

WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL PLAN REVIEW 2022-2039

Proposed Submission

January 2023



West Berkshire
COUNCIL

Local Plan Review 2022-2039 Proposed Submission

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1 Introduction and Background

Setting the scene

1.1 West Berkshire District Council is preparing new planning policies to plan for development across the District up to 2039. Our new planning policies are contained in the West Berkshire Local Plan Review (LPR).

1.2 We have now reached a formal consultation stage in the production of the LPR (known as Regulation 19) and are publishing our Draft LPR for comment. This phase of the consultation process provides local communities, businesses and other interested stakeholders with the opportunity to comment on the policy content of the LPR, within a specific remit. The remit for public consultation relates to the 'Tests of Soundness' and also includes legal compliance, as set out in the [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#). The consultation on this document starts on Friday 20th January 2023. It will run for 6 weeks and **close at 4.30pm on Friday 3rd March 2023**. The best way to respond to the consultation is via our [online consultation portal](#). You will need to register, but then any comments you make will be stored in your account for your future reference.

What is the Local Plan Review and what is it for?

1.3 The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development⁽¹⁾ which is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs⁽²⁾. Put another way, the planning system tries to ensure that the right development happens in the right place at the right time, benefiting communities and the economy.

1.4 The planning system should be plan-led. Concise and up-to-date development plans should provide a positive vision for the future of an area; a framework for meeting housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a way for local people to shape their surroundings. Planning applications must be decided in accordance with the development plan, unless relevant considerations indicate otherwise.

1.5 The West Berkshire Local Plan Review is an important part of the development plan. It identifies the development that is required to meet local needs until 2039. It sets out the strategy for distributing development within the District and the policies for protecting, conserving and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment. It helps local people in West Berkshire achieve sustainable development.

1.6 It is important that the LPR is read as a whole. All LPR policies should be viewed together and not in isolation in the preparation and consideration of planning applications. Development proposals will be judged against all relevant policies. All development plan policies will be taken into account in determining planning applications, along with other material considerations in a proportionate manner. Please note that the policies in the LPR do not list or cross-refer to all other policies that may be relevant.

Why are we reviewing the Local Plan?

1.7 The [current West Berkshire Local Plan](#) comprises:

- West Berkshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD) (2006-2026) (adopted 2012)
- Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted 2017)
- West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006 (Saved Policies)

1.8 The current Local Plan plans for development up to 2026. National policy, contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that a local plan is kept up-to-date. It also requires that a local plan should look ahead over a minimum 15 year period. Therefore to ensure we meet these policy expectations, and the related legislative requirements⁽³⁾, the Council is reviewing the West Berkshire Local Plan.

1.9 Importantly, we are also establishing a new housing requirement which will look forward to 2039. This is informed by the local housing need (LHN) conducted using the standard method in national planning guidance.

1.10 Local plans can be reviewed in whole or in part. The intention is that this review of the Local Plan will replace in one document the three documents listed above.

1 Paragraph 7, National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

2 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future (1987)

3 As contained in The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2017

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What is the wider context?

Nationally:

1.11 Local plans must be consistent with the principles and policies contained within the NPPF. ⁽⁴⁾ The NPPF covers most forms of development and sets out the government's economic, environmental and social priorities for planning in England. Local plans must also be produced in line with relevant primary and secondary legislation.

Regionally:

1.12 Local planning authorities are expected to work collaboratively with other bodies to ensure that strategic priorities are properly co-ordinated across administrative boundaries. Joint working is expected between neighbouring authorities to enable local planning authorities to meet development requirements which cannot wholly be met within their own areas.

Locally:

Minerals and Waste

1.13 West Berkshire Council is also responsible for producing minerals and waste local plans. The [West Berkshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan 2022-2037](#) was adopted on 1 December 2022.

Neighbourhood Planning

1.14 Parish and town councils within West Berkshire can produce neighbourhood plans (NDP) which, when adopted, also form part of the development plan, together with the LPR and the West Berkshire Minerals and Waste Local Plan. Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with, and reflect the strategic policies in, the LPR. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the LPR, but can promote more development. Appendix 6 sets out how the LPR policies will be applied in the neighbourhood planning context. In West Berkshire we have two made neighbourhood plans – the [Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan](#) (2017) and the [Compton Neighbourhood Development Plan](#) (2022).

Other Council Strategies

1.15 The Council has adopted a number of [strategies](#) which the LPR has taken account of. These include, but are not limited to: the Council Strategy (2021); the Environment Strategy (2021); the Economic Development Strategy (2021) and; the Housing Strategy (2021)

What has happened so far?

1.16 The review of the West Berkshire Local Plan started in 2018. We set out the scope and content of our LPR in our [LPR Scoping Report](#) and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report which we consulted on between February and March 2018. The feedback we received is contained within our [LPR Scoping Report Consultation Statement](#).

1.17 We then undertook a [second round of consultation](#) between November and December 2018 seeking views on our proposed:

- Vision for the Local Plan Review
- Revision of the existing spatial areas
- Methodology for reviewing the existing settlement hierarchy
- Criteria for the settlement boundary review
- Update of our assessment of existing Local Plan policies

1.18 The feedback we received is contained in our [Consultation Statement](#).

1.19 In February 2020, we published our assessments of sites that were submitted to us as part of the [Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment \(HELAA\)](#). We also undertook focused consultation with parish and town councils, and NDP groups seeking views on the sites assessed in the HELAA.

4 References to specific paragraph numbers throughout the LPR relate to the NPPF published in July 2021

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1.20 In December 2020 we published the emerging draft version of the LPR for public consultation. The feedback we received is contained in our Consultation Statement.

1.21 We have taken into account all of the views expressed during these consultations in preparing the Draft LPR.

Duty to Cooperate

1.22 Section 110 of the Localism Act places a legal duty on local planning authorities and other prescribed bodies to cooperate with each other when preparing development plan documents in order to address strategic planning issues relevant to their areas. The LPR is being produced through close partnership working with our neighbouring local authorities to ensure that cross-boundary planning issues are being taken into account. We have also co-operated with all authorities within a 60 minute “drive time” of Newbury with regards to employment issues. Key work on satisfying the duty takes place on an ongoing basis. A [Duty to Cooperate Statement](#) accompanies the Draft LPR and sets out in detail how the Council is co-operating on strategic cross-boundary issues in order to create and deliver a positively prepared plan.

What evidence supports the LPR?

1.23 One of the key features of the plan-led system is that development plans should be based on up-to-date evidence. The LPR is underpinned by a wide-ranging [evidence base](#), which has been prepared, reviewed and updated as necessary as part of the LPR preparation. The aim has been to understand how West Berkshire functions as a place, what makes it unique, and what is required to conserve and enhance that uniqueness.

1.24 The evidence can be broken down into two parts:

- The views and experiences of our local communities and those with a stake in the future of the District; and
- Technical research in the form of published studies

1.25 The LPR is supported by a vast amount of national and local information and numerous professional studies. These are referred to at various points in the LPR and are published on the Council’s website. This evidence base will be added to as the LPR progresses.

Structure of the LPR

1.26 The LPR includes a vision, strategic objectives and a set of policies which together provide a policy framework for assessing planning applications and guiding development across West Berkshire. It is set out as follows:

- **Introduction and context**
- A **spatial portrait** which describes and sets out a snapshot of West Berkshire in facts and figures
- Our **Vision** of what West Berkshire will look like in 2039
- Our **Strategic Objectives** which represent the key delivery outcomes that the LPR should achieve and against which its success will be measured
- Our **Development Strategy** which sets out our overall approach for managing growth and change across the District up to 2039 and which outlines our place based approach focusing on the following spatial areas:
 - Newbury and Thatcham
 - Eastern Area
 - North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)
- **Strategic policies (SP)** which set out the overarching principles for development and which are considered fundamental to achieving the vision and strategic objectives, focusing on:
 - Our place based approach
 - Our environment and surroundings
 - Delivering housing
 - Fostering economic growth and supporting local communities
- **Non-strategic site allocation policies (RSA and ESA)** which, led by the capacity of the landscape, allocate large, medium and small residential and mixed-use sites (RSA) and also employment sites (ESA) for development within each of the spatial areas
- **Development management policies (DM)** which are considered in the context of the strategic policies, providing more detail on specific issues

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- **Appendices** which set further technical information and guidance to assist in implementing the policies, including **Implementation and Monitoring**
- **Policies Map** which geographically illustrates the LPR policies

Testing the LPR

1.27 All local plans must be accompanied by a [sustainability appraisal](#) (SA) of the plan. The SA offers a systematic and robust way for checking and improving on plans and their policies as they are being developed. It helps planning authorities to fulfil the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in preparing their plans, and thus contributes to sound plan making.

