

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

Historic Environment

Policy SP9

Historic Environment

Positive action will be taken to ensure that opportunities for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment are maximised. For example, this will include, but not be limited to:

- Producing conservation area appraisals and management plans;
- Maintaining a local list of non-designated heritage assets; and
- Maintaining a list of local heritage assets which are at risk, but which do not meet the criteria for inclusion on the national Heritage at Risk Register.

The historic character, sense of place, environmental quality and local distinctiveness of West Berkshire will also be sustained and enhanced through new development, including promoting heritage-led regeneration where appropriate and delivering public benefits from the District's archaeological resources. Development proposals will be required to conserve and, where appropriate, enhance those aspects of the historic environment which are recognised as being of archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interest, or of landscape or townscape significance. These heritage assets include:

- a. Listed Buildings;
- b. Scheduled Monuments and archaeological sites of national importance;
- c. Registered Parks and Gardens;
- d. Registered Battlefields;
- e. Conservation Areas;
- f. Buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas and landscapes that have been added to the West Berkshire Local List of Heritage Assets⁽⁶²⁾; and
- g. Other places, spaces, structures and features which may not be formally designated but are recognised as significant elements of West Berkshire's heritage and are positively identified on the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record⁽⁶³⁾, or through the development management or other planning processes.

Development that has an impact upon a heritage asset, whether designated or non-designated, will be expected to maximise opportunities to preserve, enhance, or better reveal the asset's significance including the contribution to that significance made by its setting, and make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness through high standards of design in accordance with policy SP7.

Weight will be given to the conservation of the District's heritage assets in a manner according to their importance. Any harm to the significance of a designated or non-designated heritage asset must be justified. All proposals affecting a heritage asset, including its setting, should be accompanied by a 'Statement of Heritage Significance', in accordance with the current guidance from Historic England. For known assets of archaeological interest, or on land where there is archaeological potential, an archaeological desk-based assessment will be required as a minimum. The level of information provided should be proportionate to the scale and nature of the development proposed but should be sufficient to allow an informed assessment of the impact of the proposed development on the significance of the heritage asset.

Development which would lead to substantial harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset, including the contribution to that significance made by its setting will not be permitted, unless –

- h. This harm is demonstrated necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that cannot otherwise be achieved and which outweigh that harm; or
- i. The nature of the asset prevents all reasonable uses of the site; and
- j. No viable use of the asset can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and

62 West Berkshire Local List of Heritage Assets: <https://westberks.gov.uk/localist>

63 West Berkshire Historic Environment

Record: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/40980/The-West-Berkshire-Historic-Environment-Record-HER>

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- k. Conservation by grant funding or some form of not for profit, charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
- l. The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.

Development which would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, including the contribution to that significance made by its setting will be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

Where development would affect the significance of a non-designated heritage asset, a balanced judgement will be made which has regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.

Where material change to a heritage asset has been agreed, recording and interpretation should be undertaken to document and understand the asset's archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic significance. The scope of the recording should be proportionate to the asset's significance and the impact of the development on the asset. The information and understanding gained should be made available for public benefit, as a minimum through the deposition of evidence with the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record. Archaeological archives resulting from investigations in West Berkshire should be deposited in West Berkshire Museum or an appropriate digital depository, with provision made for ongoing conservation, storage, access and interpretation.

Proposals for development will be informed by and respond to:

- m. The nature and potential of heritage assets identified through the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record and the extent of their significance;
- n. Relevant historic landscape character assessments;
- o. Other features identified in various settlement character studies including the Newbury Historic Character Study and Conservation Area Appraisals; and
- p. The West Berkshire Historic Environment Action Plan (HEAP).

Supporting Text

5.48 People have left their mark on our landscape for over ten thousand years, modifying natural features, utilising local materials, cultivating the soil and creating monuments, buildings and settlements. This multi-layered interaction of humans and their environment tells our story and gives us a perspective on our own times. West Berkshire's historic environment is therefore a positive and irreplaceable resource, valuable not only in social, educational and economic terms, but as a frame and reference point for the creation of distinctive places for existing and future generations to enjoy. It shapes the District's sense of identity and is intrinsically linked to the quality of life of its residents, the success of its existing businesses and the wider cultural profile that West Berkshire projects to potential investors and visitors. The Local Plan therefore sets out to implement a positive strategy for the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of the historic environment across the District as a fundamental approach to sustainable development.

5.49 The policy gives weight to conserving the significance of heritage assets and their settings in a manner according to their importance. Heritage assets include any valued component of the historic environment, be it a building, monument, site, place, area or landscape, identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage assets include designated heritage assets and assets identified as 'non-designated' heritage assets.

5.50 There are a wide variety of heritage assets across West Berkshire, ranging in age from the early prehistoric to the modern day and in scale from landscape parks to milestones.

5.51 Designated heritage assets in 2023 include:

- 53 Conservation Areas;
- Approximately 1900 Listed Buildings;
- Approximately 90 Scheduled Monuments;
- 12 Registered Parks and Gardens;
- 1 Registered Battlefield, the First Battle of Newbury 1643.

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5.52 Non-designated heritage assets include:

- Those that have been entered onto the West Berkshire Local List of Heritage Assets⁽⁶⁴⁾;
- Assets not yet on the West Berkshire Local List of Heritage Assets but which have been identified as having heritage interest:
 - In the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record;
 - During the development management process;
 - Through other planning processes to assess local character, such as conservation area and village character appraisals;
 - Through neighbourhood plans; and
 - Through site assessments undertaken as part of the Local Plan;
- 1 Battlefield included in the Appendix of the Battlefields Register, the Second Battle of Newbury 1644;
- Nationally important but non-scheduled archaeological remains, which should be considered subject to the policies for designated heritage assets;
- Registered commons;
- Historic Public Rights of Way.

5.53 Historic England produces an annual register of designated heritage assets known to be at risk as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development. In West Berkshire the Heritage at Risk Register (HAR) has included Grade I or II* Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, Registered Parks and Gardens, the Registered Battlefield, and Places of Worship. The Battlefield of the First Battle of Newbury 1643 was removed from the Heritage at Risk Register in 2017. The Council in collaboration with the West Berkshire Heritage Forum will also maintain a list of other local heritage assets which are at risk but which do not meet the criteria for inclusion on the HAR. These may be Grade II listed buildings or non-designated heritage assets. Emphasis will continue to be given to finding solutions for those assets that are at risk through discussions with owners, management plans, stewardship schemes and partnership working.

5.54 Under the NPPF, local authorities should maintain or have access to a Historic Environment Record (HER). The West Berkshire HER⁽⁶⁵⁾ is the principal register of the physical remains of past human activity in the area, including designated and non-designated assets and those on the Heritage at Risk Register. It is the primary index to the archaeological investigations that have taken place in the District as well as to a wide range of sources of information from books to unpublished reports, and historic maps to aerial photographs, and the locations of these sources in libraries and record offices. The HER is a dynamic information service and public record, which serves both as an evidence base for the planning process and as the recipient of new knowledge gained through developer-funded fieldwork and community projects.

5.55 The HER will be used to:

- Assess the significance of heritage assets and the contribution they make; and
- Predict the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets, particularly sites of historic and archaeological interest, will be discovered in the future. Many heritage assets remain undiscovered.

5.56 Where development will lead to the loss (wholly or in part) of heritage assets, developers will be required to record and advance our understanding of the significance of the asset or relevant part of it. However the ability to investigate and record a heritage asset is not a factor in deciding whether consent for its destruction should be given. Knowledge which advances our understanding of the past is the core purpose of archaeological work. This public benefit will be best achieved if the recording is undertaken by a professionally accredited organisation or individual with appropriate expertise, complying with best practice and taking account of research frameworks. The resultant report should be deposited with the West Berkshire HER, but for investigations with particular important or unusual findings, publication through books and journals may be appropriate.

5.57 Any archaeological recording project will also involve the compilation, deposition and conservation of an archaeological archive as the record of the original findings and the raw material for future research. The West Berkshire Museum is the collecting body for physical documentary and material archaeological archives derived from

64 West Berkshire Local List of Heritage Assets: <https://westberks.gov.uk/localist>

65 West Berkshire HER: <https://westberks.gov.uk/her>

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any site researched or investigated within the unitary authority of West Berkshire. Digital archives should be deposited with an accredited digital repository. Provision should be made for the curation and safe-guarding of archaeological archives to ensure continued public engagement for the purposes of exhibition, learning and enjoyment.

5.58 Development proposals likely to affect the significance of a designated or non-designated heritage asset, including the contribution to that significance made by its setting, are required to demonstrate a thorough understanding of context, the significance of the asset and any potential impacts on that significance through the preparation of a proportionate heritage statement. This should be in the form of a 'Statement of Heritage Significance', in accordance with Historic England Advice Note 12 'Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets'. Statements of Heritage Significance must be proficient, objective and impartial in order to be of greatest value to the decision making process and should provide sufficient information to demonstrate how the proposals would contribute to the asset's conservation. For known heritage assets of archaeological interest, an archaeological desk based assessment should be provided and, where there is archaeological potential, pre-determination field evaluation may be necessary. As a minimum the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record should be consulted.

