

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	250267
Address:	31 Barkham Ride, Wokingham, RG40 4EX.		
Proposal:	Demolition of the existing dwelling and use of land as an extension to Victoria Gardens Residential Park Home Estate, with the stationing of 35 park homes (permanent C3 use class accommodation) and the construction of an ancillary community building (use class F2(b)) and park office (use class Eg(i))		
Type of Development:	Other Change of Use		
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
- ☐ No objection
- ☐ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
- ☒ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
- ☐ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

SITE LOCATION

The site is located within the countryside and adjacent to the settlement boundary of Finchampstead North. Located to the east of the site are a number of new mobile homes have been erected known as Victoria Gardens, and to west and north boundary Rooks Nest Country Park. The site is 1.501 ha orientated N-S and forms an extension to Victoria Gardens – removing the sense of an eastern site boundary that currently exists formed by an evergreen hedge and some trees.

The site itself currently contains an existing large dwelling and a number outbuildings / sheds / other buildings, large areas of open grass, with vegetation including trees towards the edges of the site.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE SITE AND THE SURROUNDING AREA

The site is surrounded on 3 sides by the 'Forest and Rides Valued Landscape', including Rooks Nest POS to the west and northern site boundaries and Barkham Ride itself to the south – the rides being a non-designated heritage asset which includes many mature and protected trees along it.

A sense of tranquillity and remoteness are noted as a 'Valuable Landscape Attributes' of the M1 LCA, and are relevant to the site, being close to Rooks Nest SANG and countryside beyond to the west.

Development proposals located within or affecting a valued landscape should have particular regard to the following attributes:

- a) Landscape quality (condition);
- b) Scenic quality;
- c) Rarity;
- d) Representativeness;
- e) Conservation interests;
- f) Recreation value;
- g) Perceptual aspects; and
- h) Associations.

Development proposals affecting Valued Landscapes will only be supported where they protect, and where appropriate, integrate with and/or enhance the special features, characteristics and qualities of the landscape, unless the benefits of the development in that location clearly outweigh the harm.

The site is located in landscape character area (LCA) M1 Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands' which is a high quality landscape with moderate sensitivity and a low capacity for change and characterised by large swathes of interconnected forestry and woodland which dominates the area over farmland, although just beyond at Rooks Nest POS the reverse is true and farmland of fields and hedgerow dominates consistent with J2 LCA.

The 'rides' are a distinctive feature of the M1 LCA impart a strong linear character to the landscape and have provided a framework for a strong settlement character of low density, mostly detached dwellings lining the rides. The landscape is highly enclosed except for views along the rides that are framed by mature Oak trees, many of which are protected and highly valued in the landscape and includes some Veteran trees. The landscape character of the rides extends along Barkham Ride and includes the site where there are several mature Oak and Poplar trees to the western site boundary and woodland to the north.

The key issues affecting the M1 LCA pertinent to the site include *woodland management, pressure for new residential development inside and outside the area that impact the landscape character*. Continued pressure for settlement expansion, infill and densification within the existing settlements leading to habitat loss, increase of traffic affecting the tranquillity of the area.

The Landscape Strategy for the M1 LCA is *to conserve and enhance existing character. In terms of development, the aim is to conserve and enhance the rural setting and gaps between settlements and maintain the low density domestic character of development*.

The Landscape Guidelines for the M1 LCA include;
Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries

and large-species trees and maintain the important vistas along rides. Enhance a sense of place through careful planning and design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night).

Similar park home sites are located to the north side of Nine Mile Ride to the south within a wooded area next to California Country Park named 'California Country Park Homes', and 'Robinson Crusoe Mobile Home Park' close to the junction with Nine Mile Ride and Park Lane to the SW, although this site being an extension to Victoria Gardens will be larger than others in the vicinity.

ARBORICULTURE

An Arboricultural Report Ref. MW.2301.BRF.SK01.AIA 10.12.24 is submitted with the application which includes tree survey, arboricultural impact assessment. Tree protection strategy, and preliminary arboricultural Method Statement.

There are several Oaks assessed as A1 and A2. There is a woodland to the north but outside of the site which is assessed as A2 quality, and there are several individual and groups of trees that form consistent screening to the NW boundary.

There are 2 Lombardy Poplars along the western site boundary that are included in the Ancient Tree Inventory as Notable trees; T34 – ATI Ref. 66156, and T20 – ATI Ref. 66170. T47 to the SW corner of the site is a Veteran / Notable tree that has 1100mm DBH. *All 3 trees should be future proofed with a Veteran tree buffer of 15 x the stem size which is not currently shown on the TPP*; T48 BZ of 16.5m, T34 BZ of 15m, and T20 of 9m.

A mix of Oaks, Lombardy Poplar, Cherry, Sycamore line the western boundary. The key features are the groups of Oak T06 'A' and Turkey Oak T08 'A' A group of Lombardy Poplar T20 with some Oak. and another group of 6 No. Lombardy Poplar all 'B' mixed with Oaks and Cherries between. At the SW corner of the site are trees T44 and T47 and further along the road boundary T50 all of these trees are 'A' quality identified as key features in the landscape and reflect the 'Forest and Rides' Valued landscape and the rides which are non-designated heritage assets.

