

# Common Concerns about the Local Plan Update

**Earlier this year, as part of the engagement for the Local Plan Update, we asked you what you think about Wokingham Borough via Facebook and Twitter and at pop-up events across the Borough.**

Thank you to everyone who stopped to chat with us and to those who commented on our Facebook posts and tweets. We'll be using the feedback as we carry out our Local Plan Update.

We noticed a couple of issues that kept coming up in talking to residents, and in the comments to our Facebook posts, and we thought it might be helpful for us to address them.

For more information on the local plan update, visit: [www.wokingham.gov.uk/localplanupdate](http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/localplanupdate)



December 2016

# COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT THE LOCAL PLAN UPDATE:



## Why aren't you protecting our green spaces and countryside?

**We are** - in fact, protecting the countryside is one of the primary reasons for what we are doing. The local plan update is about how we **protect our countryside**, while recognising that development will take place whether we like it or not. We live in a very desirable part of the country and developers would love to build as many houses as they can sell. Without an up-to-date local plan to direct where development is acceptable, developers would be applying to build everywhere and central government would likely be approving the applications because **Central Government wants a lot of houses built here** in a short space of time.



The demand for housing in our area is strong and we don't have some of the same constraints that our neighbours have which make building new homes more difficult - we don't have any Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AoNB) (although we think there are some extraordinary scenic parts of the Borough, none are legally classified as AoNB), we do have some Greenbelt but not as much as our neighbours to the east, we don't have any Crown estate land or environmental special protection areas and we are not as crowded as Reading is. We do have flooding areas along with ancient woodland and nature reserves, but much of the Borough does not have anything that we could use to justify automatic protection (technically known as a 'planning constraint'). To see a constraints map of the area, visit the Local Plan Update page on our website and scroll down to the 'Opportunities and Constraints Map'.

Our countryside is mostly private farm fields and many private farmers, understandably, like the idea of selling for development. We are losing some of these farms, but we are also ensuring that when we do lose open farmland to large scale developments that we get some public open space along with the development. Our four strategic developments will result in about **290 hectares of new public open space, play areas and parks** - that's equivalent to **390 football pitches!**

## Why are more houses coming to the Borough when we are already building so many?

Thriving towns have always needed new houses to accommodate the needs of the next generation and Wokingham Borough is no exception. The **new houses will be where you, your children and their children will call home**. Our towns and villages are like trees with rings of growth layering back through time to the original centres. This is how we stay healthy and viable as communities and accommodate our growth needs. Wokingham Borough is an **economic success** story but we cannot be complacent. We will only continue to attract and keep international businesses if we have enough great homes for their staff - accompanied, of course, by great infrastructure.

In the era up to 2006, 800 to 900 new houses were being built in the Borough each year in an incremental manner on small sites, largely in back gardens, with little or no infrastructure. Then in 2006 we began to change how we manage growth. The housing you see being built today was approved through our current local plan, which requires us to build about 660 new homes per year from 2006 to 2026. This is a smaller number of houses per year than were being built in the years up to 2006, however, these houses are being built on large strategic sites which have been planned with substantial amounts of infrastructure.

## Why don't you write a new local plan with no additional houses - we are all full up!

According to **national policy** (which we have no choice but to follow) there is a lot of land in the Borough that has the potential for development. It is up to us to plan for this properly and to protect what is most important.

If we don't plan for enough housing to meet our housing need, which is based on population growth, commuting patterns and other factors, our plan won't be approved and we will be **vulnerable to unplanned development**.



## So what? Why does it matter if we don't have an up-to-date plan?

If we don't have an up-to-date local plan that meets our housing need, housing proposals will get approved on appeal (similar to the pattern of development prior to 2006). This means we will get more new housing even though we won't get to plan where it should go and most importantly we won't get to plan the schools, roads, parks, community and sports facilities and shops that people need.



## LOCAL PLAN

### OR WE ARE VULNERABLE TO INAPPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT

## How many more houses will be in the local plan update?

Based on independent research in a technical study, we estimate that we'll need to plan for about 850 new homes per year to roll the plan forward from its current end date of 2026 to the new end date of 2036. That's about 200 new homes per year on top of the 660 we are already required to plan for. This number will be publicly tested at an examination overseen by an independent Planning Inspector to ensure it is right before it is approved.



**We will ensure that as part of this process we will consult widely, protect our most important heritage and landscapes, and manage the planning and building of the shops, employment centres, roads, schools, and community and leisure facilities required to support the new homes.** Early planning will also enable us to apply for grants and forward funding for the big infrastructure projects such as new relief/distributor roads.

## Why aren't you using money from the new housing to make things better for existing residents?

Technically we can't. The money that developers must pay when building new homes must be spent to support the development of the area rather than be used to remedy existing problems or deficiencies (except where these will be made worse by the new development). But, money from the new housing pays for, or contributes to, a range of projects that benefit existing residents as well as the new residents. If we focus on making sure development is in the right place and is well designed we can also limit the impact on existing residents while enabling you to benefit from the infrastructure investment as well.

