Barkham Parish Council Response to Wokingham Borough Council's Community Governance Review Proposals

Subject: Proposed Boundary Changes – Arborfield Green, Finchwood Park, and Barkham Ride/Rooks Nest Farm

Executive Summary

Barkham Parish Council (BPC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to Wokingham Borough Council's Community Governance Review (CGR). We support the proposed boundary changes that seek to unify Arborfield Green and Finchwood Park within Barkham Parish, and we advocate for a future parish name change to reflect the evolving identity of our community.

These changes will enhance clarity in governance, strengthen community cohesion, and support the development of a unified and sustainable new village. As part of this commitment, BPC currently maintains an office in the existing community centre at Arborfield Green and will relocate to the new community centre once completed. This ongoing presence will provide a visible and accessible point of contact for residents, helping to foster engagement and build a stronger sense of community.

Our response also outlines **conditional** support for the transfer of Barkham Ride and Rooks Nest Farm, contingent upon the inclusion of Finchwood Park which is further discussed in a later section. We believe these overall proposals will enable more effective representation and strategic planning for our growing population.

Our Approach

Barkham Parish Council's approach to the Community Governance Review is guided by a commitment to fostering community cohesion, effective governance, and long-term development. We believe that the proposed boundary changes, particularly the inclusion of Arborfield Green and Finchwood Park, will help unify the emerging neighbourhoods under a single parish identity, reducing confusion and enhancing representation.

By aligning governance structures with the lived reality of our residents, we aim to support a more cohesive and inclusive community. These changes will enable Barkham Parish Council

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to better nurture the evolving identity and needs of our growing population, ensuring that all residents benefit from consistent services, strategic planning, and a shared sense of place.

We are also mindful of the importance of community development and view this review as an opportunity to strengthen local engagement, improve transparency, and build a resilient parish that can adapt to future growth. Our proposal to explore a new parish name through community consultation further reflects our dedication to inclusive decision-making and a forward-looking vision for Barkham. This is discussed in Section 3 below.

1. Arborfield Green and Finchwood Park Developments

BPC supports the recommendation that the entirety of the Arborfield Green development be incorporated into Barkham Parish, noting that approximately 80% of the development already lies within our existing boundaries. We further support the proposal to amalgamate the Finchwood Park development into Barkham Parish, recognising it as a logical extension of the Arborfield Green community.

The CGR recommendations acknowledge that no single parish council currently represents the entire community, which has led to resident uncertainty about which council to approach for services, planning matters, or community initiatives. Additionally, important decisions affecting the new village are hindered by the absence of unified oversight and long-term strategic planning.

BPC notes that some 12 new-build dwellings constructed as part of the SDL will technically fall within the boundaries of Arborfield Parish.

Unifying the entire new village within Barkham Parish will establish a single, accountable body to represent the whole community, supporting the development of a cohesive village identity and significantly improving the effectiveness, transparency, and responsiveness of local governance.

BPC currently maintains an office in the existing community centre at Arborfield Green, and we will be relocating to the new community centre once it is completed. This continued physical presence within the heart of the community will provide a visible and accessible point of contact for residents. It will help foster stronger relationships between the council and the community, encourage greater participation in local decision-making, and support the delivery of services and initiatives that reflect local priorities. We believe this will play a vital role in building a connected, engaged, and resilient community.

We believe these changes will provide greater clarity and consistency in governance and better reflect the evolving identity and needs of our growing community.

We note that Arborfield & Newland Parish Council (A&NPC) has proposed an alternative boundary adjustment: to include the land transferred to A&NPC ownership by Crest

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Nicholson, known as Nightingale Fields allotments. BPC has no objections to this inclusion, as A&NPC owns and operates these allotments.

2. Finchwood Park, Barkham Ride and Rooks Nest Farm

BPC has been aware that Finchampstead Parish Council is reconsidering its original proposal and now wishes for Finchwood Park and parts of the Arborfield Green development to remain within its boundaries. BPC believes that this artificial division of the community is at odds with the aims of the CGR and is firmly opposed to this change and feel that the opportunity to further strengthen the cohesion of the community should take precedent over the precept considerations now being presented by FPC.

It should be noted that two councillors from the affected area have recently joined BPC, demonstrating residents' commitment to building a unified community.

As stated in BPC's original response:

"While BPC does not support boundary changes unless there is a clear and necessary justification, it is open to considering this adjustment as a reciprocal measure if Scenario 1 is implemented."

Should Finchwood Park and parts of Arborfield Green be retained by Finchampstead, BPC would withdraw its support for the transfer of Barkham Ride and Rooks Nest Farm.

This position is based on the longstanding plan to develop the former Arborfield Garrison and Hogwood Farm into a sustainable new village, with the emerging district centre forming the heart of the community. Splitting this community between two parishes would undermine its cohesion, identity, and the effectiveness of local governance.

3. Future Parish Identity and Name

With a significant portion of the current parish now identified as Arborfield Green, there is considerable scope for confusion and administrative error. To support a cohesive and forward-looking identity for the expanded parish, BPC proposes that a new name be established to embrace both the existing Barkham area and the Finchwood Park development.

We believe that selecting a new name through a community engagement exercise would foster a shared sense of place and belonging among all residents. While it is unlikely that this process can be completed before the consultation closes on 13 November 2025, BPC recommends that the consultation include a mechanism to allow for a name change at a later date, once community input has been fully considered.

In the interim, BPC suggests continuing to use the name "Barkham Parish Council" until a new name is formally agreed.

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We look forward to working collaboratively with residents and Wokingham Borough Council to shape the future identity of our parish. BPC would welcome the opportunity to explain further any of the points raised here if necessary.

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