



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

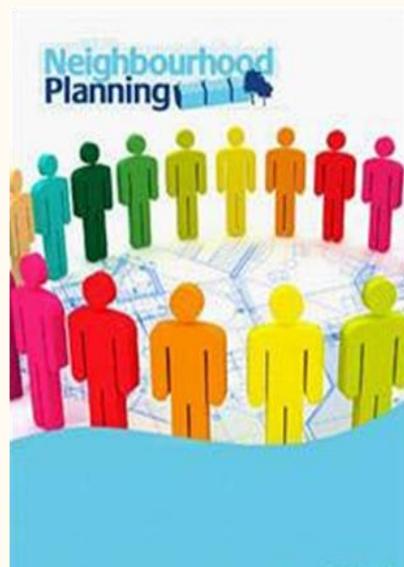
Welcome

This small exhibition has been put together to publicise the work being carried out to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for Arborfield and Barkham. The work is being taken forward by a small team of volunteers, including some councillors from each parish and one of our Borough councillors, and has reached the stage where wider community involvement is needed.

Some residents may remember a survey carried out by questionnaire about four years ago. That produced some very useful information, but work on the Neighbourhood Plan at that time was overtaken by the uncertainties associated with development proposed at Arborfield Garrison and by the Arborfield Bypass consultation.

Both these issues are now more settled, and work on the Neighbourhood Plan was restarted about six months ago.

These exhibition boards have been designed to provide as much information as possible about the Neighbourhood Plan, and the work needed to produce it. With the Borough Council now in the process of developing the Local Plan Update, which will guide the future development of Wokingham Borough up to 2036, this is a very good time to be gathering our opinions and sharing them with the Borough Council.



There are members of the team of volunteers (the Steering Group) here today, so please ask them anything at all about the Plan, and how people can get involved.

A plan for the community by the community



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

Neighbourhood Plans were introduced by the government in 2011 with the intention of giving communities a greater say in planning for their local area:

Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area. They are able to choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built, have their say on what those new buildings should look like and what infrastructure should be provided, and grant planning permission for the new buildings they want to see go ahead..(Department for Communities and Local Government, 2016)

There are many neighbourhood plans already in place all over the country. In Berkshire, several plans are in force and more are being developed.



To help deliver the plan, communities that take a proactive approach by drawing up a neighbourhood plan and secure the consent of local people in a referendum, will benefit from 25% of the revenues from the Community Infrastructure Levy arising from the development that takes place in their area. Without a plan in place, this amount reduces to 15% and is capped at a maximum amount per new house.

