



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Shaping Our Future

Welcome to the 'Shaping Our Future' event

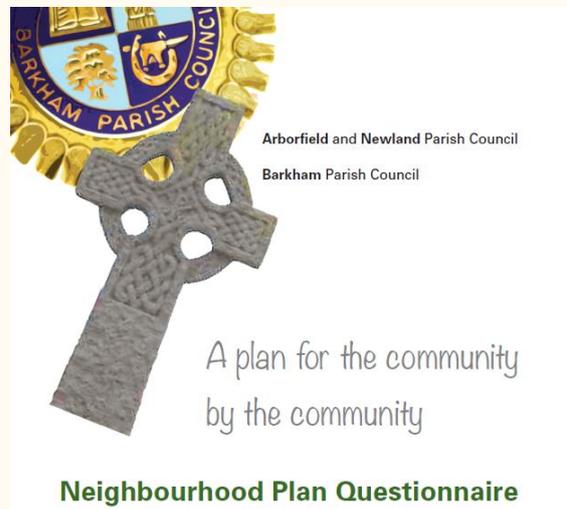
The purpose of this event is to seek feedback from residents on the work being carried out to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for Arborfield and Barkham. The work is being taken forward by a Steering Group comprised of residents, including some councillors from each parish.

A residents' survey was carried out at the end of last year and this was followed up with a range of Focus Groups addressing various topics. The Steering Group has taken on board the outcomes of these two exercises and have used them to create a Vision and Objectives for the Neighbourhood Plan. Once these are finalised it will be possible to develop the Neighbourhood Plan policies.

To help us please provide your comments using the online feedback form available at www.arbarplan.com, or the one inside the flyer, before the 5th November 2017.

Neighbourhood Plans are intended to address development and land use. Government guidance states that wider community aspirations can be included in a Neighbourhood Plan, but actions dealing with non-land use matters should be clearly identified as separate projects.

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 you can get involved.



A plan for the community by the community



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Vision and Objectives

Vision

A sustainable future for Arborfield and Barkham as a thriving and accessible community, managing development to be inclusive for all age groups and enhancing the identity and rural setting of the villages.

Objectives

Protecting identity and rural setting of the villages

- Protect and enhance the countryside – new development should blend into the landscape, not dominate countryside views
- Retain separation of settlements to retain their individual identities
- Enhance heritage and natural environment and extend conservation designations where possible
- Enhance the natural and historic setting of Arborfield Cross village centre and Barkham Street

Thriving community (includes community facilities and recreation)

- Provide full range of facilities – schools, leisure amenities, retail, medical
- Promote a strong rural economy

Accessibility (transport and greenways)

- Minimise congestion on residential roads
- Expand opportunities for sustainable transport

Managing development (housing, design and parking)

- Match housing to local needs – starter homes, key workers homes, lifetime homes and care of the elderly
- Require high quality design incorporating efficient use of resources



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Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Retaining our unique character

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 thriving communities with many activities including rambling, horse riding and local societies.



St. Bartholomew's Church, Arborfield

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.

Local plans have largely protected the environs of Arborfield and Barkham by defining settlement limits (drawing a boundary around each of the existing villages) stipulating some exceptional requirements that would need to be met for development to take place beyond them. Some areas have also been defined as areas contributing particularly to the continued separation of the villages from one another, and from surrounding built areas.

If this approach is to be incorporated into the Neighbourhood Plan, it needs to be decided:

- If and where the settlement boundaries could be extended?
- Which areas of countryside are particularly important to the character of the villages? Should these areas have special protection?
- Whether any exceptions should apply in particular circumstances, e.g. for specific types of development?
- What specific community facilities need to be provided?



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Protecting our natural heritage

In addition to defining the setting of the villages, the countryside around us represents an irreplaceable natural heritage. It is often said that we are simply the custodians of the environment, holding it in trust for future generations, as those before us have done.



Parts of the Neighbourhood Plan area are covered by special designations, for example Ancient Woodland, Local Wildlife Sites, Tree Preservation Orders. These recognise the special characteristics of areas that are important in terms of ecology, landscape, or habitat, and have helped to retain their character for us to enjoy.

Views of the countryside are especially important in establishing countryside character. With current development pressures, it is necessary to consider whether existing protection is adequate. Local designations have all been in place for a long time, and now is an opportunity to review them.

Your views are sought on a number of questions:

- Are there areas that should become protected in some way, or existing ones that should be extended?
- Which views in and around the Neighbourhood Plan area are so important that they should be specifically protected?
- What should be done to improve biodiversity and maintain varied habitats?
- Which areas should be better managed for public enjoyment?



