



# Hart Local Plan 2044

May 2026

## Scoping Consultation





## 5. Meeting development needs

**Do you have any views on how we should address this challenge, or where we should focus growth?**

Winchfield Parish Council (WPC) accepts that the Local Plan must address housing need positively. However, the scale of the housing challenge must not result in a strategy that allocates the largest available promoted sites, regardless of whether they represent truly sustainable, suitable, or deliverable locations for growth. The Local Plan must be genuinely plan-led, evidence-led, and infrastructure-led. If Hart cannot meet its housing need sustainably after testing all reasonable alternatives, it should submit a plan based on the sustainable and deliverable sites it can justify and robustly defend this position.

### **Plan-led approach**

Hart should not allow the Local Plan strategy to be driven by speculative site promotions or live planning applications.

The spatial strategy must be derived through robust plan-making, including:

- assessment of reasonable alternatives;
- assessment of settlement capacity and urban intensification;
- Sustainability Appraisal;
- transport and infrastructure evidence;
- landscape and heritage evidence;
- ecology and environmental evidence;
- viability and deliverability testing;
- assessment of cumulative impacts; and
- meaningful engagement with parish councils, residents and other stakeholders.

WPC is aware that speculative site promotions and/or live planning applications are being progressed within the parish area. WPC strongly requests that no assumptions be made that any speculative application or promoted site should be treated as a preferred option.

### **Sustainable Locations**

WPC considers the starting point for the spatial strategy must be site sustainability. Growth must be focused on locations that already have or can realistically provide the infrastructure and services needed to support new residents ensuring no detrimental impact on the use of existing amenities. Large-scale development in locations without this infrastructure risks creating car-dependent development, placing pressure on existing villages and rural roads, and causing long-term harm to settlement character and the environment.

Hart must clearly evidence why any preferred allocation or location for growth is

appropriate, and this evidence must be published in full at the next stage of consultation.

### **Brownfield Development**

HDC should follow government guidance and prioritise development on brownfield sites (previously developed land). Second priority should be locations where densification (sites resulting from the densification study) can be delivered.

Such locations are often better placed to make use of existing infrastructure and services, although their capacity, viability, and deliverability should still be tested robustly.

### **Changing Planning Context**

In 2028 HDC is to become part of the new unitary authority North Hampshire Council including Hart, Basingstoke and Deane, and Rushmoor. WPC considers this a key consideration for where growth should be focused. WPC considers that very large strategic allocations which have considerable lead-in times for delivery should not be fixed now through a district-level process, when the planning geography will shortly change.

In the context of the broader North Hampshire geography there are greater opportunities for large-scale growth in locations that are more sustainable and less isolated and constrained than many greenfield rural sites within Hart.

Therefore, the Local Plan should focus on short and medium-term deliverable sites in genuinely sustainable locations. This would avoid premature decisions that may be better considered through a wider North Hampshire spatial strategy and likely to be superseded by a new spatial document by the time any delivery may be expected.

### **Cross Boundary Planning**

As part of the evidence base for the emerging Local Plan, HDC must prepare an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment. The 2016 SHMA is no longer a sufficiently robust basis for plan-making, particularly in light of substantial changes to working patterns, travel-to-work behaviour and migration trends. The updated SHMA should provide a clear understanding of Hart's strategic housing market relationships, inform cross-boundary cooperation, and identify whether neighbouring areas are able to accommodate Hart's housing needs.

If Hart cannot meet all its housing need within its own area in a sustainable manner, then this should be addressed through cooperation with neighbouring authorities.

### **Summary**

WPC considers that HDC should address the housing challenge through a planned, evidence-led, and infrastructure-led strategy. Growth should be focused only

in the most sustainable locations. Furthermore, given the forthcoming creation of North Hampshire, HDC should be cautious about proposing large strategic allocations. The Local Plan should focus on smaller, sustainable, short and medium-term delivery as the wider North Hampshire geography may provide larger settlements more appropriate for large-scale growth.

Character Count – 4,919

### **Which groups do you believe have specific housing needs in Hart? How should the plan address their housing needs?**

WPC considers that the Local Plan should recognise the specific housing needs of different groups across Hart and this needs to be underpinned by an up-to-date Housing Needs Assessment which supports the Local Plan.

#### **Winchfield Needs**

For Winchfield, the evidence from the Neighbourhood Plan adopted in 2024 indicates that local housing need is not for large-volume housing growth. Rather, the need is for smaller homes, affordable homes, rural exception housing, homes for younger families and suitable downsizing options for older residents.

The affordability issue has seen locals being priced out of the market and therefore forced to live outside the area.

In rural parishes such as Winchfield, small-scale, locally responsive housing is more appropriate than large-scale allocations. This could include rural exception sites, limited affordable housing schemes, and housing that allows older residents to downsize while remaining close to family, neighbours and local support networks.

Recent development within Hart has not matched the local need within Winchfield specifically or the wider area with regard to smaller homes. Bungalows are very hard to find in this area with very few newly built despite high demand. If more were available it would encourage movement across the market and offer elderly residents an opportunity to stay in or near the community and support systems they are familiar with.

WPC considers the Local Plan should seek to introduce a planning policy that incentivises the provision of bungalows, older persons' housing, and inter-generational living developments. This would better reflect the needs of the demographics of the district and allow for the downsizing of properties for certain groups, therefore freeing up family housing stock.

