



EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

TOWN PLAN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1, 2
PLANNING AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT	3
HIGHWAYS/TRAFFIC	4
MAIDEN ERLEIGH LOCAL NATURE RESERVE	5, 6
MAYS LANE CEMETERY	7
MEADOW PARK	8
BULMERSHE PARK & HIGHWOOD	9
SOL JOEL PARK	10
COMMUNITY FACILITIES	11
PLAYCLUBS	12
ALLOTMENTS	13
BUS SHELTERS/STREET FURNITURE/STREET CLEANSING	14
GENERAL	15

INTRODUCTION

Since it was first mentioned in the Domesday Book, Earley has grown to become the largest town in Wokingham Borough with a population approaching 33,000 inhabitants.

This Town Plan re-affirms this Council's policies on a variety of issues which affect our residents. It also outlines our aims and aspirations for the Town and its development.

Earley is a major town within the South East Region, which itself has the largest regional population in the U.K with over 8 million people at the 2001 census. Prior to the abolition of the South East Regional Assembly, it produced projections indicating a 20% increase in households in the South East in the next 25 years; this equates to an additional one million people. Nearly a quarter of the population are predicted to be over the age of 65 within 20 years.

Following the change of administration within Central Government in May 2010 which saw the abolition of the Partnerships Board (previously the South East Regional Assembly) the previous housing allocation for Wokingham Borough area is now being reconsidered. There is still a requirement for Wokingham Borough Council to provide additional housing and, at a meeting of the Borough Council's Executive on 21st October 2010, it was resolved that the housing numbers in the adopted Core Strategy to 2026 should be agreed. Early indications are, however, that the main areas of development will be concentrated on the Strategic Development Locations, as previously identified within the current Wokingham Plan. The Town Council will continue to oppose development which it considers will have an adverse effect on local residents.

The Town Council has drafted this Plan using the following Policy Statement as its basis:

Earley Town Council will deliver services of the highest quality whilst providing value for money by following the guiding principles of Best Value. It will endeavour to promote the wishes of local residents through consultation and by representation to Wokingham Borough Council or other authorities as appropriate. The Town Council will act in the best interests of the residents of Earley and will conduct its business in an open and democratic manner.

From discussions with local residents, Town Councillors are very aware that it is sometimes not always clear what functions the Town Council is responsible for and what duties fall to the local Unitary Authority, Wokingham Borough Council. As the largest Town within Wokingham Borough, Earley is 'self-sufficient' in the provision of a number of facilities for local residents. These include Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve (but not including Laurel Park), Mays Lane Cemetery, Sol Joel and Meadow Parks, Radstock and Maiden Place Community Centres and Culver Lane Allotments. Additionally, it owns and has direct responsibility for much of the street furniture in the Town, including some bus shelters, noticeboards, illuminated town maps, roadside seats and some street lights. The Town Council is also represented on a number of local community based organisations. Residents are welcome to contact the Town Council or attend meetings to give their views.

Whilst Wokingham Borough Council is the statutory local Highways, Planning and Education Authority, it consults with and encourages Earley Town Council's participation to deliver the best possible services for the residents of Earley. In addition, it has responsibility for providing Social Services functions, refuse collections, recycling and street cleansing, collecting Council Tax, overseeing licensing, providing electoral services, youth service provision and community support. It also operates and maintains other facilities throughout the Town not managed by the Town Council, such as Loddon Valley Leisure Centre, Chalfont Park, Laurel Park and the Silverdale and Centrepoint Youth Facilities.

In summer 2005, Earley residents were asked to contribute to the Plan by forwarding details of any issues which they felt should be included. The Plan was then launched at the Town Electors' Meeting in 2006, when residents were asked to comment further and the Plan was adopted by the Town Council in June 2007. The first revision took place during 2008 and a second revision in Autumn 2010.

The policies within the Plan will be reviewed at least every two years. This allows the opportunity for progress to be monitored and any improvements made to the Plan. Residents are positively encouraged to contribute new ideas.

