

Westcott Neighbourhood Plan

2017-2026

**A report to Mole Valley District Council on the
Westcott Neighbourhood Plan**

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Executive Summary

- 1 I was appointed by Mole Valley District Council in July 2017 to carry out the independent examination of the Westcott Neighbourhood Plan.
- 2 The examination was undertaken by written representations. I visited the neighbourhood plan area on 18 July 2017.
- 3 The Plan includes a series of policies and seeks to bring forward positive and sustainable development in the plan area. There is a very clear focus on promoting sustainable development in general and in promoting infill and redevelopment development that will respect the character of the built-up form of the village in particular. The Plan is commendably short and concise. Its policies get to the heart of the issues that affect the neighbourhood area. Whilst I have recommended a series of modifications to the policies they are technical in nature and do not detract in any way from the wider integrity of the Plan.
- 4 The Plan has been underpinned by community support and engagement. All sections of the community have been actively engaged in its preparation.
- 5 Subject to the series of recommended modifications set out in this report I have concluded that the Westcott Neighbourhood Plan meets all the necessary legal requirements and should proceed to referendum.
- 6 I recommend that the referendum should be held within the neighbourhood plan area.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
31 July 2017

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the independent examination of the Westcott Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2026 ('the Plan').
- 1.2 The Plan has been submitted to Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) by the Westcott Village Forum in its capacity as the qualifying body responsible for preparing the neighbourhood plan.
- 1.3 Neighbourhood plans were introduced into the planning process by the Localism Act 2011. They aim to allow local communities to take responsibility for guiding development in their area. This approach was subsequently embedded in the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012 and which continues to be the principal element of national planning policy.
- 1.4 This report assesses whether the Plan is legally compliant and meets the Basic Conditions that apply to neighbourhood plans. It also considers the content of the Plan and, where necessary, recommends changes to its policies and supporting text.
- 1.5 This report also provides a recommendation as to whether the Plan should proceed to referendum. If this is the case and that referendum results in a positive outcome the Plan would then be used to determine planning applications within the plan area and will sit as part of the wider development plan.

2 The Role of the Independent Examiner

- 2.1 The examiner's role is to ensure that any submitted neighbourhood plan meets the relevant legislative and procedural requirements.
- 2.2 I was appointed by MVDC, with the consent of the Westcott Village Forum, to conduct the examination of the Plan and to prepare this report. I am independent of both MVDC and the Forum. I do not have any interest in any land that may be affected by the Plan.
- 2.3 I possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake this role. I am a Director of Andrew Ashcroft Planning Limited. In previous roles I have over 30 years' experience in various local authorities at either Head of Planning or Service Director level. I am a chartered town planner and have significant experience of undertaking other neighbourhood plan examinations and health checks. I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiner Referral Service.

Examination Outcomes

- 2.4 In my role as the independent examiner of the Plan I am required to recommend one of the following outcomes of the examination:
- (a) that the Plan is submitted to a referendum; or
 - (b) that the Plan should proceed to referendum as modified (based on my recommendations); or
 - (c) that the Plan does not proceed to referendum on the basis that it does not meet the necessary legal requirements.

The Basic Conditions

- 2.5 As part of this process I must consider whether the submitted Plan meets the Basic Conditions as set out in paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 4B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. To comply with the basic conditions, the Plan must:
- have regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State; and
 - contribute to the achievement of sustainable development; and
 - be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the development plan in the area; and
 - be compatible with European Union (EU) and European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) obligations.

I have examined the submitted Plan against each of these basic conditions, and my conclusions are set out in Sections 6 and 7 of this report. I have made specific comments on the fourth bullet point above in paragraphs 2.6 to 2.10 of this report.

- 2.6 In order to comply with the Basic Condition relating to European obligations the District Council carried out a screening assessment on behalf of the Village Forum. The conclusion of the Screening Report was that all of the relevant considerations

addressed indicate no significant environmental effects or only local effects which can be mitigated. None of these individually or cumulatively indicate the need to carry out full Strategic Environmental Assessment. A proportionate Statement of Reasons is included within the screening opinion.

- 2.7 The screening opinion is thorough and comprehensive. The required consultation was carried out with the three prescribed bodies.
- 2.8 The MVDC screening report also comments on the need or otherwise for a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) of the Plan. MVDC concluded that such an assessment was not required for the following reasons:
- there are no designated European sites within or affecting the Plan area; and
 - the neighbourhood plan does not allocate any site for housing development. In any event the amount of growth anticipated in the submitted Plan does not exceed that which has already been subject to appropriate assessment as part of the adoption of the Core Strategy.

It was therefore concluded that the Plan was not likely to have any significant effect on a European site.

- 2.9 Having reviewed the information provided to me as part of the examination I am satisfied that a thorough, comprehensive and proportionate process has been undertaken in accordance with the various regulations. The various reports set out a robust and compelling assessment of the relevant information. None of the statutory consultees have raised any concerns with regard to either neighbourhood plan or to European obligations. In the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I am entirely satisfied that the submitted Plan is compatible with this aspect of European obligations.
- 2.10 In a similar fashion I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and that it complies with the Human Rights Act. There is no evidence that has been submitted to me to suggest otherwise. There has been full and adequate opportunity for all interested parties to take part in the preparation of the Plan and to make their comments known. On this basis, I conclude that the submitted Plan does not breach, nor is in any way incompatible with the ECHR.

Other examination matters

- 2.11 In examining the Plan I am also required to check whether:
- the policies relate to the development and use of land for a designated neighbourhood plan area; and
 - the Plan meets the requirements of Section 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (the Plan must specify the period to which it has effect, must not include provision about development that is excluded development, and must not relate to more than one neighbourhood area); and

- the Plan has been prepared for an area that has been designated under Section 61G of the Localism Act and has been developed and submitted for examination by a qualifying body.

2.12 Having addressed the matters identified in paragraph 2.11 of this report I am satisfied that all of the points have been met subject to the contents of this report. I recommend specific modifications in respect of the Plan period later in this report (paragraph 7.36).

3 Procedural Matters

3.1 In undertaking this examination I have considered the following documents:

- the submitted Plan.
- the Basic Conditions Statement.
- the Consultation Statement.
- the MVDC Screening report.
- the representations made to the Plan.
- the adopted Mole Valley Core Strategy 2009
- the saved policies in the Mole Valley Local Plan 2000.
- the National Planning Policy Framework (March 2012).
- Planning Practice Guidance (March 2014 and subsequent updates).
- Ministerial Statements (March, May and June 2015).

3.2 I carried out an unaccompanied visit to the Plan area on 18 July 2017. I looked at its overall character and appearance and at those areas affected by policies in the Plan in particular. My site inspection is covered in more detail in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.16 of this report.

3.3 It is a general rule that neighbourhood plan examinations should be held by written representations only. Having considered all the information before me, including the representations made to the submitted plan, I was satisfied that the Plan could be examined without the need for a public hearing. I advised MVDC of this decision early in the examination process.

4 Consultation

Consultation Process

- 4.1 Policies in made neighbourhood plans become the basis for local planning and development control decisions. As such the Regulations require neighbourhood plans to be supported and underpinned by public consultation.
- 4.2 In accordance with the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 the Village Forum has prepared a Consultation Statement. This statement is thorough and it provides an appropriate balance of detail and presentation. It also provides specific details on the consultation process that took place on the second draft version of the Plan from November 2016 to February 2017. The Statement sets out how the emerging plan took account of the various comments and representations. The timeline in Appendix 4 was particularly useful to me in understanding the scale and type of consultation that was undertaken during the phases of the development of the Plan.
- 4.3 Appendix 4 of the Statement also sets out a summary of the wider consultation techniques that have been used throughout the evolution of the Plan. Details are provided about:
- The preparation of questionnaires
 - The arrangement of Open Events
 - The creation of a dedicated neighbourhood plan website
 - The organisation of public meetings
 - The publication of articles in the Parish magazine
 - Engagement with landowners, statutory bodies and MVDC
- 4.4 Appendices 5-10 of the Consultation Statement provides very useful information on the various events, the publicity materials and the survey results. This gives a useful flavour of the approaches taken and the responses received. This approach is exemplary and has given me a very strong sense of assurance that the local community has been engaged in the plan-making process.
- 4.5 On this basis is clear to me that consultation has fundamentally underpinned the Plan's production. Advice on the neighbourhood planning process has been made available to the community in a positive and direct way by those responsible for the Plan's preparation. Consultation and feedback has been at the heart of the Plan throughout the various stages of its production.
- 4.6 The positive approach that was taken in responding to the earlier comments is reflected in the limited number of representations received to the submitted plan (see 4.8 below) and their generally positive nature.

- 4.7 From all the evidence provided to me as part of the examination, I can see that the Plan has promoted an inclusive and comprehensive approach to seeking the opinions of all concerned throughout the process. MVDC has carried out its own assessment that the consultation process has complied with the requirements of the Regulations.

