

TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (As Amended)

TOWN & COUNTRY PLANNING (INQUIRIES PROCEDURE) RULES 2000

PROOF OF EVIDENCE

Brigitte Crafer CMLI

APPELLANT: Abbeymill Homes

APPEAL SITE: Land West of Edneys Hill, Barkham Road

DEVELOPMENT: Full application for the proposed erection of 16 no. dwellings with new access off Edney's Hill, plus footpaths, car ports, parking, landscaping and associated works.

LPA REFERENCE: 251486

APPEAL REFERENCE: 6005646



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

9.6. 2026

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AUTHOR

My name is Brigitte Crafer. I have a BA (Hons) and Diploma in Landscape Architecture from University of Greenwich and a Post Graduate certificate in Urban Design from University of Westminster.

I have been a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute in London since 2003.

I am employed by Wokingham Borough Council as a Landscape Architect in the Tree and Landscape Team (Community, Heritage and Green Infrastructure). I have been with the Council in this capacity since August 2015. From 2001 to 2015 I worked as a Landscape Architect, both in private practice and for local authorities.

I have visited the appeal site and the surrounding landscape a number of times.

The Landscape Statement addresses reason for refusal 2;

2. The proposed development would have an adverse impact on the landscape, character and appearance of the area by reason of the loss of an open green field in the countryside to an urbanising, poorly designed development, contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, policies CC01, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, policies AD3 and IRS2 Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan, Barkham Village Design Statement, the Wokingham Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2012), the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment and the NPPF

1.0 THE EXISTING SITE, ITS SETTING AND INFLUENCES

1.1 The site is an open pastoral field of .7 ha on the north west corner of the junction of Edneys Hill and Barkham Road – B3349 which is a Green Route. The site is free from development. The site is located outside of the settlement area and in the countryside.

1.2 In the SW corner of the site are 2 Oak trees protected by TPO 1935/2023 one of which (T2 of the order) is identified as a Veteran tree. NPPF 193c applies;

‘development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons⁷⁰ and a suitable compensation strategy exists’;

1.3 South-east of the site is a farmhouse, associated agricultural buildings and open fields. The topography of the site is elevated to the north of the site and slopes south and east towards Edneys Hill a narrow (4m wide) public road that has a distinctly appealing winding, treelined rural appearance and leads deeper into open countryside. These features contribute to the generally semi-rural character and appearance of the site and its setting which is enhanced further by the presence of mature vegetation and established trees.

1.4 Although the site is described in appellant’s Appeal LVA (Landscape Visual Appeal Statement – February 2026 Ref. LA1031.LVAS.001) as having limited contribution to the wider landscape, it is clear the site is a locally valued, notable breathing space on the edge of the settlement. It represents a significant pause between the ribbon development that extends along Barkham Road from an area of protected and ancient woodland at Bottel Copse LWS east of the site, to an area of protected woodland 140m to the west of the site on the northern side of Barkham Road. (see Fig. 1 below)



Fig. 1 – Remaining green gaps (fields and woodland) along Barkham Road (red outline) and lanes visually connecting with countryside (yellow arrows)

1.5 Other noticeable breathing spaces exist on Barkham Road close to the site between a dwelling known as ‘Tourmakeady’ and the start of the Area of Special Character (ASC) of Barkham Church and Manor, and Barkham Street. These remaining breaks on Barkham Road are few and highly valuable within the street scene. Where these spaces were historically infilled with development they are now recognised as providing important breathing spaces and visual connections to the rural countryside and an attractive backdrop through and glimpsed views between some dwellings and along lanes.

2.0 LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

2.1 The importance of these retaining open spaces around the village is also emphasised in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036, see Survey Results (2016) paragraph 1.14C, and paragraph 4.1.

- a) Identity and setting: The first major theme to emerge was that residents have a strong attachment to the rural and village character of the area. There was strong support for the proposition that the rural setting makes Arborfield and Barkham good places to live.....
- b) Challenges facing Arborfield and Barkham: concern about development related issues is widespread. The most important challenge faced by Arborfield and Barkham are traffic congestion, protecting open spaces and absorbing development.

2.2 Protecting identity and the rural setting of the villages is a key objective of the neighbourhood plan;

‘Protect and enhance the countryside – new development should blend into the landscape, not dominate landscape views’. Policies IRS1 – IRS4 are concerned with identity and rural setting. Policy IRS2 ‘recognise, respect and preserve the rural setting of settlements.’