Furthermore, as things settle in the rental market following changes to freehold / leasehold legislation it is considered that an increase in one / two-bedroom units at affordable rates for rent would help meet local needs. In addition, the opportunity provided by 'change of use' from commercial to residential properties can add significantly to mixed use developments revitalising town centres and creating new communities. The Local Plan should therefore encourage delivery of homes through these areas.

**Sustainable Locations to address need**

The Local Plan should ensure that housing is located in truly sustainable locations where residents can access services, public transport, schools, healthcare, employment and community facilities. Affordable or smaller housing in isolated locations without services is unlikely to meet local needs effectively, particularly for younger households, older residents, or those without regular access to a private car.

Character Count – 2,730

### How should the plan support economic growth?

Overall, WPC supports economic growth that is sustainable, proportionate and well-related to existing infrastructure in line with the goals of the NPPF.

#### **Employment Locations**

The Local Plan should focus major employment growth in the most accessible locations, particularly existing town centres, established employment areas and places with good public transport, services and strategic road access.

#### **Villages and Town Centres**

The plan should also protect and strengthen existing village and town centres, local shops, pubs, community facilities and small businesses, which are important to the local economy and community life.

The Local Plan should support opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and creative industries, including through the reuse of redundant areas of brownfield land or disused office property where appropriate. There are many examples of towns and cities who have reinvented redundant areas and now have thriving communities occupying these sites which has kick-started regeneration.

#### **Countryside Economy**

The Local Plan should also recognise that high-quality countryside, biodiversity, heritage, walking routes and rural character are economic assets in their own right. They contribute to quality of life, visitor appeal, health and wellbeing, and the attractiveness of Hart as a place to live and work.

Character Count – 1,334

## How should the plan support our town and village centres?

The Local Plan should recognise that different places have different roles. Support for town and village centres should focus on strengthening existing centres in the most sustainable locations, while protecting the rural character and settlement pattern of parishes such as Winchfield.

Growth should be directed to locations where it can genuinely be supported by existing centres, rather than creating new car-dependent development detached from them.

At a strategic level the Local Plan should support a diverse mix of towns and village centre uses and avoid policies or investment decisions that result in centres becoming overly dependent on a narrow range of uses. The Local Plan should increase the role and support for the community in holding events and providing spaces and facilities for residents to be able to do so.

### **Winchfield Village**

Winchfield itself is a distinctive dispersed rural parish made up of small clusters, hamlets, farms, lanes, open countryside and historic buildings. It does not have a conventional village centre and therefore should not be treated as if it has the services or infrastructure of a larger settlement. The plan should protect existing community facilities and improve access to nearby services without using service gaps as a justification for unsustainable large-scale development.

For rural parishes, the plan should support local services and community facilities where they exist, including pubs, community buildings, small businesses, farms and rural enterprises. It should also support appropriate improvements to walking, cycling and digital connectivity.

## 6. Well-designed sustainable places

### How can the plan deliver well-designed, healthy, sustainable places?

#### **Evidence Base**

WPC supports the objective of delivering well-designed, healthy and sustainable places. However, this will only be achieved if the Local Plan is underpinned by a robust, up-to-date, and locally specific understanding of Hart's landscape, townscape, historic environment, green infrastructure, settlement form and community needs. This should include landscape character assessment, townscape character assessment, green infrastructure strategy, open space assessment, public realm analysis, settlement gap analysis and design evidence.

Existing evidence prepared through made neighbourhood plans, including the Winchfield Neighbourhood Plan and its Landscape Character Assessment and Key Views work, should be actively incorporated into the Local Plan evidence base rather than treated as separate or secondary local material. This evidence provides important local detail on the character, sensitivity, and value of places within the parish and should inform both the spatial strategy and any site-specific policies or design requirements.

#### **Sustainable Locations**

WPC considers that well-designed, healthy, and sustainable places will only be achieved if the Local Plan's spatial strategy directs development to genuinely sustainable locations. Growth should be focused where infrastructure, services, employment opportunities, public transport, community facilities and day-to-day amenities already exist or can realistically be provided.

#### **Winchfield**

For Winchfield, good design must recognise the parish's distinctive dispersed settlement pattern, rural lanes, green gateways, small-scale clusters of development, historic buildings, ancient woodland, hedgerows, key views and strong sense of rural tranquillity. Any development affecting Winchfield should be required to demonstrate that it responds positively to this character and does not undermine the qualities that make the parish distinctive.

WPC is aware of emerging national planning policy reform within the NPPF regarding development located near to 'well connected' stations receiving a default "yes". WPC resists this generalising policy and considers that the Local Plan should avoid any easy assumption that development near Winchfield Station is automatically sustainable. Proximity to a railway station is only one factor in assessing sustainability.

Development cannot rely on existing rail provision alone, particularly where rail services serve a limited range of destinations and do not meet many day-to-day travel needs, as is the case in Winchfield. Any development in the vicinity of Winchfield Station would need to provide realistic, safe and convenient alternatives for active travel and public transport, rather than relying on rail proximity as a proxy for sustainability.