Representations Received

- 4.8 Consultation on the submitted plan was undertaken by the District Council for a six-week period and which ended on 25 June 2017. This exercise generated comments from the following statutory bodies:

- Highways England
- Surrey Hills AONB
- Network Rail
- Thames Water
- Historic England
- Natural England
- Surrey County Council
- Environment Agency

- 4.9 As part of my examination of the Plan I have taken account of all the comments received.

5 The Plan Area and the Development Plan Context

The Plan Area

- 5.1 The Plan area sits in the central part of the Mole Valley District. In 2011, it had a population of 2251 people living in 918 dwellings. It was designated as a neighbourhood area on 5 March 2013.
- 5.2 The Plan area is located to the immediate west of the built-up area of Dorking. In visual and landscape terms, however it is very separate and distinctive from this much-larger urban area. The context and setting of the Plan area is heavily influenced by the Metropolitan Green Belt and the Surrey Hills AONB.
- 5.3 The Plan area is predominantly rural in character. The village of Westcott sits at the heart of the neighbourhood area. As the Plan describes the village has a strong east/west orientation along the A25 Guildford Road. It is hemmed in between the expanses of higher land to both the north and to the south. The village has a compact heart in which its various retail and community facilities are located. It displays an interesting range of buildings of different ages and sizes. In some cases, they reflect the agricultural heritage of the Plan area. In other cases, they reflect the key period of expansion in the nineteenth century. Much of the village centre is designated as a conservation area.

Development Plan Context

- 5.4 The development plan covering the neighbourhood plan area is the Core Strategy 2009 together with the saved policies of the Mole Valley Local Plan 2000. The Core Strategy sets out a vision, objectives, spatial strategy and overarching planning policies that guide new development in the District up until 2026. The Plan has been designed to respect this period.
- 5.5 The Basic Conditions Statement has very helpfully listed the policies in both the adopted local plan documents with which the Plan is considered to be consistent. It highlights the key policies in the development plan and how they relate to policies in the submitted Plan. This is good practice. MVDC has also provided me with a comprehensive list of those policies that it considers to be strategic. This was also very helpful as part of the examination.
- 5.6 Policy CS1 indicates that new development will be directed towards previously developed land within the built-up areas of Leatherhead, Dorking (including North Holmwood), Ashted, Bookham and Fetcham. Westcott is identified as one of a series of larger rural villages where limited development will take place on previously developed land.
- 5.7 At the time of the examination MVDC was consulting on its emerging Local Plan. This is likely to be subject to its own examination in 2018. Plainly the emerging Local Plan is not at a sufficiently-advanced stage for the Village Forum to have been expected to

take account of its emerging strategic policies as required by Planning Practice Guidance.

- 5.8 The existing development plan, and national planning policy on Green Belt matters have provided a clear and strong context for the preparation of the neighbourhood plan. The submitted plan provides a distinctive local dimension to both national policy and the policies in the Core Strategy.

Visit to the neighbourhood area

- 5.9 I carried out an unaccompanied visit to the Plan area on 18 July 2017. I was fortunate in having chosen a very pleasant (if hot) day to visit Westcott. I approached the Plan area from Dorking to the east.
- 5.10 I parked in Westcott Street. Due to the compact nature of the village I was able to undertake the majority of the visit on foot.
- 5.11 I initially walked down Westcott Street down to Pipp Brook at the junction with Balchins Lane and Hole Hill. I saw an interesting range of houses on Westcott Street including The Old Barracks. Westcott Street also highlighted the rationale behind the approach taken in policy WNDP4. Some houses had several car parking spaces and others had none.
- 5.12 I then walked back to the triangular green area between the two parts of Westcott Street and Guildford Road. The green was beautifully-maintained. I also saw the timber framed thatched shelter for bus passengers.
- 5.13 I then continued my visit by looking at the retail units along the Guildford Road. I saw that they were very much at the heart of the community in providing for day to day shopping needs.
- 5.14 I took the opportunity to walk up Westcott Heath to the Holy Trinity Church. I saw that the character of the village changed significantly at this point.
- 5.15 At various points during my visit I saw the various community facilities and the existing public houses. In particular I walked up School Lane to the School and I saw the St John's Community Centre as I looked around the residential street running to the north of Furlong Road. I also saw the on-street parking issues in this part of the village in the early evening.
- 5.16 In order to get a full impression of the Plan area I drove around the Plan area in general, and along Longmore Lane in particular. This helped me to understand how the Plan area sits within its wider context in general, and within the Surrey Hills AONB in particular.

