money and risk exposure;

- 5) Delegates authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to implement the programme for the development of the Toutley East site, including a value for money decision on alternative delivery models for the care home and residential delivery models, taking into account the findings of the further market testing and the Council's climate commitments and targets within the CEAP.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Toutley East Masterplan and Business Case previously approved by Executive in July 2022 comprised the delivery of housing development, a new dementia care home and supporting infrastructure. The scheme was granted outline planning consent in December 2022.

Since the July 2022 Executive decision, there have been significant cost increases in the proposed construction of the care home, predominantly caused by increased inflation and uncertainties in the market. These increases represent a circa 36% increase in cost which is not funded within the current capital programme. This significantly undermines the financial business case previously presented to the Executive and results in the current delivery model for the care home scheme no longer presenting Value for Money for the Council and its residents. Executive are therefore requested to agree the cessation of the construction of the care home from the Toutley East Strategic Masterplan previously approved at Executive in July 2022.

It is recommended to Executive that the development of the site for residential development continues. The current planning consent requires delivery of a minimum of 35% affordable housing on site and planning policy compliant energy efficient and carbon reduction building measures. This report considers the implications of increasing the requirements for these provisions, in particular the financial impacts on the value that could be generated from a sales receipt.

Through the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan the Council has set itself targets around the achievement of carbon neutrality in new development. The residential development as currently proposed is required to meet current Building Regulations, and there is a further requirement, through the existing planning permission, that the dwellings will be constructed to achieve a 10% reduction in carbon emissions above the minimum requirements of Part L: Building Regulations. As the landowner of the site, the Council could seek to deliver additional energy efficiency performance. The estimated financial impacts of any additional energy efficiency provisions are set out in the Part 2 paper and are estimated that they could decrease the overall capital receipt up to over 50% due to higher build costs currently incurred with Net Zero Carbon construction. To verify the impact on costs and values of Net Zero Carbon construction, officers will undertake further market testing to both test the market appetite for Net Zero Carbon construction on this site and update our understanding of how this might affect the residential delivery models financially (both from cost and value perspective). This real market data would then input into the final decision of the residential delivery model.

There are a number of potential delivery models for the construction of residential development at this site, all which carry differing levels of risk exposure and potential financial return. The delivery models considered include 'Disposal', 'Joint Venture', 'Cost

Plus' and 'Direct Delivery' and the report below sets out the opportunities and risks associated with each of the delivery options. The full details of the cost and value implications of each option are included in Part 2 of this report. This is commercially sensitive information, which if in the public domain could undermine the Council's commercial negotiating position and thus potentially impact ability to secure best value.

The upfront funding and exposure to debt set out in the Cost Plus and Direct Delivery models is not considered prudent at this time given current market volatility. It is therefore recommended that those delivery models should not be pursued further.

Previous market engagement undertaken in 2022 indicated that disposal of the site reduces the risks to WBC to the greater extent and would secure a capital receipt quickest. Whilst the Joint Venture model does present opportunities for increased returns, it does also increase risk and it should be noted that limited interest was expressed at the time of the market engagement. In those circumstances the preferred delivery model currently is the disposal of the residential site through a framework with a development agreement which would enable the Council to capture a capital receipt whilst ensuring the development is consistent with its wider strategic objectives. However Executive are asked to note that the officer team will undertake further market testing of the Joint Venture model to ensure the latest market position is known to inform a future and final decision on a delivery model.

Subject to approval, the report seeks delegated authority to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Leader of the Council to implement the programme for the development of the Toutley East site, including a value for money decision on alternative delivery models for the care home and residential delivery models.

BACKGROUND

The Toutley East Strategic Masterplan and financial Business Case approved at Executive in July 2022 comprised the delivery of new housing development, a new dementia care home and supporting infrastructure. Outline planning consent was granted in December 2022.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES

Update on the proposed care home

Detailed design work has continued on the strategic masterplan for the site and a planning application for the site infrastructure works (access, drainage etc) was submitted in December 2022. Further detailed design work has also refined cost estimates as the specification and construction of the facility has become clearer.

A continuing challenge is managing the instability within the construction industry, including the impact of inflation rises. Since summer 2022 the construction industry has continued to be affected by material and labour shortages and price instability arising from the recent pandemic and other world events such as the impact of the Russian/Ukraine conflict.

To reflect these contextual changes, the estimated construction rates for the project have been updated in line with the BCIS All-In Tender Price Index; these indices endeavour to take account of the material and labour shortages currently impacting the industry. In addition, the construction programme mid-point has been updated reflective of the delay in achieving outline planning permission; a delay that will of itself have incurred additional inflation costs, but which has been accentuated by the concurrent inflation changes in the market.

Based on the change in circumstances, it is now estimated that the delivery cost of the care home and infrastructure could increase by circa 36% from that previously forecast. In July 2022 the cost of constructing the care home and supporting infrastructure was valued at £17.5M. It is now estimated to cost £23.9M. The Council's Project Team has been managing and refining costs to ensure best value for money for the Council, including refinement and revision of the specification of the care home design and the utilisation of best practice and examples of recently built care homes to understand how costs were managed and to achieve an industry standard.

