

Wokingham Secondary School Places Strategy (age 11 to 16) Needs and Options Paper

Consultation 2021: Background paper

Introduction

This year Wokingham Council will revise its secondary school places strategy. At this point we are asking views on how we should respond to the need for statutory school places (Years 7 to 11 or ages 11 to 16). A separate exercise will be conducted in the autumn concerning post 16 provision. There are two reasons for this split:

- There is a more acute need for additional provision for statutory school age children, with rising numbers of children in future Year 6 classes requiring secondary school places.
- Post 16 provision needs are more complex, because of the range of provision, in schools and colleges in and around the borough, and the need to ensure an appropriate mix of academic, vocational and life skills provision for all the borough's young people, including those with additional needs.

This paper is intended to provide some background information, that may assist you in completing the questionnaire.

Background

Wokingham Births

The borough increased the number of primary school places because of a rising number of younger children requiring Reception class places, largely driven by an increased number of children born in the borough, up until the 2012/13 academic year. The number of children born to Wokingham resident mothers has fallen since that point, albeit there has been considerable variation between individual years.

Born	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Reception	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Year 7	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
Earley	318	323	342	326	282	286	293	286	259	239	217
North	271	236	234	267	208	225	228	210	189	206	170
South East	179	187	172	158	145	159	158	134	139	154	173
South West	335	312	331	280	298	289	312	301	292	398	359
Woodley	324	347	351	323	353	322	406	353	370	413	321
Wokingham Town	506	534	506	518	483	513	511	521	488	527	514
Total	1933	1939	1936	1872	1769	1794	1908	1805	1737	1937	1754

Table 1 -Births 2009/10 to 2019/20

Housing

New, predominantly family, housing has had an impact on the number and location of children needing school places. New homes facilitate the arrival of established families (bringing children with them) and enable existing residents to move to new communities.

The Council's Draft Local Plan Public Consultation document from 2020 established that "Provision will be made for a minimum of 13,901 net additional dwellings, and associated infrastructure, in the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2036" (Policy H1).

Wokingham Secondary School Places Strategy 2021 to 2031 background paper

The majority of these homes would be in proposals already in place. However, section 7.8 also established that a minimum of an additional 2,061 dwellings would be required up until 2036.

The current Local Plan has focused new home building around Wokingham Town, in Shinfield and around the former Arborfield Garrison site. Development in all these areas is expected to continue into the next decade. A new Local Plan is in preparation, to ensure new homes that are required because of national planning policy will be provided with necessary supporting infrastructure (including roads and schools). This plan is expected to be relevant throughout the life of this strategy (to 2031). Earlier drafts of the Local Plan Update were based around most of these new homes being provided in the Grazeley area. However, revisions to the emergency planning requirements associated with the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Burghfield have made this scheme untenable, and the council is looking at alternative sites for new homes. Masterplanning work to understand the constraints and opportunities presented by two areas is underway. These are in the area bounded by Shinfield Village, Sindlesham, Arborfield and the M4 and on land associated with the agreed South Wokingham major development. No decision has been taken yet.

The National Planning Policy Framework establishes that local housing need should be determined using the Office for National Statistics household projection (which is based on their population projections) and a local affordability factor. The Council's most recent published assessment (published 14/01/21) shows that in accordance with this guidance, homes for 554 additional households, plus a further 235 homes (total 789 homes) would be required each year. As an approximation, 2/3rds of the housing need is directly derived from the local population projections, with 1/3rd of the planned homes providing an opportunity for additional households to be established in the area. In the period leading up to the Covid 19 epidemic the local housebuilding rate was markedly higher than 800 homes required to meet projected household formation rates, peaking at over 1,500 new homes in the 2019/20 year.