6 The Neighbourhood Plan as a whole

6.1 This section of the report deals with the submitted neighbourhood plan as a whole and the extent to which it meets the basic conditions. The submitted Basic Conditions Statement has helped considerably in the preparation of this section of the report. It is a well-presented, informative and very professional document. It follows other submission documents in terms of its design, format and presentation.

6.2 The Plan needs to meet all the basic conditions to proceed to referendum. This section provides an overview of the extent to which the Plan meets three of the four basic conditions. Paragraphs 2.6 to 2.10 of this report have already addressed the issue of conformity with European Union legislation.

National Planning Policies and Guidance

6.3 The key elements of national policy relating to planning matters are set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) issued in March 2012.

6.4 The NPPF sets out a range of core land-use planning principles to underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. The following are of particular relevance to the Westcott Neighbourhood Plan:

- a plan led system– in this case the relationship between the neighbourhood plan and the adopted Core Strategy/Local Plan.
- recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving local communities.
- proactively driving and supporting economic development to deliver homes, businesses and industrial units and infrastructure.
- actively managing patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling.
- taking account of and supporting local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being.

6.5 Neighbourhood plans sit within this wider context both generally, and within the more specific presumption in favour of sustainable development, which is identified as a golden thread running through the planning system. Paragraph 16 of the NPPF indicates that neighbourhoods should both develop plans that support the strategic needs set out in local plans and plan positively to support local development that is outside the strategic elements of the development plan.

6.6 In addition to the NPPF I have also taken account of other elements of national planning policy including Planning Practice Guidance and recent ministerial statements.

6.7 Having considered all the evidence and representations available as part of the examination I am satisfied that the submitted Plan has had regard to national planning policies and guidance in general terms. It sets out a positive vision for the

future of the plan area and promotes sustainable growth. At its heart are a suite of policies that aim to bring forward sensitive housing development to meet local needs, to safeguard its inherent character and to identify and to allow for the improvement of valued community facilities.

- 6.8 At a more practical level the NPPF indicates that plans should provide a clear framework within which decisions on planning applications can be made and that they should give a clear indication of how a decision-maker should react to a development proposal (paragraphs 17 and 154). This was reinforced with the original publication of Planning Practice Guidance in March 2014. Its paragraph 41 (41-041-20140306) indicates that policies in neighbourhood plans should be drafted with sufficient clarity so that a decision-maker can apply them consistently and with confidence when determining planning applications. Policies should also be concise, precise and supported by appropriate evidence. As submitted the Plan does not fully accord with this range of practical issues. The majority of my recommended modifications in Section 7 relate to matters of clarity and precision. They are designed to ensure that the Plan fully accords with national policy.

Contributing to sustainable development

- 6.9 There are clear overlaps between national policy and the contribution that the submitted Plan makes to achieving sustainable development. Sustainable development has three principal dimensions – economic, social and environmental. It is clear to me that the submitted Plan has set out to achieve sustainable development in the Plan area. In the economic dimension, the Plan includes policies to promote sensitive new residential development and to safeguard shops and other commercial services. In the social role, it includes policies to promote smaller housing and to support the development or improvement of community facilities. It also promotes appropriate outdoor recreational facilities in the Green Belt. In the environmental dimension, the Plan positively seeks to protect the distinctive character of the neighbourhood area. It also proposes a policy on car parking in an attempt to prevent any worsening of the existing on-street car parking issues in the neighbourhood area.

General conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan

- 6.10 I have already commented in detail on the development plan context in the wider Mole Valley District Council area in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.8 of this report.
- 6.11 I consider that the submitted Plan delivers a local dimension to this strategic context and supplements the detail already included in the adopted Core Strategy. Section 4 of the Basic Conditions Statement helpfully relates the Plan's policies to policies in the Core Strategy/saved Local Plan. I am satisfied that the submitted Plan is in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan.

7 The Neighbourhood Plan policies

- 7.1 This section of the report comments on the range of policies in the Plan. In particular, it makes a series of recommended modifications to ensure that the various policies have the necessary precision to meet the basic conditions.
- 7.2 My recommendations focus on the policies themselves given that the basic conditions relate primarily to this aspect of neighbourhood plans. In some cases, I have also recommended changes to the associated supporting text.
- 7.3 I am satisfied that the content and the form of the Plan is fit for purpose. It is thorough and distinctive to the Plan area. The wider community and the Village Forum have spent considerable time and energy in identifying the issues and objectives that they wish to be included in the Plan. This gets to the heart of the localism agenda.
- 7.4 The Plan has been designed to reflect Planning Practice Guidance (41-004-20140306) which indicates that neighbourhood plans must address the development and use of land.
- 7.5 I have addressed the policies in the order that they appear in the submitted plan. In some cases, there are overlaps between the different policies.
- 7.6 For clarity this section of the report comments on all policies whether or not I have recommended modifications in order to ensure that the Plan meets the basic conditions.
- 7.7 Where modifications are recommended to policies they are highlighted in bold print. Any associated or free-standing changes to the text of the Plan are set out in italic print.

