



Barkham
Berkshire

27 September 2008

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy,
Land Use and Transport Policy,
Policy and Partnerships,
Wokingham Borough Council,
PO Box 157, Shute End,
WOKINGHAM,
Berkshire, RG40 1WR.

Dear Sirs,

Local Development Framework 2006-2026: Submission Core Strategy

The Barkham Village Residents' Association (BVRA) was formed in 1987. Our membership comprises 608 households in Barkham out of a total of around 715 households excluding the Garrison.

Our comments on the Core Strategy fall into two parts – the Council's consultation process itself, and the detail of the proposals.

A. Consultation process

We have serious reservations about the absurd complexity of the consultation process which seems designed to discourage comments by anyone who is not a professional. The timescale is also ridiculously short.

We are also concerned that the process is heavily orientated towards those who are computer literate. There are many residents who do not own a computer, and many more who do not have a broadband connection and therefore cannot practically download the Core Strategy documents from the Council's website.

It also appears that the special summer edition of 'Wokingham Borough News' giving an overview of WBC's future plans under the Core Strategy (but with different SDL housing allocations!) was not distributed in Barkham (and perhaps elsewhere).

The above failings in the consultation process will inevitably have disenfranchised many residents.

B. The Detail

We are generally supportive of the Council's strategy of concentrating new housing development in a select number of strategic development locations. We have concerns, however, about the proposed scale of Arborfield Garrison SDL and the transport strategy.

1. Sustainability of Arborfield Garrison SDL (CP19.1)

*Not justified
Not effective*

The principal issue from our perspective is the sustainability of the scale of the proposed new settlement at Arborfield Garrison SDL of 3,500 dwellings.

This appears to be an arbitrary increase from the 2,500 dwellings specified in the South East Plan, which figure was considered to be sound by the Independent Panel after the Examination in Public.

The increased housing allocation appears to overlook the fact that Arborfield Garrison SDL is the least well located of the four SDLs from the perspective of access to local retail centres and employment areas outside the Garrison itself. This, perversely, is despite acknowledgement of this fact within the document itself (see paragraph 2.69)!

It also overlooks the fact that the new housing allocation is exclusive of existing housing at Arborfield Garrison. As at 15 October 2006 (per the 2007 Electoral Register) there were 709 households (including private housing on land released by the MoD), so if 3,500 new dwellings are built the overall amount of housing could approach 4,500 homes by the end of the plan period.

We question whether adequate forms of sustainable transport can be provided for such a large settlement in this location, especially given the lack of commitment in the Submission Core Strategy to (a) providing high quality express bus services to/from Arborfield Garrison SDL and (b) removing the level-crossing by Wokingham station (see below).

We therefore submit that the new housing allocation for Arborfield Garrison SDL during the plan period should not exceed 2,500 dwellings.

2. Measures to improve highway capacity (CP19.8)

Not effective

The Strategy envisages improvements to highway capacity, including the principal route from the north of Arborfield Garrison SDL towards Wokingham along Langley Common Road and Barkham Road (B3349), including measures to improve accessibility by non-car transport modes.

There is, in reality, little scope for road improvements to accommodate a bus priority lane and/or a cycle track, while road widening would threaten the amenity of frontagers and the semi-rural character of Barkham.

Any increases in transport capacity along Langley Common Road and Barkham Road (B3349) should have regard to protecting the character and separate identity of Barkham and respecting the amenity of frontagers.

3. Improvements to public transport (CP10)

Not justified

The list of deliverables in CP10 includes a number of high quality express bus services but not along routes to/from Arborfield Garrison SDL. There are only general references to improved public transport services to serve Arborfield Garrison SDL notwithstanding the proposed scale of the settlement and its distance from local retail centres and employment areas.

While assumptions can vary, our projections indicate that over the plan period commuter car journeys along Barkham Road (B3349) are likely to more than double and, until new schools at Arborfield Garrison SDL are built, school journeys could more than treble unless there are very significant improvements in public/school transport.

A commitment to provide high quality express bus services and local school transport is fundamental to limit the otherwise inevitable rise in car journeys.

The Strategy should therefore provide for express bus services between Arborfield Garrison SDL and Reading, Wokingham and Bracknell, as well as Winnersh and Twyford railway stations (see 4. below) and comprehensive school transport.

Any express bus services along Barkham Road or Bearwood Road should stop in the centre of Barkham Hill at Coppid Hill to alleviate the car dependency of Barkham residents.

While we support increased accessibility for cyclists, this benefits only small numbers of people and on any cost:benefit analysis the bulk of any resources to improve accessibility by non-car transport modes should be directed to facilitating mass transit movements (e.g. buses).

4. Strategic transport network (CP10)

Not justified

The Submission Core Strategy appears to assume that the Waterloo line via Wokingham is the first choice for most commuters in the district who work in London.

This overlooks the fact that the train service from Wokingham to London Waterloo is very slow and that many residents who commute to London prefer to use the Paddington line via Reading or Twyford for its quicker and more frequent services. The Paddington mainline (as well as Reading station) is also to be upgraded during the plan period, without taking account of the Crossrail improvements.

Even though Wokingham is also on the Guildford/Gatwick line, it appears likely to become the poor relation compared with the Paddington line.

The Strategy should therefore provide for express bus services at peak hours between Arborfield Garrison SDL and Twyford station along the B3030/A321.

The same express bus service could also stop en route at Winnersh station as an alternative to going to Wokingham station to join the Waterloo line and the Guildford/Gatwick line.

5. Wokingham station level-crossing (CP10)

Not justified

Although the Submission Core Strategy provides for the re-building of Wokingham station as a public transport interchange, the lack of any reference to the removal of the level-crossing by the station notwithstanding the chronic congestion it already causes on the western side of the town is a remarkable lacuna.

While the congestion caused by the level-crossing has been exercising the minds of the authorities since at least the 1890s, there is little or no prospect of improving transport capacity on the western side of Wokingham without the elimination of the level-crossing.

The Strategy must, therefore, address the removal of the level-crossing.

6. Infrastructure requirements (CP4)

Not effective

The Council's proposals on infrastructure requirements are set out in CP4. To mitigate the adverse consequences of each SDL effectively being a building site throughout the plan period, ***we believe that it should be a condition of planning permission that all new roads required should be built and all utility services required should be installed before any work commences on the construction of new buildings.***

In the case of Arborfield Garrison SDL, to protect the environment and the amenity of the residents of Barkham, ***construction traffic should be prohibited from using Barkham Road, Langley Common Road, Bearwood Road and Barkham Street*** (already width-restricted).

We hope that you will find the foregoing comments helpful in finalising the Core Strategy.

Yours faithfully,

E C D Carter MBE
Chairman
Barkham Village Residents' Association

c.c.
Cllr. David Lee, Leader of Wokingham Borough Council
Susan Law, Chief Executive of Wokingham Borough Council
Cllr. Gary Cowan, Executive Member for Local and Regional Planning
Jim Dunning, Principal Development Planning Officer
Rt. Hon. John Redwood M.P.
Barkham Parish Council
Arborfield and Newland Parish Council