

Bracknell in the Spotlight

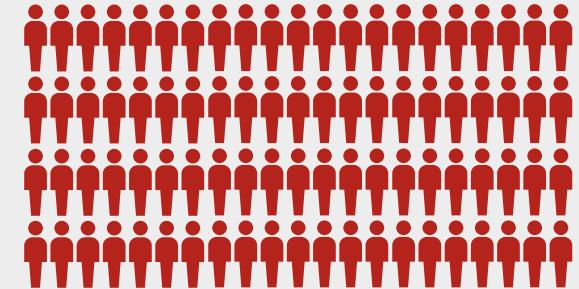


In the third instalment of articles looking at key growth areas, we put the spotlight on Bracknell Forest to share with you the key trends we have identified, alongside our predictions for the future.

Palm Hills, Ocean CGI for Shanly Homes

Boyer

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Bracknell Forest is home to a population of around

c. 121,676
(2018 figures)

Borough Context

Bracknell Forest is one of six unitary authorities within Berkshire, lying just beyond the outer edge of London's Metropolitan Green Belt which lies to the east, and beyond Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty that lie to the west.

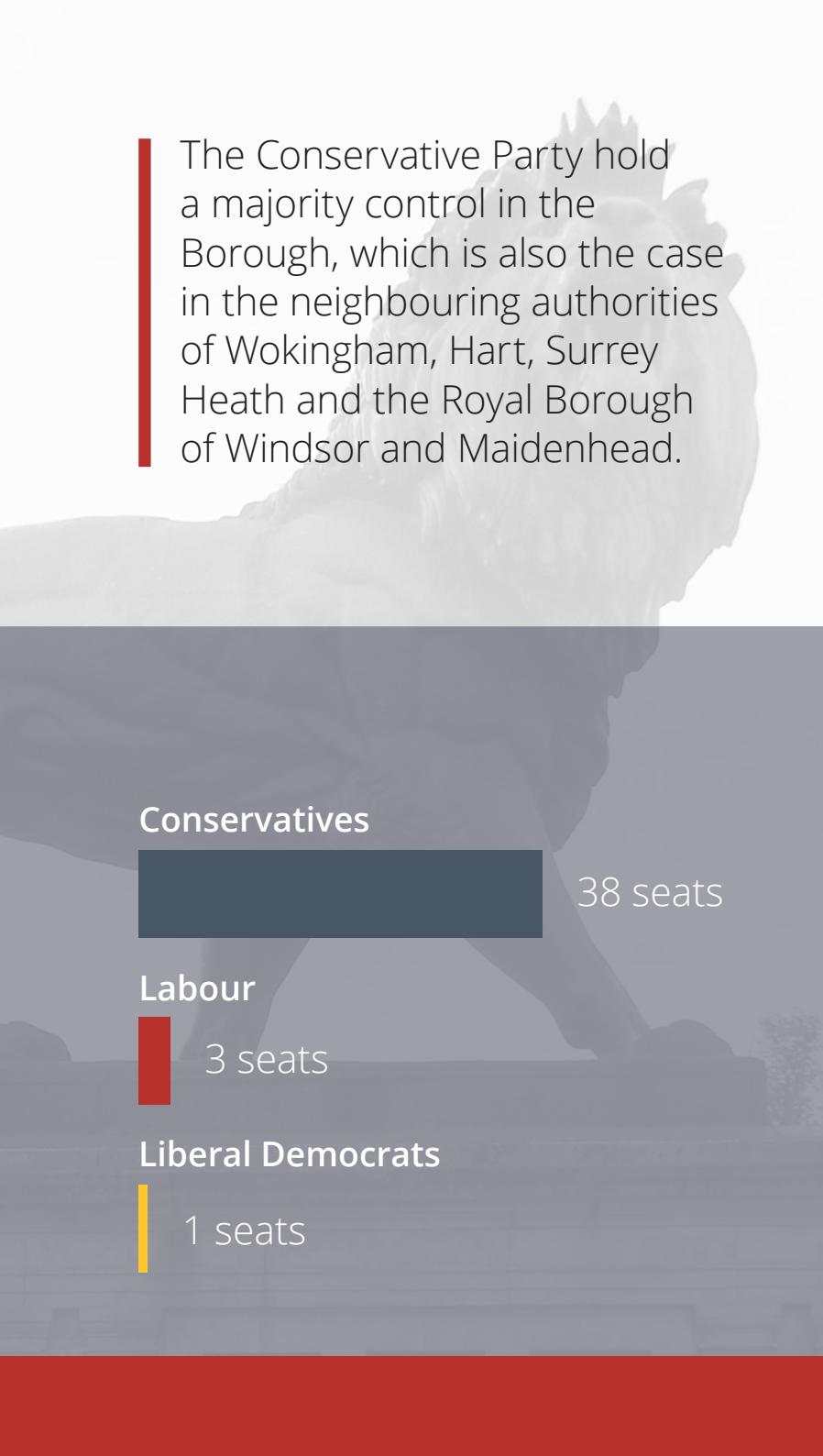
With Forest making up almost 40% of the Borough's landscape and giving it its namesake, Bracknell Forest is made up of a number of settlements, with Bracknell being the administrative centre of the Borough, and containing numerous neighbourhoods within it.

Bracknell town was one of the first 'New Towns' designated following the Second World War and was planned to provide neighbourhoods with easy walking access to a range of community facilities and green spaces.

Bracknell benefits from being located between two major urban hubs, Reading and London, with the latter situated only 25 miles away.

The wider Bracknell Forest includes the town of Sandhurst, large village of Crowthorne, as well as many smaller settlements including inter alia North Ascot, Warfield, Binfield, and Winkfield. It shares a boundary with Wokingham Borough Council to the west, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to the north and east, and Surrey Heath and Hart to the south.

Thanks to Bracknell's location and its design as a New Town, it has a strong highways network which results in limited levels of congestion, which is supplemented by ample car parking in the town centre. Travelling into Reading or London is also possible by both car; (via the M4 in the north, or the M3 in the south) train; (via Bracknell or Martins Heron stations on the Waterloo to Reading Line); or bus (station located opposite Bracknell railway station). Additionally, Heathrow Airport is only 13 miles east and is accessible via public transport connections and the motorway network.



The Conservative Party hold a majority control in the Borough, which is also the case in the neighbouring authorities of Wokingham, Hart, Surrey Heath and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.

Conservatives



38 seats

Labour



3 seats

Liberal Democrats



1 seats

Demographic and Economic Trends

Bracknell itself is a vibrant commercial centre and the location of several UK headquarters for companies including Waitrose, who also have a central distribution centre in the area.

Bracknell Town Centre has been subject to substantial regeneration in recent years through a joint venture partnership between Bracknell Forest Council and the Bracknell Regeneration Limited Partnership (Legal & General and Schroders). At the heart of the regeneration is The Lexicon; offering a shopping, leisure and entertainment complex around a new public realm. Associated with this regeneration was new and refurbished parking and public realm, plus new and refurbished housing. A further phase of the Lexicon, known as The Deck, which will deliver restaurants, bars, entertainment and retail is currently under construction and will link the Lexicon to Princess Square shopping centre.

Average earnings in Bracknell:

13.3%

higher than the UK average.

House prices in Bracknell Forest have increased by

9.1%

2015-2020

Growth in the number of households

4.3%

Between
2015 - 2020

3.6%

Anticipated increase between 2015 – 2025

Residential Market Activity



From January – July 2021, Leaders Romans Group saw net sales figures in Bracknell and Warfield increase by 64%, when compared to the same period in 2020.

Over the last two years, the demands of buyers in the market place has shifted at an accelerated rate due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with working from home practices sweeping the nation. Although people are now returning to the work place it is likely that we will see a larger proportion of people continue to work from home full or part time. This shift has resulted in an increase in demand for flexible home spaces that can operate as office spaces for when people are based from home.

Buyers are now also prioritising outside space or close access to public green spaces. This was a result of the lockdown which highlighted for many the benefits of having outdoor space when restrictions on leaving your home were in place.



Future Growth

The emerging Local Plan identifies a housing requirement of

11,482

(614 annually), between 2020 and 2037.



Bracknell Forest Council are currently in the process of preparing a new Local Plan, which will provide an overarching vision and guide the level and distribution of development in the Borough up to 2037.

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This is a significant uplift over the requirement in the previously adopted Local Plan (557 annually).

BFC have historically under-delivered against their strategic housing requirements since the early 2000's. Following the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2018, and the implementation of the new Standard Method, the long outstanding backlog was removed from the methodology of determining the housing land supply requirement. However, that unmet need did not disappear but still remains outstanding.





Blue Mountain, image supplied by Bloor Homes

In July 2021, Bracknell Forest confirmed that they could no longer demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, meaning that their policies which protect land from housing development carry less weight.

The Council are currently citing a

4.2 year land supply

so this is a sizeable drop from their previous position.

This provides an opportunity for developers to secure planning permission for housing outside settlements, if it can be demonstrated that the development can be sustainable, and comply with all other relevant national and local policies.

The area fulfils an important economic role and with it should provide an adequate supply of housing to support the local and regional economy.

The emerging Local Plan identifies a housing strategy including the allocation of a number of both brownfield and greenfield sites to meet the housing need. This includes a significant Green Belt release to deliver a new Garden Village at Jealott's Hill. The Garden Village is proposed to include 2,000 homes, alongside a primary school, a technology / science park and other supporting infrastructure. The proposal is long term and it is envisaged that 650 homes would come forward in the next Plan period (post 2037).



Future Opportunities

Bracknell Forest are required to address a higher level of housing need, and in particular now more than ever in light of the current undersupply of housing provision.

With around 35% of the Borough lying within the Green Belt, Bracknell Forest Council are looking towards the new Garden Village at Jealott's Hill as strategic Green Belt release, as well as significant redevelopment and conversion of lower quality office buildings within the Town Centre, including the proposed redevelopment of the Peel Centre and The Point for 900 homes in order to meet their housing targets.

In light of recent news of Bracknell Forest Council's housing land supply position, it is also expected that a number of the other settlements including Crowthorne, Sandhurst and the northern Parishes where there are a number of largely unconstrained areas, may now see pressure from housing development to support housing growth needed within the Borough.

Boyer and Leaders Romans Group Experience

In the view of the development opportunities available, Bracknell Forest remains a key target location for Boyer and the Leaders Romans Group Land Team. At present we are promoting a number of sites for residential development across the Borough.

We also have strong planning experience in Bracknell Forest, with Boyer having recently secured outline planning permission at appeal for 81 homes on behalf of Shanly Homes. The Inquiry focused on the potential harm to the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings. In allowing the appeal, the Inspector agreed with Boyer that the proposal would not cause harm to the site and surroundings and that the proposal would provide an appropriate transitional form of development to the edge of settlement site.

We also recently secured planning permission and listed building consent for a new Boarding House and Day House for Wellington College in Crowthorne. Wellington College was founded in 1853 and is now one of the UK's leading coeducational boarding and day schools. The high quality student and staff accommodation will be positioned around a beautifully landscaped Woodland Quad.

Boyer also advised on the residential-led mixed-use development of the former Blue Mountain Golf Course. The scheme includes 403 dwellings, a new 2,000 pupil all-through school, new sports facilities and a 13 hectare SANG. Boyer led the planning negotiations and after securing an allocation in the Local Plan, successfully resolved all technical issues to secure planning permission.

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