

PLANNING REF : 252684
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Bearwood Road
: Barkham, Wokingham
: BERKSHIRE
SUBMITTED BY : Mr D Reynolds
DATE SUBMITTED : 21/12/2025

COMMENTS:

I object to this planning application because its proposal would cause harm to the quality of the landscape in this location and is completely unnecessary, as an alternative access for the site is available.

The proposal would cause harm because the application site is located in the countryside, outside development limits, adjacent (and opening onto) a designated Green Route and within the Barkham and Bearwood

Valued Landscape area, as defined in policy NE6 of the draft LPU. A valued landscape such as this also engages paragraph 187(a) of the current version of the NPPF (December 2024). The application site also lies within Wokingham BC's Landscape Character Assessment area J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay.

Removing hedgerow planted only recently, to reinstate that which was removed previously for other works, and introducing development into this sensitive location is contrary to the provisions of each of the policies mentioned above, specifically:

1) Adopted Core Strategy Policy CP11 addresses proposals outside development limits, including in the countryside. It is a generally restrictive policy intended to protect the quality of the environment and prevent coalescence of settlements but contains seven defined exception clauses. The proposal does not satisfy any of them.

2) Adopted MDD Policy CC03 addresses green infrastructure, including green routes. Green routes are defined in its glossary as 'Roads into settlements that are lined with trees and other vegetation which make a significant contribution to character and environment of the area and contribute to the Borough's network of wildlife corridors.' The proposal is contrary to sections 2(a), 2(d) and (3) of this policy.

3) The Borough's Landscape Character Assessment defines landscape characteristics and sets out objectives and strategies for their management. The landscape strategy for LCA area J2 is to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the landscape. The key aspects to be conserved and enhanced are identified as the field pattern with mature hedgerow trees, wetland and woodland habitats, rural lanes and historic features. In terms of development, the aim stated is to integrate new development into its landscape setting, and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements. Landscape Guidelines include: conserving woodlands, including ancient and remnant standard trees; and conserving the open rural qualities of the farmed landscape. The proposal does not conserve or enhance anything but, instead, degrades the visual quality of the landscape and is therefore contrary to the objectives of the LCA for area J2.

The LPU

A Stage 1 examination in public of the draft LPU was concluded in November of this year and so it can be considered as being at a sufficiently advanced stage of preparation for its policies to be given appropriate material weight by the Council.

4) Draft LPU policy NE5 addresses landscape and design matters. Sub-section (2) states: 'Development proposals should be demonstrably informed by, and respond to, the distinctive characters set out in the Landscape Character Assessment and other relevant assessments, which provide an understanding of the valued characteristics, features and quality of local landscape character areas.'

Related paragraph 14.47 provides: 'The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) forms the primary document in relation to the understanding of the valued characteristics, features and quality of the landscape character areas of the borough. The LCA should be the starting point for all development proposals.'

Draft LPU policy NE6 defines Valued Landscapes and sets out their attributes, which must be taken into consideration when development is proposed within them. Paragraphs 14.57-14.60 of the LPU are also relevant in this respect and, in particular, the second and third sentences of paragraph 14.60: 'Development proposals within or otherwise affecting valued landscapes must carefully consider and take account of the important landscape attributes and characteristics. Development will normally only be supported where these are protected.'

The proposal is clearly contrary to LPU policy NE5 sub-sections (2) and (5) plus policy NE6 sub-sections 2(a), (b) and (g). It also fails sub-section 3 of the latter because it does not 'protect, integrate with and/or enhance the special features, characteristics or qualities of the landscape' but, instead, diminishes it.

On a separate matter, paragraph 5.2.3 of the Planning Statement suggests that the proposal is consistent with policy SS5 of the draft LPU. Although not specified, reference to its subsection (2)(k) can be inferred. However, this appears to arise from either a misinterpretation of the policy or an attempt to derive from it a meaning not expressed by its wording. Creating a site access in this location would not constitute the 'provision' of essential utilities but is a measure intended to facilitate the provision of such services in locations elsewhere, distant from the site, where the pipeline renewal works described will be undertaken. This scenario is not provided for in the policy and to suggest otherwise is, at best, hopeful.

Furthermore, the proposal is unnecessary because the Parish Council highlights the existence of another access point only yards away from the where the one intended would be located, an obvious opportunity which seems to have escaped the applicant. That access has already caused harm to the landscape by removing a section of

ancient hedgerow and installing a gate there, fragmenting the linear pattern of natural vegetation with built form. The last thing needed now is for another to be constructed virtually alongside it, thereby compounding the degree of harm caused. This is like death by a thousand cuts; the effects being small in isolation but fatal cumulatively. Common sense should be embraced by using the existing gated entrance temporarily.

The conflicts described are significant, and relate to three established and at least two draft development policies of the Council, and are therefore more than sufficient to justify refusal of the application. I encourage it to do so. However, should permission be granted, conditions would be appropriate relating to:

- (i) restricting use of the access for the sole purpose specified and
- (ii) reinstatement of the land to its former condition SWIFTLY on expiry of the temporary permission, to avoid repetition of the undesirable situation where the previous access point in this location was left in place for TWO years after the site compound was cleared from the land. Consequently, the condition should not just specify a set period of time but also the completion of works, whichever occurs sooner. In this respect, the period sought by the applicant seems excessive for the programme of works it envisages and so 12 or 18 months would appear to be entirely adequate, and specifying 'or within one month of completion of works, whichever occurs sooner' would not be unreasonable.

Finally, it is stated in paragraph 1.1.3 of the Planning Statement that planning permission is not necessary for the creation and operation of the site compound in its entirety. As the requirement for planning permission is a matter for the Council to assess in its role as planning authority, not an applicant, I presume it has or will take a view separately on the validity of this bold contention.