Barkham Brook



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Our historic environment

The area to be covered by the neighbourhood plan is rich in heritage assets. Over two dozen Listed Buildings and Ancient Monuments are designated by Historic England. In addition to the history represented by the buildings themselves, their settings – the areas in which they reside – are also important.



St. James' Church, Barkham



Swan Inn, Arborfield

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. Many of these buildings have no statutory protection and rely on the good offices of the current owners to retain their historic identity – often at considerable cost.

Establishing land use policies around conservation is often difficult, but what are your opinions on the following suggestions?

- What should be done to ensure that our historic built heritage continues to survive, not just as isolated buildings, but in appropriate settings?
- Should the boundary of the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area or the Barkham Area of Special Character be reviewed?
- Should additional Conservation Areas or Special Character Areas be sought?
- Are there important buildings that should be designated as significant to local history?
- Are there other heritage assets that need protection, for example the avenue leading to the Old Churchyard in Arborfield?

What could be done to make the retention and maintenance of historic buildings more viable, e.g. the Infirmary Stables at Arborfield Green?



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Development underway and proposed



Crest Nicholson – Arborfield Green Delivery

Major developments are already planned in and around our area. The new community at Arborfield Green is taking shape. Ultimately it will grow to 3,500 homes and will be served by its own district centres, community facilities, shops and schools. The new Bohunt school opened in 2016 and has now moved into the new building. It is expected that the whole Arborfield Green development will take up to 15 years to complete.

At Shinfield, towards Reading, plans include another 2,500 homes. Building is already underway and will take many years to complete. Other, smaller developments are also adding to the numbers of new houses. Cross Rail will open in stages during the next few years, which will further increase pressure for development within the area.

Associated with some of these developments, new roads and other facilities are to be provided. Plans have been submitted for the Arborfield Relief Road, with a start on site proposed for 2018. Barkham Bridge, notorious as an accident site, is to be widened to accommodate two-way traffic.

In addition, plans have been submitted for the extraction of 3 million tonnes of gravel in Arborfield, in an area between the village and the River Loddon. If approved, extraction is expected to take around 10 years to complete.

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 Cross Relief Road, Nine Mile Ride 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 was expected that a total of 660 houses would be built each year. This figure is being increased to approximately 850 houses per year between 2013 and 2036, subject to review in the Local Plan Update process. This would mean that Wokingham will have to find land, over and above the 14,000 committed in the current plan.

In spite of the huge amount of building taking place around Wokingham, a number of planning appeals have been lost on the grounds that the Borough does not have an adequate 5 year land supply. This is because a flawed system is used to assess land supply which relies on developers advising what they expect to build.

If the Borough does not meet its housing target (over which it has no control), then the developers are rewarded with yet more allocations. This is in spite of the Borough having granted over 10,000 applications – enough for a 12 year land supply, based on applications granted.



The Borough has started the process of developing a new Local Plan Update, and has asked for proposals from landowners and developers. The land put forward is equivalent to 26% of the two parishes. This compares with 7% being the existing built area and 10% committed as part of Arborfield Green. Although all these sites are not expected to be approved, the extent to which open spaces and landscape could be eroded is daunting to say the least.