PLANNING AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

The population of Earley has more than trebled in the last 25 years. This massive expansion has resulted in high density development and pressure on the remaining open spaces, including back gardens. The Lower Earley Development Plan terms have not been strictly adhered to. More dwellings were built than had originally been proposed, resulting in over one thousand extra houses. This development has also put a strain on the Town's infrastructure, particularly noticeable in terms of road congestion, inadequate provision of local secondary places, dentists, doctors and facilities for all ages.

The Town Council will:

- Minimise the impact of infilling by continuing to oppose proposals for inappropriate development.
- Strive to maintain the character of established areas by:
 - Opposing inappropriate development;
 - Working with the Borough Council to oppose the minimum parking standards currently presented in Planning Guidelines with the aim of improving road safety by reducing on-road parking;
 - Protecting the character of Earley by preserving the unique buildings within the Town boundaries.
- Contribute to the Wokingham Borough Plan 2006 – 2016 to minimise the impact of further development to the residents of Earley.
- Do everything we possibly can to ensure the preservation of the green wildlife corridors within Earley.
- Liaise with the Borough's Planning Enforcement Officers.
- Through the planning process, try to ensure that development contains suitable provision for the ageing population (e.g. bungalows and sheltered housing) and people on low incomes.
- Ensure developers contribute adequately towards minimising the effect of their plans.
- Object to Planning Applications where conversion of garages would result in inadequate on-site parking.
- Object to Planning Applications which would erode 'Green Lungs' or gaps between established settlements.
- Oppose development which destroys trees or established hedgerows.
- Support sustainable development within the Town boundaries.
- The Town Council will liaise with Reading University, the Local Planning Authority and local residents over the proposals for the redevelopment of the Sibly Hall site.
- The Town Council will endeavour to keep local residents informed of the proposals for major developments, and will make an informed response to the Local Planning Authority on any Planning Application received.

HIGHWAYS/TRAFFIC

Because of its location, Earley is subject to a high percentage of 'through traffic'. The roads in the Town already suffer from excessive traffic volumes, to the detriment to local residents.

Recent Achievements of the Town Council include:

- Obtaining a safer entrance to the Loddon Valley Leisure Centre.
- Promoting Walk to School campaigns.
- Successfully campaigning for new pedestrian crossings.
- Additional parking restrictions in Radstock Lane and Northbourne Close

The Town Council will:

- Continue in its efforts to obtain HGV bans in residential areas.
- Support the Borough Council in promoting the reduction in term-time traffic.
- Encourage appropriate traffic speeds.
- Promote improvements in public transport.
- Oppose the creation of the Winnersh by-pass unless it can be proved that it will not further exacerbate local traffic congestion or flooding. .
- Promote the introduction of school time reductions of speed limits outside schools.
- Support the proposal to create a 3rd Thames Crossing if it also minimises the adverse impact to residents of Earley.
- Liaise with the Borough Council and the Police to reduce the amount of on footway/verge parking.
- Strive to ensure that speed limits within the area are harmonised.
- Lobby the appropriate authorities to try to obtain the creation of a fourth lane on the M4 between Junctions 7 and 12.
- Encourage by all possible means the use of cycles within the Town, including contributing to the Borough Council's Draft Cycling Strategy.
- Encourage the provision of safer crossings on routes to schools.
- In partnership with the Borough Council to try to achieve a more appropriate route for pedestrians into Chalfont Square.
- In liaison with the Borough Council, investigate and, if appropriate, act upon reported problems caused by commuter parking in Kenton Road and surrounding areas.

MAIDEN ERLEGH LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

The Town Council is very proud to own Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve. This area is seen as a haven for many local residents, and visitors to the area are impressed by its beauty and air of tranquillity. Whilst the Nature Reserve is, by definition, an area reserved for nature, the Town Council has striven to keep a balance between maintaining the area both as a Nature Reserve, a coarse fishery and a general recreation area. The area also provides a very valuable teaching aid to many local schools and youth groups, and the Park Ranger Service offers support in providing environmental education to local young people. This service is enhanced by the excellent on-site classroom provided at the Interpretation Centre off Instow Road.