This increase in capital costs is not currently funded within the Medium Term Financial Plan agreed in February 2023.

At the same time the cost of borrowing has significantly increased. The strategic business case in 2022 assumed a borrowing rate of 3% pa based upon the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rates at the time. Interest rates against borrowing under the PWLB are currently sitting at around 5.1% pa for 25 year projects.

The July 2022 Executive report set out the financial and non-financial benefits of the delivery of a new care home by WBC. The cash flow modelling at the time included a net benefit saving to the Council of £337,000 per annum across the full 50-year operational lifespan of the care home. The report did however identify that the net

benefit may in actuality rise to circa £700,000 over a four-year period – thus identifying the potential for better pay back than reported.

Since then further assessment of the market has been undertaken and has prompted further detailed modelling on the predicted net benefit to be generated by the care home delivery. That modelling indicates that the Council would likely realise a net benefit payback of £337,000 per annum at opening of the care home (2025/26), increasing to £500,000 per annum at year 5 of operation and £700,000 per annum at year 10.

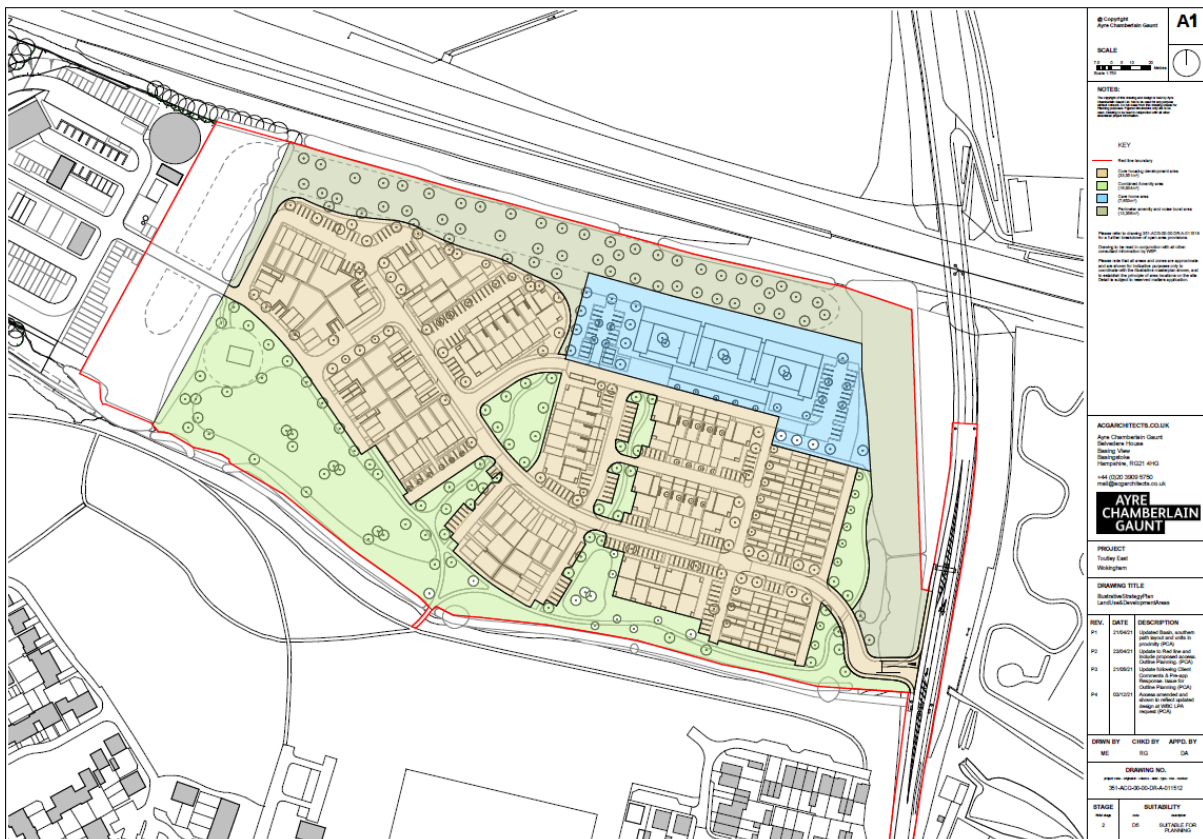
The forecasted increase in revenue income and/or savings generated by the operation of the care home does not however match the significant increased construction and finance costs of the delivery. This significantly undermines the financial business case previously presented to the Executive and results in the care home scheme, as currently proposed, no longer presenting Value for Money for the Council and it's residents. Further information on the financial business case is set out in the Part 2 paper. Executive are therefore requested to agree the cessation of the construction of the care home from the Toutley East Strategic Masterplan previously approved at Executive in July 2022, whilst alternative delivery models for care in the borough are assessed.