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



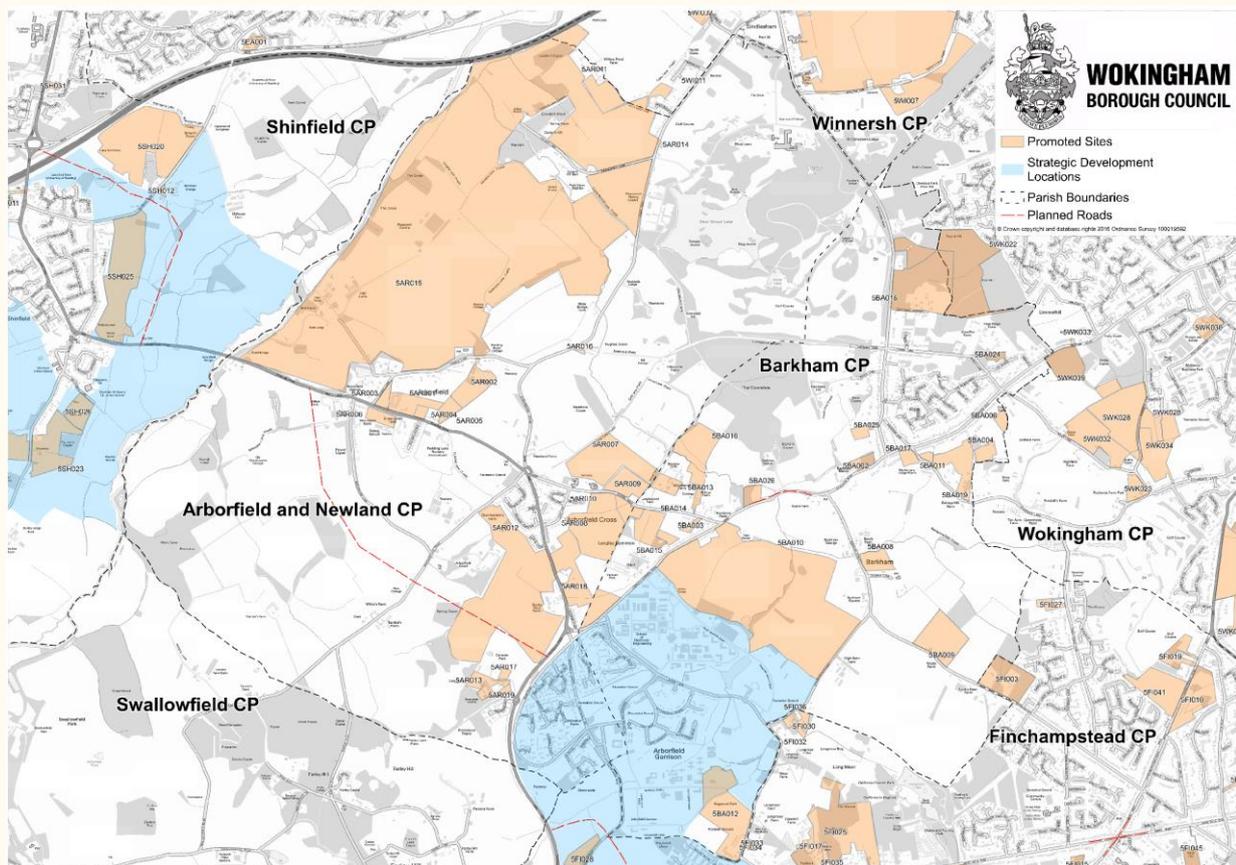
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Local Plan update

The new Local Plan will replace the Core Strategy adopted in 2010, and the MDD adopted in 2014 and is intended to cover the period up to 2036. The Borough issued a 'Call for Sites' in 2016 to understand what land is available for new housing and other uses.

Barkham Square is being assessed in more detail as part of this process.

All the areas marked in beige on the map below have been put forward by landowners or by developers for more house building, along with sites in other parishes.



Local Plan Update – 'Call for Sites'

The inclusion of land on this map does not mean that it is suitable, or will be approved. It simply indicates that it has been proposed for development.

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Thriving communities

A community is a group of people living in the same place or with a common interest. Thriving communities prosper and grow. They provide opportunities to be employed, to socialise, recreate, belong, and flourish.

How can the Neighbourhood Plan help this objective?

A Neighbourhood Plan consisting of land use policies, cannot by itself achieve this objective. Carefully crafted land use policies, however, can create the right platform to encourage a thriving community. Conversely ill conceived policies would have the opposite effect.



Barkham Village Residents Association – Annual Easter Egg Hunt

Here of some examples of how the Neighbourhood Plan could do this:

- Support rural businesses in appropriate locations, which do not harm the countryside
- Encourage the shared use of any new community facilities, such as those provided in association with new schools
- Require proposals for new community facilities to be submitted with business plans to ensure long-term viability, perhaps with partner organisations
- Discourage the redevelopment of community facilities for other purposes
- Support applications that propose a range of environments, including outside areas and that cater for all ages

Do you think this is on the right lines? Are there other aspects that should be considered?

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Sustainable development

Sustainability is the 'Golden Thread' which runs through planning, according to the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF suggests this should be achieved through a range of themes including a prosperous rural economy, sustainable transport, a wide choice of quality homes, conserving and enhancing the natural and historic environment. All these themes are relevant to Arborfield and Barkham.

All too often, development is driven by one particular need, without fully considering the wider or future impact. Living within our environmental limits is one of the central principles of sustainable development.

The focus of sustainable development is far broader than just the environment. It's also about ensuring a strong, healthy and just society, a thriving local economy and managing the environment for current and future generations.



