



EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

DRAFT TOWN PLAN

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The South East has the largest regional population in the U.K. - over 8 million people in 2001. The South East Regional Assembly projections indicate an increase in households in the South East from 724,000 in 2001/02 to 866,000 in 2026/27. Additionally, the total population in the South East is set to rise by between 985,000 and 1,095,000 in the same period.

Age composition of the population of the South East is also set to change in that period, with the greatest change occurring in the 65+ age group, which it is estimated will increase from 16% of the population in 2002 to 23% in 2027, 12% of which is projected will be in the 75+ age range.

Regional Planning Guidance 9 requires the Wokingham Unitary Authority area to accommodate 8,110 new dwellings in the period 2001 – 2016.

With all major sites within the Town now used, the majority of this new development will be built on areas outside the Town's boundaries. Nevertheless, this level of development is likely to impact quite severely on local residents and most particularly on the already over-stretched infrastructure.

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 District Council or other authorities as appropriate. The Town Council will act in the best interests of residents of Earley and will conduct its business in an open and democratic manner.

This plan aims to re-affirm the Town Council's policies on a variety of issues which affect local residents. It also outlines the Town Council's aspirations for the Town and future actions and proposals which, it is hoped, will go some way to mitigating the effects of the further proposed development in the Wokingham area.

Once adopted, the Plan will be used as the basis of the Town Council's contribution to the emerging Wokingham District Plan.

The Plan has been drafted by Town Council Officers, with the various policies and plans already discussed and agreed by Councillors used as its basis. In summer 2005, local 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. It will be formally adopted by the Town Council once further input is received from residents and Councillors and, if appropriate, further amendments made.

It is intended that the various policies within the Plan will be reviewed bi-annually. This will allow the opportunity for progress to be monitored and to any additions to be made to the Plan. Residents have been/will be positively encouraged to contribute and be given regular updates.

PLANNING AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

The population of Earley has more than trebled in the last 25 years, as has the number of households. This massive expansion over a relatively short period of time has resulted in all the available large areas of open space in the Town now used for building. Because the terms of the Lower Earley Development Plan were not strictly adhered to, more dwellings were built than had originally been proposed. This has put a strain on the infrastructure, and this is particularly noticeable in terms of road congestion, lack of school places, lack of dentists and doctors and a lack of facilities, particularly for young people. It is considered that this leads to an erosion of the quality of life to local residents.

The Town Council is concerned about a number of recent planning applications which seek to create new developments on existing gardens, or which replace existing detached or semi detached properties with terraces and blocks of flats. Whilst the need for affordable housing is recognised, this is seen as 'piecemeal development' and, in the view of the Town Council, only serves to further impact on the infrastructure in this area.

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Minimise the impact of backland infilling by continuing to oppose proposals for inappropriate development of this type.
- Strive to maintain the character of established areas by:
 - opposing development which is not in-keeping;
 - continuing to lobby the District Council over its seeming strict adherence to the minimum parking standards presented in PPG.3 to try to ensure adequate on site parking.
 - Work towards obtaining Conservation Area status for the area around Maiden Erlegh Drive.
 - Striving to reverse the decision of central Government to class back gardens as 'brownfield sites'.
 - Lobby the District Council to reduce the scale of development allowed under Permitted Development rights.
- Contribute to the formulation of the Wokingham District Plan 2006 – 2016 to try to minimise the impact of further development to the residents of Earley.
- Ensure the preservation of the green wildlife corridors within Earley by apposing all "back garden" developments.
- Contribute towards the ongoing updating of the District Council's Planning Guidelines to ensure promotion of good quality and appropriate development.
- Take an active role in liaising with the District's Planning Enforcement Officers when unapproved development is brought to the Town Council's attention.
- Through the planning process, to try to ensure that all new development contains a percentage of dwellings for the projected increasing ageing population (e.g. bungalows, sheltered housing) and key workers (e.g. lower cost/shared cost dwellings of good design).
- Promote the use of Section 106 monies for the continued improvement to the road and community infrastructure in this area..
- Continue to object to Planning Applications which seek to gain permission to convert garages into living accommodation unless adequate on site parking is available.
- Object to Planning Applications which seek to erode 'Green Lungs' or gaps between established settlement boundaries.
- Continue to object to Planning Applications in respect of 'Scotchman's Knob' to maintain this area as a valuable green lung and wildlife habitat.
- Support the District Council in its efforts to reduce the number of new dwellings allocated to Wokingham District within the emerging South East Plan.
- Oppose development which seeks to destroy trees or established hedgerows

Because of its location in relation to Reading, and junctions 10 and 11 of the M4, the A4 and Thames Valley and Suttons Industrial Estates, Earley is subjected to a high percentage of 'through traffic'. Many of the older roads in the Town now take excessive volumes of traffic and this is of detriment to local residents, and particularly because of the close proximity of some houses to the roadside. Examples of this are Elm Lane, Elm Road, Wilderness Road and Church Road, The situation has been further exacerbated by other factors, such as the expansion of the ASDA complex and the extended opening hours, the school run associated with the need to substantially expand many of the local primary schools to try to provide sufficient school places, and the need for many senior school pupils to travel outside the Town boundaries to receive education. Additionally, because of the high volume of traffic travelling along the recognised (if inappropriate) through routes, what were formerly quiet residential roads are now used as 'rat runs', for example Aldbourne Avenue/Ramsbury Drive.

Since this plan was first drafted, the Town Council has:

- Succeeded in its efforts to obtain a dedicated entrance to the Loddon Valley Leisure Centre to improve safety for everyone in this area and particularly pedestrian traffic in and around the Leisure Centre.
- In liaison with the District Council through the Walk to School campaign, achieved the installation of a pedestrian crossing in the 'Beech Lane dip'.
- In liaison with the District Council, succeeded in obtaining a pedestrian crossing at the top of Pitts Lane.
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The Town Council will seek to:

- Continue in its efforts to obtain an HGV ban on Rushey Way (except for the Section between Beeston Way and the goods inwards access to Asda).
- Support the District Council in promoting Walking to School to try to reduce term-time traffic.
- Continue in its efforts to obtain a pedestrian crossing in Chalfont Way
- Encourage appropriate traffic calming in roads where a speeding problem has been identified.
- Pursue further the creation of home zones and encourage the District Council to run a pilot project in Aldbourne Avenue/Ramsbury Drive.
- Promote the use of Section 106 monies for improvements in public transport
- Continue to pursue the idea of the creation of a Junction 10a onto the M4 for access only London-bound.
- Oppose the creation of the Winnersh By-pass unless it can be proved that it will not further exacerbate traffic congestion in the Town, or add to the danger of flooding in the area of Sindlesham Mill.
- Push for the creation of a mini-roundabout at the junction of Rushey Way/Gypsy Lane.
- Promote the introduction of 20 mph speed limit outside schools only during school arrival and departure times (i.e. when school warning signs are active).
- Support the proposal to create of a 3rd Thames Crossing.
- Liaise with the District Council and the Police to reduce the amount of on footway/verge parking.
- Lobby the District Council to take some action over the speed cushions in Elm Lane and to consider again the creation of mini roundabouts with the junctions of Beaconsfield Way and Redhatch Drive.

MAIDEN ERLEIGH 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 course 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 class room 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 new Earley Environmental Group.

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Create habitats to encourage a diversity of wildlife, including the provision of specialist nesting sites on the island, the lake banks and the woodlands.
- Develop a protected reed margin on the bank of the lake adjacent to Instow Road.
- Develop marginal vegetation to screen hard landscaping on the bank of the lake adjacent to Lakeside.
- Continue to coppice the woods and enhance the woodland flora.
- Develop a biological database for the Reserve.
- Continue to develop protective/screening vegetation around perimeter of Reserve and large island.
- With the support of the recently created Earley Environmental Group to 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, to continue to offer a high standard of environmental education to local people, schools and youth groups; including new facilities such as a dipping pond.
- Maintain the reserves pathways in a manner appropriate to its nature reserve status.
- Maintain Maiden Erlegh Lake as a course fishery and, through a co-ordinated fish management programme, to 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 by designating 'no go' areas for fishermen
- Enhance biodiversity across the parish by creating new hedgerows and wildflower areas.
- Undertake a review of the Nature Reserve to ensure that the physically disadvantaged can enjoy as many of the reserves facilities as possible.

MAYS LANE CEMETERY

The management of Mays Lane Cemetery passed from Earley St. Peters Church to the Town Council in the early 1980's. 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 kept to a very high standard.

Further expansion of the Cemetery to provide specialist burial areas for children are planned.

Since this plan was first drafted, the Town Council has:

- Obtained suitable software for the updating and maintenance of the burial records

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Continue the programme of 'topple testing' of headstones in line with Health & Safety Guidelines.
- Create an area within the un-consecrated section of the Cemetery specifically for the burial of children of the Muslim faith.
- Create an area within the consecrated section of the Cemetery specifically for the burial of children of the Christian faith.
- Extend the roadway into the currently unused section to allow easier vehicular access.
- As space permits, provide seats and specimen trees within the areas of the Cemetery currently in use.
- Create an area within the 'old section' for the storing of headstones removed from graves as a result of topple testing.
- Instigate a programme of repair for all memorials erected before 31st December 1945.
- Continue negotiations with Orange PLC with a view to that company installing a telecommunications mast in the unused area at the end of the Cemetery, to provide income to offset against the Cemetery running costs, thus reducing the burden to the Earley Council Tax Payer.
- Continue to maintain the Cemetery to a high standard

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 up to the age of 14. The play area at Meadow Park was fitted out approximately 12 years ago, with wooden style equipment. Whilst this looked attractive, it has proved less than robust, and 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. Additionally, the wooden dog proof fencing has also been replaced.

The Town Council in association with volunteers 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 seek to:

- Continue the programme of updating the play equipment as necessary.
- Ensure that the physically disadvantaged can enjoy as many of the parks facilities as possible.
- Enhance the wildflower areas and naturalised bulb areas.
- Upgrade entrance gates and fences as necessary.
- Continue to maintain the Park to a high standard.

The management of Sol Joel Park was taken over by the Town Council on a 50 year lease from Reading Borough Council in 2001. Prior to that, the Park had been allowed to run down, 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 concern about its condition when under the management of the Borough Council, because of the historical significance of the area to Earley, and because it was felt that the Park was not being used to its full potential.

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Continue negotiations with Reading Borough Council to extend the current lease on Sol Joel Park.
- Refurbish/Replace the existing skate park equipment.
- From the Town Council's own resources, and from external funding, to 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, possibly including a youth drop-in facility.
- Seek Section 106 funding and grants from outside bodies to assist with the refurbishment of the Pavilion and other facilities at the Park.
- Introduce a programme of replacing the play equipment in the toddlers' area.
- Provide fencing around the toddlers' play area to make it 'dog proof'.
- Continue to monitor the health of the Poplar trees on the site.
- Continue the programme of improvement of the sports pitches
- Draw up plans for re-use of the formal garden area.
- Review the on-site parking provision and recommend improvement/extension if necessary.
- Improve the security of the boundary between the Park and Mays Lane.
- 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.
- To promote the use of the in line hockey and basket ball courts adjacent to the skate park area
- Provide additional seating and litterbins.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The Town Council has management of Radstock and Maiden Place Community Centres on extended leases from Wokingham District Council. Both Centres continue to be extensively used, both by regular hirers such as pre-school playgroups, by Wokingham & Bracknell College, the local Baptist Church, etc., and for one off bookings such as wedding receptions and family parties.

It is hoped that sufficient funding will be available to allow the redevelopment of the Sol Joel Park pavilion to include a room which could be used as a community facility and also a youth drop in facility.

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Provide air conditioning to the Main Hall and bar/lounge area at Maiden Place Centre.
- Refurbish the Kitchens at both centres.
- In liaison with the residential Social Club, investigate the possibility of providing a family room at the Maiden Place Centre.
- Investigate the possibility of computerised bookings systems for hall hire at the community Centres and other Town Council facilities.
- Promote the use of the facilities available at both Centres to maximise usage.
- Continue to maintain the Community Centres to a high standard.

The Town Council provides all day child care facilities during the Easter and Summer holidays. The Schemes are monitored by Ofsted and, in the past, have proved extremely popular.

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Continue to run day care facilities for 5 – 11 year olds, provided that the financial burden on the Earley Council-tax Payer does not substantially increase.
- Investigate further the promotion of the Playclubs to all sections of the Community.
- Continue to review the standard and variety of activities offered to children attending the playclubs.
- Continue to maintain the high Ofsted ranking achieved by the Playclubs.

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

The Town Council recently introduced a 'Best Allotment' Competition, in partnership with the resident Horticultural Society.

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Undertake repairs to the main entrance to the site.
- Continue to promote the site to local people, and Earley residents in particular.
- Undertake repairs to the central roadway.
- Clearly delineate the boundary between the site and neighbouring properties in Milton Road/Erleigh Court Gardens, to prevent future boundary disputes.
- Continue to promote high standards of cultivation at the site by routine inspections and by the presenting of the Best Allotment award.
- Carry out an assessment to ensure that the site does not disadvantage the physically disabled.
- Continue to monitor requests from organisations/individuals requiring plots designed for use by the physically or mentally disadvantaged.

BUS SHELTERS/STREET FURNITURE/STREET CLEANSING

The Town Council is responsible for the provision of a number of bus shelters throughout the Town (about 50 in total). It also provides the town noticeboards and the illuminated town plans. Furthermore, whilst litter clearance/street cleansing is the responsibility of the District Council, because of the high volume of litter in the Town, the Town Council employs a part-time litterpicker.

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Continue the programme of replacing two bus shelters each year.
- Undertake a review and if necessary updating of the Town Plans.
- Try to contract out the services of the Street Furniture Janitor to undertake the cleaning of the shelters in Wokingham Road (not owned by the Town Council) to bring them up to an acceptable standard.
- Continue to work in close co-operation with the District Council over the upgrading and expansion of provision of litterbins throughout the Town.
- Consider requests received from local residents for the provision of additional street furniture.
- In suitable non-residential locations, to promote the installation of advertising shelters to reduce the cost of providing this facility.
- Continue to maintain the street furniture for which it has responsibility to a high standard.

The rapid expansion of Earley, as previously mentioned in this Plan, has led to a lack of available community facilities, especially for young people. It has also resulted in a general erosion of infrastructure facilities for all members of the Community. Furthermore, it is the view of the Town Council that little thought appears to have been given to the future of the Town or its inhabitants now the lower Earley development is complete. There is sometimes a division between inhabitants of 'old Earley' and those living in lower Earley. There is also a lack of identity in the Town, which is further exacerbated by the lack of any defined Town Centre or natural central meeting area.

Earley has a high (16%) ethnic minority population and there is concern that these residents find it difficult to become integrated within the community which is Earley.

With the amount of development in this area, there is concern at the loss of natural habitat. Through the conservation work carried out by the Town Council staff, and particularly the Park Ranger Service at Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve, the maintenance and appropriate management of the remaining areas in the Town is seen as a high priority.

The Town Council is already seen as one of the most efficiently run Council's 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 and to try to put right some of the mistakes made by other authorities, and particularly the planning departments of those authorities, in the past.

This section of the Town Plan outlines the Town Council's proposals to try to rectify some of these identified problems.

Since this plan was first compiled, the Town Council has:

- Through partnership agreements, obtain a dedicated Police Community Support Officer for the Town.

The Town Council will, therefore, seek to:

- Support the District Council with plans to redevelop the Chalfont Square area to create a Town Centre.
- Seek to move the Town Council Offices to a more central and easily accessible area
- Continue to raise the profile of the town of Earley and the Town Council through all possible means.
- Continue to support local community based/charitable/voluntary organisations through the recently revamped donations system.
- Continue to take a very pro-active role in trying to provide facilities for young people in the area through continued involvement with the Area Youth Committee
- Promote the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders by the police against known individuals who continue to create a nuisance to local residents
- Continue to support the use of Outreach Youth Workers
- With the support of the District Council, continue to offer assistance to local residents through the Help Shop facility based at the Town Council offices.
- In liaison with the District Council, provide bmx/skate park facilities in lower Earley.
- Continue its negotiation with the District Council and other neighbouring parishes to obtain, through Section 106 agreements, areas of land within the Town or on it's boundaries for use as consecrated, non-consecrated and green burial areas.

- Exploit the use of Section 106 monies for the benefit of Earley residents.
- Liaise with the District Council over the updating of its 'Community Strategy' to try to ensure that previously exposed gaps in community provision are plugged.
- Through input into the various Plans and Strategies currently under consideration, try to obtain an increase in the number of hospital places in this part of Berkshire.
- Through close liaison with the District Council, to bring about an improvement in the management of the open spaces currently managed by that authority, particularly Chalfont Park, Laurel Park and the Events Field in Kilnsea Drive.
- Support the work of the recently formed Earley Environmental Group in general, and in particular to assist in the development of a biological database for the Town.
- Assess all areas of open space in Earley to maximise their contribution to local biodiversity.
- Develop a programme of hedge planting around the parish to give Earley a more rural feel and settle it back into the landscape after 45 years of house building.
- Instigate a system of three year financial forecasting, to allow the Town Council to effectively plan to fulfil the projects outlined in this Plan
- Obtain 'Quality Council Status' during the life of this Plan.