



Compton Parish Council

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Response to the West Berkshire Council's Local Plan Scoping Consultation (2026)

Developing a vision

1. In order to guide the development of the Local Plan vision, what do you think makes West Berkshire distinctive?

West Berkshire's distinctiveness lies in its predominantly rural character, its extensive coverage by the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, and its network of villages with strong historic identity. The district combines high-quality landscapes, biodiversity, heritage assets and agricultural land with market towns that provide key services. This rural pattern, and the relationship between settlements and countryside, is central to the area's identity and should remain a guiding principle for future planning.

2. What do you think are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing West Berkshire that the Local Plan should prioritise?

The main challenge is accommodating significantly increased housing requirements while protecting the National Landscape, managing infrastructure capacity, and maintaining the character of rural settlements. Opportunities include focusing growth in sustainable locations, prioritising brownfield land, and strengthening town centres. Housing delivery should prioritise homes for local people, including existing residents and those with a strong local connection who have been forced to move away due to lack of suitable housing, with clear evidence of need shown in Compton's Housing Need Survey and reinforced by the loss of older social housing stock through disposals by Sovereign. The Local Plan can also support climate resilience, nature recovery and improved transport links, ensuring growth is planned alongside infrastructure and environmental protection. The forthcoming creation of Ridgeway Council will require the Local Plan to integrate with a wider strategic area to ensure continuity.

Planning for homes and healthy communities

3. How can the Local Plan deliver well-designed, healthy, sustainable places?

The Local Plan should ensure development is landscape-led, reflects local character, and is supported by infrastructure from the outset. New homes should be located where services, transport and community facilities already exist or can be delivered sustainably. Policies should secure high design quality, energy efficiency, biodiversity enhancement, active travel routes and accessible green spaces. Parking layouts should avoid tandem spaces where one vehicle

blocks another, as this often leads to overspill parking on streets and reduces safety and amenity. Pavements should be retained on smaller residential roads to ensure safe, inclusive routes for visually impaired residents, wheelchair users, pushchair users and others who rely on level pedestrian access. Layouts must support accessibility, active travel and everyday usability for all residents.

4. Where should new homes be focused in West Berkshire, and why?

New homes should be focused in the most sustainable locations: existing towns, areas with strong transport links, and places where infrastructure capacity can be expanded. Rural villages within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, such as Compton, face environmental and infrastructure constraints and have already absorbed significant recent growth, so further large-scale development would not be appropriate. Housing delivery should prioritise homes for local people to support community stability. Affordable housing for local people is particularly important, as shown by Compton's Housing Needs Survey and the disposal of older social housing stock, especially bungalows, which reduces suitable options for residents with long-standing local connections. A strategic approach is needed to avoid dispersing growth into constrained rural areas. The Local Plan should allow future coordination across the wider Ridgeway Council area once reorganisation takes effect.

5. As part of our spatial strategy, we need to consider a range of options for how West Berkshire could grow over the longer term. Do you think the new Local Plan should explore whether a new settlement could help deliver homes and supporting infrastructure in the future?

No

6. If a new settlement is considered appropriate, where do you think it should be located and what factors should guide that decision?

The Parish Council does not support the creation of a new settlement within this part of West Berkshire. The landscape, biodiversity value and groundwater-dependent chalk environment mean that locating a new settlement would cause significant harm. The area lacks the transport, utilities and foul water capacity needed to support a new settlement, and the environmental impact would be unacceptable. The feasibility would depend heavily on definition and scale, but the Parish Council does not consider a new settlement in this area to be realistic or sustainable.

7. What types of housing are most needed?

Select up to three options:

- ✓ Affordable housing (including social rent and affordable rent)
- ✓ Homes for families (2+ bedrooms)

Homes for first-time buyers

✓ Specialist and supported housing (e.g. supported living, care homes, extra care)

Accommodation for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

Self-build and custom house building

Rural exception housing

Other

8. The Council undertook a Call for Sites earlier this year to identify land that may be available for housing development. Are there any additional sites that you think present an opportunity for development and would like to promote for housing through the Local Plan process?

Compton Parish Council does not identify any land within the parish that is suitable for allocation. Compton has already absorbed substantial recent growth through the Institute site (160 dwellings) and a further 40-home scheme at the Baxter site is currently progressing through the planning process. The Parish Council considers that no further sites should be allocated in Compton for the duration of the new Local Plan. Compton lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and faces significant infrastructure constraints, including foul water capacity, digital connectivity limitations and rural road pressures. Any further allocations would not be sustainable and would undermine the village's character. The Parish Council also wishes to emphasise that future housing delivery should prioritise homes for local people wherever possible.

Supporting our economy

9. How should the Local Plan support economic growth, including the rural economy?

By ensuring employment land is directed to sustainable locations with appropriate transport links and infrastructure. Rural economies should be supported through small-scale, appropriate rural enterprise, reuse of existing buildings, and protection of valued employment sites. Large industrial uses should not be directed to rural villages within the National Landscape. The Plan should also support digital connectivity, local services and opportunities for home-based and flexible working.

