

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 10 JUNE 2025

Councillors Present: Tony Vickers (Chairman), Stephanie Steevenson (Vice-Chairman), Adrian Abbs, Dennis Benneyworth, Dominic Boeck, Jeff Brooks, Patrick Clark, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Jeremy Cottam, Iain Cottingham, Laura Coyle, Paul Dick, Billy Drummond, Denise Gaines, Stuart Gourley, Clive Hooker, Owen Jeffery, Paul Kander, Jane Langford, Ross Mackinnon, Alan Macro, David Marsh, Geoff Mayes, Tom McCann, Biyi Oloko, Erik Pattenden, Justin Pemberton, Vicky Poole, Christopher Read, Matt Shakespeare, Richard Somner, Joanne Stewart, Louise Sturgess, Clive Taylor, Martha Vickers, and Howard Woollaston

Also Present: Sarah Clarke (Monitoring Officer and Interim Executive Director for Resources), Paul Coe (Executive Director for Adult Social Care), AnnMarie Dodds (Executive Director for Children's Services), Joseph Holmes (Chief Executive), Clare Lawrence (Executive Director for Place), Paula Amorelli (Team Leader for Planning Policy), Sharon Armour (Legal Services Manager), Laura Callan (Service Lead for Planning), Sam Chiverton (Zoom Host), Philippa Venables (Service Director for Development and Housing), Darius Zarazel (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Honorary Alderman Tony Linden, and Honorary Alderman Graham Pask

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Carolyn Culver, Councillor Janine Lewis, Councillor Nick Carter, Councillor Phil Barnett, Councillor Nigel Foot, Councillor Antony Amirtharaj, Councillor Jane Langford (attended virtually), Honorary Alderman Graham Bridgman, Honorary Alderman Paul Bryant, Honorary Alderman Adrian Edwards, Honorary Alderman Rick Jones, Honorary Alderman Mollie Lock, Honorary Alderman Hilary Cole, and Honorary Alderman Andrew Rowles

PART I

1. Declarations of Interest

All Members declared that they had been lobbied by residents, Enborne Parish Council, Tilehurst Parish Council, Cold Ash Parish Council, and Thatcham Town Council on Agenda Item three – the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041. However, as this was not a disclosable pecuniary interest, other registerable interest, or non-registerable interest, they determined to remain in the meeting to debate and vote on the item.

Councillor Clive Taylor declared that he was the Chairman of Tilehurst Parish Council, and that the Council was historically, and remained, opposed to the Pincents Lane development proposed in Agenda Item three. However, as he believed that this did not prejudice or influence his judgement of the public interest, he determined to remain in the meeting to debate and vote on the item.

Councillor Tony Vickers declared that he was a representative on the North Wessex Down National Landscape Council of Partners. However, as he believed that this did not prejudice or influence his judgement of the public interest, he determined to remain in the meeting to debate and vote on the item.

COUNCIL - 10 JUNE 2025 - MINUTES

2. Adoption of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review (LPR) 2023-2041

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Tony Vickers and seconded by Councillor Denise Gaines:

“That Council agree that speaking times for this item be:

- 10 minutes for the proposer of the motion
- 5 minutes for the seconder of the motion
- 6 minutes for the Leader of the Opposition Group
- 4 minutes for the Leader of the Minority Group
- 3 minutes for all other speeches, as per the Constitution.”

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

Council considered a report (Agenda Item three) concerning the Local Plan Review (the Plan) for West Berkshire.

MOTION: Proposed by Councillor Denise Gaines and seconded by Councillor Justin Pemberton:

“That Council:

- 1) Recognises that the Council is still under the Direction set out in the letter from the Minister of State for Housing, Planning and Building Safety dated 19th December 2023 (as set out in Appendix C) that required the Council to consider adopting the LPR, including any Main Modifications recommended by the Planning Inspector deemed necessary to make the Plan sound.
- 2) Acknowledges the contents of the Inspector’s Final Report (as set out in Appendix D).
- 3) Adopts the West Berkshire LPR 2023-2041 (as set out in Appendix E), which incorporates the Main Modifications as set out in the Inspector’s Final Report, and other Additional (minor) Modifications (as set out in Appendix F).
- 4) Subject to recommendation 2, replace the West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026 Development Plan Document (adopted July 2012), the Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted May 2017), and the West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991 – 2006 (saved policies 2007 as amended in July 2012 and May 2017), with the West Berkshire LPR 2023-2041.
- 5) Subject to recommendation 2, adopt the Policies Map (as set out in Appendix G) and publish them alongside the West Berkshire LPR 2023-2041.
- 6) Subject to recommendation 2, accept the content of the Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA) Report (as set out in Appendix H) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA): Addendum of Proposed Modifications (as set out in Appendix I) and publish them in accordance with Regulation 16 of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004.
- 7) Subject to recommendation 2, give delegated authority to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Portfolio Holder for Planning and Housing to agree any further Additional (minor) Modifications to the LPR and updates to its accompanying Policies Map, as appropriate, before publication.”

COUNCIL - 10 JUNE 2025 - MINUTES

Councillor Gaines introduced the report and emphasised that the Administration did not consider this to be their Local Plan, as it was submitted before the current Administration took control of the Council. She also noted the speed at which the Plan was submitted to the Regulation 19 stage by the previous Conservative led Administration, just before the local elections in 2023. At that election, the Liberal Democrats campaigned on fixing the Plan and had done everything possible to do so – including attempting to withdraw it and stop its examination. However, the Council had been directed by the Secretary of State to not withdraw the Plan, and Members were informed that they were still under that direction.

She predicted the point that would be made by Opposition Members, that the new sites would not have been allocated if the Plan had not been withdrawn. As the Plan's Inspector had requested further work be done and that additional information be provided about site allocations, she believed the two-year delay to the Plan would have resulted in these new allocations being brought forward anyway. As the Plan needed to be considered sound by the Inspector, he had requested 112 main modifications be made. These main modifications ranged from minor alterations to major policy changes.

Specifically, the Inspector found that SP17, the North East Thatcham site, was not a sound allocation without the addition of 1,000 houses, increasing the total for the site up to 2,500 – the figure that was presented in the Thatcham Growth Study. However, the Plan would enable the Council to help create a new Masterplan and Design Code for the site that the developer would be required to meet. This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) would be finalised before any application for the site would be submitted and the Council would look to get input from all relevant stakeholders, including local residents and Town and Parish Councils. Councillor Gaines also informed Council of the Administration's intention to set up a residents' forum to help get input into the SPD.

If the Council did not adopt the Plan, Councillor Gaines indicated that this would lead to the Council being forced to meet higher housing targets set by Central Government and not be able to control where, or to what quality, homes would be built. In addition, it would be very likely that the sites allocated in the Plan would be brought forward by developers anyway, but without a Plan the Council would not be able to control their design, energy efficiency standards, associated infrastructure requirements, health and educational provision, or employment aspects. In addition, Council noted that it was highly likely that the Secretary of State would intervene to force the adoption of the Plan on the Council if it was not approved, resulting in additional costs. Ultimately, Councillor Gaines recommended the Plan be adopted by Council because the option of having the Local Plan was less bad than not having the Plan.

Members of the Opposition highlighted the Liberal Democrat 2023 Local Election Manifesto pledge to 'fix the flawed Local Plan', indicating that this was not feasible when it had been promised and was simply an attempt to win the election. It was also suggested that if the Administration had not delayed the progression of the Plan by seven months by attempting to withdraw it, the site allocations that were widely opposed – such as the additional 1,000 houses at North East Thatcham and the allocation at Pincents Lane – would not have been included. Therefore, the Plan that was being recommended for approval was significantly worse than the original Plan the previous Conservative Administration had submitted.

It was also highlighted that the Local Plan submitted by the previous Administration had taken over three and a half years to submit and so was not rushed to submission. In addition, Council noted it had been the result of cross-party work. However, the point was

COUNCIL - 10 JUNE 2025 - MINUTES

made that disagreement with the inclusion of the widely opposed site allocations had been made clear during these cross-party discussions.

Council discussed several site allocations from the Plan. On the three allocations in Theale, some Members opposed the cumulative impact these developments would have on local facilities which had not been upgraded after other developments had taken place in the village. In addition, flood risk was also raised as a potential concern resulting from these additional allocations.