Officers are currently considering the different available options to meet the identified significant future need for nursing care across the Borough and Executive will be updated in due course when recommendations on future provision are known. This work will also consider the implications for Suffolk Lodge in Wokingham, which was to be replaced by the new care home at Toutley East.

Update on the residential

The proposed development

The 2022 outline planning permission grants consent for up to 130 dwellings on the site and a care home (the developable areas coloured beige and blue respectively on the plan below). The residential units would be a mixture of residential types (houses and apartments) and residential sizes (1 – 4 bed units).



As of March 2022, the local housing need for the Borough stood at 781 dwellings per annum. The development would therefore contribute considerably towards local housing need.

The site identified for the care home is 0.77ha so if this site were to instead be developed for residential development it could accommodate approximately 26 additional dwellings (assuming a density of 35 dwellings per hectare). Development of this land for anything other than the consented care home would require a new planning permission to be granted. In deciding the programme for the development of the site consideration will therefore need to be given to (1) allowing for the delivery of residential across the full site or (2) allowing the delivery of residential across the majority of the site, whilst retaining the part of the site previously identified for the care home for any future service use which may subsequently be identified.

Development of the site (inclusive of the care home or not) requires the provision of facilitating and mitigating infrastructure, both on and off the site. Site specific infrastructure includes:

1. The formation of a new access from, and improvements to, Twyford Road;
2. Roads and footpaths within the site;
3. Flood attenuation and open space;
4. A landscaped acoustic bund/barrier running along the northern and western boundaries of the site to provide protection from the A329 and the adjacent depot respectively;
5. An emergency access/egress route through the adjacent depot site; and
6. The provision of a new pedestrian/cycle route bridging over the Ashridge Stream to the south of the site, linking into the new local centre at the Matthewsgreen development.

The current strategic masterplan is reliant upon land from the adjacent Council-owned Toutely Depot site to provide land for the western acoustic bund and for the emergency access/egress route that will need to be provided and managed in conjunction with the depot operators. The Council will therefore, through any delivery/disposal agreement, need to provide a commitment to the availability of this land or there may be a reduction in the housing numbers that can be delivered on the site, and therefore in the value of the land receipt. Similarly the Council will also need to commit to facilitate the delivery of the new pedestrian/cycle route into the Matthewsgreen local centre across Council-owned land to the south of the site.

The development would also be required to pay a significant CIL contribution to the Local Planning Authority (circa £3.6m-£4.3m depending on final levels of affordable housing) and S106 contributions (circa £1.4m in value) towards infrastructure provision; all of which would be in addition to any land value achieved.

It is recommended that the Council continues and facilitates residential delivery at the site because:

- The scheme will deliver new homes in the Borough in a sustainable location, helping to contribute towards the Council's housing targets;
- The scheme will deliver a minimum affordable housing provision of 35% on site (calculated at between 46 - 54 units, depending on final housing numbers), plus an additional 13 shared ownership self and custom-build homes, for local people in housing need (see below);
- Development of the site for residential would attract significant CIL and S106 receipts for the provision of infrastructure locally; and
- Development/disposal of the site for residential use will generate a significant capital receipt to contribute towards the Council's capital budget and the delivery of other projects in the MTFP.

Infrastructure provision - affordable housing and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

The general affordable housing need for the Borough is 352 dwellings per annum. The Council must also be able to grant enough self-build permissions to match demand on the Council's self build register.

Under the outline planning permission, the development will need to provide a minimum of 35% affordable housing on site. Initial estimates indicate this could potentially range between 46 and 54 affordable dwellings, depending on final housing numbers. The S106 agreement indicates an anticipated 70/30 Social Rent/Intermediate rental split, although the exact size, location and mix will be approved under a reserved matters planning application. The planning permission does not impose any maximum level of affordable housing provision at the site.

In addition to the minimum 35% provision, as per the Executive resolution in July 2022 the masterplan continues to include the provision of 13 shared ownership self and custom-build homes for local people in housing need. This will pioneer a new delivery model for the provision of affordable housing in the borough, showcasing self and custom-build as a deliverable option. A successful application to the Brownfield Land Release Fund secured £494,000 to help bring forward the self-build scheme. It is therefore recommended that this Executive resolution is inclusive of agreement to

provide these additional affordable units. The inclusion of the 13 self-build units will increase affordable housing levels on the site to between 43-45% (dependent on final housing numbers).

The site therefore will contribute, as a minimum, just under a fifth of the Borough's annual general affordable housing need, including over 30 genuinely affordable social rented dwellings.

Given the strategic development location approach, major developments are infrastructure thirsty, with the associated requirement to provide new roads, schools, sports facilities, etc. Where affordable housing is exempt from CIL, increasing levels of affordable housing significantly will reduce CIL receipts and therefore may act to prejudice the delivery of essential infrastructure. A balance will need to be struck between providing higher levels of affordable housing and delivering the infrastructure improvements needed to support the new developments.

