

West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

The Spatial Strategy

Policy SP1

Spatial Strategy

The overarching spatial strategy for West Berkshire will deliver the spatial vision and strategic objectives for the District over the plan period and inform the preparation of neighbourhood plans (NDPs). The strategy:

- a. Directs development to areas of lower environmental value;
- b. Optimises the use of previously developed land; and
- c. Optimises the density of development to make the best use of land whilst conserving and enhancing the distinctive character and identity of the built, historic and natural environment.

The development approach will be based on three spatial areas:

- Newbury and Thatcham
- Eastern Area
- North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

The focus of development in each spatial area will be required to follow the District-wide settlement hierarchy set out in policy SP3 which takes account of the function and sustainability of settlements and promotes sustainable communities.

Development and redevelopment within the settlement boundaries of those settlements identified in Appendix 2 and outlined on the Policies Map will be supported. Outside of settlement boundaries, land will be treated as open countryside where development will be more restricted, as set out in policies DM1 and DM35.

In each spatial area, opportunities should be taken to make the best use of previously developed land with higher densities of development in locations such as town centres, where the extent and capacity of supporting infrastructure, services and facilities is the greatest.

In making optimum use of land and achieving high quality design, density on individual sites will vary according to their location and context, size of developable area and site specific issues such as shape and access:

- Within Newbury, Thatcham, Tilehurst, Purley on Thames, and Calcot, developments are expected to secure a net density of at least 35 dwellings per hectare with densities of at least 70 dwellings per hectare in town centres and for flatted developments along main transport routes and close to transport nodes.
- Within other defined settlements developments are expected to secure a net density of at least 30 dwellings per hectare with higher densities achievable in the centres of Hungerford, Pangbourne and Theale.
- Developments on the edge of defined settlements are generally expected to secure a net density of 30 dwellings per hectare outside of the National Landscape, and 20 dwellings per hectare within the National Landscape.
- Lower density developments will be appropriate in certain areas of the District that are particularly sensitive to the impact of intensification and redevelopment. This may be because of the prevailing character of the area, the sensitive nature of the surrounding countryside or built form, and/or the relative remoteness from public transport.

The strategy will deliver a range of site sizes for residential development. There are already significant existing commitments throughout the District. Additional development will come forward on both large strategic sites and smaller non-strategic sites allocated in the LPR and in some neighbourhood plans, together with infill development, including that on windfall sites within settlement boundaries. Allocations are related to the role and function of settlements and the development opportunities identified through the HELAA.

Town centres will be expected to continue to play a vital role for communities and will need to adapt to meet the changing needs of communities. Main town centre uses will be located in accordance with policy SP18. Within town centres, schemes will be of an appropriate scale and character to respond to the role and function of the centre and to support sustainable communities.

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Employment development to meet the existing and future economic demands of businesses will be directed to sites allocated for employment land, to sites within settlement boundaries, to Designated Employment Areas (DEA) and to existing suitably located employment sites, to help promote sustainable patterns of development, prioritise the use of previously developed land and support the retention of these areas for employment uses. In accordance with policy SP17 and policy SP18, proposals for office development will be directed to town and district centres and DEAs.

Proposals to strengthen and diversify the rural economy will be encouraged, particularly where they are located in or adjacent to Rural Service Centres and Service Villages identified in the settlement hierarchy. Existing small and medium sized enterprises within the countryside will be supported in order to provide local job opportunities and maintain the vitality of smaller rural settlements and their communities.

Demand for travel will be managed, and accessibility to sustainable transport opportunities increased through improving choice in transport modes. Existing community infrastructure will be protected and, where appropriate, enhanced. Infrastructure requirements will be set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP).

The District's historic environment and environmental assets will continue to be protected and enhanced and used positively in development to establish a distinctive sense of place that nurtures human health and wellbeing.

Newbury and Thatcham

Newbury will retain its traditional market town heritage and continue to fulfil its key role as the administrative centre and major town centre for the District. Opportunities will continue to be taken to regenerate and enhance the townscape of the town centre and its periphery.