### **Design Approach**

The Local Plan should require a genuinely landscape-led and place-led approach to all development, particularly larger greenfield allocations and any potential new community. Green infrastructure, open space, drainage, biodiversity, movement and public realm should be structuring elements of the spatial strategy and site design from the outset, rather than mitigation added after the development layout has been fixed. Development should be shaped by the landscape, not imposed upon it.

Good design must be locally specific. Design codes may help, but only if they reflect the actual character of places like Winchfield. WPC would not support generic suburban design being applied to the dispersed rural parish.

New development should have a distinct sense of place that responds to Winchfield's existing character, rather than imposing a standardised form. It should respect the scale, pattern and grain of existing development, the rural landscape setting, local materials, important views, heritage assets, lanes, dark skies, local distinctiveness, hedgerows and green infrastructure.

Design should also be prepared with meaningful involvement from the existing community, so that it takes into account local knowledge and preferences. A place shaped with local people is more likely to be well-designed, sustainable and supported because it responds to real community needs and identity. New development must be joined up with the existing community, physically, socially and functionally, rather than appearing as detached or inward-looking.

The Local Plan should also embed health and wellbeing into design policy. This means creating accessible public spaces that respond to local needs. The focus should be on everyday access to high-quality outdoor space, not simply meeting quantitative open-space standards.

Overall, the Local Plan should make clear that good design is not only about appearance. It is about creating places that are well located, locally distinctive, connected, healthy, climate-resilient, infrastructure-supported and capable of forming part of a sustainable community.

## 7. Infrastructure

### What infrastructure issues or challenges do we face and how can they be overcome?

#### Infrastructure Baseline

WPC considers that the next stage of the Local Plan consultation must be supported by a clear infrastructure baseline study for Hart. This should establish the existing position across the district before growth options are assessed and provide interactive mapping.

The baseline should include schools, early years provision, GP capacity, dentists, community facilities, shops and amenities, public transport, walking and cycling accessibility, road capacity, utilities, water supply, wastewater treatment, drainage, flood risk, open space, green infrastructure, and digital connectivity.

This baseline is essential so that the impacts of different growth options can be assessed. It should identify existing infrastructure deficits, not just the additional infrastructure required to serve new development. Transport modelling will be particularly important given the constraints and challenges across the district.

#### Infrastructure-First Approach for New Development

WPC considers that Hart must take an infrastructure-first approach to new development. Growth options should be tested not only in terms of housing numbers, but also in terms of whether they are sustainable and deliverable in infrastructure terms. Major development should not proceed on the basis of vague future mitigation or unfunded aspirations.

A key concern is that infrastructure is often planned too late in the development process. The Local Plan should ensure that necessary infrastructure is identified, costed, funded and delivered in step with development. Larger allocations should not proceed unless there is a clear infrastructure delivery mechanism.

#### Infrastructure Challenges within WPC

Winchfield has a railway station and two pubs, but it does not have the everyday infrastructure required to support significant housing growth. Shops, doctors, dentists, garages, schools, and other services are several miles away in settlements such as Hook, Hartley Wintney, Odiham, and Fleet. There is no bus service.

The Local Plan needs to assess access to services realistically, rather than relying on the existence of the station as a proxy for sustainability. HDC needs to ensure that proposed development will provide all the services needed to make developments sustainable and secure the delivery of that infrastructure.

The parish has a rural road pattern, narrow lanes, constrained bridges, limited footways, and highway conditions that form part of its local character but also create

infrastructure constraints. These constraints must be properly assessed before any assumptions are made about the suitability of growth.

WPC considers that the presence of Winchfield Station does not, by itself, make the parish a sustainable location for large-scale growth. Day-to-day services are limited, and residents rely on nearby settlements for many essential needs.

The plan should also seek to improve connectivity and accessibility for rural communities where possible. This could include safer walking and cycling links, better access to the station, improved public rights of way, better public transport, rural road safety improvements, and enhanced broadband.

### **Green Infrastructure**

WPC considers that green infrastructure should be recognised as essential, multifunctional infrastructure, not as a secondary environmental benefit. It should be planned as a connected district-wide network that delivers biodiversity, climate adaptation, natural flood management, carbon storage, recreation, health and wellbeing, landscape character and visual amenity benefits.

This requires updated mapping of ecological networks, landscape connectivity, public access, open space deficits, natural capital and ecosystem services. The Local Plan should ensure that green infrastructure is designed and delivered at the earliest stage of development planning, with clear requirements for management and maintenance.

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy should be translated into a practical and interactive delivery tool. It should connect landowners, parish councils, environmental bodies, developers, community groups and infrastructure providers, so that nature recovery is an active delivery framework. Biodiversity net gain should be directed towards strategic local priorities and should strengthen existing habitat networks rather than isolated habitat parcels.

### **Water Infrastructure**

WPC is aware of significant issues with South East Water concerning water supply, wastewater, and drainage capacity. These issues underline the need for water infrastructure evidence to be available before preferred growth options are fixed within the Local Plan. Sites should not be identified as preferred options unless there is clear evidence that water infrastructure can be delivered.

Character Count – 4,758

## 8. The natural and built environment

### How should the local plan protect and enhance the natural and historic environment?

#### Complete Evidence Base

WPC considers that the Local Plan should treat the natural and historic environment as a starting point for the spatial strategy, not as a constraint to be considered after growth locations have already been chosen.

