

West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

Settlement Hierarchy

Policy SP3

Settlement Hierarchy

Development in West Berkshire will be required to comply with the spatial strategy set out in policy SP1. The focus of development will follow the District-wide settlement hierarchy which takes account of the function and sustainability of settlements across the District and promotes sustainable communities. The scale of development proposals will be expected to be relative to the existing or proposed level of facilities and services in the settlement, together with their accessibility.

Urban Areas: Newbury, Thatcham, Eastern Urban Area (Tilehurst, Calcot, Purley on Thames)

The urban areas will be the prime focus for housing and economic development, offering development potential through:

- a. Regeneration and change in the existing built up area including the redevelopment of suitable previously developed sites for both housing and employment purposes;
- b. Strategic and non-strategic sites allocated for housing and economic development through other policies in the LPR and/or neighbourhood plans;
- c. The retention of the individual identity of adjacent settlements; and
- d. The necessary supporting infrastructure.

Rural Service Centres: Burghfield Common, Hungerford, Lambourn, Mortimer, Pangbourne, Theale

These larger rural settlements offer development potential appropriate to the character and function of the settlement through:

- e. Infill or changes of use within the settlement boundary;
- f. Non-strategic sites allocated for housing and economic development through other policies in the LPR and/or neighbourhood plans; and
- g. Rural exceptions affordable housing schemes

Service Villages: Bradfield Southend, Chieveley, Cold Ash, Compton, Great Shefford, Hermitage, Kintbury, Woolhampton

These smaller rural settlements may offer some limited and small-scale development potential, appropriate to the character and function of the village, in order to meet local needs through:

- h. Infill or changes of use within the settlement boundary;
- i. Non-strategic sites allocated for housing and economic development through other policies in the LPR and/or neighbourhood plans; and
- j. Rural exceptions affordable housing schemes.

Development in smaller settlements with settlement boundaries, and which are not included in the settlement hierarchy, will be delivered in accordance with policy SP1. Development outside of these settlements, in other rural hamlets and in isolated groups of development will be restricted to that which is appropriate in a rural area as set out in policy DM1.

Neighbourhood plans can allocate non-strategic sites for development. These must be located either within and/or adjoining the settlement boundaries of Urban Areas, Rural Service Centres and Service Villages. Strategic site allocations cannot be made within neighbourhood plans.

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Supporting Text

4.31 The policy has been informed by a re-assessment of the settlement hierarchy used for the previous Local Plan. The revised and updated settlement hierarchy⁽²⁷⁾ ensures that new development planned throughout the plan period continues to be directed to the more sustainable settlements, is appropriate for the settlement in question and is adequately supported by infrastructure and services.

4.32 The hierarchy categorises the District's settlements according to their different roles, and groups them accordingly. At the top of the hierarchy are the larger towns and areas that fulfil the most functions and which are the most sustainable. The smaller settlements with fewer functions are towards the bottom of the hierarchy.

Table 1 District Settlement Hierarchy

Type	Role and function	Settlements
Urban Areas	The main urban areas with a wide range of services and opportunities for employment, community and education. Serving a large catchment area with good levels of accessibility and frequent public transport provided to a large number of destinations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newbury • Thatcham • Eastern Urban Area (Tilehurst, Calcot, Purley on Thames)
Rural Service Centres	Settlements with a good range of key services and opportunities for employment, community and education. They serve a wide catchment area and contain reasonable accessibility and regular public transport provided to a number of destinations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burghfield Common • Hungerford • Lambourn • Mortimer • Pangbourne • Theale
Service Villages	Smaller settlements with a more limited, yet valued, range of key services and opportunities for community and education with some localised employment. They serve a small local catchment, contain a lower level of accessibility and provide often limited public transport in terms of destination choice and ease of commuting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bradfield Southend • Chieveley • Cold Ash • Compton • Great Shefford • Hermitage • Kintbury • Woolhampton

4.33 Development over the plan period will build upon the existing settlement pattern and direct most development to those urban areas which have the infrastructure and facilities to support sustainable growth. The main focus for growth will therefore be Newbury, Thatcham and the east of the District. Focusing further growth in these areas has the potential to make the best use of previously developed land and house residents close to jobs, shops, leisure and cultural facilities and public transport.

4.34 Outside of these areas, the six rural service centres across the District provide a focal point for the surrounding villages and rural areas in terms of the provision of services and facilities. Although they do not have as wide a range of services as the urban areas, they are still sustainable locations.

4.35 There are a number of other villages across the District which have been identified as service villages. Most are in the National Landscape. These offer a more limited range of services but act as focal points for their surrounding rural areas.

4.36 The characteristics of the individual rural service centres and service villages vary, reflective of the diverse nature of West Berkshire. They are not intended to have the same amount of growth as each other; instead, the level of growth will depend on the role and function that they perform for the surrounding spatial area, and will be related to their location, size, range of facilities and services as well as the availability of suitable development opportunities. Their sustainability will be considered alongside other factors, particularly environmental constraints such as the National Landscape or the DEPZ around the AWE sites of Aldermaston and Burghfield. Due to these environmental constraints the development potential within these areas could be more limited and specific regard should be given to policies SP2 North Wessex Downs National Landscape and SP4 Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston and Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Burghfield.

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4.37 Any non-strategic residential allocations within neighbourhood plans that are situated within defined settlement boundaries will not count towards meeting the housing requirement figure in policy SP12. This is because there is a presumption in favour of development within defined settlement boundaries and to do so would be inconsistent with the assumptions made in the LPR about the District's overall housing land supply.

4.38 Settlements outside of the settlement hierarchy will deliver additional development but this will be limited to infill or change of use within the settlement where a settlement boundary has been defined, and to rural exception schemes for affordable housing to meet local needs. Some limited development is important for the long-term sustainability of rural communities. Outside these settlements, in the countryside, a more restrictive approach to development will be taken as set out in other policies in the LPR.