

MID AND WEST BERKSHIRE LOCAL ACCESS FORUM

Secretary Sandra Griffin

To: The Steering Group, Tilehurst Neighbourhood Plan

By email to: steering-group@tilehurstpcnp.org.uk

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24 October 2022

Tilehurst Neighbourhood Plan; Regulation 14 Consultation Comments by the Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum

1 Introduction

The Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Tilehurst Neighbourhood Plan at the time of its Regulation 14 Consultation.

The Forum is a statutory advisory body to West Berkshire Council, Reading Borough Council, and Wokingham Borough Council, appointed under Section 94 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 ('CROW'). It is a statutory advisor on the improvement of public access to land within the area, for open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the area to these 'appointing authorities' and other relevant bodies, which include parish councils. In carrying out these functions, a Forum must have regard to the needs of land management and the desirability of conserving the natural beauty of the area.

As your consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan took place between meetings of the Forum, I have, as the Forum's Chair, invited members to review the document and to make comments. I have then collated these comments into this document, and I now submit them to the Steering Group on behalf of the Forum.

The Forum would be happy to engage with the Tilehurst Parish Council or the Steering Group as the plan is further developed, or to put you in contact with a member with expertise in on a particular aspect.

2 General Comments

We warmly welcome the emphasis in this draft Neighbourhood Plan on encouraging more walking and cycling and access to green spaces. We support all of the proposed policies and projects that promote these. Our comments are therefore intended to assist in strengthening these aspects of the Neighbourhood plan, and in clarifying some small points.

We welcome the mentions of horse riding and the Hall Place Equestrian Centre in the draft Neighbourhood Plan, but the plan does not recognise their particular needs. We make some suggestions to address this in a section below.

Circular routes are particularly valuable for recreation and exercise. We therefore suggest that you might consider in the Neighbourhood Plan how a number of off-road circular routes of different lengths and types could be developed. Footpaths should, where possible, be accessible for people with disabilities, the elderly and parents with buggies and prams, as well as just able-bodied walkers. The surface and any necessary gates should be appropriate for as many types of users as possible, and any existing stiles replaced by gates and steps removed.

At present, there are no recognised off-road routes out of Tilehurst for cyclists and horse riders. The neighbourhood plan might consider how these might be created, though this would require liaison with neighbouring parish councils and/or West Berkshire Council. These might, for example, connect to Nunhide Lane in Sulham parish.

We recognise the difficulty in getting such routes officially recorded as public rights of way (i.e. added to the definitive map maintained by West Berkshire Council). It may be easier to obtain the agreement of the Landowner for their use as 'permissive footpaths/bridleways'.

Walking, cycling and horse riding in the countryside offer huge benefits for 'wellbeing' (mental and physical health), quality of life and sustainable living. These benefits might be mentioned at appropriate places in the document.

We suggest that consideration is given to including 'valued views' in the Neighbourhood Plan - including views from public rights of way and open spaces¹.

2.1 Equestrian activities

Horse grazing, horse riding and the BHS-approved Hall Place Equestrian Centre are mentioned in the Plan (para 8.12, Appendices F2, F7), and figure 9.1 shows horses grazing near Barefoot Copse. The equestrian centre is one of few in West Berkshire. The community appears to value the rural feel that these bring.

The West Berkshire Local Transport Plan's Active Travel Strategy recognises the need to cater for equestrians in its Active Travel Strategy, and the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan recognises and supports the value of equestrian activities (paras 3.13, 3.14, 9.12).

At present, the particular needs of the equestrian community are not recognised in the draft Plan, with respect to access to open space, rights of way and the need to avoid busy roads. These needs are therefore not addressed in its action points, policies or projects.

We therefore suggest that the final Neighbourhood Plan give more focus to the equestrian activities within the parish and their needs, building on the Active Travel Strategy and the AONB Management Plan.

Providing for horses will encourage them to stay in the parish. This will increase the diversity in sporting opportunities that are available to the local community, while helping to keep the rural ambience they bring.