Arborfield Green Community Centre Play Area

At its core sustainability is an approach to development that looks to balance different, and often competing, needs.

Our intention is to bring all the key sustainability themes together, weaving the 'Golden Thread' throughout the Neighbourhood Plan.

- How should 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 best be achieved?
- What does the area need that is new and what should be protected or enhanced?

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Sustainability Focus Group

A Focus Group of 24 residents came together to consider what sustainability could mean for Arborfield and Barkham. Highlights of their deliberations include:

- Require any development to be of a high standard of design, located close to facilities and sited sensitively within the landscape. It must respect the existing historic and natural assets
- Ensure an appropriate mix of housing is achieved including starter homes, key worker housing and lifetime houses
- Ensure flood risk is addressed at an early stage of the planning process
- Protect countryside to retain a leafy feel while supporting a strong rural economy based on farming
- Recognise limitations on the area's transport infrastructure which is based on narrow rural roads and lacks a railway station
- Extend positive aspects of existing green infrastructure which can provide sustainable transport, outdoor exercise and well-being
- Need for health centre and pharmacy, ideally also incorporating a high-dependency care unit using latest technology
- Design out crime
- Plan for increased demand for refuse facilities, water, recycling and renewable energy using innovative technology
- Develop a list of projects, which may not be provided directly by the Neighbourhood Plan such as superfast broadband, management of allotments, public transport improvements. These could be funded as additional developments arise

Do you agree that these are the priority issues?



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New housing



Waterman's View, Arborfield Green

One of the key issues in the Plan area is new development. There are already over 3500 new houses either recently completed or in the pipeline.

The residents survey indicated strong support for homes for first-time buyers, and for life-time homes that people can continue to occupy in their later years.

What approach to new housing should be taken in the Neighbourhood Plan?

There are a variety of options:

Oppose all further development on the basis that there is already have enough in the pipeline	Not acceptable under the rules governing the content of Neighbourhood Plans
Plan for some new housing sufficient to meet local needs	This could be achieved within the existing commitments at Arborfield Green
Allow for some development in sustainable locations	A process is needed to decide how such locations should be identified
New major housing site	Two such site have been proposed by developers in the 'call for sites' - Hall Farm and Barkham Square
Market-led housing development	Leave the landowners and developers to bring forward proposals based entirely on market conditions

The government requires Neighbourhood Plans to be positive on the subject of development, so it is not possible to place a maximum on the amount of new housing. Given the continuing pressure for development in Wokingham Borough, it is very likely that parishes will have to accommodate some new development through the Local Plan Update.



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

What and where?

Protecting the identity and rural setting of our villages by retaining the open spaces around them were given very high priority by residents in the survey. Most of the identified future challenges facing Arborfield and Barkham were linked to new development.



Barkham Bridge Fields

The Neighbourhood Plan team have come to the view that the best way forward is to plan for some development in the most sustainable locations. Leaving the future to the market is likely to result in urban sprawl and loss of the countryside setting so important to local people.

It now has to be decided:

- How should locations for new housing be determined?
- What sort of housing is required?

Should the provision of homes for first-time buyers and provision for older people be a requirement of any new housing development? Should proposals for new care homes be sought?

One of the survey questions asked late last year was about where people felt that any new housing should be located. There was an even spread of replies, from new settlement to infill development.

The Steering Group's preferred approach is therefore to develop some criteria that would help determine where any new housing would best be sited.

Examples might be:

- Within or adjacent to existing settlement boundaries
- Where good bus services are available
- Where there would be minimal impact on landscapes
- Make use of brownfield sites where available
- Where the separation between settlements would not be adversely affected



Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

Getting around

Much is already happening, or is planned in the Neighbourhood Plan area. Arborfield Cross Relief Road, Barkham Bridge widening, parts of the Greenway network, and the Nine Mile Ride Extension are all in the immediate plans or under construction. The Shinfield Eastern Relief Road will eventually open to traffic.



Most of local traffic is generated from housing areas, and the vast majority of peak hour traffic comprises journeys to work and to school. Recent and proposed housing construction will inevitably generate additional traffic. In spite of the new roads being built, existing roads will become more congested.

So, what should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan? The Greenways focus group has developed a detailed network, and it is intended to incorporate that into the Neighbourhood Plan as a basis for implementation.

Beyond that, there are a variety of approaches:

- Locate new housing where residents can have a realistic opportunity to use bus transport?
- Press for more safe cycling routes so that residents have alternatives to driving?
- Require improvements to sustainable transport routes, to allow better connectivity and crossings on main roads.
- Make it easier for people to work at home with superfast broadband?

