

Newbury's New Housing

If not Sandford Park, then where?

Of the 10,500 (min.) new homes that West Berkshire needs to provide between 2006 and 2026 (the so-called Plan Period), Newbury¹ has to take approx. 5,400. **That is 'a given' – not for consultation now.**

Of these, 777 were already completed by 31 March 2010. Another 2,564 were "committed" (i.e. under construction or on sites with planning permission) by that date. These include 1500 at Newbury Racecourse.

Of the 2000 new homes designated for Sandford Park, only half (1000) are due to be completed in the Plan Period.

So (777+2564+1000=) 4,341 of the 5,400 required are accounted for, leaving 1,059 (or 'about 1000', as the 5,400 is an approximate target) to be found in a selection of other sites, almost all of them 'brownfield' (i.e. on previously developed land or PDL). These sites will be identified in the next stage of the Local Development Framework process, known as the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (SADPD).

Before the SADPD is drafted, a review of the Employment Land requirement will be carried out². This is significant, because almost all remaining sites in Newbury with potential for taking more than about 5 new homes each are currently designated for 'employment uses'. [There are few 'garden grabbing' sites left!] The Council has to prove that there is more than enough land for offices, factories, warehouses etc in Newbury, before it can release such land purely for housing.

However what we say is that the Council has not considered redevelopment of sites with a **mixture** of housing and employment uses. Parkway is a classic example, as is the approved site of

Faraday Plaza – facing Parkway across Victoria Park and the A339. So too is the Market Street redevelopment – like Parkway & Faraday Plaza, this is largely Council-owned land, between the bus and train stations. These all combine at least 100 new homes, at very high densities, with a higher density of jobs than was there before.

Market Street is already in the figures above – part of the 'about 1000' homes not yet formally designated (unlike Newbury Racecourse, which is 'committed'). Parkway and Faraday Plaza are also in the 'committed' category – but not 'strategic' sites. Sandford is the second Newbury strategic housing site. A site has to be capable of taking at least 500 new homes to be 'strategic'.



¹ "Newbury" includes those parts of Greenham, Speen, Enborne, Shaw-cum-Donnington and Cold Ash parishes that lie within the current "settlement boundary" of Newbury.

² We say this is overdue. The Employment Land Assessment published in 2007 and used as evidence in the Core Strategy was based on secondary data collected prior to 2005 and local fieldwork/surveys in 2006. This was an entirely different economic era, which is not going to return until almost half-way into the Plan Period – if at all.

However it is possible to designate a 'broad location' (i.e. a group of sites, none of which need to be pin-pointed) as 'strategic'. That is what the Council has done for the East of the District, where an area described as "the urban fringe of Reading, Theale and land between" are to take "about 500 homes".

We want Newbury's **Town Centre Periphery** to be considered as a strategic broad location for housing, so that there will be no need to designate Sandeford for housing at this time. We believe that, without losing any jobs from this area, we can redevelop a number of sites to provide about 500 **more** in this area than the Council has taken account of.

Most of these sites are owned by the District Council. Many of them are in the flood-plain – but only another £110,000 is needed to ensure that a flood prevention scheme, already designed by the Environment Agency, can start next April and be finished within a year. We say the Council should put up this money, because it stands to gain millions of pounds in future rent revenue by protecting its properties from flooding.



That leaves only 500 homes to be put elsewhere. We say that a significant proportion (perhaps 150) could be built in Compton, where the Institute of Animal Health vacates a large employment site in 2013. The rest could be in smaller extensions of the Newbury settlement boundary, defined by the SADPD.

We think Sandeford is the least appropriate or 'sustainable' of all possible urban extensions that could be made at this time – largely

because South Newbury is already committed to the Racecourse's 1500 homes. We have therefore carefully reassessed the "Sandeford vs. North Newbury" table in the revised Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment (SA/SEA), which the Council has been made to prepare for this consultation. The Council's table is buried in Appendix 8



to "Strategic Sites Policy Paper", itself an appendix to the SA/SEA – and not actually something that you are being asked to comment on!!

Please compare our scoring of Sandeford & North Newbury with the Council's – and draw your own conclusions. Then tell the Council what you think. They will have to pass your comments on to the independent Inspector.

Dr Tony Vickers MRICS
for **Sandeford: the Wrong Solution**

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