



Borough Local Plan 2032-2042 scoping consultation

September 2026

1. Introduction

WildCookham has contributed to the Cookham Parish Council submission to the consultation and we are also partners of the RBWM Climate Emergency Coalition. We also refer the Council to the UK Climate Change Committee's Fourth Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk, [A Well-Adapted UK](#), published in May this year. This is essential reading for any organisation involved in development planning and we trust that Council officers are fully aware of it.

Our comments here focus on what we see as the overriding environmental and ecological issues and approach that should underpin every aspect of the new Borough Local Plan (BLP). There are other issues which are fully addressed in the Cookham Parish Council and Climate Emergency Coalition submissions documents which we endorse.

2. The top line

1. Climate change is treated in the consultation as a subsidiary issue. It must be a primary focus in any housing and other development plans. It must also take into account the accelerating pace of climate change, with average global temperatures set to hit 2°C above pre-industrial times and up to 3.5°C in the UK.
2. Each growth option and proposed site must be assessed for the full range of impacts, including transport emissions, embodied carbon, flood and overheating exposure, water availability, ecological effects and infrastructure requirements. A sustainable borough for the long-term is at least as important as putting up more houses.
3. The plan must incorporate measures of climate adaptation as well as mitigation.
4. Flooding will be an increasing risk in communities in the Thames Valley, including Cookham. Nature-based solutions must be adopted to ensure that flood risk management goes in hand in hand with protecting our natural environment and encouraging biodiversity.
5. Natural corridors are an essential means of protecting wildlife whilst supporting local residents and encouraging their health and well-being. The green gap between Cookham and Furze Platt is also especially important in maintaining the identity and integrity of Cookham, for the benefit of visitors and residents.

3. What happened to the climate crisis?

1. The document supporting the new National Policy Planning Framework, issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, makes clear that environmental issues are to be a key part of any local planning policy. Chapter 5, with sub-sections CC1, CC2 and CC3, addresses the broad planning issues and the specific issues of climate mitigation and climate adaptation. The introduction to the chapter refers to the need for plans to 'contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the full range of current and potential impacts of climate change, by minimising vulnerability and improving resilience'.
2. Other chapters reinforce this - chapter 10 on Securing clean energy and water; chapter 18 on Managing flood risk and coastal change; and chapter 19 on conserving and enhancing the natural environment. All of these topics should be part of the scope of the RBWM BLP.
3. This Government prioritisation presents the Royal Borough with a crucial opportunity to develop plans that meet the climate challenge we face. The new Plan will take us through to the 2040s and developments resulting from it will be with us far beyond that. By that time average global temperatures are forecast to hit 2°C above pre-industrial levels. In the UK it is forecast that the impact will be greater – between 3° and 3.5°C higher. This will impact just about every aspect of our communities and our personal lives.
4. **Despite this clear threat to our communities, climate change gets just one mention in the RBWM consultation scoping questionnaire where nature is simply treated as an important asset 'contributing to the Borough's character, identity and quality of life'. Moreover, the assumption is clearly that we can still mitigate against climate change when we so clearly need now to be adapting to it as well – as the NPPF document so clearly points out.**
5. The above suggests that there needs to be a mental reset at the Council. Simply giving a slightly higher priority to climate change will miss the point. The BLP must make clear that each development and site option, and any other infrastructure proposal, starts with an assessment of the full range of environmental impacts over the next several decades (including emissions, embodied carbon, flood risk, water quality and availability, sewage, overheating, habitat and biodiversity loss). Specific plans that address these challenges need to be part of the planning process from the start.
6. It may be that this will require additional skills involved. There is now good experience of managing nature-based projects (from the Wildlife Trusts, Natural England and other organisations) and the Borough should not hold back from accessing this. The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy, led by RBWM, must also play its part.
7. In summary, we see the creation of the new BLP as the opportunity we need in the borough to prepare our residents for a very different world. The Royal Borough and its Council must ensure that every element of the BLP puts climate resilience and long-term environmental sustainability at its heart.

4. An ever-evolving reality

1. We are not dealing with a static situation. Forecasts 20 years ago concerning the speed of global warming and other key measures have been shown to be well short of the actual outturn. Plans need to take into account not just the current status but must prepare for an ever-worsening climate. Locally in Cookham we have seen the impact of this since the current BLP was first being prepared in 2006. In the 20 years since then Cookham has experienced:
 - 1.1. Flooding occurring every three years against the earlier 10, causing damage to houses and businesses
 - 1.2. Record low drinking water levels, regular water-leaks and shortages
 - 1.3. Drought every five years against earlier 10 years, with hosepipe bans for local residents and major crop failures for our farmers
 - 1.4. Most recently 200+ new houses being built in Cookham, 330 in adjoining land at Furze Platt and 360+ houses across the river in Bourne End, all within a mile of Cookham Rise. These add exceptional pressure on every service, notably sewage, water supply, traffic. (Note that the possibility of a further 200+ housing development between Cookham and Furze Platt will exacerbate an already dangerous situation and must be opposed).
 - 1.5. Less space for nature – and the essential benefits this brings - through building on greenbelt with agricultural buildings repurposed to businesses and later houses
 - 1.6. Intensified farming practices and creeping urbanisation through existing enlargement of dwellings, further degrading biodiversity.
2. Unless we accept that this has been happening, and why, we will not be able to adequately address the very real challenges we now face. Moreover nature protection needs to be forward looking. We cannot rely on past data since the onward march of climate change is resulting in accelerating ecosystem damage and biodiversity loss.