Initial calculations based on 130 units indicate that at 35% affordable housing the residential could generate a CIL receipt of circa £4.3m to the Council. This would reduce to £3.5m if affordable housing provision is increased to 50% and still further if affordable housing is increased above 50%. To ensure satisfactory contribution towards strategic infrastructure provision, it is recommended that any development agreement includes provisions such that any developer may not apply for CIL exemption on any more than 50% of the units.

Requiring a higher level of affordable housing will also impact the capital receipt that the Council could expect from the development. The financial impacts of requiring additional affordable housing provisions are set out in the Part 2 paper. In summary, it is estimated that by increasing the required provision of affordable housing from the current proposed 43-45% to 50% could reduce the capital receipt by circa 7%. In order to optimise best value it is the recommendation that additional affordable housing, over and above that secured through the planning consent plus the 13 self-build units, will not be provided within the development. The recommended provisions comply with policy and would include over 50 affordable residential units on the site.

Infrastructure provision - Carbon reduction initiatives

Wokingham Borough Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019 which commits the council to playing as full a role as possible in reducing our carbon footprint to be carbon neutral by 2030. The Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan and associated Progress Reports demonstrates the planned steps towards achieving this goal. One of the key areas for action within the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan is the opportunity presented through new development. In particular action 8.1 is an action which enables Wokingham Borough Council to take the lead and set an exemplar approach by requiring major residential development to be designed and built to achieve carbon neutrality, including through new policy requirements in the emerging new Local Plan. For the Council's own developments, action 8.6 targets that the Council's new development will be built to carbon neutral standards. The outcomes from this action are that carbon neutrality is considered from the design stage and associated costs are identified and that net zero carbon standards are considered for all new developments.

Currently all new buildings constructed in the UK are required as a minimum to meet UK Building Regulations. Specifically, with regards to energy and carbon compliance, all

buildings must meet the building regulations Part L 'Target Emission Rates' (TER); which were updated in June 2022 (requiring new homes to cut carbon emissions by 31% compared to previous standards) and are due for further more stringent changes in 2025 as part of the government's Future Home Standard whereafter all new homes will be expected to be zero carbon ready. A net zero carbon ready home is designed and built to the same efficiency standard of a net zero home, but does not have a renewable energy system installed yet

The planning permission for the Toutley scheme imposes a further requirement that the dwellings will be constructed to achieve a 10% reduction in carbon emissions above the minimum requirements of Part L: Building Regulations. These requirements will be delivered through a range of energy conservation measures and low/zero carbon technologies; which will be finalised through the detailed design process of the development. Exactly how these standards are achieved will need to be evidenced to the Local Planning Authority pursuant to the planning conditions of the development. The development therefore will achieve energy efficiency standards in excess of industry minimum standards .

As the landowner of the site, the Council could seek to deliver additional energy efficiency performance, in excess of the current planning consent and Building Regulations, subject to further planning approval. If the site was to be disposed of, any additional provisions would need to be secured within a Development Agreement with the purchaser.

The estimated financial impacts of any additional energy efficiency provisions are set out in the Part 2 paper. The estimated costs of delivering Net Zero Carbon have been advised by costs consultants with experience of working with sustainable house builders and have been bench-marked against industry figures. In summary, current advice is that achieving full Net Zero Carbon design could decrease the overall capital receipt up to over 50% due to higher build costs currently incurred with Net Zero Carbon construction.

The market testing undertaken for this development was undertaken in 2021/22 and the construction industry, in particular in relation to Net Zero Carbon technology and construction practices, is evolving at rapid pace. Therefore it would be prudent to go back out to both test the market appetite for Net Zero Carbon construction on this site and update our understanding of how this might affect the residential delivery models financially (both from cost and value perspective). This real market data would then input into the final decision of the residential delivery model.

Residential delivery models

July 2022 Executive decision

The Strategic Masterplan and Return on Investment for the Toutley East development was previously presented to Executive on 28 July 2022, wherein the Executive Members resolved the following relating to the residential element of the development:

[4] To note the delivery options for the residential development identified at that stage, which will be subject to a future business case being approved by Executive and Council;

The financial business case (outlined and approved at Executive in July 2022) assumed the sale of the residential site to a housebuilder and relied on this income to fund part of the care home and infrastructure construction costs. The Executive were however asked to note that the residential element of the Toutley East scheme could be delivered in a number of different ways, each of which carry differing levels of risk exposure and potential financial return.

Informed by discussions with the market in 2021/22, at the time of the July 2022 Executive WBC officers were erring towards the recommendation of a Joint Venture approach. Further discussions with the market since July 2022 has identified a number of risks and considerations of a Joint Venture approach and this market testing has informed the assessment set out below.

Delivery model options

Since July 2022 officers have had further conversations with the market and received up-dated valuation advice from our valuation consultants. Below is set out the opportunities and risks associated with each of the delivery options. The full details of the cost and value implications of each option are included in Part 2 of this report. This information is commercially sensitive as it sets out the financial assumptions of each option and if these were in the public domain this would potentially undermine the Council's commercial negotiating position and thus potentially impact ability to secure best value.

