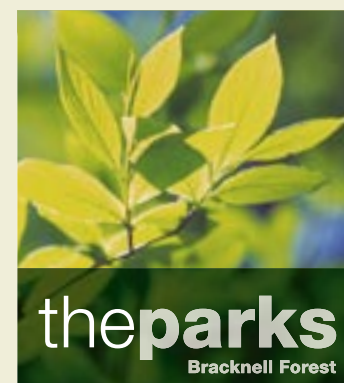


parklife



A new way of living in a unique parkland setting



George Wimpey has grand designs on 'the parks'

Once in a blue moon, along comes a new development that really does live up to the hype. The case in point is that of the parks on the site of the former RAF Staff College in Bracknell Forest, Berkshire.

Leading UK developer, George Wimpey, has pushed its planners and designers way beyond their comfort zones in order to produce what will be a remarkable new community with sustainability at its heart.

English Partnerships, the Government's regeneration agency and owners of the site, set stringent criteria in order to separate the men from the boys when it came to selecting a developer. These included urban design and public realm, ideas for community engagement and, above all else, sustainability. Ten developers vied for appointment with six of them getting onto the shortlist. The George Wimpey team fought hard to convince English Partnerships of its vision and ability and proudly emerged victorious back in February 2005.

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“Once in a blue moon, along comes a new development that **really does** live up to the hype.”

Reasons to be **cheerful**

It was without doubt the team's passion that won the day. It was clear its members fully appreciated the vast potential of the site and wanted to create something extra special with a real sense of place for future generations to enjoy.

The plans for the development demonstrated respect for the landscape, flora and fauna while at the same time delivering beautiful new homes in a wonderful natural setting that would be an asset to the existing area.

The apartments and houses have been designed to delight the senses. Some people like open-plan, some don't. Some go for grand while others prefer cosy. Either way, there's plenty of variety to suit individual tastes and pockets because George Wimpey understands the great diversity of human expectations.

What all the properties do have in common is lots of natural light, neat storage solutions and adaptable space. They're also energy efficient and eco-friendly in a number of

imaginative ways – a topic that is discussed in more detail later on in this publication.

Getting regeneration **right**

With the **parks**, the George Wimpey team aims to wipe out once and for all the spectre of soulless, soul-destroying housing estates that has often blighted public perception of new developments over the past three decades.



This is how it can and should be done. Visually appealing streetscapes, verdant mature trees, outdoor seating areas for casual conversation or just watching the world go by, stimulating children's play areas and swathes of green open space criss-crossed by safe cycle and walking routes.

Add to this an enviably convenient location within easy reach of Bracknell town centre and train station and it's easy to see why the **parks** will be a new community that future residents will feel proud to be part of. ■



How **George Wimpey** new community

One thing is for certain: not just any old developer gets the opportunity to create a superb new community in an exceptional setting such as the former RAF Staff College site in Bracknell.

The redevelopment of the 44 hectare brownfield site was required to help address Bracknell's shortage of new and affordable homes.

Before George Wimpey was appointed to the task by English Partnerships, the national regeneration agency, it had to fight off intense competition from nine other prospective developers.

English Partnerships set stringent selection criteria covering sustainability, urban design and public realm, community engagement and delivery. These were based on the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister's definition of a sustainable community which encompasses such hallmarks as "active, inclusive and safe", "environmentally sensitive", "well designed and built" and "well run".

Winning approach

A press release issued by English Partnerships upon the appointment of its preferred developer in February 2005 stated "all the received bids were remarkable for their quality and adherence to the standards imposed by the agency". However, at the end of the day George Wimpey's hard-working team shone through above the rest.

Here, we'll examine what impressed English Partnerships so much. These are just some of the measures the leading developer has put in place to ensure that what is now known as the **eparks** will remain an enjoyable, environmentally considerate place to live for generations to come.