The underlying conundrum is that whatever is sought, it will cost money, and that is in very short supply. To date, the Borough Council has funded most of its transport proposals from new development. Providing much needed infrastructure tends to encourage a cycle of further development which in turn leads to a need for yet more infrastructure.

What approach would you like to see included in the Neighbourhood Plan?

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Arborfield Cross village centre



Arborfield Cross Centre

The planned completion of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road, currently programmed for 2020, provides a unique opportunity to reclaim the village of Arborfield Cross for the community. This could be done partly through the adoption of policies encouraging changes of use for specific sites in the village.

What changes in land use would you like to see in Arborfield:

- Are there specific sites that don't fit comfortably into the village scene and would benefit from a different land use?
- Are there particular uses that you think should be encouraged e.g. more retail, or local services?

Crucial to realising this vision is limiting through-traffic, without adversely affecting local businesses, by introducing well-designed traffic management measures. Arborfield and Newland Parish Council is already working with the highway authority (WBC) to develop a scheme that will support these aims.

What should be included in these proposals?

- Traffic calming – chicanes, road humps, etc?
- 20 mph zone?
- Additional parking?
- Limitations on certain vehicles e.g. HGVs?
- Reduction in the size of the junction at The Bull so that land may be returned to village green use?
- Careful planting to 'green' the main street through the village?



Theale Centre

Please let the Steering Group know what you prefer.

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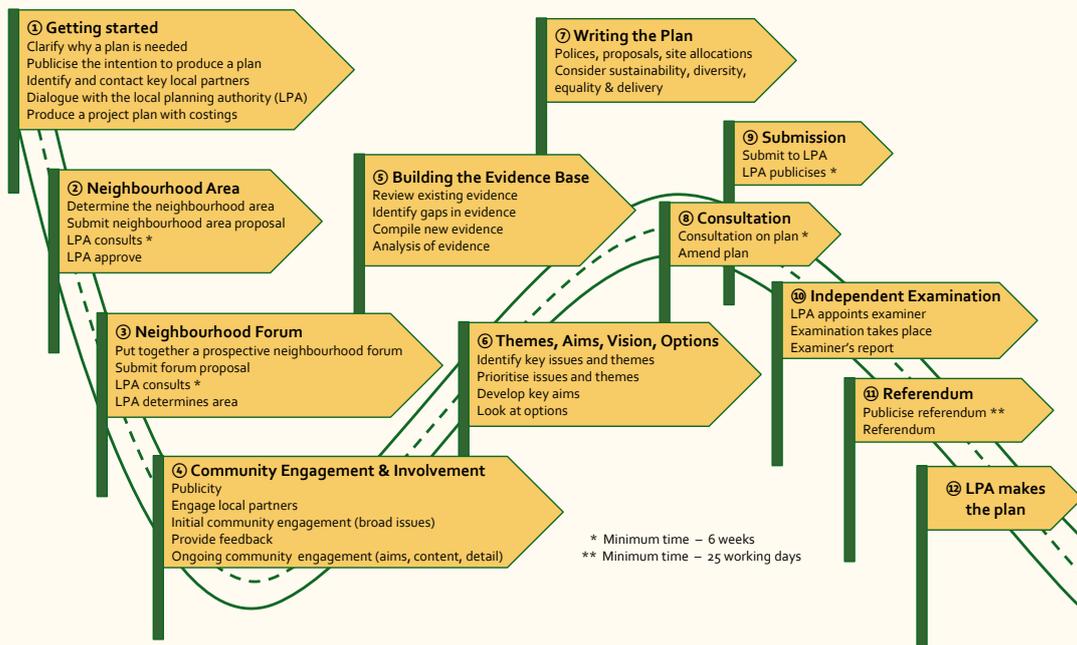


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Next steps.....

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

Neighbourhood Plan Process



This event is part of Step 6, developing 'Themes, Aims, Vision, Objectives'. Once feedback is received from residents that the plan is on the right track, then the Steering Group can press on with 'Writing the Plan'. This will lead to a formal consultation before we submit the plan to Wokingham Borough Council hopefully, in spring 2018. The referendum will follow later in 2018.

Once a Neighbourhood Plan is in force following a successful referendum, it carries real legal weight. Government guidance states that where a planning application conflicts with a Neighbourhood Plan that has been brought into force, planning permission should not normally be granted.