Policy AD3 concerns new housing outside of development limits and states it will not normally be permitted, but if consented approximately 50% of the site should be open space.

3.0 EXISTING BUILT DEVELOPMENT IN THE SITE SETTING

3.1 ‘Barkham Hill’, north of the site and Barkham Road is defined as a Limited Development Location. At Barkham Hill development is broadly located behind the rear gardens of the original south facing roadside residential development facing Barkham Road. The site is being referred to in the appellant’s documents as part of Barkham Hill, but is identified in the Local Plan as being outside of Barkham Hill development area and in the countryside.

3.2 Residential development west of the site consists of a stretch of large front facing detached dwellings to Barkham Road. However, Coppid Hill House and an additional 4 large detached dwellings are built behind the front facing dwellings to Barkham Road resulting in a dense and intense arrangement which is contrary to the normal pattern. The built form extends for 54m from the western site boundary towards Tourmakeady House.

4.0 PRoW – ACCESS AND RECREATIONAL ROUTES IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO SITE

4.1 To the SE of the site is PRoW WOK133 which extends south from Barkham Road, and SW towards Barkham *Area of Special Character* (ASC) via Edneys Hill and WOK135 where it becomes BARK 10.

4.2 Opposite the site is PRoW BARK19 a byway open to all traffic also known as Aggisters Lane which is lined with groups of trees, some protected by TPO 0761-1995.

4.3 A short distance to the west of the site is an area of woodland protected by TPO 0765/1995 and an area of Priority Habitat and semi-natural broadleaf woodland. Areas of woodland are a common feature along Barkham Road.

5.0 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

5.1 The site is located within Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA-2019) Area J2 ‘Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay’. A landscape of moderate quality, sensitivity and a modest capacity for change. Although not located in the Valued Landscape the site is close to ‘Barkham Bearwood’ VL. All the LCAs have ‘Valued Landscape Attributes’;

5.2 The following ‘*Valuable Landscape Attributes*’ that relate to the site and its surroundings include;

- Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provides a rural character away from settlement, and creates an important separation between settlements.
- Mature hedgerow trees and in-field trees which provide a wooded character and visual interest within the landscape.
- Rural settlement pattern of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages outside the urban area which provides a rural character and a link to the past.
- Recreational value of the network of rights of way between settlements.
- Views across the landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south provides a loose sense of enclosure.

All of these attributes are consistent with the site location and character, with further discussion below;

5.3 The Appeal LVA says the site *does not* contain any notable landscape features, however there are a group of 2 Veteran trees to the SW of the site protected by TPO1935/2023, one of which is within the site and both of which influence the site and surroundings, see NPPF 187b. The site itself is a valuable landscape feature within the streetscene.

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

‘recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland’;

Paragraph 193c;

‘When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons⁷⁰ and a suitable compensation strategy exists;’

5.4 The key issues affecting the J2 LCA relevant to the site include;

Hedgerow loss and replacement with fencing, loss of structure and species diversity in woodland, and lack of new tree planting or natural regeneration to rebalance age structure of hedgerow trees is an ongoing threat to the character of the landscape. Impact on landscape character from large scale development, and resulting impacts on increasing road traffic, pollution and particularly the erosion of roadside verges leading to loss of tranquillity. High demands on the landscape from recreation.

5.5 The Landscape Strategy is to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the landscape. The key aspects to be conserved and enhanced are the field pattern with mature hedgerow trees, wetland and woodland habitats, rural lanes and historic features. In terms of development, the aim is to integrate new development into its landscape setting and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements.

5.6 The Landscape Guidelines include;

- Conserve woodlands and remnant standard trees. Increase the extent of woodland (and tree planting) to provide screening of roads and development using locally occurring species.
- Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape which provides a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements. and retain their sense of physical and visual separation.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows with standard trees as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape.
- Reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so. Plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and create a positive interface between the built up and rural areas
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to minimise the potential impacts of any new development on valuable attributes.
- Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage particularly in the most rural areas.
- Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate new roads...Encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads and minimising fencing and other boundary structures.