Community provision

Firstly, George Wimpey entered into extensive local consultation to find out people's views and concerns about how the site should be developed and how it would best sit in the wider context of the Bracknell area.

In close consultation with its partners on the project, English Partnerships and Bracknell Forest Borough Council, it was decided that

20% of the homes at The Parks would be designated for affordable housing. This figure may rise to 38% if future phases are approved, with a significant percentage being allocated to key workers. Six of the properties at The Parks are being built specifically for disabled householders, but all construction of homes and outside areas is Part M compliant to ensure safety and easy access for all.

Important help for First time buyers


First time buyers often face particular difficulty in getting onto the housing ladder. Accordingly, in conjunction with Catalyst Housing Association, George Wimpey will offer homes under English Partnerships' First Time Buyers' Initiative. FTBI enables people who cannot otherwise afford to buy a new home, to purchase a new property with government assistance. Up to a maximum of 50% of the total purchase price is paid to the developer. This enables the FTB to take out a mortgage amounting to a minimum of 50% of the total purchase price. The government is then entitled to a share of future sale proceeds equaling its initial percentage contribution.

Honouring its commitment to the wider community of Bracknell, George Wimpey has made a number of important financial contributions, specifically towards a new library for the town and the **eparks'** designated school. In addition, the developer is funding a brand new bus route connecting the development with the local area to the tune of £300,000. This will encourage people from outside the **eparks** to come and make use of its inspiring public open spaces and proposed sports facilities, making it a destination in its own right.

A walk in the woods

An inspiring masterplan has been created by George Wimpey and its partners. Perhaps





sustain this into the future

one of the most striking features of the **parks** is the retention of some 19 hectares of public open space which will incorporate beautiful existing woodland, mature trees and proposed sporting facilities. Also being created are three children's play areas designed to stimulate, challenge, and involve the little ones.

The idea of 'outdoor rooms' has been used to create distinct areas with sociable outdoor seating and street-lighting. The built environment is punctuated by tree-lined boulevards and public squares that encourage people to play low-key games like boules, or just sit and chat as the world goes about its business. Subject to further consultation, also planned are a number of pocket parks around which housing will be gathered.

The bigger **picture**

Throughout the development, safety and security is a prime consideration and streets and outside areas are designed to create natural surveillance and visibility without feeling that Big Brother is looking on.

Cycle storage sheds make it convenient for people to take to their bikes rather than the car for local trips, in particular access to Bracknell train station a short ride away. Cycleways and walkways will provide safe, quick connections to surrounding amenities.

Discreet recycling bin storage has been carefully designed not to stick out like a sore thumb while at the same time allowing easy collection by Bracknell Forest Borough Council's refuse trucks.

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Let it **rain**, let it pour

Rainwater butts will be positioned to collect rainwater from the rooftops which can then be used for watering the gardens and communal landscaped areas – which incidentally will incorporate drought tolerant planting in these times of climate change.

A new balancing pond will provide a Sustainable Urban Drainage Solution – affectionately known as SUDS – which will help to reduce any excess water run-off from the site should it occur.

Respect for the **ecology**

A number of surveys have been carried out which show that although the **eparks** isn't a major 'hang-out' for bats, there is evidence of occasional summer and winter roosts and bats certainly feed over the wooded parts of the site. In order to protect those bats that do come to stay and encourage others to join the party, many bat boxes have been installed in the woodland area, while bat bricks will be incorporated into new buildings to provide further roosting opportunities. Two large bat houses will also be built on the site

As part of the drive to promote bio-diversity on site, swift boxes are to be installed, providing important new nesting sites for what is a local priority species. The balancing pond mentioned earlier will become home to native aquatic and marginal plant species. New woodland planting of native species, locally sourced, will take place around the northern margins of the pond.



The bio-diversity of the woodland will be enhanced through a habitat management plan which encourages native flora to flourish. In both the woodland area and the green open spaces, the hope is to encourage wildlife to the site through the creation of wildflower areas and woodland glades and rides which will benefit insects like butterflies and bees.