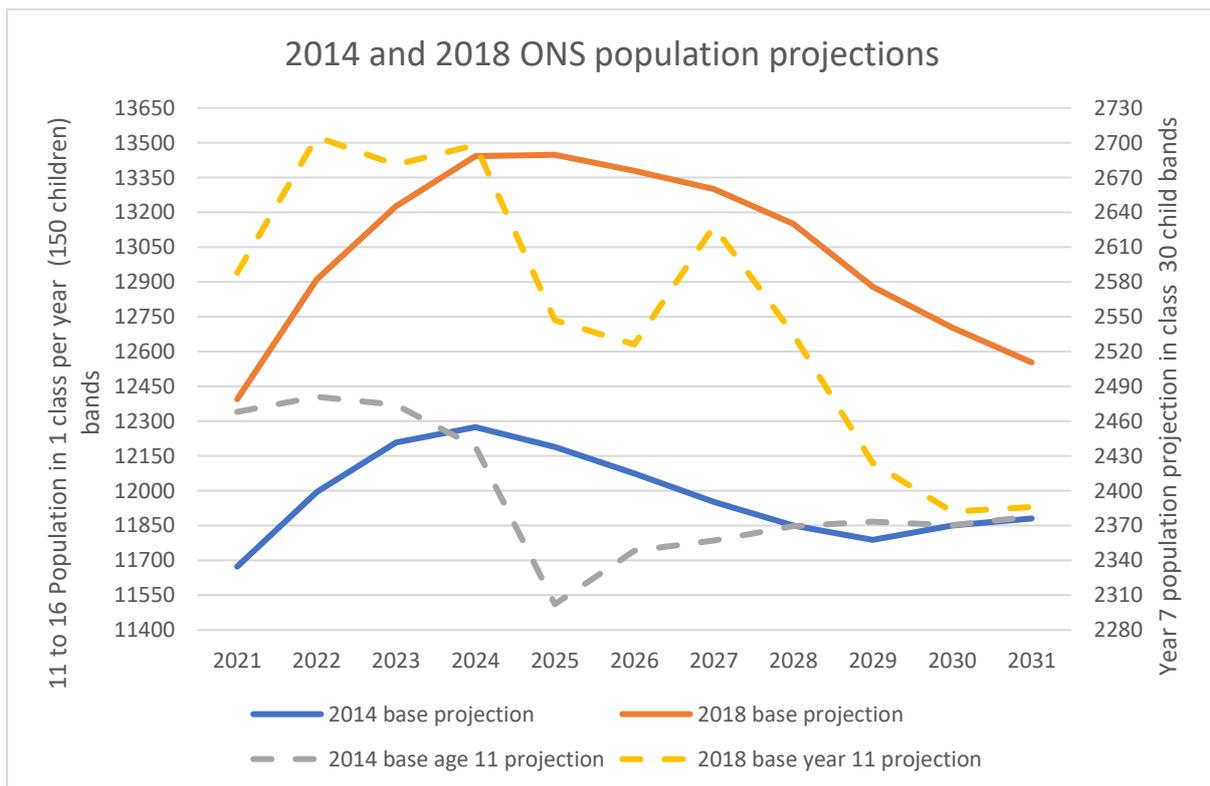
A long-established rule of thumb is that every 1,000 homes will, in the long run, be occupied by 30 children from each year group, but with higher levels of child yield in the initial years after occupation. Note that these children may already be captured (entirely or in part) in existing roll and population projections.

[Population projections](#)

The ONS population projections are the starting point for both the analysis of both Housing Need and long-term school place need. As noted above the housing build numbers may exceed the projected household need numbers (derived from the household projections) by a considerable margin. It is likely that this will impact on future iterations of the population and household projections. Therefore, the assessment of long-term need, based on current population projections must carry an important caveat, that future population numbers may be above the current projections.

The most recent population projection is 2018 based. The population for the whole school age group is expected to peak in the years 2024 to 2025 (at just under 13,500 children), dropping back to slightly above the 2021 level by 2031. The age group corresponding to Year 7 is projected to start at 2,600 children, to reach a peak over the period 2022 to 2024 (circa 2,700 children), dropping back to 2,400 children by the end of the decade. Note that these figures are not directly comparable to roll figures as the projections do not correspond to school years and they include home and independent school educated children.

