

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	250407
Address:	Land South of Oak Tree, Waingels Road, Charvil.		
Proposal:	Permission in principle application for a residential development comprising the erection of a minimum and a maximum of 9 dwellings.		
Type of Development:	Minor Dwellings (1-9) PiP		
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

The site is in the 'River Loddon' Valued Landscape, and in the countryside in a sensitive location adjacent to the northern boundary of Norris Bird Copse a bird sanctuary and Local Wildlife Site comprising of eutrophic standing water which is also a Berkshire Priority Habitat. In fact, some of the bird sanctuary boundary appears to be in the red line boundary of the site. A 'Berkshire Biodiversity Opportunity Area in the form of 'Loddon Gravel Pits' extends into the southern half of the site from the south. A short distance to the west of the site is an area of 'Ancient, Semi Natural Woodland' (ASNW) protected by TPO0028/1971. There are many Veteran trees to the periphery of the LWS which extend along a drainage ditch to the east.

A footpath CHAR 5 is located to the south of the site to the southern boundary of the bird sanctuary.

The site is located within the Council's 'Landscape Character Assessment' Area J4 'Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay' a moderate quality landscape with low sensitivity and a considerable capacity for change. The eastern boundary is adjacent to the neighbouring LCA B1 'Loddon River Valley and Open Water' which has a moderate landscape quality, moderate sensitivity and a modest capacity for change.

The site is much more akin to the **B1 LCA**

'Valuable Landscape Attributes' for LCA B1 include;

- Undeveloped riverine character from network of rivers, drainage ditches and restored lakes provide a sense of place along with the wooded context of natural and restored woodland fringing carr vegetation and pollarded willows around flooded gravel pits.
- Remnant pockets of traditional pasture, and a mosaic of ecologically valuable wetland and woodland habitats including BAP priority habitats designated LWS where restored gravel pits support a diverse range of birds and nationally scarce flora.
- Popular recreational facilities at Dinton Pastures Country park. Built development is confined to small clusters around fords, although the urban influence of Woodley to the periphery.
- Localised areas of tranquillity particularly around restored lakes and away transport corridors and visual influence of adjacent settlements.

The Key Issues affected the B1 LCA include;

- Changes to woodland through loss of species diversity and lack of management, pathogens and climate change and the use of chemicals resulting in polluted run off affecting water quality.
- Loss of landscape features such as pollarded willows, waterside pasture including wet meadows as a result of intensive grassland management and changes in agricultural practice including pony paddocks on settlement edges. Loss and fragmentation of wetland habitats as a result of scrub encroachment.
- High demands for recreation and erosion of rights of way ecological and landscape features as a result of expanding population and demand for new residential development on the floodplain impacting and fragmenting landscape character.

The Landscape Strategy for B1 LCA is;

to conserve and enhance the restored wetland character of the floodplain, employing management improvements to increase its robustness. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the restored gravel pits with their important wildlife habitats and fringing wooded areas as well as the traditional pasture and associated features.

In particular, there is an opportunity to consider better integration of the transportation corridors and large scale industrial/business land uses (including the Winnersh Triangle area) and recreational facilities that affect the overall perception of tranquillity and peacefulness.

In terms of development, the aim is to avoid the spread of development onto the floodplain and avoid the amalgamation of adjacent settlements

Landscape Guidelines for LCA B1

- Conserve and enhance the intrinsic character and beauty of the riverine landscape corridor and the restored gravel pits. Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape, the BAP priority habitat woodland copses and fringing carr, particularly surrounding the large lakes where it provides ecological habitats and creates an enclosed and secluded character.
- Conserve, enhance and manage wetland, grassland and pasture habitats. Particularly protect BAP priority habitats from development, changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. Consider further opportunities for the recreation of riverside meadows or permanent pasture to restore and extend grassland habitats. The area forms part of the Loddon Valley Gravel Pits BOA, a network of habitats has been identified as a target for recreation of fen, meadow and grassland habitats and restoration and positive management of wet woodland. An appropriate wetland and grassland management regime to enhance biodiversity is critical.
- Maintain the prevailing hydrology and water tables to enable anaerobic conditions to preserve archaeological sites in low lying wetland areas, particularly along river corridors. Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape while managing recreational pressure on the river and river floodplain, particularly Dinton Pastures Country Park.
- Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges on the edge of the floodplain through hedges, wooded boundaries, occasional scrub planting, and large-species trees to provide visual screening. Conserve and enhance the rural character of the open floodplain landscape avoiding the spread of development on to the floodplain

LCA J4 includes the site on its periphery, a densely settled area with a strong urban and suburban character located to the west of the borough and east of Reading. Pockets of open space remain.

