

**EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL**

**Full Council Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**5. TOWN MAYOR'S COMMUNICATION**

**Christmas Carols at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre 14/12/2025 & 20/12/2025**

It was a joy to attend the Wokingham Borough Schools Concert on 14<sup>th</sup> December where the children & Berkshire Music Trust performed beautifully as well as thoroughly enjoying themselves.

On 20<sup>th</sup> December it was the turn of joint churches in Earley to celebrate Christmas with readings & carols in both English & Cantonese. The High Sheriff, Shaun Taylor, attended to encourage the children doing various craft activities before the carols.

Both events brought joy & the Christmas spirit to our community.

**LINK Lunch 25/12/25**

It was my pleasure to attend the lunch held at WADE in Wokingham, along with the Wokingham Borough & Wokingham Town Mayors. All 3 mayors helped to serve the turkey dinner that was cooked on site by volunteer chefs.

It was lovely to see everyone, who would otherwise been alone on Christmas Day, enjoying themselves with the food, company & singing.

It was good to have the opportunity to thank all the volunteers who visit LINK friends throughout the year or had given up their Christmas Day to set up the centre, transport attendees & of course tidy up after the event.

There was a real atmosphere of community spirit.

Cllr Nicola Brock, Town Mayor

**Earley Town Council Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**8 Representatives on Other Bodies**

**8.1 Kenton Road Day Centre on Jan 26<sup>th</sup> 2026**

The chairman reported that the centre was ticking along very well. Various events - Mc Millan coffee morning, Fish and chip lunch, and the Christmas lunch were all well attended. There was still difficulty filling the rota to man the premises for Monday mornings. A new member of the committee has come forward however and is willing to cover this. There is also a need to encourage more people to use the centre on Monday and Tuesday mornings. Mark (the new committee member) is going to advertise the centre on the Earley discussion board and has some new ideas to attract people – e.g. providing tech help with phones and tablets. Another idea was to have sessions demonstrating how cryptic crosswords work.

The chairs purchased with the help of ETC have proved to be a very good purchase and are appreciated by everyone. The entrance hall is the next project the centre would like to improve. It needs replastering in part (plaster is falling off) and decorating. They also need to investigate installing a handrail near the door as there is a slope that makes it difficult for some users- especially those using walkers.

The treasurer reported that the Christmas lunch had raised £125 as the committee had largely made dishes and bought wisely. Raffles had raised £160 and the tombola £75 and the bank balance was healthy. A new hirer – a group from the National Federation of Occupational Pensioners has made an initial booking and it is hoped that this will be a regular monthly session.

**Future Events –**

Given the popularity of lunches, it was agreed to hold a Fish and chip lunch on Feb 3<sup>rd</sup> and a Soup and Pud lunch in March. Given the popularity of the sharing lunch held before Christmas it was also decided to arrange another as it brought everyone together but didn't involve a lot of work for the committee.

The next meeting will be held in April – date to be advised.

Cllr Anne Bassett

# Claire Connell MA, ACA, CTA

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The Councillors  
Earley Town Council  
Council Offices  
Radstock Lane  
Earley  
Reading RG6 5UL

26<sup>th</sup> January 2026

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen

## **Internal audit for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 – interim report**

Local councils are required to have an internal audit of their accounting records and their system of internal control by Regulation 5 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. During my visits in December 2025 and January 2026 I reviewed the financial systems and controls for the year to date.

A further visit will be required after the year end to review the final accounts.

My internal audit testing was based on the guidelines included in the current NALC Governance & Accountability Practitioners Guide. Initial discussions established whether there were any changes to the internal controls in place and a series of tests using the financial records, vouchers, minutes, previous audit reports etc were conducted to establish the effectiveness of the controls.

### **Overall conclusion**

Generally, the financial records are well maintained and appear complete and fit for purpose. The control systems and procedures which operate on a day-to-day basis appear efficient and effective.

Specific comments below are in the order of the headings in section 1 of the Annual Return. There are no significant matters or concerns that I need to draw to your attention.

### **Assertion 10**

A new governance assertion is being added to the AGAR for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026 concerning digital and data compliance. Discussions held with Council Officers showed that the Council is well on the way to being able to agree its compliance with the assertion at the year end.

I do recommend that the Council reviews the publication of data in accordance with the ICO model publication scheme and the Transparency Code as I believe there is currently some data which is not being published such as a contracts register.

### **Detailed report (structured around the objectives listed in section 1 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return)**

As part of the testing I checked:

#### **A Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the year**

- The accounts are maintained on RBS Omega and kept up-to-date.
- The RBS Bookings package is used for hall and pitch bookings.
- Burials are recorded in a bespoke database and standing information for allotment holders is maintained in Excel. Invoices for these services are raised in Omega.

**B This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for**

- A sample of payment invoices was checked to ensure that they had been approved, correctly paid and VAT treated correctly. No errors were found.
- The procedures in place for the procurement of high value items and services were reviewed. There hasn't been any requirement to use Find-a-tender yet this year.
- The system for making electronic payments was reviewed. This was unchanged from the previous year.

**C This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives & reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these**

- The Standing Orders and Financial Regulations were reviewed. The Standing Orders were updated in July 2025 and the Financial Regulations were last updated in June 2022 and have been reapproved annually since then.
- The risk register was approved in July 2025 with an update made in September 2025
- Council minutes were scrutinised.

***Observations and outstanding audit work:***

- A new model template has been issued for Financial Regulations since the last update undertaken by Earley Town Council. I understand that subsequent to my last visit, Earley Town Council has decided to rejoin BALC and thus NALC. This will give the Council access to model template documents and enable it to update policies in line with the national guidelines.
- Insurance cover will be reviewed at the final visit

**D The Precept resulted from an adequate budgetary process, progress against the budget was regularly monitored, and reserves were appropriate**

- The reporting of financial results and monitoring of actual against budget was reviewed. Financial updates are provided at the Policy & Resources meetings (and are emailed to all councillors).
- The budget setting process for 2026-27 was in progress at the time of my visits. The process appears thorough and has once again included a review of the earmarked reserves being held.

***Outstanding audit work:***

- Final out-turn against budget will be reviewed at the final visit

**E Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT appropriately accounted for**

The following areas were checked and no issues arose:

- The precept was agreed to Council minutes and bank statements
- CIL income was reviewed and agreed to bank statements
- Rental income was reviewed
- Test checks were made for burial income and allotment income
- Test checks were made for pitch and room hire income.
- Fishing income was reviewed
- The procedures for recording repair café income were reviewed
- Quarterly VAT returns were reviewed. A partial exemption calculation is prepared on a quarterly basis, with a final annual review.

**F Petty Cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for**

- Amounts being paid out of petty cash are small in number and value and are supported by receipts and petty cash vouchers.
- Top-ups have been made by withdrawing cash from an ATM.

**Observations:**

- The petty cash reconciliation is reviewed by the Town Clerk on a monthly basis.
- A check of the petty cash balance should be made by a third party at least once a year.

**G Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with the authority's approvals and PAYE/NI requirements were properly applied**

- Payroll is outsourced to a local payroll company.
- A sample of employees were selected and their rates of pay checked. Deductions for tax, national insurance and pension were also checked. No issues arose.

**H Asset and investments registers were complete, accurate and properly maintained**

- The fixed asset register will be reviewed after the year end.

**I Periodic bank reconciliations properly carried out during the year**

- Bank reconciliations are prepared on a monthly basis and the reconciliations for the Barclays accounts are reviewed by the Town Clerk and the Chair of P&R.
- At the end of each quarter the reconciliation statement also contains the CCLA and NS&I balances.

**Observations:**

- The paperwork supporting the quarterly reconciliation report should include a list of balances for each account produced by the accounting software as well as copies of the bank statements.