6.0 REVIEW OF DAS

The submitted DAS states the variation in levels across the site is 8m falling from the high point in the NW of the site, to a low point in the SE towards the proposed entrance. I note the topography and the trees are the key features on the site, but the site itself is a key feature of the immediate and local setting, its corner location, its open, rural and undeveloped character provides continuity of green infrastructure to the south, east and south- west. This character is typical of Barkham Road with its ‘*landscape pauses*’ of open space and woodland which contributes to its Green Route designation.

6.1 The DAS and other documents refer to the settlement pattern at Barkham Hill located north of Barkham Road and east of Bearwood Road which in my opinion is significantly

different from the linear settlement pattern which is typical of Barkham Road. The layout proposed does not follow the building line established to the east of Edneys Hill, or on the west side at Coppid Hill House.

6.2 The DAS asserts that despite the constraints of topography, trees and access, the proposed development *represents an opportunity to preserve the character of the site setting* where 16 new dwellings will make a ‘huge difference’ to local services.

6.3 I disagree the proposals preserve the character of the site setting, rather the proposals fail to preserve what the site represents along Barkham Road which is, as discussed above a landscape pause of open space and trees with far reaching views to the landscape ridges of Finchampstead (LCA M2) and Wellingtonia Avenue in the far distance and views of the rural landscape of the LCA J2 site setting in the near distance.

6.4 The residential character directly to the north of the site is also characterised by features of the landscape along Aggisters Lane. Importantly, the linear residential character on the north side of Barkham Road ends at No. 1 Bearwood Road. The pocket of development along the south side of Barkham Road is concentrated around the junction with Bearwood Road, and is framed by open spaces to the south and north-west.

7.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPEAL STATEMENT – Ref. LA1031.LVAS.001 February 2026

7.1 *In summary, the Appeal Site is a contained, undeveloped parcel at the south-western edge of Barkham Hill, framed by existing residential development and boundary vegetation. Its scale, topography, and context allow for sensitive, low-density development that responds to the character of the settlement edge and surrounding landscape, while avoiding significant visual or landscape effects, as demonstrated in the submitted LVA.*

7.2 Please see below my response to the appeal LVA assessment of the site as a development site, and consideration of the impact on the views and landscape character of development upon them.

- It can be argued that the site is a landscape feature in itself. It represents a breathing space within a formal semi-urban street pattern.
- The site is part of a locally valued rural landscape backdrop and visible example of the topography of the undulating wooded coombe landscape which provides far reaching southerly views from the north toward Wellingtonia Avenue, and in the foreground a curiosity in the roofscape of Mortimer Farm.
- Views from Edneys Hill of the sites’ topography are clear from Edneys Hill Farm where PRoW WOKI33 and WOK135 meet.
- Edneys Hill is frequently used by pedestrians connecting with recreational routes further afield. Travelling along Edneys Hill which is a ‘C’ road views towards the site above the top of the bracken and between hedgerows with hedgerow trees

lining Edneys Road demonstrate clear views of Coppid Hill House and Quarter Hill House and dwellings further to the west that make up the pocket of development with Bearwood Road.

- During spring / summer views may be dependant on the height of bracken (a perennial -plant lining the road that reaches between 1-2m) – but views will be much more open during winter months when the largely deciduous/perennial vegetation dies down.
- Edneys Hill also provides a series of views travelling north that demonstrate the solid built character of the existing development on the south side of Barkham Road between the site and Tourmakeady. The views along Edneys Hill show the bulwark nature of the existing dwellings looming over the small fields and trees of the J2 agricultural landscape. The existing dwellings appear out of character with the more scattered built development of Edneys Hill and block views to the north. With the addition of the development, the sense of a solid screen of building will be reinforced, and all sense of the remaining permeability removed. The result will be that of dense urban development, highly emphasised by the topography of the site, and not typical of either the J2 character area or the existing linear settlement character.

7.3 Illustration of Important Views;



Fig. 2 - View across the site between the site and Coppid Hill House (on Barkham Road) of the Wellingtonias on Wellingtonia Avenue.



Fig 3 - View along Edneys Hill close to Spindleberry dwelling looking north to development



Fig. 4 - View along Edneys Hill close to Edneys House looking north to proposed development site



Fig. 5 - View along Edneys Hill close to Lee of the Hill dwelling looking north towards development site.

