



In 1988, Risborough Area Residents Association (RARA) was formed for the residents of Princes Risborough, Longwick-cum-Ilmer, Great and Little Kimble, Ellesborough, Lacey Green and Loosley Row, Bledlow-cum-Saunderton, Monks Risborough, Askett, Whiteleaf and Cadsden to protect, enhance and represent independently the views of residents on significant issues arising concerning the natural and developed environment and the provision of public services and amenities.

This Chairman's Annual Report covers the last 12 months of RARA's activity since last year's AGM on 28th November. Now in my third year as Chairman, I recognise the scale of voluntary commitment by members of the Committee and our 600 RARA members to achieve a better Risborough Area.

Much of this report focuses on the **LOCAL PLAN** where RARA's work has continued to:

- work towards a lower scale of development;
- consult with local residents on future proposals

In February and March this year RARA responded to the Planning Inspector Nicola Gulley's Main Modifications Consultation (arising from last summer's hearings) for the Plan, submitting compelling arguments to:

- reduce the scale of development in Risborough
- emphasise the need for sustainability
- draw attention to the ineffectiveness of buffer zone between PR and Longwick,
- highlight the need for other road traffic management solutions other than relief road - a waste of taxpayers' money
- protect AONB

However, despite these responses the Local Plan was deemed 'sound' by the Planning Inspector subject to the proposed modifications, none of which included the aforementioned for Princes Risborough.

In August, Wycombe District Council formally adopted the Plan and the inspector's recommended 9% increase in its housing target and backed the

document's proposed release of 10 sites from the green belt and 12 sites from an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) for new development. All 3 of Risborough's Cllrs (also PR Cllrs) voted in support. There were only 2 Cons WDC Cllrs that voted against.

The plan now proposes between 11,659 and 11,899 homes allocated for development up to 2033. The housing target marks a nine per cent increase compared to the 10,925 homes a year in an earlier version of the plan and follows a modification recommended by the inspector.

The plan proposes the release of green belt land to provide 1,139 of the homes and 17 hectares of new employment development, an approach backed by the inspector.

In her report, Gulley said there was a "compelling case" for the release of land from the green belt. She concluded that exceptional circumstances existed to justify the release of the 10 sites which constitute the green belt releases.

In addition, the plan allocates 12 sites for housing and employment within the Chilterns AONB, after the inspector concluded that the council had assessed the sites on a "clear, logical and justified basis". More than two-thirds of the district is within the Chilterns AONB.

The inspector also backed a memorandum of understanding between the council and neighbouring Aylesbury Vale District Council for the latter to take on a portion of Wycombe's housing need that cannot be met in the district.

Aylesbury Vale has agreed to allocate land in its emerging local plan for 2,275 homes that Wycombe says it cannot provide for.

The adopted plan further includes a policy which would require developers to ensure that tree canopies cover at least a quarter of the site area on sites outside of the town centre that are larger than 0.5 hectares. However, the policy has been relaxed following the examination.

A main modification will allow developers to use other green infrastructure, such as green roofs and walls to deliver equivalent benefits, where the planting of trees is impractical.

Legal challenge to the Plan

It is possible for the Plan to be challenged under s.113 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Any challenge has to be made within 6 weeks of the Plan being adopted. The RARA Committee unanimously agreed that challenging the 'soundness' of the Local Plan in the courts would be a difficult and (unaffordable) costly process, and with the strength of the government housing agenda continuing to maintain momentum, the challenge would not be supported. However, from elsewhere, the Council has now been served with notice of two applications to legally challenge the local plan, which could lead to a Judicial Review of the Council's decision to adopt the plan.

The applications have been made in relation to Land off Clappins Lane, Naphill and Hollands Farm, Bourne End and Wooburn. There are 2 stages to the process:

1. The court has to first give permission for a challenge to be heard. This is based on an initial assessment of the claims made by the applicants and the Council's response to those claims.
2. If permission is given, then claims will be heard in the High Court and a judgement will be made whether the contested parts of the plan are quashed and if the remainder of the plan should remain in force or not.

In the meantime, this does not change the status of the plan, it is still adopted and decisions on planning applications will be made in accordance with policies in the plan.

Princes Risborough Expansion Plan (PREA)

In June and July RARA responded to the 7-week consultation to comment on the draft expansion plan or Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which sets out where the new homes will go but also gives guidance on the character and density of the houses. Once finalised, the SPD will be used as part of the local framework to approve or reject planning applications.