**J Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.**

- These will be reviewed at my visit in May or June 2026.

**K If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2024/25 it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt**

- Not applicable – the Council was subject to a limited assurance review in 2024/25.

**L The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation**

- The Council provides the AGARs for the past five years on its website in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- ETC endeavours to comply with the Transparency Code as best practice. Payments over £250 are published on the website on a quarterly basis.

- M The authority, during the previous year (2024/25) correctly provided for the period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations**
- The exercise was advertised on the website in advance of the period commencing.
  - The exercise was carried out for the correct number of days and included the first 10 working days of July as required.
- N The authority has complied with the publication requirements for the 2024/25 AGAR**
- The correct documents were published in advance of the relevant deadlines.
- O The council met its responsibilities as a trustee of trust funds**
- Not applicable - The Council is not a trustee for any charities.

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I trust that these comments are self-explanatory, but please do not hesitate to contact me if councillors would like further details. I should like to thank the Council officers for their assistance during my visits.

Yours faithfully



Claire Connell

**Earley Town Council Meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**Agenda Item 10.1 – FINANCE - FEES & CHARGES 2026/27**

At its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026, members of the Amenities & Leisure Committee made the following recommendations in relation to the fees and charges for 2026/27. Details of current charges (2025/26) can be found on the Earley Town Council website.

This information was provided to the Policy & Resources Committee who agreed with the recommendations.

**Mays Lane Cemetery**

- All charges to be increased by 5%

**Culver Lane Allotments**

- All charges to remain unchanged

**Hall Hire**

- 5% increase to bookings on Fri/Sat after 6pm (non-regular)
- All other charges to remain unchanged

**Fishing Permits**

- Adults permit charges to increase by £1
- Child permits to remain unchanged

**Sports Pitch Hire**

- All charges to remain unchanged

**Earley Town Council Meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**Agenda Item 10.2 – FINANCE – MAYS LANE CEMETERY**

At its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026, members of the Amenities & Leisure Committee discussed fees and charges for 2026/27, noting that burial charges for ‘out of area’ applicants at all burial grounds are significantly higher than charges for in area residents.

As Members are aware, ETC is unable to provide additional burial space at Mays Lane Cemetery owing to the constraints of the site but it will be able to provide additional space for the interring of cremated remains.

The space remaining for *new* burials is therefore finite and it’s estimated our capacity will last for approximately 12 months. Members of the Amenities & Leisure Committee therefore discussed the idea of restricting the use of *new* burial plots to Earley and Woodley residents only and no longer accepting ‘out of area’ applicants for *new* burials.

***New burial plots available*** – there are 11 *new* plots currently available. We may be able to provide a few more as there are specific, small areas that have not yet been test dug (a process used when there appears to be space but no records are available to confirm the fact).

***Annual numbers of new burials*** – in 2025, there were 17 *new* burials, 2 of which were ‘out of area’ and 15 were either Earley or Woodley residents. So far in 2026, there have been, or are booked, 4 *new* burials, 1 of which is ‘out of area’ and 3 are Earley/Woodley residents.

It is important to clarify that the service under consideration is only that of the provision of *new* burial plots. All other services would remain available to Earley/Woodley residents and those who are ‘out of area’ (2<sup>nd</sup> burials; interring of cremated remains; ash scattering; applications for memorials and so on).

## Earley Town Council Meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026

### **Agenda Item 11. BUDGET & PRECEPT 2026/27**

Meetings of the Budget Working Party were held on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2025 and 20<sup>th</sup> January 2026. All councillors were invited to both meetings and all were provided with a copy of the draft 2026/27 Budget.

#### **Ear Marked Reserves**

During 2025/26 councillors conducted a full review of ear marked reserves (funds put aside for specific purposes or projects). Discussions at the Budget Working Party meetings resulted in councillors agreeing to the following amendments to ear marked reserves, all of which have been incorporated into the draft budget:

Devolution – a new Devolution EMR has been created to enable ETC to respond positively to devolution opportunities, assets and/or services, should it consider the opportunity to be appropriate for ETC and in the best interests of its residents. Fund = £150k.

Youth Services – councillors supported expanding ETC's youth service provision. EMR to be increased to £75k.

Local Transport – ETC to support local transport services if it considers a business case has been made and there are appropriate levels of benefit to its residents. Fund = £100k.

Sol Joel MUGA – Quotes to be obtained for the refurbishment of the MUGA at Sol Joel Park. Fund = £5k.

Cemetery Extension – as ETC is unable to extend the burial area at Mays Lane Cemetery due to site constraints and will only be able to expand its facilities for the interring of cremated remains, councillors agreed to reduce this EMR by moving £100k to the Dilapidations/Refurbishment EMR.

Environmental Projects – an additional £20k to be put into this EMR.

#### **Charges and Fees**

The Amenities and Leisure Committee have proposed minimal increases to some of ETC's charges and fees, others remain unchanged. These recommendations are supported by the Policy & Resources Committee and have been presented to this Council meeting for approval.

#### **Elections**

The amount put aside to cover election costs has been increased following notification from WBC that its charges to ETC would be increasing by an average of 24%. ETC has all-out elections in May 2027, costs to the town council could be in excess of £50k.

#### **Dilapidations**

It is likely that expenditure on this will be significant in the coming year. Several ETC assets are of an age when significant repairs and improvements may be needed, for example SJP pavilion and Radstock House. Whilst work such as improved heating systems may be funded from the Net Zero EMR, other works ie roof repairs, updating bathroom facilities etc, will be funded from the Dilapidations fund.

#### **Staffing Levels**

Expenditure in 2025/26 was below budget for several reasons, some of which were out of our control. In 2026/27 the new caretaking system will be well established and the Bike Workshop Co-ordinator will be in post. In early Spring we will assess our outdoor staffing levels and recruit if necessary.

**General Reserves** – a healthy level of general reserves (GR) is essential for all parish and town councils, they often have limited sources of income outside of the precept. ETC's GR level has been reduced in previous years to ensure they are no higher than necessary. They should reflect the scale of a town council's day to day expenditure and, in ETCs case, the fact that employing its own staff rather than relying on outside contractors means substantial staff costs which cannot be quickly reduced. The officer recommendation is that ETC's GR level should be in the region of £700 – 750k. The draft budget document predicts a GR level of £670k as at 31/3/27 which, whilst being below our previous recommendation, is not of concern to the RFO and Finance Officer as there are sufficient EMR reserves that could be called upon if necessary.

Note – the draft Budget 2026/27 assumes a 0% increase to the 2026/27 precept.

Members should also note that the Sibly and CIL reserves can be used on specific expenditure only and cannot form part of the GR.

## **PRECEPT**

At the Budget Working Party meetings councillors discussed precept levels for 2026/27.

Two proposals in relation to the precept were made, these are presented to Council for discussion and resolution:

### **1. No increase to the precept**

2026/27 Precept = £1,058,105

Band D £87.58 (a decrease of 48p per year on 2025/26)

Impact on GR – predicted GR as at 31/3/27 = £670,146

### **2. Increase the precept by 1%**

2026/27 precept = £1,068,686

Band D £88.46 (an increase of 39p per year on 2025/26)

Impact on GR – predicted GR as at 31/3/27 increased by £10,581 to £680,727

Members to discuss and **RESOLVE** as appropriate.

# EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

## Notice of Meetings

2026/2027



Notice is hereby given of the following meetings of the Council and its Committees

	Amenities & Leisure	Planning	Policy & Resources	Council
	(Wednesday 7.00pm)	(Tuesday 7.00pm)	(Wednesday 7.00pm)	(Wednesday 7.00pm)
2026	20th May	12th May		ANNUAL 6th May MTG
		9th June	10th June	
	22nd July	7th July		8th July
		4th August		
		8th September	9th September	16th September
	14th October	6th October		
		3rd November	11th November	25th November
		8th December		
2027	13th January	12th January	20th January	
		9th February		3rd February
	3rd March	9th March	10th March	24th March
		6th April		

The Annual Meeting of the Town Council will be held on 6th May 2026

All Council meetings are held at the Council Offices, Radstock Lane, Earley  
Members of the public are welcome to attend

In addition, the Town Council will host the Annual Town Meeting on Tuesday 21st April 2026 at 7pm  
Maiden Place Community Centre, everybody welcome

**Earley Town Council**  
**Council Meeting 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**Agenda Item 13 - ETC CHAIRS GROUP MEETING**

Notes

An ETC Chairs Group meeting took place on **9<sup>th</sup> December 2025**.

Present at the meeting were Cllr N Brock (Chair of Council and Chair of Amenities & Leisure Committee), Cllr D Hare (Chair of Policy & Resources Committee), Cllr A Neal (Chair of Planning & Transport Committee) and J Friend, Town Clerk.

Matters discussed:

**Budget & Precept**

Agreed second Budget Working Party meeting would be held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

**Bus Services – Request for Funding**

Discussed importance of gaining as much information as possible on matters such as evidence of need, co-funders and so on. Agreed the matter would require opportunities for deliberation by all councillors before any decisions could be made.

**Centrepoint**

JF updated them on recent discussions with WBC re possible Centrepoint lease.

**Crescent Centre**

Cllr T Maher, as a trustee of Earley Charity had indicated that the Crescent Centre may be interested in working more collaboratively with ETC. No information on the nature of such collaboration was available so the matter was just noted.

**Borough Mayor's Walk**

Cllr Neal pointed out that the borough mayor was doing a charity walk, starting and finishing in Earley, no contact had been made with ETC or with Earley's Town Mayor. Cllr Brock suggested she would be willing to accompany the borough mayor on part of the walk in Earley and would contact her with her offer.

**Climate Emergency Action Plan**

Cllr Neal observed that the CEAP had not been reviewed even though it had been agreed that this would be done annually. He suggested much of it was out of date and in need of a revamp. Agreed to put the matter on the February full council agenda, to appoint to the CE working group and get the review started. In the meantime, Cllr Neal, who is happy to be on the working group, will start reviewing the original to identify areas that require updating and areas that may be missing altogether.

## Notes

An ETC Chairs meeting took place on **22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026**.

Present: Cllrs N Brock, D Hare, A Neal and the Town Clerk.

Matters discussed:

### **Bus Services – Request for Funding**

Noted that this had been discussed by the Bus Working Party, the Planning & Transport Committee and the Policy & Resources Committee. There was still a lot more information required and a report would be going to the full Council meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

### **Crescent Centre**

No movement on this. Cllr Brock, as ETC's representative to the Crescent Centre, will be attending a trustees' meeting in March.

### **Cemetery Footbridge**

Neither the Town Clerk nor the Operations Manager had received any meaningful responses on how this WBC project was progressing. We are aware that it has progressed, WBC has allocated funding, but WBC is not communicating with us. Cllr Hare, as Leader of ETC, had sent a letter to WBC and Cllr Neal, as Chair of Planning & Transport, had emailed the officer in charge – still no meaningful response. It would appear that the only communication that has been received on the matter was from a borough officer to Cllr M Smith in his borough councillor capacity. Attendees at the meeting were angry that, once again, WBC has shown a complete lack of respect for the town council and the fact that their project is on ETC land yet they will not consult with the landowner, ETC.

Concern was expressed that WBC contractors could start cutting down ETC trees without our knowledge or permission (as they had done at Maiden Place Community Centre). The Town Clerk will investigate to see if there is some form of legal letter that ETC can send to WBC to try to make them communicate with us on this matter.

### **Climate Emergency Action Plan**

Cllr Neal had found templates for such documents that were designed for use by town and parish councils and would provide these to the working group once membership was agreed at next month's full council meeting.

### **Declarations of Interest**

Discussed the recent situation where a dual hatted councillor wished to make a declaration of interest at a town council meeting, the declaration having been drafted by a WBC officer and deemed inappropriate by the officer clerking the town council meeting. Agreed with the Town Clerk that councillors are members of town council standing committees in their capacity as an elected town councillor and that the current wording used at meetings of the Planning & Transport Committee for declarations of interest for those councillors who also sit on the WBC planning committee was clear and appropriate.

**MERA – SIDS**

MERA had applied to WBC for Speed Indicator Devices to be installed in Silverdale Road but WBC had declined, stating that their Traffic Management Team had reviewed the request and closed it. MERA had asked if the town council would adopt the request on MERA's behalf. The Chairs suggested that the highways authority would require evidence that SIDS were required in this location (complaints, accident figures etc), as would ETC if it were to adopt such a request. JF to respond to MERA asking what evidence of need has been provided to WBC and what can be provided.

## Full Council Meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026

### **Agenda Item 14 – LOCAL BUS SERVICES**

#### **Background**

At its meeting in July 2025, Council asked for the Bus Working Group to be re-formed and asked to draft comments to be submitted to WBC, in relation to its Transport Network Review.

In September 2025, the Bus Working Group, WBC's Community Transport Manager and WBC's Active Travel Officer met to discuss the Town Council's comments and, in November 2025, a letter was received from WBC requesting the Town Council review some options for transport improvements in Earley and consider if the Town Council would be open to making a financial contribution to the services.

The Bus Working Group drafted a further response and a presentation was given by WBC's Community Transport Manager to the Planning & Transport Committee at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2026. The Planning & Transport Committee comments on the draft response and the presentation noted that the funding amounts being requested were very high and that it would appear that evidence of need for these increases had not been demonstrated. Whilst councillors were not averse to considering providing financial support to local bus services, they were of the view that a lot more information would need to be provided before any decisions could be made. General thoughts were that Earley is already well served with bus services and that the 4/4a services already provide a service from Earley to Wokingham.

At its meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2026, the Policy & Resources Committee further discussed the Bus Working Group's draft response to WBC's request for funding.

#### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made by the Policy & Resources Committee to Council, in relation to the funding requests being made by WBC, in principle, for a 5-year period, starting April 2027. (See Bus Working Group's draft response document, questions 9 a/b/c/d/e)

1. Bus service contracts for 19 a/b/c are due to end in 2026 and WBC is looking to extend the contracts between September 2026 & March 2027.  
Request = £754.37 one off cost

The *recommendation* is that ETC agrees to fund this option.

2. Option to jointly fund a new Lower Earley to Wokingham service  
Request = Up to £120,000 per year (subject to tender and other funding partner requests to Wokingham Town Council, Winnersh Parish Council)

The *recommendation* is that ETC is unable to comment on funding this in principle, as no evidence has been provided to show that there is a demand for such a service and there are already services that run from Earley to Wokingham. A breakdown of how the £120,000 has been calculated has also not been provided. As such, no real business case from WBC has been presented. Such a business case is required in order for ETC to consider this request.

3. Option of additional evening journeys on the 19b service between 8pm – 11pm  
Request = Up to £50,000 per year (subject to tender)

The *recommendation* is that ETC does not agree to fund this option, in principle, due to low uptake of people already using current evening services.

4. Option of funding a Sunday service on 19b service  
Request = Up to £80,000 per year (subject to tender)

The *recommendation* is that ETC expresses an interest in funding this option, in principle, as it would provide transport to the Royal Berkshire Hospital on a Sunday, where medical appointments, scans etc are now delivered on a Sunday. However, WBC will need to provide a business case and provide evidence that there is a demand for this service.

5. Contribution towards enhancing community transport from Earley  
Request = Up to £85,000 (one off capital contribution)

The *recommendation* is that ETC does not fund this option, in principle, as providers are able to apply for grants.

Members to **RESOLVE**: -

1. That the recommendations of the Policy & Resources Committee in relation to questions 9 a/b/c/d/e, about funding be accepted.
2. That the Bus Working Group's draft response be amended with the accepted recommendations of the Policy & Resources Committee,
3. That the full draft response with the amendments be accepted and submitted to WBC.

## Wokingham Borough Council's Transport Network Review

Draft response discussed at meeting of Bus Working Group held on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

### Local Bus Services

**1. How well do you think the existing contracted routes of 19a, 19b and 19c meet local needs?**

- The loading on the 19b can be pretty good especially at rush-hour and on Saturday mornings. In the latter case, the bus pickups many University of Reading students heading into town. Many also use the service to visit Asda to do their shopping. In addition, the 19b collects school children near RBH in the afternoon at about 1540 when the bus can become overloaded.
- The 19a (which heads east down Silverdale Road before going to Woodley) involves catching a bus post morning rush-hour. Loading is very light from Earley to Woodley though it does pick-up passengers in Woodley. The same can be said for the 19c which runs from Woodley to Wokingham Road then along Mill Lane before heading up Silverdale Road. There is reasonable loading in Woodley but very few passengers going onto Earley at about 1645.
- The 19a & c services do not go to Asda, Chalfont Surgery or Lower Earley library.
- The 19a/b & c services do stop outside Royal Berks Hospital (RBH) unlike the 21 and 4/4a services.
- The 19a/b & c services do not run on a Sunday so getting to the RBH on that day from Earley is very difficult. All three services do not run late into the evening but this was not considered an issue until it was raised in the letter from WBC.

**2. Do you think any changes should be made to the existing routes to better help meet the needs of residents in Earley?**

- Both the 19a and 19c services do not go to Asda, Lower Earley library or Chalfont Surgery. From the Silverdale Road area you need to walk to Beech Lane to catch the 19b to get to the above destinations.
- The 19a and 19c services currently do not go to Rushey Way which is considered to be the start of Lower Earley. Currently if you wish to catch the 19a or 19c you need to walk from Lower Earley to Silverdale Road.
- To make the 19a and 19c more accessible to Lower Earley residents, it is suggested that the current route of the 19a is amended so that at the bottom of Silverdale Road the bus turns right onto Gipsy Lane and at the junction with Rushey Way goes left before turning left onto Toseland Way and then continuing up Mill Lane on the existing route. (Please see option 1 map).
- An alternative route would be to head from Gipsy Lane up Rushey Way before turning down Kilnsea Drive before looping back along Rushey Way and then onto Toseland Way/Mill Lane as previously suggested. (Please see option 2 map ).
- Both suggested routes provide more options for Lower Earley residents and more opportunities for the bus company to pick up more passengers. Although the second option would take longer to complete than now. The current 19a and 19c services are often early

and have significant dwell-time at the Wokingham Road stops.

- The Kilnsea Drive option also gives eastern Lower Earley residents access to a service (19c) serving the Royal Berkshire Hospital as well as a service to central Woodley (19a). However, it does not resolve the problem of getting from Silverdale Road to Asda without a change onto a 21 bus.

### **3. Is the Town Council supportive of a new route between Earley and WokinghamTown?**

- The message often received from Earley residents is the lack of a bus service to Wokingham from Lower Earley.
- There is a frequent 4/4a bus service along the Wokingham Road for Earley residents but it is pretty inaccessible for those walking from Lower Earley in the Rushey Way area.
- One solution is to catch the 19b bus to Earley Gate and then walk to the Three Tuns to pick up a 4/4a service to Wokingham. This requires a fair degree of planning to minimise the delay between the hourly 19b and the more frequent 4/4a services. Also, you will be charged for two bus journeys each way and having to take two buses could deter people from bus travel.
- Another solution is to catch the 19a bus from Silverdale Road to the George pub bus stop on the Wokingham Road and then change onto a 4/4a service to Wokingham. The same issues with planning and bus fare charges will apply here too.
- It is possible to plan these journeys as well as keeping costs down by use of the Reading Buses app as well as by the use of fare capping, but this may be too complicated for the average casual bus user especially those without access to a smartphone.
- If getting to Wokingham from Lower Earley is too complicated, expensive and time consuming, residents will simply drive to Wokingham, not travel to the town or go to Reading where there are more direct bus options
- A new bus service from Lower Earley to Wokingham would be beneficial to:
  - Young people going to WBC schools such as Holt, Forest, Emmbrook and St Crispins or to travel to Winnersh or Wokingham to meet up with friends It would also be an alternative to travelling to Reading.
  - Those visiting Wokingham Hospital, though the walk from the railway station where the bus would be expected to stop is a reasonable distance, so may not be an option for those less abled.
  - Those wanting to visit the WBC offices.
  - Those wanting to visit Wokingham town centre to shop/drink/have a meal as an alternative to going to Reading.
- Town Councillors may support a new bus service but would need to know more about the financial amounts which ETC would be asked to fund for all or part of the service There are also concerns that WBC may also come to ETC looking for a significant increase in the subsidy for the 19a/b/c services when it is up for renewal. The required subsidies would also need to be paid each year for a specified period.
- Town Councillors who may not live in Lower Earley may feel a business case for a Lower Earley to Wokingham bus service has not been made and the effort/funding should go into supporting existing 19a/b/c services.

**4. How well do you think the new Lower Earley to Wokingham link meets the needs of residents in Earley?**

- ETC have a number of suggestions to the proposed WSP route:
  - Route needs to stop outside ASDA where the 19b currently ends before heading up Elm Lane. The loop round Rushey Way feels unnecessary.
  - Route needs to go down Silverdale Road instead of Beech Lane to allow Silverdale Road residents access to ASDA. However, the problem with diverting the service down Silverdale Road is that it avoids a large part of western and central Lower Earley which is the point of having the bus service in the first place.

A diagram showing suggested changes to the WSJ option can be found at the end of this document.

**5. If a new service were to be introduced which of the following routing options is preferable and why:**

**a) a service via Lower Earley Way and Reading Road compared to a service via Lower Earley Way and Hatch Farm Way.**

- The option of routing the bus up Reading Road allows Lower Earley residents to get off on Wokingham Road and walk to Winnersh Triangle Railway Station. However routing the service up Wokingham Road duplicates, the existing 4/4a services.
- Routing the bus service via Hatch Farm Way provides a service which does not exist today and provides a short-cut to heading round the cinema roundabout and then up the Reading Road. The downside is the service would not serve Winnersh Triangle station but could be diverted to pass by Sainsbury's at Winnersh crossroads as well as dropping off near Winnersh station.
- A bus service serving Winnersh Crossroads opens up the opportunity of a service to Twyford railway station passing by the entrance to Dinton Pastures. There is also an option here to catch a 4/4a service to Wokingham though there is still the problem of waiting and being charged for a second bus journey. Either way the bus would serve local schools.

**b) A service via Rushey Way compared to a service via Silverdale Road**

- A service via Rushey Way would be far more accessible for those living in Lower Earley but it would largely duplicate the already frequent 21 service. Perhaps the service ought to be routed down Kilnsea Drive to collect more passengers.
- A service via Silverdale Road would be useful for passengers wanting to visit ASDA and Chalfont Surgery but it would miss out on the Lower Earley passengers. Loading via Silverdale Road could be low.

**6. Given that there is only limited funding available, do you think the borough should prioritise funding the existing 19a, 19b, 19c as they currently operate over any new services?**

- Loading on 19b can be high especially on Saturday mornings and during school hours. It would be interesting to see how close 19b was to paying for itself and whether subsidy could be reduced.

- The 19a and 19c services often have low loading and need amendment as described previously. Do Silverdale Road residents really want a bus going to Woodley?

