

## **The background to growth at Princes Risborough in the context of the new Local Plan**

### **Why a plan for Princes Risborough?**

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 started preparing a separate draft Plan for Princes Risborough for an expansion of the town by 2500 homes and consulted extensively on this during February – March 2016. We are also preparing a plan for the rest of the District, and we consulted on this from June – August 2016. In the autumn of 2016 the Council took the decision to bring the Princes Risborough Town Plan and the District-wide Local Plan together. Publication of the combined plan is timetabled for the summer of 2017. This combined plan will contain all the detail on Princes Risborough that was previously in the separate plan (with some editorial changes so that it reads as part of the whole plan).

Because of the emphasis the Government is now putting on the need to build new houses, a number of planning applications have been pursued in the area to the north west of the town. We won an appeal at Mill Lane, because of the site specific issue of flooding, in the spring of 2016. In the summer 2016 we lost an appeal at Williams Way, Longwick – outside the area of the Princes Risborough Town Plan but where similar issues prevail. More recently, we heard in March 2017 that we have won the appeal at Park Mill Farm, primarily because the application failed to take opportunities available to integrate with the existing town, and traffic impacts. We granted permission for housing on the previously developed 'brownfield' Leo Labs site in 2016, and this is now under construction. There are other planning applications in the area.

By putting together a town plan, we can specify the infrastructure that is required, and the quality of the development we wish to see. If we don't put a plan together, we may well end up with development, but we won't get the same contribution to infrastructure, or have the same level of control over the quality of what is built.

### **Why do we need to plan for so many homes?**

The Government requires the Council to prepare a plan by the Government, in co-operation with surrounding local authorities. In the summer of 2016, the draft Local Plan identified that we needed to plan for about 15,000 homes to meet the needs of Wycombe District up 2033. About 50,000 homes are required across the whole of Buckinghamshire. In the summer of 2016 the Office of National Statistics issued new population projections. Revised estimates based on this information have reduced the number, to 12,900 for Wycombe, and 45,000 for Buckinghamshire 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. Forty-eight (48%) of the District falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt, which runs all the way round London. Local councils can only change Green Belt boundaries in exceptional circumstances, and only through the process of revising the Local Plan. The AONB boundary is set by the Government, and cannot be altered by WDC. Because these strong protections limit the opportunities for growth in the District, we cannot accommodate the full 12,900 homes in the District. In the autumn of 2017 we entered into an agreement with Aylesbury Vale District Council, that we would provide 11,200 homes, and they would accommodate 1,700, to meet the revised requirement of 12,900 homes.

### **What is planned elsewhere 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;
- 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;
- 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.

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 not taking forward allocations in the AONB that would be ‘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 avoid traffic following the A40 along the valley bottom.

### **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; the village is not surrounded by the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. 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 650 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 sites at Lane End, Longwick, Walters Ash and Naphill, and Stokenchurch, and further consideration is being given to development near Kimble. Overall the Plan proposes over 10% of the housing supply in the rural areas including these larger villages.

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