WPC welcomes the commissioning of a new district-wide landscape character assessment and the intention to assess landscape and heritage sensitivities for different sites. This should be expanded into a comprehensive and transparent evidence base that includes landscape sensitivity assessments for areas with development potential, particularly greenfield sites, settlement-edge locations, and any potential new community options. The sensitivity work should consider not only visual containment, but also landscape character, settlement separation, tranquillity, dark skies, historic landscape pattern, rural lanes, key views, ecological networks, cumulative effects, and the contribution of land to the identity of settlements and parishes.

The Local Plan should also coordinate all relevant evidence into a single usable framework. This should include the district and local landscape character assessment, townscape character assessment, landscape sensitivity assessment, heritage sensitivity work, conservation area appraisals, local lists, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, green infrastructure strategy, open space evidence, flood-risk evidence, biodiversity data, natural capital mapping and made neighbourhood plan evidence. This should ideally be presented through an interactive mapping tool that can be used by communities, applicants, officers, and decision-makers.

The Local Plan should actively incorporate the evidence base prepared for the Winchfield Neighbourhood Plan. This local evidence should inform the assessment of growth options. HDC should also complete heritage impact assessment work for any growth options being brought forward within the Plan.

For the larger strategic growth options, HDC should require site-specific landscape sensitivity assessment, landscape and visual impact assessment, and assessment of cumulative impacts.

#### Emerging Plan Policy

The Local Plan should include strong criteria-based policies requiring development to conserve and enhance landscape character, settlement identity, historic setting, biodiversity, key views, rural lanes, public rights of way and green gaps between settlements.

Policies should require development proposals to demonstrate how they have responded to the relevant character and sensitivity evidence. This should include

clear requirements for landscape-led master planning, early arboricultural and ecological input, heritage setting assessment, visual assessment where appropriate, and long-term management of landscape and ecological mitigation.

### **Historic Character of Winchfield**

For Winchfield, the Local Plan should give particular weight to the parish's role as a highly valued and distinctive rural landscape as the green lung at the centre of Hart. The Winchfield evidence base identifies a distinctive landscape of dispersed settlement, small hamlets, low-intensity farming, ancient woodland, hedgerows, rural lanes, watercourses, key views, the Basingstoke Canal, historic farmsteads and listed buildings.

The Local Plan should ensure that development does not lead to coalescence between Winchfield and neighbouring settlements, does not erode the rural setting of historic buildings and routes, and does not urbanise the landscape. It should also protect and strengthen the parish's network of ancient woodland, SINC's, hedgerows, roadside verges, ponds, watercourses and species-rich habitats.

### **Winchfield Historic Environment within the Landscape Context**

The historic environment must be considered in its landscape context. Designated heritage assets such as St Mary's Church, Winchfield House, the Basingstoke Canal Conservation Area, listed canal bridges, listed farm buildings, milestones, and other listed buildings should be protected.

The Local Plan should also recognise the contribution of non-designated heritage assets, historic routes, sarsen stones, wartime defence features, historic field patterns, and traditional rural lanes. The setting of heritage assets should be assessed robustly, particularly where development could alter the rural experience of historic places.

### **Key WPC Concerns**

Engagement undertaken in preparing the Winchfield Neighbourhood Plan showed that residents place great importance on the parish's historic and natural environment. Key concerns included the impact of major development on the character of the area, the loss of village identity, coalescence with neighbouring settlements, and the need to respect village character while supporting appropriate sustainable development. Winchfield's natural and historic landscape distinctiveness is considered the defining characteristic of the identity of the parish.

Therefore, the natural and historic environment should be central to the Local Plan spatial strategy.

**Are there any specific natural or historic assets in Hart that warrant a separate local plan policy, rather than being protected by national policies or legal protection? If so, why?**

Yes. The Local Plan should include specific policy recognition for locally important landscape, natural and historic assets where their value is not fully captured by national designations or legal protection. In Winchfield, this should include:

- the **historic heart of Winchfield** around St Mary's Church, where the Grade I listed church retains a rare and highly sensitive rural setting;
- the landscape around **Shapley Hill and Shapley Heath**, including its heathland character, local topography, ancient woodland, SINC designations and relationship with the historic Winchfield House parkland landscape;
- the remnant parkland and estate landscape associated with **Winchfield House**, including North and South Lodges, parkland trees, woodland structure and historic approaches;
- the **network** of ancient woodland, SINC, hedgerows, ponds, rural verges and woodland corridors across the parish;
- the **Basingstoke Canal corridor**, including its combined ecological, recreational, historic, visual and tranquillity value;
- **Winchfield's key views** and associated public rights of way, Brenda Parker Way, rural lanes and green gateways; and
- the **open rural gaps** that maintain settlement separation between Winchfield, Fleet, Hook, Hartley Wintney, Odiham and Dogmersfield.

These assets warrant policy recognition because their importance lies in the combination of landscape, ecology, history, recreation, tranquillity and community identity. They are vulnerable to incremental change, cumulative impacts, recreational pressure, urbanising infrastructure and poorly located development. A specific Local Plan policy would provide a clearer and more proactive basis for conserving and enhancing these assets while guiding any necessary development towards genuinely sustainable and locally responsive outcomes.

