

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

## 9 Development Management Policies: Our Place Based Approach

### Policy DM1

#### Residential Development in the Countryside

Exceptionally, new residential development outside of adopted settlement boundaries will be permitted. These exceptions are solely limited to development which is appropriately designed and located and which satisfies one or more of the following criteria:

- a. Sites allocated as part of the development plan;
- b. Sites for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople (policies RSA28, RSA29 and DM20);
- c. Rural exception housing and/or First Homes exception sites (policies DM16 and DM17);
- d. The conversion of redundant or disused buildings (policy DM24);
- e. Housing to accommodate rural workers (policy DM23);
- f. The extension to or replacement of existing residential dwellings (policies DM25 and DM28);
- g. The subdivision of existing residential dwellings (policy DM27);
- h. Student or staff accommodation necessary to meet the reasonable needs and operational requirements of existing educational and institutional sites in the countryside (policy DM38); or
- i. Limited residential infill in settlements in the countryside with no defined settlement boundary where:
  - i. It is within a closely knit cluster of 10 or more existing dwellings adjacent to, or fronting an existing highway; and
  - ii. The scale of development consists of infilling a small undeveloped plot commensurate with the scale and character of existing dwellings within an otherwise built up frontage; and
  - iii. It does not extend the existing frontage at either end; and
  - iv. The proposed plot size and spacing between dwellings is similar to adjacent properties and respects the rural character and street scene of the locality.

### Supporting Text

**9.1** New development is easiest to assimilate when located within existing settlements. The overall spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy for West Berkshire is set out in policies SP1 and SP3. The policies seek to accommodate development in the most sustainable way, focusing development in settlements with existing facilities and services. Policy SP1 sets out that the principle of development is acceptable inside settlement boundaries and makes clear that only appropriate limited development in the countryside will be allowed.

**9.2** In this context, this policy makes clear that land outside of settlement boundaries will be treated as open countryside where there is a presumption against new residential development. National planning guidance currently advises that blanket policies restricting development should be avoided unless there is robust evidence on why this is necessary. In West Berkshire, the conservation and enhancement of the North Wessex Downs National Landscape and its setting is clearly a key consideration. At the same time, planning guidance also makes clear that planning policies and decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The appreciation that all countryside will have some such qualities means that it needs to be protected or safeguarded. Responding to that acknowledgement whilst maintaining the vitality of rural communities is also a key consideration in West Berkshire. This policy therefore sets out the exceptional circumstances whereby residential development outside settlement boundaries may be acceptable.

**9.3** The countryside of West Berkshire is characterised by small settlements and dispersed farmsteads. Due to the constant pressure for development, these settlements and farmsteads are at risk from piecemeal development. Cumulative impact is an important consideration in these areas, as incremental changes when viewed collectively can significantly change the character of a landscape.

**9.4** The conversion of rural buildings to residential use for instance can have a considerable impact on the character of the surrounding area. Similarly, the intensification of modest rural properties through extensions and the addition of large ancillary buildings and/or redevelopment can result in a disproportionate number of larger country houses, resulting in a loss of smaller and mid-sized properties and increased suburbanisation undermining a balance in the

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historic settlement pattern and rural character. Whilst there may be no increase in the actual number of dwellings, a scene that was once comprised of isolated agricultural workers cottages and barns set within open fields is urbanised and the rural character altered.

**9.5** An assessment therefore, has to be made of the sensitivity of the landscape to a particular type of change and the subsequent capacity of that area to absorb the change. For some areas, the character may be so fragile that new development is not acceptable even on a small scale. All development proposals are expected to respond positively to their context by conserving and enhancing landscape character in accordance with policy SP8 and by strengthening a sense of place in accordance with policy SP7 and also SP5.

**9.6** In particularly exceptional cases there may be a very special circumstance where an isolated new home of truly outstanding design standards, reflecting the highest standards of architecture, is proposed. Such proposals will be extremely rare and will be considered on their individual merits.

**9.7** For all development proposals in the countryside, robust evidence will need to be provided to support the application to demonstrate that an exceptional approach is fully justified. The Council publishes a list of local documents<sup>(108)</sup> that are required as part of planning applications and developers are encouraged to ensure their proposals comply with this list. Proposals will be expected to clearly illustrate the appropriateness of the development within the rural context.

108 List of local documents: <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/planningforms>