

Settlement Boundary Review (SBR)

Information for town/parish councils & neighbourhood planning groups March 2021

As you will be aware, as part of our [Local Plan Review \(LPR\)](#), we are undertaking a review of the settlement boundaries across the District.

What are settlement boundaries?

Settlement boundaries are a long established planning tool. They identify the main built up area of a settlement within which development is considered acceptable in principle, subject to other policy considerations. While allowing for development, settlement boundaries protect the character of a settlement and prevent unrestricted growth into the countryside. They create a level of certainty about whether or not the principle of development is likely to be acceptable.

Why are we reviewing settlement boundaries now?

We committed to reviewing the boundaries for all settlements as part of the Local Plan Review to 2037 when we undertook a partial review for some settlements as part of our work on the [Housing Site Allocations Development Plan Document \(HSADPD\)](#). As part of the review process we are also including settlements that currently do not have settlement boundaries.

How are we reviewing the settlement boundaries?

We are taking a landscape led approach to the drawing of settlement boundaries. We have a wealth of information already contained in [landscape character assessments](#) and community led documents such as [town and village design statements](#), [parish plans](#) and [neighbourhood plans](#) which we are using as a guide. We are also undertaking a detailed 'on the ground' community led assessment of each individual settlement. Our settlement boundary review criteria¹ sets out the general principles we will follow when defining a boundary and give guidance as to what would usually be included and what would usually be excluded. A copy of the criteria is set out at the end of this document.

The process so far

We gave all town/parish councils and neighbourhood planning groups across the District an opportunity to undertake an initial review of boundaries in February and March last year. We felt you were likely to be much more aware of particular local issues and concerns than we were and so getting your input at this stage was

¹ We sought comments on our proposed criteria for the settlement boundary review as part of the [second round of Regulation 18 consultation](#) we undertook between 9 November to 21 December 2018. From the comments we received it was clear that there was overwhelming support for the principle of the Council's landscape led approach to the drawing of settlement boundaries. Details are set out in our [Consultation Statement \(June 2019\)](#).

invaluable. As far as possible we have used the results from this exercise as a clear community steer for the way forward. We then considered this information alongside the evidence contained in our existing landscape character assessments and other relevant documents. We have also needed to consider a number of requests that have been submitted by residents and other developers for small extensions to boundaries in some settlements. Taking all of these factors into account we have drawn up proposed new boundaries and have verified our approach by undertaking our own 'on the ground' review of all the settlements across West Berkshire.

What stage are we at now?

We are now seeking your views on the proposed new boundaries.

We have prepared maps showing our proposed new settlement boundaries for those settlements within your parish. For ease of reference, the maps also show the existing boundaries where relevant.

As a general guide you will see that for each settlement most of the changes have been made in order to:

- iron out inconsistencies in boundaries which were previously mapped at a smaller scale
- Include development which is now clearly part of the main built up area
- Align boundaries with residential curtilages where appropriate
- Align boundaries along roads to the edge closest to the settlement
- Include single plot or other small scale development opportunities which would provide infill and rounding off opportunities that are physically, functionally and visually related to the existing built up area, taking account of any environmental development constraints
- Incorporate sites proposed for allocation in the LPR. *(Please note that if any of these sites are removed from the LPR before adoption, then the settlement boundary will be redrawn to exclude them.)*

Timescale

We would welcome your comments on the proposed new settlement boundaries and are giving you 6 weeks to let us know what you think. Please send your comments to us at planningpolicy@westberks.gov.uk by **21 April 2021**.

Next steps

After this consultation ends we will consider all the responses we receive. We will then finalise the boundaries for inclusion in the draft version of the Local Plan Review which we aim to consult on later this Spring.

Many thanks
Planning Policy Team

Settlement Boundary Review Criteria

The Council will take a landscape led approach to the drawing of settlement boundaries.

When reviewing the boundary for any given settlement the Council will consult the following sources, where relevant:

- Landscape Character Assessment for West Berkshire (2019)
- North Wessex Downs AONB Landscape Character Assessment (2002)
- Landscape Sensitivity Studies (2009) for Newbury, Thatcham, Hungerford and West Reading
- Landscape Sensitivity Assessments (2011) for the rural service centres and service villages in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- Landscape Capacity Assessments (2014 and 2015) for potential housing sites in the AONB
- Historic Landscape Characterisation and Historic Environment Character Zoning
- Historic Environment Record
- Settlement character studies such as Village, Town and Parish Design Statements
- Conservation Area Appraisals
- Adopted Parish Plans and Neighbourhood Development Plans

In conjunction with any relevant recommendations from the above studies the Council will also apply the following principles in the revision of settlement boundaries:

Principles of inclusion of land uses

Settlement boundaries identify the main built up area of a settlement within which development is considered acceptable in principle, subject to other policy considerations. While allowing for development, settlement boundaries protect the character of a settlement and prevent unrestricted growth into the countryside. They create a level of certainty about whether or not the principle of development is likely to be acceptable.

Where practicable and barring the exceptions set out below, boundaries will usually follow clearly defined features such as walls, hedgerows, railway lines and roads. Where possible, preference will be given to using features that are likely to have a degree of permanence as some features can change over time. Where development is on one side of the road only, the settlement boundary will be drawn along the edge closest to the settlement. Some boundaries may also follow along the rear of built development in order to prevent inappropriate development, for instance where dwellings have large back gardens.

Boundaries will include:

- The main settlement area. i.e. the area of close knit physical character
- Sites allocated through the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan processes
- Curtilages which are contained, are visually part of the built up area and are separated from the open or wider countryside
- Recreational or amenity open space which is physically surrounded by the settlement (or adjoined on three sides by the settlement)
- Existing community facilities (such as churches, schools and village halls) which are physically and visually related to the settlement
- Single plots or other similar small scale development opportunities which would provide infill and rounding off opportunities that are physically, functionally and visually related to the existing built up area, taking account of any environmental development constraints.

Boundaries will exclude:

- Highly visible areas such as exposed ridges, land forms or open slopes on the edge of settlements
- Open undeveloped parcels of land on the edges of settlements which are not either functionally or physically or visually related to the existing built up area
- Recreational or amenity open space which extends into the countryside or primarily relates to the countryside in form and nature. This includes designated Local Green Space.
- Tree belts, woodland areas, watercourses and other features which help to soften, screen existing development and form a boundary to the settlement
- Areas of isolated development which are physically or visually detached from the settlement and areas of sporadic, dispersed or ribbon development
- Large gardens or other areas, such as orchards, paddocks, allotments, cemeteries and churchyards, which visually relate to the open countryside rather than the settlement
- The extended curtilages of dwellings where future development has the capacity to harm the structure, form and character of the settlement
- Loose knit arrangements of buildings on the edge of a settlement
- Farmsteads, agricultural buildings, or converted agricultural buildings on the edge of a settlement which relate more to the rural context
- Horse related development, minerals extraction, landfill, water features, public utilities (sewage treatment plants, substations) on the edge of a settlement
- Important gaps between developed areas in fragmented settlements. Settlement boundaries do not need to be continuous. It may be appropriate, given the nature and form of a settlement, to define two or more separate elements of it.
- Roads, tracks and public rights of way running along the edge of a settlement.

Specific issues to be considered on a site by site basis:

- The wider setting and important views both into and out of the settlement will, where appropriate, be taken into account
- School playing fields
- Garden centres and plant nurseries
- Employment and leisure uses located on the edge of settlements will be considered according to their scale, functionality, visual and physical relationship to the settlement.
- Existing commitments for built development where development is underway and built out or substantially built out will be considered according to their scale and physical relationship with the settlement.