The Town Council in association with volunteers has:

- Planted 1500 new trees in the woodlands.
- Planted over 5000 wildflowers.
- Created three new wildflower grasslands.
- Installed a series of silt-entrapment ponds.
- Built and equipped the Environmental Interpretation Centre.
- Built the popular duck-feeding platform.
- Created a wildlife gardening demonstration area.
- Upgraded the signage and notice boards.
- Supported the setting up of the Earley Environmental Group.
- Developed a protected reed margin on the bank of the lake adjacent to Instow Road.
- Ensured that the physically disadvantaged can enjoy as many of the Reserve's facilities as possible, by the creation of 6 new fishing platforms.

The Town Council has:

- Produced a flood plan for Maiden Erlegh Lake
- Successfully promoted fishing competitions and tuition days with the generous support of the Environment Agency.

The Town Council will:

- Create habitats to encourage a diversity of wildlife, including the provision of specialist nesting sites on the island, the lake banks and the woodlands.
- Continue to coppice the woods and enhance the woodland flora.
- Develop a biological database for the Reserve.
- With the support of the Earley Environmental Group, maintain a high level of conservation based projects both at Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve and other important wildlife areas in the Town.
- Through the Park Ranger Service, continue to offer a high standard of environmental education to residents, schools and youth groups; including new facilities such as a dipping pond.
- Maintain the Reserve's pathways in a manner appropriate to its Nature Reserve status.
- Maintain Maiden Erlegh Lake as a coarse fishery and, through a fish management programme, continue to improve the quality of water in the lake and the quality of the fish stocks.
- Protect wildfowl and other wildlife at the lake and promote breeding areas for fish.

- Enhance biodiversity across the Parish, for example, by maintaining and creating hedgerows and wildflower areas.
- Encourage use of the Interpretation Centre and maximise hire income
- Continue to encourage good dog management in the Local Nature Reserve
- Investigate renewable energy sources for the Interpretation Centre
- Maintain a good standard in the wildlife garden area

MAYS LANE CEMETERY

The management of Mays Lane Cemetery passed from Earley St. Peter's Church to the Town Council in the early 1980s. Since then, the facilities have been expanded, including the provision of tarmac roads, a car parking area and a Memorial Garden. Since taking over management of Mays Lane, the Town Council has maintained the area as a lawn cemetery, and this has assisted in allowing it to be maintained to a very high standard.

The Town Council has:

- Obtained suitable software for the updating and maintenance of the burial records.
- Created an area within the un-consecrated section of the Cemetery specifically for the burial of residents of Earley of the Muslim faith.
- Created a Children's area within the consecrated section of the Cemetery.
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The Town Council will:

- Continue to 'topple test' headstones in line with Health & Safety Guidelines.
- Extend facilities into the unused section as necessary.
- Provide seats and specimen trees within the areas of the Cemetery currently in use.
- Instigate a programme of repair for memorials erected prior to 1946.
- Continue to maintain the Cemetery to a high standard.
- Refurbish the roadway
- Investigate the possibility of providing an area for the burial of copies of the Quran

MEADOW PARK

Meadow Park provides a large open space for strolling, picnicking and the playing of informal games, dog walking, etc. and there are areas set aside as wild flower meadows.

The Park also provides formal children's play areas for toddlers and older children. The play area at Meadow Park was fitted out in 1994, with wooden equipment. The Town Council has introduced a phased replacement programme over the last few years, with many of the items being replaced with equipment of a much more substantial metal construction.

The Town Council has:

- Made the park feel more open and welcoming by removing a large number of imposing shrub beds including those that limited views into the play areas.
- Re-sown and planted the two wildflower meadows.
- Replanted the entrance flower beds with lower, more attractive plants.
- Replaced the fencing around all three play areas with cheerfully-coloured metal fencing.
- Upgraded all of the play areas with durable new equipment.
- Provided additional seating.

The Town Council will:

- Continue the programme of updating the play equipment, when funding permits.
- Ensure that the physically disadvantaged can enjoy as many of the park's facilities as possible.
- Enhance the wildflower areas and naturalised bulb areas.
- Maintain entrance gates and fences as necessary.
- Continue to maintain the Park to a high standard.

BULMERSHE PARK & HIGHWOOD

Earley Town, together with Woodley Town and Wokingham Borough, is jointly responsible for management of the Bulmershe Park. We are also part of the management team of Highwood, which contains an area of native woodland.

The Town Council has:

- Planted trees in Bulmershe Park to enhance the overall environment.
- Provided expertise to support the management of the park from within our Park Ranger service.
- Improved the habitat for rare species.

The Town Council will:

- Continue to work in partnership with other local authorities to maintain this area to protect the interests of residents.

SOL JOEL PARK

The management of Sol Joel Park was taken over by the Town Council on a 50 year lease from Reading Borough Council in 2001; this was done in order to improve the facilities and level of maintenance to the benefit of residents. Under the management of Reading Borough Council, the Park had been allowed to deteriorate, and, although football and cricket were still being played, the pitches were in a poor condition and the wooden pavilion was in a bad state of repair and lacking many of the facilities now required, such as single-sex changing areas, access for the physically disadvantaged, etc.

The Town Council made the decision to take over management of the Park because of concerns over its management and the historical significance of the park to Earley. The Town Council feels that the Park is not being used to its full potential.

The Town Council has:

- Created a skate park.
- Provided a hard play area with provision for basketball and roller hockey.
- Extended the car parking, improved the entrances and installed gates.
- Improved the condition of the pitches with frequent maintenance and pest control.
- Provided a new pedestrian entrance to link with the Wokingham Road crossing.
- Installed CCTV to improve security.
- Obtained planning consents to replace the pavilion.
- Provided fencing around the toddlers' play area to make it 'dog proof'.
- Replaced the play equipment in the toddlers' area.
- Reviewed the on-site parking provision and implemented extension works.
- Established a friends of Sol Joel Park Group
- Carried out a biodiversity survey
- Improved the play equipment provision of the Park, including the installation of a large piece of equipment using Playbuilder funding.
- Established a user Group for the skatepark
- Created an additional cricket wicket

The Town Council will:

- Continue negotiations with Reading Borough Council to extend the current lease on Sol Joel Park.
- Upgrade the existing skate park equipment.
- Replace the existing pavilion with a building which will not only provide changing facilities, but which can also be used for more general community based projects.
- Work with local organisations to encourage full use of the facilities.
- Replace dying trees with native species.
- Continue the programme of improvement of the sports pitches.
- Draw up plans for re-use of the formal garden area.
- Improve the boundaries of the park.
- Promote the facilities and sports pitches to ensure maximum usage.
- Continue to review security at the Park through liaison with the Police, and, if necessary, to introduce other security measures.
- Provide additional seating and litterbins
- Provide further items of play equipment suitable for children of all ages including the disabled
- Explore opportunities to obtain funding towards the refurbishment of the Skatepark
- Assist the Earley Xtreme Sports Group in making the August skate park jam an annual event.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The Town Council runs Radstock Lane and Maiden Place Community Centres.

These Centres are extensively used by regular hirers such as pre-school playgroups, Wokingham & Bracknell College, the local Baptist Church, etc. One-off bookings include wedding receptions and family parties.

We intend to obtain sufficient funding to redevelop Sol Joel Park pavilion for sports and community use.

The Town Council has:

- Facilitated the establishment of social clubs at both our Community Centres.
- Supported the establishment of the Community Resource Centre (CResCent).
- Provided recycling facilities at the two Community Centres
- Provided air conditioning at Maiden Place Community Centre.
- Improved facilities at Maiden Place and Radstock Community Centre, including provision of air conditioning in the Main Halls, refurbishment of the kitchens and improvement of the outside areas.

The Town Council will:

- Promote the use of the facilities available at both Centres to maximise usage.
- Maintain the Community Centres to a high standard.
- Work with other local groups to ensure good use of all facilities in the Town.
- At Maiden Place Centre, working in liaison with Lower Earley Baptist Church, provide a joint first class community facility.

PLAY-CLUBS

The Town Council will seek to provide day care facilities for children during the Summer holidays in partnership with other providers.

The Town Council will:

- Provide resources for the provision of a summer playclub

ALLOTMENTS

Culver Lane Allotment site is situated off Blackthorn Close in north Earley. It has approximately 70 plots available to rent. Priority is given to Earley residents, and there is currently a ~~small~~ waiting list of people wishing to rent a plot.

The Town Council has:

- Introduced a 'Best Allotment' Competition, in partnership with the resident Horticultural Society.
- Provided plots suitable for use by the disabled.
- Created a variety of plot sizes to meet individual requirements.
- Upgrading of central road way
- Provided a wood chip store, which is regularly 'topped up'.
- Installed a noticeboard on the site.

The Town Council will :

- Continue to promote the site to local people, and, in particular, Earley residents.
- Continue to promote high standards of cultivation at the site by routine inspections and by the presenting of the Best Allotment award.
- Undertake repairs to the main entrance to the site, boundaries and improve facilities provided to the Allotment users.
- Encourage the formation of a plot-holder run Allotment Society.
- Aim to make the allotments self-funding
- Where large plots become available, seek to divide them to allow more residents the opportunity to have an allotment.

BUS SHELTERS/STREET FURNITURE/STREET CLEANSING

The Town Council provides about 50 bus shelters throughout the Town. We also provide town noticeboards and the illuminated maps. The Town Council also employs a part-time litter-picker.

The Town Council has:

- Committed to a programme of replacing bus shelters.
- Provided town maps in key locations.
- Provided bus shelters in the area.
- Constructed 'missing link' footpaths.
- Provided additional street lights where required.
- Supported the setting up of the Adopt-a-street scheme

The Town Council will:

- Keep the Town maps up to date.
- Continue to upgrade and expand the provision of both litter and dog waste bins and encourage their use.
- Provide appropriate street furniture.
- In suitable locations, promote the installation of advertising shelters to reduce costs.
- Continue to maintain our street furniture to a high standard.
- Support initiatives to address litter such as community 'litter picks'.
- Liaise with Wokingham Borough Council to ensure shelters of a suitable quality are installed.
- Maintain litterpicking service
- Liaise with Wokingham Borough Council and other agencies over identified litter problems,

GENERAL

The Town Council is already seen as one of the most efficiently run Councils in this area. It is, therefore, considered that this places it in a good position to spearhead efforts to bring about improvements in the Town.

The Town Council has:

- Obtained and funded a dedicated Police Community Support Officer for the Town.
- Implemented a process for assessing bids for grant funding on an annual basis.
- Provided a BMX/Cycle Track at Paddick Drive
- On a 14 year lease from the Borough Council, undertaken the maintenance of the whole of the Paddick Drive Open Space.

The Town Council will:

- Continue to raise the profile of the Town of Earley, including the possibility of twinning with a similar town, provided there is no additional cost to the Council Tax Payer.
- Support local voluntary organisations including the use of grant funding.
- Continue to take a pro-active role in providing facilities for young people including provision of BMX tracks and our continued involvement in the Area Youth Committee.
- Continue to support the use of Outreach Youth Workers.
- With the support of the Borough Council to continue to offer, assistance to local residents through our Help Shop facility, based at the Town Council offices and to press the Borough Council for financial support for this service.
- Work with neighbouring Authorities to identify areas of land for use as consecrated, non-consecrated and green burial areas.
- Try to ensure that gaps in community provision are filled and participate in the Borough Council's Community Strategy.
- Work with the Borough Council to improve the management of open spaces it currently maintains, particularly Chalfont Park, Laurel Park and the Events Field.
- Support the work of the Earley Environmental Group and assist in the compilation of a biological database for the Town.
- Assess all areas of open space in Earley to improve local biodiversity.
- Instigate a system of three year financial forecasting, to allow the Town Council to plan effectively.
- Work towards 'Quality Council Status'.
- Where there is an advantage to the residents of Earley, to accept management responsibility for as much of the Town's infrastructure as practical.
- Strive to make the best use of Section 106 funding for the benefit of the Community.
- Discuss with Reading University the possibility of the Town Council taking on the management of Redhatch Copse
- Take on the management of Laurel Park Pavilion