**7. If additional funding were to be found, which of the following enhancements do you think should be prioritised?**

**a) funding a new route to Wokingham Town Council**

- Possibly but not at the expense of existing services. ETC may find it difficult to fund significant amounts to support 19a/b/c together and a new Lower Earley to Wokingham or Twyford service.

**b) enhancing the operating hours of the existing 19b service (8pm to 11pm)**

- If a 19b bus user has to catch a later bus it is likely that they will get a 21 bus and walk. A late evening service is not something that immediately is considered needed.

**b) providing a Sunday service on the existing 19b service**

- Given Sunday shopping in Reading and that the RBH is a 24/7 operation, it feels that there is a good business case for a bus service serving Lower Earley and the RBH. The 19b also serves ASDA and might be beneficial for University students (not to mention local residents living in the south of the town) wanting to do their weekly shops. On a Sunday there are no bus services in Earley to RBH.

**d) funding an increase in capacity for community transport for the Earley area**

- Community transport groups can apply for grants from Earley Town Council and we would look on any application seriously. The issue is not with the age of vehicles they use but the shortage of volunteer drivers and the number able to drive these vehicles with an appropriate driving licence.

**8. Are there any other comments the Town Council wishes to make about the services or information provided?**

- Many comments have been made about getting to Wokingham from Lower Earley by taking two buses which means paying two separate fares each way. Travelling from Earley/Lower Earley to Winnersh/Wokingham involves travelling through two bus zones (Reading and Wokingham) which inevitably results in higher fares. Reading buses needs to consider cross bus zone ticket to entice motorists to use the 19abc and 4/4a bus combinations.

## Funding

**9. Please could you confirm which of the following, if any, Earley Town Council would be willing to fund, in principle:**

~~a) a continuation of the current funding arrangement towards the 19a, 19b and 19c services, on a pro-rata basis, to enable the extension of the existing contracts until March 2026? The cost of this would be £754.37— (Following WBC's presentation given at the Planning & Transport Committee meeting, this question has changed).~~

**a) bus service contracts for 19 a/b/c are due to end in 2026 and WBC are looking to extend the contracts between September 2026 and March 2027. This cost would be £754.37.**

- Yes

**b) to jointly fund a new service between Earley and Wokingham? Whilst costs will be subject to tender, we would expect the cost to be up to £120,000 per year, for a 5-year period, with the option to extend for one or two further years. Please note that this level of funding is likely to provide an hourly service to Wokingham Town but would be subject to all parties agreeing to funding.**

- There needs to be funding from other local Town/Parish Councils, such as Winnersh Parish Council and Wokingham Town Council, as a new service would be passing through both of those parish/towns, as well as Earley. This is something that would need more analysis and is not something to be rushed into.

**c) to fund additional evening journeys on the 19b service between 8pm and 11pm at a cost of up to £50,000 per year, for a 5-year period**

- Not a priority. Bus services in the evening on the 19b from Reading are often empty.

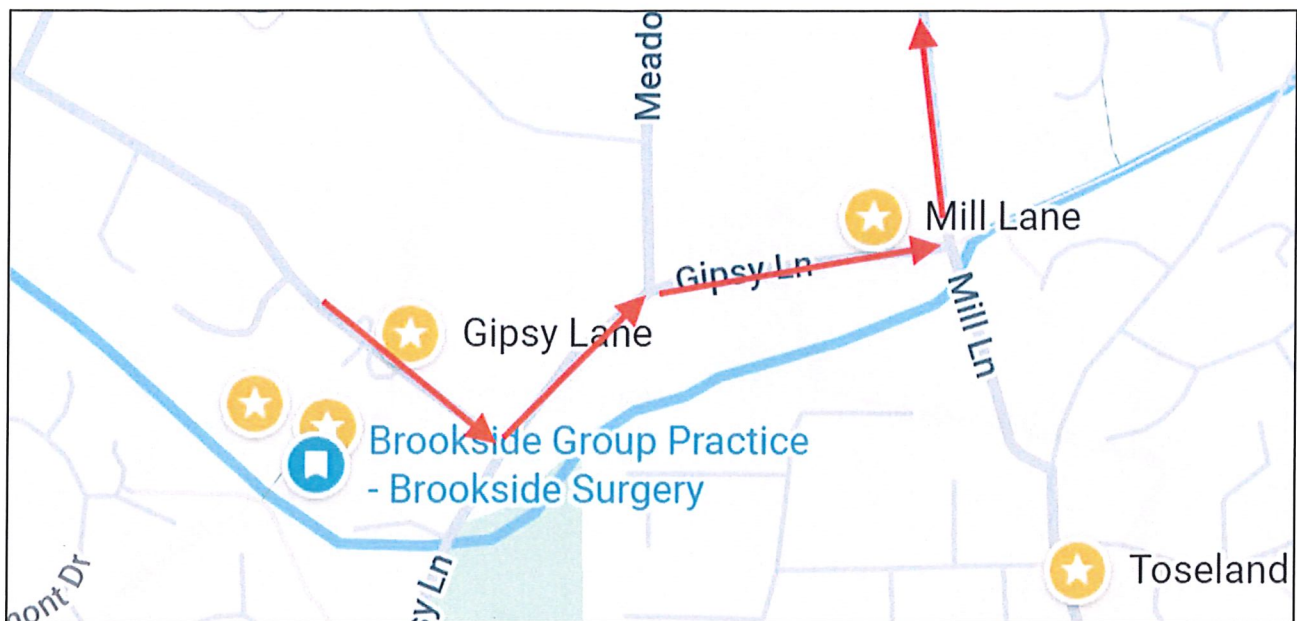
**d) to fund a Sunday service on the 19b service at a cost of up to £80,000 per year, for a 5-year period**

- This needs careful consideration given the prevalence of Sunday shopping and the lack of alternative bus services to the Royal Berkshire hospital.

**e) to fund the purchase of a new minibus for the use by a community transport provider to help cater for trips originating in the Earley area. As a guide the cost of a vehicle like those used by Readibus is £85,000.**

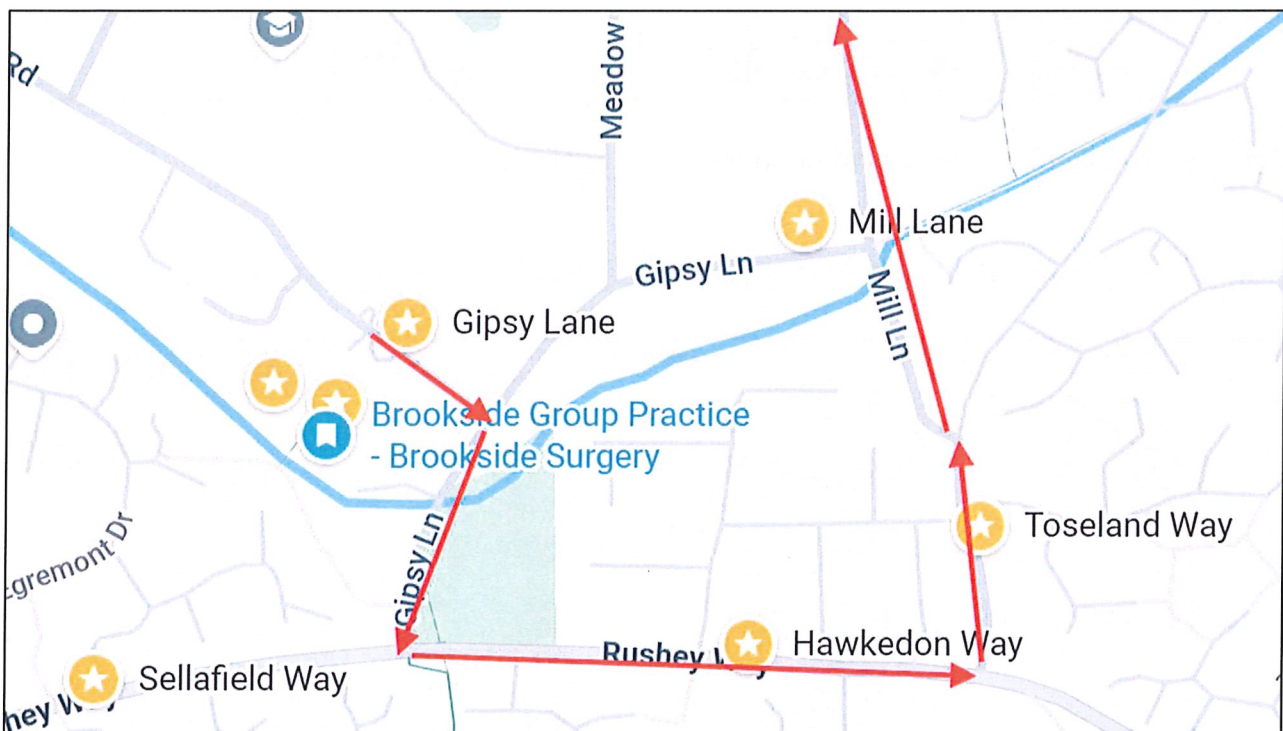
Community Transport providers are able to apply for grants.

Current 19a/c route in Silverdale Road area



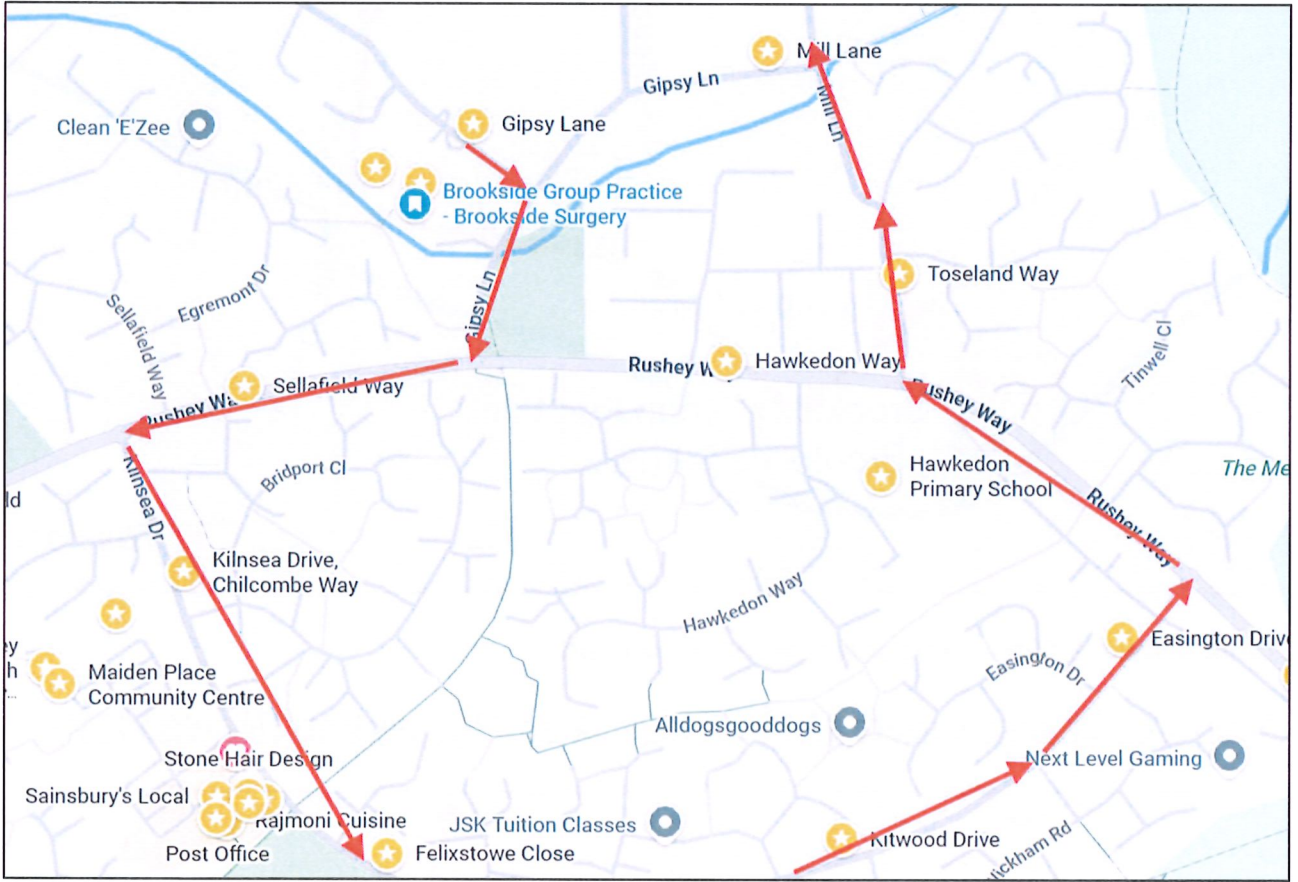
Route shown is 19a – 19c goes in reverse direction.

Option 1 - Changing route of 19a/c to go down Rushey Way/Toseland Way



Route shown is 19a – 19c would go in reverse direction.

### Option 2 - Changing route of 19a/c to go down Kilnsea Drive and Toseland Way



Route shown is 19a – 19c would go in reverse direction.

### Suggestion to WBC's proposed Lower Earley to Wokingham route



Full Council Meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026

**Agenda Item 16 – Tree Preservation Orders**

**Background**

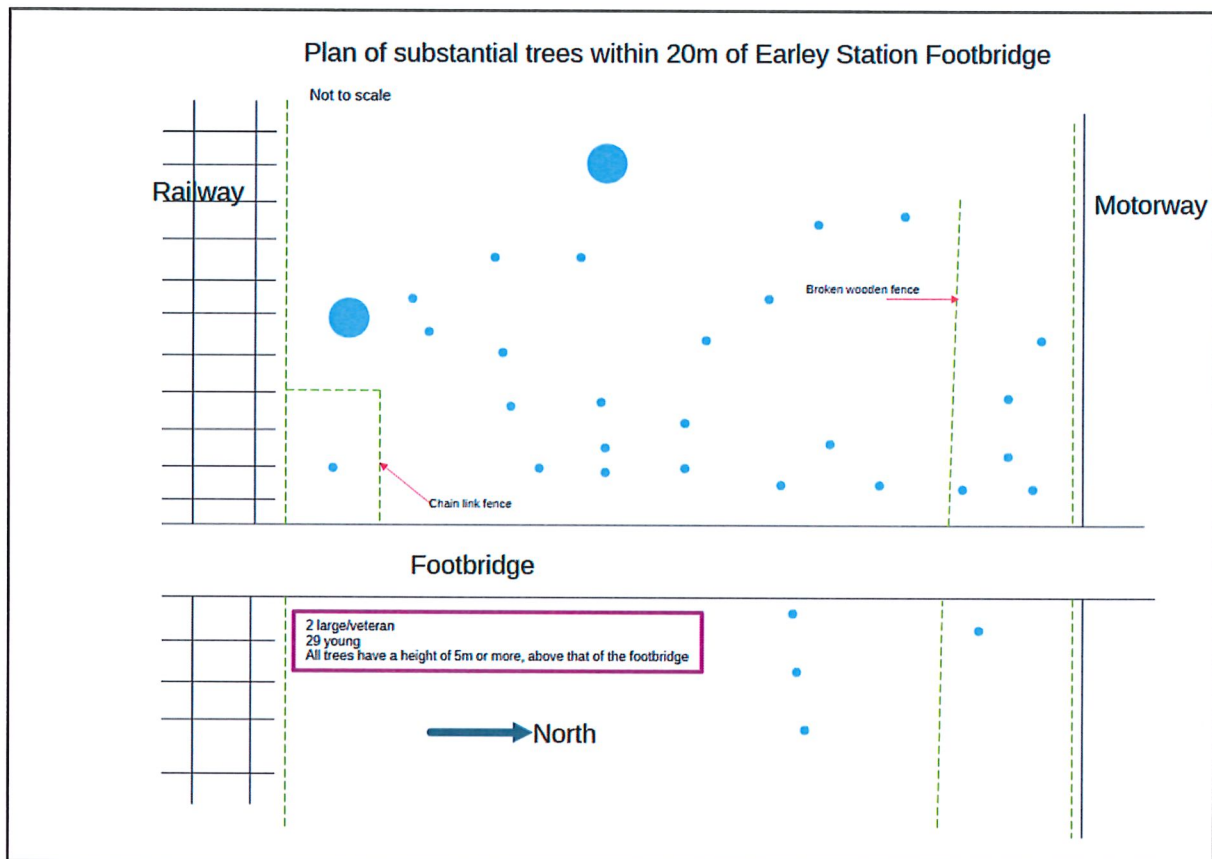
At the Planning & Transport Committee meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2026, Councillor Neal reported that at Wokingham Borough Council’s Executive meeting on 16th October 2025, £1.3 million was added to the capital budget for the Earley station footbridge project.

As ETC had received no communication about the footbridge project, since a WBC Highways Structural Engineer requested access to Town Council land to carry out trial holes around one of the footbridge piers in 2023, the Planning & Transport Committee asked for a letter to be sent to WBC requesting details about the project, timelines and for details on how WBC intended to access the footbridge during the work. The letter was sent, but no response has been received.

Councillor Neal, Chairman of Planning also raised concerns regarding trees located near the footbridge, which do not appear to be subject to Tree Preservation Orders. The concern is that WBC will just fell the trees in order to carry out the footbridge works, should any trees be in the way.

Councillor Neal has identified two large/veteran trees and there are 29 other trees near the footbridge which are younger but are of the same height as the veteran trees, providing greenery and screening to the location.





WBC's website says that the criteria WBC will consider in relation to TPOs is as follows: -

- *The tree(s) must have 'amenity'. Amenity is not defined in law but Government guidance states that Orders should be used to protect selected trees and woodlands if their removal would have a significant negative impact on the local environment and its enjoyment by the public. Amenity assessment could include aspects such as:*

*Visibility - the trees, or at least part of them, should normally be visible from a public place, such as a road or footpath, or accessible by the public.*

*Individual, collective and wider impact – e.g. size and form; future potential as an amenity; rarity, cultural or historic value; contribution to, and relationship with, the landscape; and contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area.*

*Other factors - such as importance to nature conservation, heritage or response to climate change.*

- *It must be 'expedient' to include the trees in a TPO. Expediency is also not defined, but it usually means that there is a risk of trees being felled, pruned or damaged in ways which would have a significant impact on the amenity of the area. The risk does not have to be immediate, in some cases it may be expedient to proactively create TPOs.*
- *An Order can be used to protect individual trees, trees within an area, groups of trees or whole woodlands. Protected trees can be of any size or species, but not usually commercial fruit trees.*
- *The Borough Council currently makes in the region of three TPOs per month. They often include a number of trees in each Order.*
- *Any requests to include trees in a Tree Preservation Order will be considered on their merit and prioritised accordingly.*

More information about Tree Preservation Orders can be found on WBC's website at: -  
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/countryside-parks-and-conservation/trees-hedges-and-grass-cutting/tree-preservation-orders-tpos/how-request-tree-preservation-order>

**Recommendation**

The Planning & Transport Committee would like to recommend that ETC considers applying for a Tree Preservation Order on the veteran tree near to the footbridge and the other 6 trees, which may also be at risk.

Members to **RESOLVE** as appropriate.

Emma Carroll  
Deputy Town Clerk

**Full Council Meeting – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2026**

**Agenda Item 17 – COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

To note that the final recommendations of the CGR panel have been submitted to Wokingham Borough Council for approval. The recommendations are:

- a) Agree to make no changes to the existing arrangements for the parishes of Charvil (paragraph 49), Remenham (paragraph 72), Ruscombe (paragraph 77), Sonning (paragraph 90), St Nicholas Hurst (paragraph 95), and Wargrave (paragraph 110).
- b) Agree the internal warding and ward name changes for the parishes of Twyford (paragraph 105), Winnersh (paragraph 115), Wokingham Town Council (paragraph 122) and Woodley Town Council (paragraph 136) subject to Local Government Boundary Commission for England consent where needed.
- c) Agree the boundary changes between Shinfield parish (paragraph 85) and Earley Town (paragraph 60) and the consequential changes to the warding arrangements of the parish and town noting that these changes are subject to consent from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.*
- d) Agree the changes in the area of Arborfield & Newland parish (paragraph 38), Barkham parish (paragraph 44), Finchampstead parish (paragraph 67) and Swallowfield parish (paragraph 100) noting the implementation timetable at paragraph 27.
- e) Agree the changes to the boundary between Finchampstead Parish Council (paragraph 67) and Wokingham Town Council (paragraph 122), subject to consent from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England
- f) Agree that there are no changes to the boundary between Finchampstead Parish Council (paragraph 67) and Wokingham Without Parish Council (paragraph 131), therefore keeping the “Crowthorne Triangle” part of Finchampstead Parish.
- g) Agree that the existing southern boundary is retained between Wokingham Town and Wokingham Without Parish but acknowledging the need to expedite another Community Governance Review in the area of the Wokingham Southern Distributor Road before 2035 once residents are in occupation.

**AND**

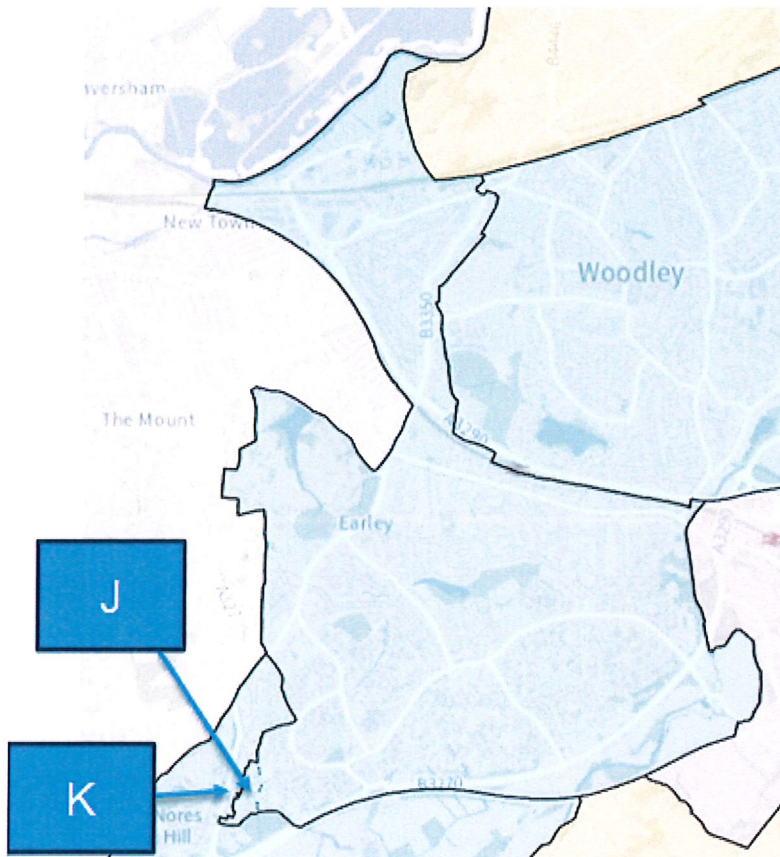
To **agree** to delegate authority to the Monitoring Officer to prepare and make orders under Section 86 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to give effect to the recommendations, including such ancillary and consequential provisions as are considered necessary, and to publish the decisions of the Council and reasons for them and to bring them to the attention of persons interested in the review as soon as is reasonably practicable.

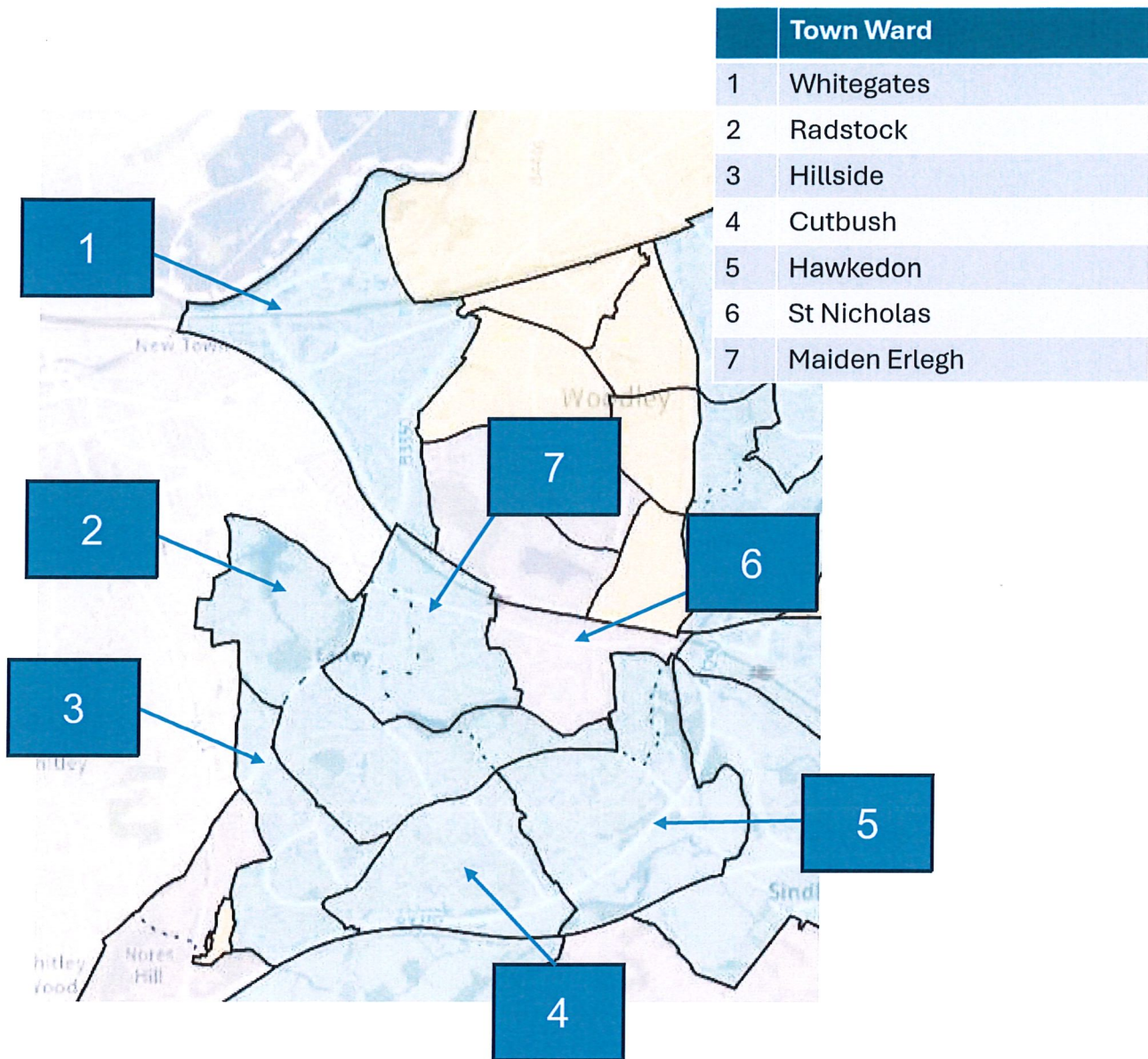
**NOTE**

Both the Town Clerk and Cllr A Neal notified WBC that the maps and tables relating to Earley in the original recommendation document were poorly drafted and, in some areas, unreadable. Replacement maps and tables have now been attached to the original document.

**REPLACEMENT MAP ON PAGE 79 OF THE COUNCIL AGENDA PACK**

**Map 4.5 Earley Town Council Internal Warding Arrangements incorporating Area J & K.**





**Table 4.1**

Ward	Current Electorate	Revised Electorate	Councillors	Current Councillors per Elector	Revised Councillors per Elector
Cutbush	3800	3800	4	950	950
Hawkedon	4007	4007	4	1002	1002
Hillside	2959	3163	3	986	1054
Maiden Erlegh	2940	2940	3	980	980
Radstock	4447	4447	5	889	889
St Nicolas	2114	2114	2	1057	1057
Whitegates	3278	3278	4	820	820

RECORD OF COUNCILLOR ATTENDANCES - 2025/26

NAME OF COUNCILLOR	COUNCIL					AMENITIES & LEISURE					PLANNING												POLICY & RESOURCES						
	05	07	09	11	02	03	05	07	10	01	03	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	12 (E)	01	02	03	04	06	09	11	01	03
R. AHLAWAT	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓																				
A. BASSETT	✓	✓	✓	✓			B	✓	✓												✓				✓				
A. BRADLEY	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓																				
N. BROCK	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓			
R. BROWNE	✓						✓		✓												✓								
R. COOK	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓												✓								
M. DE JONG	✓		✓						✓			B	✓	B	✓	✓	✓	✓	B					✓					
J. EASTWELL	✓	✓	✓	✓																					✓				
D. HARE	✓	✓	✓	✓											✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓					
T. HOLTON	✓	✓	✓																					✓					
M. IYENGUMWENA	✓	B		✓								B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓									
S. JORDAN	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓								
P. JORGENSEN	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	B	✓	B									
I. KHAYINZA	✓		✓	✓																									
G. LITTLER	✓	✓	✓	✓																				✓		✓			
A. LONG	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓												✓			✓		✓			
T. MAHER		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓																✓		✓		
S. MATTHEWS	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓																✓		✓		
A. NEAL	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓		✓		
S. NEWTON	✓	✓	✓	✓					B																✓		✓		
A. NEWTON		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓																				
H. SARASAN		✓	✓																										
C. SMITH	✓	B	✓	✓								B	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	B	B								
M. SMITH	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓								
K. YABSLEY																													

(shaded cell denotes non-representation on Committees)

R = Representing Town Council    B = Attending Borough Meeting    ✓ = In Attendance    F = Attending Fire Authority Meeting    A = Approved Leave of Absence

**IMPREST ACCOUNT - Payment Requests 1142 - 1147**  
Vouchers between 15th January 2025 - 25th January 2026

<b>Number</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Amount</b>
1142	Salaries Jan 26	£33,780.92
1143	HMRC PAYE & NI Jan 26	£13,290.92
1144	LGPS Pension Jan 26	£14,007.87
1145	RBL Poppy Wreaths	£156.00
1146	Damage Deposit Return GV	£50.00
1147	Damage Deposit Return FP	£50.00
	<b>Total Payments</b>	<b><u>£61,335.71</u></b>