3 Comments on specific paragraphs and sections

Section 6: The West Berkshire Council online map² shows a number of footways in the urban part of Tilehurst that are not public footpaths - especially between cul-de-sacs. We suggest that these might be specifically mentioned.

Paragraph 6.36, Figure 6.1: Two of the routes shown on this map are public bridleways. We therefore suggest that its title is amended to 'Public Rights of Way'.

Paragraph 6.36: Public Footpaths TILE/6, TILE/7, TILE/8 and TILE/12 form parts of a 'Recreational Route' designated by West Berkshire Council², which are shown on the Ordnance Survey Explorer (1:25 000) map as "Berkshire Circular Routes". We suggest that this is mentioned. These routes also go in part along roads, so the footways of these roads might need particular attention. As these routes are highlighted on the maps used by regular walkers, they may be attracted to visit the parish.

Paragraph 6.36: West Berkshire Council is currently updating its Rights of Way Improvement Plan, and we are pleased to note that Tilehurst Parish Council has contributed to its development. It is

¹ The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan is an example of 'valued views in a Neighbourhood Plan: https://arborfield.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Map_D_Important_Views_And_Vistas.pdf

² <https://gis2.westberks.gov.uk/webapps/OnlineMap/> - Local Street Gazetteer, under Highways & Recreational Routes, under Countryside.

likely that this will be completed by the next stage in the development of your Neighbourhood Plan. We suggest that either the current or the new plan is included in Appendix G.

Para 8.12: We are unclear what is meant by “recreational cycle trails and walking bridleways within the adjacent NWD AONB”. We are not aware of any recognised cycle trails or bridleways in the AONB that are readily accessible from Tilehurst, but they may be permissive routes that are not recorded on maps. We suggest that the wording is clarified, and any such routes are included on a map (see also the comment to paragraph 9.423).

Paragraph 8.12: In addition to the AONB, the Kennet and Avon Canal tow path is only 600m away from the boundary of the parish, and could also be mentioned.

Paragraphs 9.420 and 9.422: We agree that the value of green spaces can only be realised if there is access to them. We recognise the challenges that access can bring. Education and good signage are therefore important.

Paragraph 9.43: It is unclear whether this paragraph is describing the area of the AONB within the parish or more widely. If the former, then it is incorrect, because there are no bridleways within the part of the parish within the AONB. (*n.b. there is no map on page 50*)

Paragraph 9.423. It would be very helpful for a map to be available in the Plan and online of routes that residents are permitted to use by the landowner - ‘permissive paths’ and ‘permissive bridleways’. (*n.b. there is no map on page 51*)

Paragraph 9.49: A Forum member with experience in developing a Neighbourhood Plan expressed concern that the covenants on Baresfoot Copse and Cornwell Copse may not be sufficient to fully protect them as public open spaces. The wording of the covenant is open to different interpretations, and covenants can be difficult to enforce. The Neighbourhood Plan is a good opportunity to strengthen the protection for these open spaces, in the spirit of the bequest.

Paragraph 9.51: Public rights of way are valuable as wildlife corridors linking woodlands and open spaces.

Paragraph 10.3: We note that projects “T1-T4 will be incorporated into a separate Getting Around document”. It is unclear if it is intended to be a formal part of the Neighbourhood Plan; they will carry greater weight in planning terms if they are a full part of it.

Appendix G: We suggest that the following documents, mentioned in this document, are added to the list of References and Supporting Evidence:

- West Berkshire Local Transport Plan, Active Travel Strategy:
https://www.westberks.gov.uk/media/36907/Transport-Active-Travel-Strategy/pdf/Active_Travel_Strategy.pdf?m=637111431714830000
- North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/our-work/management-plan/>
- West Berkshire Council Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan
http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/documents/s94154/T_LCWIP%20report_A4_21.pdf
- West Berkshire Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan
<https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/39154/Rights-of-Way-Improvement-Plan-ROWIP>

Yours sincerely,



Simon Pike, Chair, Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum

A local access forum under Section 94 of the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000, appointed by, and advising:



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL