

Wokingham Borough Council Development
Management
Civic Offices
Shute End
Wokingham
RG40 1BN

Ref: AT/25/78

2nd November 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

Applicant: Mr & Mrs Manning
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 1no dwelling,
detached double garage with associated landscaping, parking, EV
charging point, cycle and bin storage following demolition of
existing dwelling.
Site: 149 Victoria Road, Wargrave, Reading, RG10 8AG

PLANNING COMMENT RESPONSE

Following recent responses from several local residents and the Parish Council regarding this planning application, my clients, Mr. and Mrs. Manning, have instructed me to provide a formal reply. This response is intended to address the specific concerns raised, provide reassurance to neighbours, and clarify any misunderstandings regarding the proposals.

It is important to note that a full Planning Statement has already been submitted as part of the application, which assesses the proposal against relevant national and local planning policies. The purpose of this letter is not to repeat that policy assessment, but rather to respond to points of concern raised by residents and the Parish Council, with a view to providing clarity and reassurance.

From the outset, it should be emphasised that this application has been submitted in good faith, with the aim of delivering a high-quality development that is both sensitive to its surroundings and considerate of neighbouring amenity. Mr. and Mrs. Manning have no intention of causing any undue disruption or inconvenience to their neighbours along Victoria Road or within the wider community. Their objective is clear: to ensure that the development enhances the site, respects local character, and contributes positively to the area while remaining fully compliant with planning policy and good design principles.

Concerns have been raised by local residents and the Parish Council that the development is going to be subdivided into two plots and the garage turned into a dwelling in the future

From the outset, the intention for this proposal has been clear and consistent; to retain the plot to support a single dwelling, with the garage functioning as an ancillary and subservient structure to the main dwelling. The design has been informed by a desire to create a high-quality, bespoke family home, while preserving the site's residential character and respecting the architectural qualities of the surrounding area.

The applicants are long-standing residents of Wargrave and have carefully considered this site over a number of years with the aspiration of redeveloping it into their permanent home. Their aim is to reinstate the use of the plot in a manner that responds sensitively to local context, whilst allowing an opportunity for contemporary design that reflects their personal needs and lifestyle.

As keen cyclists and fitness enthusiasts, the applicants require dedicated storage space for specialist equipment accumulated over many years. As the proposed dwelling does not benefit from traditional roof void storage that a typical two-storey dwelling might provide, the garage has been designed to accommodate this essential ancillary storage function. The spatial arrangement, garaging at ground level with storage above, is a common and established format nationally and sits comfortably within acceptable design parameters for outbuildings serving a single dwelling.

It is important to emphasise that the proposal does not seek to introduce a second dwelling. The scheme clearly comprises one single-storey dwelling and an ancillary outbuilding used for parking and storage. The suggestion that the garage could be used as a separate residential unit is contrary to the submitted plans and design intentions. The applicants fully appreciate the professional and ethical obligations associated with the planning process, and there is no intention to prejudice future development control through covert means.

In addition to the above, it is important to reinforce that the proposed garage could not, in practical or policy terms, be converted into a separate dwelling. Even if a future party were to pursue such a proposal, the building simply does not meet the **Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS)** for independent residential accommodation.

The NDSS requires a minimum **37m²** for a 1-bedroom, single-storey dwelling and **58m²** for a 1-bedroom, two-storey dwelling. The proposed garage, when accounting for the necessary construction upgrades to achieve habitable standards, would provide approximately **31.58m² at ground floor level** and **20.5m² at first-floor level**, equating to a total **Gross Internal Area (GIA) of only 52.08m²**. This falls significantly short of both the minimum **single-storey** and **two-storey** NDSS thresholds.

Accordingly, the building cannot reasonably or feasibly be brought forward as a standalone dwelling, and doing so would be contrary to adopted space-standards policy and basic residential amenity expectations. The scale, internal configuration, and intended ancillary purpose of the building reinforce its function as incidental to the main dwelling only.

To provide additional assurance, the applicants would welcome an appropriate planning condition preventing subdivision of the plot or the independent residential use of the garage in future. This is a reasonable and enforceable mechanism, consistent with planning practice, which would ensure the long-term integrity of the development as a single-dwelling plot.

Concerns have been raised that the proposal will seek to establish access through Bird Gardens

A further concern raised by several local residents, particularly those within Bird Gardens, relates to the perceived potential for future vehicular access to be sought from Bird Gardens. It is acknowledged that Bird Gardens is a private road maintained by its residents, and the applicants fully recognise and respect this arrangement.

For clarity, the applicants have no intention, now or in the future, of creating or seeking to create any form of access to the application site from Bird Gardens. The proposal makes use of the existing vehicular access from Victoria Road, which will remain the sole point of entry to the property. It is also relevant to note that a ransom strip exists between the site and Bird Gardens, which is not within the ownership or control of the applicants. There is no intention to purchase or seek rights over this land, and as such, access via Bird Gardens is neither feasible nor proposed.

To further reassure local residents, the applicants have already issued a written statement to neighbouring properties confirming their commitment to retaining the existing access arrangements and to maintaining the site as a single residential plot, with the garage serving as an ancillary building only. A copy of that communication is reproduced below:

"29th October 2025

Hello Neighbour

This is just a quick note from Laurence & Sam, the recent owners of 149 Victoria Road, to reassure everyone in Bird Gardens that we have no intention of seeking access to our plot through or over Bird Gardens at any point now, or in the future. Nor do we seek to split the plot into two separate dwellings, if we were to receive planning approval the garage will remain ancillary to the main dwelling in perpetuity.

If you have any other questions about our plans please can you reach Laurence on 07XXX XXXXXX.

Best,

Laurence and Sam Manning"

In order to provide absolute certainty on this matter, the applicants would be happy for the Council to impose a planning condition preventing any form of future access being created from Bird Gardens, and ensuring that the ancillary garage remains incidental to the use of the main dwelling. This is a reasonable and proportionate approach which safeguards the privacy, amenity and interests of Bird Gardens residents, and reinforces the applicant's clear and consistent position.

Residents and the Parish Council have voiced concerns that the proposal would be an overdevelopment of the site, with local residents further voicing that the design and built form are not in keeping with the local area (resident only)

Response to Concerns Regarding Overdevelopment

Concerns have been raised that the proposal represents an overdevelopment of the site. At the outset, it is important to recognise that the principle of back-land style development has already been established at this location through the approved Bird Gardens scheme (Ref: F/2011/2047, approved 8 December 2011), immediately adjoining 149 Victoria Road. This notable precedent demonstrates that sensitively designed development to the rear of the existing building line is considered acceptable in planning terms within this context.

Given that principle has been accepted locally, an appropriate next test is whether the scale of development remains proportionate to the plot and comparable to neighbouring sites.

The application site measures approximately **847m²**, with the proposed building footprint occupying **282m²**, resulting in **565m² of retained open garden space**. This equates to approximately **66% soft/landscaped space**, representing a generous and spacious setting for the dwelling.

For comparison:

Address	Approx. Plot Size	Built Footprint	Open Garden Space	% Open Space
149 Victoria Rd (site)	847m²	282m²	565m²	66%
147 Victoria Rd	210m ²	51.3m ²	158.7m ²	75%
151 Victoria Rd	414m ²	106m ²	308m ²	74%
Bird Gardens (avg.)	325m ²	92.1m ²	232.9m ²	71%

These figures show that the proposed ratio of built footprint to landscaped space is entirely consistent with the surrounding pattern of development, particularly in the context of a single-storey dwelling, which naturally requires a greater ground-level spread to achieve comparable floor area to the two-storey properties adjacent.

It is also noted that the GIA of the proposed dwelling is **196m²**, aligning closely with nearby examples — the average Bird Gardens dwelling being approximately **184m²**, and 151 Victoria Road approximately **185m²**. Many other dwellings along Victoria Road exceed these figures. This reinforces that the proposal sits comfortably within the scale and character of the area in terms of internal floor space provision.

It is further highlighted that the scheme will deliver a fully accessible single-storey home, offering a valuable and inclusive dwelling type not currently present in the immediate vicinity nor within the proposed scheme at 109 Victoria Road. This is an important qualitative planning benefit.

Furthermore, Wokingham Borough Council provides clear guidance on the treatment and consideration of backland development. The Council's policies recognise that such proposals can be acceptable where they are appropriately designed, sympathetic to local character, and demonstrate no harm to neighbouring amenity or the wider built environment. In this context, the following extract is particularly relevant:

“By its nature and location, it is difficult for ‘backland’ development to reflect existing character. In some cases it may be acceptable, where it results in a high quality environment for both the proposed and existing residents.”

Taken together, the plot size, level of retained landscaping, and comparative GIA all demonstrate that the proposals do not constitute overdevelopment. Rather, the development reflects a balanced, policy-compliant use of land that respects the established spatial pattern and character.

Response to Design and Character Concerns

A comment was raised regarding the forward-positioned garage. However, the submitted Design & Access Statement clearly explains how its form and detailing has drawn reference from the Victorian character along Victoria Road. This has been done deliberately to ensure a respectful and contextually sympathetic frontage presentation. This element reads as consistent with the existing streetscape, and its traditional influence will be evident to the LPA.