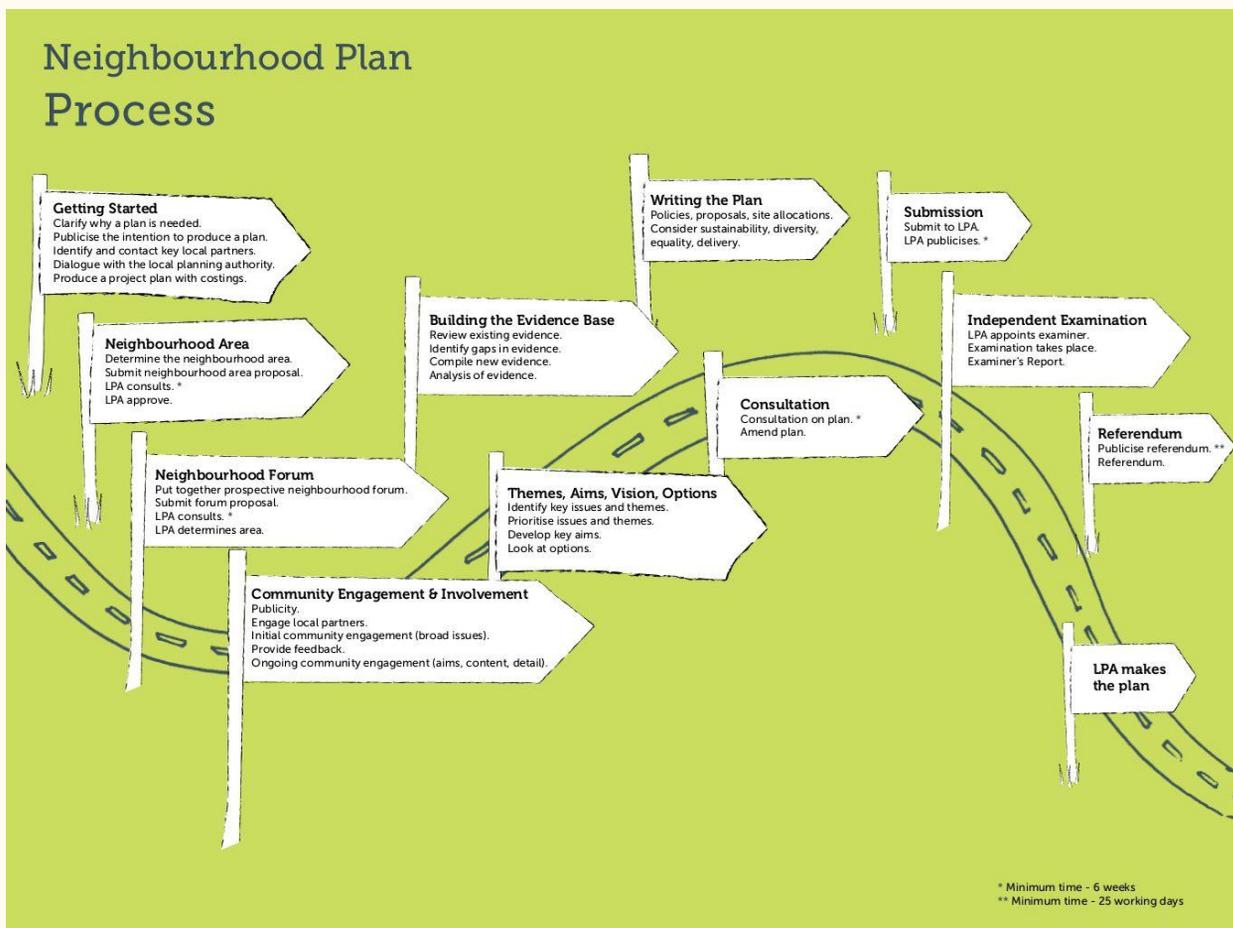


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Developing a Neighbourhood Plan

There are a number of stages to developing a new plan, as depicted in the diagram below.

Once a neighbourhood plan is in force following a successful referendum, it carries real legal weight. Decision makers are obliged to consider proposals for development in the neighbourhood against the neighbourhood plan.



The first three stages of the process have already been completed. This exhibition is the first part of stage 4 – Community Involvement and Engagement. The more people who get involved, and the more that can be engaged with the plan, the stronger and more effective the plan will be.

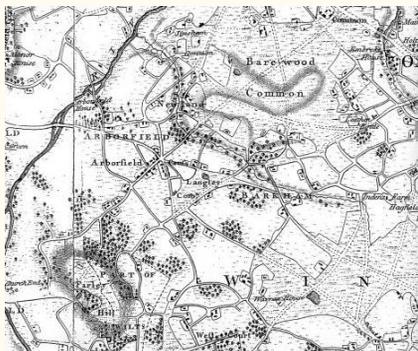
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Arborfield and Barkham today

The rural setting of Arborfield and Barkham villages defines their character. The attractive landscape comprising farmland and woodland is punctuated with small settlements, hamlets and individual dwellings. Together these settlements form modern and vibrant communities with many active societies and activities focused on a small number of centres.



The settlement pattern is the modern-day product of historic farmlands. Both villages celebrate diversity in building styles, reflecting stages in history dating back to the 16th century.

Both parishes have Village Design Statements in place, and these seek to protect and enhance what is important to local people. Crucially, the opportunity to live largely in the countryside, yet have ready access to a major regional centre at Reading, to national road and rail networks, and to Heathrow and Gatwick airports promotes a high demand for existing housing.



Two issues have risen to the top when local people have been surveyed in the past about their concerns – traffic congestion, and increasing urbanisation. Each has the potential to alter forever the unique character of the villages.

