



Peter Must
Chairman
8 Albert Road
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 2AL
Tel: 0118 9781671

The Wokingham Society
Registered as a Charity (No. 274988)
Website; www.wokinghamsociety.org.uk

email: chairman@wokinghamsociety.org.uk

THE WOKINGHAM SOCIETY RESPONSE TO DRAFT LOCAL PLAN

The Wokingham Society Executive Committee offers the following comments on the draft Local Plan:

Page 41: Policy SS11: Safeguarded Routes

(d) v. 'South Wokingham Distributor Road (junctions at both Finchampstead Road and London Road) and associated improvements to the railway bridges on the A321 Finchampstead Road, Wokingham.'

The section of the Finchampstead Road from its junction with the South Wokingham Distributor Road to the junction with Molly Millars Lane is currently the subject of a planning application and, if approved, it will not need to be included in this Policy. The application will not propose any changes to the two railway bridges and will thus not be 'associated' with them. The possible future improvements to the bridges should therefore be stated without reference to the SWDR.

(d) vi. 'Northern Distributor Road'

It is not clear whether this refers to the North Wokingham Distributor Road. If so, why does it need to be included since the junction with the Reading Road, and the section up to the start of the Winnersh Relief Road currently await planning approval and this reference can thus be deleted?

e) Third Thames Crossing from Thames Valley Park Drive/A3290 to South Oxfordshire

We very much support this ambition, and hope that ways can be found to bring South Oxfordshire District Council on board.

Pages 42/43: Policy SS12: Improvements to Transport Routes

n) 'Extension to southern distributor road'

Assuming this refers to the South Wokingham Distributor Road, it would help to have some idea of what further development is being contemplated. We understand that failure to mention a possible future proposal would make it difficult to proceed, but the local community deserve some indication of what is meant by this reference.

"Page 49: 5.4 Updated Transport Plan

We trust that there will be an opportunity to comment on the draft updated Transport Plan when it is issued alongside the draft final version of the LPU. In particular, we are concerned

that the current draft Local Plan does not contain any alternative strategy should the proposals for road improvements and changes in travel modes fail to halt the increase in traffic congestion, which is a stated aim at 6.1 of the current Travel Plan."

Page 54: Policy C4: Vehicle and cycle parking

We can find no mention here or elsewhere of the Council's intended Borough-wide Parking Management Plan which, according to the Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Report in September 2019, was to come before the Executive and then be put out for public consultation. Such a Plan is urgently required and should be part of the LPU.

Pages 59-69: CONNECTIONS

In the whole of this draft Plan there is not a single reference to running, as distinct from walking and cycling, as a healthy activity to be encouraged and facilitated. References could easily be incorporated into Policies C3 and C8, as well as in HEALTHY AND SAFE COMMUNITIES under Policy HC3: Open Space, Sports, Recreation and Play Facilities. Running frequently occurs on roads (eg as part of the Wokingham Half Marathon) and this requires as much safety provision as is provided or intended for pedestrians. A colleague's recent experience is worth quoting:

'I did a run which included the stretch along the new estates from Coppid Beech to Matthews Green and much of that was on the road. This wasn't too bad at lunchtime but would have been dangerous in the evening. Non-pavements stretches included Binfield Road and Bell Foundry Lane - there may have been paths but I didn't see them'.

Pages 59-63: Policy C8: Green and Blue Infrastructure and Public Rights of Way

We welcome the ambition to protect, improve and extend existing green and blue highways and public rights of way and, in particular:

Policy C8:4 which requires developers to submit a Rights of Way Impact Assessment, 5.57: which seeks the integration of rights of way into wider networks such as the Thames Path and National Cycle Network

But success will be measured against the extent to which these aims are translated into action..

Page 78: Policy H1: Housing provision

'Provision will be made for a minimum of 13,901 net additional dwellings, and associated infrastructure, in the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2036.'

The volume of supply proposed in Tables 2 and 3 amounts to 16,802, which is 2,901 greater than the above "minimum of 13,901 net additional dwellings" proposed by WBC. Since the Borough Council has secured massive public backing for asking the Government to spare us any more housing, it is unhelpful to be seen to be offering to exceed the estimated number required. At the very least, an explanation needs to be offered as to why the proposal is for a 'minimum' (as if any number in excess would be acceptable), and why the proposed supply is so much more than that 'minimum'.

Page 93: 7.76: The final sentence has something missing: 'To date, the council has a good track record in delivery specialised accommodation, through Wokingham Housing Limited with a completed ^ of developments across the borough'.

Page 84: Policy H5: Affordable Housing

We would prefer that the Council did not accept any cases for commuting the obligation for affordable housing into a contribution to off-site. In the absence of such action, we welcome the decision (at 7.37 on page 85) to go beyond Government planning policy by seeking affordable housing provision, or an equivalent financial contribution, for between 5 and 9 dwellings, unless there are overwhelming reasons not to do so. Although it is implicit in this section that commuted sums paid in lieu of affordable housing on site will be dedicated to providing affordable housing elsewhere, we urge that this be stated explicitly, and that the Council tell the public where and how it has spent the money.

Pages 94-95: Policy H10: Conversion and sub-division of buildings

‘7.86 Development proposals for the conversion or sub-division of buildings will be assessed in relation to their impact on the amenity and character of the surrounding area, particularly in terms of the suitability of the property to provide quality accommodation’

Permitted Development Rights

We urge the Council to try and persuade the Government that this provision results in poor housing and is a disservice to potential residents.

Page 102: Policy DH1: Place Making and Quality Design.

Although the Supplementary Planning Documents for the four SDLs in the Borough specified that Key Design Principles should include “Public art integrated within the design of the development”, We suggest that this should be a requirement for all major developments, in line with the Council’s emerging art and culture strategy. This might best be included in Policy HC1: Promoting Healthy Communities as an additional section:

‘5. Proposals for all major development schemes will be required to include provision for public art integrated within the design of the development’.

Page 106: Policy DH3: Shopfronts

Although one or two specific shop front guides have been produced (eg for Elms Field, the Borough lacks a comprehensive set of guidance on this issue. Some years ago the then Wokingham District Council produced a ‘Shop fronts & signage guide’ by the Conservation & Design Team 1994, 9-page Planning Guidance giving advice on shop signs, blinds, grilles and security measures within conservation areas. It never saw the light of day, but we have a draft copy. We propose that this be revised and adopted, or a new one written.

We suggest the following additional specifications in the sections indicated:

8.16 shop fronts.

Shop window glazing bars add interest and extra security.

Plastic windows in historic buildings are visually detrimental.

8.17 Buildings.

Inset doorways draw customers in and awnings add interest (, eg Cote Broad St, Wokingham)

8.19 Signage

Commercial corporate signage should not take precedence over local historic area design guidance.

Page 117: Policy HC1: Promoting Healthy Communities

‘3. Development proposals will be supported which:

b. Support the provision of new or improved health facilities, in consultation with Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS England’

It must be axiomatic that any major application for increased housing which does not ensure a proportionate increase in health care provision will run totally counter to the Council's aim of ensuring continued and even improved health services and should be rejected on that account. Proposals for major developments a need to demonstrate how proportional increases in hospital, surgery and social care will be achieved, or an element of the developer contribution must be put towards funding such additional provision. .

4. Proposals for all major development schemes will be required to include a Health Impact Assessment (HIA).

9.3 One of the key objectives for the Local Plan Update is to ‘improve health and wellbeing by enabling independence, encouraging healthy lifestyles, facilitating social interaction and creating inclusive and safe communities This theme **transgresses** the policies in this plan....,

‘Transgress’ is the wrong word, since it means to violate a command or law or to go beyond a boundary or limit How about ‘runs through all’, ‘over-arches’, ‘spans’ or ‘permeates’?

Page 121-125: Policy HC4: Local Green Space

Proposed additions to list of local green spaces:

Leslie Sears Playing Field, RG41 2FD

Located off Crail Close and Reeves Way, the playing field has 5.5 acres of grassland, incorporating a younger children’s play area which includes new play equipment – butterfly spring see saw, single and double arch swings and a ‘nursery rhymes’ multi-play system. A ‘Countryside for All’ gate has been provided for easier access. It is managed by Wokingham Town Council as a registered charity with the objectives that

1. the land shall for ever hereafter be preserved for the enjoyment of the public for recreational purposes.
2. a reasonable portion of the land is set apart for use by young children.

Viking Field, RG41 4EL

This 10-acre field is adjacent to Leslie Sears Playing Field, and is a large open space with a natural grass meadow. This area was bequeathed to the District Council in 1997 by Mrs Henagulph to be kept as a “wildflower field” and to be used as a public amenity. It is managed by Wokingham Town Council.

Redlands Farm Park, RG41 4ED

Tucked away down Evendons Lane, this peaceful 9-acre park, managed by the Town Council, is much used by dog walkers. There are beautiful views from the top of the park over Finchampstead. A ‘Countryside for All’ gate has been installed for easier access. There are two magnificent specimen oak trees in the field. The park has a memorial bench and plaque in memory of two teenagers who died tragically in 2005.

Page 122: 9.16 ‘The designation of land as Local Green Space through local and neighbourhood plans allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Local Green Spaces may be designated where those spaces in both villages or in a town’.

The second sentence is not intelligible. Should it read: “Local Green Spaces may be designated whether those spaces are in a village or in a town”?

Page 124: 9.30 ‘The planning system has an important role in directing the location of development that may give rise to pollution or other hazards’.

What does ‘directing’ mean? Does it mean ‘suggesting locations for such developments’? One would hope that no such developments would be permitted. Or does it mean ‘ensuring that developments do not give rise to unacceptable levels of pollution or other hazards’?

Page 126: 9.38 ‘In some circumstances it may be necessary to fund mitigating measures elsewhere within the borough, to offset any increase in pollutant emissions as a consequence of the proposed development’.

Surely it is not acceptable to allow an increase in pollutant emissions in the three AQMAs by funding mitigating measures elsewhere. Could the sentence start : ‘In some circumstances, but never in AQMAs, it may be necessary...’?

Page 128: Table 4: Should this indicate the unit of measurement (eg ‘Noise Level (db Lamax)’)?

Page 139: Policy NE3: Trees, woodland and hedgerows

Policy NE3: 1(a): we support the aim for existing woodland and hedgerows to be retained, enhanced and where possible extended.

Peter Must
Chairman
The Wokingham Society

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