

# **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) ON THE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN**

## **What is the Borough Local Plan?**

The Borough Local Plan (BLP) is a key planning document guiding and supporting future development, regeneration and investment in the area. It sets out the vision for development of the Royal Borough for the period 2013 to 2033, including how many new homes are needed, how much space for jobs, the best locations for new development and, just as crucially, where development cannot happen. It includes planning policies for managing development and infrastructure to meet local needs. Local Plans form the policy basis for determining planning applications, along with any other relevant factors.

## **Why is it important?**

The BLP ensures that new housing and other development is well designed and meets local needs, happens in the right places and is supported by suitable infrastructure. A sound, adopted plan is vital in delivering the council's future place-making and climate change ambitions, meeting the growing needs and aspirations of the borough by guiding investment, regeneration, jobs and the right mix of homes in the best locations, including new family homes and affordable housing – all supported by required infrastructure improvements. The old Local Plan is now very out of date. By having a new sound plan identifying the best locations to meet projected housing needs, as required by the Government, the borough is in a stronger position to resist inappropriate and unsupported speculative development elsewhere in the borough, and to protect our built and natural heritage.

## **How was it developed?**

The BLP has been produced over many years, with work commencing in 2013. The production and agreement of a Local Plan has three separate stages: preparation, examination, and adoption. The council has sole responsibility for the first and final stages, but the examination is the sole responsibility of the Inspector. The Royal Borough's Local Plan has just completed the second stage and has been shaped over roughly a decade through national planning policy, a series of public consultations, evidence about the social, economic and environmental characteristics and prospects of the area, and public examination by an independent Planning Inspector. The Inspector has found the plan to be sound, lawful and capable of adoption by Full Council, subject to her required main modifications.

## **Where will new development take place?**

Under the Local Plan's spatial strategy, new development will largely be focussed within and around the urban area of Maidenhead as the borough's major service centre, supporting its town centre regeneration. Some development will happen in and around Windsor and Ascot to make best use of infrastructure and services. Outside of these locations, only limited growth will be accommodated.

This strategy focuses the required housing in the most appropriate locations, supported by suitable existing and planned infrastructure, aligning with the council's place-shaping ambitions and helping to guard against inappropriate and unsupported speculative development elsewhere. It seeks to minimise the amount of greenfield land released and maximises family housing and affordable housing.

### **How many homes are required to be built?**

The Government requires councils to set targets for home-building that meet projected housing needs and to identify sites to supply five years' worth of housing. To meet Objectively Assessed Need (OAN), at least 14,240 dwellings need to be built over the plan period of 2013 to 2033.

### **What types of homes will be delivered by the Plan?**

The BLP requires that a mix of housing types and sizes are built, including a proportion of family housing (on larger greenfield sites), as well as affordable housing and accessible and adaptable homes for those with limited mobility. In addition, the plan requires that on larger developments, some of the dwellings delivered are for custom and self-build dwellings. The council's Corporate Plan includes a goal to enable over 3,000 new homes by 2026, of which at least 1,000 will be affordable housing (of mixed tenures and affordable housing types).

### **How many homes does the Plan provide for and why do we have a 'buffer' between the housing need figure and the amount of housing that the plan seeks to deliver?**

We need to deliver at least 14,240 homes over the plan period (2013 to 2033) in order to meet the objectively assessed need (OAN). We cannot simply plan to meet deliver 14,240 homes as there are uncertainties over housing delivery, including the capacity of allocated sites, the number of windfall sites that may come forward and whether all of the allocations will be built by 2033. Therefore, we need a modest buffer between the need figure and housing land supply identified. The current buffer of about 1,700, 12% above OAN, protects against under delivery and delays and is reasonable and appropriate. Without a buffer, the Inspector would almost certainly have found the plan unsound. So the total amount of homes that the Plan provides for is 15,948.

### **Why was the housing target not reduced following release of the 2018 based Household projections?**

In July 2020, the BLP Inspector asked the Council to consider whether the 2018 based household projections represented a 'meaningful change' in the housing situation. In its response, the council concluded that while the Government's 2018 based Household projections showed a downward trend in housing requirements, they did not represent a meaningful change in the housing situation, due to methodological issues and adjustments for economic growth. When these adjustments are factored in, the need figure would end up being close to the current objectively assessed need target. The Inspector has endorsed this conclusion in her report. If the BLP is not adopted, any new plan would have to use the current

standard methodology, and this would almost certainly result in the need for greater housing numbers.

### **How much Green Belt in protected?**

Protecting and enhancing the environment is a key priority of the Local Plan. The Royal Borough is currently 83% Green Belt and while some greenbelt development is needed to meet local housing needs, 82% will still remain greenbelt. The Submission Version of the Local Plan would have resulted in the loss of about 1.7% Green Belt, but as a result of changes made to the plan as it evolved, this has been reduced to about 1% so even more Green Belt land is now being protected. Furthermore, all of the sites selected for Green Belt release make a relatively low contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, including the Triangle employment site (allocation AL14).

### **Why is the Maidenhead Golf Course site included?**

Maidenhead Golf Course is part of a larger site allocation known as AL13 (Desborough/South-West Maidenhead). The redevelopment of Maidenhead Golf Course is crucial in meeting a significant proportion of the borough's housing need in a strategic way, delivering a sustainable new urban extension as part of the next phase of Maidenhead's regeneration. The club site offers a highly sustainable location, which, once complete, will deliver more than 2,000 desperately needed homes, with 30% of the properties being affordable, in addition to a new primary and secondary school, and a community hub. It will accommodate future population growth while guarding against speculative Green Belt development across the borough, including on Green Belt land elsewhere.

While Maidenhead Golf Course is not currently publicly accessible, except for the public rights of way running across the site, the many green spaces created within the new development will be accessible to everyone. It will open-up significant areas of green space for public access, providing a central green area along with strategic and local open spaces across the site, including a green spine running from north to south. Rushington Copse will be retained along with as many mature trees as possible.

### **Isn't there a covenant on Maidenhead Golf Course preventing its development?**

There are no restrictive covenants on the Golf Course land (part of site allocation AL13) prohibiting the provision of residential development.

### **Why are we not building all new homes on brownfield land?**

In line with government advice, the Council has made every effort to ensure that a high proportion of the new housing supply in the BLP is on sites that have been previously developed (brownfield). For example, high intensity development is proposed on a number of sites in town centres, particularly Maidenhead, to make best use of their close proximity to services, facilities and public transport. The BLP

also contains the allocation of a number of brownfield sites for housing development across the Borough that demonstrates the commitment to using previously developed land as a priority in order to protect the Green Belt.

However, we cannot simply allocate all brownfield sites for housing as most of these are being actively used for employment purposes and releasing these would mean that we are short of office and industrial sites. In addition, brownfield sites in town centres do not normally provide family homes with gardens.

The decision to release a limited amount of Green Belt (about 1% of the total) was considered to present the most sustainable balance of social, environmental and economic needs and will help us to deliver a greater amount of family homes, affordable housing and infrastructure such as schools, community centres and green space.

### **Did the Inspector make further changes to the Plan following the Main Modifications consultation last Summer?**

The Main Modifications in the Inspector's Report are substantially the same as the Proposed Main Modifications that were consulted on last year, with no significant changes. Nearly all of the changes relate the correction of a limited number of errors and inconsistencies in the plan.

### **What is the scope to withdraw or make changes to the Local Plan at this stage?**

The Local Plan is the council's plan and already has weight in determining planning applications, having progressed to the final stage of the process and through multiple stages of public consultation. Full Council decided to submit the plan for examination in 2017 and agreed the Proposed Changes Plan in 2019 for public consultation. It has now been found by an independent Planning Inspector to be sound, lawful and capable of adoption by Full Council, subject to her required main modifications.

At this late stage, the council does not have the power to remove specific site allocations included in the Proposed Changes version of the plan that the Council approved in October 2019. The council can either adopt the plan with all of the main modifications or not adopt it. Any attempt to withdraw the Local Plan would very likely result in the Council losing control over the adoption and would almost certainly result in legal challenge from those whose interests would be substantially prejudiced by the delayed adoption. Similarly, any decision by Full Council not to adopt the plan would be very likely to provoke Government intervention.

### **How does the adoption of the Plan affect the performance against the Government's Housing Delivery Test 2021?**

The Housing Delivery Test (HDT) is an assessment by Government of the number of homes built against the homes required over the previous 3-year period. The latest results of this assessment were published by the Government in January 2022 and indicated a performance of 73% (i.e., less homes were built than were required). As a result, the "presumption in favour of sustainable development" applies in the

Borough. This “presumption” would risk more speculative development taking place. However, when the BLP is adopted, the HDT 2021 calculation will be re-run on the basis of the BLP housing requirement. It is anticipated that the “presumption” would not apply but this would need to be agreed with the Government. If the Plan were not to be adopted, then the presumption in favour of sustainable development would continue to apply for the foreseeable future with far less control over speculative applications as a result.

### **What are the next steps after adoption?**

After adoption, the Council will notify those who made representations that the plan has been adopted and make documents available on the website and (as soon as possible) in libraries. There will also be a six week period for persons who wish to legally challenge the Plan.

Adoption of the new plan will mean it has full weight in deciding planning applications, complementing existing planning documents such as the adopted neighbourhood plans. In bringing forward the largest housing sites, including the Golf Course redevelopment, there will also be further engagement with the community to help inform plans, in addition to the usual statutory consultation once planning applications are submitted.