

Are you interested in the future of Finchampstead?

Finchampstead is a great place to live and work now but what do you want it to be like in 5, 10 or 15 years time? There remains constant pressure on our green spaces and infrastructure to support future development. Although at times we may feel that such things are out of our hands, there is a way in which we can have some direct control over the future of our community.

Government policy encourages communities to develop **Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDP)** to ensure that the community has a real say in where and how any development should take place. Contributing to a Neighbourhood Development Plan is your opportunity to shape the future of the Parish within the Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan, including its housing, roads, schools, amenities and environment.

Such plans should be produced by the community for the community. To produce a plan that is acceptable to the residents of Finchampstead, Finchampstead Parish Council (FPC) is looking for volunteers with a range of interests and skills to form a group who would take responsibility for production of the plan.

What is a Neighbourhood Development Plan?

“A Neighbourhood Development Plan puts in place planning policy for a neighbourhood area to guide future development. It is about the use and development of land and may contain a vision, aims, planning policies, proposal for improving the area or providing new facilities, or allocation of key sites for specific kinds of development.”

In simple terms, a Neighbourhood Plan:

- **IS NOT** a means of blocking all future development.
- **IS** an agreement on how to deliver the Wokingham Borough Local Development Plan in a way that works best for the people of Finchampstead.
- **IS** the best way to safeguard the area from speculative and unplanned development.
- **IS** an agreed set of planning policies for the area which are used to decide whether or not to approve planning applications.
- **IS** written by the local community, the people who know and love the area, rather than the local Planning Authority

What does a Neighbourhood Development Plan cover?

An NDP gives guidance over land use. The community may be required by the Wokingham Borough Plan to make space for an agreed level of additional housing in the area but the NDP plays a key role in deciding where that housing will go and perhaps more importantly, where it will not go. The scope of the plan is largely up to those who volunteer to work on it, but it can include land use for;

- Housing
- Community facilities and amenities
- Economic or business activities
- Retail space
- Protected Green Spaces
- Environmental and Sustainability issues
- Heritage Considerations

Would you like to influence the future?

Finchampstead Parish Council is intending to facilitate the production of a Neighbourhood Development Plan to map out the future of Finchampstead Parish over the next ten or more years. The Parish Council will sponsor it and have some input but we should not provide all the resources required and we need your help. The principle is that you, the community and residents of Finchampstead will be the authors of the Neighbourhood Development Plan.

The work would take place over approximately two years but much of that time would be taken up by the consultation process and stage approvals by Wokingham Borough Council and the Planning Inspectorate.

We need people! Primarily those who are prepared to get involved for the benefit of the community. We would also welcome those who have skills in Planning, Research, Legal matters, data-gathering, writing and publishing, communication skills, project management (to name but a few). We are looking to form a truly representative team, with participants from all parts of the parish and with a good mix of age and gender! But more than anything, we need people who are happy and able to be part of a team, come with positive energy, time and enthusiasm and are motivated to help to form the future of the Parish.

If you are interested in helping, or would just like more information, then please email:- [**ndp@finchampstead-pc.gov.uk**](mailto:ndp@finchampstead-pc.gov.uk) and we will get back to you.

Also, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-planning--2> and <https://locality.org.uk/services-tools/neighbourhood-planning>

for a lot more background information on NDP's, what they do and how to produce one.

Questions & Answers

Q. Is an NDP just 'giving in' to having more and more housing in the parish?

A. No; the allocation of housing that comes to Finchampstead will be set by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) in the Local Plan and that will be done whether or not we have an NDP.

Q. So what's the point of doing an NDP?

A. There are two main benefits (although there are also many others) ;
First, the plan gives the parish a lot of control over where any new housing may go, what it will look like and how it is built to 'fit in' with the Parish.
Second, once we have a plan that meets the agreed housing allocation, an NDP is a very strong defence against further speculative building in the area; such as that which has recently been proposed near Sand Martins and Longwater Rd. It is a great re-enforcement to both parish and borough planning policies.

Q. So does this mean that there will definitely be more housing in Finchampstead?

A. We can't say for certain until WBC has updated the Local Plan and that won't be until mid-2019 but our hope is that any housing allocation to Finchampstead will be covered by the developments around Arborfield Green some of which is in our Parish. If so, the real benefit of the NDP will be to stop any further unplanned and speculative building.

Q. Does an NDP over-ride the borough's Local Plan?

A. NDP's work best when they dovetail with the Local Plan. The Local Plan is a high-level 'strategic' document and an NDP provides a lot of detailed local input that the borough council couldn't know themselves. However, if the two plans are fully aligned, and the Finchampstead NDP has been approved by WBC, then when an NDP has also been approved by the Planning Inspectorate and by the community in a local vote, it carries the same legal status as the Local Plan.

Q. Why can't the parish council just do this themselves?

A. The concept of an NDP is that it should reflect the thinking of the whole community to which it applies and that the community endorses it (or not) by a vote before it can be legally adopted. If the work were undertaken by just by the Parish Council then there would be less input from the community as a whole and some residents may feel that their opinions have not been considered. FPC will take the initiative in instigating the process and provide the overall project and financial management but the content of the plan should reflect the consensus views of the residents.

Q. What sort of people are you looking for?

A. Anybody who is keen and enthusiastic to help! There are some specific skills that we will be looking out for but it's much more important to have a great deal of common sense and the ability to work in a team with other people.

Q. How much time will it take?

A. That will be very much up to the individuals concerned and what they are prepared to contribute. Our experiences from other parishes is that the process can take up to three years but with a lot of peaks and troughs in the workload. Perhaps an evening or two a week would be average for most of the team.

Q. Do I have to get elected or agree to represent a particular 'interest group'?

A. No, joining the team is not an elected position and you won't be part of the parish council. You join in as an individual in your own right and not because you are part of any group or organisation. In bringing the team together, we are trying to ensure that it reflects as good a cross-section of the parish as possible, but the most important thing is to have people who are willing and able.

Q. Do we get paid for doing this work?

A. No, it's all voluntary. The team may hire some specialist external consultants if the need arises, but the team members don't get paid.

Q. What if I volunteer and the work becomes too much, or I need to drop out for other reasons?

A. That's entirely up to you. No-one is compelled to stay involved if they don't wish to.

Q. Who's in charge of this?

A. The Parish Council will help to set the project team up and will provide a project manager to co-ordinate the whole process. FPC will remain as the 'sponsor' of the project, provide financial support where necessary and is the body to which the project team is accountable. However, how the team sets itself up and who leads it will be up to the team members. Some parish councillors may volunteer to work on the team but their role will be decided by the whole team (apart from the project manager). The project manager's role will be to ensure that the timetable produced by the team is adhered to and external bodies are managed appropriately, he/she will not be responsible for the content of the plan.

Q. What does the team actually do?

A. The process for drawing up an NDP is well set out and there are a number of weblinks which provide a lot of detailed information and 'templates' to get us started. A large part of the work is gathering information and especially consulting with local residents, both as individuals and through a variety of community groups. Where specific technical advice is required, this will be hired and paid for via the Parish Council.

Q. When does it all start?

A. We want to have the team in place by the end of February 2019 at the latest.