



EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

TOWN PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

Since it was first mentioned in the Domesday Book, Earley has grown to become the largest town in Wokingham Borough with a population approaching 34,000 inhabitants. The 2011 Census indicates that 23% of the population is in the 0 – 17 age range, 7% in the 18-24 age range, 48.5% are 25 – 59, and 21.5% are aged 60 and over.

This Town Plan re-affirms this Council's policies on a variety of issues which affect our residents. It also outlines our aims and aspirations for the Town and its development.

There is a requirement for Wokingham Borough Council to provide additional housing and, at a meeting of the Borough Council's Executive on 21st October 2010, it was resolved that the housing numbers in the adopted Core Strategy to 2026 should be agreed. The main areas of development will be concentrated on the Strategic Development Locations, as previously identified within the current Wokingham Plan. The Town Council will continue to oppose development which it considers will have an adverse effect on local residents.

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

From discussions with local residents, Town Councillors are very aware that it is not always clear what functions the Town Council is responsible for and what duties fall to the local Unitary Authority, Wokingham Borough Council. As the largest Town within Wokingham Borough, Earley is 'self-sufficient' in the provision of a number of facilities for local residents. These include Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve (including Laurel Park Pavilion on lease from the Borough Council, but not the Park itself), Mays Lane Cemetery, Sol Joel and Meadow Parks, Radstock and Maiden Place Community Centres, Silverdale and Centrepoint Community and Youth Centres and Culver Lane Allotments. Additionally, it owns and has direct responsibility for much of the street furniture in the Town, including some bus shelters, noticeboards, illuminated town maps, roadside seats and some street lights. The Town Council is also represented on a number of local community based organisations. Residents are welcome to contact the Town Council or attend meetings to give their views.

Whilst Wokingham Borough Council is the statutory local Highways, Planning and Education Authority, it consults with and encourages Earley Town Council's participation to deliver the best possible services for the residents of Earley. In addition, it has responsibility for providing Social Services functions, refuse collections, recycling and street cleansing, collecting Council Tax, overseeing licensing, providing electoral services, targeted youth service provision and community support. It also operates and maintains other facilities throughout the Town not managed by the Town Council, such as Loddon Valley Leisure Centre, Chalfont Park and Laurel Park

In summer 2005, Earley residents were asked to contribute to this 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 and the Plan was adopted by the Town Council in June

2007. The first revision took place during 2008, a second revision in Autumn 2010 a third revision in Summer 2012 and now this fourth revision in 2014/15.

The policies within the Plan will be reviewed at least every two years. This allows the opportunity for progress to be monitored and any improvements made to the Plan. Residents are encouraged to contribute new ideas and the presence of the Plan is noted in the Annual Council Tax Leaflet.

PLANNING AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

The population of Earley has more than trebled in the last 30 years. This massive expansion has resulted in high density development and pressure on the remaining open spaces, including back gardens. The Lower Earley Development Plan terms have not been strictly adhered to. More dwellings were built than had originally been proposed, resulting in over one thousand extra houses. This development has also put a strain on the Town's infrastructure, particularly noticeable in terms of road congestion, inadequate provision of local secondary school places, dentists, doctors and facilities for all ages.

The Town Council will:

- Minimise the impact of infilling by continuing to oppose proposals for this type of development.
- Strive to maintain the character of established areas by:
 - Opposing inappropriate development;
 - Working with the Borough Council to oppose the minimum parking standards currently presented in Planning Guidelines with the aim of improving road safety by reducing on-road parking;
 - Protecting the character of Earley by preserving the unique buildings within the Town boundaries including identification of buildings to be designated as 'Buildings of Local Character'.
 - Opposing planning applications for two storey side extensions right up to the boundary to reduce the effect of terracing.
- Do everything we possibly can to ensure the preservation of the green wildlife corridors within Earley.
- Liaise with the Borough's Planning Enforcement Officers.
- Through the planning process, try to ensure that development contains suitable provision for the ageing population (e.g. bungalows and sheltered housing) and people on low incomes.
- Ensure developers contribute adequately towards minimising the effect of their plans.
- Object to Planning Applications where conversion of garages would result in inadequate on-site parking.
- Object to Planning Applications which would erode 'Green Lungs' or gaps between established settlements.
- Oppose development which destroys trees or established hedgerows.
- Support sustainable development within the Town boundaries.
- Continue to work to minimise the impact of the development of the Sibly Hall site and protect the woodland.
- Endeavour to keep local residents informed of the proposals for major developments, and will make an informed response to the Local Planning Authority on any Planning Application received.
- Continue to oppose inappropriate shop and public house opening hours and delivery times.
- In partnership with Woodley Town Council, try to protect the Site of Urban Landscape Value between the two towns.
- Continue to support all efforts to maintain post office facilities within Earley.
- Continue to oppose planning applications which aim to provide houses of multi-occupancy where there is insufficient on-site parking provision.
- Continue to oppose the building of detached buildings in the back gardens of existing properties which are too close to the boundary or which would mean an inappropriate reduction in the available amenity space of the host dwelling or which would have insufficient parking
- Continue to request that the Local Planning Authority includes a condition within any planning approval for garage conversions which requires the applicants to use porous materials in the