Valued Landscape Attributes relating to the site include;

Small wooded copses that contain valuable habitats including BAP priority habitat and wet woodland. Recreational value including nature reserves, views of surrounding lowlands provide a sense of place and visual variety.

The key issues include;

Effect on tree health from pathogens and climate change, hedgerow loss and soil erosion from field expansion and intensification of agriculture. High demands for recreation threatening the tranquillity of the landscape and erosion of landscape and historic features from pressures for recreation.

The Landscape Strategy for LCA J4:

to conserve and enhance the open areas within the urban conurbation; the character of the landscape between settlements; the rural interface and buffer to the more rural area of the Thames floodplain to the north, and the River Loddon to the east.

The key aspects to be enhanced and restored are the wildlife habitats and areas of remnant historic parkland. In particular there are opportunities for creation of woodland habitats to link and connect existing woodlands.

Landscape Guidelines for LCA J4 include:

- Protect the remaining areas of open land separating Sonning, Woodley and Charvil in order to provide a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements. Conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges through wooded boundaries and large-species trees to provide visual screening and a positive interface between the built up and rural areas that provides an appropriate setting for Woodley, Earley and Charvil.
- Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, linking to current areas of BAP priority habitat, predominantly using locally occurring native species in order to provide screening of roads, development and the urban fringe. Reinstall or repair hedgerows with native species where there are opportunities to do so, as important wildlife habitats and landscape features.
- Increase recreational value of the area through creation of new public open space and public rights of way.
- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape; sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night; and ground modelling and other landscape works to help minimise disruption) to minimise the impacts of development on valuable attributes

A 'Illustrative Perceived Settlement Plan' is submitted showing the site within the Woodley Settlement Area – adjacent to the LWS to the south and countryside to the east. The existing settlement edge of Woodley is beyond Waingels College to the west.

The Illustrative Plan is not correct a reflection of the settlement edges of either Charvil or Woodley and highlights the location of the site in relation to the surrounding countryside and the landscape character of its immediate surroundings; the presence of the Aldermoor Nature Reserve and the Bird Sanctuary to the south. Wooded and open countryside to the east and north including Sonning Golf Club. The plan highlights the importance of the area as open countryside that forms the separation of settlements as referred to in the Landscape Strategy for LCA B1 and within the landscape guidelines for LCA J4.

A plan showing the facilities around the site is included in the application which illustrates the proximity of the nature reserves / LWS to the site.

An Illustrative Wider Context Plan is submitted which includes the proposed site layout in relation to the key constraints such as the Bird Sanctuary. Nature Reserve, Scout Campsite within the Ancient Woodland. The drawing also includes 4 larger detached dwellings known as Lakeside, Oak Tree, Nikunj and Briarside accessed from Waingels Road. All these dwellings are in generous plots with differing orientations.

The plan emphasises the development as being of an entirely different layout and character; detached dwellings in much less generous plots that has no development of a similar character close to it.

The plan also emphasises the proximity of development to the Bird Sanctuary which seems a contradiction in terms – as how much sanctuary will be provided during the intense development phase on this site and how will the effects of development be managed in such close quarters to a wildlife site and still protect wildlife? Such as run off, noise, adverse effects on trees and woodland, water quality, tranquillity?

Following completion, what will the effects of human habitation with all the paraphernalia associated with living an urban life in the countryside be? How can the sense of separation between settlements be preserved? How will the countryside and its integrated habitats be conserved and enhanced? (highlighted in the LCA B1); *the need to conserve and enhance remnant pockets of traditional pasture, and a mosaic of ecologically valuable wetland and woodland habitats including BAP priority habitats designated LWS where restored gravel pits support a diverse range of birds and nationally scarce flora* be fulfilled ?

The Illustrated Sketch Plan is for 9 dwellings and has gardens backing onto the LWS, but there is no buffer shown between the southern site edge and the LWS. The rear gardens to the eastern boundary have trees and vegetation around the boundary and these are important habitats identified in the B1 LCA. The redline boundary encroaches into the area of eutrophic wetland and leaves a narrow area of land between the site and a dwelling known as the Copse. There are existing trees to part of the northern site boundary. It is not known what species of trees and shrubs exist in the area as yet and what their contribution is to the typical wetland habitat. No information is submitted relating to the existing vegetation on and close to the site boundaries. An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) is required to BS5837:2012 as part of an application and to comply with Policy CC03d which requires trees, hedges and other vegetation is protected and retained during development.

A Landscape and Visual Impact is a requirement of Paragraph 2.19 of the Local Plan.

Policy TB21
Policy CC03
Policy CP3

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Date:	12.3.25	Signed:	B. Crafer
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