

Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2037

**A report to Bracknell Forest Council on the
Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Development
Plan**

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Executive Summary

- 1 I was appointed by Bracknell Forest Council in November 2022 to carry out the independent examination of the Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by written representations. I visited the neighbourhood area on 16 December 2022.
- 3 The Plan includes a range of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. There is a very clear focus on safeguarding the character of the local landscape. It proposes the designation of local green spaces.
- 4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been actively engaged in its preparation.
- 5 Subject to a series of recommended modifications set out in this report, I have concluded that the Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood area.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
24 July 2023

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2037 (the 'Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan has been submitted to Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) by Winkfield Parish Council (BPC) in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2012 and its updates in 2018, 2019 and 2021. The NPPF continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 The role of an independent examiner is clearly defined in the legislation. I have been appointed to examine whether the submitted Plan meets the basic conditions and Convention Rights and other statutory requirements. It is not within my remit to examine or to propose an alternative plan, or a potentially more sustainable plan except where this arises as a result of my recommended modifications to ensure that the plan meets the basic conditions and the other relevant requirements.
- 1.5 A neighbourhood plan can be narrow or broad in scope. Any plan can include whatever range of policies it sees as appropriate to its designated neighbourhood area. The submitted Plan has been designed to be distinctive in general terms, and to be complementary to the development plan. It has a clear focus on maintaining the character and appearance of the neighbourhood area and safeguarding its landscape setting.
- 1.6 Within the context set out above, this report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the basic conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.7 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the neighbourhood area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by BFC, with the consent of WPC, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both BFC and WPC. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. I have 40 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level and more recently as an independent examiner. I am a chartered town planner and have significant experience of examining neighbourhood plans. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service.

Examination Outcomes

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan as submitted proceeds to a referendum; or
 - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
 - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.
- 2.5 The outcome of the examination is set out in Sections 7 and 8 of this report.

Other examination matters

- 2.6 In examining the Plan I am required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
 - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and
 - the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.
- 2.7 I have addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.6 of this report. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan complies with the three requirements.

3 Procedural Matters

3.1 I have considered the following documents during the examination:

- the submitted Plan;
- the Basic Conditions Statement;
- the Consultation Statement;
- the Environmental Report (June 2022);
- the HRA Screening Statement;
- the Character Assessments;
- the various Evidence Papers associated with the Plan;
- WPC's responses to the clarification note;
- BFC's response to the clarification note;
- the representations made to the Plan;
- the Bracknell Forest Borough Local Plan 2002 (saved policies);
- the Bracknell Forest Core Strategy 2008;
- the Bracknell Forest Site Allocations Local Plan 2013;
- the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021);
- Planning Practice Guidance; and
- relevant Ministerial Statements.

3.2 I visited the neighbourhood area on 16 December 2022. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular. The visit is covered in more detail in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.16 of this report.

3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations made to the submitted Plan, I was satisfied that the Plan could be examined without the need for a public hearing. In coming to this conclusion, I took account of the detailed nature of many of the comments made on the Plan and the level of detail in the Plan and its supporting documents. This level of detail gave me a useful and a comprehensive insight into the views which were made.

3.4 The neighbourhood area was revised whilst the examination was taking place. This process was a procedural response to recent minor revisions to parish boundaries in Bracknell Forest. The revision to the neighbourhood area will ensure that no part of the Borough is covered by more than one neighbourhood area. For clarity any reference to the neighbourhood area in this report refers to the revised area (as designated on 22 July 2023).

4 Consultation

Consultation Process

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such the regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 WPC prepared a Consultation Statement. The Statement sets out the mechanisms used to engage all concerned in the plan-making process. It provides specific details about the consultation process that took place on the pre-submission version of the Plan (March to April 2022). It captures the key issues in a proportionate way and is then underpinned by more detailed appendices. It is a good example of a Consultation Statement.
- 4.3 The Statement sets out details of the comprehensive range of consultation events that were carried out in relation to the initial stages of the Plan. They included:
- the series of events listed in section 2.1 of the Statement;
 - the use of a dedicated website;
 - the engagement with young families through the local schools;
 - the use of the WPC Newsletter; and
 - the call for sites.
- 4.4 The Statement also provides details of the way in which WPC engaged with statutory bodies. I am satisfied that the process has been proportionate and robust.
- 4.5 The Statement provides specific details on the comments received during the consultation process from statutory bodies and the wider community associated with the pre-submission version of the Plan. It identifies the principal changes that worked their way through into the submission version. This process helps to describe the evolution of the Plan.
- 4.6 I am satisfied that consultation has been an important element of the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation.
- 4.7 From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that WPC has sought to engage with residents, statutory bodies and the development industry as the Plan has been prepared.

Representations Received

4.8 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by BFC and ended on 2 December 2022. This exercise generated comments from the following organisations:

- Affinity Water
- National Grid
- National Highways
- Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Rushmoor Council
- Berkshire Archaeology
- Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
- Berkshire Garden Trust
- Bracknell Forest Council
- Surrey County Council
- Bracknell Town Council
- The Crown Estate
- Persimmon Homes
- St William Berkeley Homes
- Gladman Developments Limited
- Warfield Park
- British Horse Society
- Network Rail
- Sport England

4.9 Representations were also received from residents

4.10 I have taken account of the various representations as part of the examination of the Plan. Where it is appropriate to do so, I make specific reference to the individual representations in Section 7 of this report.