provision of any additional on-site parking and also to provide soft landscaping to reduce the visual impact.

- Continue to oppose planning applications which propose a change of use of designated amenity land.
- Make recommendations to the Local Planning Authority for design features which reflect the character of the local area.

HIGHWAYS/TRAFFIC

Because of its location, Earley is subject to a high percentage of 'through traffic' which is increasing owing to the large number of houses being building in surrounding areas. The roads in the Town already suffer from excessive traffic volumes, to the detriment of local residents.

Achievements of the Town Council include:

- Promoting Walk to School campaigns.
- Successfully campaigning for new pedestrian crossings.

The Town Council will:

- Continue in its efforts to obtain HGV bans in residential areas.
- Support the Borough Council in promoting the reduction in term-time traffic.
- Encourage appropriate traffic speeds.
- Promote improvements in public transport.
- Promote the introduction of school time reductions of speed limits outside schools.
- Support the proposal to create a 3rd Thames crossing if it also minimises the adverse impact to residents of Earley, in particular those in the Whitegates Ward area.
- Liaise with the Borough Council and the Police to reduce the amount of on footway/verge parking.
- Strive to ensure that speed limits within the area are harmonised.
- Lobby the appropriate authorities to try to obtain the creation of a fourth lane on the M4 between Junctions 7 and 12 and to campaign for appropriate noise limitation features such as quiet tarmac.
- Encourage by all possible means the use of cycles within the Town, including contributing to the Borough Council's Cycling Strategy.
- Encourage the provision of safer crossings on routes to schools.
- Monitor parking restrictions to assess their effectiveness for residents and whether other areas have been adversely affected as a result.
- Continue to liaise with Wokingham Borough Council regarding inappropriate parent parking and dropping off/collecting of pupils outside schools.
- De-clutter the streets by encouraging the Borough Council to remove all unwanted and unnecessary road signs
- Canvas Wokingham Borough Council to provide more Vehicle Activity Signs.

The Town Council has:

- Contributed to the Wokingham Borough Plan 2006 – 2016 to minimise the impact of further development to the residents of Earley.
- Through negotiation with the freeholder, obtained agreement for the provision of additional signage and other possible improvements to improve access to Chalfont Square.
- Logged a formal request with the Borough Council that improved pedestrian facilities to access 'Area DD' are provided.
- Through negotiation with the freeholder and in co-operation with the Maiden Erlegh Residents Association, achieved some improvements to the car parking area at The Parade in Silverdale Road.

MAIDEN ERLEGH 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 coarse 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 classroom 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 wildflower grasslands.
- Upgraded the signage and notice boards.
- Ensured that the physically disadvantaged can enjoy as many of the Reserve's facilities as possible, by the creation of 6 fishing platforms.

The Town Council has:

- Produced a flood plan for Maiden Erlegh Lake
- Successfully promoted fishing competitions and tuition days with the generous support of the Environment Agency.

The Town Council will:

- Regenerate the wildlife gardening demonstration area.
- Continue 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.
- Continue to coppice the woods and enhance the woodland flora.
- Develop a biological database for the Reserve.
- With the support of the Earley Environmental Group, 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, continue to offer a high standard of environmental education to residents, schools and youth groups; including new facilities such as a dipping pond.
- Maintain the Reserve's pathways in a manner appropriate to its Nature Reserve status.
- Maintain Maiden Erlegh Lake as a coarse fishery and, through a fish management programme, 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 and promote breeding areas for fish.
- Enhance biodiversity across the Parish, for example, by maintaining and creating hedgerows and wildflower areas including, with the co-operation of the Borough Council, increase verge planting
- Encourage use of the Interpretation Centre and maximise hire income
- Continue to encourage good dog management in the Local Nature Reserve
- Investigate renewable energy sources for the Interpretation Centre
- Continue to maintain the Nature Reserve to a high standard by putting biodiversity first

MAYS LANE CEMETERY

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

The Town Council has:

- Created and extended a Children's area within the consecrated section of the Cemetery.
- Begun the development of the lower end of the Cemetery for future use

The Town Council will:

- Continue to 'topple test' headstones in line with current Health & Safety Guidelines.
- Provide seats and specimen trees within the areas of the Cemetery currently in use.
- Instigate a programme of repair for memorials erected prior to 1946.
- Continue to maintain the Cemetery to a high standard.
- Refurbish the roadway
- Investigate the possibility of providing an area for the burial of copies of the Quran
- Continue developing the lower end of the Cemetery for future use.