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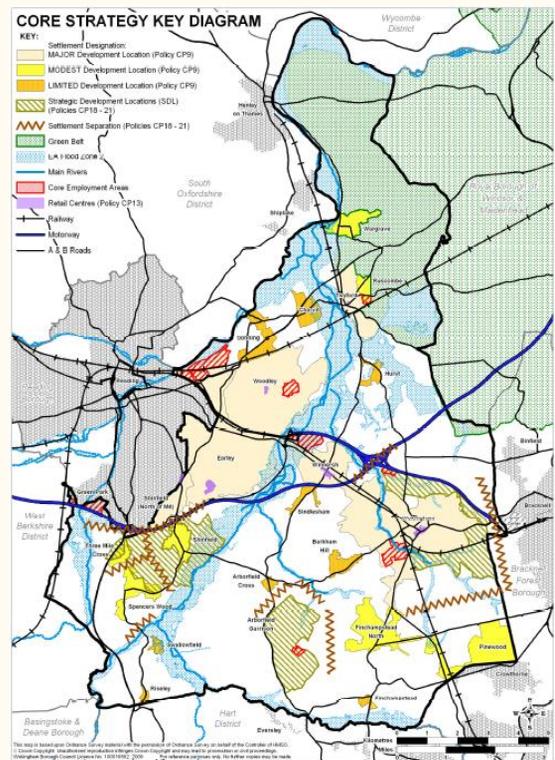


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Changes already in the pipeline

Major developments are planned in and around our area. Plans include provision for 3,500 new homes at Arborfield Garrison together with district and neighbourhood centres, community facilities, shops and schools. Construction of the first houses and the senior school have been under way for some time, and it is expected that the whole development will take up to 15 years to complete.

At Shinfield, just up the main A327 to Reading, the plans include another 2,500 homes and other development. A lot of building is already underway, and will take many years to complete. Other, smaller developments are also adding to the numbers of new houses.



In Arborfield, between the village and the River Loddon, plans are being prepared for the extraction of 3 million tonnes of gravel, expected to take around 10 years to complete.

Associated with some of these developments, new roads and other facilities are to be provided. The design of an Arborfield Bypass is currently being developed, with a start on site promised for 2018. Barkham Bridge, notorious as an accident site, is to be widened to accommodate two-way traffic.

The Arborfield Green development will more than double the number of houses in Arborfield and Barkham combined. By the time the planned developments are completed, the Borough Council's traffic forecast indicates roads at full capacity, including the Arborfield Bypass and all routes into Reading and Wokingham.



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Pressure for more development

There is pressure from government to increase the number of houses being built and to build them more quickly.

When Wokingham Borough Council drew up the current plan, it proposed four Strategic Development Locations. Two of these are in Wokingham town. The other two, which are larger, are at Shinfield and Arborfield Green. The Council's housing target under the current local plan is to build approximately 660 additional houses a year.

As part of updating the local plan, a new housing assessment has been carried out. This shows that the housing need in Wokingham Borough between 2013 and 2036 will be 850 new homes per year. This figure has to be worked through the local plan process, looking at issues such as land supply, before a new housing target can be agreed.

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UPDATE**



Pressure for more development is also coming from more local sources. Reading Football Club would like to build 200 homes on their training ground at Hogwood Park. Both Parish Councils have been approached by other developers wanting support for more new houses on additional sites.

Arborfield and Barkham are not the only areas coming under pressure for development, but our parishes are amongst the few areas where larger scale growth is already under way.

Deciding what the future should look like will be the key theme of the Neighbourhood Plan.

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Natural heritage

The countryside and rural setting for Arborfield and Barkham comprises many different landscapes, varied habitats, interesting walks and has historical significance. The three areas below are representative of this diversity.

The Coombes, Arborfield and Barkham



This area of hilly, wooded walks straddles the parishes and is an area of ecological interest. Notable tree species include sweet chestnut and holly. In spring there is a bold display of bluebells to the west and rhododendrons elsewhere. The woods abut open countryside and a golf course.

This small area of attractive woodland is all that remains of a larger wood cleared to make way for farming in the 1960s – a reminder that once destroyed, natural heritage is lost forever. Species include oak, hornbeam, ash and rarer service trees. Birds, insects and fungi thrive. The copse is a designated Local Wildlife Site.

Pound Copse, Arborfield



Historic Farmlands, Barkham



The field systems around the church with ancient hedgerows and ditch systems can be traced back over many hundreds of years. They are still being farmed and provide an unchanging backdrop for residential areas and the medieval village site. Kites and buzzards soar while deer graze.



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Historic built environment

The area to be covered by the neighbourhood plan is rich in heritage assets. There is a designated Conservation Area in Arborfield Cross, Areas of Special Character in both villages, and both parishes have numerous historic buildings and permanent reminders of how the villages developed and the communities grew.



Over two dozen Listed Buildings and Ancient Monuments are designated by Historic England.



