



# Berinsfield Parish Council

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**Mrs. Annette Loveland**  
**Clerk to the Council**

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4<sup>th</sup> November, 2024

Mr. A. Ashcroft,  
Independent Examiner,  
Berinsfield Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Dear Mr. Ashcroft,

Thank you for your recent Clarification Note as part of your examination of this second version of the Berinsfield Neighbourhood Plan (BNP2).

We have reviewed your questions and are able to respond by grouping them into three types: those that are very much focused on the BNP2 spatial vision; those that seek to deliver greater benefits than the Local Plan norm; and those that the local community would expect to see in the plan.

## **Spatial Vision**

### Policy BERIN1

*I have noted the overlaps between the submitted policy and Policies STRAT10i and H9 of the Local Plan. Please can the Parish Council advise about the way in which the submitted policy is in general conformity with Policy STRAT10i and the specific circumstances which will apply to the development of the Berinsfield Garden Village?*

### Policy BERIN2

*In general terms, this is a very positive policy. However, should a degree of flexibility be built into the policy to ensure that the overall development of new homes in the Plan period is financially viable?*

### Policy BERIN18

*In general terms this is a very positive policy. Nevertheless, is part B too prescriptive and inflexible?*

Policy BERIN19

*In general terms this is a very positive policy. Nevertheless, is part B too prescriptive and inflexible?*

The Parish Council considers this suite of policies goes to the heart of the community's vision of the future of Berinsfield. Although that vision is simple in its essence – 'one village' – it has struggled to encourage the other key stakeholders to buy into it. This is not because those stakeholders necessarily disagree with it, but they demand full flexibility and want to see nothing that they consider may hinder the delivery of the Garden Village, whether that leads to 'one village' or not.

No stakeholder wants to see the transformation of Berinsfield delivered more than the local community, who have faced the uncertainty of SODC's plans for the village and its regeneration for more than a decade. The Parish Council has nothing to gain from using BNP2 to stifle the planning or delivery of the masterplan.

However, nor does the community want to hand SODC and the land interests a blank policy cheque for how the strategic allocation and Garden Village policies and ambitions are interpreted and delivered. Unfortunately, the inconsistencies in communications between the land interests and SODC with the Parish Council as the elected body of the community in recent years, and the long delays to real progress, have undermined its confidence that the vision will be realised without serious compromises having to be made.

From the outset the community has been concerned of the high risk of the Garden Village becoming two villages of distinct communities. SODC and the County Council have never explicitly been willing to accept that risk exists or to allay those fears in their communications on the masterplan. Instead both they and the main land interest in their respective Regulation 16 comments continue to stress that they need all delivery options on the table and none of the 'lines in the sand' that they perceive these BNP2 policies draw.

The Parish Council continues to disagree. It wants the masterplan – for the new development of the village extension and for the redevelopment and regeneration of land in the existing village – to accept these BNP2 policies as the starting point for evolving the proposals. None are considered to be in conflict in principle with either the adopted or emerging Local Plan policies or Garden Village ambitions. It understands that if SODC can clearly demonstrate the detailed financial modelling and delivery of the components required by the policies will be unviable then the 'other material considerations' of S38(6) can be argued at the planning application stage. As it is at present, those stakeholders have not demonstrated BNP2 will render the Garden Village unviable.

All that said, the Parish Council had always hoped that the parallel running of the BNP2 process and Garden Village masterplan would have presented SODC and others with the opportunity to model these matters by now with agreement on how to tackle any necessary trade-offs. The BNP2 policies could then have been modified to reflect the collective agreement arrived at to deliver a successful project. As it is the very significant delays to that project have not made that possible, leading to these other stakeholders alleging that the BNP2 will undermine progress.

Further, the Parish Council suspects that others are looking for demons where they don't exist. Their respective objections to the wording of §4.10, which is not policy in any event, demonstrate a misunderstanding of the facts, i.e. in relation to the 'indicative housing figure' provided for by NPPF §67/68, the figure for Berinsfield is zero (see Reg 19 Policy SP1(11)). Hence, BNP2 makes no housing site allocations but contains no policy that seeks to prevent windfall/infill housing that may be part of the regeneration of the existing village. Though the Parish Council could have ignored those comments – and the examiner has chosen not to draw specific attention to them – it is concerned that they signal a wider questioning by the other stakeholders of the Parish Council's motives.

The Parish Council requests that the examiner keeps an open mind on this matter and remembers NPPF §29 that encourages communities like Berinsfield to “develop a shared vision for their area ... (to) shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan”. BNP2 makes no attempt to undermine or conflict with strategic policy – it simply wants to provide a vision-led starting point for the ongoing masterplanning work so that the local community can have confidence that the next decade of considerable uncertainty and disruption to their lives will be worth it.

### **Other Community Benefits**

#### Policy BERIN4

*Does the Parish Council have any specific evidence to support its view that development proposals should achieve a 20% biodiversity net gain?*

The 20% requirement is very much the result of SODC encouraging this policy approach, per Policy NH2 of the proposed Reg 19 Local Plan and its higher sustainability ambitions for the Garden Village. The Parish Council understands from SODC that it has the evidence base to show that the requirement is justified and will not undermine the viability of development, either as part of the existing or new Garden Village. On this basis it has been happy to accept SODC's recommendation for BNP2.

#### Policy BERIN11

*Based on my observations during the visit, I fully understand the reasoning behind the policy. Nevertheless, two questions arise. The first is are any such proposals planned or scheduled in the Plan period? The second is whether it is appropriate for a neighbourhood plan to comment about potential development outside the neighbourhood area?*

The Parish Council understands that proposals to improve the quality and accessibility of the bridle way may form part of the wider Garden Village masterplan, which is expected to be implemented in the plan period.

The Parish Council accepts that, although it is very keen to see such improvements happen as part of a wider initiative to connect the village with the wider network, BNP2 cannot technically contain policy that affects land outside the neighbourhood area. It therefore suggests the following modification for the examiner to consider for recommendation:

**Proposals to install a hard surface sustainable travel track along that part of the Roman Road bridle way that lies within Berinsfield as part of the Garden Village masterplan, will be supported.**

## **Symbolic Policies**

### Policy BERIN6

*The Plan's ambition for the development of brownfield land is laudable. However, does this policy bring any added or locally-distinctive value to national and local planning policies on this matter?*

### Policy BERIN12

*Does this policy bring any added or locally-distinctive value to national and local planning policies on this matter?*

The Parish Council accepts that these policies do not materially shift adopted development plan or national planning policy. However, in both cases, the community has consistently regarded them as especially important to Berinsfield and they will not be familiar enough with other policy documents to know that such matters are already covered.

In that sense, both policies are symbolically important enough to remain in the document – they would be conspicuous by their absence – but they have been drafted in a way that will not confuse development management decisions.

Furthermore, Clause B of BERIN12 is intended to encourage the highways authority and landowners to deliver more dedicated off-street parking places to avoid the grass verges being damaged, and pavements being obstructed, by parked cars. The problem is a legacy of the 1960s design of the village but recently implemented proposals have shown that this works, and the community want to encourage more.

Beyond those specific queries raised by the examiner, which embrace much of what Pfarmigan, the County Council and SODC have said in their representations, the Parish Council has little to add.

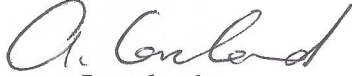
It is frustrated that, having spent so much time with SODC officers between the pre-submission and submission stages to agree all the main modifications, SODC saw it necessary to produce a long list of unfiltered and uncoordinated comments at this late stage. Aside from those relating to the spatial policies addressed above, the Parish Council has no further comment to make in advising the examiner how to respond.

The Parish Council also notes the comments made by Oxford Wet N Wild and the interest of some businesses in investing in Berinsfield. It is also frustrated that one key solution – of allowing the BNP2 to plan to modify the Green Belt boundary in the Parish to allocate land for employment development on brownfield as well as greenfield land – was not supported by SODC at the examination of the adopted Local Plan in 2020 with no explanation given (this despite the same specific provision being made for the Wheatley Neighbourhood Plan). Without a strategic policy hook there is nothing BNP2 can do to address these opportunities in the Green Belt.

The Parish Council would be happy to provide further clarification of the points, if required.

Kind regards

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'A. Loveland'.

Annette Loveland,  
Clerk to Berinsfield Parish Council