The initial sections of the Plan

- 7.8 These introductory elements of the Plan set the scene for the range of policies. They do so in a concise and proportionate way. The Plan is well-presented and makes a very clear distinction between its policies and the supporting text. Where appropriate it includes interesting evidence in a tabular format.
- 7.9 The Introduction provides a very clear context to the neighbourhood plan process. In particular it sets out a brief chronology of the Plan's production and how this has overlapped with early elements of the production of the emerging Local Plan.
- 7.10 Section 3 sets out key information about the neighbourhood area that has influenced the preparation of the Plan. It includes an interesting description of the village itself (3.1), and an equally interesting account of its wider landscape setting (3.2).
- 7.11 Section 4 provides important information on accommodation types, sizes and tenure in the Plan area. It also sets a context for the range of policies that appear later in the Plan. Section 5 relates the submitted Plan to national planning policy, the achievement of sustainable development and to the development plan. Paragraphs 5.5.1/5.5.2 helpfully address the matter of the monitoring and review of the Plan.

Paragraph 5.5.2 indicates that the Plan will be reviewed no later than five years after it is made. The importance of reviewing the Plan against evolving national policy and the emerging Local Plan is identified in particular.

Policies in General

- 7.12 The Plan policies are helpfully set out to respond to important identified objectives and key local issues. The presentation of the Plan will ensure that decision-makers have clarity on its policies.

Policy WNDP1: Size, Architectural Style and Character of Housing Development

- 7.13 As its title fully describes this policy addresses the community's expectation that new housing development should reflect the character of the Plan area in general, and the built-up form of the village in particular. It also addresses the importance of new residential development responding to housing demands within the village.
- 7.14 I am satisfied that the approach adopted has regard to national policy. It is also in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan in which Westcott is identified as a larger rural village.
- 7.15 I recommend modifications to the policy to ensure that it has the clarity required by the NPPF. In particular these modifications address:
- The overlooking issue – this matter may not impact on all developments.
 - Repositioning non-policy text into the supporting text.
 - Clarifying the types and sizes of developments that will be supported. As drafted the policy simply asks that development proposals 'reflect' housing demand.
 - The identification of the 'village core' – as submitted the policy signposts the reader to the Core Strategy. The Plan would have the clarity required by the NPPF if it defined the village inset (and the Green Belt) as part of its own Policies Map.
- 7.16 I also recommend a modification to the supporting text to the policy (6.1.1). Whilst its approach is appropriate its language is inconsistent with Policy CS1 of the Core Strategy. That policy identifies Westcott as a 'larger rural village' (not a small village) and promotes 'limited development and infilling on previously developed land in such villages.

Replace the first sentence of the policy with the following:

'New housing developments should reflect the character of the surrounding area. Where necessary developments should be designed to respect the amenities of surrounding properties in general, and to avoid unacceptable levels of overlooking of adjacent properties in particular.'

Delete the third sentence of the policy.

Replace the fourth sentence of the policy (as submitted) with the following and separate it from the remainder of the policy so that it sits as a second component:

‘The size of the new dwellings should reflect the housing demand in the village. Proposals for small developments of houses for 1-4 bedroomed properties within the village core shown on the Policies Map will be particularly supported’.

Replace paragraph 6.1.1 with the following:

Policy WNDP1 sets out important guidance for the development of any new housing developments that may come forward in the Plan period. It reflects the approach adopted in Policy CS1 of the Core Strategy that limited development and infilling is anticipated to take place in Westcott and the other identified ‘larger rural settlements’. The policy links this strategic matter to the housing needs survey carried out in the Plan area. It also requires that any new development should reflect the character of the area in which it is located. The policy has been designed to cater for the level of growth that was anticipated in the Core Strategy. Most development are expected to be between one and four dwellings in size. Should larger developments come forward through redevelopment proposals or by other means there may be the potential to subdivide the sites concerned to create multiple clusters of dwellings.

Produce a free-standing Policies Map showing the village inset/core, the Green Belt and the Plan boundary.