1.28 The SA process is intended to be an integral part of preparing a local plan, rather than separate to it. The SA of the Draft LPR has been fully integrated into the plan-making process, so that it has informed and influenced the LPR as it has evolved. The SA will continue to evolve as the LPR progresses.

Next steps

1.29 Once the Regulation 19 stage is complete, the Council will submit an updated Draft LPR to the Secretary of State who will then appoint an independent Planning Inspector to undertake a 'public examination' of the Draft LPR. During the examination process, the Secretary of State and the independent Planning Inspector will use the NPPF and comments submitted during the Regulation 19 consultation to determine whether the LPR is sound and legally compliant.

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AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield

Policy SP4

Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston and Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Burghfield

In the interests of public safety, and to ensure that any proposed developments do not pose an external hazard to the AWE sites, any new development of a type more particularly described in the table below ⁽¹⁰⁾ located in the Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ)⁽¹¹⁾ of AWE Aldermaston and AWE Burghfield is likely to be refused planning permission by the Council, especially when the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR) and/or Ministry of Defence (MoD) have advised against that development and/or object.

The ONR will be consulted on applications for new development in the DEPZ, Outer Consultation Zone (OCZ)⁽¹²⁾ and any other consultation zone as detailed on [ONR-website](#) which meets the consultation criteria described in the table below (as may be amended by the ONR from time to time).

For development proposals in the DEPZ and OCZ for each of AWE's sites, consideration will be given as to how the proposed development would impact on the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan and supporting documents.

Development within the Land Use Planning Consultation Zones: Office for Nuclear Regulation

AWE Aldermaston (AWE A)		AWE Burghfield (AWE B)
Zone	Development Type	
DEPZ	Any new development, re-use or re-classification of an existing development that could lead to an increase in residential or non-residential populations thus impacting on the off-site emergency plan.	
	Any new development, re-use or re-classification of an existing development that could pose an external hazard to the site.	
OCZ	Any new residential development of 200 dwellings or greater.	
	Any re-use or re-classification of an existing development that will lead to a material increase in the size of an existing development (greater than 500 persons).	
	Any new non-residential development that could introduce vulnerable groups to the OCZ.	
	Any new development, re-use or re-classification of an existing development that could pose an external hazard to the site.	
12km zone	A circular zone of 12km radius around all nuclear sites, for certain types of significant development due to the potential for such developments to pose an external hazard to sites.	

ONR's website provides non-exhaustive examples of the types of developments that could pose an external hazard to a nuclear licensed site and the examples of the type of developments ONR would expect to be consulted on.

The maps set out in Appendix 3 provide the mapping information, as at March 2020 in relation to the DEPZs, OCZs (5km) and the 12km consultation zones for each AWE site as per the ONR consultation criteria.⁽¹³⁾

Supporting Text

4.36 There are two nuclear licensed sites located in West Berkshire, the Atomic Weapons Establishment in Aldermaston (AWE A) and in Burghfield (AWE B). These are operated by AWE plc on behalf of the Ministry of Defence and regulated by the Office of Nuclear Regulation (ONR) (as well as other regulators).

10 This table reflects the ONR's consultation criteria as at 2022 – please note that these may change over time and the Policy SP4 reflects the Council's intention to follow the latest ONR guidance from time to time

11 Detailed Emergency Planning Zone (DEPZ) as defined by REPPiR and as detailed on the Council's [website](#)

12 Outer Consultation Zone (OCZ) and 12km zones defined on ONR website along with relevant distances and centre points

13 It should be noted that the ONR 12km land use planning area should not be confused with the REPPiR Outer Planning Zones (OPZ) for the AWE sites. OPZs are for emergency planning use only. In 2022 they were AWE Aldermaston 15km and AWE Burghfield 12km.

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4.37 Both AWE sites are core to sustaining the UK government's nuclear deterrent and support national defence and security.

4.38 There are hazards associated with the authorised use of these sites including conventional chemicals, explosives and radiation sources. As a result of the quantities and types of material involved, the sites are also regulated under the following key legislation:

- a. The Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPIR)⁽¹⁴⁾. Both sites fall within the scope of REPPIR legislation. The regulator for these sites is the ONR;
- b. Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 2015 (COMAH)⁽¹⁵⁾. Under these regulations AWE A is a Lower Tier COMAH site. The joint regulators for this site are the ONR and the Environment Agency (EA). AWE B does not fall under the COMAH regulations at the present time (2022);
- c. Explosive Regulations 2014⁽¹⁶⁾. Both AWE A and AWE B sites have explosives on site and AWE plc holds an explosives licence for both sites. The regulator is the ONR.
- d. Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 (EPR). Both sites generate and dispose of radioactive wastes. The regulator is the EA.

4.39 The NPPF states at paragraph 45: "*Local planning authorities should consult the appropriate bodies when considering applications for the siting of, or changes to, major hazard sites, installations or pipelines, or for development around them.*"

4.40 Furthermore, the NPPF at paragraph 95 states:

"Planning policies and decisions should promote public safety and take into account wider security and defence requirements by:

- i. *anticipating and addressing possible malicious threats and natural hazards, especially in locations where large numbers of people are expected to congregate. Policies for relevant areas (such as town centre and regeneration frameworks), and the layout and design of developments, should be informed by the most up-to-date information available from the police and other agencies about the nature of potential threats and their implications. This includes appropriate and proportionate steps that can be taken to reduce vulnerability, increase resilience and ensure public safety; and security and*
- ii. *recognising and supporting development required for operational defence and security purposes, and ensuring that operational sites are not affected adversely by the impact of other development proposed in the area."*

4.41 Paragraph 97(b) (ensuring that operational defence and security sites are not adversely affected by the impact of other development in the area) is complemented by paragraph 187 of the NPPF which provides, amongst other things, that "*planning policies and decisions should ensure that new development can be integrated effectively with existing businesses...*" and that existing businesses "*should not have unreasonable restrictions placed on them as a result of development permitted after they were established*".

4.42 These national policies should be read alongside other relevant policies relating to economic development within the LPR.

4.43 The NPPF defines major hazard sites, installations and pipelines as: '*Sites and infrastructure, including licensed explosive sites and nuclear installations, around which Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (and Office for Nuclear Regulation) consultation distances to mitigate the consequences to public safety of major accidents may apply.*'

4.44 The preface to the [guidance](#) accompanying REPPIR 2019 states: "*The provisions in REPPIR have been developed with consideration of provisions in the Control of Major Hazards Regulations 2015 (COMAH) [10] and the Pipelines Safety Regulations 1996 [11] to maximise emergency preparedness consistency between Regulations for major hazards sectors.*"

4.45 Nuclear installations which are regulated by REPPIR present a potential major hazard as a result of the quantities of radioactive materials on the site.