6. The specifics

1. This is a scoping phase so we are not setting out specific actions related to Cookham. We note that Cookham Parish Council's address some of the specific concerns of Cookham residents, as do other bodies such as the Cookham Society. And below we set out the headline proposals put forward by the Climate Emergency Coalition, which WildCookham endorses.
2. We do however stress two principal concerns that apply across the Borough but have particular relevance in Cookham:
 - 2.1. **Flood risk management:** The Cookham floodplain, stretching from Battlemead to Cockmarsh/Winter Hill, presents an opportunity as well as a threat. Flood risk management plans using nature-based solutions can offer, in addition to flood control, a range of benefits including water quality improvement, biodiversity

recovery and carbon sequestration and climate benefits. Local access, health benefits, volunteering opportunities are also key benefits from taking a holistic view of the area. Such schemes can access significant external funding. Housing in or close to any area of potential flooding over the coming decades must not be allowed.

- 2.2. **Natural corridor protection:** Cookham's exceptional range of natural habitats must be protected – the River Thames and its backwaters and wetlands, the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC, the chalk escarpment at Winter Hill, the floodplain grasslands, its four Local Wildlife Sites and its farmland. The Cookham Neighbourhood Plan confirms the importance of this natural heritage, both for residents and the many visitors to Cookham. Integral to this rich variety of habitats is the corridor that separates Cookham from Furze Platt and Maidenhead. A vital link between the Chiltern Beechwoods and the valley floodplain this corridor has already been significantly reduced in recent decades: there must be no further reduction.

Food security: Linked to the protection of our natural corridors is the threat to food security from climate change. The Plan must ensure that productive agricultural land is not taken out of circulation.

Climate Emergency Coalition submission

WildCookham endorses the document submitted by the Climate Emergency Coalition as a well thought-through assessment of the issues that the BLP needs to address.

Climate mitigation, adaptation and nature recovery must be organising principles for the whole Borough Plan. Every development option should be tested against whether it reduces emissions, remains safe and liveable in the future climate, and leaves nature measurably better off.

This is not an anti-development position. It supports homes and neighbourhoods that are affordable to heat, accessible without compulsory car ownership, resilient to flooding and overheating, and healthy places in which to live.

Commitments RBWM needs to make

1. A climate-compatible spatial strategy

Assess each growth option and proposed site for transport emissions, embodied carbon, flood and overheating exposure, water availability, ecological effects and infrastructure requirements - not merely housing capacity.

2. A quantified carbon assessment

Establish an emissions baseline and pathway consistent with net zero, and publish the comparative carbon consequences of alternative development patterns.

3. Equal treatment of adaptation and mitigation

Prepare a climate-risk evidence base covering river and surface-water flooding, extreme heat, drought and water scarcity, wildfire, habitat stress and infrastructure failure.

4. Sustainable location before technical mitigation

Prioritise suitable brownfield and town-centre locations close to everyday services and dependable public transport. Protect valuable urban habitats, mature trees, allotments and flood-storage land.

5. Homes designed for their whole life

Pursue very low energy demand, clean heat, rooftop solar where suitable, summer comfort, water efficiency, adaptability and whole-life carbon assessment for significant developments.

6. A transport hierarchy

Plan first for walking, wheeling, cycling and reliable public transport. Growth without practical alternatives to driving will lock in emissions and disadvantage people without cars.

7. Nature recovery as infrastructure

Protect habitats first, connect them through a mapped recovery network, and secure long-term delivery. Treat trees, wetlands, soils and green corridors as cooling, drainage, carbon, health and wildlife infrastructure.

8. Renewable-energy planning

Identify suitable areas for renewable and low-carbon energy, storage and grid infrastructure, with environmental safeguards and community benefit.

9. Infrastructure alongside development

Secure public transport, active travel, sustainable drainage, water capacity, green space and community facilities at the appropriate stage rather than after homes are occupied.

10. Measurable delivery and accountability

Set indicators, annual reporting and corrective triggers for emissions, mode share, energy performance, renewable capacity, flood resilience, tree canopy and habitat condition.

WildCookham

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