Looking after the **people**

As well as creating the right environment for local wildlife, it goes without saying that George Wimpey is creating fabulous, eco-friendly homes for its two-legged population. There's a very broad range of styles to choose from and picture windows, balconies



and privacy strips make each home a delight to live in, regardless of size or tenure. As well as creating new homes, George Wimpey will be converting the late-Victorian Ramslade House, formerly used for training senior RAF officers, into a handy crèche facility for young families, a space for community use and a number of offices.

Homes for **life**

All the properties at the **eparks** – from one-bedroom apartments to large family homes – will have attained EcoHomes Very Good rating. They'll also be built to provide not only a sensible amount of space to live in to begin with, but a layout that will enable people to change or customise their home as they reach different stages of their lives.



Recognising that up to 10% of the country's workforce now work from home, additional power and telephone sockets make it easy to turn the spare room into a high-tech home office.

Many helpful features such as segregated pull-out recycling bins in the kitchens

will be incorporated, together with vital energy-saving devices such as low energy lamps, pull-out clothes drying lines in the bathrooms (wave goodbye to the energy guzzling tumble dryer), and A-rated washing machines and fridges to reduce energy demand.

Embracing the future

There's also the option of having a solar panel installed in the roof to help cut energy bills. Kitchen units and worktops will be made either from recycled wood products or timber which has been certified from sustainable sources, while bathrooms will feature dual-flush WCs, low flow showers and spray taps on basins to reduce water wastage.

All in all, the **eparks** promises to be a wonderful place to live, work, socialise and belong to for years and years to come.

To make sure everything stays just the way it should, a long-term management scheme is in place, completing an extremely positive picture. ■



Typical George Wimpey Interior

From an **expert** point of view

Nothing works in isolation. What applies to the world ecology in general can apply on a smaller scale to specific locations and projects, such as theparks.

We asked senior ecologist, Angela Bond of WSP Environmental Limited – ecology consultants at theparks – for her views on the vital importance of maintaining a healthy respect for the ecology and some of the ways this has been achieved at the new landmark development.

“Conserving biodiversity – in other words, maintaining the existing variety of life – is widely recognised to be of key importance to the future sustainability of the planet. Not only do our natural resources such as food, fuel, and raw materials underpin economic growth, but a rich biodiversity is now recognised to provide a range of social and health benefits to communities. We are also becoming increasingly aware of the importance of healthy, functioning ecosystems and the role that they will play in securing future drinking water supplies and providing flood alleviation in the face of the new challenges presented by climate change.

“The value placed on biodiversity by our government is reflected in the policies and guidance published at both a national and local level that relate to biodiversity and ecological conservation. Decisions about changes in land use and design of new development directly influence the local biodiversity and national documents such as Planning Policy Statement 9 (2005) gives clear guidance to Local Authorities on conserving and enhancing biological diversity in England. This includes the broad aim that planning, construction, development and regeneration should have minimal impacts on biodiversity and enhance it wherever possible.

“One of the mechanisms for addressing biodiversity needs at a national and local level within the UK has been the development of Biodiversity Action Plans. Bracknell Forest Borough Council has developed the Bracknell Biodiversity Action Plan (BBAP) 2006-2011 which outlines details to safeguard six core habitats in Bracknell and twenty four important species.

