

Buckinghamshire's New Local Plan: What Could It Mean for Chesham?

Buckinghamshire Council has published its Draft Local Plan for consultation, setting out how the county may develop over the next twenty years. While planning documents are not everyone's idea of bedtime reading, this is one of the most important consultations affecting Chesham for a generation.

The Local Plan will guide decisions on housing, employment, transport, town centres, infrastructure and environmental protection until the mid-2040s. Once adopted, it will become the primary basis for deciding planning applications across Buckinghamshire.

The consultation gives residents, businesses and community organisations an opportunity to comment before the Plan is submitted to an independent Planning Inspector for examination.

So, what does it mean for Chesham?

A Change in Direction

For many years, planning discussions in Chesham have often focused on the possibility of housing development on Green Belt land around the edge of the town.

The draft Local Plan takes a noticeably different approach.

Rather than relying primarily on expansion into the surrounding countryside, Buckinghamshire Council is proposing that much of Chesham's future growth should be accommodated through regeneration and redevelopment within the town itself.

This approach is reflected in Policy SP9, which identifies Chesham Town Centre as a focus for regeneration, investment and growth. It also builds upon the Chesham Regeneration Strategy adopted by the Council in 2023.

In simple terms, the Council is seeking to make better use of previously developed land while supporting investment in the town centre and protecting the Green Belt that surrounds the town.

Where Could New Housing Be Built?

The draft Local Plan identifies three town centre sites as Tier 2 allocations that together are expected to deliver approximately 325 new homes.

CHS01 – Star Yard (240 homes)

Star Yard is the largest of the three allocations and is identified for approximately 240 homes. The site currently operates as one of the principal public car parks serving Chesham Town Centre.

The Plan supports redevelopment of the site provided development responds positively to the character of the town centre, maintains access for servicing and pedestrians, and protects the vitality of the High Street.

Importantly, the policy requires sufficient public parking to be maintained either on the site or at an alternative town centre location.

CHS02 – Albany Place (30 homes)

Albany Place is allocated for approximately 30 homes.

Although relatively modest in housing terms, it is arguably one of the most strategically significant sites because it currently contains both the Elgiva Theatre and a public car park.

The policy specifically requires:

- replacement public parking with no overall loss of spaces; and
- reprovision of the existing theatre in a suitable town centre location.

This means that any future redevelopment would need to address not only housing but also the future of one of Chesham's most important cultural assets.

CHS03 – Water Meadow (55 homes)

Water Meadow is allocated for approximately 55 homes.

Like Star Yard, it currently functions as a significant public car park serving the town centre. The policy requires public parking provision to be maintained either on the site or at an alternative central location.

The policy also seeks to retain pedestrian connections and secure contributions towards improvements to Lowndes Park and children's play facilities.

These allocations represent a significant shift in planning strategy. Rather than relying primarily on development in the Green Belt, the Council is proposing that a substantial proportion of Chesham's future housing growth should be accommodated through regeneration and redevelopment within the existing town centre. Taken together with a number of smaller sites, 580 homes represent one of the largest concentrations of planned housing growth ever proposed within Chesham Town Centre.

What About Parking?

One of the first questions many residents will ask is whether redevelopment of Star Yard, Albany Place and Water Meadow could lead to a loss of town centre parking.

The draft Local Plan addresses this issue directly.

All three allocations currently include public parking provision and the policies generally require parking to be maintained either on the redevelopment site itself or at an alternative town centre location.

In practice, this means the Council is not proposing to sacrifice town centre parking simply to create housing. Instead, the Plan seeks to balance regeneration, housing delivery and continued accessibility to the High Street.

Whether residents believe the proposed safeguards are sufficient is likely to be an important topic during the consultation.

A Different Type of Planning Approach

One of the most interesting aspects of the draft Plan is not just where development may occur, but how the Council proposes to manage it...

Traditional Local Plans often specify housing numbers, building heights, densities and detailed design requirements.

The Buckinghamshire Plan adopts a more flexible approach.

Instead of setting rigid development parameters, it focuses on outcomes. Development proposals are expected to contribute to regeneration, vitality and investment while complying with planning policies, infrastructure requirements and affordable housing obligations.

Supporters of this approach argue that flexibility makes regeneration more achievable because schemes can adapt to changing economic conditions and market demand.

Others may feel that greater certainty is needed about the scale and form of future development.

Both viewpoints are likely to feature prominently during the consultation.

Will New Housing Regenerate the Town Centre?

This is perhaps the most important question raised by the draft Plan.

The Council's approach appears to be based on the idea that bringing more residents into the town centre will support local businesses, increase activity throughout the day and evening, and encourage further investment.

There is logic behind this approach. More residents can mean more customers for local shops, cafés and services.

However, successful regeneration often depends on more than housing alone.

Many residents may wish to consider whether additional measures are needed to encourage investment, improve public spaces, strengthen cultural and community facilities, attract businesses and create a more vibrant town centre environment.

The inclusion of Albany Place also raises wider questions about the future role of cultural facilities within Chesham. Many residents may feel that successful regeneration should not simply deliver additional housing, but should also strengthen the town's cultural, leisure and community offer.

Why This Consultation Matters

The draft Local Plan places Chesham more firmly within Buckinghamshire's regeneration agenda than has been the case for many years.

For supporters, this offers the prospect of investment, new housing, improved vitality and protection of the surrounding countryside.

For others, it raises questions about density, infrastructure, townscape and the practical delivery of regeneration.

Whatever your view, the decisions taken through this Local Plan will influence how Chesham develops for the next twenty years and beyond.

This consultation is therefore one of the most important opportunities local residents will have to help shape the future of their town.

The consultation runs for six weeks from 23 July to 6 September 2026.

Residents are encouraged to read the relevant sections of the draft Plan and submit their comments before the consultation closes.

For a direct link to the consultation documents, visit www.cheshammasterplan.uk and scroll down to the 'Coming Soon – Buckinghamshire Local Plan Consultation' section.