The site allocation at Pincents Lane was also raised as a serious concern by several Members. Council noted that a previous planning application on the site had been refused at appeal and that one application had received over 3,000 letters of objection from local residents. A current petition against the development of the site had also received over 1,700 signatures. The principal concerns about allocating this site were around the permanent loss of an open and wild green space, the poor highways and access arrangements for the site, and the local traffic issues that would be compounded by the additional vehicle movements. Concerns about the pressures on local health services were also raised. Members also objected to the extension of the Tilehurst settlement boundary to include the site as they saw this as an inappropriate way of making development of the site more likely.

On the proposed site allocations in Cold Ash, as these had not been supported by the recently adopted Cold Ash Neighbourhood Plan, some Members indicated that they could not support the approval of these sites and so would not be voting to approve the Plan.

For North East Thatcham, Members noted that the majority of local residents were opposed to the proposal for 2,500 homes on the site. As the facilities and infrastructure in Thatcham were at maximum capacity, Members raised serious concerns about what the significant increase in Thatcham's population would mean for these already strained services. Residents had also indicated that they would like to see more detail about the relief road and healthcare facility provisions but that these had not been provided in the Plan. However, Council also noted the conclusion of an independent King's Counsel that had determined that there were not sufficient grounds to challenge this site allocation. Overall, several Members highlighted that this site allocation was neither reasonable nor sustainable, and therefore they could not support the adoption of the Plan.

On the allocation in Pangbourne, some Members believed that this was of an appropriate scale for the village and that there was local capacity to take on the additional residents. This allocation was used as an example of an appropriate site which would help contribute to the viability of the village in the long term.

In addition, a point was raised that if both the previous and current Administrations had worked together on a Local Plan, the Council would not be in the position of risking not having a Plan or adopting one that was unacceptable.

Although some Members disagreed with some of the allocations proposed, as not having a Plan would trigger the 'tilted balance' in favour of planning applications and also result in the Council needing to meet the Central Government housing figure of 1,070 houses per year rather than the 515 in the Plan, they agreed that approving the Plan would be less harmful than not having a Plan. In addition, the Plan would enable the Council to have some measure of control over developments that would be coming forward in the Plan period, ensuring that all applications, even in the allocated sites, were built to a good quality and would be community focused. Therefore, on balance, these Members agreed to support the approval of the Plan.

COUNCIL - 10 JUNE 2025 - MINUTES

Council also noted that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government would be very likely to intervene immediately should Council refuse to approve the Plan. In this event, the Plan would be forced on the Council, and it would be charged for any associated costs. In addition, Council noted that this could be the last Local Plan produced by West Berkshire Council due to the forthcoming Local Government Reorganisation. In that move into a new authority, these targets could be readjusted.

Overall, although some Members were opposed to the Plan due to several of the site allocations proposed, the majority of Members considered that the risks of not approving the Plan outweighed those drawbacks.

At the request of Councillor Jeff Brooks, supported by Councillors Ross Mackinnon, Dominic Boeck, and Howard Woollaston, a named vote was held.

Adoption of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review (LPR) 2023-2041		
For	Against	Abstain
Councillors	Councillors	Councillors
Adrian Abbs	Dominic Boeck	Dennis Benneyworth
Jeff Brooks	Jeremy Cottam	
Patrick Clark	Paul Dick	
Heather Codling	Clive Hooker	
Martin Colston	Paul Kander	
Iain Cottingham	Ross Mackinnon	
Laura Coyle	Alan Macro	
Billy Drummond	David Marsh	
Denise Gaines	Tom McCann	
Stuart Gourley	Biyi Oloko	
Owen Jeffery	Chris Read	
Geoff Mayes	Joanne Stewart	
Erik Pattenden	Clive Taylor	
Justin Pemberton		
Vicky Poole		
Matt Shakespeare		
Richard Somner		
Stephanie Steevenson		
Lousie Sturgess		
Martha Vickers		
Tony Vickers		
Howard Woollaston		
22	13	1

COUNCIL - 10 JUNE 2025 - MINUTES

The Motion was put to the meeting and duly **RESOLVED**.

(The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and closed at 8.08 pm)

CHAIRMAN
Date of Signature