The Council was asking local people to give their comments on:

- how and when roads and schools will be built
- what developers will be expected to include in planning applications
- how well the guidance reflects the vision that has been set by the Risborough steering group "for the town to be a modern, green and

accessible place with a vibrant community, which strongly reflects its historic roots and setting within the Chiltern Hills”

RARA’s response can be seen on our new website but key points raised include:

- Throughout the document and at the public hearings we have noted concerns from the developers, with regard to the viability of proposals. The inference is that we are heading towards ad hoc planning. Something we were told the Local Plan would avoid.
- Awareness the developers do not have an ‘appetite’ for a relief road and are not in favour of making contributions to fund it. This could lead to a ‘road to nowhere’, something ‘Homes England’ will want to avoid happening with a grant of £12m from their Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) to ‘kick start’ paying for the relief road.
- Fear that infrastructure requirements were end-loaded and that if phase 3 of the development did not happen the associated infrastructure required for the existing town as well as phase 1 and 2 housing would never materialise.
- In view of the pending formation of a Unitary Council there is no merit in rushing ahead at this stage with a Local Plan that is unsustainable and does not command the support of the community.

In terms of specific detail RARA noted:

- The relief road will go through AONB and will create wider transportation congestion issues
- The lack of any proper integration with the existing town, and
- non-existent buffer Zone with Longwick referred to at the Public Meetings as ‘The Longwick Gap’ that is proposed to have sports fields with floodlights, existing traveller sites and new houses currently being built by Rectory Homes, hardly the green buffer to prevent urban sprawl.
- Lack of employment to justify housing numbers – it is not a sustainable plan
- Major environmental concerns raised regarding the Poppy Road development and AONB
- Most of the proposed housing development and leisure facilities are more than 1km from the town centre. We should be focusing more on town centre residential development
- Alscot hamlet, an historical setting and a designated conservation area, will be totally isolated by development and worryingly the choice of high-density homes close to its boundary. How does this meet WDC’s vision

for the town to 'strongly reflect its historic roots and setting within the Chiltern Hills'?

- The new primary school will not be delivered until Phase 2 – despite the document highlighting only a 5% surplus capacity at present. Where will children during the build out in Phase 1 go to school locally? The proposal for new schools' delivery will be lagging the need as identified in you document. The first primary school needs to be brought forward.
- The PREA is well over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the secondary school. This will generate a massive increase in the size of the school run, with severe detrimental effects on air pollution and traffic flow, during the busiest hours.

In summary:

RARA is concerned that this SPD seeks to deliver approximately 1,150 homes by 2027/8, as phase 1 and 2, with very little of the suggested infrastructure improvements included.

SPD proposes a section of the proposed 'relief' road, between Picts Lane and Park Mill (across the front of the station, down Summerleys Rd, through a newly laid out bridge and through Sumitomo), to be implemented (despite there yet to be any proposed plans available) as part of phase 1 of development. WDC has recently advised the award of a £12m Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) to support the delivery of this section of the road. We have had no clarification from WDC on any terms and conditions associated with this award and through recent conversations with a developer have learnt this is a loan which will need to be paid back by the developers and will be released in instalments.

The proposed Sports Hub, existing Town Centre improvements (including car parking) and remaining proposed infrastructure are not now suggested until phase 3 (between 2028 and 2033), when the remaining housing (1500) is proposed. This is very concerning to RARA as feedback from residents has consistently told us that infrastructure improvements to the town are required regardless, and that they are imperative before the town could accommodate any significant growth. RARA is also concerned that with the imminent unitary changes to local government and with waning developer appetite for building in this more remote part of the district there is the very real possibility that phase 3 may never happen and that the proposed required infrastructure improvements to the town centre would therefore be in serious jeopardy. This could leave Princes Risborough with up to 1200 new homes (a 40% growth), a stretch of relief road that only feeds a development site, and no other new infrastructure to support the existing or new town.

Further points will be raised under agenda item 5.

Communication:

We continue to keep our members and local residents informed of developments and the work we are doing via newsletters, our website and Facebook posts. Facebook has been used more frequently this year and we try to support initiatives by local groups and businesses which are helping the community in Risborough. Thank you to Mandy Dormer who sends communications out for RARA.

Thank you to Richard Clayton for creating our brand new RARA website where much of our key responses can be viewed. This will be covered in agenda item 7.

Political Landscape:

Running Buckinghamshire via a centralised Unitary Council will be the subject of the talk our guest speaker Carl Etholen will be kindly giving this evening. We hope the Local Elections in May next year will provide greater focus on the housing agenda being thrust upon Princes Risborough.

We continue to work to protect, enhance and represent **independently** the views of residents on significant issues arising concerning the natural and developed environment and the provision of public services and amenities.

I am very grateful to all the members of the committee, Colin Courtney, Richard Clayton, Will Streule, Ian Parkinson and Mandy Dormer whose commitment and concern for the future of Risborough drives the work of RARA. Thank you to all our members, and local residents who have continued to support and believe in the work of RARA.

Thank you

Linda Cannon Clegg

Chairman RARA