5 The Neighbourhood Area and the Development Plan Context

The Neighbourhood Area

- 5.1 The neighbourhood area consists of the parish of Winkfield. Its population in 2011 was 14998 persons living in 6532 houses. It was initially designated as a neighbourhood area on 24 December 2015. It was subsequently revised on 22 July 2023 to reflect the outcome of a parish boundary review. The parish is a large and irregular area located to the north, east and south of Bracknell.
- 5.2 The principal settlements within the parish are North Ascot, Chavey Down, and Winkfield Row. In addition, the communities of Martins Heron and The Warren and Forest Park are within the parish on the eastern edge of Bracknell Town.
- 5.3 Approximately 75% of the Parish area is designated as Green Belt. It extends from the southern to the northern boundaries of the Parish, east of the A332 and B3017 skirting the southern edge of Chavey Down and encircling North Ascot. To the north it also includes land beyond 'The Cut' and out towards Cranbourne and Woodside.

Development Plan Context

- 5.4 The Bracknell Forest Core Strategy was adopted in February 2008. It sets out the basis for future development in the Borough up to 2026. Policy CS2 establishes a series of locational principles focusing on Bracknell Town Centre, previously developed land, and other land within defined settlements (which include Chavey Down, North Ascot and Winkfield Row in the neighbourhood area).
- 5.5 Other policies in the Core Strategy which have an impact on the neighbourhood area include:
- CS7 Design
 - CS8 Recreation and Culture
 - CS9 Development on Land outside Settlements
 - CS16 Housing Needs of the Community
 - CS23 Transport
- 5.6 The Core Strategy is underpinned by the Site Allocations Local Plan. It allocates sites for different forms of development required to achieve the vision and spatial objectives in the Core Strategy. Its principal focus is on the development of sites in and around Bracknell. Nevertheless, Policy SA3 (Edge of Settlement sites) allocates land for residential development in the neighbourhood area at Sandbanks, Winkfield, and Bog Lane Winkfield. Policy SA2 (Other land within Defined Settlements) also allocates land at 152 New Road, Winkfield.
- 5.7 BFC is preparing a new Local Plan that will in due course replace the existing development plan. The new Plan will cover the period to 2037. The Plan is now well-advanced. It was submitted for examination in December 2021. The hearing sessions took place in 2022 and the Planning Inspectors have now published their post hearings letter. BFC is now working on main modifications to the Plan.

- 5.8 The submitted neighbourhood plan has been prepared within its wider development plan context. In doing so it has relied on up-to-date information and research that has underpinned previous and existing planning policy documents in Bracknell Forest. This is good practice and reflects key elements in Planning Practice Guidance on this matter.

Unaccompanied Visit

- 5.9 I visited the neighbourhood area on 16 December 2022. I approached the A322 to the west. This allowed me to understand its relationship with Bracknell to the north and west and its connection with the strategic highway network.
- 5.10 I looked initially at Martins Heron. I saw the way in which the new houses and the road network had been organised in a planned and strategic way. I saw the significance of the Tesco superstore and the role played by the Martins Heron railway station.
- 5.11 I then looked at Chavey Down. I saw that it had a very secluded and discrete character based around St Martins Church.
- 5.12 I then drove to the King George V playing fields. I saw its scale and significance. I also saw its role as part of the proposed local gap. I looked at the proposed gap on the other side of the B3017 and from Forest Road.
- 5.13 I then drove to Winkfield. I saw that it had a different character to Winkfield Row North and South. I saw the significance of St Mary's Church and its relationship with The White Hart PH on the other side of Church Road. I was also able to appreciate the Old Rectory to the immediate west of the Church.
- 5.14 I then drove to Cranbourne. I saw that it had its own distinctive character and appearance.
- 5.15 I then drove to Lovel Road. In doing so I saw the significance of Cranbrook School.
- 5.16 I left the neighbourhood area along the King's Road. This provided me with another indication of the way in which it connected with the strategic road network.

6 The Neighbourhood Plan and the Basic Conditions

6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped considerably in the preparation of this section of the report. It is a well-presented and informative document. It is also proportionate to the Plan itself.

6.2 As part of this process, I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the Basic Conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:

- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State;
- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development;
- be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area;
- be compatible with European Union (EU) obligations and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR); and
- not breach the requirements of Chapter 8 of Part 6 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

6.3 I assess the Plan against the basic conditions under the following headings.

National Planning Policies and Guidance

6.4 For the purposes of this examination the key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued in July 2021. Paragraph 3.4 of this report comments about the way in which the Basic Conditions Statement addresses the NPPF.