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. The play area at Meadow Park was fitted out in 1994, with wooden equipment. The Town Council has introduced a phased replacement programme over the last few years, with all of the items being replaced with equipment of a much more substantial metal construction.

The Town Council 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.
- Upgraded all of the play areas with durable new equipment.
- Provided additional seating.
- Obtained funding for and installed outdoor gym equipment
- Achieved Fields in Trust status for the Park

The Town Council will:

- Continue the programme of enhancing the play equipment, when funding permits.
- Ensure that the physically disadvantaged can enjoy as many of the park's facilities as possible.
- Enhance the wildflower areas and naturalised bulb areas.
- Maintain entrance gates and fences as necessary.
- Continue to maintain the Park to a high standard.

BULMERSHE PARK & HIGHWOOD

Earley Town, together with Woodley Town and Wokingham Borough, is jointly responsible for management of the Bulmershe Park. We are also part of the management team of Highwood, which contains an area of native woodland.

The Town Council has:

- Planted trees in Bulmershe Park to enhance the overall environment.
- Provided expertise to support the management of the park from within our Park Ranger service.
- Improved the habitat for rare species.

The Town Council will:

- Continue to work in partnership with other local authorities to maintain this area to protect the interests of residents.

SOL JOEL PARK

The management of Sol Joel Park was taken over by the Town Council on a 50 year lease from Reading Borough Council in 2001; this was done in order to improve the facilities and level of maintenance to the benefit of residents. Under the management of Reading Borough Council, the Park had been allowed to deteriorate, 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 has:

- Rebuilt the pavilion.
- Installed a new concrete skatepark
- Extended the existing car parking, improved the entrances and installed gates.
- Improved the condition of the pitches with frequent maintenance and pest control.
- Installed CCTV to improve security.
- Provided fencing around the toddlers' play area to make it 'dog proof'.
- Replaced the play equipment in the toddlers' area.
- Carried out a biodiversity survey
- Improved the play equipment provision of the Park, including the installation of a large piece of equipment using Playbuilder funding.
- Created an additional cricket wicket
- In partnership with Wokingham Borough Council, installed the first Parkour Training Facility in Berkshire within the Park
- Obtained Fields in Trust Status for the Park
- Carried out an extensive tree/hedge planting programme
- In partnership with Wokingham Borough Council, provided additional car parking at the Mays Lane side of the Park

The Town Council will:

- Continue negotiations with Reading Borough Council to extend the current lease on Sol Joel Park.
- Work with local organisations to encourage full use of the facilities.
- Continue plans for re-use of the formal garden area.
- Improve the boundaries of the park.
- 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.
- Provide additional seating and litterbins
- In partnership with Wokingham Borough Council, provided an inclusive play area for children with a wide range of disabilities
- Continue to seek funding to provide a first floor to the new pavilion

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The Town Council runs Radstock Lane and Maiden Place Community Centres and, in October 2013, at very short notice, took on the management of Silverdale and Centrepoint Community & Youth Centres from Wokingham Borough Council to prevent their closure.

These Centres are extensively used by regular hirers such as pre-school playgroups, Wokingham & Bracknell College, fitness clubs and social and hobby groups, etc. and Silverdale Community & Youth Centre hosts youth activities through the Bike Workshop and Music Fusion Group. One-off bookings include wedding receptions and family parties.

The Town Council has:

- Provided recycling facilities at the two Community Centres
- Improved facilities at Maiden Place and Radstock Lane Community Centre, including provision of air conditioning in the Main Halls, refurbishment of the kitchens and improvement of the outside areas.
- Refurbished the-cloakrooms at Radstock Lane and Maiden Place Community Centres
- Replaced the curtains in the Main Hall at Radstock Lane Community Centre
- Worked with the Kilnsea Pre-school Playgroup to assist them in achieving an extension to the Maiden Place Community Centre to provide a children's toilet area and suitable office.
- Taken on the management of Silverdale & Centrepoint Community & Youth Centres from the Borough Council to prevent them closing.