The main dwelling adopts a contrasting contemporary architectural language. It is fully acknowledged that this form differs from the prevailing Victorian typology; however, its design strategy has been carefully conceived to be visually recessive and respectful. The dwelling is set down into the plot and intentionally screened from public view, with a green living roof and comprehensive landscape strategy ensuring it will nestle unobtrusively within the site. Views from neighbouring properties will be mitigated through the naturalised roofscape and planting, replacing what is currently an under-utilised and tired plot with a high-quality, environmentally responsive environment.

Contemporary architecture sits alongside historic form successfully throughout Wargrave and the wider borough. For example, Willow Haven (Ref: 223518), permitted in March 2023, and Narula House along the River Loddon, are celebrated examples of modern design integrated sensitively within traditional settings. Both developments demonstrate that character is not defined by replication, but rather by design quality, contextual awareness, and enhancement of place, qualities which this proposal has been shaped to achieve.

In this context, the proposal does not seek to mimic pastiche forms, but instead enhances architectural diversity, delivers an exemplary landscaped setting, and ensures minimal visual presence. This approach aligns with modern planning principles that support high-quality, context-responsive contemporary design, where it safeguards amenity and enhances environmental character, both of which this scheme demonstrably achieves.

Concerns that the proposal is too close to neighbouring boundaries and the proposal will result in a lack of privacy (particularly from windows along the west elevation)

A number of residents have expressed concern that the proposed development sits too close to neighbouring boundaries and may therefore impact neighbouring amenity. These concerns are fully understood and have been carefully considered throughout the design process. Ensuring the privacy, comfort, and long-term amenity of surrounding residents has been a central focus of the scheme from the outset.

From the earliest stages, the design has been carefully considered to ensure that the proposal responds positively to the guidance set out within the Wokingham Borough Design Guide SPD and relevant Core Strategy policies regarding design, residential amenity and contextual integration. The Borough actively encourages well-designed contemporary architecture where it responds to local character and enhances site conditions. This scheme does exactly that, adopting a landscape-led, low-profile approach so the dwelling is recessive in the townscape and sensitively integrated into the garden setting.

Adherence to Boundary Separation Guidance

To ensure that the proposal sits appropriately within the plot and respects neighbouring properties, particular emphasis has been placed on achieving and exceeding the recommended separation standards. In accordance with the Borough Design Guide:

- A **minimum 1 metre separation** has been retained to all plot boundaries, ensuring an appropriate buffer and maintenance access.
- A **22-metre rear-to-rear separation** has been achieved where relevant, consistent with established guidance aimed at protecting privacy and minimising the perception of enclosure. This specifically addresses concerns raised by residents on Fiddlers Walk.

These distances meet or exceed the standards that the Council applies universally across the borough, and therefore the proposal accords with established amenity expectations for new residential development.

Low-Profile and Subtle Building Form Protects Amenity

In addition, the dwelling has been intentionally designed as a single-storey property, and the built form is further sunken into the plot so that the finished roof level is broadly aligned with the ground level of Victoria Road. This design strategy significantly reduces the visual presence of the building from surrounding plots and eliminates any opportunity for overlooking from primary living spaces.

Key design measures contributing to amenity protection include:

- **Eaves height not exceeding 3 metres**, consistent with the SPD guidance for minimising impact near boundaries
- **A green living roof**, further softening the building's appearance and ensuring the roofscape reads as garden rather than built form
- **No upper-storey accommodation**, preventing direct overlooking into neighbouring gardens or habitable rooms
- Carefully positioned windows and screening to ensure privacy is preserved throughout the site and for neighbours

These measures go above and beyond typical amenity safeguards and demonstrate a proactive approach to responding to residents' concerns.

Contextual Precedent and Good Planning Practice

It is also important to acknowledge that single-storey, garden-integrated architecture represents a sensitive and low-impact development approach, especially when compared with more traditional two-storey forms that would introduce greater massing, visual presence, and potential for overlooking. The chosen design maximises privacy for neighbours and minimises any perceived intrusion, while also delivering a high-quality, modern, accessible home that aligns with contemporary sustainable design principles.

Overlooking and Privacy Protection

A further concern raised relates to potential overlooking from windows on the west elevation of the proposed dwelling. We fully appreciate the importance of maintaining residential privacy, and this has been a key driver in the design process. It is important to note that the proposed property sits substantially below the finished floor level of neighbouring homes, meaning sightlines from the internal living spaces are directed upward towards boundary treatments rather than into adjoining gardens or windows. This ground-level relationship fundamentally limits any opportunity for overlooking.

In addition, the site benefits from established fencing and proposed boundary planting, which already provides strong separation between plots. The application proposes to retain and enhance this screening with new landscape planting, ensuring robust year-round privacy. Taken together, the sunken building profile, single-storey height, boundary fencing and supplementary planting ensure that views from the elevations will remain contained within the site, fully protecting neighbouring amenity.

For further assurance, window placement on this elevation has been carefully considered, and where windows are proposed they serve spaces that would not create harmful visual intrusion. As such, the combination of site topography, boundary treatment, landscape strategy and window design ensures that the development will not give rise to overlooking in any form. This approach aligns with the Wokingham Borough Design Guide and Core Strategy Policy CP3, which require development to safeguard privacy and amenity for neighbouring properties.

In summary, the proposal has been meticulously designed to ensure compliance with adopted planning policy and design guidance relating to boundary treatment, amenity protection, and contextual response. The building sits respectfully within the plot, maintains appropriate separation to all neighbouring boundaries, and through its intentionally discreet architectural form, avoids any adverse impacts on privacy, daylight or outlook.

On this basis, it is clear that the development represents a sensitive, policy-compliant and neighbour-conscious addition to the site, and concerns regarding proximity have been fully addressed through robust design principles and planning justification.

Concerns that the proposal is lacking in a detailed landscaping plan showing screening and planting

We fully appreciate that neighbouring residents are keen to understand the proposed landscape treatment for the site. Landscaping has always been a fundamental component of the design strategy, particularly given the intention to integrate the dwelling discreetly within its setting and maintain the established verdant character of Victoria Road.

It is standard practice for detailed landscape proposals to be secured via planning condition, typically pre-occupation, to allow for coordinated and professional input at the appropriate stage of the design process. Should planning permission be granted, we would expect, and indeed welcome, such a condition. This approach ensures that a comprehensive landscaping scheme, prepared by a suitably qualified landscape architect or equivalent professional, can be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for approval.

This process will also ensure transparency and allow interested residents the opportunity to view and comment on the final landscape proposals through the statutory consultation process. The Applicant's intention is to deliver a high-quality, robust and ecologically sensitive landscape scheme that enhances privacy, softens built form and contributes positively to local character, in accordance with the aims of the Wokingham Borough Design Guide and Policy TB21 (Landscape Character).

Finally concerns regarding details of retaining walls, a culvert and drainage

Several residents have expressed concerns regarding retaining walls, the existing rear culvert, and site drainage, including the existing foul sewer connections. While these matters are clearly important from an engineering and safety perspective, it should be emphasised that they do not constitute material planning considerations and therefore fall outside the scope of the planning determination process.

These elements will, however, be fully addressed through the Building Regulations approval process, which is specifically designed to ensure the structural integrity of retaining walls, the safe management of culverts, and the adequacy of both foul and surface water drainage systems. At this stage, there is no indication that any of these matters would be compromised by the proposed development. Compliance with Building Regulations will ensure that all structural and drainage requirements are fully met, safeguarding both the site and neighbouring properties.

By separating planning considerations (such as design, scale, and amenity) from technical building matters, the application demonstrates that all relevant planning policies and guidance have been considered, while engineering and safety issues will be addressed through the statutory Building Control process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposed development at 149 Victoria Road has been carefully conceived to respect the character of the surrounding area, safeguard neighbouring amenity, and deliver a high-quality, accessible single-storey dwelling that is fully compliant with Wokingham Borough Council planning policy.

The proposal addresses all material planning considerations, including scale, siting, design, boundary separation, landscaping, and privacy. It maintains generous garden space, integrates sensitively within the plot, and is visually recessive through its sunken design and green living roof. Concerns regarding overlooking, access, and overdevelopment have been fully mitigated through careful design, boundary treatment, and the incorporation of landscaping measures.

The garage remains ancillary to the main dwelling, consistent with the proposed site layout and below the Nationally Described Space Standards, preventing any risk of future subdivision or independent occupation.

Precedent for similar development exists locally, and the scheme demonstrates that contemporary architecture can sit comfortably alongside traditional Victorian and Edwardian forms without detracting from the character of the area. Furthermore, all technical considerations such as drainage, retaining walls, and sewer connections will be addressed through Building Control, ensuring the development is safe, sustainable, and robust.

Overall, the scheme represents a thoughtful, proportionate, and policy-compliant development, enhancing the site, preserving and improving local amenity, and contributing positively to the wider residential environment. It is therefore respectfully submitted that the application should be supported and planning permission granted.

We welcome any further comments or requests for additional information from the Local Planning Authority and look forward to working collaboratively with the Council and local residents to achieve a positive and mutually acceptable outcome.

Thomas Andrews
For and on behalf of Atelier T&B Limited