6.5 The NPPF sets out a range of core land-use planning issues to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are particularly relevant to the Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Plan:

- a plan led system – in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the adopted Core Strategy and the Site Allocations Local Plan;
- delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
- building a strong, competitive economy;
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities;
- taking account of the different roles and characters of different areas;
- highlighting the importance of high-quality design and good standards of amenity for all future occupants of land and buildings; and
- conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance.

6.6 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development. Paragraph 13 of the NPPF

indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.

- 6.7 In addition to the NPPF, I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and ministerial statements.
- 6.8 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance in general terms subject to the recommended modifications included in this report. It sets out a positive vision for the future of the neighbourhood area. It seeks to ensure that it safeguards its character and appearance. The Basic Conditions Statement maps the policies in the Plan against the appropriate sections of the NPPF.
- 6.9 At a more practical level, the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraph 16d). This matter is reinforced in Planning Practice Guidance. Paragraph ID:41-041-20140306 indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise, and supported by appropriate evidence.
- 6.10 As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. Many of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

Contributing to sustainable development

- 6.11 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the way in which the submitted Plan contributes towards sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social, and environmental. The submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the neighbourhood area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes a policy for employment development (Policy W7). In the social dimension, it includes policies on community facilities (Policy W6) and to promote a range of house types and tenure (Policies W4/5). In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect its natural, built, and historic environment. It has specific policies on design (Policies W2/3), the natural environment (Policy W8) and a Local Gap (Policy W9). WPC has undertaken its own assessment of this matter in the submitted Basic Conditions Statement.

General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan

- 6.12 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in Bracknell Forest in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.13 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context. The Basic Conditions Statement helpfully relates the Plan's policies to policies in the

development plan. Subject to the recommended modification in this report, I am satisfied that the submitted Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 6.14 The Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2015 require a qualifying body either to submit an environmental report prepared in accordance with the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 or a statement of reasons why an environmental report is not required.
- 6.15 In order to comply with this requirement WPC commissioned an Environmental Report for the Plan. The assessment is thorough and well-constructed. The report comments that the emerging Local Plan does not require neighbourhood plans to allocate land for development. It advises that Policy LP4 of the emerging Local Plan allocates sites with a total capacity sufficient to meet the identified housing need/proposed housing requirement, once account is also taken of supply from existing commitments and windfall. In this context it then comments that there are certain arguments for allocating land for development through the neighbourhood plan. Firstly, allocation of land could help to meet needs for housing and/or employment locally. Secondly, by allocating land for development the Parish would benefit from a degree of protection against 'the presumption in favour of sustainable development' (NPPF paragraph 11).
- 6.16 The Report considers a series of reasonable alternatives to the strategy set out in the Plan. In doing so it comments about the environmental issues surrounding the potential housing sites which it considers.
- 6.17 In a more general way the Report also comments about the environmental implications of the other policies in the Plan.

Habitat Regulations Assessment

- 6.18 WPC commissioned a separate Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan (July 2022). The HRA report is both thorough and comprehensive. It takes appropriate account of the significance of protected sites at the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, the Windsor Forest, and Great Park SAC and the Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham SAC (which sits largely within the Thames Basin Heaths SPA).
- 6.19 The initial exercise concluded that (in the absence of mitigation) there is potential for the sites and policies included in the Plan to lead to increased recreational pressure on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. On this basis, it concluded that likely significant effects could not be excluded and the Plan had been screened in for Appropriate Assessment.
- 6.20 The resulting appropriate assessment (section 5) considered development plan policies and guidance and subsequent mitigation measures. It recommended that additional text be added to policies and/or supporting text of policies W5, W6 and W7. In this context it concluded that there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of habitats sites as a result of the submitted Plan, either alone or in-combination with other plans and projects.

- 6.21 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination, I am satisfied that a proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. The wider process provides assurance to all concerned that the submitted Plan takes appropriate account of important ecological and biodiversity matters. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of the basic conditions.

Human Rights

- 6.22 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. In addition, there has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. Based on all the evidence available to me, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

Summary

- 6.23 On the basis of my assessment of the Plan in this section of my report, I am satisfied that it meets the basic conditions subject to the incorporation of the recommended modifications contained in this report.

7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the policies in the Plan. It makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that they have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 The modifications focus on the policies themselves given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended modifications to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is distinctive and proportionate to the neighbourhood area. The wider community and WPC have spent time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in their Plan. This sits at the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance (ID:41-004-20190509) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted plan. Where necessary I have identified the inter-relationships between the policies.
- 7.6 For clarity this section of the report comments on all policies whether I have recommended modifications in order to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

The initial section of the Plan (Sections 1-5)

- 7.8 The initial parts of the Plan set the scene for the range of policies. They do so in a proportionate way. The Plan is presented in an effective way. It makes good use of well-selected maps. A very clear distinction is made between the policies and the supporting text. It also highlights the links between the Plan's objectives and its resultant policies.
- 7.9 The Introduction addresses the background to neighbourhood planning. It comments about how the Plan has been prepared and how it will be used. It also includes a map of the neighbourhood area (Figure 1.1). In the round it is a very effective introduction to a neighbourhood plan. For completeness, I recommend that this part of the Plan comments about the Plan period. This will reinforce the information on the front cover.

