

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

PART B

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

Comment 1

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU1
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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

Whilst consistent with local strategic policy in the Core Strategy (2010), Policy RU1 provides limited detail to add value to existing policy in the development plan. National planning policy and guidance is clear that neighbourhood plans should avoid repeating national or local plan policies. We would recommend that the policy is either removed or amended to provide some additional local context for guiding and managing development within the neighbourhood area.

Comment 2

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU2
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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

The council has previously highlighted concerns regarding the content of the Design Code, including its purpose and how it will be used to make decisions on future development proposals. To reemphasise, a design code would need to illustrate the existing character of the area (typology) and set out a reasoned justification for the specific parameters. Currently, the design code guidance is too prescriptive to be applied to all new development proposals within the neighbourhood area, and it is not clear which points should be adhered to when assessing development proposals. We would also question whether the design code/guidance should apply to uses other than housing.

Further concern is also expressed to the site-specific design requirements set out in Appendix A, which will have implications on the indicative site capacities for two identified housing allocations (Land to the rear of 9-17 Northbury Lane for 7 dwellings; Land between 39-53 New Road for 12 dwellings) in the emerging Local Plan Update. Encouraging larger plot sizes and lower densities as inferred to in Code R11 would constrain development in a manner not supported by national policy or emerging local strategic policy. In particular paragraphs 119 and 124 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) place an emphasis on planning policies and decisions *'promoting an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions'* and *'supporting development that makes efficient use of land'*.

In addition, some higher density development could be acceptable within some areas of the parish. Removing opportunity for higher densities in appropriate areas would not be making effective use of land and would reduce both quantum and variety of housing types to be able to respond to local needs, as sought in Policy CP5 (Housing mix, density and affordability) of the Core Strategy (2010). As such the policy will not contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and is therefore considered to be contrary to the basic conditions. Further, Policy RU1 of the Ruscombe Neighbourhood Plan promotes high-quality design, development and places which can be achieved through core principles established in Policy CP3 (General Principles of Development) of the Core Strategy (2010) without the use of an overly restrictive design code/guide.

It is therefore recommended that the Design Code should clearly demonstrate how densities have been considered in the current local context. As an alternative, the policy could state that *'the density of any new development must be appropriate to its surroundings'* and ensure applicants have full regard to the specific typologies and principles set out in the Design Code.

Furthermore, some only typologies include references to car parking, sometimes referring to parking in front gardens, whilst typologies make no reference to parking. A consistent approach to parking would help to provide clarity and consistency.

We would also highlight the recent publication of the National Model Design Code (June 2021) and National Design Guide (January 2021) by Government which are material planning considerations in the decision-making process and set out detailed guidance to be considered in the production of local design codes, guides and other design policies to promote successful design.

Comment 3

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU3
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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

The council fully supports the principle of this policy. However, we recommend that the following amendment would help to align with existing policy in the development plan and national policy:

'Development proposals should ~~sustain~~ conserve and, **where possible**, enhance the historic environment, particularly the special architectural and historic ~~interest~~ **interest** significance of the designated Ruscombe Conservation Area and its setting.'

(Remainder of policy is unchanged)

We recommend that the title of the policy should be amended to 'Ruscombe Conservation Area' to reflect our suggested amendments to the policy wording above.

We also recommend some specific amendments to the submitted plan to reflect our suggested modifications to the policy. In particular:

Page 2 under 'aims' – To **preserve or enhance** ~~conserve~~ the character of the St. James' Church Conservation Area **and its setting**.

Page 23 – Preserving ~~and~~ **or** enhancing the distinct character of local areas, including the **St. James' Church Conservation Area and its setting**

Page 24 under 'objectives' – To preserve ~~&~~ **or** enhance the character of the St. James' Church Conservation Area **and its setting**

Comment 4

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU4
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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

Whilst the council fully acknowledges the need for applicants to engage local communities and other stakeholders in their development proposals, Policy RU4 is not considered a land-use planning policy and is standard practice in the pre-application process. As per national policy and guidance, neighbourhood plans form part of the statutory development plan and should only deal with the development and use of land. If the neighbourhood planning group wish to proceed with this requirement, the council would recommend that elements of the policy are either moved and incorporated into Policy RU1: Development Limit for Ruscombe,

(similar to Policy AD₁ of the made Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan¹) or moved into the supporting text of the plan.

Comment 5

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU5
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

¹ Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 (April 2020), available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=516387>

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

The Council supports the principle of this policy. However, we consider that, in its current form, the plan's evidence has provided insufficient justification for classifying fourteen buildings or structures as 'Buildings of Traditional Local Character'. In particular, the information contained in Appendix B should include more detailed and reasoned justification, following more closely the criteria and methodology set out within Appendix 2 of the Council's Buildings of Traditional Local Character – Policy and Procedures.

We also recommend that the following amendments to Policy RU5 would help to align with existing policy in the development plan and national policy and would provide greater clarity to assist decision takers.

'Development proposals affecting non-designated heritage assets, including Buildings of Traditional Local Character listed above, will be supported where they **can demonstrate that they retain and sustain, or where practical (where possible) enhance the traditional, historical, local, and special significance of the building or structure and its setting** significance of the asset. ~~Proposals which cause harm to the asset or its setting will not be supported unless the public benefits outweigh the harm to the significance of the asset'.~~

In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, including Buildings of Traditional Local Character, a balanced judgement will be taken having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Comment 6

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU7
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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

The council fully supports the principle of this policy. However, regarding the second paragraph of the policy, there is no specific element of the policy that clarifies how a decision taker would take this matter into consideration through their development proposals. We recommend that the following amendment to paragraph 5.25 of the supporting text would help an applicant to demonstrate that the existing uses identified in criteria (i) and (ii) are no longer viable and would align with paragraph 3.85 of the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) local plan:

'These community facilities within the Parish are therefore valued by the local community and offer a valuable resource to support community life. The policy therefore identifies these on the Policies Map, and seeks to avoid their loss. **In demonstrating that an existing use is not viable, applicants must produce evidence that genuine and sustained efforts to promote, improve and market the facility at a reasonable value have been undertaken. The policy,** but also recognises that improvements or extensions to some may be necessary to ensure they remain viable. In these cases, other planning policies will still need to be addressed e.g., heritage.'

Comment 7

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU8
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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Policy RU8: Local Green Spaces must be in general conformity with paragraphs 101 to 102 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which states in particular that designation of land as Local Green Space should be used to protect green areas of particular importance to the community. Paragraph 102 of the NPPF sets out the following criteria, where the green space is:

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

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

The Council supports seven of the ten areas of green space proposed for designation, which are included for consultation in the emerging Revised Growth Strategy for the Local Plan Update². The assessment of the proposed sites (along with other nominations) is set out in the Local Green Space Topic Paper (November 2021)³. However, within this policy context, the Council consider that insufficient justification has been provided by the qualifying body to identify the following three areas of land for Local Green Space designation:

Local Green Space iv. New Road Pond – the site comprises a small area of incidental open space along New Road which offers no particular recreational, ecological or tranquillity value and therefore does not warrant further consideration as a Local Green Space designation. The proposed area is within the wider setting of the Ruscombe Conservation Area and would be covered by relevant policies in the Development Plan, national policy and legislation.

Local Green Space vii. Crossroads Lane – the site comprises a small area of amenity greenspace at the crossroad junction of Stanlake Lane, New Road, Waltham Road and Ruscombe Lane, which offers very limited recreational value and therefore does not warrant further consideration as a Local Green Space designation

Local Green Space ix. Land at London Road – the site comprises a small area of amenity greenspace and roadside verge which offers very limited recreational value and therefore does not warrant further consideration as a Local Green Space designation.

² Wokingham Borough Council Local Plan Update: Revised Growth Strategy Consultation (Nov 2021 – Jan 2022), available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/planning-policy-information/revised-growth-strategy-consultation/>

³ Wokingham Borough Council Local Green Spaces Topic Paper (November 2021), available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/planning-policy-information/revised-growth-strategy-consultation/?categoriesct191f252ff-550d-4cfa-a838-92ef2cb5f83c=10784>

Comment 8

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU10
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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

RU10: Managing Traffic

The policy approach is supported in principle. However, the policy should be amended to refer to financial contributions towards improving non car related modes of travel. This would help to address some of the issues and opportunities highlighted in the supporting text to Policy RU10, regarding infrastructure provision for pedestrians and cyclists.

Comment 9

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

Whole document?	Yes/No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU11
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Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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

RU11: Car Parking

The policy approach of reflecting the relevant Local Plan policy, in this case MDD Policy CCo7, is welcomed. However, to ensure clarity and consistency, several amendments are recommended.

Firstly, to be comprehensive the policy should also refer to the standards set out in Appendix 2 of the MDD. The policy should also refer to Electric Vehicle Charging (EVC) spaces as set out in the Wokingham Borough Highways Design Guide (2019). More broadly, the policy should also recognise the role of garages in providing car parking spaces.

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