5.59 Heritage assets rarely prevent development schemes where their significance has been properly assessed and understood from the outset. Indeed, the most successful schemes often arise from this understanding and an appreciation of the social, cultural, economic, and environmental value that can be gained from their retention, sympathetic re-use and successful integration. Preserving embodied energy through the re-use and adaption of existing historic buildings for example, can be more sustainable than constructing new buildings. Proposals for energy saving measures should be designed with the knowledge and understanding of the building's significance. Getting the balance right and avoiding unintended consequences, is best done with a holistic 'whole building' approach in accordance with the current guidance from Historic England. This helps to highlight and resolve uncertainties and reconcile conflicting aims, ensuring that energy efficient measures are suitable, robust, well integrated, properly coordinated and sustainable.

5.60 A clear understanding of the significance of a heritage asset and its setting is necessary to develop proposals which avoid or minimise harm. Advice from the Council's officers should be sought in the process of creating proposals; early assessments, a conservation plan or targeted specialist investigation can help to identify constraints and opportunities arising from the asset at an initial stage. This is particularly relevant where heritage assets have received little previous attention, or where there is archaeological potential. Such studies can reveal alternative development or design options, such as more compatible uses or a more appropriate scale of development. These schemes are more likely to minimise harm and deliver public benefits in a sustainable and appropriate way.

5.61 Having an understanding of the way the historic environment of the District has influenced settlement patterns, and the sense of place of particular areas across West Berkshire, is essential when accommodating future development. Relevant landscape character assessments, including Historic Landscape Characterisation (2007)⁽⁶⁶⁾ and Historic Environment Character Zoning (2007)⁽⁶⁷⁾ will be used by the Council to inform and support planning decisions. At a more detailed level, these will be supplemented by the use of relevant settlement character studies, including the Newbury Historic Character Study (2006)⁽⁶⁸⁾, and adopted Conservation Area Appraisals⁽⁶⁹⁾.

5.62 The historic environment belongs to the whole community and everyone should be able to participate in sustaining this shared resource. One mechanism for achieving this is through the West Berkshire Heritage Forum, a partnership established in 2009 to recognise, promote and protect the District's heritage. The West Berkshire Historic Environment Action Plan (HEAP), published by the West Berkshire Heritage Forum, describes the character and evolution of the area as a whole and identifies its significant historic components. These include Mesolithic sites in the Kennet Valley; transport routes such as the Ridgeway and other old drove roads, the Kennet & Avon Canal and the Great Western Railway; pottery and brick manufacture and the cloth industry; Civil War battles; and the sites associated with the Cold War, nuclear technologies and peace protests. The HEAP identifies key issues and opportunities and provides an overview of the actions required to ensure long term conservation. Its aims encompass the promotion of greater awareness, understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment and advocacy of a multi-agency approach to sustainable management.

66 Historic Landscape Characterisation (2007): <https://westberks.gov.uk/historicenvironmentprojects>

67 Historic Environment Character Zoning (2007): <https://westberks.gov.uk/historicenvironmentprojects>

68 Newbury Historic Character Study (2006): <https://westberks.gov.uk/historicenvironmentprojects>

69 Conservation Area Appraisals: <https://westberks.gov.uk/conservation-area-appraisals>

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5.63 Since 2012 the Council has also been working with the West Berkshire Heritage Forum and local communities to compile a West Berkshire Local List of Heritage Assets⁽⁷⁰⁾. The list is regularly updated as new assets are identified. Successful conservation and enhancement of the historic environment of the District can only be achieved through partnership and co-operation. To this end the Council will continue to work closely with the West Berkshire Heritage Forum and local communities to ensure that decisions continue to reflect the value the public places on it.

5.64 The Council has a statutory duty to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the District's 53 Conservation Areas. As part of this duty and as part of its strategy to maximise opportunities for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment the Council is undertaking a phased programme of Conservation Area Appraisals (CAAs), in partnership with the West Berkshire Heritage Forum. As well as helping to define what is special about a particular Conservation Area, the project will provide local communities with an understanding of how and why Conservation Area status is appraised, designated, and applied in future development and conservation management decisions. This will help communities better engage with the management of change in their area, allowing them to more effectively champion the significance and values of local heritage. The project has involved the setting up of a Conservation Area Working Group, which has developed a 'Toolkit', which contains a variety of guidance, list of resources, and an appraisal report template, to assist parish councils and volunteers in undertaking a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.

70 West Berkshire Local List of Heritage Assets: <https://westberks.gov.uk/localist>