At the end of paragraph 1.2 add: 'The Plan period is 2022 to 2037'

- 7.10 Section 2 provides comprehensive information about the neighbourhood area. It does so to good effect. Section 2.2 helpfully describes the key settlements in the parish. Important elements of this analysis have underpinned the production of the Plan.

7.11 Section 3 comments about the national and local planning contexts which have underpinned the preparation of the Plan. It provides a background to the emerging Local Plan.

7.12 Section 4 sets out the community's view on planning matters. It overlaps with the Consultation Statement. Paragraph 4.1 helpfully describes the Plan's Working Party and the way in which it secured input from the various communities in the parish.

7.13 Section 5 sets out the Vision and the eight objectives of the Plan. The Vision is as follows:

'In 2037 Winkfield has retained its villages and hamlets separated by countryside gaps and the essential character of the Green Belt has been preserved. Development has been well-designed and contributes positively to the visual character of the local surrounding's heritage. Community facilities and services have survived and flourished. The special environmental assets of the Parish have been preserved and the community has benefitted from access to and enjoyment of the countryside.'

7.14 The remainder of this section of the report addresses each policy in turn in the context set out in paragraphs 7.5 to 7.7 of this report.

Policy W1: A Spatial Plan for the Parish

7.15 As its name suggests this policy sets out a spatial strategy for the Plan. In general terms it does so to good effect. It includes the following elements:

- the green infrastructure network will continue to shape the location of new development;
- the ongoing importance of safeguarding the Green Belt;
- the use of suitable brownfield sites will be encouraged;
- a policy approach for Green Belt villages;
- a policy approach for the countryside; and
- maintaining the Bracknell – North Ascot Strategic Gap and the Winkfield Row North – Winkfield Row South Local Gap.

7.16 The policy has attracted a series of representations from BFC and the development industry. They address an overlapping range of issues including:

- the need for flexibility to allow a degree of new strategic development in the parish which may naturally arise from the examination of the emerging Local Plan;
- the importance attached in the policy to the Strategic Gap as proposed in the emerging Local Plan and to the Local Gap as identified in the submitted Plan (Policy W9);
- the way in which the policy has interpreted Green Belt policy; and
- the distinction which the policy makes between greenfield and brownfield development.

7.17 I have considered these matters very carefully. On the balance of all the information available to me, I recommend modifications to the policy to ensure that it meets the

basic conditions and will be capable of being applied with clarity and consistency during the Plan period. The recommended modifications address the following matters:

- a simplification of Part C2 of the policy so that its focus is simply on supporting the use of brownfield land;
- providing clarity to part C3 of the policy so that it has regards to paragraph 149e of the NPPF;
- clarifying the remit of part C4 of the policy; and
- ensuring that part C5 of the policy applies in a general way. This acknowledges that the proposed Winkfield Row North/Winkfield Row South Local Gap is separately addressed in Policy W9 of the Plan.

7.18 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It provides a spatial plan for the parish within the context set by the current development plan. The Plan's broader approach to monitoring and review (paragraph 5.7 of the Plan) anticipates that the strategy may need to be revisited once the emerging Local Plan has been adopted.

In part B of the policy replace 'our' with 'the'

Replace part C2 of the policy with: 'Development on brownfield land will be supported where it delivers the objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan.'

In part C3 of the policy delete 'and not have an adverse impact on the character of the countryside or the openness of the Green Belt'.

In part C4 of the policy replace the opening element with: 'Within the countryside (land outside the defined settlements, outside village boundaries and outside the Green Belt),'

Replace the final sentence of part C4 of the policy with: 'As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should protect and where practicable enhance the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and quality of the Landscape Character Area within which they are located.'

Replace part C5 of the policy with: 'Development proposals should demonstrate how the character of the area has been taken into consideration, and that valued landscape functions relating to the separation of settlements will not be compromised, including on a cumulative basis.'

Replace the final sentence of paragraph 6.4 with: 'Green Belt policy along with the identification of a local gaps between Winkfield Row North and Winkfield Row South (in Policy W9) further protects these areas.'

In paragraph 6.5 delete This reflects.... Green Belt'

Delete paragraph 6.7.

Replace paragraph 6.8 with: 'The designation of a Local Gap (in Policy W9) will not necessarily prevent development. Proposals within the defined Gap will need to demonstrate that the landscape functions relating to the separation of settlements have not been compromised.'

Policy W2: Promoting High Quality Design in the Character Areas

- 7.19 This policy sets out a comprehensive approach towards design and character. The general approach is underpinned by the Character Area Assessment. It incorporates specific requirements and expectations for each of the identified character areas.
- 7.20 The supporting text comments that the intention of the policy is to provide a set of principles that set out the quality of development that will be expected for each character area and to reflect the wishes of the community as stated in the 2016 survey. The Plan clarifies that it does not prevent or discourage innovation in architectural forms or detail, but it is important that any new development demonstrates a connection with local character and place-making. The Plan comments that the overriding consideration should be whether the new build harmonises with its setting. This will be achieved by using guidance set out in the Character Area Assessments (2018).
- 7.21 I am satisfied that the Plan takes a positive approach to this matter. In the round it is a positive local response to Section 12 of the NPPF.
- 7.22 In its representation to the Plan, Warfield Park suggest that the recently implemented scheme for 82 park homes should be excluded from Character Area 4. I have considered this matter very carefully. In the broader context of the policy and its format I am satisfied that this approach is not necessary. The Character Areas will have different elements of developments and it would be impractical to omit parcels of land from the overall matrix of defined character areas. In any event the policy will not affect implemented planning permissions.
- 7.23 I recommend detailed modifications to the wording of the policy. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions.