(a) Disposal

In this option the Council would sell the site to a third party, who would in turn build the residential development themselves – likely a private house builder. This process would secure a significant up-front capital receipt to the Council, which could immediately be introduced into the Council's budget to help fund other services/priorities.

The Council could look to dispose of the site via a market sale (where the site is offered to the market as a freehold land transaction) or at auction (whereby the land is auctioned and sold on the day). In each of these instances the Council would forego any control over the product design/quality/delivery or other WBC priorities such as sustainable design or affordable housing (over and above what is required by planning policy). The only control over development would be via the Local Planning Authority under the enforcement of planning obligations. Such disposal will also be unpalatable to the market, as the developer would be wholly beholden thereafter on the Council to deliver other measures before the new homes could be occupied – i.e. the emergency access route through the depot and a foot/cycle path across the land to the south connecting into the Matthewsgreen local centre.

The realistic option for disposal would therefore be via a Framework with development agreement – where if desired WBC could apply additional obligations upon the housebuilder/purchaser regarding the delivery of the development. This would afford WBC some control over quality, design and delivery programme, should that be required.

It may be that the Council would wish to nominate disposal of the affordable housing to a specific landlord, such as a Registered Provider under the development agreement.

Such decisions will need to be considered in the round and against the financial performance of the project as a whole.

The opportunities and risks of this model are as follows:

Opportunities	Risks
No up-front costs for the Council – no exposure to debt during a time of inflated finance costs	Will reduce WBC overall control over the quality of housing product
Would secure up-front value certainty for land disposal - money that could be introduced immediately into the Council's budget to help fund other Council services/priorities at a time of economic challenge.	Will reduce WBC control over delivery programme for construction of the residential; although these could be secured to a degree by the development agreement.
Removes residential sales risks following completion; risks associated with fluctuations in the market.	Foregoes opportunities for profit share associated with other delivery models.
Potential to nominate a specific landlord such as a Registered Provider via a development agreement – albeit with potential implications for land receipt.	Asks for additionality such as additional affordable housing provision and carbon efficiency measures would reduce the value of the capital receipt to WBC, and may in actuality be unpalatable to potential purchasers.

The potential values that could be achieved through the disposal model are included in the Part 2 paper.

This framework method would require WBC resource in procuring and managing the contract to ensure that it meets WBC's requirements and that the Council delivers against its commitments. The Council would need to deliver both the emergency access/egress route through the adjacent depot and the pedestrian/cycle path to the local centre across the WBC controlled land to the south; as both of these elements are a requirement of the development but would sit on WBC land outside of the red line boundary.

(b) Joint Venture

A joint venture delivery model would involve WBC working with a private sector developer to deliver the proposed scheme. Both parties would be required to sign a development agreement to contract them to delivering a number of outputs. For the proposed scheme at Toutley East, this could include the achievement of detailed planning permission, delivery of affordable housing to a nominated Registered Provider and the delivery of sustainable housing. The joint venture model effectively means that WBC would receive the land value and potentially a proportionate share of the developer profits; although some developers do not like to give profit share and would rather give growth in land value over time. The receipt of value is not however secured until realisation of profit on sale of the residential properties.

WBC already do have some experience of this option via its partnership with David Wilson Homes at Elms Field, in Wokingham town centre.

The opportunities and risks of this model are as follows:

Opportunities	Risks
Would potentially secure greater value to WBC than direct disposal because 1) housebuilder does not have to purchase the land and does not therefore incur additional cost burdens of finance and stamp duty etc. and 2) potential to share profit – although the potential to profit share in the current economic climate will likely be limited.	Previous market engagement has indicated that market appetite for JV on this single/relatively small site is likely to be limited. In addition, given the current market volatility, WBC's negotiating position in the JV partnership would be reduced. Both of these aspects may impact WBC's ability to achieve best value.
Allows WBC to potentially benefit from the growth in sale values over time (if they increase), which would not be the case for a traditional land sale to market	Profit not realised until end of development (3 years)
Would provide access to partner's standard house types which will reduce fees and project delivery timescales	Sales risk associated with potential decreases in residential values or deflation of the market.
Access to partner's design and build expertise and knowledge	Will reduce WBC overall control over the quality of housing product
Access to partner's established supply chain enabling utilisation of buying power to drive efficient pricing	Will reduce control over delivery, as this will be managed by JV partner, although some WBC control may be included within JV agreement
Partner able to access funding will reduce WBC risk exposure	JV partner will require market facing profit return which may impact scheme viability, WBC return and/or other WBC aspirations
Partner will manage delivery and provide skills, experience and capacity	WBC would have to purchase the affordable housing from the JV Partner in order to create a revenue stream. This would be deducted from WBC's return.
Partner will bring experience in the market to ensure product meets market demand	Asks for additionality such as additional affordable housing provision and carbon efficiency measures may reduce the value of the JV to WBC, and may in any event be unpalatable to JV partners

The viability testing in Part 2 of this report indicates that the value of the Joint Venture to WBC would vary depending upon the level of affordable housing required and the ability to negotiate profit share.

Under this model the Council would not receive any income until such time as the residential receipts from the Joint Venture are received (circa 3 years).

Market testing in 2021/22 showed some limited interest in Joint Venture working at that time. That market testing however was undertaken at a time when there was less volatility in the market and on the premise of two available development sites within the Council's ownership. Given the continuing macro-economic uncertainties and subsequent projections of a downturn in residential property values nationally, there is a lot more uncertainty in the market at this time. It is therefore questionable whether there would be continuing interest in Joint Venture partnering at this time for what would be a

relatively small development site. Lack of interest will limit WBC’s ability to achieve competitive tendering and therefore drive best value through the Joint Venturing model.

The previous market testing undertaken at the site dates back to 2021/22. The construction industry has moved on since that time such that it would be prudent to go back out to test the market’s current appetite for Joint Venture partnering to help inform future and final decisions on delivery.

(c) Cost Plus

In this scenario the Council would retain control over delivery of the proposed development by securing funding for the scheme and working alongside a contractor partner to deliver the scheme. WBC would work alongside a housebuilder to establish market demand and refine the masterplan accordingly. The housebuilder would be able to provide insight as to market demand and, once the house types and mix are established, a financially viable delivery model would be developed.

The advantages and disadvantages of this approach are as set out below:

Opportunities	Risks
WBC would retain control of the quality of the housing product	WBC required to fully fund the construction of the residential development, and therefore requires significant up-front funding and debt exposure, at a time of market volatility and considerably inflated interest rates.
WBC would have control of project delivery via a development manager and professional team	WBC assumes full sales risk
Would provide access to house builder’s standard house types which will reduce fees and project delivery timescales	Profit not realised until end of development (3 years)
Access to partner’s design and build expertise and knowledge	Depending upon the partnership working, there is risk that the house types might not meet market demand and/or that the house types may not deliver development optimisation in regard of the ratio of space to value
Access to partner’s established supply chain enabling utilisation of buying power to drive efficient pricing	
Model generally requires reduced profit margin for partner compared to JV	
Ability to retain affordable housing and generate revenue stream	

As indicated in the Part 2 paper, whilst the indicative return to the Council demonstrated under this model is significantly increased from the Disposal and Joint Venture models, that increase is directly reflective of the additional risk associated with the up-front funding of circa £30-40m construction costs. This model therefore will significantly increase the Council’s exposure to debt and associated risk; during a time of market volatility.

(d) Direct Delivery

Direct delivery of the housing by WBC would broadly follow the same structure as the cost-plus model. WBC would fund the scheme via the PWLB, however in this case WBC would create their own house types.

Opportunities	Risks
WBC would retain control of the quality of the housing product	Requires significant up-front funding and debt exposure, at a time when interest rates are considerably inflated.
WBC would have control of project delivery via a development manager and professional team	WBC assumes full sales risk
Potential to develop speciality house types that respond directly to the market (e.g. Net Zero Carbon), and which could be marketed to other LA's seeking to deliver those housing products – potential additional revenue stream	Substantial cost and risk will be incurred to develop house types. Higher design fees as WBC would be required to create their own house types.
Contractor would not require additional profit over and above standard rates for OH&P (Overheads and Profit – circa 7%)	WBC have no experience of direct delivery of residential on this scale
Ability to retain affordable housing and generate revenue stream	

As set out in Paper 2, forecasted up-front costs and returns are very similar to those that would be anticipated under the Cost Plus delivery model. Like in the Cost Plus model the up-front funding will significantly increase the Council's exposure to debt and associated risk; during a time of market volatility.

Use of capital receipts

The financial business case outlined and approved at Executive in July 2022 assumed the sale of the residential site to a housebuilder and relied on this income to fund part of the care home and infrastructure construction costs. If the care home is no longer delivered in this location, any value generated through any of the delivery models above would be generating a capital receipt which is no longer ring-fenced for a specific purpose and which would be an additional contribution to the Council's wider capital programme (the value of which depends on the delivery model chosen).

Alternative land use options

The site sits within the Wokingham settlement boundary and has been identified for development since the adoption of the Core Strategy in 2010. Whilst designated in the Core Strategy for employment uses, the site has more recently been promoted for residential in the local plan up-date (2020) and in 2022 secured planning permission for residential use.

If the Council does not pursue residential development at the site then this will potentially impact the projected housing delivery numbers under the emerging Local Plan Update. Moreover, if this site falls away then the LPA may need to identify an

alternative site to compensate the loss of housing numbers towards its housing land supply.