Newbury will be a focus for housing development. An urban extension on greenfield land to the south of Newbury, at Sandford Park will provide a new residential neighbourhood with supporting facilities and green infrastructure in accordance with policy SP13. Smaller scale developments will include redevelopment of previously developed land.

Thatcham will be a focus for regeneration, for new housing and for improved provision of services and facilities. A new urban extension to the north east of the town will provide a new residential neighbourhood with supporting facilities and green infrastructure in accordance with policy SP14. Opportunities will be taken to maintain and enhance the identity of Thatcham separate to that of Newbury and its surrounding rural settlements in accordance with policy DM2.

Newbury and Thatcham will remain the focus for business development, with Newbury the main focus for office development. DEAs in this spatial area will play a vital role in meeting the existing and future economic needs of the District.

The villages in the surrounding area will retain their existing role and separate identity, with settlement boundaries and policies SP8, DM1 and DM2 ensuring that physical separation is maintained.

Eastern Area

The Eastern Urban Area will continue to be a focus for housing development through existing commitments, allocated sites and regeneration and change in the existing built up area.

The individual identities of the separate settlements within this area will be maintained and the high quality landscape and environmental assets in this part of West Berkshire will be conserved and enhanced.

Theale will be a focus for additional housing through existing commitments and allocated sites.

The area will continue to be important for business development with the retention of DEAs.

North Wessex Downs National Landscape

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape will have appropriate and sustainable growth that conserves and enhances its special landscape qualities as set out in policy SP2.

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Supporting Text

4.18 The principles which underlie the spatial distribution stem from the overriding objective of enabling sustainable development, development that will meet the social and economic needs of the District while conserving and enhancing the environmental assets of the District and meet the objective to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change and minimise demand for energy and other resources.

4.19 The LPR aims to build on the principles of the Core Strategy with regard to the spatial distribution of development. The focus will be on existing settlements, using the settlement hierarchy, set out in policy SP3. This steers development to the most sustainable areas, with an appropriate balance between urban and rural development, in order to meet local needs and maintain vibrant and balanced communities with their own sense of identity, while conserving and enhancing the environmental assets of the District. The existing urban areas are regarded as the most suitable locations for future development by virtue of their existing access to services and facilities, thereby providing the opportunity to reduce out-commuting and the need to travel. Development in Newbury and the smaller towns of the District is seen as contributing not only to their regeneration, through provision of additional services and facilities, but also to the rural areas they serve.

4.20 The strategy seeks to make effective use of brownfield land. Opportunities for infill development and for re-use of brownfield land are greatest in those settlements at the upper levels of the hierarchy, particularly in Newbury. Greenfield allocations are also set out in the Plan, allocating a range of sites of varying sizes. The allocation of sites takes account of the evidence from the HELAA, SA and the settlement hierarchy, with higher levels of development at the higher levels of the hierarchy.

4.21 The approach in the different spatial areas reflects the different characteristics of the different parts of West Berkshire. Policies SP12, SP13, SP14 and RSA1-29 set out the allocations for residential and mixed use development in the separate spatial areas and the housing requirements for neighbourhood plans. Employment land allocations are set out in policies ESA1 - ESA6.

4.22 The NPPF indicates that the efficient use of land is a priority⁽²¹⁾ and that planning policies should support development that makes efficient use of land. West Berkshire is a diverse area and densities achieved will reflect this diversity. Higher densities will be sought in town centre locations, having regard to the sustainability of the location and the character and amenity of the surroundings. The policy makes clear that site specific constraints and local character may justify variations from the densities set out in the policy.

4.23 The West Berkshire Density Pattern Book⁽²²⁾ provides more information on the densities that are typical in the different part of the District and will be used by the Council as a starting point to guide development.

21 NPPF Paragraphs 119 and 120

22 West Berkshire Density Pattern Book: David Lock Associates (September 2019): <https://westberks.gov.uk/local-plan-evidence#site%20selection>