

Why GLRA should support the Grazeley Settlement plan

*Briefing for the committee of the Great Langborough Residents' Association
David Nash, Secretary: 20 November 2016*

Why does Wokingham BC plan to build a Garden Settlement in Grazeley?

The existing Local Plan (2006 – 2026) has concentrated the greater part of housing development delivery into a number of Strategic Development Locations (SDLs). Most of these are on the boundaries of existing settlements. They include a North and South Wokingham SDL. The added over 4,000 dwellings will put a huge additional load on existing infrastructure. We see it in the estimates of increased traffic through roads established in the 19th century or even earlier, an already overloaded GP provision, excessive demand on existing schools with a new school building programme struggling to keep up.

The process of planning and delivery around existing settlements is slow and expensive.

Central Government recognises this as an issue – especially in the crowded South East. Initiatives like the “Northern Power House” are unlikely to impact its effect – especially for the next couple of decades.

It describes support for new Garden Settlements as follows¹: -

We want to encourage more local areas to come forward with ambitious locally-led proposals for new communities that work as self-sustaining places, not dormitory suburbs. They should have high quality and good design hard-wired in from the outset – a new generation of garden villages, towns and cities.

We know that there is interest at the local level in how developing new garden villages, towns and cities can be a suitable way of meeting local housing need, rather than building on to existing settlements. We are taking important steps to support local areas who want to move in that direction.

*We are proposing to strengthen national planning policy to provide a more **supportive approach** for new settlements. We are committing to legislate to update the New Towns Act 1981 to ensure we have a statutory vehicle well-equipped to support the delivery of new garden cities, towns and villages for the 21st century.*

*There are a number of **funding streams** which, subject to eligibility, could be open for successful expressions of interest to secure priority access.*

So, this is the background to Wokingham BC's interest in participating in the new garden settlement initiative. It's not a WBC “secret plan”. It is a document jointly supported by Wokingham Borough, West Berkshire District and Reading Borough Councils.

As the expression of interest says²: -

it is clear that a new settlement of this scale presents opportunities to provide large scale social, environmental and economic infrastructure, including; a rail station, new transport links, a new motorway bridge, schools, retail and employment opportunities, flood alleviation, strategic scale green (and blue, based on local rivers) infrastructure and the ability to create a new highly sustainable community for western Berkshire.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/locally-led-garden-villages-towns-and-cities>

² WBC Local Plan Update – Latest News <http://www.wokingham.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-plan-update/>

Why should GLRA support the Grazeley Proposal?

GLRA identified a large number of significant concerns about the impact of the current plan on Wokingham. We have expressed some very grave reservations – we are aware that massive extensions to the outskirts of our town will impose severe loads on its predominantly Victorian infrastructure.

Do we want a new local plan that just continues with this potentially very damaging method of development – adding to existing settlements?

In opposing the Grazeley proposal, we might well be encouraging a continuation of the harmful effects of the existing methodology.

The majority of residents of Grazeley and Grazeley Green will not welcome the idea.

However, from the perspective of residents of Wokingham town, if this plan is accepted, it includes the provision of 15,000 new dwellings. This represents 17 years of the WBC newly estimated demand of 856 per annum.

These additional houses will have to be located somewhere. Can we tolerate the idea that a portion of these 856 causes even more expansion of Wokingham town?

GLRA exists to represent the interests of residents of central Wokingham.

We might sympathise with the views and concerns of people living in other areas.

However, I recommend that we maintain this local focus and support the Grazeley plan and support its inclusion as a key component of the new WBC Local Plan 2016 – 2036.