

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):	Senior Planning Policy Officer
Responding on behalf of:	N/A
Organisation name (if applicable):	Wokingham Borough Council
Address:	Wokingham Borough Council Civic Offices Shute End Wokingham
Postcode:	RG40 1BN
Email address:	Ben.Davis@wokingham.gov.uk
	<p>If you would like to be notified of Wokingham Borough Council's decision whether to 'make' the Plan (to bring it into legal force), please tick the box below.</p> <p>Yes, please notify me <input type="checkbox"/></p>

PART B

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

Comment 1

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU1
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	------------

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 recommend that the policy is either removed or amended to provide some additional local context and value for guiding and managing development within the neighbourhood area.

Comment 2

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU2
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	------------

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 through the plan's preparation. 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 proposed 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 typologies include references to car parking, sometimes referring to parking in front gardens, whilst other typologies make no reference to parking. A consistent approach to parking would help to provide clarity and consistency.

We would also highlight the 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?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU3
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	------------

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 and acknowledges that the policy/supporting text has been modified to align with existing policy in the Council's development plan and national planning policy.

However, we would seek a minor change, to include the word 'conserve' in the policy and would therefore recommend the following amendment:

'Development proposals should **conserve** ~~sustain~~ and, where possible, enhance the historic environment, particularly the special architectural and historic significance interest of the designated Ruscombe Conservation Area and its setting. Features identified as positive characteristics of the Conservation Area and its immediate setting are defined in the Ruscombe Housing Design Code attached as Appendix A, to which all proposals must have full regard.'

Comment 4

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU4
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	------------

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), moved into the supporting text of the plan or included as a 'Community Action' at the end of the Plan.

We would also point to a minor grammatical error in paragraph 2 of the policy, and suggest the following amendment:

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

Where development proposals are for 10 or more dwellings, more than a 1000m2 of new floor space, or where the site is greater than a hectare in size, applicants should demonstrate in the Statement of Community Involvement how they have engaged in a meaningful way with local residents and other stakeholders prior to submitting a planning application.

Comment 5

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU5
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	------------

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 supports the principle of this policy, and it is acknowledged that the policy has been modified to align with Policy TB26 of the MDD local plan and national planning policy, which is welcomed.

The Managing Development Delivery (MDD) local plan sets out a process and set of criteria to be followed, with local importance to be expressed within a form of Statement of Significance. Following engagement with the Council’s Conservation Officer, the information contained in Appendix B is considered sufficient in providing a reasoned justification for the proposed Buildings of Traditional Local Character in Policy RU5 of the Plan and aligns with the criteria and methodology set out within Appendix 2 of the Council’s Buildings of Traditional Local Character – Policy and Procedures.

Further clarity would be welcomed regarding the extent the landowners of the identified buildings/structures have been engaged in this process. This is also recognised as best practice in guidance published by Historic England in their Local Heritage Listing: Identifying and Conserving Local Heritage Advice Note 7 (Second Edition), which provides useful advice for identifying non-designated heritage assets in local plans and neighbourhood plans, in particular:

Paragraph 33 of the guidance states:

‘The management of any non-designated heritage asset on a local heritage list will be easier if it is included on the list with the knowledge of the owner. Owners should be advised of the intention to locally list an asset, including an explanation of the planning implications’ (our emphasis)

Paragraph 55 of the guidance states:

‘Particular attention should be given to responses received from the owners of assets as these will assist in developing future management strategies. Although there is no statutory requirement to consult owners before adding an asset to the local list, inviting comments may provide information that is important for understanding its significance’ (our emphasis)

Currently, the consultation documents indicate that landowners were engaged in February 2020, however no details are provided regarding any comments received. The Consultation Statement (October 2021) indicates that two landowners were further consulted in September 2021, similarly no details of the process nor the outcome are provided for in the Plan.

It is recommended that the Plan is supported by evidence clearly summarising the engagement between the qualifying body and the landowners of each building or structure, including details of any responses received.

The Council's Conservation Officer has also recommended some minor modifications to the supporting text of the Plan, and include:

- References in the Plan to 'St. James Church Conservation Area' should be replaced with 'Ruscombe Conservation Area', which is the correct name for the designation.
- Under the 'Foreword', amend the third aim as follows: '*To preserve ~~and~~ or enhance the character of the ~~St James's Church~~ **Ruscombe** Conservation Area and its setting.*'
- Paragraph 2.6 includes a list of specific buildings, but reference should be made to their listing under statutory legislation, e.g., Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
- Paragraph 3.7 under 'Designated Heritage Assets etc (TB24)' suggest deleting 'etc'. The Plan could also benefit with a definition of a designated heritage asset, as per Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Paragraph 3.7 under - 'Archaeology (TB25)' - The Plan could benefit in identifying the four archaeological sites on a map.
- Paragraph 5.15 - this should also refer to the Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) who is the responsible authority for designating listed buildings, in consultation with Historic England.
- Appendix B - With respect to the dating of a number of the properties, further clarity and confirmation regarding the age of some properties would be welcomed, notably with respect to I) Ruscombe Cottage, IX) Southbury Farm, X) Lake Cottage, XIII) Keepers Cottage and XIV) Lake Farm.

Comment 6

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU7
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	------------

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 and acknowledges that the supporting text at paragraph 5.25 of the updated draft Plan has been modified. The modifications provide further guidance to assist applicants by demonstrating how an existing community use identified in the policy would no longer be viable and to provide further clarity for how a decision taker would take this matter into consideration when assessing development proposals. The modified text also aligns with paragraph 3.85 of the Council's Managing Development Delivery (MDD) local plan.

Comment 7

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU8
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	------------

Do you support, support with modifications, oppose, or wish to comment on this policy/paragraph? (Please tick one answer)

Support Support with modifications Oppose Wish to comment

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

Policy 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 were included for consultation in the 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/?categoryesct91f252ff-550d-4cfa-a838-92ef2cb5f83c=10784>

Comment 8

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU10
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	-------------

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 policy approach is supported. It is acknowledged that the policy has been modified to set out how development proposals should contribute towards improving non car related modes of travel, for example traffic calming measures and active travel improvements; and would address some of the issues and opportunities highlighted in the supporting text, with respect to infrastructure provision for pedestrians and cyclists.

Comment 9

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number		Policy Reference:	Policy RU11
-----------------	----	------------------	--	-------------------	-------------

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 policy approach of reflecting the relevant Local Plan policy, in this case MDD Policy CC07, is welcomed. Further, it is acknowledged that the policy has been modified to ensure that development proposals provide and retain appropriate levels of parking in line with the Council's adopted parking standards and regard had to the Council's Highway Design Guide.

The policy also recognises the role of garages in providing car parking spaces subject to providing sufficient internal space and consideration of impacts on active frontages.

Comment 9

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

Whole document?	No	Paragraph Number	3.16	Policy Reference:	N/A
-----------------	----	------------------	------	-------------------	-----

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.

It is recommended that paragraph 3.16 of the supporting text of the draft Plan is amended to reflect that the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan was adopted by the Council in January 2023 and forms part of the Council's Development Plan and used to make decisions on relevant planning applications.