10. How can the Local Plan best support the vitality and viability of West Berkshire's town and district centres?

The Plan should help centres adapt to changing retail patterns by supporting mixed uses, flexible workspace, leisure, culture and community facilities. Enhancing public realm, active travel routes and accessibility will strengthen vitality. Policies should encourage redevelopment of underused sites and support independent businesses. Strong centres reduce pressure on rural villages by concentrating services in sustainable locations.

11. The Council undertook a Call for Sites earlier this year to identify employment land that may be available for development. Are there any additional sites that you think present an opportunity for development and would like to promote for employment uses through the Local Plan process?

No response

Infrastructure

12. What infrastructure issues, challenges or opportunities do we face and how can they be addressed?

Key issues include school capacity, healthcare access, public transport limitations, rural road constraints, digital connectivity, drainage and foul water capacity. Compton's foul water network is already operating beyond safe capacity, with repeated tankering, surcharging, infiltration issues and no completed upgrade to Compton Sewage Treatment Works. Groundwater infiltration continues to compromise the system, and operational failures demonstrate that the network cannot accommodate additional loading. There is concern that abstraction from the chalk aquifer during prolonged dry periods could affect groundwater levels, with potential consequences for the River Pang and local hydrology. The broadband exchange is at capacity & mobile signal is poor. These represent clear constraints on sustainable growth. The LP must recognise foul water capacity & digital connectivity as essential infrastructure and ensure development is only in areas where these can be expanded sustainably.

13. What approaches should the Council use to secure appropriate infrastructure from new development?

The Plan should use clear policies requiring timely delivery of infrastructure through planning obligations, master-planning, and coordination with providers. Development should demonstrate that schools, healthcare, transport and utilities can be delivered before occupation. Strategic sites should include comprehensive infrastructure packages, reducing pressure on existing communities.

Growth, environment and climate resilience

14. How should the Local Plan protect and enhance the natural and historic environment?

The Local Plan should prioritise protection of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, biodiversity, heritage assets and green infrastructure. Development should be landscape-led, avoid sensitive locations, and deliver measurable biodiversity net gain. Policies should support nature recovery networks, protect water quality, and ensure design responds to local character.

Given Compton's location within the Pang catchment, the Plan should also ensure strong protection for chalk streams, which are highly sensitive to changes in water quality, groundwater levels and hydrological pressure.

Where development is appropriate, priority should be given to homes for local people to support community stability and reduce pressure for further expansion into sensitive landscapes.

15. What should the Local Plan prioritise in responding to climate change?

The Local Plan should prioritise energy-efficient buildings, renewable energy, sustainable drainage, water efficiency, active travel, and resilient green infrastructure. It should avoid directing growth to areas at high flood risk and support measures that reduce carbon emissions and enhance climate resilience.

Engagement

16. What methods of engagement would you find most useful and would encourage you to get involved in consultations on the Local Plan?

Clear, accessible consultation materials, parish-level briefings, online events and early sight of evidence documents support meaningful engagement. It is also important that consultations are timed to align with parish council meeting cycles. Many parish councils do not meet in August, and capacity is reduced during the Christmas period. The current consultation runs across August, which makes it difficult for councils to consider documents at formal meetings and provide timely responses. Major consultations should be timed so they can be introduced at the twice-yearly District Parish Conferences, which provide an established forum for explanation and discussion. Avoiding August and late December would help ensure full participation.

17. We currently use a variety of means to keep you informed, such as email updates, Council newsletters and web articles, social media posts. How would you prefer to be kept informed about future Local Plan consultations and key stages?

Email updates, direct notifications to parish councils, and clear web pages with key documents and timelines are preferred. Regular updates at the District Parish Conference would also be helpful.

18. Are there any barriers that make it difficult for you to engage with the Council on local planning matters?

Timing is a significant barrier. Parish councils typically do not meet in August, and capacity is reduced over the Christmas and New Year period. The current consultation runs across August, which limits the ability of local councils to consider documents at formal meetings and agree responses. Major consultations would benefit from being aligned with the twice-yearly District Parish Conferences, which provide a structured opportunity for officers to explain proposals and answer questions. The volume and complexity of evidence can also be challenging. Early release of summaries, clear mapping and timely communication would help parish councils engage more effectively.

19. Please take this opportunity to make any other comments that do not fit under the questions above regarding what the Local Plan should contain and/or how we should engage with you.

Compton is already expected to absorb significant recent growth through the Institute and Baxter sites. Given its location within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and its limited infrastructure, further large-scale development would not be appropriate. The Local Plan should recognise the constraints affecting rural villages and ensure growth is directed to sustainable locations with capacity for infrastructure delivery. Housing should prioritise local people, including those forced to move away due to lack of suitable options. The Parish Council is concerned that Sovereign continues to dispose of older social housing, particularly bungalows, rather than refurbishing and re-letting them, reducing suitable accommodation for older residents and those with long-standing local ties. The new Local Plan needs to ensure continuity and integration into the future Ridgeway planning framework, so that evidence and representations gathered now remain valid and transferable.