In part A of the policy replace ‘are expected to’ with ‘should’

Policy W3: Design of parking

- 7.24 This is a comprehensive policy. Its purpose is to inform the design of parking to reduce its impact on the streetscape using strong soft and/or hard landscaping, architecture, and boundary treatment. The approach taken recognises that many of the Character Area Assessments identified parking as an issue which detracts from the overall character of the parish.
- 7.25 The policy takes a positive approach to this matter. I recommend a detailed modification to the wording used in the opening element of the policy to bring the clarity required by the NPPF. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions.

Replace the opening element of the policy with: ‘The provision of parking, garaging or ancillary buildings and electric vehicle charging points should be incorporated sensitively within development proposals and their landscaping by ensuring that:’

Policy W4: Housing type, size, and choice

- 7.26 This policy has been designed to ensure that new housing meets local needs. It comments that proposals for new residential development should address local housing needs and that on sites of fewer than 10 dwellings, at least 80% of the dwellings should be a mix of 1, 2 and 3-bedroom homes. It also comments that an alternative mix may be delivered only where clear evidence is presented that there is a need for such a mix.
- 7.27 The policy also comments that development proposals which provide the following types of residential accommodation will be encouraged:
- Affordable homes including Starter Homes;
 - Homes specifically developed for private rent;
 - Undeveloped, serviced plots made available individually for purchase by self-builders; and
 - Sheltered, extra care, and registered care provider provision.
- 7.28 The policy aims to ensure that new houses developed in the parish meet local needs. This approach takes account of the scale and nature of the existing housing stock and identified housing needs. In general terms the approach taken is both appropriate and evidence-based. However, to bring the clarity required by the NPPF and to bring the policy up to date I recommend the following modifications to the various elements of the policy:
- to ensure a degree of proportionality to part A of the policy. In proposing revised thresholds, I have taken account of WPC's helpful responses to the clarification note;
 - the deletion of part B of the policy. This reflects the circumstances where BFC has not adopted a local plan policy requiring the use of National Described Space Standards (NDSS); and
 - the deletion of any reference to Starter Homes in part C of the policy. This reflects the changing nature of affordable housing and the recent significance of First Homes in national policy.
- 7.29 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social dimension of sustainable development.

Replace part A of the policy with:

'Proposals for new residential development should address the most up to date local housing needs. On sites of five or more dwellings, at least 80% of the dwellings should be a mix of 1, 2 and 3-bedroom homes. Sites delivering two, three or four dwellings should provide at least one home of 1, 2 or 3-beds.

Alternative housing mixes will only be supported where there is clear evidence to support such an approach on design, layout, viability, or housing need grounds.'

Delete part B of the policy.

In part C of the policy (first bullet point) delete ‘including Starter Homes’

Policy W5: Rural Exception Sites and entry-level exception housing

- 7.30 This policy continues the approach taken in Policy W4.
- 7.31 The first part of the policy comments that small scale rural exception housing schemes will be permitted to meet a local housing need. It advises that this need must be identified through a local needs survey for the Parish and that the provision of market housing to support the affordable provision must be accompanied by a robust and clear viability appraisal.
- 7.32 The second part of the policy comments that proposals for the development of entry-level homes suitable for first time buyers or those looking to rent their first home will be supported on land which is not already allocated for housing, provided they comply with a series of size and layout requirements.
- 7.33 The policy takes a robust and positive approach to this matter. Part F includes mitigation measures which have arisen as a result of the Appropriate Assessment exercise (as addressed in paragraph 6.20 of this report).
- 7.34 I recommend that part A of the policy is modified so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF and can be applied consistently within the Plan period.
- 7.35 I recommend the deletion of part D of the policy and its relocation in the supporting text. This acknowledges that it describes the implementation of the policy.
- 7.36 Finally I recommend a modification to part E of the policy so that it is consistent with modifications which I have separately recommended to Policy W9 of the Plan.
- 7.37 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. In a similar way to Policy W4, it will contribute to the delivery of the social dimension of sustainable development.

Replace the first sentence of part A of the policy with: ‘Small-scale rural exception housing schemes which would meet a local housing need will be supported.’

Delete part D.

