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Subject: Local Plan Review Response  
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Good morning

Here follows Holybrook Parish Council's response to the West Berkshire Local Plan Review (LPR) 2022-2039:

1. Blurring of Settlement Boundaries

The Proposed Main Modifications include changes to the Policies Map that appear to expand settlement boundaries, potentially leading to urban sprawl and the erosion of distinct community identities. This blurring of boundaries threatens the character of existing settlements and encroaches upon valuable green spaces that serve as natural buffers between communities. Maintaining clear and well-defined settlement boundaries is essential to preserve the unique identity of our already over-developed parishes. There is little green space left in the East of the District and it must be preserved at all costs.

2. Insufficient Infrastructure to Support Recent and Proposed Developments

The LPR allocates sites for housing and economic development; however, there is a lack of detailed planning for the necessary infrastructure to support these developments. Over recent years, significant development has occurred within the district without a corresponding enhancement of infrastructure. The current plan does not adequately address the need for improved transportation, healthcare, education and other essential services to support both existing residents and new developments. Without a robust infrastructure plan, further development will only worsen the strain on already overburdened services, leading to a decline in the quality of life for residents. Offering CIL payments is not enough for infrastructure such as doctors' surgeries – there are not enough doctors.

3. Inequitable Distribution of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Funds

Whilst Community Infrastructure Levy is a useful resource for the community in which development is taking place, it is concerning that areas surrounding and affected by large-scale developments do not receive a proportion of CIL funds to mitigate the impacts of such projects on their communities. This lack of funding places an undue burden on these communities, which must cope with increased pressure on local services and infrastructure without corresponding financial support. A more equitable distribution of CIL funds is necessary to ensure that all communities benefit from development and can address the associated challenges effectively.

4. Objections to Proposed Development on Pincents Hill, Calcot

The Council is particularly concerned that the area of green space on Pincents Hill has been included in the plan.

Pincents Hill represents one of the last open green spaces in Tilehurst, serving as a vital haven for wildlife and a cherished recreational area for residents. The proposed development threatens to destroy this natural habitat, leading to a decline in local biodiversity. Previous campaigns, such as the Save Calcot Action Group, have highlighted the importance of this area for both wildlife and the community.

Historically, several attempts have been made to develop Pincents Hill, all of which have been rejected due to valid concerns. Notably, in 2009, a proposal for 750 homes was dismissed after an appeal, with inspectors citing "substantial harm" to the open countryside. This pattern of rejection underscores the unsuitability of Pincents Hill for large-scale development.

The local community has consistently opposed development on Pincents Hill. For instance, a 2022 proposal for 165 homes received more than 2,000 objections, along with a petition signed by over 1,100 individuals. Concerns raised included the impact on traffic, loss of green space, and overdevelopment. Given this strong and persistent opposition, it is clear that residents do not support development on this site.

The proposed site appears to contravene planning policies, which prioritise building new homes on previously developed land within settlement boundaries. Pincents Hill is a greenfield site outside established settlement boundaries, making it an inappropriate location for such development. Previous rejections have upheld these planning principles and this proposal should be treated no differently. Simply, retrospectively changing the settlement boundaries should not be allowed just so that more, inappropriate, development can be undertaken.

Conclusion

The Proposed Main Modifications to the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2022-2039 and, particularly to include Pincents Hill and a possible site, present serious concerns. The LPR fails to address settlement boundary protection, infrastructure capacity, green space planning and fair distribution of CIL funds.

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