

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Examination of the Borough Local Plan 2013-2033

This Statement is in response to the invitation in the letter dated 15th September 2020, from Banks Solutions, on behalf of the Inspector, to comment on the Council's response (RBWM 026) to the Inspector's question to the Council, dated 13th July 2020, concerning household projections.

It is written on behalf of Bray Parish Council.

Bray Parish Council are one of the 13 Organisations which have already made a combined response to the Inspector on this matter. The Parish Council, of course, completely endorse the content of that response.

The Parish Council would, however, wish to emphasise two points in particular.

First, the Parish Council consider that all indications are that the housing requirement for the Royal Borough, from the time of submission of the BLP until the end of the Plan period, is less - indeed considerably less - than was anticipated when the 2012 Housing Projections were published. This should lead the Inspector to take a cautious view about the allocation of new housing sites.

Furthermore, in such circumstances, any potential justification for the allocation of Green Belt land for housing or commercial development is removed, and current housing projections certainly provide no demonstrable exceptional circumstances which would support development in the Green Belt, having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework.

The second argument for caution and prudence arises from the current COVID-19 pandemic. There has been a demonstrable increase in home working; a demonstrable decline in the "high street" retail and leisure sectors; a drastic reduction in the use of public and private transport. Some of these phenomena may be temporary, although many experts are now forecasting that there will be long term changes in people's living, working and leisure activities and behaviours. However, the increase in home working necessitated by COVID-19 has accelerated a trend already in progression with improved communications technologies. The ability to home-work, or to work in independent hubs nearer to home, will inevitably lead to less requirement for commercial premises.

Approval of a BLP which plans for an over-provision of residential and commercial floorspace would run contrary to all current indications which suggest that new and more subtle methods of future planning need to be adopted. Approval of the Plan as presently submitted is likely to result in the sterilisation of much land, including Green Belt, which could be put to much better and more sustainable use in the future for the benefit of local communities.

If there is an opportunity to address the Inspector further on this matter, Bray Parish Council would be pleased to do so.

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