

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	243165
Site Address:	Old Louma Cottage, Hollybush Road, RG40 3QR
Expiry Date:	16 May 2025
Site Visit Date:	7 August 2023
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of a 1No detached dwelling with associated parking and landscaping. Followed by the demolition of the existing dwelling.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Countryside
Scale and Location of Development Proposals
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone
Tree Preservation Orders

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP17 – Housing Delivery
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
31425 T/APP/H0330/A /89/122152/P5	Erection of a 3 bedroom bungalow	Conditionally Approved – 13/10/1988 Condition substituted 5 at Appeal 17/11/1989
96/64209/F	Proposed conversion of existing roof space to enlarge living accommodation	Conditionally Approved – 23/09/1996
F/2001/5426	Proposed two storey front extension to dwelling with attached double garage and single storey rear extension.	Refused – 28/03/2002
F/2003/9360	Proposed single storey front and side extension to dwelling plus dormer window extension.	Conditionally Approved – 22/01/2004
151483	Proposed erection of a two storey front extension and a single storey side extension to dwelling.	Conditionally Approved – 23/10/2015
221832	Application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the Existing dwelling house.	Refused – 06/09/2022
223654	Application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the use of an outbuilding as an annexe.	Approved - 01/02/2023
231383	Full application for the proposed change of use of residential annex to self-contained dwelling, and installation of a new access road.	Approved: April 2024

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments
WBC Drainage – No objection subject to a condition
WBC Highways – No objection
WBC Landscape and Trees - Objection
WBC CIL – CIL liable development
WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments
WBC Ecology Newts – No objection
WBC Ecology – Request further information

External

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments
South East Water – No comments

REPRESENTATIONS

Finchampstead Parish Council	No objection
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	One letter received raising the following concerns: - The proximity of the access road to the neighbouring site. - In line with the above, concerns have been raised as to the potential to damage the neighbouring site as a result, in relation to the boundary fencing, vegetation and the potential for run-off issues. - The location of the septic tank used for the drainage.

APPRAISAL

Context: The application site comprises a parcel of land to the rear of Brooklands, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. It is positioned within a TPO protected woodland which covers a wide area at the rear of properties on Hollybush Ride, Heath Ride and Nine Mile Ride.

This application seeks planning permission for the demolition of the existing cottage for the erection of a larger, two storey property.

There are other examples of development at the rear of properties within this area, including the adjacent dwelling known as 'Long Acre'.

Due to its position within the woodland, the application site is largely secluded from view when assessing aerial photos and it is also not visible from the Hollybush Ride.

Permission was recently granted for the application building to formally change its use from a residential annex to a self-contained dwelling. Although its original construction date is unknown, the building known as Old Louma Cottage actually predates that of the main property, known as Brooklands. It was itself recognised as a dwelling until permission for Brooklands was granted in 1989, where it became tied in as an annexe to the newer property.

To facilitate the change of use as granted through application 231382, a new access road from Hollybush Ride leading up to the application site was also granted permission.

Principle of Development: The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The site is located outside the settlement boundary and in designated Countryside. Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy does not ordinarily permit development outside of development limits, however, there are exceptions. Regarding replacement dwellings, the policy states that the proposal must: *'Bring about environmental improvements;'* or *'Not result in inappropriate increase in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.'*

The proposed development would mark a clear increase in built form on the site, which is demonstrated by the footprint calculations undertaken by Officers. This indicates that the proposed dwelling would have a footprint of approximately 95m², which would be a 69% increase from the existing building (approximately 56m²). The replacement dwelling also comprises first floor accommodation, fundamentally altering the nature of built form from a modest bungalow to a two-storey property. This is clearly a notable increase in the scale and mass over the original dwelling.

Notwithstanding the above, it is not considered that the proposal would undermine the overall purpose of Policy CP11, which seeks to prevent the inappropriate or excessive encroachment of development into the countryside. While the proposal includes some areas of additional built form, these are modest in scale and are carefully sited to remain well-contained within the existing envelope and prevent coalescence of built development on the plot with nearby houses. The proposed replacement dwelling does not extend beyond the established curtilage or disrupt the wider openness of the surrounding countryside. Furthermore, the use of the site would remain entirely residential in nature, consistent with its lawful use, and would not introduce any new or intensified land use that might conflict with the policy's objectives.

As stated, CP11 emphasises the importance for replacement dwellings in the countryside to bring about environmental improvements. The submitted plans do not display any specific sustainability measures, however, a sustainability statement accompanies the application and outlines the various ways the proposal would seek to improve the environmental performance of the replacement dwelling. This includes modern construction methods, such as high levels of thermal insulation, plus the potential in the future to incorporate Heat Pumps. The practice of demolishing an existing dwelling for the erection of a larger property is itself unsustainable practice, however, the inherent sustainability credentials of the new dwelling in line with current building regulations standards would contribute to lower carbon emissions produced by the site, as well as securing its long-term functionality in response to climate change.