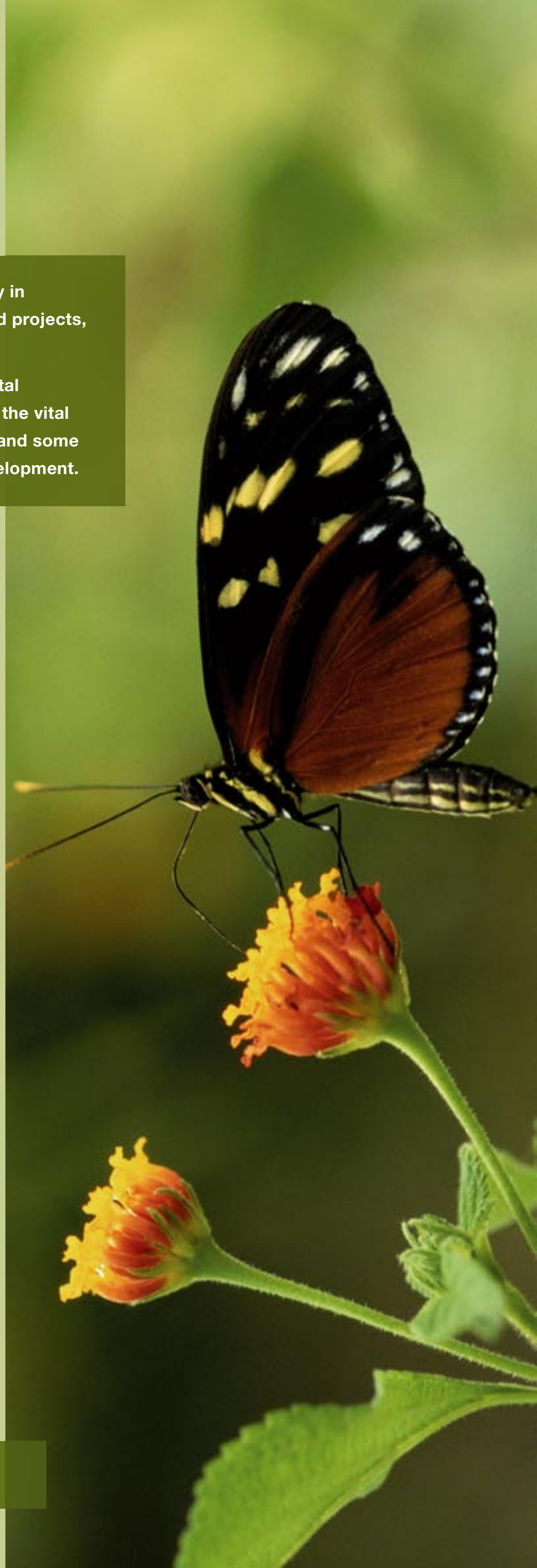
“theparks incorporates the principles outlined within national and local policies and the BBAP in a number of important ways, firstly and crucially by involving ecological consultants from an early stage in the design process. This enabled us to complete a series of ecological surveys to assess the existing biodiversity present on the site. We then went on to incorporate a number of ecological design features specifically aimed at enhancing existing habitats and mitigating against potential impacts to locally valuable wildlife.

“A good example of this is the comprehensive mitigation programme for bats that has been devised as part of the scheme. This programme has been approved by Natural England and provides for the continued use of the site by the local bat populations. All bat species are protected at a European level, and one of the bat species using the site, the Noctule bat, is also a priority species within the BBAP.

“In addition, the existing woodland on the site will be retained within the new scheme. Woodland is a BBAP habitat and proposals to enhance the value of the existing woodland flora and fauna are consistent with the aims of the BBAP.

“We’re proud of the groundwork we’ve been able to put in place at theparks and will be continuing to work hard alongside George Wimpey and Bracknell Forest Borough Council towards our ecological goals throughout the development process. It’s an exciting and rewarding project to be involved in.”

**Angela Bond, Senior Ecologist,
WSP Environmental Limited**



What makes a **21st Century** community?



“For the times, they are a-changin’” states the old Dylan song, and the words hold true more than ever right here and now in the 21st Century.

People know what they want and they wish to live. If they don’t like something, they simply vote with their feet and the options are legion.

The fact is that vastly increased Internet access and the proliferation of consumer-type television programmes means that the man in the street is better informed than he has even been, and knowledge equals power. ‘Shopping around’ is far easier, and so providers of goods and services have had to pull out all the stops and get creative in order to attract and retain business amid fierce competition. We’re officially a fussy nation now, and only the best will do.

“ Housebuilders are acutely aware that trotting out standard little boxes in drab, lifeless streets and estates just won’t wash anymore. ”

Changing **expectations**

Take the example of M&S. Once part of the very fabric of British society, it would have been unthinkable even 20 years ago that this pillar of the High Street would go spinning into decline at the turn of this century. But it did. People grew discontented with the quality and range of goods being offered to them so they simply went and shopped elsewhere. Only by embracing the reality of this empowered consumer has M&S been able to pull things around in the last couple of years.

Programmes such as ‘Changing Rooms’, ‘The House Doctor’ and ‘Location, Location, Location’ have opened people’s eyes to the amazing possibilities that are out there when it comes to their homes. Ever-increasing media coverage about ecological concerns and sustainability has also made everyone much more sensitive to the ethics of modern living. Housebuilders are acutely aware that trotting out standard little boxes in drab, lifeless streets and estates just won’t wash anymore. These days, we can make informed choices about such matters.

Visionary design

A fine example of a housebuilder successfully tuning into the 21st Century vibe and providing a highly desirable product is that of George Wimpey at the **parks**, its flagship development in Bracknell, Berkshire. Being created on the site of a former RAF Staff College for the training of senior officers, the **parks** offers inspirational, environmentally efficient homes in a country park setting. You could say that it’s a proper 21st Century community.

But what does the term really mean? First and foremost, it’s a place that makes folk happy, somewhere they can’t wait to get home to at the end of the day. Somewhere where they’re proud to entertain their nearest and dearest, somewhere that makes them feel included, safe and uplifted. It’s a place with human values – designed by people who understand people. A 21st Century community should be one that can adapt and evolve right into the 22nd Century.

Stability is another important factor. While life accelerates and changes with often alarming speed, more than ever people are feeling the need to put down roots and know they are somewhere that will see them through the different stages of their lives.

Referring back to the **parks**, the properties are designed with in-built flexibility and accessibility to keep pace with changing lifestyle demands.

Green and pleasant

One thing does remain constant: our children are the most important thing in the world to us. A 21st Century community should therefore be one where they can be outdoors safely and do the things kids love to do: run, jump, play, interact, learn and imagine. Three play areas at the **parks** will hold children’s attention, stimulate their natural zest for life and teach them to meet and overcome challenges.

And learning doesn’t just apply to the youngsters. People of all ages need mental stimulation in order to stay feeling youthful and positive. The wonderful ecology of the **parks** offers plenty of food for thought. There’s a natural drainage system centred around man-made ponds that will gradually come to attract diverse species of wildlife. Walkways and cycleways will criss-cross the development through mature trees and green spaces, creating the chance to explore and observe local flora and fauna.

Out and **about**

In an ideal world, everyone would be able to leave the car at home for short trips because everything they needed would be easily accessible on foot, be it buying in the basics, going out for a meal or live entertainment, or getting sporty.

If it sounds too good to be true, it isn’t because at the **parks**, future residents will only be a short walk away from Bracknell town centre which is about to undergo possibly the most forward-thinking transformation in Britain.

On the subject of cars, George Wimpey is well aware that people expect the freedom

to own vehicles even if they’re not needed for every trip. That’s why the developer has built in discreet parking into the Masterplan. Yes, the motors are still there, but no one will feel like they’re living in a giant car park and traffic calming measures keep the pace of life mellow. There’s plenty of other options too – cycling, walking or using the new bus service which will be funded by the developers.

Being well-connected is another important criteria for a 21st Century community. As well as being close to the thriving town centre and its train station, there’s loads to see and do in the surrounding areas. Country pub lunches, golfing, racing at nearby Ascot, historic visitor attractions such as Windsor, watersports on Horseshoe Lake and the Look Out Discovery Centre science exhibition are just a few that spring to mind.

Heeding the **intricacies**

Having a fantastic home to live in comes way up the priority list for modern life, and at the **parks** no one should feel disappointed. Inside and out, these dream properties are designed by leaders in their field, and the sheer variety and range of styles – from one-bedroom apartments to five-bedroom detached houses – means there’s a wealth of choice. Families in particular will love the fact that there’s a good selection of detached homes with larger than average gardens for a new development. Yet perhaps

most important of all in these increasingly aware times, is the issue of sustainability and this lies at the very heart of what makes a real community for this century.

the **parks** treads lightly on the environment, encourages bio-diversity, features hassle-free recycling facilities in each home as well as a long list of other eco-friendly features which are discussed in full in the article on sustainability within this publication.

A long-term management strategy will also be in place to ensure that standards are kept high well into the future.

The **human** factor

Then there are the more intangible aspects of sustainability that have to do with creating a sense of place and belonging: the balance between privacy and community and having the choice to duck in and out of both, the balance between security and freedom.

With the carefully thought-out and executed foundations being put in place at the **parks** by George Wimpey, it should just take a little time – plus a little enthusiasm from its residents – to create somewhere that embodies all these subtle elements – a place that’s a delight to live, a real community for the 21st Century. ■



As one of England’s 18 New Towns, Bracknell in fact boasts a rather long and colourful history. Mentioned in a Winkfield Boundary Charter dating back to 942, the name Bracknell derives from ‘Braccen-Heale’, or ‘bracken covered secret place’. Described later in 1847 as ‘a small village without a church’, its main industries were market gardening and brick-making.

Bracknell: A town with a

The arrival of the railways in 1856 sparked something of a transformation. A bustling cattle and poultry market sprang to life in 1870, and the Bracknell Brick & Tile Company followed hot on its heels in 1886. The result? By 1900, Bracknell had become a hub of activity, complete with its own Holy Trinity parish church.

Nowadays, the town’s three most ancient buildings are all pubs: the most infamous of them being The Hind’s Head. The story goes that the scheming landlord used to put his rich guests in a room with a trap door by the bed so that the unfortunate inmate would fall to his death down a deep well. Luckily, one of the barmaids took a shine to a prospective victim and forewarned him of his grisly fate. Naturally, he ran to the authorities and the murderous publican was duly apprehended and arrested.

Government development

Post-Second World War Britain faced a legacy of damaged properties, and the restoration of the country’s war-torn cities led the Government to bring about the creation of a number of New Towns, largely concentrated around London to act as overspill areas. Bracknell was designated as a New Town on 17 June 1949. As a result, it has become a major employment centre within the thriving Thames Valley belt. Important local employers currently include Siemens ICL, Johnson & Johnson Medical, Hewlett Packard, Panasonic, BMW and 3M.

Life in Bracknell now

Art Director, Russell Turner has lived in Bracknell with wife, Rosanna, and children Morgan (5) and Jago (3), for six years. He has this to say about the benefits that modern-day Bracknell has to offer. “It’s a fantastic business location, right in the M4 Corridor, and close to both the M3 and M4 motorways. It’s really handy to get to

Windsor or Wokingham, Royal Ascot is just down the road and there are pretty country villages nearby. The town centre has some very popular leisure facilities, including an excellent sports and swimming centre, a dry-ski slope and an ice-rink. If you enjoy golf, there are some good clubs in the area too.

“If like me you have a young family Bracknell’s really great – lots to do and loads of outdoor activities. For example, there’s the Look Out Discovery Centre in Bracknell Forest. It has a hands-on science exhibition, nature trails for walking and mountain-biking and a really cool children’s adventure playground where the kids can go tree-top walking. We definitely think there’s a lot to be said for living here.”

To the future

Now, Bracknell is eagerly anticipating the next exciting chapter in its history in the form of major town-centre regeneration. The brainchild of masterplanners, the Richard Rogers Partnership, the proposed £750 million mixed-use regeneration scheme promises a dazzling metamorphosis of the somewhat outdated central district.

If approved, plans include the provision of 56,000m² of new retail outlets, 15,000m² of new bars, cafes, restaurant and entertainment & leisure facilities, a 4,000m² foodstore and extensive public spaces. Also planned are a new health centre, library and bus station, together with 3,500 new parking spaces.

Also new...

As Bracknell goes from strength to strength – attracting a growing population – so the need for quality community housing grows too. George Wimpey is currently redeveloping the former site of the RAF Staff College at Bracknell Forest into a landmark brownfield site with sustainability at its core.



“ If like me you have a young family Bracknell’s really great – lots to do and loads of outdoor activities. For example, there’s the **Look Out Discovery Centre** in Bracknell Forest.

It has a hands-on science exhibition, nature trails for walking and mountain-biking and a really cool children’s adventure playground where the kids can go tree-top walking.

We definitely think there’s a lot to be said for living here.”

Russell Turner, local Bracknell resident

tale to tell





The land was acquired by English Partnerships from Defence Estates in February 2004 as part of an on-going strategy to make best use of surplus property assets to meet housing needs. In February 2005, English Partnerships appointed George Wimpey as preferred developer of the new scheme.

Interestingly, the motto of the old College was *Visu et Nisu* – ‘by vision and effort’, something George Wimpey is striving to live by in the meticulous planning of what is now called the **theparks**.

On the **doorstep**

Future residents, alongside the existing population of the area, will benefit from enviable local amenities. There are no fewer than three infant schools, three junior schools, 24 primary schools, six secondary schools and one special school under Bracknell Forest Borough Council's umbrella. In addition to a wealth of private, voluntary and independent nurseries, the **theparks** will also be equipped with its own privately run crèche facility.

Bracknell Forest BC's website describes itself as ‘one of the best educational authorities in the country’. Tony Eccleston,

the Council's Director of Education, Children's Services and Libraries comments, “The local Bracknell Forest schools perform well and are amongst the fastest improving in the country according to government ministers. There is a mix of public, private and voluntary early years provision feeding into the Borough's infant, junior and primary schools.

“Transfer at 11 years of age is into comprehensive schools which with the exception of Ranelagh, a Church of England voluntary aided school nearby, serve designated areas aligned with local communities. The secondary school for The Parks area is Brakenhale and parents can express preferences for others. All secondary schools have sixth forms which work in collaboration with Bracknell and Wokingham College, one of the best in the region. The Borough's approach to meeting special educational needs is inclusive whether pupils attend Kennel Lane Special School or their local comprehensive.”

An **apple** a day...

In case the old wives' tale proves unreliable, there's also plenty of excellent healthcare provision within the borough.

Bracknell Forest Primary Care Trust works in partnership with the Council and other voluntary agencies to ensure the most appropriate care is provided for the local community. Three main acute hospital trusts serve the area, together with a main paediatric care centre and range of GPs and complementary health practitioners.

Hop, **skip**, jump

Getting about is easy too. Regular train services run from Bracknell train station to Reading in a journey time of about 20 minutes, while London Waterloo is just over an hour away. Heathrow Airport is a cinch via either the M3 or M4, and to the west lies Swindon, Bristol and the West Country.

All-in-all, you could say that Bracknell is a good example of the classic ‘rags-to-riches’ tale. From humble beginnings, today it has incredible employment opportunities, great facilities, stuff-of-dreams communication links, the prospect of a state of the art town centre and last but by no means least, a wonderful new place to live – the **theparks**.

Visit the **theparks** Sales and Information Centre, off Lime Walk, Bracknell, open from 10am to 5pm daily.
Telephone: 01344 486521/01344 456348 or visit www.theparksbracknell.co.uk

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