

Response to the West Berkshire Council's Local Plan Integrated Impact Assessment (2026)

Compton Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the West Berkshire Local Plan Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) Scoping Report.

The Parish Council supports the Council's decision to prepare a single integrated assessment covering SEA, EqlA and HIA, and agrees that the new Local Plan should be shaped by robust baseline evidence, clear sustainability objectives and careful consideration of reasonable alternatives. We particularly welcome the emphasis on health, equality, accessibility, climate resilience, biodiversity, landscape, heritage and infrastructure.

Compton's adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan (2022) identifies a consistent local position: Compton should remain a small, contained rural village within its downland setting; development should be landscape-led, dark skies should be protected, local facilities should be safeguarded, and new growth must not worsen transport sustainability. In that context, the Parish Council considers the proposed IIA framework to be broadly appropriate but asks that it is applied with sufficient local sensitivity to ensure that village-scale and parish-specific impacts are properly recognised.

Key comments

1. Stronger recognition of local character and settlement sensitivity

The baseline correctly identifies that Compton lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and contains important landscape, heritage and tranquillity assets. The IIA should give greater weight to the distinctiveness of smaller rural settlements, including Compton, and avoid reliance on district-wide averages that may mask local constraints.

The Compton NDP places strong emphasis on maintaining the village's rural character, open views and dark skies. The IIA should ensure that these qualities are reflected in the appraisal of reasonable alternatives and policy options. This should continue to be a clear principle in the IIA when assessing growth options and site alternatives.

2. Infrastructure capacity must be tested at parish and settlement level

The Scoping Report rightly highlights the need to align growth with infrastructure. For Compton, this is especially important in relation to:

- education provision
- healthcare access
- drainage and foul water capacities
- community facilities

- parking and rural road conditions
- public transport availability

The NDP records longstanding local concern about limited public transport, parking pressure, and the need for development to be properly serviced and supported by essential infrastructure. The IIA should therefore include settlement-level appraisal rather than assuming district-wide provision is sufficient. This should include particular attention to water, foul drainage, power, digital connectivity and the phasing of delivery.

3. Housing mix and affordable housing

The Parish Council supports the objective of meeting identified housing need in sustainable locations. The IIA should test whether emerging options provide a genuine mix of dwelling sizes, tenures and affordability, including homes for younger households, older people, downsizers and local workers.

Compton's NDP highlights the need for smaller homes, rural exception housing, and a balanced housing mix, while also resisting over-intensification that would be out of keeping within the village context. Further weight should also be given to provision for older residents, including care housing, residential homes and specialist accommodation, given the ageing population in and around the Downs and the need for people to be able to downsize or remain locally with support.

4. Health, wellbeing and social inclusion

The health objectives are welcome. The IIA should more explicitly consider:

- access to everyday services in rural areas
- social isolation affecting older residents and those without access to a car
- the needs of disabled people and families with limited mobility
- the importance of local facilities such as the surgery, village hall, open spaces and rights of way

Compton's NDP identifies these as essential to local wellbeing and community cohesion. It would also be helpful for the IIA to recognise the value of community participation and local initiatives in supporting health and wellbeing.

5. Biodiversity, green infrastructure and Rights of Way

The Parish Council supports the biodiversity and green infrastructure objectives. The IIA should ensure that assessment covers:

- ecological connectivity
- hedgerows and local wildlife corridors
- rights of way and recreational routes
- local green spaces
- the wider setting of the National Landscape

The Compton NDP specifically seeks to protect and enhance open space, rights of way, biodiversity and linked green spaces across the Parish. This should include the protection and enhancement of safe walking and cycling routes as part of a wider connected green infrastructure network.

6. Active travel and cycling

The IIA should say more about cycling, not just walking and public transport. In a rural area such as Compton, safe cycle routes between the village and surrounding settlements could make a real difference, particularly with the growing use of e-bikes. Better and safer cycling provision should therefore be considered as part of the assessment of sustainable travel and accessibility.

7. Climate change, drainage and water

The Parish Council supports the strong emphasis on climate resilience, water resources and flood risk. For Compton, the Council should give explicit weight to:

- foul water capacity constraints
- groundwater infiltration issues
- fluvial, surface-water and groundwater flood risk
- the need for confirmed infrastructure upgrades before growth is planned

Growth cannot be considered in isolation from drainage, sewer capacity and the need for confirmed infrastructure upgrades. The IIA should therefore test whether any growth option is deliverable without worsening existing sewer overload and groundwater-related network failures. The IIA should also be explicit about the need to avoid adding pressure to drainage systems that are already constrained.

8. Economy, equestrian activity, tourism and local visitor economy

The economy section should reflect the importance of equestrian activity, including the horse-racing industry, alongside tourism, walking-based visitor activity, and associated hospitality uses, as these are material parts of the district and parish's rural economy. This includes the wider visitor economy, such as cafes, pubs, restaurants and live events, which help sustain village life and local services.

9. Solar energy and low-carbon development

We would like to see stronger emphasis on solar energy, particularly in new-build housing, as part of the transition away from reliance on oil heating and towards lower-carbon homes. This aligns with the NDP's support for carbon-neutral development, renewable energy generation and low-carbon transport and heat.

Suggested additional emphasis in the IIA

The Parish Council recommends that the IIA gives further attention to:

- parish- and settlement-level baseline data where available;
- transport accessibility and car dependency in rural areas;
- cumulative effects on Compton and surrounding villages from growth in nearby settlements;
- impacts on village identity, tranquillity and landscape setting;
- infrastructure phasing and deliverability before site allocation.

Conclusion

Compton Parish Council supports the overall approach of the IIA Scoping Report but asks that it is applied in a way that gives proper weight to the characteristics of Compton as a rural service village within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. In particular, the final IIA should ensure that site selection and policy choices do not undermine the aims of the Compton Neighbourhood Development Plan, or the sensitive environmental, landscape and infrastructure context of the parish.