The following alternative uses of the site have been considered and discounted for the following reasons:

- Employment – the site is allocated for Employment in the current Local Plan, as an extension to the Toutley Industrial Estate. Despite that allocation, no employment development/interest has come forward. A report by Avison Young commissioned in 2019 concluded that at the micro level the site is not suitable and/or viable to provide employment development given its locational and access constraints. In addition, a WBC commissioned Employment Land Needs Study (2019) found that at the macro level the borough no longer needs the land at this site to provide for employment needs. There is therefore neither an identified need for employment at this site, nor a likelihood that a viable employment scheme will come forward.
- Solar Panels – The installation of solar panels at the site could be explored further, although it is envisaged that grid connection may well limit the suitability/viability of such a project. It is also questionable whether a stand alone renewable energy scheme should be promoted in lieu of residential on what is an extremely sustainable site within the settlement boundary and so well served by the recently constructed SDL infrastructure.
- Revert back to farmland – The reversion of the site to farmland would secure minimal rental income for the Council. It would also run counter to the aspirations of the development plan, which seeks in the first instance to locate development within the settlement boundaries before sequentially considering edge of settlement and countryside locations.
- Public Open Space/SANG – The site could be utilised as public open space and/or Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG). If SANG then the Council could explore opportunities for the sale of SANG units to help subsidise the initial capital cost of delivery and on-going maintenance. Similarly, there may be opportunities to increase bio-diversity at the site and sell credits to developers. The North Wokingham SDL is however already very well served by SANG (west of Old Forest Road, Bell Farm, etc) and POS. There is not therefore a strategic or local need for SANG or POS in this location.
- SEN school – The Council has recently been successful in securing DfE funding for the provision of two new SEND schools within the Borough. An Executive resolution in September 2022 approved the submission of the proposals to the DfE and supported the recommendation to utilise two sites – one at Rooks Nest Farm and one at Grays Farm – albeit caveating that the formal disposal of those sites would be subject to a further Executive resolution. Consideration of this site for a SEND school is included in a separate Executive Paper (Development of Wokingham’s Two Special Educational Needs Schools) and following approval of that paper then this site is not the preferred location for a SEN school.

Recommendation

No sustainable or achievable alternative use for the site has been identified and therefore it is recommended that the site continue to be promoted and developed for residential use.

The upfront funding and exposure to debt set out in the Cost Plus and Direct Delivery models is not considered prudent at this time given current market volatility. It is therefore recommended that those delivery models should not be pursued further.

Previous market engagement undertaken in 2022 indicated that disposal of the site reduces the risks to WBC to the greatest extent and would secure a capital receipt quickest. Whilst the Joint Venture model does present opportunities for increased returns, it does increase risk and it should be noted that limited interest was expressed at the time of the market engagement. In those circumstances the preferred delivery model currently is the disposal of the residential site through a framework with a development agreement which would enable the Council to capture a capital receipt whilst ensuring the development is consistent with its wider strategic objectives. However Executive are asked to note that the officer team will undertake further market testing of the Joint Venture model to ensure the latest market position is known to inform a future and final decision on a delivery model.

It is recommended that the site is developed on the basis of the existing planning permission (minimum 35% affordable housing), inclusive of a requirement to deliver an additional 13 affordable self build units (in accordance with the grant funding already received) and a provision that CIL exemption may only be applied for on up to 50% of the dwellings. These provisions could be secured against both the Disposal and Joint Venture delivery models.

In relation to carbon efficiencies, additional market testing will inform our understanding of how the achievement of greater energy efficiencies measures (up to Net Zero Carbon) might affect the residential delivery models financially (both from cost and value perspective). This real market data would then input into the final decision of the residential delivery model.

Procurement Officers are currently looking into all relevant options for the land disposal and, at this stage, more information is required to understand if this can be categorised as land disposal or as development. Land disposal with no conditions is unlikely to fall under the Public Procurement Regulations (PCR) (2015), however if land disposed is with additional conditions over and above the approved planning permission conditions, it may fall under a Public Works Contracts under the PCRs. Such details will be worked through once the principle of disposal is established, to ensure that proper procedure is adhered to.

It is recommended that, following completion of the further market testing, authority is delegated to the Director of Resources and Assets, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to implement the programme for the disposal/delivery of the residential land at Toutley East.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and 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)	Dependent on delivery model. Disposal would generate capital receipt in years 1 or 2. Profits from Joint Venture will not be realised until year 3 at the earliest.	Yes	Capital
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other Financial Information

The full details of the cost and value implications of each option are included in Part 2 of this report. This information is commercially sensitive as it sets out the financial assumptions of each option and if these were in the public domain this would potentially undermine the Council's commercial negotiating position and thus potentially impact ability to secure best value.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The proposed redevelopment of the site has been subject to extensive local consultation as follows:

- January 2020 – Draft Local Plan Update – consultation inclusive of a site allocation at Toutley East for 100 dwellings
- February/March 2021 – Pre-planning - Public engagement on the planning proposals in advance of application submission
- May 2021 – Planning application submission - Full statutory consultation by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) on the development proposals to inform the LPA's determination of the planning application
- November 2021 – WBC's Revised Growth Strategy – consultation inclusive of an allocation in line with the planning application for up to 130 dwellings and a care home.