Character Count – 1,794

## 9. Climate change

### How should we address climate change in the local plan?

WPC has a golden thread of climate change awareness running through its Neighbourhood Plan and fully supports the work of Hart District Council in addressing climate change, including its declaration of a climate emergency.

The Local Plan has an important role to play in ensuring that new development considers the impacts of new development and is itself resilient to the effects of climate change. This should influence the spatial strategy, site selection, infrastructure planning, design, and environmental policies.

Local Plan policies should support climate-resilient and low-carbon development including passive heating and cooling, high levels of insulation, solar energy, ground and air source heat pumps, sustainable drainage, waste water management, rainwater harvesting, and floodwater management.

#### **Sustainable Locations**

A key tenet of addressing climate change is ensuring that development is located in the most sustainable places. Development should be focused where infrastructure already exists or can realistically be delivered, including public transport, local services, schools, healthcare, walking and cycling routes, and utilities. Therefore, this leads to development utilising and enhancing existing village and town commercial centres.

The plan should also address water and wastewater capacity, flood risk, sustainable drainage, tree and hedgerow protection, carbon sequestration, renewable energy and climate-resilient design. These matters should be considered at the plan-making stage, not left to be resolved after sites have already been selected.

#### **Reducing Car Dependency**

WPC strongly supports a modal shift away from private car use towards public transport, walking, cycling and other sustainable travel modes. However, given the scale of growth expected through the Local Plan, it is unlikely that sustainable travel modes alone will be able to serve all development unless growth is directed to genuinely sustainable locations.

This is particularly important given Hart's geography and existing infrastructure constraints. If the spatial strategy directs growth to poorly connected locations, new development is likely to increase car dependency and associated climate impacts.

One of the most important ways the Local Plan can address climate change is therefore through its spatial strategy. Allocations should be focused on sites with

existing and established infrastructure, including public transport, local services, amenities, walking and cycling infrastructure. The plan should avoid car-dependent development and should require realistic, funded and deliverable sustainable transport measures from the outset.

### **Protect Carbon Sequestering Sites**

Winchfield plays a significant role in supporting Hart District Council's climate objectives. The parish's rural landscape of trees, hedgerows, fields, ancient woodland and other natural habitats absorbs and stores carbon.

The largest carbon sequestration areas in the parish are native broadleaf woodlands, which in Winchfield comprise at least 61 hectares. In addition, Winchfield hosts two 4.5MW solar farms, making an important contribution to renewable energy generation.

WPC considers that the emerging Local Plan should include specific policy protection for existing natural capital and land use that performs a carbon sequestration or climate resilience function, recognising these as climate change infrastructure. Development on such sites should not be regarded as sustainable simply because mitigation or offsetting is proposed. Where a site already provides climate-positive functions, the starting point should be to avoid harm and consider alternative locations before relying on mitigation to compensate for the loss or erosion of that natural capital.

Character Count – 3,748

## 10. A new vision for Hart

### What aspects of Hart do you value and want to protect?

#### Hart District

WPC values Hart's distinctive character as an attractive district of rural areas, towns and villages interspersed within a high-quality countryside setting. The Local Plan should protect the quality of the countryside and recognise its importance to the character of Hart, the identity of its communities, and the quality of life enjoyed by residents.

The future of Hart should not be planned solely around housing numbers. The Local Plan should also protect the landscapes, settlement patterns, historic environments, open spaces, and rural qualities that make Hart a desirable and distinctive place to live.

#### Winchfield Parish

WPC is naturally focused on the aspects of Winchfield that it seeks to value and protect. The vision for Winchfield, as set out in the made Winchfield Neighbourhood Plan (2022-2037), highlights the core qualities that the parish wishes to retain and enhance.

*Winchfield, with its ancient and unusual dispersed settlement pattern is, in 2037, a vibrant, attractive village with its own unique character and ambience and sits at the very centre of Hart District. Our residents have embraced the opportunities offered by modern technology enabling them to live and work in a countryside environment.*

*The Norman Church and other historic buildings are cherished and used by the community; protected for future generations. The historic environment sits in harmony with several small, fully sustainable developments of sympathetically designed new housing which have enabled younger families to live in the village.*

*Our quiet, narrow lanes, bridle paths, well maintained footpaths and the Basingstoke Canal welcome residents and visitors alike; offering space for healthy outdoor leisure pursuits or quiet enjoyment of the peaceful rural scenery. Winchfield is the healthy heart and lungs of Hart; the physical and mental benefits of access to outdoor space enjoyed in our village contribute significantly to the overall diversity and opportunities this District has to offer.*

WPC considers that the following aspects of Winchfield should be particularly valued and protected:

- the parish's rural character and rare dispersed settlement pattern, made up of clusters, hamlets, farmsteads, fields and woodland rather than a conventional village centre;
- St Mary's Church, a Grade I listed building dating from around 1150 and

understood to be the oldest listed building in Hart District and its setting in open fields;

- all designated heritage assets within the parish such as The Old Rectory, as well as all Non-Designated Heritage Assets as per the Neighbourhood Plan;
- the parish's green identity, including farmland, fields, hedgerows, ancient woodland and open countryside, which help prevent coalescence and maintain the separate identity of the rural environment;
- the Basingstoke Canal, which forms part of the southern boundary of the parish and is protected by its conservation area status;
- the wider natural environment, including the Basingstoke Canal, the public rights of way network, the Brenda Parker Way, rural lanes, ancient woodland, hedgerows, watercourses and existing recreational routes;
- the key views identified in the Winchfield Neighbourhood Plan, including through Policy NE2; and
- the parish's dark skies, which should be protected in line with Neighbourhood Plan Policy NE5.