Most of the trees are within the site boundary, but some are outside of it. Of the 55 tree features surveyed 24 will be removed (see below), this includes the removal of a large Oak tree that has been classified T54 'U' due to its poor condition. It looks as though most of the trees along the southern site boundary are offsite trees but this is difficult to see exactly as the application boundary is not included on the Tree Protection Plan. Please make sure this is included on any future plans.

All construction is proposed outside of the RPA of the retained trees. (Although there is no clear indication on the plans as to whether the building footprints correlate with the building foundations). The report assures that the services will be outside of the RPA – however we will need information to support this.

The Tree Protection Plan shows proposed layout of park homes as well as dwellings of the approved scheme (PA23071). It also details removal of G55 Mixed group in

eastern part of the site, G57 Mixed species hedge in NW corner, T04 and T05 Goat Willow and Silver Birch, T22 Olive, T23 Oak and T54 Oak.

Tree works are recommended in the Tree Survey observations and should be carried out as per the Arboricultural Consultants recommendation.

There is a Leyland Cypress hedge and fence to the inside of the northern site boundary and is shown as being removed, and a surface water ditch is located to the rear adjacent to the northern site boundary. The eastern side of the plot has a small avenue of mixed species trees G55, of low value that will be removed, and the groups of trees to the E boundary including T24,25,26,27,28 will be retained. Laurel hedging exists along a small section of the eastern site boundary.

The root protection areas of the retained western boundary trees extend towards the side of the park homes. It is preferable that RPAs are kept free of development or garden space.

SITE LAYOUT AND DESIGN – Drawing Number 2680-06B

The drawing shows the existing vegetation retained but also additional landscaping – to replace the conifers to the northern boundary. The plan also shows a dividing hedge between proposed Plot 19 and Plot 9 of Victoria Gardens.

The site links Victoria Gardens with the proposed layout by utilising the existing road into Victoria Gardens which extends the existing layout in what would seem a natural way to the west, creating a very large park home site of 61 dwellings overall. The proposed development includes a centrally placed residents community building and garden. Victoria Gardens contains 26 homes overall and an office and includes 2 areas of open space for landscaping, whereas the proposed development includes no open spaces or space for incidental landscaping.

The existing access to 31 Barkham Ride will be blocked up with new hedging (include trees) to match the existing planted along the boundary line. The existing access to Victoria gardens is to be used for the proposed extension of the site, and accommodating traffic movements associated with 61 dwellings and incidental traffic, which will over double the amount of activity to and from the site and its single entrance. The width of the new access road is 4.1m wide and will be finished in tarmac. Each park home has its own driveway at 3m wide and approximately 10m long.

The proposed layout shows a densely settled site with few if any opportunities for landscape enhancements within the layout and as such is contrary to Policy CP3. There is no indication on the Site Plan of any defensible space associated with the plots. Most of the park homes are between 5.4m and 6m apart. There is no indication if the plots will be separated by fencing. There is no space shown for enhancement planting to the site entrance e.g. there is a distance of about 5m between the edge of Plot 1 and the access road edge but nothing is shown. The vegetation shown on the plan is mostly that of the retained trees and hedges with some enhancement planting to the northern boundary to replace the conifer hedge.

The park homes to south of the site are set back by 8.5m from the southern boundary hedge. Within this space is the root protection area of T48 which I recommend should be treated as if it was a Veteran tree and a full Veteran tree Buffer Zone (BZ) applied – which would also mean that the BZ could not be used as a garden or planted with ornamental plants but left as it is currently as if in a meadow, and be fenced off.

The previous application for the building of traditional dwellings allowed a townscape character to be established with a view of dwellings facing the road. With this new application the park homes are single storey with perhaps part of the roof tops visible above the hedge line. There is a clear view into the Victoria Gardens site with the boundary treatment of non-native hedges and a distinct park home character set back some distance from the roadside. The proposed extension to the existing site will not be set back so far. The existing layout of caravans appear very close together on aerial mapping but looking from Barkham Ride look less dense.

The proposed site has plots separated by about 9m from the side walls of Plots 34 and 29 and about 6.5m between Plots 29 and 31. There is a distance of 10m between the rear of plots 17-19 and the rear site boundary. The pond is in the same location as on the previous scheme in the NW corner.

As it stands there is no indication of plot separation or what this would look like in terms of boundary treatment if there is space for it and what it might comprise of e.g. how much space would be allocated per plot?

Landscape Visual Impact Assessment – LVIA/bkmrde/873-1/WBC – For the Proposed Demolition of Existing Buildings, installation of 35no. Park Homes and Construction of a communal building with parking and landscaping.

A desk study of development plan policy and map data to include local landscape designations. A photographic appraisal of the site and its surroundings was undertaken and a landscape strategy proposed that takes account of the landscape sensitivity and its capacity to accommodate change.

The site consists of a single private dwelling, detached garage, access driveway and areas of hardstanding and fencing. The site is at 60m AOD with a small crossfall to the lower northern boundary. There is an offsite ditch with a bank which is adjacent to the northern site boundary, and a ditch that runs from the centre of the northern ditch diagonally across the site and joins with a N-S ditch which runs along the eastern edge of the site close to the site boundary. Its not clear how these will be accommodated within the site layout.

Mature trees and hedges line the western and on the northern boundaries where some of the trees and vegetation are outside of the site boundary and in land owned by the Highway Authority. Of the tree species present along the western boundary is Oak, Poplar and Sycamore.

The LVIA states that the site can be divided into 2 existing landscape zones; the developed central part of the site with buildings and hard landscaping, and the areas of grass to the south enclosed by mature hedgerow adjacent to the country park,

and a similar area of open grass backing onto woodland to the north. The mobile home park to the eastern boundary. There are no public footpaths within the site, but Rooks Nest Country Park contains footpaths that connect with the wider network of PRoW.

The series of images in appraisal of *Inward Views* towards the site - Images 1-12H – 4 Photos per sheet – all of these inward views are thought to have a short term moderately adverse effect on the view.

There is no assessment of the inward views from the east which I assess as having clear views of the site with the wooded western boundary framing the view. – The LVIA says that the proposals will have a **short term moderate/adverse** effect on the view. – I do not see that the proposed section of hedge on the east site boundary will do much to screen anything in the short term and that the views from Victoria Gardens will be open and there will be more of the same type of development across an extended distance.

Overall, I agree the proposals will have a **moderate adverse** effect on inward views from the north, west and south – but from the east the views will be **permanent adverse** effect on the existing home owners where there is no interior landscaping proposed.

The Visual Receptors are users of the public footpaths and country park, local residents, road users in vicinity, but also the existing residents of Victoria Gardens. Pedestrians will have filtered views of Barkham Ride including the proposed vehicle entrance which is already in use as an entrance to Victoria Gardens which motorists will already be aware of. Existing residents will have restricted views to the development through any gaps in the boundary hedgerow and tree screen.

Summary of Visual Impact

The Visual Appraisal Summary states that the study site is largely enclosed by mature vegetation to the north, west and south. There are filtered views into the southern part of the site from the driveway entrance, and there are filtered views from Rooks Nest Country Park framed by mature boundary vegetation and screen fencing – (from the north and the west).

The extent of the development read with Victoria Gardens shows no breaking up of the internal site layout by anything other than roads will not help the development to fit into the existing site character or help to visually break it up.

The cumulative effect of development on the landscape is thought to be **short term moderate/adverse** impact on the landscape character particularly at the entrance to the proposed development which will diminish over time to provide long term **beneficial landscape impact**.

The landscape strategy Drawing 873/1/01 includes '*the boundary landscape zones treatment will be designed to provide the appropriate visual amenity to accommodate new built form into the sensitive edge of settlement*'. The Indicative Landscape Strategy Plan 873/1/01 12/24 includes a native hedge / hedgerow trees

to replace the Leylandii hedge to the northern boundary, as well as clipped hedging around the proposed community building with 2-3 new trees.

Areas of retained lawns will be managed as wildflower habitat whilst the overall grassed site shown as 'Communal Greenspace' on the plan will be managed by the residents management company. It is proposed that the western boundary hedgerow be retained and managed by the management company and enhanced with new planting.

The LVIA describes **the inner dwelling layout** as being designed to fit the context and local character based around the retained and enhanced landscape structure with new pedestrian links. The proposals for the inner layout includes the removal of the existing site driveway and the development will use the existing driveway to Victoria Gardens. Driveways to access the homes will be of tarmac and consist of permeable paving and shared surfaces. The existing ditches and new pond will be included in the proposals.

Conclusion

The proposals lack internal landscaping and as such will struggle to create a sense of place or be able to meet with Policy TB21 in enhancing the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

The layout does not promote integration of the scheme with any adjoining POS or countryside – which could include extending the western vegetated character into the site to create extended green infrastructure, and providing some extensions from the east. The opportunity has not been included in the landscape strategy. In this way the development is contrary to Local Plan Policies CC03 and TB21.

The M1 LCA landscape strategy is to *conserve and enhance existing character. In terms of development, the aim is to conserve and enhance the rural setting and gaps between settlements, maintaining the low density domestic character of development.* The development will be less visible than the previously approved scheme but lacks overall sufficient landscape enhancement. In terms of impact on the valued landscape the proposals do protect and integrate the special features and characteristics and qualities of the VL although it could be more extensive.

There is no indication of visibility splays on this drawing which is a requirement to assess potential loss of landscaping.

I have no objection to the development however some key things need to be made clearer;

Adoption of a buffer zone for Veteran tree in SW corner. Exploration of the internal layout and how plots may be divided to create defensible space and internal connections of green infrastructure.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Date:	28.3.25	Signed:	B. Crafer
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