The 2014 base projection is included to show how population projections can change over a short period. This population projection underpins the 2014 base household projection that underpins the assessment of housing need. Even in a four year period, the projection has changed significantly, with over 1,000 additional children projected in the 2018 base projection (for the 11 to 16 year group) and over 200 children (equivalent to 7 classes) variance between the two peaks. Both, 2014 and 2018 projections do though point to peak child numbers for the age groups feeding Year 7 in the early 2020s, with sharp falls after 2024 and lower numbers (on average at least) in subsequent years and similarly a peak in roll numbers for the statutory year groups around 2025 and falling numbers from 2026 onwards.



Graph 1 – ONS population projections to 2031

Wokingham Roll projections and school capacity

Wokingham’s roll projections take account of projected Year 6 rolls, the historic transfer rates between primary and secondary schools, and historic year group survival rates. They take no account of the relative popularity of schools or of school

admission numbers. Their primary usefulness is as a tool for projecting area needs, rather than understanding future individual school rolls. They run up until the 2028/29 year¹.

For secondary school place planning the Council's area is broken down into two areas, north and south. The north area includes Maiden Erlegh, Bulmershe, Waingels and the Piggott schools (and therefore Earley, Woodley and parishes to the north of the A329M). The south area includes Oakbank, Bohunt, St Crispins, Holt, Emmbrook and the Forest Schools (and therefore parishes to the south of the A329M, and M4 (with Hurst Parish served by schools in both areas)).

The analysis uses current admission numbers (so the school capacity is 5 times the current admission number, even if the school is building numbers up from Year 7). All but two Wokingham schools have sixth forms and the total school capacity includes sixth forms. Sixth form numbers are not necessarily directly related to the 11 to 16 roll; schools have discretion over the range of courses offered and the number of places available to young people who did not previously attend the school.

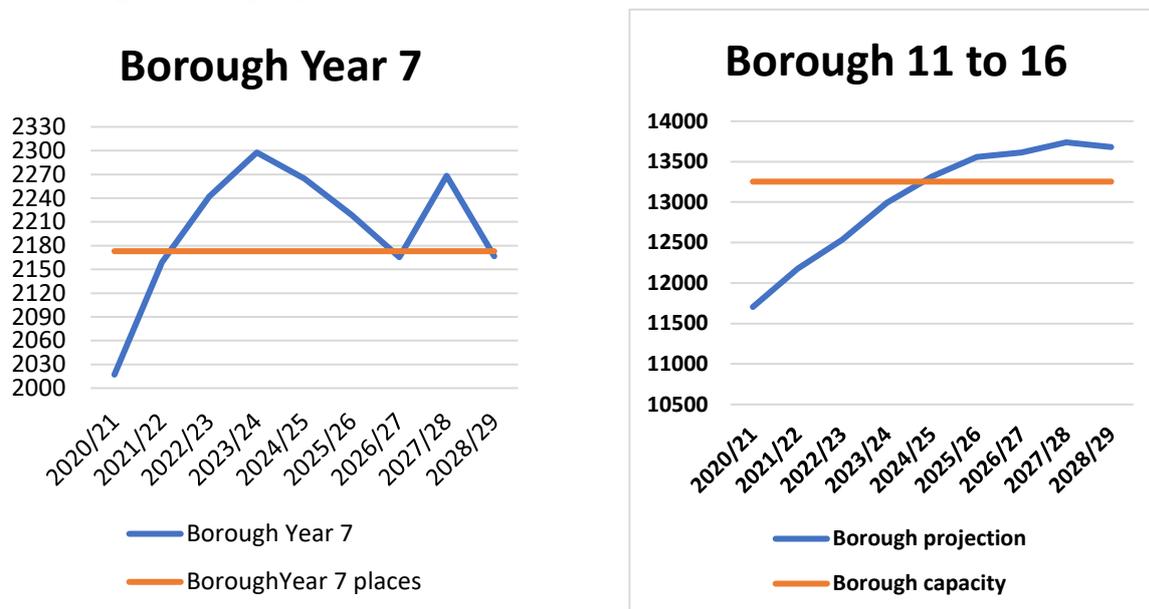
¹ *There are a number of important caveats that apply to the WBC roll projections:*