### **Recreational Infrastructure**

The importance of the Basingstoke Canal, the public rights of way network, the Brenda Parker Way, rural lanes, ancient woodland, hedgerows, watercourses and existing recreational routes should be recognised. These assets are used by residents and visitors and should be protected from recreational pressure, fragmentation, and urbanising change. These assets set Winchfield apart from other parishes due to the recreational infrastructure attracting visitors.

Where growth places additional pressure on these networks, developer contributions should be used to enhance access, biodiversity, signage, safety, habitat resilience and long-term management.

### **Summary**

Overall, the emerging Local Plan should protect Winchfield's rural character, historic setting, landscape quality, dark skies, biodiversity, key views and settlement identity. It should avoid development that would urbanise the parish, erode its dispersed character, lead to coalescence with neighbouring settlements, or undermine the qualities that the made Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect.

Character Count – 4,413

**What aspirations do you have for the future of the area?**

## **Hart District**

WPC would like Hart District to remain an attractive landscape of rural areas, towns and villages interspersed within a high-quality countryside setting. The Local Plan should protect the quality of the countryside and acknowledge its importance to the character of the district and to the quality of life of its residents.

Our aspiration is for Hart to grow in a way that is genuinely sustainable, fair and locally distinctive. New homes should be provided where they meet evidenced need, are supported by infrastructure, and are appropriate to the character and capacity of the host area.

## **Winchfield Parish**

Winchfield is to remain a living rural community, supported by small-scale, locally responsive housing, improved accessibility and connectivity, enhanced community infrastructure, and the protection and enhancement of landscape, heritage and biodiversity. For Winchfield, the aspiration is not to prevent all change, but to manage change carefully.

Overall, the emerging Local Plan should protect Winchfield's rural character, historic setting, landscape quality, dark skies, biodiversity, key views and settlement identity. It should avoid development that would urbanise the parish, erode its dispersed character, lead to coalescence with neighbouring settlements, or undermine the qualities that the made Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect.

Character Count – 1,363

## **What kind of development would you like to see more of?**

As WPC has set out elsewhere in these representations there are several key characteristics of development that we would like to see more of:

- Development that reflects and contributes to the existing character of the area.
- Development in truly sustainable locations that do not lead to a car-dependent development.
- Development that is infrastructure-led, with necessary services, facilities and transport improvements provided at the outset rather than after homes have been occupied.
- Development that delivers public and community benefits, including improved accessibility, connectivity, community infrastructure, green infrastructure and local services.
- WPC does not support development of large speculative housing estates in sensitive rural locations, particularly where they would overwhelm the existing community, damage landscape character, increase car dependency, create coalescence, or come forward outside the Local Plan process.

- Policy that supports the development of bungalows, elderly living and multi-generational developments to support downsizing for the elderly demographic within HDC and free up stock of larger housing for the use of families, etc.

In rural parishes such as Winchfield a real focus for development that we would like to see more of is:

- Small-scale development that responds to local need and helps sustain village life for future generations. This could include housing that responds to local needs, including smaller homes, affordable homes and opportunities for younger families or older residents wishing to remain within the community.
- Bungalows and multi-generational developments are a specific focus for the parish to allow residents to continue independent living.
- Development that strengthens existing communities, respects landscape and heritage, enhances biodiversity, and contributes positively to the long-term sustainability of small villages.

Character Count – 1,908

## What should the plan priorities include?

WPC considers that the Local Plan priorities should include the following:

- An evidence-led approach to plan preparation where all the necessary evidence to prepare the plan is in place ahead of fixing a spatial strategy. This should include evidence on housing need, infrastructure, transport, landscape, heritage, biodiversity, flood risk, utilities, viability, deliverability, settlement intensification, empty property analysis, and assessment of reasonable alternatives.
- High levels of engagement with local communities, parish councils and other stakeholders. Hart should provide clear and demonstrable evidence showing how consultation responses have been considered and how local concerns have influenced the emerging plan and have been addressed.
- The Council should have a core focus on sustainable development and not seek to designate or allocate sites simply in order to meet the calculated housing need if those sites are not sustainable or appropriate in planning terms. Where the evidence demonstrates that the full level of need cannot be met within the district without unacceptable harm, HDC should be prepared to take that position and justify it through the Local Plan process. This places even greater importance on a strong and comprehensive evidence base, which properly explains the district's constraints, and demonstrates that every reasonable opportunity to meet housing need has been fully explored.
- A plan-led approach to development that resists speculative planning applications. It should not allow the spatial strategy to be driven by speculative planning applications or promoted sites before those sites have been properly assessed through the plan-making process.
- An overarching strategic view of the changing planning context, including the creation of the new North Hampshire Council. WPC considers that Hart should prioritise small and medium-sized sites that are sustainable and deliverable in the short to medium term over large strategic allocations which will have considerable lead-in times for delivery and should not be fixed now through a district-level process when better more sustainable options can be assessed under the new geography of North Hampshire.