Policy WNDP2: Infill and Redevelopment

- 7.17 This policy follows on from the previous policy. In this case its focus is on residential infill and redevelopment proposals. At its heart is the ambition to facilitate redevelopment schemes that would increase the stock of 1 to 3-bedroom housing suitable for new families and older persons wishing to remain in the Plan area.
- 7.18 As with Policy WNDP1 the policy has regard to national policy and is in general conformity to the strategic policies in the development plan. In particular it promotes the type of redevelopment proposals anticipated in Policy CS1 of the Core Strategy. It has the potential to contribute significantly to the achievement of the social dimension of sustainable development in the Plan area as both younger and older persons will be able to move into or remain within the village.
- 7.19 I recommend three modifications to the policy. The first modifies the language used for the village core and its relationship to a free-standing policies map. The second deletes any direct reference in the policy itself to providing housing for ‘new families and older persons seeking to vacate larger dwellings’. Whilst this may naturally occur, in most cases the planning process cannot directly control the eventual occupancy of new dwellings that may come forward in the Plan area. Its principal role is to facilitate the type of dwellings that will come forward and which would then have the opportunity to satisfy these important social needs. However, to recognise the

community importance of this matter I recommend that the issue is also addressed by way of modifications to the supporting text. The third recommended modification sets out to provide the necessary clarification on the character issue at the end of the policy.

Insert ‘as shown on the Policies Map’ after ‘area’ and delete ‘that is.... Green Belt’

Delete ‘suitable for.... of the village’

Insert a second part of the policy to read:

‘The proposed new residential developments should respect the scale and layout of the particular gardens and should otherwise comply with development plan policies in general, and the first part of Policy WNDP1 in this Plan in particular.’

Include the following at the end of paragraph 6.2.3:

Policy WNDP2 actively supports the development of 1 to 3-bedroom houses. Properties of this size have the ability to accommodate the identified needs of younger families or older persons to set out home or to remain/downsize within the village. Proposals that seek to address these specific needs will be welcomed by the community.

Policy WNDP3: Connectivity within the village and into the countryside

- 7.20 As described in paragraph 6.3.1 the policy sets out to ensure continued access to cycling and footpath routes in the village and into the countryside both generally and to ensure that any new development does not detrimentally affect the existing networks. Plainly these are important ambitions and have the very clear ability to contribute to the social dimension of sustainable development. Paragraph 6.3.3 identifies the extensive use of the existing network.
- 7.21 I recommend that the policy is modified so that it has the clarity required by the NPPF. The first sentence is both unclear and places unreasonable requests on developers. In any event the expectation that new footpaths are created in new development is adequately addressed elsewhere in the policy. The second sentence simply refers to existing MVDC supplementary planning document. There is no need for a neighbourhood plan to repeat or to re-state exist local policy. However, I recommend that it is referenced separately in the supporting text. Thirdly I recommend the deletion of repetitive text in the third sentence of the policy.

Delete the first and second sentences of the policy.

In the third sentence replace ‘must’ with ‘should’ and delete ‘where they exist’.

At the end of paragraph 6.3.1 add:

'Where new routes are provided as part of wider development schemes the overall proposals should conform to the MVDC Supplementary Planning Document 'Designing Out Crime' (December 2011)'.

Policy WNDP4: Parking Provision

- 7.22 This policy sets out standards for car parking provision for residential development in the Plan area. It specifies a minimum of two off-street car parking spaces per dwelling. The policy also encourages parking to be provided above and beyond the needs of any specific development. It also sets out expectations for the quality of car parking spaces and areas.
- 7.23 The supporting text (6.4.1) and the justification section (6.4.3-6.4.5) set out the circumstances that underpin this policy. Car ownership levels in the Plan area are higher than MVDC and Surrey averages. In addition, the Plan area's attractiveness generates weekend visitors for local residents, and more generally to pursue recreational activities in and around the Surrey Hills.
- 7.24 My visit to the Plan area was in the late afternoon and the early evening. I was able to see the concentration of cars parked around the Green, Westcott Street and in the service access road to the front of the principal group of shops off the Guildford Road. I also saw the concentration of on-street parking in the streets running off Furlong Road.
- 7.25 The County Council has commented on the policy. It draws attention to its own maximum car parking policy approach. It also comments that a minimum of two car parking spaces may be excessive for smaller properties that come forward during the Plan period. The submitted neighbourhood plan takes a different view on the application of car parking standards to that used both by MVDC and the County Council. Policy MOV5 of the saved Local Plan applies November 1999 County Council maximum standards.
- 7.26 Plainly there is a balance to be struck on this matter. Policy MOV5 is not a strategic policy and in any event, I need to assess the submitted policy against the more recently-published NPPF's policy approach on this matter. Paragraph 39 of the NPPF advises that local parking standards should take into account a range of factors including the availability of and opportunities for public transport and local car ownership levels. On the basis of this important component of national planning policy and what I saw when I was in the Plan area I can see that there is clear justification in principle for the application of a minimum standards approach. In this respect, the Plan has regard to national policy.
- 7.27 However within the context of this overall conclusion I share the County Council's view that the requirement for a minimum of two car parking spaces may be excessive for the smallest of properties. This may prove to be particularly important given the identified housing need for smaller properties in the Plan area (as set out in its paragraph 6.1.6). It also has the potential to result in new developments where the

provision of car parking spaces is at the expense of other matters including layout and design. On this basis, I recommend a modification to the policy that introduces a lower minimum standard for one-bedroom dwellings. I also recommend a modification to the policy to ensure that it takes account of the usual visitor parking needs associated with residential properties. Plainly it would be unreasonable to expect new private residential developments to contribute directly or indirectly to meeting the car parking needs of general recreational visitors to the Plan area.

7.28 I also recommend modifications to other elements of the policy. I recommend the deletion of the final sentence of the first paragraph of the policy and its repositioning within the supporting text. It is essentially the outcome of the implementation of the policy rather than a policy in its own right. I recommend an identical approach for the final sentence of the second paragraph of the policy for the same reason. I also recommend that ‘encouraged’ is replaced with ‘particularly supported’ in the first sentence of the second paragraph of the policy. This will provide appropriate clarity both to the decision-maker and to potential developers.

**Replace the first paragraph of the policy with the following:
Within the village core as identified on the Policies Map off-street car parking for new residential developments should be provided to the following minimum standards:**

1-bedroom properties	1 car parking spaces
2-bedroom properties (and larger)	2 car parking spaces

On housing developments of 10 or more dwellings allocated visitor car parking should be provided on site to an additional 20% of the figure calculated for the development based on the minimum car parking standards.

Delete the final sentences of the both paragraphs of the policy.

In the first sentence of the second paragraph of the policy replace ‘encouraged’ with ‘particularly supported.’

*Include the following additional supporting text at the end of paragraph 6.4.1:
‘Policy WNDP4 provides a context against which proposals for new residential developments will be assessed. It sets out minimum car parking standards. It also requires a premium for visitor car parking for any larger developments that may come forward within the Plan period. The policy has been designed to ensure that new development does not add to the current levels of on-street car parking. Residential schemes that provide parking spaces above the minimum standards will be particularly supported where they maintain appropriate standards of layout and design for the wider development. Plainly car parking should sit comfortably within the attractive setting of the village. The policy addresses this matter. Unsympathetic car parking arrangements or solutions (such as multi-storey car parks or parking areas with intrusive lighting) will not be supported.’*

Policy WNDP5: Recreation Development

- 7.29 The policy aims to encourage appropriate use of Green Belt land for outdoor recreational facilities. Its approach has regard to national planning policy (NPPF 79-92).
- 7.30 I recommend that the policy is modified so that it refers to the Policies Map (in this case which would identify the spatial extent of the Green Belt). I also recommend that the references in the policy to the NPPF and to development plan are deleted as they are unnecessary in this context. I recommend that the reference to the support of the local community is repositioned into the supporting text. Plainly public comment on any such proposals is a matter which MVDC will consider on a case-by-case basis rather than a policy consideration in its own right.

Replace the policy with the following:

Within the Metropolitan Green Belt appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation will be supported where such proposals preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

Include the following at the end of paragraph 6.5.1:

It is consistent with relevant sections of the NPPF and with the development plan. The policy provides the opportunity for community-driven and supported projects which would meet the recreational and leisure needs of the local community.

Policy WNDP6: Shops and Commercial Services

- 7.31 The policy sets out to safeguard the existing retail facilities in the Plan area. As I saw from my visit they are centrally-located within the village off the main Guildford Road. I also saw that they had a popular role at the heart of the community. This reinforces the findings of the community survey as set out in paragraph 6.6.3. The policy also provides support for associated facilities such as improved access and car parking.
- 7.32 The thrust of the policy is entirely appropriate. The retention of shop units will do much to stimulate the economic and social dimensions of sustainable development in the village.
- 7.33 I recommend modifications to the policy to ensure that it has the clarity required by the NPPF. In particular given the thrust of the policy and the very clear concentration of retail units in three blocks of properties off Guildford Road it would be appropriate to identify these blocks on the Policies Map. This approach would also apply the policy to the former retail premises that were vacant at the time of my visit. I also recommend that the proposed marketing period is reduced to six months. There is no direct evidence about the need for the longer minimum period of twelve months as

set out in the submitted plan. I also recommend a modification to the final sentence of the policy in the interests of clarity. Finally, I recommend a modification to reflect the recent closure of the shop unit that contained the Post Office (as referenced in paragraph 6.6.1). This has happened since the Plan was submitted.

Replace the policy with the following:

The following blocks of properties as shown on the Policies Map are safeguarded for retail use:

[Insert numbers] Guildford Road (the Westcott Bakery block)

[Insert numbers] Guildford Road (the Mace block)

Number 2-6 Guildford Road (between Institute Road and Parsonage Lane)

Within these areas changes of use from retail use to other uses will not be supported unless:

- **the property has been marketed for a minimum period of six months for alternative retail use without success; and**
- **it can be clearly demonstrated that a retail use is no longer financially viable.**

Proposals within the defined retail areas designed to assist in the retention or the establishment of new retail units or otherwise to improve the general operation of the retail areas will be supported where they respect the character of the areas concerned and otherwise comply with development plan policies.

In paragraph 6.6.1 replace 'keep the.... into the future' with 'to assist in the re-occupation of vacant shop units with new retail business in general, and to secure the re-opening of the village Post Office in particular'

At the end of (the modified) paragraph 6.6.1 add:

'Policy WNDP6 identifies the three blocks of retail premises in the Plan area and sets out the basis against which proposals for non-retail uses will be assessed. It also offers support to associated proposals that are intended to support these important retail areas. These could include improved access arrangements, car and cycle parking.'

Policy WNDP7: Enhancement of Community Services

7.34 This policy sets out to provide a positive context within which modern, flexible community facilities can be provided and maintained. It does so to good effect. It identifies the existing facilities in the Plan area and identifies that within the Plan period some of the facilities will require significant financial investment.

7.35 I recommend a modification to the policy that repositions contextual non-policy text into the supporting text. Otherwise the policy meets the basic conditions.

Replace 'which create.... for residents' with 'in the Plan area'

Insert the following at the end of 6.7.1:

The implementation of the policy will help to create a cohesive and supportive village life by creating financially viable and sustainable facilities for local residents.

Other matters

- 7.36 A neighbourhood plan needs to specify the period to which it has effect. The submitted Plan does not directly do so. The matter is however addressed in the Basic Conditions Statement. In that document, the Plan period is specified to be from 2018 to 2027. I recommend that this information is also included in the Plan itself. In doing so I recommend that the start date is 2017 rather than 2018. This reflects a reasonable expectation of MVDC's ability to organise a referendum and make the Plan before the end of the calendar year. I also recommend that the end date is 2026 rather than 2027. This would establish a more appropriate relationship between the neighbourhood Plan and the adopted Core Strategy (which has an end date of 2026).

Insert 2017-2026 after 'Plan' on the front cover of the Plan itself.

Insert the following at the beginning of paragraph 2.2.1:

'The Plan period is from 2017 to 2026'.

8 Summary and Conclusions

Summary

- 8.1 The Plan sets out a range of policies to guide and direct development proposals in the period up to 2026. It is concise and distinctive in addressing a specific set of issues that have been identified and refined by the wider community.
- 8.2 Following my independent examination of the Plan I have concluded that the Westcott Neighbourhood Development Plan meets the basic conditions for the preparation of a neighbourhood plan subject to a series of recommended modifications.
- 8.3 This report has recommended a series of modifications to the policies in the Plan. Nevertheless, it remains fundamentally unchanged in its role and purpose.

Conclusion

- 8.4 On the basis of the findings in this report I recommend to Mole Valley District Council that subject to the incorporation of the modifications set out in this report that the Westcott Neighbourhood Plan should proceed to referendum.

Referendum Area

- 8.5 I am required to consider whether the referendum area should be extended beyond the Plan area. In my view, the neighbourhood area is entirely appropriate for this purpose and no evidence has been submitted to suggest that this is not the case. I therefore recommend that the Plan should proceed to referendum based on the neighbourhood area as approved by the District Council on 5 March 2013.
- 8.6 I am grateful to everyone who has helped in any way to ensure that this examination has run in a smooth and efficient manner. The Westcott Village Forum has produced a concise and well-constructed neighbourhood plan that properly reflects its distinctive and attractive environment.

Andrew Ashcroft
Independent Examiner
31 July 2017

