

NEWS RELEASE



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Date: 15 November 2021
Issued by: James Burton

Issue No: 262/21
Version: 0.1

NOW IT'S YOUR CHANCE TO HELP US SHAPE YOUR BOROUGH'S FUTURE

Residents of Wokingham borough are being urged to share their views on where new homes and a wide range of supporting services and amenities should be built over years to come.

At a special meeting last Friday, Wokingham Borough Council's executive agreed to launch a public consultation on a revised growth strategy for its new local plan.

This will begin next Monday (22 November) and runs to 24 January next year after being extended by a week from the initially proposed date to ensure everyone has a chance to take part.

The council wants as many people as possible to respond because the finished document, which will be drawn up in accordance with Government approved planning processes, will help meet future demand for housing, schools, roads, green spaces, community and leisure facilities and much more.

It has suggested following the same principles as its existing local plan, which concentrated development in four major new communities at Shinfield Parish, Arborfield Garrison and North and South Wokingham alongside significant investment in infrastructure.

This strategy is proving a success, as shown by the fact that the borough's property values are growing faster than anywhere else in Berkshire and it has topped several lists for its residents' quality of life, including a recent study by the Legatum Institute research group.

Unlike the previous draft local plan, which people were consulted on last year, a new town of about 15,000 homes at Grazeley is no longer being put forward. This is now unachievable following an extension of the emergency planning zone around AWE Burghfield to include that area.

- MORE -

The council therefore suggests an alternative approach which will continue to reflect residents' preferences, expressed in earlier consultations, for most development to be built in carefully planned major new communities with suitable infrastructure.

The revised growth strategy includes a new garden village with generous green space on land south of the M4, between Shinfield, Arborfield and Sindlesham.

This would comprise about 4,500 homes, of which at least 2,200 would be built during the plan period to 2038 while the rest would help meet demand beyond then. Of these, 35 per cent would be affordable housing for local people.

The area, which includes land at Hall Farm and in the Loddon Valley, would accommodate a substantial amount of the borough's housing and employment needs in a sustainable way and on a scale which meets the challenges of climate change sustainably.

New jobs in a range of sectors would be created in the area near the Thames Valley Science and Innovation Park, which might accommodate a full or partial relocation of the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading, subject to funding decisions.

There would also be new walking and cycle routes, primary schools, a secondary school, sports facilities and neighbourhood centres. A major public green space or park would be created along the River Loddon, offering scope to improve biodiversity by restoring and enhancing habitats.

The revised growth strategy also proposes an additional allocation of about 800 homes within the council's existing South Wokingham major development, to the south of the railway line and Waterloo Road.

This is in addition to the 2,500 dwellings allocated to South Wokingham in the current local plan. Under this proposed revision, Gray's Farm off Heathlands Road would be developed for outdoor and indoor sports and community uses.

- MORE -

These larger allocations help the council to provide new homes by allocating fewer sites overall, protecting the vast majority of the borough.

However, some smaller scale development is also needed to support the vitality and viability of smaller communities and create opportunities for local people to stay in their area.

The council therefore also proposes about 2,700 homes across 46 smaller sites in Wokingham town and the parishes of Arborfield and Newland, Barkham, Charvil, Finchampstead, Hurst, Ruscombe, Shinfield, Sonning, Swallowfield, Twyford and Winnersh.

The revised growth strategy is also looking to designate more than 70 additional areas as local green space, far more than the eight proposed in the previous draft plan, so it wants people's views on this too.

The draft local plan included clear commitments, which will be retained, to tackling the climate emergency through sustainable development policies, protecting valued landscapes and providing affordable housing quotas of up to 50 per cent on most new developments.

Cllr Wayne Smith, executive member for planning and enforcement, said: "Like other local authorities, we're legally required to produce policies that guide planning decisions on where development is supported and where it isn't.

"Our current policies still effectively manage development across the borough while delivering high-quality infrastructure but were only written to do this until 2026. The new ones must therefore look further forward while taking that same successfully proven approach.

"Without valid and effective planning policies, developers could easily challenge any decision to refuse permission and the council could lose its say over where or how new housing and other development would take place.

"This could lead to homes being allowed in unsuitable locations, being of lower quality, and in places where infrastructure can't be improved to serve residents properly.

- MORE -

“Having an up-to-date local plan will allow us to continue planning the services and facilities that are built alongside new homes - and to ensure that the developers pay for them.

“We want as many people as possible to respond to this consultation. Sharing your views gives you the chance to help shape the plan to your needs, and those of your loved ones, for generations to come.”

Residents can find out more by booking a place at one of two public meetings at the main hall at St Crispin's School in Wokingham on 22 November or at Arborfield Green Leisure Centre on 30 November. Both run from 7pm to 9pm.

Anyone planning to attend is asked to consider taking a Covid-19 lateral flow test.

There will also be four virtual meetings, again requiring advance booking, on December 2 and 6, two on each date running from 6pm to 7pm and 7.30pm to 8.30pm, one of which will be recorded for viewing on demand.

For more information about the revised growth strategy and the success of our current local plan, or to respond to the consultation or book a place at an information meeting, visit engage.wokingham.gov.uk.

- ENDS -

Further information:

1. More from Cllr Wayne Smith, executive member for planning and enforcement, at wayne.smith@wokingham.gov.uk