## 11. Any other comments

### Are there any other matters that we should consider when preparing the new plan?

**Yes.** Development in Hart should be completely plan-led. Hart should ensure that speculative planning applications for very large developments do not undermine the Local Plan. Where a proposal is of such scale that it would effectively determine the location, scale, or phasing of growth, it should be considered through the Local Plan and not through a standalone application.

#### **Local Plan Examination and the transition to North Hampshire**

WPC considers that the Local Plan should provide greater clarity on how the plan-making process will be managed through local government reorganisation and the transition to the new North Hampshire authority.

The Scoping Consultation indicates that Hart District Council intends to prepare the Local Plan to a stage where it can be handed over to the new authority and taken through examination and adoption. WPC understands the importance of maintaining progress and ensuring that Hart is not left without an up-to-date Local Plan.

In particular, WPC would welcome clarification on how the Local Plan will proceed if there are delays, unexpected changes, or issues arising through examination after the new North Hampshire authority is in place. There is also a concern that the new unitary authority may need to focus on wider strategic planning matters, including any future Spatial Development Strategy, which could affect the priority given to progressing and adopting the Hart Local Plan.

WPC does not want Hart's communities to be left without the protection of an up-to-date Local Plan during or after the transition to the new authority. This is particularly important given the scale of development pressure and the risk of speculative planning applications. Therefore, greater clarity is needed on how Hart would avoid a policy gap if examination or adoption is delayed after the local government reorganisation.

The plan should not be rushed to meet reorganisation deadlines if this results in an unsound plan. However, Hart should also not be left in a policy vacuum if the plan is delayed after transfer to the new authority.

#### **Infrastructure and Viability**

As addressed in the infrastructure section of these WPC representations, infrastructure is a key consideration in preparing the Local Plan. However, it is also important to consider how infrastructure requirements interface with the Local Plan Viability Assessment.

The infrastructure and viability evidence need to be joined up and calculated on site-specific testing rather than using broad infrastructure costs. Without this approach

growth options can be presented as viable and deliverable within the plan when the true infrastructure requirements have not been properly understood.

Hart therefore needs to identify the actual infrastructure “kit” required for each growth option. This should include roads, junctions, schools, healthcare, wastewater, water supply, drainage, flood mitigation, active travel, public transport, green infrastructure, open space, biodiversity and community facilities.

The Local Plan should therefore ensure that infrastructure planning, viability testing, and site selection are undertaken together before any preferred growth options or allocations are identified.

### **Stalled Sites and Empty Homes**

WPC considers that, as part of preparing the Local Plan, HDC needs to make sure they have a robust evidence base. Across the region are several stalled development sites that have planning permission but are not delivering development or housing. HDC needs to review these and see if they can unlock or aid the pace of delivery or whether alternative development approaches should be made for these sites.

Similarly, there are several empty homes across HDC and a review of these should be undertaken by HDC. Hart should review empty homes, vacant buildings and stalled permissions as part of its housing land supply and urban capacity evidence. Where sites or buildings are capable of being brought back into beneficial use, HDC should consider what intervention, compulsory purchase, partnership working, or delivery mechanisms may be appropriate.

### **Summary**

While these representations are submitted by Winchfield Parish Council and necessarily draw on local evidence, many of the issues raised are relevant across HDC as a whole. The emerging Local Plan should recognise the different roles, capacities and constraints of Hart’s towns, villages and rural parishes, and should avoid applying a uniform approach to places with very different infrastructure, landscape, heritage, settlement form and community needs. Winchfield should therefore be considered as one example of wider district-wide issues relating to sustainable growth, infrastructure capacity, rural character, landscape sensitivity, climate resilience and community engagement.

Character Count – 4,775

## Do you have any other views on what the new plan should contain?

Yes.

### **Evidence Base**

WPC requests that the new Local Plan is supported by a robust, up-to-date and transparent evidence base. At this stage, it is not clear what evidence is being prepared to support the new Local Plan or how that evidence will inform the emerging spatial strategy.

WPC considers that the evidence base must be available before preferred options are identified, so that parish councils, residents and other stakeholders can properly assess the emerging plan. The evidence should not be prepared after the spatial strategy has effectively been fixed.

WPC would like to highlight the following evidence which should be updated, prepared or published to support the next stage of consultation:

- Housing Needs Assessment, which should underpin the preferred options published at the next stage of the plan.
- Housing Needs Survey, with WPC involved in informing and supporting this work where it relates to local housing needs in Winchfield.
- Strategic Housing Market Assessment, to understand how travel patterns, migration, demographics, and housing market relationships have changed since the 2016 assessment.
- Employment Land Review, as previous evidence is now out of date.
- Retail, Leisure and Town Centre Study, as previous evidence is now out of date.
- HDC Settlement Capacity and Intensification Study, which should be used to demonstrate and determine sustainability of development options.
- Updated Settlement Hierarchy, including consideration of the role of villages and rural settlements.
- Natural and Historic Environment Framework, ideally including a mapped tool to bring together relevant environmental and heritage evidence.
- Landscape and Townscape Character Assessment, including landscape sensitivity assessments for potential development areas.
- Green Infrastructure Strategy.
- Open Space Assessment.
- Settlement Gap Analysis.
- Public Realm Analysis.
- Heritage Impact Assessment work, including setting and cumulative impacts for potential growth locations.