The Town Council will:

- Promote the use of the facilities available at all Centres to maximise usage.
- Maintain the Centres to a high standard.
- Work with other local groups to ensure optimum use of all facilities in the Town.
- Continue to support the Bike Workshop and Music Fusion Group at the Silverdale Community & Youth Centre and explore other opportunities to provide targeted youth work as appropriate
- Once the leases between Wokingham Borough Council and the Town Council are finalised, undertake a programme of refurbishment and redecoration of the two Community & Youth Centres as appropriate.
- Investigate the possibility of providing a drop-in coffee shop facility at Centrepoint Community & Youth Centre.
- Maximise funding opportunities for all four buildings to increase income and with particular reference to the two Community & Youth Centres.

ALLOTMENTS

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

The Town Council has:

- Provided plots suitable for use by the disabled.
- Created a variety of plot sizes to meet individual requirements.
- Upgraded central road way
- Provided a wood chip store, which is regularly 'topped up'.

The Town Council will:

- Continue to promote the site to local people, and, in particular, Earley residents.
- Continue to promote high standards of cultivation at the site by routine inspections and by the presenting of the Best Allotment award.
- Support the Earley Allotment Society.
- Aim to make the allotments self-funding
- Where large plots become available, seek to divide them to allow more residents the opportunity to have an allotment.
- Continue to investigate other areas which could be used for allotments

BUS SHELTERS/STREET FURNITURE/STREET CLEANSING

The Town Council provides about 50 bus shelters throughout the Town. We also provide town notice-boards and the illuminated maps.

The Town Council has:

- Continue its programme of replacing bus shelters
- Supported the setting up of the Adopt-a-street scheme

The Town Council will:

- Keep the Town maps up to date.
- Continue to upgrade and expand the provision of both litter and dog waste bins and encourage their use.
- Provide appropriate street furniture.
- In suitable locations, promote the installation of advertising shelters to reduce costs.
- Continue to maintain our street furniture to a high standard.
- Continue to support the work of the EASI litterpicking volunteers
- Liaise with Wokingham Borough Council to ensure bus shelters of a suitable quality are installed.
- Maintain the Town Council's litterpicking service
- Liaise with Wokingham Borough Council and other agencies over identified litter problems.

GENERAL

The Town Council is already seen as one of the most efficiently run Councils 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.

The Town Council has:

- Provided a BMX/Cycle Track at Paddick Drive
- On a 14 year lease from the Borough Council, undertaken the maintenance of the whole of the Paddick Drive Open Space.
- Obtained Laurel Park Pavilion on a 14 year lease from Wokingham Borough Council

The Town Council will:

- Continue to raise the profile of the Town of Earley, including the possibility of twinning with a similar town, provided there is no additional cost to the Council Tax Payer.
- Support local voluntary organisations including the use of grant funding.
- Continue to take a pro-active role in providing facilities for young people
- With the support of the Borough Council to continue to offer, assistance to local residents through our Help Shop facility, based at the Town Council offices and to press the Borough Council for financial support for this service.
- Work with neighbouring authorities to identify areas of land for use as consecrated, non-consecrated and green burial areas.
- Try to ensure that gaps in community provision, including youth service provision, are filled and participate in the Borough Council's Community Strategy.
- Work with the Borough Council to improve the management of open spaces it currently maintains, particularly Chalfont Park, Laurel Park and the Events Field.
- Support the work of the Earley Environmental Group and assist in the compilation of a biological database for the Town.
- Assess all areas of open space in Earley to improve local biodiversity.
- Instigate a system of three year financial forecasting, to allow the Town Council to plan effectively.
- Work towards 'Quality Council Status' when a new scheme becomes available.
- Where there is an advantage to the residents of Earley, to accept management responsibility for as much of the Town's infrastructure as practical.
- Strive to make the best use of Section 106/CIL funding for the benefit of the Community.
- Negotiate with Wokingham Borough Council to enable the Town Council to take on the management of Redhatch Copse and other open spaces within the Sibly Park Development.
- Produce a plan showing a system of green corridors across Earley and work towards protecting these
- Work towards the designation of a network of Local Nature Reserves across Earley.
- In partnership with local voluntary organisations, consider the possible creation of a community orchard.
- Endeavour to negotiate the management of land at the Elm Lane Reservoir Site when Wokingham Borough Council's contract for the land expires.

APPENDIX A

IDENTIFIED BUILDINGS OF LOCAL CHARACTER

Items for inclusion in this section are currently being considered by the Town Council and a revision sheet will be issued once this work is complete