



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**General Information Document on Town and Country Planning,
including Neighbourhood Planning**

This statement has been prepared to meet Regulation 4(3)(b) of the Neighbourhood
Planning (Referendum) Regulations 2012 (as amended)

1. The Planning System

The planning system manages the use and development of land and buildings with the aim of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. Without the system, development would not be managed and could take place anywhere, with considerable impact on people and the environment. It is through the planning system therefore that we, as a society, strike a balance between allowing development to support economic, social and environmental objectives.

The planning system has two main parts which are usually the responsibility of the local planning authority (the borough/district council, county council, or unitary council):

- Plan making – setting out proposals for development and policies to guide development decisions over time.
- Managing development – when decisions on development proposals are taken through the assessment of planning applications.

Not all forms of development require planning permission from the local planning authority, being permitted directly by national legislation. This type of development is known as permitted development.

Where a proposed development requires planning permission from the local planning authority, Wokingham Borough Council is responsible for deciding whether the development should go ahead.

The starting point for decisions on planning applications is the development plan which comprises adopted local plans, and any relevant made neighbourhood plan.

2. National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), last updated in August 2026, sets out the government's planning policies for plan-making and for decision-taking. It includes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) supports the NPPF and provides further guidance on planning issues such as neighbourhood planning.

3. Local Plans

Local plans are prepared by local planning authorities and set out the strategic policies for managing development. Local plans form part of the development plan, the starting point for deciding planning applications.

Policies include those to deliver key development including homes and jobs required, the provision of retail and community facilities, and infrastructure. Policies relating to protecting the environment and responding to climate change, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment are also included.

Local plans must be prepared with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. They must be positive, appropriate, effective and consistent with national policy in accordance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended) and the NPPF.

The adopted local plans for Wokingham Borough are the Core Strategy (adopted January 2010), the Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (adopted February 2014) and the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Local Plan (adopted January 2023). Additional information about the Local Plan for Wokingham is available on the following website:

www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/adopted-development-plan

The council is preparing a new local plan which, when adopted, will replace the Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery plans listed above. This plan is currently in the final stages of being examined by government appointed planning inspectors, with adoption anticipated in the first half of 2027. Additional information is available on the council's website using the link below:

www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy/emerging-local-plan-update

Changes nationally to the planning system require the council to also begin work to prepare another new local plan which will be referred to as the Local Plan 2045. This is driven by the government's ambition to increase the number of new homes built in England from 300,000 a year to 370,000 a year. Additional information is available on the council's website at the following link:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-policy-and-developer-contributions/local-plan-2045>

4. Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood planning was introduced under the Localism Act 2011. It provides an opportunity for local communities to play a direct role in shaping how land in the areas in which they live and work is used and developed.

Neighbourhood plans are produced by the parish or town council, commonly referred to as the 'Qualifying Body'. The Sonning Neighbourhood Plan has been prepared by Sonning Parish Council. There is a statutory process that must be followed to 'make' (adopt) a plan.

Basic conditions

Neighbourhood plans must meet certain "basic conditions" as set out in the legislation broadly summarised as below:

- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- not have the effect of preventing development from taking place which is proposed in the development plan for the area of the authority;
- 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.

How are they made?

A neighbourhood plan must be prepared through a process of consultation before being tested through an independent examination.

The key stages in producing a neighbourhood plan are:

- 1) Designating a neighbourhood area
- 2) Preparing a draft neighbourhood plan
- 3) Pre-submission publicity and consultation
- 4) Submission of a neighbourhood plan to the local planning authority
- 5) Publication and consultation on the submission draft plan
- 6) Independent examination
- 7) Referendum
- 8) Bringing the neighbourhood plan into force

It is the independent examiner's role to check whether the submitted neighbourhood plan meets the basic conditions and, if not, whether any modifications should be made to the plan to ensure this. The examiner will also recommend whether the submitted or amended plan should progress to the next stage in the process which is a referendum.

An independent examiner (Andrew Ashcroft MRTPI) was appointed to consider the Sonning Neighbourhood Plan in March 2026 and provided his report to Wokingham Borough Council in June 2026. The examiner's report recommended that, subject to modifications proposed, the plan should proceed to referendum. Wokingham Borough Council accepted and agreed all the modifications proposed, with some minor deviations to provide factual updates and correct typos, and were subsequently satisfied that the neighbourhood plan met the basic conditions and all other legislative requirements. Wokingham Borough Council confirmed on 24 September 2026 that the neighbourhood plan could proceed to referendum.

What Does the Referendum Result Mean?

The Sonning Neighbourhood Plan referendum will be held on **Thursday 12 November 2026 from 7am to 10pm.**

If more than half of those voting do so in favour of the neighbourhood plan, the local planning authority (Wokingham Borough Council) must make it part of the development plan and use it to guide decisions on planning applications.

Additional information in relation to neighbourhood planning is available to view at the link below:
<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/neighbourhood-planning/>