- Water Cycle Study.
- Stalled Development Sites Analysis.
- Empty Homes Analysis.

This evidence is necessary to allow WPC to assess the emerging Local Plan properly and to ensure that Hart's spatial strategy is genuinely evidence-led. It is particularly important that evidence relating to infrastructure, sustainability, landscape, heritage, ecology, settlement character and deliverability is available before decisions are made about preferred growth locations or site allocations.

### **General Comment on Timetable and Strategy**

WPC would also like to make a general comment regarding the Local Plan timetable. The timetable appears to leave a limited period for Hart District Council to consider the consultation responses received at this scoping stage before publishing the next consultation in October.

WPC recognises that this is a scoping consultation, and that the nature of responses may be different from later formal plan consultations. However, WPC wishes to ensure that the spatial strategy and preferred options to be set out at the next stage are not pre-determined. The representations submitted at this stage should be fully considered, and Hart should provide a clear explanation of how they have informed the next version of the plan.

The next stage of consultation should therefore be accompanied by a clear audit trail showing how comments from this scoping stage have been reviewed, what issues have been taken forward, rational as to those which have not, and how the evidence base has shaped the emerging spatial strategy.

Character Count – 3,490

## 12. How should we engage with you?

### Are there other ways we should publicise the public consultations?

Yes. Hart should not rely primarily on online engagement or social media. Many residents may not see digital notices, may not be on council mailing lists, or may find the portal difficult to use.

Consultation should also be publicised through parish councils, parish newsletters, village noticeboards, local newspapers, direct mail where possible, libraries, community buildings, GP surgeries, schools, local businesses, churches, village halls and local community groups.

For rural communities, Hart should ensure that consultation material is visible in the places people already use.

HDC should take a more proactive approach to public consultation, recognising that written consultations alone do not reach most residents. Engagement should be brought into local centres, high streets, shops, workplaces and schools through displays, roadshows and informal conversations that make it easy for people to give feedback. Meaningful long-term planning must be informed by proper research into what residents want.

Character Count – 1,010

### What methods of engaging the public (such as drop-in exhibitions) should we use during public consultation?

Hart should use a mix of methods, including parish-level drop-in exhibitions, staffed consultation events, online briefings, printed summaries, interactive maps, topic-based workshops and meetings with parish councils.

For Winchfield and other affected rural parishes, Hart should hold local in-person sessions where residents can see maps, ask questions and understand potential implications. In a relatively small district such as Hart, the cumulative effect of speculative developments and the Local Plan can have significant consequences for infrastructure, services, the environment and the character of multiple communities. Residents should therefore be supported to understand both the wider planning context and the collective implications of growth across the district. The Council should provide easy to understand summaries of evidence, site options, infrastructure impacts and the relationship between the Local Plan and speculative planning applications.

Character Count - 576

**Is there a group or community you are aware of that find it harder to participate? If so, what steps could we take to help those groups engage?**

Groups who may find it harder to participate include older residents, people without easy digital access, people with disabilities, younger people, working families, those with limited transport, and residents who are not confident using online planning portals.

Hart should provide printed materials, accessible summaries, telephone support, non-digital response options, local drop-in events, evening and weekend sessions, and clear guidance on how to respond. **The online portal should not be the only realistic route for making representations.**

Character Count - 546

**How would you like to be engaged with during the preparation of the Local Plan?**

**Parish Council Engagement**

WPC and all parish councils need to be engaged and involved early in the process of preparing the Local Plan as key stakeholders. The key ask is early parish-level engagement before preferred options are fixed, early sharing of evidence, and a clear audit trail showing how parish council comments have been considered.

**Winchfield Parish Council**

WPC is aware that speculative site promotions and/or live planning applications are being progressed within the parish area. Given the potential scale and significance of such proposals, engagement should take place before any preferred spatial strategy or preferred site allocations are effectively settled.

Hart should continue to engage directly with WPC and should share the full evidence base supporting the next stage of the Local Plan in sufficient time for meaningful review. The Scoping Consultation states that Hart will hold meetings and correspondence with some key stakeholders where necessary to develop the evidence base. WPC considers that this should include parish councils directly affected by potential strategic growth options.

WPC would welcome early engagement on the scope and methodology for key evidence documents, particularly where they relate to site assessment, landscape, heritage, infrastructure, transport, water infrastructure and viability.

Given the made Neighbourhood Plan and detailed local evidence base, Hart should work directly with Winchfield Parish Council to ensure local evidence is properly considered. This should include regular officer meetings, early sight of relevant evidence, parish-specific workshops and clear feedback on how local representations have informed the emerging plan.

If there are large strategic growth allocations proposed within Winchfield Parish, it would be appreciated if HDC would hold parish-level briefings and workshops with the Parish Council and residents. This would allow for consultation on these proposals, presentation of any evidence, and the airing of key concerns. It is considered key to do so before any direction and policy is fixed and cannot be impacted by WPC.

The Parish Council also considers that Hart should provide a clear record of how WPC representations to the plan have been taken into account. This is particularly important where comments relate to the spatial strategy approach, infrastructure capacity, landscape sensitivity, settlement character, heritage, ecology, community facilities and more.

Character Count – 2,477

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