

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2038

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

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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;

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- 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

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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);

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- 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

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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.