7.4 All of these images show the same visual effect of the existing development between the site and Tourmakeady. The density and saturation of the views from the existing development does not noticeably reduce with distance and will only be intensified by further development on the site in the middle view between Mortimer Farm and the existing built development between the site and Tourmakeady .

7.5 Closer to the site along Edneys Hill the views of the site are screened by topography and by the vegetation along the western edge of the road. As trees are being removed to facilitate the entrance and visibility splays, the effect this will have is to open up views of the existing development and further built development in the foreground.

7.6 Figure CJ 2.2 of the LVA shows the site is the foreground and the density of the existing development between the site and Tourmakeady with very little landscaping between the dwellings and only vegetation from the site in the right hand foreground. The influence of this vegetation will be mostly lost within the site. The dense urban character of the existing development is stark. The image shows recently completed development on the north side of the site along Barkham Road, but as these dwellings are viewed through the existing tree line of the site. As there are fewer of them, the impact from the 3 dwellings is less intense than that of the proposed site with the existing dwellings next to the site .

7.7 Where paragraph 2.1.3 of the appeal LVA discusses the predominantly low density, linear or ribbon development pattern along Barkham Road, with a mix of housing types set within spacious plots and well treed street scenes. My opinion is that is not the case with the existing development between the site and Tourmekeady at all, as it is neither

typical or low visual density, and is not well treed. The proposed development will be of the same ilk – albeit with a slightly different development pattern which is again not typical of the existing ribbon development along Barkham Road.

7.8 Paragraph 2.1.4 of the appeal LVA says that the site is physically and visually separated from the ASC/VL but I disagree with this statement. The site from Edneys Hill and Barkham Road is seen in the context of the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape. The site is within the J2 LCA and displays the visual characteristics many of which are valued attributes of it such as;

- **Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provides a rural character**
- **Mature hedgerow trees and in-field trees which provide a wooded character**
- **Views across the landscape to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south provides a loose sense of enclosure.**

7.9 In paragraph 2.1.5 of the Appeal LVA describes the context of the site as allowing for ‘a sensitive, low-density development that responds to the character of the settlement edge and the surrounding landscape ‘ I disagree with this as the design development is not linear/ribbon like but extends into the rear of the site across the significant level changes, thus providing a tiered development which is not represented in the immediate surroundings. The proposals will have an adverse impact on the trees/hedgerow lining Edneys Hill, opening up a wider view of the urban character of the site layout, which is in no way a sensitive response to the site location.

7.10 The Appeal LVA describes the landscape as Medium value, with Medium/Low susceptibility, and overall Medium – Medium Low sensitivity. The potential landscape effects on the site and its setting are thought to be Moderate/Minor adverse . The effects on the J2 LCA are thought to be no higher than Negligible adverse. This is no different from the original position of the Landscape Consultant. My opinion also remains that the proposals will result in a very high magnitude of change on the landscape character, and visually to the setting.

8.0 – REBUTTAL TO LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPEAL STATEMENT

Rebuttal to the Jenk Landscape’s response to my comments in Section 6 of the appeal LVA; (Jenk = JL)

- The importance of the site as a locally valued pause/breathing space is in JL’s view overstated but as I have previously mentioned above these undeveloped spaces in the landscape are reflected as important in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 see paragraphs 1.14C, 4.1.
- JL reflects in paragraph 6.1.2 of the LVA the influence of Policy CP11 as allowing for sensitive development in the countryside – but CP11 actually says that

proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted – as it seeks to maintain the quality of the environment, and none of the listed exceptions apply.