14 Radiation - Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2019 (REPPIR)

15 [COMAH Guidance](#)

16 [Explosives Regulations 2014 -L150](#)

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- 4.46** Under the REPPiR legislation a DEPZ must be determined by the local authority where the relevant nuclear site is situated, for the AWE sites this is West Berkshire District Council.
- 4.47** The DEPZ determination process, including the data behind the information provided in the Consequence Report prepared and issued by AWE, in 2019, was subject to an unsuccessful Judicial Review brought against the Council.
- 4.48** The DEPZ for the AWE sites is the geographic area that in respect of which the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan must have detailed plans in place and the Council, along with the other agencies involved in the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan, must be able to respond effectively. The regulators therefore require assurances that the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan owned by the Council is adequate and can be implemented effectively in order to protect the public.
- 4.49** The OCZ and 12km land use planning consultation zones for the AWE sites are determined by the ONR and extends from a geographical centre point on each AWE sites.
- 4.50** The DEPZs and OCZs for the AWE sites cross over into the following neighbouring councils: Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Reading Borough Council, and Wokingham Borough Council (see further below).
- 4.51** In respect of both AWE sites the ONR is consulted on any applications for new development within the DEPZ, the OCZ and the 12km zone (and any other consultation zone determined by the ONR from time to time) which meet the consultation criteria. These developments may have an adverse impact on the viability and operability of the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan and/or pose an external hazard to the nuclear sites.
- 4.52** The ONR provides advice to the local planning authorities on planning applications for developments around the AWE nuclear licensed sites. This advice seeks to limit the radiological public health consequences to members of the public in the event of a radiation emergency and to ensure that the developments do not pose an external hazard to the sites.
- 4.53** Given the potential cumulative effects of any population increase surrounding the AWE sites, it will be necessary to monitor committed and future approved but not built development in partnership with neighbouring councils. The councils will monitor housing completions and commitments as part of the Annual Monitoring Report and send this information directly to the Emergency Planning Services in each council and the ONR for them to make informed judgements when assessing future development proposals.
- 4.54** The ONR's decision making process is detailed on its website. ⁽¹⁷⁾ The ONR will normally advise against a particular development should they not receive adequate assurance from the owner of the Off-Site Emergency Plan that the development can be accommodated within that Plan. As a result, the ONR will consider feedback provided by West Berkshire District Council Emergency Planning Service, as the Plan owner under REPPiR. This feedback is often based on wider consultation with the AWE Off-Site Planning Group (a group of responding local, regional and national agencies). Should it be considered by the responding agencies that the AWE Off-Site Emergency Plan (the Plan) would be adversely affected with no viable and sustainable mitigation options available, such that the Plan would not be able to accommodate the development and therefore protect public health, then normally West Berkshire District Council Emergency Planning Service would submit advice against the development to the local planning authority and inform the ONR. Consideration will be given taking into account the Guidance currently under development.
- 4.55** The ONR will provide advice for developments that potentially pose an external hazard to the AWE sites.
- 4.56** Policy SP4 reflects the Council's intention to normally follow the ONR's advice in the ONR's consultation zones.
- 4.57** During the plan period there may be changes in the inputs to the ONR's process which may result in consequential changes to the consultation zones or criteria. These will be kept under review.
- 4.58** During the plan period there may also be changes to the DEPZ as a result of the requirement under REPPiR legislation to undertake formal reviews of the DEPZ at least on a 3 yearly basis or because of a material change in work with ionizing radiation. This may result in the DEPZ for either AWE site remaining the same, extending or reducing in size and geography over time. These will be kept under review.

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Landscape character

Policy SP8

Landscape Character

Landscape led development which conserves and enhances the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character of the District will be supported.

The natural, cultural, and perceptual components of the character of the landscape will be considered as a whole. Particular regard will be given to:

- a. Its valued features and qualities;
- b. The sensitivity and capacity of the area to change; and
- c. Ensuring that new development is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.

Development should be demonstrably informed by and respond positively to the evaluation of the distinctive landscape character areas set out in the [West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment](#) (2019) and other relevant landscape character assessments. These assessments provide an understanding of the valued characteristics, features and qualities of identified local landscape character areas across West Berkshire.

Proposals for development should be accompanied by an appropriate landscape assessment carried out in accordance with the current guidance from the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment. The level of information provided should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed but should be sufficient to allow an informed assessment of the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed development. The assessment should demonstrably inform the detailed design of the development, including its layout, form, scale and appearance in accordance with Policy SP7.

Supporting Text

5.36 One of the key issues facing West Berkshire is the conservation and enhancement of the distinctive local character of both the natural, and built and historic environment. It helps local people in West Berkshire achieve sustainable development. The high quality diverse landscape character with its rich cultural and natural heritage contributes to the enjoyment and overall quality of life of everyone in the District. Having an understanding of this distinctive character and using this as a positive tool in accommodating necessary change will ensure that the inherent qualities and valued features of West Berkshire's landscape will continue to be appreciated.

5.37 Conserving and enhancing the distinctive landscape character of the District is given considerable weight in line with national policy which sets out that valued landscapes should be protected in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan.

5.38 74% of the District lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB, extending from Wiltshire in the west and Oxfordshire in the north, over the Berkshire Downs. At West Berkshire's eastern boundary, the River Thames, the North Wessex Downs AONB adjoins the Chilterns AONB above Purley-on-Thames and then curves back around the north of Newbury before returning south to cover part of the Hampshire Downs. The AONB is characterised by the quality of its chalk landscape which ranges from remote open downland, dramatic skyline escarpments, contrasting wooded downland, and the small scale intimate settled river valleys of the Lambourn and Pang. As a nationally valued and designated landscape, the North Wessex Downs AONB will be conserved and enhanced in accordance with its national status and this is set out in Policy SP2.

5.39 A landscape does not have to have a designation to be valued locally. Outside the AONB, the River Kennet and the inter-connected Kennet & Avon Canal, from Newbury to Reading, lies within a distinctive broad corridor of an open lowland landscape characterised by a variety of wetland habitats including wet meadow, reed bed, and flooded gravel workings. Further to the south and east there are small areas of remnant heath with the Ministry of Defence owning large tracts of land at Aldermaston and Burghfield.

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5.40 Value can apply to areas of landscape as a whole or to individual elements, features and aesthetic or perceptual dimensions which contribute to the character of the landscape. There are no locally designated landscapes in West Berkshire. All landscapes across the District have some degree of value and all development should therefore respond positively to the identified character and valued qualities inherent in that local landscape. The West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment 2019 evaluates and provides an understanding of what is important and why, for each identified local landscape character area across the District. It provides a framework for informed decisions to be made as to whether different landscapes should evolve by:

- Conserving the existing and historic character;
- Enhancing existing character by introducing new features into the landscape;
- Strengthening or restoring a previous character; or
- Creating a new character when a sense of place and local distinctiveness have been eroded or lost.

5.41 Other relevant landscape character assessments include the North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002), which was produced in order to manage and guide change across a designated area extending beyond West Berkshire. In addition, [Historic Landscape Characterisation](#) (2007) and [Historic Environment Character Zoning \(2007\)](#) ⁽³⁰⁾, which provide a sound understanding of the historic environment context of West Berkshire, can also be used by the Council to inform and support planning decisions.

5.42 The character of the landscape in West Berkshire is defined by the historic processes that have shaped and formed the landscapes that exist today. Having an understanding of these processes and the way the historic environment of the District has influenced settlement patterns and the sense of place of particular areas is essential when accommodating future development. Settlements are a key component of the landscape, and in West Berkshire most settlements can trace their origins back over many hundreds of years. The separate and distinctive identity of these individual settlements helps to define communities and is an important feature of the local character of West Berkshire. A variety of rural settlement forms can be seen, from the nucleated patterns common on the chalk downs to the more dispersed patterns found in the southern part of the District. Much of the pressure for development is around the edges of settlements, which can physically lead to coalescence or introduce an increase in activity which has an urbanising effect. Despite this, a key feature of even the larger settlements is the way in which few have coalesced in recent times and so the blurring of the physical distinction between places has largely been avoided. The retention of these actual and perceived visual breaks remains important for the continued maintenance of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.

5.43 The policy makes clear that proposals for development should be accompanied by an appropriate landscape assessment carried out in accordance with the current guidance from the Landscape Institute and IEMA. Depending on the scale and nature of the proposals this will either be a formal Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) typically as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or less formally as a Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA). Regardless of the scale of the assessment, it should address both the potential landscape effects and also the potential visual effects that may result from the development. Detailed development proposals will then be expected to respond positively to this assessment to ensure they conserve and enhance landscape character by strengthening a sense of place in accordance with Policy SP7.

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Green Infrastructure

Policy SP10

Green Infrastructure

The Council will strengthen both local and strategic green infrastructure (GI) assets across the District. This will be achieved by protecting and enhancing existing GI assets and linkages and adding to the local network for the benefit of both the natural environment and the health and wellbeing of the community. This policy will be considered in conjunction with other policies in the LPR affecting the status and provision of GI in the District.

Depending on their location, nature and scale, development proposals should:

- a. Protect and/or enhance existing GI and the functions this performs,
- b. Create additional GI which is integrated into the overall development design from the outset; and
- c. Take opportunities to achieve multi-functionality by bringing GI functions together.

Proposals for GI will be supported where they:

- d. Help to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and boost resilience through sustainable drainage measures which minimise urban heating, flood risk and maximising GI habitats to sequester carbon and provide environmental cooling and insulation functions;
- e. Generate high quality GI which creates an attractive and distinctive setting to new development, enhancing any existing asset that may be present. This should be planned and designed from the outset as a network of multifunctional green and blue spaces and other natural features which identify and respond to the site's local context. Proposals for GI will be expected to be designed in accordance with the most up to date recognised GI standards;
- f. Can provide pleasant and safe 'green routes' to commute or travel on foot, cycle and horseback which help to link parts of urban areas and to the surrounding countryside along blue (water) and green corridors;
- g. Enhance the natural environment and natural processes to improve biodiversity and increase natural capital whilst seeking opportunities to use green infrastructure to extend wildlife corridors and provide habitat connectivity, particularly in urban areas and where it contributes to nature recovery networks;
- h. Use the GI network to help improve health and wellbeing and promote local social interaction and community networks;
- i. Increase its attractiveness as a recreation opportunity and support accessibility to public open spaces which are adaptable and capable of accommodating multiple uses of varying ability;
- j. Restore and open up historic routeways such as hollow ways and drovers roads, avenues and access to historic parks;
- k. Does not involve the culverting of watercourses, except where essential to allow highways and / or other infrastructure to cross;
- l. Protect, enhance and support the creation of integrated constructed wetlands, 'wet woodland' habitats, ponds, lakes, reed beds, raingardens, and floodplain meadows;
- m. Make appropriate provision to protect, enhance, improve and maintain accessible networks of blue corridors, including the restoration of chalk streams and their catchments, de-culverting, back water creation, de-silting, naturalising the channel through in-channel habitat enhancements and removal of structures where appropriate;
- n. Maintain and enhance natural drainage features; and
- o. Provide 'buffer strips' of vegetation along the banks of water courses.

Development proposals will be required to take account of existing access networks within and around the site. Opportunities should be sought to protect and enhance the Public Rights of Way network within and adjacent to development proposals in line with the NPPF, having particular regard to ensuring the needs of all users have been provided throughout the year. The addition of new connections and status upgrades to the existing rights of way network will be supported.

Proposals involving the loss of green or blue spaces and other natural features will not be supported unless there is no longer a need for the existing infrastructure or an alternative is provided to meet the local needs that is both accessible and of equal or greater quality and benefit to the community.

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Proposals for major development will be required to consider the long-term management and maintenance of GI infrastructure and should clearly demonstrate how these considerations have informed site proposals. Details of maintenance requirements and arrangements will be required to be set out, including who is responsible for these requirements. Appropriate funding arrangements for delivery of the long-term maintenance requirements should be clearly demonstrated to the Council before construction starts, including measures to secure biodiversity net gain through all phases and stages of the development.

The amount, type and design of GI will be informed by the appropriate national and local standards, guidance and best practice current at the time of the application.

Supporting text

5.61 The NPPF defines green infrastructure as ‘a network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider communities and prosperity’. It is integral to successful place-making through the range of multi-faceted benefits well-designed and integrated green infrastructure can bring to an area. In West Berkshire the Green Infrastructure network will be The network is planned, designed and managed to:

- promote healthier living and positive well-being;
- lessen the impacts of climate change;
- improve air quality and water quality;
- support economic growth and investment via greener settings;
- boost tourism and support tourism related jobs;
- encourage walking, cycling, horse riding and other recreational and sensory experiences;
- store carbon; and
- improve biodiversity and ecological resilience.

5.62 Examples of GI assets include:

- Natural and semi-natural rural and urban green and blue spaces – including woodland and scrub, hedgerows, individual trees and groups of trees grassland (e.g. downland and meadow), heath, wetlands, open and running water, brownfield sites and bare rock habitats (e.g. quarries);
- Parks and gardens – urban and country parks, formal gardens, and institutional grounds (e.g. schools and hospitals);
- Amenity green space – informal recreation spaces, play areas, outdoor sports facilities, housing greenspaces, community gardens, roof gardens, village greens, commons, living roofs and walls, trees and hedgerows, civic spaces, and highway trees and verges;
- Allotments, orchards, and farmland;
- Cemeteries and churchyards;
- Green/blue corridors - rivers and canals (including their banks and towpaths), road verges and rail embankments, cycling routes and public rights of way;
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites and Nature Reserves;
- Local Green Spaces;
- Accessible archaeological and historic sites;
- Functional green space such as sustainable drainage schemes (SuDS) and flood storage areas;
- Green and brown roofs and green walls on buildings; and
- Lakes and reservoirs.

5.63 The government’s 25 Year Environment Plan (2018) highlights that ‘The provision of more and better quality green infrastructure, including urban trees, will make towns and cities attractive places to live and work, and bring about key long term improvements in people’s health’. The document makes a commitment to the production of a GI Framework, ⁽³¹⁾ currently being produced by Natural England, which will help to target the creation and/or improvement of GI across the District. The Framework complements Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and Nature Recovery Strategies which both form part of the Environment Act (2021). To ensure high quality multi-functional GI is delivered in West Berkshire as set out in the policy, development proposals will be expected to be designed having regard to the Natural

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England Framework, and any future relevant national, regional or local guidance which could be brought forward. Proposals will be supported which use the most up to date recognised GI principles and standards. For example, The Building with Nature Standards developed by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) or the emerging Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards. In addition, if a development falls under BREEAM, consideration of Land Use and Ecology Credits should be undertaken at the design stage to ensure the requirements of Policy DM4 Building Sustainable Homes and Businesses is met.

5.64 The policy makes clear the Council's commitment for strengthening both local and strategic GI across the District for the benefit of both the natural environment and the health and wellbeing of the community. New GI provision will add to the integrity of the wider GI network of the District and those of neighbouring authorities. Key opportunities include:

- Adopting Sustainable Drainage systems to alleviate flooding and, while supporting broader biodiversity aims and providing local amenity;
- Creating green and blue spaces and planting within development to provide shade, cooling and wind interception and an insulation role in winter;
- Forming buffers zones and wildlife corridors for key habitats and species;
- Providing good quality, accessible green and blue spaces and infrastructure within development to improve health and wellbeing, creating an attractive place to live and work;
- Maximising the number of functions and benefits delivered by each GI asset;
- Interconnecting GI assets to form a strong GI network of green and blue spaces and corridors which deliver the range of GI functions and improve off road connectivity;

5.65 The West Berkshire Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (Level 1) (2019) recommends that all new development close to rivers and culverts should consider the opportunity presented to improve and enhance the river environment and contribute to national, county and local biodiversity targets. This can be achieved through proposals exploring opportunities for river restoration and enhancement, and projects which reconnect rivers with their floodplains. Options include, backwater creation, de-silting, de-culverting and naturalising the channel through in-channel habitat enhancements and removal of structures. Special consideration needs to be given the Rivers Pang and Lambourn which are groundwater-fed chalk streams, and are fragile hydrological systems, supporting diverse, rare habitats. The Chalk Stream Strategy (2021) sets out the key foundations and principles of chalk stream restoration. It highlights that chalk stream restoration should include the following considerations: the natural gradient of the river, an intact river bed, a dynamic interconnection between the river and the floodplain, and the ecological processes and habitat requirements of the ecosystem engineers (fish, insects, mammals and plants) to shape the habitat.

5.66 The Council will work in partnership with the local community, statutory advisors, developers, landowners and other organisations to identify and prioritise areas which will provide the best opportunities to protect, maintain and enhance the District's network of high quality 'multi-functional' green and blue spaces and other natural features.

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Biodiversity and geodiversity**Policy SP11****Biodiversity and geodiversity**

Development proposals will be required to demonstrate how they conserve and enhance biodiversity and/or geodiversity including their long-term future management and deliver a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain.

Development will be permitted where it:

- a. Protects biodiversity and/or geodiversity value and implements appropriate conservation management. The degree of protection will be proportionate to the status of the site or species in terms of its international, national and/or local importance;
- b. Avoids fragmentation and maximises opportunities for restoration, enhancements and connection of linear features which enables strong connectivity of biodiversity as part of an integrated habitat network (including links to habitats outside the district);
- c. Incorporates beneficial biodiversity and/or geodiversity conservation features and enhances existing features, including those that will help wildlife to adapt to climate change where appropriate;
- d. Provides or retains appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites, habitats for protected or priority species or main rivers, which are informed by detailed site-based assessment;
- e. Provides coherent ecological connectivity and permeability that is integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure and any nature recovery network identified as relevant to the location;
- f. Seeks to eradicate or control any invasive non-native species present on site; and
- g. Is compatible with any Biodiversity Action Plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategy and /or other strategic conservation management plans for species or habitats that have been formally adopted by the Council.

In addition to the above, where specific identified sites are to be affected the following will be taken into account:

Internationally Designated Sites

Development likely to result in a significant effect on an internationally designated site will be subject to assessment under the Habitats Regulations and will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that there are no alternatives following/through appropriate derogation tests for the proposal and that any adverse effects on the integrity of the site can be fully avoided, mitigated and/or compensated and proposals are in the public interest.

Nationally Designated Sites

Development which is likely to have any adverse impact on the notified features of a nationally designated site will not normally be permitted. In exceptional circumstances, a proposal may be found acceptable where it can be demonstrated that:

- j. A suitable alternative site with a lesser impact than that proposed is not available;
- k. The on-site benefits of the proposal clearly outweigh the impacts on the notified features of the site and where applicable, the overall site or habitat network;
- l. All appropriate mitigation measures have been proposed and secured through the development management process; and
- m. Does not prevent future attainment of nationally protected sites from meeting Favourable Condition, or to provide enhancements to enable the nationally designated sites to meet Favourable Condition as per their Conservation Objectives.

Irreplaceable Habitats

Proposals which are likely to result in the loss or deterioration of an irreplaceable habitat (such as ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees, ancient hedgerows, traditional unimproved meadows/ancient grasslands and lowland fens) will only be permitted for wholly exceptional reasons where:

- o. The need and benefits of the development in that location clearly and unambiguously outweigh the loss;

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- p. It has been adequately demonstrated that the irreplaceable habitat cannot be retained with the proposed scheme; and
- q. Appropriate compensation measures are provided on site wherever possible and off site where this not is feasible. The scale and quality of the compensation measures required will be commensurate to the loss or deterioration of the irreplaceable habitat and will be considered on a site by site basis, including long term management and maintenance.

Sites of Local Importance

Development proposals affecting sites of local importance should always seek to contribute to their favourable management in the long term.

Where a proposal is likely to result in harm to sites of local importance (including habitats or species of principal importance for biodiversity, and sites that meet the criteria for designation as a Local Wildlife Site or designation as a Local Geological Site), developers will be required to accord with the following sequential approach:

- r. Firstly, seek an alternative site in the District with a lesser impact than that proposed;
- s. Secondly, if the first is not possible, demonstrate mitigation measures can be taken on site; and
- t. Thirdly, and as a last resort, seek appropriate compensation measures, on site wherever possible and off site where this is not feasible including long term management and maintenance.

Biodiversity Net Gain

All proposals should demonstrate a minimum biodiversity net gain of 10% via a Biodiversity Net Gain Plan using the most up to date biodiversity accounting metric developed by Natural England and provide details of the long-term maintenance and management of the net gain. This should be delivered on site in the first instance, or through biodiversity off setting where appropriate.

Major developments in particular must include measures to deliver biodiversity gains through opportunities to:

- u. Restore and enhance existing features on site;
- v. Create additional habitats and ecological networks on site which help support the District's wider ecological network; and
- w. The linking of existing habitats within West Berkshire to create links between ecological networks and where possible, with adjoining features.

Supporting text

5.67 West Berkshire supports a rich and diverse range of biodiversity and geodiversity assets which reflect both the underlying geology and soils and traditional management practices that have been carried out over many years. The aim of this policy is to provide a framework for conserving and enhancing this richness and diversity both for its own sake, but also the positive contribution that it makes to the overall quality of life and sense of place for residents and visitors to West Berkshire in both urban and rural areas. Policy SP11 sets out how new development in West Berkshire will be expected to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment at a landscape scale as well as sites of biodiversity importance at different levels. Where appropriate, new development should promote conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and should secure opportunities for a net gain for biodiversity.

5.68 The 2019 'State of Nature Report' indicates that biodiversity across the UK is continuing to decline and as such change is required in relation to how we manage land. The Report highlights that urbanisation can fragment landscapes by creating barriers between habitats, thus isolating some populations but also recognises the wide variety of green spaces which exist within urban environments including domestic gardens, parks, allotments, cemeteries, ponds, and road verges which can all add to biodiversity value. Habitat connectivity is a key challenge for biodiversity and linked to the challenge of the climate crisis it is important that habitats do not become isolated with metapopulations and local populations of faunal and flora species finding themselves less able to respond to natural fluctuations where they can face heightened risk of decline and extinction.

5.69 Linear features, or stepping stones, which form part of the connected habitat includes networks of hedgerows and ditches; habitats along all water courses; roadside verges; and (cumulatively) private gardens (including links to habitats outside the District) are essential for the migration, dispersal, and genetic exchange of wild species. Examples of linear features within West Berkshire include waterways such as the River Kennet, River Lambourn and the Kennet and Avon Canal and they play an important role in providing strong connecting links across the biodiversity network.

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By protecting these natural habitats and networks across the District, the Council may be able to avoid or repair fragmentation and isolation of natural habitats and ultimately conserve and enhance our priority natural areas and the connections between them. This element of the policy closely links with Policy SP10.

5.70 A buffer zone is a landscape feature which can be used to protect a sensitive area from the impacts of development (or other harmful neighbouring land use). Buffers which are linked to corridors will be supported as a means of increasing connectivity across the District to help nature thrive. Buffers should be appropriately designed and informed by an understanding of what needs to be protected and/or mitigated. Regard should also be given to Policy DM6 in regards to providing appropriate buffers along watercourses.

5.71 The policy takes a hierarchical approach according to the designation and significance of the natural assets and will apply the principle of net gain through delivery in line with paragraph 179 a) of the NPPF and wider government policy including the 25 year Environment Plan (2018).

Sites of International and National Importance

5.72 The most important sites for biodiversity and individual wildlife species receive statutory protection under international and national legislation and form part of the national site network. Special Protection Areas (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) are internationally important and are afforded the highest level of protection. Candidate SACs and proposed SPAs will be afforded the same level of protection as those already designated.

5.73 SACs are internationally important conservation sites which are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). Under these regulations, it is a requirement to seek and protect the most valuable and threatened habitats and species. In accordance with the policy, any developments which are likely to have significant effects on SACs will be required to prepare an appropriate assessment to identify the implications for the site in respect of the site's conservation objectives. There are three SACs in the district (which are all sensitive to surface and groundwater quality and quantity):

- Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain
- River Lambourn
- Kennet Valley Alderwoods.

5.74 The Kennet and Lambourn Floodplain SAC is ecologically important as it contains a cluster of sites which supports one of the most extensive known populations of Desmoulin's whorl snail in the UK and is one of two sites representing the species in the south-western part of its range in the important chalk stream habitat. Integrity of the population is being maintained by taking measures, including habitat creation, to safeguard populations.

5.75 The River Lambourn SAC is an example of a chalk river characterised by an abundance of water-crowfoots. These species help to modify water flow, promote fine sediment deposition and provide shelter and food for fish and invertebrate animals. The River provides a habitat which is only found in southern and eastern England. For part of its length it is a winterbourne, drying through the summer months. It is one of the least-modified rivers of this type, with a characteristic flora dominated by pond water-crowfoot upstream and water-crowfoot further downstream. It is adversely affected by nutrient enrichment, mainly from sewage inputs and agriculture, but is also vulnerable to artificial reduction in river flows. In March 2022 Natural England advised that the SAC was in unfavourable condition due to unnaturally high levels of phosphorus. It also advised that future development within the hydrological catchment of the River Lambourn SAC must achieve 'nutrient neutrality' to ensure that it does not impact on the condition of the protected site. The Council's approach to nutrient neutrality is set out in Policy DM6 and a more detailed Supplementary Planning Document will also be produced.

5.76 The Kennet Valley Alderwoods SAC is an alluvial forest with Alder and Ash and which contains the largest fragments of alder-ash woodland on the Kennet floodplain. The wettest areas are dominated by alder over tall herbs, sedges and reeds, but dryer patches include a base-rich woodland flora with much dog's mercury and also herb-Paris. The occurrence of the latter is unusual, as it is more typically associated with ancient woodland, whereas evidence suggests that these stands have largely developed over the past century.

5.77 The Council also has a duty to ensure that future development does not adversely affect the integrity of SACs outside of its geographical area. This includes the Solent Maritime SAC, which receives water from the River Test. The catchment for the River Test extends into a very small part of the district around Combe. It is also adversely affected by nutrient pollution and in March 2022 Natural England advised that the SAC was in unfavourable condition due to excessive levels of nitrogen. It also advised that future development within the hydrological catchment of the River Test must achieve 'nutrient neutrality' to ensure that it does not impact on the condition of the protected site.

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5.78 There are no SPAs within West Berkshire, although there is a very small part of the District (256 hectares) around Beech Hill within 5km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. The 5km boundary has been determined by Natural England as a buffer area to regulate development near the SPA. However, it is possible that certain types of development up to 7km from the boundary of the SPA could have an impact on the SPA. Proposals for new residential development of one or more net additional dwellings up to 5km from the boundary of the SPA, and residential development of over 50 dwellings located between 5 and 7km of the boundary of the SPA, will therefore require screening to assess whether they will have a likely significant effect on the SPA. Where a significant effect exists or cannot be excluded, an Appropriate Assessment under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) would need to be undertaken. Proposals will only be permitted if they do not adversely affect the integrity of the SPA. The Thames Basin Heaths SPA Delivery Framework will be used to guide assessment and any avoidance or mitigation measures that may be needed. The provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) to attract new residents away from the SPA is a key part of these avoidance measures, together with strategic access management on the SPA and monitoring. Since the level of development expected to come forward in this area of the District is extremely low, the Council will explore opportunities for cross boundary working in this regard. Alternatively, SANG may be provided by developers for individual developments where it complies with Natural England's guidelines and there is an appropriate contribution to strategic access management and monitoring. In all cases SANGs will need to be agreed with Natural England.

5.79 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are nationally designated sites which have important wildlife or geological value. There are currently 51 SSSIs within West Berkshire covering 1470 hectares. Six fall within the SACs. The pre-dominant (60%) designated habitats are chalk streams and grassland, and ancient woodland.

Irreplaceable habitats

5.80 The NPPF states that 'development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists. Within West Berkshire there are a number of irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland, ancient or veteran trees, ancient hedgerows, traditional unimproved meadows/ancient grasslands and lowland fens. However, this list is not definitive and applicants should assess whether there are any other irreplaceable habitats present on a site by site basis. Compensation measures for irreplaceable habitats will not be considered acceptable where the replacement habitat provided results in a neutral impact. Instead, the compensation to be provided will be based on the nature or extent of damage or loss to the irreplaceable habitat and will contribute towards the enhancement of biodiversity. Compensation could be in the form of habitat creation, enhancement or restoration and potentially be large in nature to reflect the irreplaceability of the habitat loss or damage. This will be assessed on a site by site basis in consultation with the relevant conservation body. If a proposal impacts upon Ancient Woodland, ancient or veteran trees or ancient hedgerows, development will also need to be in accordance with Policy DM16 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows.

Sites of Local Importance

5.81 The District contains a range of habitats and geological features of local significance designated as Local Wildlife Sites and Local Geological Sites. Local Wildlife Sites are non-statutory sites of significant value for the conservation of wildlife. These sites represent local character and distinctiveness, and have an important role to play in meeting local and national targets for biodiversity conservation. There are 508⁽³²⁾ sites (c.7600 ha) designated for their county level importance and covering 11% of West Berkshire, many of which are ancient semi-natural woodland.

5.82 Site selection criteria for Local Geological Sites have been drawn up by the Berkshire Geoconservation Group, and there are currently five sites in West Berkshire covering 150 hectares.

Protected and Priority Species

5.83 Some species, such as bats, great crested newts and badgers, have special protection under international and national legislation (such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.) and must be considered as part of the planning application process. Similarly, priority species are identified under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act as of principal importance for the purposes of conserving biodiversity in England. The Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre also holds information for rare, scarce and notable (but not limited to) species in West Berkshire.

5.84 Where there is a reasonable likelihood that a protected or priority species may be present and affected by a proposal, comprehensive surveys will need to be undertaken to provide the evidence needed to allow a determination to be made and licenses to be sought where necessary. Appropriate compensation measures should be provided

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where development would disadvantage the conservation of a priority species. For example, the Sky Lark, Lapwing and other ground nesting birds require suitable habitats so that the species are not displaced as part of development which would limit the success of the species. There are many opportunities for biodiversity and geological enhancement in all parts of the District and not just on identified sites.

5.85 Ponds are critical to great crested newts for breeding. Whilst on land, great crested newts are also dependent upon other habitats such as woodland, hedgerows, rough grassland and scrub. They are generally found within 500m of ponds, although may travel further than this. West Berkshire Council has been granted a District Licence as part of the Nature Space supported District Licence Scheme for Great Crested Newts. This enables the Council through its planning function to authorise activities affecting Great Crested Newts. Developers will be required to pay compensation for their impacts of the proposed development which will enable long term management agreements to be put in place with land owners and managers to fund and maintain newt habitats which is more effective for newts on sites and on a landscape scale.

Biodiversity Net Gain

5.86 Paragraph 174 of the NPPF highlights the need to provide net gains for biodiversity by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) can be defined as “Development that leaves the environment in a measurably better state than beforehand” (DEFRA, 2018). BNG will be achieved through a combination of retaining important features of the site and by making on site biodiversity enhancements to ensure an overall measurable minimum 10% net biodiversity gain is achieved, which contributes to restoring and enhancing the wider ecological networks and biodiversity of the District. To achieve net gain, a development must have a higher biodiversity unit score after development than before development. The most up to date Natural England Biodiversity Metric should be used to allow the assessment of biodiversity impact of a given development, and where appropriate the size of contribution required to offset the ecological impact of that development. The Council will deliver Biodiversity Net Gain in line with latest national guidance and the Environment Act 2021.

5.87 To demonstrate that development proposals have met the requirements of Policy SP11, they will need to be accompanied by an appropriate ecological impact assessment (EclA) where this is relevant to the type of development proposed and its relationship with biodiversity and geodiversity interests. These assessments should be undertaken by a suitably qualified and/or experienced ecologist, be consistent with nationally accepted standards and guidance from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, and will need to include a Biodiversity Gain Plan (including the completed Metric calculator) to measure the net gain achieved on site or loss that would need to be compensated. The assessment should be proportionate to the scale and impact of the development and so for householder and most minor applications this will initially involve a Preliminary Protected Species Survey or Preliminary Ecological Appraisal in order to assess if further work is required.

Compensatory measures and long term management

5.88 Compensatory measures refer to all measures designed to help offset the adverse effects that cannot be further reduced by mitigation measures. Compensation for residual harm is considered the last step and will be considered where it can be evidenced that on-site improvements are not possible, may result in piecemeal mitigation on small sites, or where better opportunities exist to secure net gain elsewhere. Compensatory measures (also known as biodiversity offsetting) will normally involve off-site measures to balance losses within the development site or to offset residual effects on affected wildlife sites. Compensatory measures should provide a biodiversity net gain in accordance with Policy SP11. In addition newly created habitats should be in place in time to provide fully the ecological functions that they are intended to compensate for.

5.89 Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) have been identified by the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership. There are 17 which have currently been identified, either whole or in part, across the District. BOAs do not represent a statutory designation or a constraint upon development, rather, they are the areas where biodiversity improvements are likely to have the most beneficial results at a strategic scale. The Council will pursue net gains for biodiversity in and around BOAs and projects which seek to enhance biodiversity within West Berkshire, particularly based on Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, will be supported.

5.90 Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a new system of spatial strategies for nature they will: map the most valuable existing habitat for nature; map specific proposals for creating or improving habitat for nature and wider environment goals; and agree priorities for nature’s recovery. Once the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is produced for the District it will guide the delivery of biodiversity net gain and other nature recovery measures through illustrating where the most valuable existing habitats are located and will focus on habitat creation and/or improvement where it will achieve the best outcomes. Prior to the Local Nature Recovery Strategies being produced the Council will work

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with applicants and relevant stakeholders to identify strategic locations for the delivery of off-setting as part of the Local Nature Recovery Network. The Biodiversity Opportunity Areas are likely to be incorporated into the Local Nature Recovery Network.

5.91 Where compensation is required, regard will be had for the risks associated with the difficulty of success and the time-lag between any loss of biodiversity, and the achievement of the requisite habitat quality or other feature in determining the level of compensation required. To ensure the successful delivery and conservation in perpetuity, management arrangements will also need to be considered. Policy SP11 requires the long term management and maintenance of a site, and this should be achieved through a Habitat Management Plan. Details of maintenance requirements and arrangements must be set out, including who is responsible for these requirements. Funding arrangements for delivery of the long-term maintenance requirements should be demonstrated to the Council before construction starts, including measures to secure biodiversity through all phases and stages of the development.

5.92 The Environment Act 2021 sets out that in relation to biodiversity net gain any on-site or off-site biodiversity increase must be secured for 30 years. To allow for a consistent approach the Council will define long term management and maintenance to be a minimum of 30 years. To assist in undertaking appropriate compensatory measures, the Council will require the developer to use prevailing guidance by respective designating bodies.

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Policy DM15**Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows**

Development which conserves and enhances trees, woodland and hedgerows will be supported.

Development proposals should be accompanied by an appropriate Arboricultural Survey, Arboricultural Impact Assessment and/or an Arboricultural Method Statement. Proposals will be expected to clearly demonstrate that wherever possible existing trees, woodland and hedgerows have been incorporated into the design and layout of a scheme from the outset. Where this cannot be achieved the onus is on the applicant to justify the loss of trees and/or other features as part of the proposals.

The loss or deterioration of protected trees, groups of trees, woodland or important hedgerows will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and in accordance with the relevant legislation, policy and good practice recommendations. Where protected trees are subject to felling, a replacement of an appropriate number, species and size in an appropriate location will be required.

Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees and ancient hedgerows are irreplaceable habitats. Development resulting in their loss or deterioration will be considered in accordance with Policy SP11. The scale and quality of the compensation measures required will be commensurate to the loss or deterioration of the irreplaceable habitat.

Development proposals which could potentially result in the loss of ancient wood pasture; or trees, woodlands and hedgerows located within historic parks and gardens will be considered in accordance with policy DM13, for those within Registered Parks and Gardens, or Policy DM12 for those forming part of non-designated heritage assets.

Where loss or damage of non-protected trees, woodland or hedgerows is unavoidable, appropriate replacement or compensation planting including appropriate measures to secure their long term maintenance will be required.

Development proposals will provide appropriate protection for retained trees, woodland and hedgerows in advance of any work on site to prevent damage to root systems and to take account of future sustainable growth.

Where appropriate, suitable opportunities should be identified and incorporated for the restoration and planting of new trees, woodland and hedgerows. New planting should:

- a. Be suitable for the site conditions;
- b. Use appropriate tree pit sizes and soil volumes;
- c. Use native species wherever appropriate;
- d. Be informed by and contribute to local character; and
- e. Enhance or create new habitat linkages.

To ensure the sustainable growth of restored or newly planted trees, development will be required to include appropriate measures to secure their long term maintenance.

Supporting text

10.125 The purpose of this Policy is to ensure the management, including conservation and enhancement, of existing trees, woodland and hedgerows, and to ensure that opportunities for restoration and new planting are realised where appropriate. Development proposals will be considered in accordance with the latest guidance in British Standard BS5837 'Trees in relation to demolition, design and development'.

10.126 This policy does not prevent the appropriate management of trees, woodlands and hedgerow or removal of trees and hedges that are not in character with their locality particularly if they are a non-native species of flora. For new planting the use of UK and Ireland sourced and grown tree stock is encouraged.

10.127 West Berkshire's trees, woodland and hedgerows are valued visual and ecological assets in our towns, villages and countryside, adding local character and distinctiveness to the landscape, streets, parks, gardens, public rights of way and other open spaces. They have an inherent biodiversity value and can help integrate new development into the landscape, its character, and environment. They are important components of the historic environment as

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planted or managed flora, and often historically important as indications of past land use and ownerships. They assist in mitigating for the effects of climate change, increase the tree canopy cover in the district and make both public and private areas within a development more attractive, enjoyable and healthy places to be.

10.128 The protection of existing trees, woodland and hedgerows and the addition of new planting contributes greatly to conserving and enhancing the local character of an area. Boundary treatments are particularly important and the character of an area can easily be lost if front gardens or boundary hedgerows are removed. There is evidence in both rural and urban areas of the district of long established boundary hedgerows being ripped out and replaced by close boarded fencing or walls. A proportion of these result in retrospective applications to retain fences or walls in excess of 1 metre next to highways. Where planning applications are required to propose new boundary treatments or retrospective applications are required to regularise works already undertaken and it is clear that an established hedgerow will or has been removed, the Council will require sufficient space to be left to allow for the retention of an existing hedge or planting of a new one to replace the one that has been removed.

10.129 The retention of existing trees and hedgerows within new gardens adds a sense of establishment and maturity to any new development. New planting can also add value, with the use of dwarfing rootstocks a way of accommodating trees in smaller gardens.

10.130 In the public realm, street trees and appropriate planting can help soften the streetscape and ensure it is not dominated by hard surfaces and parked cars. Structural landscaping is encouraged in publicly managed areas. The specification and choice of design, materials and planting should take account of the pressures placed upon the public realm through the movement of both people and vehicles.

10.131 Individual trees, groups and lines of trees and woodlands important to the character of Conservation Areas, to their setting and to the approaches to Conservation Areas should be retained and appropriately managed.

10.132 Protected trees includes trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order or those located within a Conservation Area. They also include those hedgerows meeting the criteria of "important hedgerow" in the Hedgerow Regulations.

10.133 Ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees are identified as irreplaceable in the NPPF. Ancient woodland is the most extensive habitat remaining in West Berkshire. It also has a high archaeological value as a type of land use as it often contains much older features such as prehistoric field systems and barrows and also evidence of management such as sawpits and charcoal burning. Ancient semi-natural woodland currently covers 2894 hectares. There are a further 1164 hectares of plantation on ancient woodland sites which could potentially be restored. Ancient woodlands and veteran trees once lost cannot be recreated, their unique character, high archaeological value and valuable biodiversity resource will be safeguarded and not allowed to be lost or lose condition.

10.134 Development should buffer any ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees and ancient hedgerows it affects by providing sufficient space to afford surrounding protection and allow for future growth and expansion where possible. Development near ancient woodland will be treated in accordance with the most up to date joint Natural England and Forestry Commission Standing Advice. This currently advises that development proposals should have a buffer zone of at least 15 metres from the boundary of the woodland to avoid root damage. For ancient and veteran trees the buffer zone should be at least 15 times larger than the diameter of the tree. The buffer zone should be 5 metres from the edge of the tree's canopy if that area is larger than 15 times the tree's diameter. Precise buffers would need to be determined through detailed assessment and design when proposals are submitted for development. The Council will adopt a precautionary approach as to what would be considered appropriate in order to ensure that any buffer fulfils the specific requirements of its location and the type of development proposed.

10.135 It is important that a buffer zone consists of semi-natural habitats such as woodland and/or a mix of scrub, grassland, heathland and wetland. Development proposals, including gardens would not be appropriate. Sustainable drainage schemes would only be considered acceptable if they did not affect root protection areas and any changes to the water table did not negatively affect ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees. The Woodland Trust ⁽⁴⁴⁾ highlights the importance of protecting and enhancing natural habitats around ancient woodland in order to help reverse the historic fragmentation of this irreplaceable habitat and to improve ecological connectivity with the surrounding landscape.

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10.136 Ancient woodland is greatly at risk from ammonia pollution and so all ammonia-emitting developments, such as intensive livestock units, which fall within 5 kilometres of an ancient woodland site will require an additional assessment to include a detailed Ancient Woodland Nitrogen Impact Assessment of the ancient woodland(s) of concern. This will need to demonstrate that there will be no deterioration as a result of the contributions from the development.

10.137 Within the district there are historic ancient wood pastures and historic parkland, both of which are also irreplaceable habitats. These form important elements of West Berkshire's heritage and it is essential their significance is taken into account in development proposals.

10.138 The Council needs to better understand what proportion of the district has tree canopy cover and the extent of the functions this cover provides. A canopy cover assessment will be undertaken for West Berkshire. This will provide the basis for setting targets for canopy cover within the district, supporting both this policy and Policy SP10, in the consideration of future development proposals.

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Policy DM20**Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople**

The Council will meet the identified permanent and transit need for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople by allocating land for pitches and/or plots.

Existing authorised sites for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople will be safeguarded for use by Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, unless acceptable replacement accommodation/pitches/plots can be provided. This is to ensure that there remains a good supply of pitches and plots in the District.

Permanent Gypsy and Traveller sites and sites for Travelling Showpeople will be developed:

- a. On sites allocated in Policies RSA24 and RSA25;
- b. As expansions to existing authorised Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites, unless in conflict with criterion d;
- c. On sites located in, or well related to, existing settlements; or
- d. When in rural settings, ensuring the scale of the site(s) do not dominate the nearest settled community, whether singly or cumulatively with any other Gypsy and Traveller, and Travelling Showpeople sites. Isolated locations in the countryside should be avoided.

Where possible sites will be on previously developed land. The Council will seek compatibility of use with that of the surrounding land use and promote the integrated co-existence between the site and the settled community, including adequate levels of privacy and residential amenity both within the site and with neighbouring occupiers.

Proposals for development should satisfy the following criteria:

- i. Site planning will be landscape-led and development will be in accordance with Policies SP7 and SP8;
- ii. Ensure each pitch can accommodate space for a mobile home and touring caravan, parking, and if to be provided, a day room/amenity building. Provision will be made for play and residential amenity space. A layout plan shall be submitted with a planning application to demonstrate how the site and each pitch is laid out;
- iii. Provide safe access with appropriate turning space(s);
- iv. The development would not generate traffic of a type or amount that would result in substantial harm to local roads, and/or would require improvements that would adversely affect the character and nature of such roads. A Transport Assessment or Transport Statement should accompany a planning application, which would also detail appropriate mitigation;
- v. The site has easy access to local services including public transport, shops, schools and health services;
- vi. Measures to improve accessibility by, and encourage use of, non-car transport modes including internal walking routes linked to any existing Public Rights of Way network are provided. These measures should be set out in a Travel Plan for the site;
- vii. Development avoids areas of high flood risk and if required provide a Flood Risk Assessment, in accordance with Policy SP6;
- viii. It is demonstrated that surface water will be managed in a sustainable manner through the implementation of Sustainable Urban Drainage Methods (SuDS), in accordance with Policy SP6;
- ix. Adequate and appropriate infrastructure is provided for the supply of electricity and water, facilities for drainage and waste disposal;
- x. Development will be informed by an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA). Appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures will need to be implemented to ensure any designated sites and/or protected habitats and or species are not adversely affected; and
- xi. Development will not harm the value of any heritage assets and their setting and proposals will be in accordance with Policy SP9.

Proposals for Travelling Showperson sites will be required to satisfy the above criteria and additionally demonstrate that the site is appropriately designed to accommodate the storage and maintenance of show equipment and associated vehicles.

This policy supplements the detailed provisions for each of the sites set out in Policies RSA24 and RSA25.

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Supporting Text

11.24 West Berkshire Council, as the local planning authority, is required to identify sites to meet the needs of Gypsies, Travellers, and Travelling Showpeople. Proposed sites within settlement boundaries are considered acceptable in principle, as with conventional housing, subject to material considerations. Some of the policy criteria will assist in providing a suitably located and designed site.

11.25 There is a corporate commitment to supporting sustainable communities, and a good supply of affordable housing including social rented housing to address housing needs. This applies to the Travelling communities as well as settled communities.

11.26 The Council is required by national policy to set pitch and plot targets which address the likely permanent and transit accommodation needs in the area, working collaboratively with neighbouring authorities. A [Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment](#) has been undertaken to inform the LPR.

11.27 Need

11.28 The following tables set out the need for Traveller pitches and for Travelling Showperson plots. For clarity, the cultural and the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS) need figures are two different representations of need. The PPTS need based on the PPTS definition of 'Gypsies and Travellers', and cultural need, which is defined as those Gypsy and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople who do not travel and identify themselves as part of the Traveller and Travelling Showpeople community.

Table 7 Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment Identified Need 2021/22 to 2037/38 cultural need/PPTS need

	Cultural Need	Of which PPTS need
5 year Authorised Pitch Shortfall (2021/22 to 2025/26)	13	9
Longer term need		
2026/27 to 2030/31	5	3
2031/32 to 2035/36	9	6
2036/37 to 2037/38	3	2
Longer term need total to 2037/38	17	11
Net Shortfall 2021/22 to 2037/38	30	20

Table 8 Travelling Showperson plot requirements 2021/22 to 2037/38

	2021/22 to 2025/26	2026/27 to 2037/38	Total
<u>Travelling Showperson plots</u>	20	4	24

11.29 The GTAA identifies a need for four transit pitches, which would accommodate eight caravans.

11.30 The GTAA does not identify a need for houseboat dwellers and thus the LPR does not provide for any permanent houseboats.

Supply

11.31 There is an existing private site at New Stocks Farm, Paices Hill, Aldermaston. There are 24 permanent pitches, with 15 transit sites. Policy RSA32 seeks to allocate 8 permanent pitches at Paices Hill, which uses the land used as transit sites. This results in the reduction of 8 transit pitches.

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11.32 There is an existing Council operated site at Four Houses Corner, Reading Road, Ufton Nervet, which is due to be refurbished. When it reopens there will be 17 pitches. The updated GTAA is clear that when the site reopens a survey of households is required to determine the long term needs from children and young people living on the site.

11.33 There are other authorised small private traveller sites in the District.

11.34 There is currently one Showperson's Yard in the district which is located at Long Copse Farm. The 2019 GTAA concludes there is no additional need for Travelling Showperson yards and any need that does arise can be addressed on the Long Copse yard.

11.35 To address the longer term need for Gypsy and Traveller pitches and for transit sites/short term stopping places a Development Plan Document will be prepared. The Local Development Scheme outlines the timetable, with evidence being prepared between February 2023 and December 2025, leading up to adoption by September 2027.