

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	250835
Address:	Land adjacent to Hutts Farm Cottage, Blagrove Lane, Wokingham, RG41 4AX.		
Proposal:	Outline application for the proposed erection of 4 no. detached dwellings with associated parking and access. (All matters reserved except for means of access and layout.)		
Type of Development:	Minor Dwellings (1-9)		
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 located the countryside between Wokingham and Barkham .

The site is within Wokingham landscape character area (LCA) J2 'Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay', a moderate quality landscape of moderate sensitivity and a moderate capacity for change.

There are protected trees on the site; to the south-western boundary 2 Oak tree protected by TPO 0914/1997.

There is a tree within the site recognised in the Ancient Tree Inventory as being a 'Notable' tree ATI Ref. 44638 which I equate with T19 of the submitted tree survey.

Trees on the opposite side of the lane but material to development are; T21 a Notable tree (44988), T18 a Notable tree (44977), T17 a Veteran tree(44988). All these trees are included in the ATI reference numbers in brackets. These trees are also protected by TPO 1465/2013 and includes T15, T21 and T29.

The site is a small triangular piece of ground to the north-east of Hutts Farm Cottage, and the land is essentially an extension of a larger field to the west that just happens

to be fenced off into a small paddock giving the appearance of having no particular use because of its size but with the field beyond becomes a much bigger field.

Hutts Farm Cottage the host site, can be read as part of small group of buildings associated with Hutts Farm. In this arrangement the buildings resemble a small grouping of structures that could be associated with a farmhouse and barns. Located in the countryside the groups of buildings relate broadly to each other but not to any other extended area of settlement. The location of the buildings behind native hedges and trees reinforces the rural character.

The site and its location is characterised by open fields lined with hedgerows and tree lined lanes. Blagrove Lane adjacent to the site has many trees protected by TPO and some of the trees are recognised on the Woodland Trust's Tree Inventory as Notable and Veteran trees. (see above). The treelined character of Blagrove Lane continues for some distance linking to the south-west extent of Wokingham Town. The treelined character also extends along Doles Lane. These lanes together connect to Wokingham and Barkham and their rural character of trees and hedgerows, and fields beyond perform an important function as areas of separation between the settlements. The proposed development would contribute to reducing this important separation, which can already be perceived as tenuous due to the small distances between the lanes and the adjacent settlements, however, this obviously highlights the importance of them being retained.

Although not in a 'Valued Landscape' (see Valued Landscape Assessments 2024) the J2 LCA has 'Valued Landscape Attributes' which include; arable farming, and older settlements of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages. The J2 LCA has a wooded context providing characteristic mature hedgerows and in-field trees combined with woodland belts, BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland.

The landscape strategy for J2 LCA is to '**conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the landscape**. The key characteristics to be conserved and enhanced are the field pattern with mature hedgerows trees, wetland and woodland habitats rural lanes and historic features.'

The J2 LCA Guidelines include the following that are pertinent to the site;

- To conserve woodlands, including ancient woodland, BAP priority habitats and remnant standard trees. **Conserve the open and rural qualities of the farmed landscape which provides a physical and visual separation or gap between settlements.** Protect the individual identity of villages and retain their sense of physical and visual separation.
- In particular protect the sensitive areas of open land between Barkham and Wokingham town.
- Conserve and manage hedgerows with standard trees as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the link they provide across the landscape.
- Repair and reinstate woodland where there is an opportunity to do so.

- Conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed pasture and arable fields and maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements.

The proposed development is for 4 large dwellings in the countryside – contrary to Policy CP11 of the Local Plan. The dwellings are accessed just past a bend in the lane. Dwellings are arranged via a cul de sac. In order to create the cul de sac, the existing earth bank will be cut through to create a 1:12 gradient, which is an incursion into the root protection area of tree T21 which is recognised as a 'Notable' tree (Ref. 44988) on the ATI and is also protected by TPO1465/2013. The tree is a future Veteran tree and as such should be future proofed by implementation of a buffer zone of 15 times its girth measurement as per the PPG on Ancient and Veteran Trees. T17 is classified as a Veteran on the ATI website (ATI Ref. 44975) and should be afforded the correct Buffer Zone of 15 times its girth as per the PPG on Ancient and Veteran trees which states that buffer zones should not be in gardens. T17 root protection area is clearly in a garden.

The trees have already experienced incursion into their rooting areas and the impact of further incursion into the RPA of T21 is not sustainable e.g. further incursions included digging into the soft ground of a bank and introducing further hard landscaping; parking bays and a roadway into the RPA and probably lighting and other engineering activities associated with development. This is contrary to Policy CC03ii)D which requires the retention and protection of trees, hedges and other landscape features through development. Retention so that the tree remains healthy.

Many old trees have been growing with little or no incursion and older Oak trees are less able to sustain further and extensive incursions into the RPA and over time may fail.

The design layout of the dwellings is urban in form with none of the character of the nearby arrangement of rural dwellings. The layout urban in form, is a rigid and structured layout that has nothing of the organic looser rural arrangement typical of countryside dwellings about it.

There is no sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves, and the way they interact with their surroundings. The layout will have a detrimental effect on the growing environment of the trees, and will not be able to maintain and enhance the ability of the site to support flora and fauna. The layout is not an of an appropriate scale or layout, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design. The proposed development does not maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment.

The proposals fail to take account of Policy TB21 which requires that proposals demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the landscape character assessment including the landscape quality, landscape strategy, landscape sensitivity and key issues. Proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

The general principles for design in rural areas or the settlement edge referred to in the Borough Design Guide have not been met as proposals fail to incorporate and enhance features that contribute to the landscape character. The existing trees have not been taken into account in the layout and are secondary to it.

No features of the existing settlement pattern have been incorporated into the design.

The development harms the setting of the adjacent dwellings and reduces the important sense of separation between settlements.

The development is located on a bend in the lane and not carefully composed in relation to the important views along the lane. The relationship between public and private space and the transition between them should relate to the existing character of the countryside in the location. There is little landscaping to the setting, no incidental space within the development to create more buffer planting, Close board fencing is a feature of urban development and out of character with the rural setting.

The proposals are contrary to Policies CP1 and CP3 of WBC Core Strategy, and Policies CC03 ii / d and e , Policy TB21 of the Local Plan.

The proposals conflict with the NPPF 12/24 specifically Paragraphs 187b as the scheme fails to recognise 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.

And conflicts with Paragraph 193c as 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;

I am unable to support the proposals.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Date:	15.5.25	Signed:	B. Crafer
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