- a) *The analysis of place sufficiency is gender neutral. In the real world many of the available places may be in a single sex school, and therefore not be available for use by girls or boys.*
- b) *The model maintains a constant proportion of children not previously on the roll of a Wokingham Primary School in projected Year 7 admissions to Wokingham schools (based on the historic proportion of such children allocated places at individual schools). These children are a mix of children attending (and in many cases living) in neighbouring boroughs, children attending independent schools or being home educated and children whose families have recently moved into the borough. The proportion of such children varies markedly, between less than 5% and nearly 50%. One effect of rising local demand could be that a smaller number of children living further from oversubscribed schools (e.g. in other boroughs) will be admitted. There is no clear evidence of this effect to date, though.*
- c) *The model captures a range of real-world factors that affect roll numbers in simple measurements. It does not easily allow the effects of changed cross border movement versus children new to the borough to be disentangled, for example (both impact on the number of children admitted, not previously on the roll of a Wokingham primary school). These factors vary from year to year (for example, if new housebuilding ceases in an area, the flow of new children into new homes will stop too).*

For individual schools, the principal deficiency with the roll projections is that they take no account of each school's PAN or relative popularity. In the real world rising demand does not lead to rising admissions to already oversubscribed schools or necessarily increased admissions to less popular schools. However, this deficiency becomes a strength for area planning, as it gives a better indication of area need, than would be the case if individual schools were capped.

The Wokingham Borough

The Borough level projection points to a peak need for Year 7 places in 2023/24, when just over 120 additional Year 7 places will be required (or four classes of 30), reducing to 2026/27, when the projected demand and places balance, followed by a lower peak of 90 required places in 2027/28. The 11 to 16 analysis points to there being sufficient places until 2024/25, and a requirement for 485 places by 2027/28 (dropping back slightly by 2028/29).



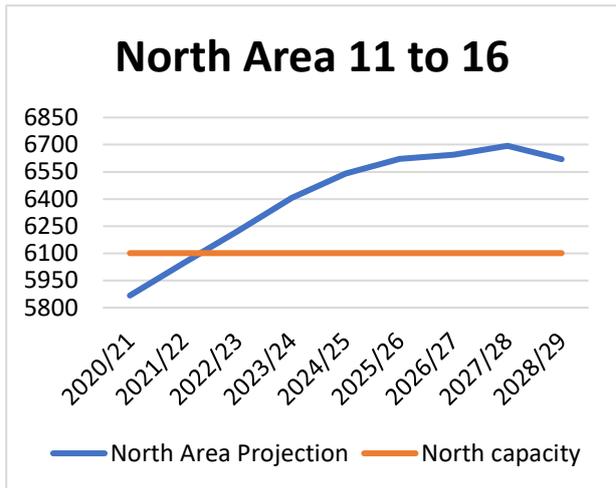
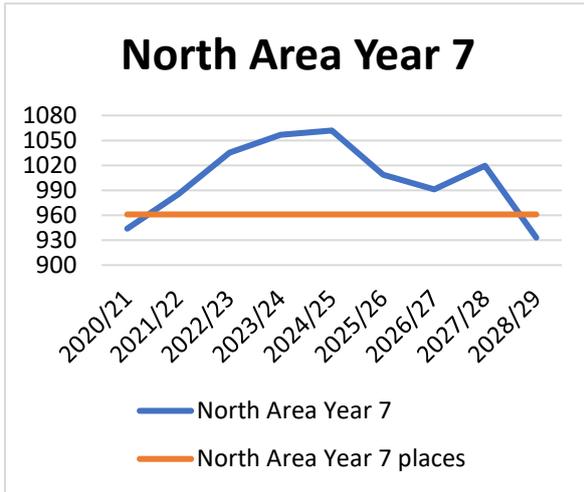
Graphs 2 and 3 Borough Projections to 2028/29

The North Area

Looking at the north area alone, both the Year 7 and (to a lesser extent the 11 to 16) projections point to “bulge” passing through. Year 7 demand is projected to peak in the period 2023 to 2025, when up to 100 additional Year 7 places are required, dropping back to 2020 levels by 2028/29. For the 11 to 16 age group, demand peaks later in 2027/25, with a maximum need for 600 additional places.

Within the northern area, one issues is noted:

- South Twyford: where rising demand has meant that families were unable to secure Year 7 places in 2021 at the only school within walking distance (the Piggott School). Additional places were agreed for 2021 and (subject to further agreements) it is likely that the Council will support an expansion programme at that school.



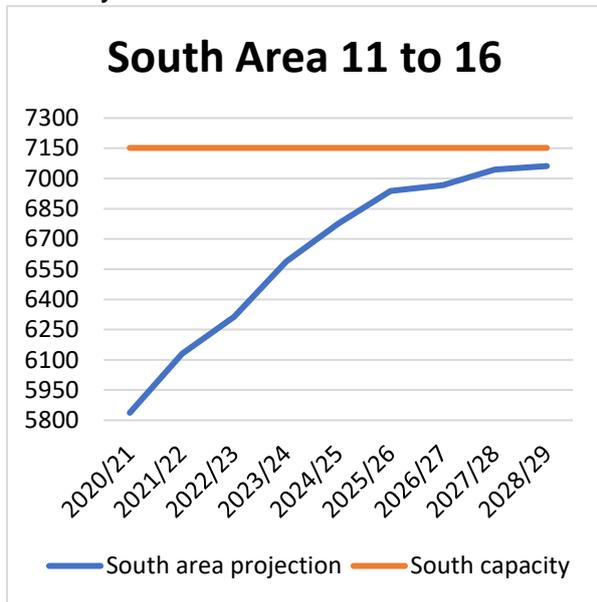
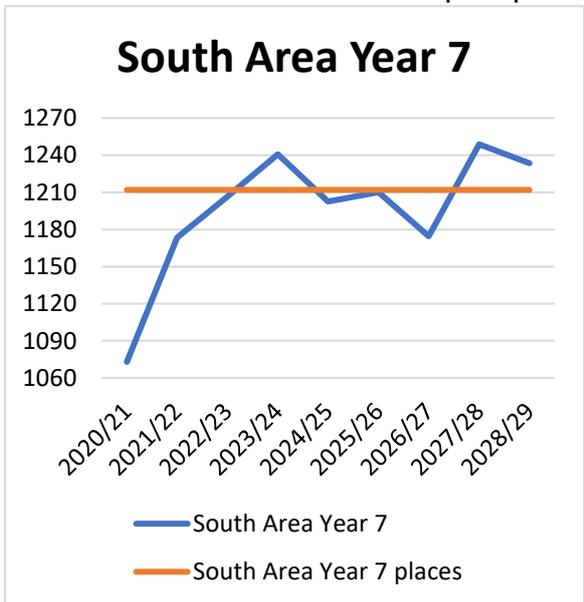
Graphs 4 and 5: North area projections

The South Area

Looking at the south area the need for Year 7 places is projected to increase sharply until 2023/24. Thereafter demand fluctuates around the current number of available Year 7 places (with a range of + / - 40 places). Looking at 11 to 16 need and place availability as a whole in this area, projected need is expected to increase towards capacity by 2028/29.

Within the southern area, one significant issue has been identified:

- The difference between the popularity of the two single sex schools has meant that there are surplus places for boys at Forest School.



Graphs 5 & 6: South Area projections

Comparison with ONS projections

Firstly, as expected, the number of children in the roll projection each year is less than the number of children in the roll projection. If the ONS figures are reliable then

a very significant proportion of the population must be educated outside the state system, or have moved into the borough without relinquishing state school places in other areas.

Secondly, the pattern of change is markedly different, with a clear peak in need towards the middle of the decade, but demand dropping back from that point (essentially to current levels). This would point to a need for bulge accommodation that would not be required at the end of the period. This is clearly at variance with the roll projection for the borough as a whole. The Year 7 north area figures show a similar pattern, and a peak with declining demand, but the downturn in demand in Years 7 to 11 occurs later in the decade. The south area, by contrast shows continued growth in Years 7 to 11 rolls, probably reflecting the impact of ongoing housebuilding in the area (as noted above, at a rate that is appreciably higher than would match the household and population projections).

Increasing capacity

Over the period of the strategy there are three ways of increasing the number of places available:

- Utilising surplus places in older age groups
- Expanding existing schools
- Opening new schools

Utilising existing capacity

There are few schools in Wokingham that have the ability to offer significant numbers (60 or more) of additional places, without additional accommodation.

- In the north only Waingels College is projected to have two 11 to 16 year groups that are undersubscribed by more than 30 places in each year group in 2021/22.
- In the south only Emmbrook and the Forest schools are projected to have two or more year groups undersubscribed by 30 children or more in 2021/22. The combination of the Forest School's gender restriction, undersubscription and admissions law has meant that while this school had surplus Year 7 places, additional capacity was required at other schools.

Note that it is likely that these surplus places will be required in future years, so allocating to schools with surplus places in older age groups may well create a need for investment in future years.

They do have the advantage of potentially being available at short notice, and deferral of investment may be helpful to the authority, at a time when the developer payments required to service commitments have reduced, because of the impact of Covid 19 on the construction industry last year.

This is therefore at best a partial solution for 2021 and 2022 admissions.

Expansion of existing schools

There are three main restrictions on the expansion of places available at existing schools.

- Firstly, given that nearly all secondary schools are now academies, expansion is dependent on agreement with school Trusts. Given that a number of schools have increased their rolls in recent year it is not reasonable to assume that all Trusts would wish to grow. They may be concerned, for example, by the possible loss of PE space, and the challenges of managing a larger student body.
- Secondly, expansion is dependent on securing planning consent for schemes. This may be challenging on a number of sites not least because of the difficulties in securing additional car parking and in maintaining sufficient PE space. A number of sites are already highly developed and it may be challenging to deliver satisfactory expansion proposals.
- Thirdly, resource limitations, the extent of the building works required to secure a satisfactory expansion and the time required to execute schemes may limit the Council's ability to offer additional places at some schools. For example, it is unlikely that a multi-storey car park would be regarded as offering sufficient value for money, even if this was the only way of meeting additional car parking requirements.

It may not therefore be possible to create additional provision through school expansion in the heart of some communities.

This is the most deliverable option for the next 5 years (at least).

Opening new schools

A new school would require a significant site. It is likely that sites within established residential areas would be too compromised to be considered. It is most likely therefore that a new site would be acquired through the master planning process for a new residential community.

Given the number of new homes planned and the established ability of housebuilders to sell high volumes of new family homes in the area it will be prudent to ensure that at least one large scale new housing scheme includes the potential for a new secondary school. This could enable a new school later in the decade or early in the 2030s. If it became clear that too few places could be created through school expansion, then it may be necessary to bring a new school forward into the mid 2020s, to meet the current projected place shortfall.

A new school depends on a new site being identified and significant funding being identified. This points to this being a viable option towards the end of the decade.

Piers Brunning

Senior Specialist

Commissioning Teams