Arborfield is essentially an Anglo-Saxon village. The 'field' was one of several areas of open land lying in a band across mid-Berkshire and marking the western boundary of Windsor Forest. It was originally part of the huge parish of Sonning, owned by the Bishop of Salisbury. The Bullocks of Arborfield became Lords of both parishes through marriage around 1330 and continued to own them for several centuries

Barkham, which means 'Birch Tree Home', is also an Anglo Saxon village and is mentioned in a Chronicle of 952. The Bullocks continued to use the original manor house in Barkham located near the church, formerly Barkham Court now Church Cottages, which is still surrounded by the old moat.



The Bull Inns in Arborfield and Barkham are said to be named after the Bullocks.

Village Design Statements have been adopted by both communities. During the development processes, a number of common themes emerged from the aspirations of local people. Of paramount importance is the preservation of village identities, both in the context of physical separation and as part of protection against further urbanisation.

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Transport

In common with much of the South East, improvements to the local transport networks have failed to keep pace with either economic growth or the onset of new development. The result is that travel can be frustratingly slow at peak times and hazardous at others. Traffic spills onto unsuitable routes, including country lanes, where it impacts on other users and residents whose homes front these roads.



Bus services provide only limited destinations for non-car users. Cycling has become a risky pursuit on most roads, and pedestrians have often to take their chances on busy country roads where once they could walk in comparative safety.

Travel is not generally an end in itself– it happens only because people need to get to somewhere else for work, education, shopping, or recreation. Where those facilities are developed is therefore of crucial importance to the impact they have on local traffic. Equally, being able to work at, or close to home, avoids another commuting journey on the network.

Away from the road system, there are a number of footpaths and other rights of way, but they do not generally connect with each other, or to the places residents most want to get to. Some work has been done to develop improvement proposals to overcome this by creating greenways, but more is needed. More 'safer routes to school' are also needed.





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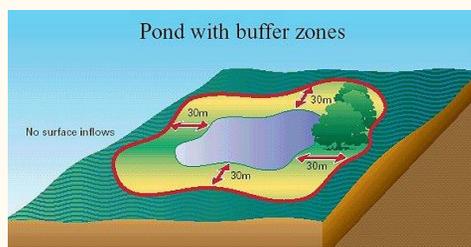
Flooding



Neighbourhood plans can help manage environmental risks and improve resilience to climate change. By highlighting local problems and developing policies for land use that support the local plan and national planning policies, a community can help manage the risk of flooding at a more localised level.

Arborfield and Barkham have had their share of local flooding. This is one of the areas where local knowledge can be all-important. Official records have improved greatly with the creation of flood maps. Local authorities now have greater responsibilities to ensure that the approach to minimising flood-risk is coordinated. However, the underlying causes and mechanisms involved in local flooding are often best known by those who live nearby.

There are many ways to contribute to reducing flood risk, from the use of permeable materials for driveways to the provision of buffer zones around existing and proposed watercourses.



Other actions could include landscaping to manage and store water and promoting the use of sustainable drainage systems. Planting trees can also help, and contribute towards creating green spaces as they can store water, and provide shade for people and wildlife.



How should the community try to improve flood-resilience through the Neighbourhood Plan? Many other plans already in operation have much to say about the prevention of flooding, and there are lots of ideas and initiatives to work with. Sharing the knowledge of people in the local community would be a good first step to understanding how flooding occurs locally, and making plans to reduce future risks.



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Sustainable Development

The concept of sustainable development can be interpreted in many different ways, but at its core is an approach to development that looks to balance different, and often competing, needs against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face as a society.



All too often, development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering the wider or future impacts. Living within our environmental limits is one of the central principles of sustainable development. But the focus of sustainable development is far broader than just the environment. It's also about ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. This means meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity.

So, how should the need for sustainable development be reflected in the policies in the Neighbourhood Plan - how can the best balance between the environment, the local economy, and social needs be achieved? What does the area need, and what should be protected or enhanced?

The development already in the pipeline will have impacts on all three aspects of sustainability. We must take into account the development at Arborfield Green and the new infrastructure when developing the Neighbourhood Plan.

What will be needed then?

How should it be reflected in the Plan?





Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Employment



The location of employment is the major driver of peak hour traffic congestion on our road network. Over 85% of the journeys made each morning and evening are to and from work, and a good proportion of the remainder are to schools. It follows that providing places of work and education close to housing is a good idea.

However, experience shows that only about 10% of residents in any area will work in the same area. The reasons are many, and our high levels of personal mobility make it possible to live somewhere and work somewhere else.

There are some things that could be done locally to support local businesses, and to make it easier to work at or near home:

- Support for extensions to existing employment areas, providing small units for local businesses
- Support for small business applications in housing areas, provided that they are not intrusive in a residential environment
- Support for conversion of some agricultural buildings to provide start-up units for new businesses
- Better coverage of super-fast broadband, making it possible to work from home more effectively, and to support existing businesses
- Provision of short-let serviced offices to enable new businesses to get off the ground, and employees of others to work closer to home



The aim would be to create additional employment opportunities in ways that present a lower impact on the community, and at lower cost. Schemes for 'smart' working and shared business overheads could also be developed.



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Future needs

Preparing a Neighbourhood Plan provides the opportunity to consider what might be needed in the future.

Plans may seek to allocate land for housing, employment, or community uses, or suggest highway improvements for consideration by the highway authority, in this case the Borough Council.



The cost of housing remains a major issue nationwide. Affordable housing is a form of housing where occupation is restricted to families on lower incomes. This may include homes at affordable rents and part-ownership schemes. Should the Neighbourhood Plan make some sort of provision to enable affordable homes to be brought forward?

With people living longer there is a need to consider the future housing needs of elderly people, for example small properties, sheltered housing, or care facilities. Should the Neighbourhood Plan make some sort of provision to enable proposals to be brought forward?



Community facilities are often provided through pastoral and other voluntary organisations. Should the plan be making provision for new community facilities? If so, what sort of facilities do you think will be needed?

As part of considering sustainability, we will need to consider economic and social impacts alongside those on the environment. What do you value about our area? Are there aspects that are of particular importance to you? What could be done to improve them?





Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

What is *your* vision for the future?

The future for Arborfield and Barkham will be shaped by a great many things, from the state of the economy to the value placed on our surroundings.

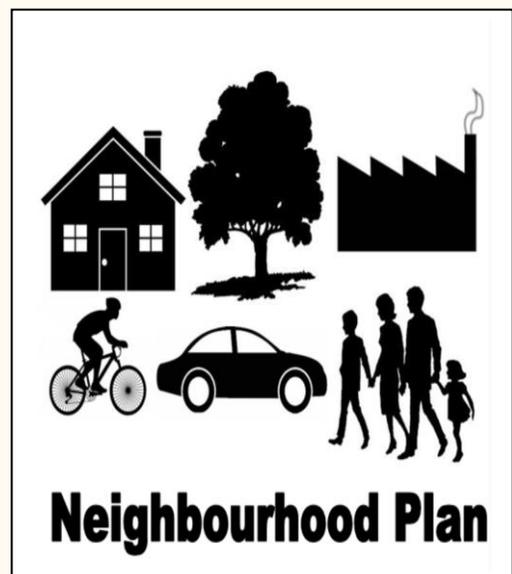
Once the neighbourhood plan has been completed, including passing a referendum, it will become one of a number of land-use policy documents that have to be taken into account in looking at proposals for new development.



Every Neighbourhood Plan has to be consistent with local and national planning policy, but they offer an opportunity to supplement such policies and guidance with more specific, localised detail on a range of different topic areas including: site allocations, design, transport, the environment, and so on.

In order to draft the plan, the team need to know what the community thinks is important, both now and in the future. The process is starting by asking everyone to complete a Neighbourhood Plan questionnaire. From the responses, it is hoped to learn which direction the plan should be going in, and what local priorities to pursue.

Please help us by completing a questionnaire, and encouraging others to do the same. There are copies here that can be returned to a number of locations or, better still, please complete online at www.arbarsurvey.com



A plan for the community by the community



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Next steps.....

4. Community Engagement & Involvement (the current step)

Two drop in events for residents

Completion of survey

5. Building the Evidence Base

Analysis of survey results

Establish focus groups to review key issues

6. Themes, Aims, Vision, Options

Identify and prioritise key issues and themes

Develop key aims, look at options

7. Writing the Plan

Develop policies within framework of WBC local plan and national guidance

Consider sustainability, diversity, equality, delivery

8. Consultation

Plan put forward for consultation period with residents and other stakeholders

9. Submission

Plan submitted to WBC

WBC publicises the plan

10. Independent Examination

Plan submitted to an independent examiner appointed by WBC

Examiner's report

11. Referendum

Publicise the referendum

Referendum open to residents of Arborfield and Barkham

12. WBC adopts the Plan