## How has money from the new housing benefited me?

Money from the new houses is substantial – approximately **£350million** – and has contributed to or paid for the 2014 play park at **Dinton Pastures**, upcoming improvements to **California Country Park**, the new **games area in Finchampstead**, upgrades to **sports facilities** and **play parks** across the Borough and will be used to pay for the self-service machines that will help us protect and expand our library services, **keeping our libraries open** and staffed in an era when many local authorities are closing libraries. The money is also funding **new roads and improvements to the existing highway** network which will benefit existing residents – the **Shinfield Eastern Relief Road** will lighten the pressure on roads in Shinfield, the **Arborfield Cross Relief Road** will do the same for Arborfield Cross and the new **Station Link Road** has improved the flow of traffic through Wokingham town.

## Why are you allowing new houses without the necessary roads, schools and other infrastructure?

**We aren't.** The first new secondary school in the Borough in over 50 years, **Bohunt Wokingham Secondary School**, in the Arborfield Garrison major development, opened its doors in September 2016 before any of the new houses in Arborfield were occupied. **Floreat Montague Park Primary School** also opened in September 2016 when just a couple hundred of the new homes in the South Wokingham major development were occupied. There are another **6 primary schools** coming to the Borough to serve the pupils of the major development locations.

Other benefits, supported by or paid for by new housing development, already here or coming soon include:

- 89 hectares of new **public open space, play areas and parks** have already been opened to the public (that's equivalent to about 120 football pitches) with another 200 hectares still to come (270 football pitches)
- About 210 new **affordable homes** have already been built with another 2,300 still to come
- New and improved **sports and leisure facilities**, including two gyms serving people with long-term health concerns, pool pods for both the Carnival and Loddon swimming pools to allow people with restricted mobility to access the pool, new changing facilities and gym equipment at Carnival and Bulmershe leisure centres, a dance studio and outdoor play area at St Crispin's leisure centre, play equipment for families with additional needs at Sol Joel Park, improvements to tennis courts at Cantley Park, upgrade of sports courts and floodlighting at the Loddon Valley Leisure Centre, and upgrades of play parks across the Borough.

- New **community centres** – a new community centre in Shinfield Village is under negotiation now, as is one in Montague Park and one in North Wokingham. Another three in Arborfield Garrison and another one in South Wokingham are planned.
- 4 new major roads – the **Shinfield Eastern Relief Road** is scheduled to open early 2017; work is underway on the **North Wokingham Distributor Road**; the **Arborfield Cross Relief Road** is in the detailed planning stages; and the **South Wokingham Distributor Road** will come with the development south of the railway
- **Road improvements** including the Winnersh Relief Road, Station Link Road and the Coppid Beech Roundabout
- Improvements to the **cycle network** and **public transportation**
- A network of **footpaths, cycleways and bridleways** connecting up the Borough



**The infrastructure for these new communities is coming!**

**Our roads are already chock-a-block and can't handle the cars that will come with new houses!**

Our roads are congested, as is the whole of the southeast. We live in a part of the country where everyone wants to live, and that comes with a cost.



Our roads are congested because we all drive a lot! We all need to make the effort to walk, cycle or use public transport more. We are improving the road network to make it work better (such as the Station Link Road) but we are also investing in alternatives to driving.

**Are you only engaging residents because you have to?**

We are trying to talk to far more people than we legally have to – both because we think it is right and because it will help us make better decisions. We can't change the fact that we have to plan for new housing in our local plan update, but with your help we can make it as agreeable as possible not only for the new residents who will directly benefit but also for the residents who already live in the borough. **And we do listen.**

Maybe what we haven't done well is to explain to you how your comments influence our decisions.

We recognise this and it's something we are trying to do better.

Here are two examples of how your comments made a difference:

A couple of years ago we consulted residents on what routes they would like us to take for the Arborfield Cross Relief Road (ACRR) and the North Wokingham Distributor Road (NWDR). In both cases the residents strongly supported routes that were very different from those suggested by our technical assessment. So we went away and spent time and money looking for routes that were as close as possible to the residents' preferences.

**YOU SAY...  
WE LISTEN**

We think we'll be able to build the ACRR almost exactly as residents wanted. The NWDR is more difficult, but most of what residents want is being included in the plans – only a small section around Toutley Road proved impossible because it would have caused too much damage to the flood plain.

**Where can I find more information about the local plan update?**

The local plan update page on our website is a great place to start. There you'll find a summary of the local plan process, our expected timetable, how you can get involved, the latest news, and more.



[www.wokingham.gov.uk/localplanupdate](http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/localplanupdate)

You can also sign up for our local plan update newsletter by emailing:



[communityengagement@wokingham.gov.uk](mailto:communityengagement@wokingham.gov.uk)