- In paragraph 6.1.3 JL does not recognise undeveloped areas of landscape as representing a defining characteristic of Barkham Road this suits his argument for developing what is clearly a breathing space along Barkham Road. The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 stipulates that this is the reason undeveloped spaces should remain undeveloped. In my opinion this is how the space is seen in the development plan as if it was not, it would be identified for development.
- I note in paragraph 6.1.4 that JL states that the proposals follow the linear settlement character – but neither the proposals or the adjacent development from Coppid Hill House to Tourmakeady strictly define the historic pattern of single dwellings facing Barkham Road. The existing development on the west side of the site is a doubling of the linear development and a doubling of dwellings. What it does create is a dense urban development that has the effect of looming over the existing open land which will be replicated on the appeal site, severing the link with the landscape to the south and the near and far reaching views across this landscape.
- In paragraph 6.1.5 JL challenges the prominence of the change in levels across the site. The level change and the resulting height of the dwellings reinforce the dense urban impact of the proposed development in the context of the existing neighbouring development to the west. The change in levels on the site accentuate the dominance of both the existing development and the impact of further development of the same ilk as illustrated in the visualisation in Viewpoint 10 in views from Edneys Hill in the appeal LVA. The illustration shows the 2 developments side by side set to the rear of Mortimer Farm, removing any sense of permeability.
- The reference to Edneys Hill and the retention of boundary vegetation in paragraph 6.1.6 – this is just one location at the site entrance where the vegetation will be cut back to facilitate visibility splays resulting in undoubted visual impact on the character of Edneys Hill (a narrow country lane) . This is for a short section of the site but this short section will have a big impact and change to the character of this country lane and no additional landscaping is proposed to enhance the space as it is within highways land, where it is likely that no further enhancements will take place, or be maintained.
- Much of the landscaping in the southern part of the site is given over to an attenuation basin and the landscaping around it being wild flower seed means that the space will not be usable within the scheme but serves a purpose of providing an attractive edge. Wildflower spaces can be very difficult to maintain in perpetuity. No amenity space / play space is provided.

8.1 The discussion in the appeal LVA regarding the Officer's Delegated Report at paragraph 6.1.8 says it is important to recognise the context of the site has changed with the construction of 3 x 2.5 storey townhouses opposite the site. The latest site layout differs from previous proposals (dismissed at appeal) in that they provided a 'coherent street facing arrangement orientated to Barkham Road and Edneys Hill with the southern part of the site proposed for public open space.

8.2 My opinion is the development facing Edneys Hill will illustrate the incompatibility of the proposals against the fine grain of Edneys Hill and the landscape / settlement pattern to the south. Edneys Hill is a country lane where accesses are generally farm gates to fields, and openings to reach farmhouses/ very few detached dwellings. It is noted that residential development along Edneys Hill is predominantly to the north side with views to the countryside and Barkham Area of Special Character.

8.3 Developing the site where the principle access to 16 dwellings will be from Edneys Hill, a narrow country lane will erode the character of the lane, by the effects of facilitating the entrance, removing trees and hedges, as well as the impact from vehicles accessing and egressing the site.

8.4 The application is supported by the LVA, but that does nothing other than highlight the reasons for the site remaining as an open breathing space along Barkham Road and preserving the integrity of the character of Edneys Hill.

9.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

9.1 The site is a locally valued area of undeveloped open space along Barkham Road, a Green Route. The site is not within development limits and the proposal will fail to maintain the quality of the environment. The proposals cannot demonstrate that development is within development limits and fails to respect the transition between built up area and open countryside, by taking account of the character of the adjacent countryside and landscape.

9.2 The design layout fails to provide a designated area of public open space and the amenity planting provided is not usable in as much as there are no lawns / seating areas to mingle / play. An attenuation basin takes up much of the space in the southern part of the site, which fails to enable integrating with the wider landscape to the south. Although the proposed planting will provide something of a setting for dwellings, it is a backdrop against which urban development will sit.

9.3 Although landscape proposals will enhance within the development itself it will fail to integrate with the countryside either with the proposed built form or the landscape around it by failing to provide a sufficient transition between site and adjacent land, and by responding to existing built development directly to the west of the site which itself does not meet with the guidelines within the Council's Landscape

Character Assessment 2019 and as such fails to meet the criteria of Policy TB21 which requires proposals to demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment including landscape quality, landscape strategy, landscape sensitivity and key issues.

9.4 The proposed development of the site is contrary to the Arborfield and Barham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036 where proposals fail to protect open spaces, or protect and enhance the countryside where development should blend into the landscape not dominate the landscape views.

9.5 The proposals fail to recognise the site itself is one of the 'Valued Landscape Attributes' of J2 LCA and development on it will result in a lack of permeability and adversely influence views to the ASC and Barkham and Bearwood VL. The site topography is a typical example of the undulating landscape associated with LCA J2 consisting of small fields and wooded coombes.

9.6 The proposals fail to meet with the guidelines of the LCA and fail to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the J2 landscape as such is contrary to Policies CP3 of the CS, Policies CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan.