

The background to housing numbers and distribution in the new Local Plan

Why do we need to plan for so many homes?

The Government requires the Council to prepare a plan, in co-operation with surrounding local authorities. At the time of our draft Local Plan in the summer of 2016 the figures indicated the need for about 15,000 homes to meet the needs of Wycombe District up 2033, with about 50,000 homes required across the whole of Buckinghamshire. Revised figures, based on the most recent projections from the Office of National Statistics, have revised down these figures – to 12,900 for Wycombe District, and about 45,000 for the county as a whole.

What makes this a difficult task in Wycombe District?

Seventy-one per cent (71%) of the District falls within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), which has the same status as a National Park, in terms of protecting the landscape. The AONB boundary is set by the Government, and cannot be altered by WDC.

Forty-eight (48%) of the District falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt which runs all the way round London. Most of the land in the Green Belt is also in the AONB. Local councils can only change Green Belt boundaries in exceptional circumstances, and only through the process of revising the Local Plan.

The AONB and Green Belt designations have different functions. The AONB is – as it says – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Planning policies ensure that the natural beauty of the landscape is protected. Green Belt on the other hand is designated to control the growth of towns, and to stop them merging into one another through urban sprawl. The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the purposes of the Green Belt.

Because these strong protections limit the opportunities for growth in the District, the new Local Plan proposes to accommodate 11,200 homes out of 12,900, with the rest (1,700) being accommodated in Aylesbury Vale.

Aylesbury Vale District Council also consulted on its draft Local Plan in the summer of 2016, which indicated it could accommodate some unmet need from Wycombe District. A Memorandum of Understanding has now been signed between the two Councils, agreeing 1700 homes.

Where have we looked to find sites for housing in the District?

We have had a thorough review of the scope for meeting housing needs within the District. This has included:

- Assessing the scope for development on previously developed (“brownfield”) sites (in urban and rural areas), including on former employment land where appropriate –which will provide around 5,000 homes, mostly in High Wycombe;
- Development of a number of larger greenfield sites in and around High Wycombe which were previously held in reserve for housing but have since been released –which will provide around 1755 homes;
- Significant expansion of Princes Risborough with a further 2,500 homes – the existing town is about 3,500 homes. Land to the north and west of Princes Risborough lies outside both the AONB and Green Belt.
- Accommodating 160 homes in the area around the Kimbles, and 300 in Longwick, which, like Princes Risborough, both have land outside both AONB and Green Belt.
- Reviewing the scope for removing areas of land from the Green Belt where it would not be significantly harmful to the purposes of the Green Belt –which could provide around 1000 homes;
- Identifying the scope for development in the larger villages outside of the Green Belt but in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty –which will provide a few hundred homes.
- Working with Aylesbury Vale District Council on the possibility of them taking Wycombe’s unmet need – now confirmed at 1700 homes.

If we do not explore development options to take some areas out of the Green Belt for development, and to allocate sites for development in the AONB, more housing would need to be taken by Aylesbury. That might make their build rate simply too ambitious, and their plan may fail. If their plan fails, our plan fails, and developers are then left to choose what sites come forward, and how. Both Green Belt and AONB options have been subject to very careful analysis, and application of the national policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Green Belt sites are only being proposed where they perform Green Belt purposes weakly, and we are carefully testing AONB allocations to avoid major development.

High Wycombe – allocating most growth to our largest town

The High Wycombe area is identified as the principal focus for development – it offers by far the best range of services, facilities, access to jobs and to public transport in the District. There are opportunities to redevelop brownfield sites within the town and the town will benefit from further regeneration. We expect the wider Wycombe area to deliver around 5000 homes. However the opportunity to develop around the edge of the town is more limited due the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Green Belt, although the Green Belt assessment has identified some limited further opportunities. The ability of the town to take more

development is also constrained by significant traffic congestion, caused in large part by the hilly nature of the town, and the limited opportunities to improve the flow of traffic following the A40 along the valley bottom.

Princes Risborough – significant expansion

The town of Princes Risborough is bounded by the Green Belt and the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) to the southeast but land to the northwest of the town up to the District boundary does not have these protections. Because of the scale of growth proposed here, we drafted a separate Plan for Princes Risborough for an expansion of the town by 2500 homes and consulted extensively on this during February – March 2016. The Princes Risborough Town Plan is now being incorporated into the wider Local Plan for the whole District.

Marlow – limited growth

Whilst benefiting from a good employment base and a good range of local services, Marlow is severely constrained by Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the floodplain of the River Thames. Development will therefore be focused within the town and will be more limited in scale.

Bourne End and Wooburn

Bourne End and Wooburn regards itself as a number of villages, rather than as a town. In terms of population it is only a little smaller than Princes Risborough. The village centre, at Bourne End, offers fewer facilities. The River Thames floodplain restricts the scope for development to the south/south west of the village. It is not surrounded by the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, but it is surrounded by the Green Belt. The former reserve site at Slate Meadow together with opportunity(s) arising from the Green Belt assessment means that there is scope for further development in this location, of up to 750 houses.

Our rural areas

Some of the larger villages have scope to grow sustainably. This will need to happen in a way that protects their character and the quality of their surroundings. However this will vary from village to village due to the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the potential harm to the Green Belt and their differing range of facilities including their access to bus and rail services. The plan proposes limited sites at Lane End, Walters Ash and Naphill, and Stokenchurch. In addition, Longwick is being asked to accommodate 300 new homes – with a village of about 560 homes at present, and the Kimbles are being asked to accommodate 160 homes, with about 440 homes in the Parish. Overall the Plan proposes over 10% of the housing supply in the rural areas including these larger villages.