

WAVERLEY LOCAL PLAN 2016

Waverley Borough Council published in August its draft of part 1 of its new Local Plan. Once adopted, the new plan will set out the planning framework for the Borough for the period between now and 2032.

A key element of the Plan is the number of new homes which need to be provided for in order to meet the expected local demand. The figure for the Borough as a whole has been broken down in the draft in order to set out the number of new homes to be provided by the major settlements (Farnham, Godalming, Haslemere and Cranleigh) and the larger villages. The proposed number for Elstead is 150, for the period 2013-32; this includes 22 homes already built or for which planning consent has been given.

The Parish Council has commented extensively on the Local Plan draft, and a copy of the full response can be found on the Parish Council website. On the issue of the number of new homes to be provided in Elstead, the Council has queried the basis of the Waverley figure of 150, which does not appear to be justified by the supporting data. It has therefore asked for further discussions with Waverley planners to try to sort this problem out.

One other proposal in the draft Plan which has also caused some concern in the village is that the village settlement area (ie the built up part of Elstead) should be taken out of the Green Belt. The Parish Council has accepted this proposal and I should perhaps explain why.

The aim of the Green Belt, as set out in the Governments National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued in 2012, is to prevent urban sprawl around the country's major conurbations by keeping land permanently 'open' in character. The NPPF goes on to make it clear that where village settlement areas are already heavily developed (ie they contain little or no open or undeveloped space) they should be taken out of the Green Belt, and the specific character of such villages protected through other more appropriate Local Plan policies. Elstead's settlement area is already well developed and contains little open space other than the village greens, the Thursley Road recreation ground and the old cemetery. Each of these areas has its own specific protection. So in the terms of the NPPF there is little case for opposing the removal of the settlement area from the Green Belt.

Currently, under the existing Local Plan policies, the Green Belt is described as 'washing over' the settlement area. What this means is that Waverley has applied a more relaxed regime in regard to residential development in the settlement area than is applied in the Green Belt outside it. However, recent reports by Planning Inspectors have queried this approach, which they say does not comply with the more recent NPPF. The significance of this is that if the settlement area under the new Plan were to remain in the Green Belt, Waverley would probably be obliged to apply more restrictive policies in relation to residential developments within the settlement area, in particular house extensions, which could make life a lot more difficult for many residents.

It is for these reasons that the Parish Council has not opposed the plan to take the settlement area out of the Green Belt. It believes that the special character of Elstead village can be better protected by more specific policies enshrined in particular in a Neighbourhood Plan which incorporates the Elstead Village Design Statement.