Replace E iii with: ‘the layout, massing and height of the buildings are designed in such a way as to avoid compromising the Winkfield Row North/Winkfield Row South Local Gap; and’

At the end of paragraph 8.9 add the deleted part D of the policy

Policy W6: Community Facilities

- 7.38 This policy takes an interesting and distinctive approach to community facilities. The first part comments that development proposals to maintain or extend the viable use of existing community facilities or to expand provision either through expansion of an existing facility or the development of a new facility will be supported. The second part of the policy offers support to proposals to establish a new doctor’s surgery and/or a

new dentist facility provided they are located outside the Green Belt and have sufficient off-street car parking spaces

- 7.39 The policy is underpinned by appropriate evidence. The steering group has collected evidence on community facilities within the Parish that are valued by the community and offer a valuable resource to support community life in the Community Facilities Topic Group Evidence Report (Feb 2018).
- 7.40 The policy takes an appropriate approach to this matter. It meets the basic conditions.

Policy W7: Employment and Retail

- 7.41 This policy takes a comprehensive approach to proposals for employment and retail uses. The first part of the policy comments that proposals to strengthen the local economy through the development of new small-scale employment and retail uses, including flexible start-up/small scale accommodation, will be supported within settlements where they meet a series of criteria. The second part of the policy comments that proposals to enable working from home which require planning permission will be supported, provided the business use remains ancillary to the main residential use and there is no significant harm caused to local residential amenity by way of car parking, traffic movements or noise.
- 7.42 The third part of the policy comments that proposals that intensify HGV movements on narrow, unsuitable rural roads and their junctions and, which damage verges and risk the safety of pedestrians and cyclists will be resisted.
- 7.43 In general terms the policy takes an appropriate approach to the economic development of the parish. Its details are rather complicated given that the policy addresses both employment and retail development and covers a diverse parish. In part A I recommend the deletion of any reference to retail development. As BFC comment its inclusion involves an assessment of the sequential tests. In reaching this conclusion, I have taken account of WPC's responses to the clarification note. In specific terms I have recommended the inclusion of its suggested definition of small-scale employment development. I also recommend consequential modifications to the supporting text.
- 7.44 I recommend that part C of the policy is simplified. As submitted it addresses a series of matters which are beyond the control of the land use planning system and which would be difficult to relate directly to development proposals either as planning applications determined by BFC or as planning conditions are monitored and, where necessary, enforced.

Replace the opening element of part A of the policy with: 'Development proposals for new small-scale employment, including flexible start-up/small scale accommodation, will be supported within settlements provided they:'

In part A of the policy delete i.

Replace part C of the policy with: ‘Proposals which would have an unacceptable impact on the capacity or safety of the local highway network will not be supported.’

In paragraph 10.1 replace the final two sentences with: ‘Proposals for any new retail units will be assessed against national and local planning policies.’

At the end of paragraph 10.2 add: ‘For the purpose of Policy W7 a small-scale business use is an activity where the space could reasonably be used to operate a business employing 10 people or less.’

In paragraph 10.4 replace ‘both for retail and small-scale office/commercial space’ with ‘for small scale office/commercial space’

Policy W8: Biodiversity and Wildlife Corridors

- 7.45 This policy focuses on biodiversity and wildlife corridors. It comments that all development proposals are expected to deliver at least a 10% biodiversity net gain in addition to protecting existing habitats and species. It also comments that proposals on or adjacent to the wildlife corridors identified in Figure 11.1 must demonstrate a layout and design which ensures that wildlife is not impeded in its movement along the corridor. Finally, it comments that proposals to enhance the wildlife corridors or create new corridors are strongly encouraged.
- 7.46 In general terms the policy takes a positive and appropriate approach to this matter. I recommend the following modifications to ensure that the policy has the clarity required by the NPPF and can be applied with consistency throughout the Plan period:
- the inclusion of a proportionate element into part A. As submitted the policy would otherwise apply to all proposals;
 - detailed refinements to parts B and C of the policy; and
 - the reconfiguring of part D of the policy so that it would result in sustainable approaches to drainage wherever practicable (rather than simply the consideration of the matter as set out in the submitted policy).
- 7.47 Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the environmental dimension of sustainable development.

In part A of the policy replace ‘All’ with ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location’

Replace part B of the policy with: ‘The incorporation of design features into development proposals that encourage and promote local wildlife will be particularly supported.’

Replace the final sentence of part C of the policy with: ‘New planting should consist of native species of trees, shrubs and grasses acting and designed to provide accessibility for wildlife.’

Replace part D of the policy with: ‘Where practicable development proposals should incorporate sustainable urban drainage and natural flood management techniques.’