Public Sector Equality Duty

An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken in July 2020 and has been updated to reflect the proposed changes to the strategic masterplan. The Impact Assessments have not identified any potentially negative impact upon persons with protected characteristics.

Climate Emergency – *This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030*

The development would deliver a highly sustainable development in accordance with current planning policy and in excess of minimum building regulation requirements. The ability and financial implications for achieving Net Zero Carbon will be explored through the recommended market testing to help inform thereafter final decisions around the delivery model.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
By Virtue of Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

List of Background Papers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 2 Residential Delivery Models – Financial Performance • Part 2 Update to Strategic Business Case Since July 2022

Contact Sarah Morgan	Service Commercial Property
Telephone Tel: 07801 664394	Email sarah.morgan@wokingham.gov.uk

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

TITLE	Corporate Building Cleaning Services
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Executive on 29 June 2023
WARD	(All Wards);
LEAD OFFICER	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers
LEAD MEMBER	Councillor Imogen Shepherd-DuBey

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

Procurement of a contract for the provision of building cleaning services at Wokingham Borough Council corporate sites, some Maintained Schools, and Academies. The service will be operated as a traded service.

The contract will generate social value through the provision of employment opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION

To procure a new contract for cleaning services via competitive procurement process.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Request to go to market to procure the provision of cleaning services at WBC (Wokingham Borough Council) sites and schools (maintained schools and academies) across the borough.

Proposed contract term:

Start date: 1 April 2024; initial term of 36 months (3 years) with option to extend for further 24 months (1 + 1-year extensions) – total of 60 months (5 years)

A detailed procurement strategy paper was reviewed and approved by an internal senior officer group (Strategic Procurement Board) on 16th March 2023 and is appended to this report for reference.

A commercial strategy is also being developed in parallel with this procurement in consideration of expanding the provision of this service to additional sites in view to maximising value.

Background

Building cleaning services has been procured centrally for a number of years, which has been an essential requirement for the successful maintenance of the corporate buildings. To ensure value for money, a corporate contract is made available, enabling asset managers to access cleaning services when they need. External sites, such as schools, have also been able to opt in to use the contract, which is managed by a dedicated resourced based in the Procurement and Contracts team.

The current contract runs until 31st March 2024, therefore preparation for the procurement of a new contract has already started with a view to advertising the opportunity in May and awarding the contract by September 2023 to allow for sufficient mobilisation period. Site managers have been consulted and development of the scope of the new contract is underway.

The proposed details of the new contract are:

- Start date: 1 April 2024
- Initial term of 36 months (3 years)
- Option to extend for further 24 months (1 + 1-year extensions)
- Total of 60 months (5 years), including the options to extend.

This contract ensures that cleaning services are sourced in a compliant way, specifications are in line with the corporate priorities (suppliers will be required to use cleaning materials that do not negatively impact on the environment), and the service is available and easily accessible to all sites that may need it. This contract will be providing potential job opportunities for Supported Employment and for local residents, in particular for job seekers not able to drive to work, which is currently the case (the incumbent supplier tends to recruit staff locally and offers job opportunities to residents living in walking distance from the sites, creating social value).

Analysis of Issues

Currently, 26 sites have opted to use the building cleaning service through the corporate contract. Overall, the sites are pleased with the service being provided and during regular contractor meetings, quality audits and users feedback the Procurement and Contracts team can confirm the dedication of the current supplier to provide a high level of service.

Following consultation with the current users, the analysis of the feedback indicated decreasing interest in the use of this service, which prompted a commercial review and subsequent development of a commercial strategy to attract new sites. This process is ongoing and will not affect the procurement of the new contract. Should the commercial strategy be unsuccessful.

Cost Benefit Analysis

If a new contract is secured, this would run from 1 April 2024 for 36 months (three years) to March 27 with option to extend to March 28 and then March 29 if required.

The current traded service model involves a significant amount of administration, which would be improved under a revised model. Various options have been explored and a new model recommended that would reduce administration time and allow for the management cost to be recovered. The new model is also aimed at increasing the interest and potentially attracting new sites to opt in and use the service on a traded basis.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer-term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative

that Council resources are optimised and 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)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Once the procurement is complete and new contract is operational officers will progress approaches to increase the external take-up of the services. Should this provide a budget saving, it will be reported through the usual monitoring arrangements and then reflected in future budget setting.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

Sites across the council have been consulted regarding their continued cleaning requirements.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Suppliers bidding for the cleaning contract will be expected to consider and follow Equality Duty.

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

The service specification has been developed in line with requirements for environmentally friendly cleaning materials.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

The procurement strategy attached as appendix 1 contains exempt information.

List of Background Papers

Corporate Cleaning Services_FINAL_Approved SPB_16 03 2023 - redacted

Contact Joanne Jennings	Service Business Services
Telephone No	Email joanne.jennings@wokingham.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

Agenda Item 19.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank