

Position Statement by Steve Bacon

I believe I have much to offer the people of Arborfield Ward if I served as their Borough Councillor, having built up many years of relevant experience.

Armed with a degree in Transport Administration, I spent several years carrying out passenger traffic forecasting, surveys and market analysis with British Airways, after which I moved full-time into I.T. This experience means that I can interpret and act on road and housing statistics.

Over the years, I've travelled extensively and had the opportunity to compare and contrast urban transport systems in many countries. Between 2000 and 2002 I and my family lived in Stuttgart, in a region sharing many similarities with the Thames Valley – except that its passenger transport systems are [fully integrated](#), whereas ours aren't. I rarely needed my car to commute the 25 miles each way daily, preferring to use bus, tram and train all on a single season ticket. We have nothing similar in the U.K. outside of London.

I represented Arborfield on the old Wokingham District Council between 1994 and 1997, and chaired the Planning and Transportation Committee for most of that time. I know full well the pressure on [housing](#) in this Borough, and I steered the District Plan 1991-2006 almost to completion before I lost my seat. We've counted the cost since in unsuitable in-fill sites and an inadequate road network. I know that there are few places where housing can go without causing intolerable conditions for existing residents and commuters, and that is why I wanted to site development at Grazeley. This would have been able to provide excellent rail and bus services as well as the convenience of the dual-carriageway A33 and the M4 at Junction 11.

I have submitted responses to the emerging Core Strategy at every stage, and was delighted to take my part in preparing the Parish Council's response to plans for the Arborfield Garrison site (see 'Arborfield News' for more details).

Early on in the process, I realised that without radical changes, Wokingham Borough would suffer even worse traffic problems if housing sites were located around Wokingham Town and in Arborfield. I focussed my research on traffic solutions including the [Ashridge Interchange](#) on the A329(M) and replacement of the [Station Level Crossing](#) with a new link road and bridge. I spent hundreds of hours researching and transcribing articles from the local newspapers and [Minutes](#) from Berkshire County Council committee meetings. The result has been that both of these solutions are now actively being considered, and have been reported in the local press.

In my research, I've managed to unearth reports from way back in the [early 1970s](#) that the Barkham Road can't absorb extra traffic. Even now, I'm well aware that it's impossible to bypass Barkham Road even if the level crossing were eliminated. Also, over the years, I've developed the web-site for [Arborfield Local History Society](#), and I've documented many key events that took place during the 19th and 20th Centuries as reported in the local press. However, one event that never happened was the construction of the [Basingstoke – Wokingham Railway](#) in 1896. If it had been built, the Garrison site would have had direct rail access to Waterloo – but there again, the [Remount Depot](#) may never have been located here if the railway had carved deep cuttings and embankments through the area.

I've had links with the Garrison going back to the mid-1970s, starting with the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, though only singing in the Chorus. As a Foundation Governor for the Junior School, covering around two decades until its merger with the Coombes Infant School, I got to know senior Army personnel who also served on the Governing body. Throughout that time, the Garrison has been in a state of flux. My local history research has shown that there have been fears of closure for well [over 70 years](#), but they haven't happened yet. My Army contacts have told me that, until the site is finally vacated and sold, it's unwise to make any plans around its future. So why has the Core Strategy been based on the supposition that the site will be vacated in a couple of years' time? This is folly on a grand scale. There's no 'Plan B', but there should have been.

I want to do everything in my power to prevent any housing development on the (largely green-field and countryside) Garrison SDL unless the Army has completely vacated the Garrison site. Even then, the first houses and the main centre should be located on the 'brown-field' area rather than despoiling our lovely rural surroundings – and the road infrastructure should be in place before the first building foundations are laid on-site. Because I believe that the Army will still be here by 2026, my 'Plan B' is for Grazeley.

I've achieved a fair amount in the last few years even though I'm not on the Council; my influence would be far greater if I were a Borough Councillor.

Promoted by M McNeill on behalf of Steve Bacon (Liberal Democrats), both at 2, Ella Garrett Close, Reading RG2 7BL