Policy W9: Local Gaps

- 7.48 This is an important policy within the wider approach taken in the Plan. It comments that development is expected to maintain the integrity of the Winkfield Row North/Winkfield Row South Local Gap. It also comments that proposals that are likely to lead to the coalescence of these settlements or fail to maintain a significant gap between them, both physical and visually, will be resisted.
- 7.49 The second part of the policy advises on its implementation. It comments that in maintaining the visual integrity of the gap, development proposals must demonstrate how the landscape character has been taken into consideration and that valued landscape functions relating to the separation of settlements will not be compromised, on a cumulative or individual basis. It also advises that proposals in the local gap will be required to demonstrate how they might reinforce the positive characteristics of the gap.
- 7.50 The policy has attracted representations from BFC, Persimmon Homes and Gladman Developments.
- 7.51 There is a degree of inconsistency between the policy and the supporting text. The former proposes the designation of a Local Gap at Winkfield Row North/Winkfield Row South. Elements of the supporting text consolidate this approach. However, paragraph 11.8 comments about the Strategic Gap between Bracknell and North Ascot which was included in the emerging Local Plan. This inconsistency has translated into the representations.
- 7.52 Whilst it is not unreasonable for a neighbourhood plan to draw attention to strategic matters in a local plan, in this case the proposed Strategic Gap between Bracknell and North Ascot is proposed in the emerging Local Plan. When the representations were made on the Plan there was a lack of clarity about the outcome of the examination of the Local Plan. However, since that time the Inspectors’ Post Hearing letter has been published (January 2023). In paragraph 49 the Inspectors comment that ‘(the) Strategic Gaps and Green Wedge do not add any value to the policies of the Plan as submitted. A main modification to the Landscape Character Policy LP37, together with Development in the Countryside will provide clarity and adequate protection to ensure that the distinctive character of the setting of settlements is not eroded.’ In these circumstances I recommend the deletion of paragraph 11.8 of the submitted Plan. I also recommend the deletion of any references to the Strategic Gap on the Policies Maps.
- 7.53 I looked at the proposed Winkfield Row local gap carefully during the visit. I saw that the defined area was clearly-defined and distinctive from the surrounding built development. Whilst the part of the proposed Local Gap to the east of the B3017 (based on the Playing Fields) was more open and unaffected by boundary trees than the area to the west of the B3017 I saw that the wider area would assist in safeguarding

the separate identities of the two communities. Plainly it would also fulfil an important role in preventing the potential coalescence of the two communities through development proposals.

- 7.54 I am also satisfied that the proposed Local Gap is local in both scale and character. In this context it contrasts significantly with the proposed Strategic Gap included in the emerging Local Plan.
- 7.55 I saw the way in which the proposed Local Gap overlapped with the King George V Playing Fields (as proposed to be designated a local green space). In its representation BFC commented about the overlapping identification of the Playing Fields as both part of a Local Gap and as a local green space. Nevertheless, based on all the evidence, including WPC's response to the clarification note, I am satisfied that the approach taken meets the basic conditions. Planning Practice Guidance identifies a range of circumstances where local green spaces can be designated within the context of other land use designations. In practical terms, this may well be an academic issue given the higher bar provided by local green space designation and the public ownership of the Playing Fields.
- 7.56 I have considered the policy very carefully. On the balance of the evidence, I am satisfied that the proposed Winkfield Row Local Gap serves a clear purpose and its designation would meet the basic conditions. Nevertheless, I recommend modifications to part A of the policy so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF and can be applied consistently through the development management process in the Plan period.
- 7.57 I recommend that part B of the policy is deleted and repositioned into the supporting text. This acknowledges that its primary purpose is to describe how the policy would be applied.
- 7.58 For clarity I also recommend that the title of the policy is modified so that it refers solely to the Winkfield Row Local Gap.

Replace part A of the policy with:

'Development proposals should maintain the integrity of the Winkfield Row North/Winkfield Row South Local Gap as shown on the Policies Map. Proposals that would have an unacceptable impact on the integrity of the Local Gap, either physical and visually, will not be supported.'

Delete part B of the policy.

Replace the policy title with: 'The Winkfield Row North/Winkfield Row South Local Gap'

Delete paragraph 11.8.

At the end of paragraph 11.10 add: 'In maintaining the visual integrity of the gap, development proposals should demonstrate how the landscape character has been taken into consideration and that valued landscape functions relating to the separation of settlements will not be compromised on a cumulative or individual basis. Wherever

practicable proposals in the Local Gap should demonstrate how they would reinforce its positive characteristics.'

Delete any references to the Strategic Gap on the Policies Maps.

Policy W10: Dark Skies

- 7.59 This policy acknowledges that certain parts of the parish enjoy dark skies. The policy comments that while ensuring new developments are secure in terms of occupier and vehicle safety, dark skies are to be preferred over lighting systems that emit unnecessarily high levels of light. It continues in commenting that future outdoor lighting systems should have a minimum impact on the environment, minimising light pollution and adverse effects on wildlife. It also comments that low energy lighting technologies should reduce consumption and minimise glare in order to keep night-time skies dark.
- 7.60 In general terms the policy takes a positive approach to this matter. Nevertheless, I recommend that the format of part A of the policy is modified so that its purpose is clear and to enable it to be applied with clarity and consistency through the development management process.
- 7.61 I also recommend that part B of the policy is repositioned into the supporting text. Whilst the Institute of Lighting Professionals guidance draws attention to best practice on this matter it explains how the policy should be implemented rather than operating as a land use policy. Otherwise, the policy meets the basic conditions.

Replace the policy with: 'While ensuring new developments are secure in terms of occupier and vehicle safety, outdoor lighting systems should be designed to limit their impact on the environment, including light pollution and its associated effects on wildlife. Wherever practicable, low energy lighting technologies should be used to reduce consumption and minimise glare in order to keep night-time skies dark.'

At the end of paragraph 11.15 add: 'External lighting designs shall comply with guidance and recommendations issued by the Institution of Lighting Professionals.'

Policy W11: Local Green Spaces

- 7.62 This policy proposes the designation of a series of local green spaces (LGSs). The approach taken is underpinned by the LGS Assessment (Appendix A).
- 7.63 On the basis of all the information available to me, including my own observations, I am satisfied that the proposed LGSs comply with the three tests in paragraph 102 of the NPPF. In several cases they are precisely the types of green spaces which the authors of the NPPF would have had in mind in preparing national policy.
- 7.64 In addition, I am satisfied that their proposed designation would accord with the more general elements of paragraph 101 of the NPPF. Firstly, I am satisfied that their designation is consistent with the local planning of sustainable development. They do not otherwise prevent sustainable development coming forward in the neighbourhood area and no such development has been promoted or suggested. Secondly, I am

satisfied that the LGSs are capable of enduring beyond the end of the Plan period. Indeed, they are an established element of the local environment and, in most cases, have existed in their current format for many years. In addition, no evidence was brought forward during the examination that would suggest that the proposed LGSs would not endure beyond the end of the Plan period.

- 7.65 The policy itself follows the matter-of-fact approach in paragraph 103 of the NPPF. The policy meets the basic conditions. It will contribute to the delivery of the social dimension of sustainable development.

Policy W12: Pedestrian/Cycle Network

- 7.66 This policy acknowledges a common concern across the parish about road safety and parking. There is also concern that future growth could exacerbate these issues. The Plan suggests that this requires a solution to traffic which will result from additional use and efforts are needed to encourage travel by means other than the car and there is a requirement for good and safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists, especially for children walking to school.
- 7.67 The policy takes an appropriate approach to this matter. I recommend detailed modifications to the wording used in part C of the policy to bring the clarity required by the NPPF and to allow the policy to be applied in a proportionate fashion. I also recommend the deletion of the final sentence of part C of the policy as it is supporting text rather than policy. I recommend that the supporting text is modified to explain the matter.

Replace part C of the policy with: ‘As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should seek to ensure that they incorporate safe access points to link up with existing footways and cycle routes wherever practicable.’

At the end of para 12.7 add: ‘Part C of Policy W12 addresses this matter. To help ensure that residents can walk and cycle safely to local facilities serving the community, development proposals should seek to ensure safe access to link up with existing footways and cycle routes, wherever practicable. This is particularly important where existing access is limited but is capable of improvement.’

Policy W13: Martins Heron Station

- 7.68 This policy acknowledges the importance of the Martins Heron station in the parish. The first part comments that proposals to deliver improvements at Martins Heron Railway Station that will encourage access to and from the station for pedestrians and cyclists are supported. The second part comments that proposals that result in a reduction in the total amount of cycle racks and car parking spaces or will further harm the existing highways safety standards or accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists will not be supported. Proposals to provide more car and cycle parking will be supported.
- 7.69 I saw the position of the station during the visit and its relationship with the houses in the immediate locality and the Tesco store.

- 7.70 In general terms the policy meets the basic conditions. I recommend that part B of the policy is broken into its separate elements. Otherwise, it meets the basic conditions.

Replace Part B of the policy with:

‘B: Proposals to provide more car and cycle parking at the Station will be supported.

C: Proposals that result in a reduction in the total amount of cycle racks and car parking spaces at the Station or will further harm the existing highways safety standards or accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists will not be supported.’

Other matters - General

- 7.71 This report has recommended a series of modifications both to the policies and to the text in the submitted Plan. Where consequential changes to the text are required directly as a result of my recommended modification to the policy concerned, I have highlighted them in this report. However other changes to the general text may be required elsewhere in the Plan as a result of the recommended modifications to the policies. It will be appropriate for BFC and WPC to have the flexibility to make any necessary consequential changes to the general text. I recommend accordingly.

Modification of general text (where necessary) to achieve consistency with the modified policies.

Other Matters – Specific

- 7.72 In addition to its representations which raise basic conditions matters on a policy-by-policy basis BFC suggest general revisions to the more general parts of the Plan. They are set out in Appendix B of the representation.

- 7.73 I recommend that the Plan incorporates the following revisions as proposed by BFC (the references relate to the part of the Plan as set out in the left-hand column of the appendix):

Paragraphs 1.10/2.4/2.34/2.35/2.41/3.1/5.12

Glossary

Appendix B Evidence Base

8 Summary and Conclusions

Summary

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2037. It is distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community.
- 8.2 Following the independent examination of the Plan, I have concluded that the Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.

Conclusion

- 8.3 On the basis of the findings in this report I recommend to Bracknell Forest Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report the Winkfield Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan should proceed to referendum.

Referendum Area

- 8.4 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the designated (and recently-revised) neighbourhood area. In my view, that area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved by Bracknell Forest Council on 22 July 2023.
- 8.5 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth and efficient manner.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
24 July 2023