Overall, whilst a change to the visual appearance of the site will occur, the proposal would not have a significant spatial impact on the openness of the Countryside for the reasons outlined above. The proposal is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle, in accordance with the aims of Core Strategy policy CP11.

Character of the Area: The general character of the area is immediately defined by its verdant and woodland setting, synonymous with its countryside designation in this part of the borough. With regard to built form, the pattern of development in the immediate locality is varied due to the different ages of development. Whilst there is somewhat of a linear building line, this is not the defining characteristic of Hollybush Ride by any means, where backland development and inconsistent gaps between dwellings are both features at different points within the street scene. There is also notable variation

between the dwelling types and their designs, with large two storey properties juxtaposed against modest bungalows, and with modern, contemporary designs adjacent to more traditional styles.

The site sits in the Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands Landscape Character Area. The site is well wooded and identified as a Valued Landscape as per the Valued Landscape Assessment (2024).

The woodlands on the site are protected by long-established TPOs.

The site sits wholly within the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape. Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that *'Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan)'

The landscape strategy for the area is described in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Association (2019). 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.

Policy CP3 states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that are of an appropriate scale of activity, layout and character of the area without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces and have no detrimental impact upon important landscape features.

It is expected of a replacement dwelling to be in the same or similar position to the existing dwelling, particularly in this location, as the existing dwelling has no associated curtilage or garden to prevent further spreading of domestic paraphernalia. This is discussed at 8.5.3 in the Design Guide. RD11 states *"The form, or massing of a replacement dwelling should relate well to its context and to local character. The relationship between the form of the building, the topography and landscape, will be of particular importance"*.

As set out in the principle of development, whilst not entirely identical, the position of the replacement property would be similar to the existing dwelling on the site, thus reducing the effect of unnecessary encroachment into the countryside. The new dwelling would have a larger footprint than the existing, however, the areas of additional built form would not significantly encroach outside the current site or result in coalescence to nearby houses. The position of the property is considered to adequately maintain the woodland character and appearance of the surroundings, but with a slight movement into the open areas of the site to move the dwelling further away from the TPO woodland, which will reduce pressure on its trees and samplings, while also preserving a greater degree of distinction between the residential setting and the natural woodland.

Despite the relative historic interest of the existing property, it is currently, and has been for a while, a vacant building, with the exterior showing signs of deterioration. As a

result, the design of the proposal, which could be described as an arts and crafts style building, would clearly mark a significant departure from the existing dwelling. Nonetheless, it is not considered that this would cause harm to the area, due to the varied nature of built form on Hollybush Ride, the context of which having been set out at the start of this section.

The existing dwelling has no particular architectural merit, and its external appearance currently has a negatively visual impact. This proposal provides the opportunity to enhance the site's contribution to the character of the area in this respect, and given the matching proportions, external detailing, and architecturally interesting features, the quality of the design is considered to achieve this aim.

The materials proposed include a mixture of brick with timber framing. These are considered appropriate in this countryside setting.

The scale of the proposal would not be disproportionate to other dwellings on similarly sized plots within the wider area. Whilst the context differs, being to the rear of the plot, considerable weight must be given to the presence of the existing and established building. The replacement property would clearly be of a larger scale, however, it would be no more visible from wider vantagepoints. For these reasons, the proposal is therefore not considered to undermine the coherence of the street scene, nor have an undesirable impact on the established pattern of development.

The Trees & Landscape Officer (T&L) has raised an objection to the scheme. The reasons for doing so are fairly broad and refer more specifically to impacts upon the surrounding TPO Woodland, which will be addressed separately below. Nonetheless, the objection response does touch upon the character impacts of the development, in which the T&L Officer refers to the sites location as part of the Valued Landscape, stating that the design of the dwelling is not one that constitutes innovation and is therefore contrary to paragraph 84 of the NPPF. The T&L Officer concludes that due to the increase in footprint and size over what has previously been approved, the proposal does not represent development acceptable in the Valued Landscape.

In response to the concerns of the T&L Officer, it is firstly noted that paragraph 84 of the NPPF seeks to avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside. The proposed property, being a replacement of an existing dwelling, and one that would be in close proximity to the residential setting of Hollybush Ride, is clearly not in conflict with the policy mentioned. Accordingly, its perceived failure to meet the policies exemption criteria is not considered relevant in this instance.

The more pertinent concerns raised relate to the general impact upon the Forest and Rides Valued Landscape. It is important to note that although development proposal located inside a Valued Landscape are judged more strictly in terms of their impact on landscape character, it is not simply a case that all development is opposed in these locations. Relevant to the case at hand, a common-sense approach needs to be undertaken, where consideration is given to the fact that the well-designed property, albeit of a larger scale, would be replacing a run-down and unsightly building, which in itself detracts somewhat from the Valued Landscape setting that the T&L is rightfully seeking to protect. Alternatively, the siting of the proposed dwelling has been carefully considered to ensure respect for its surroundings, by avoiding harm to key attributes of

the Valued Landscape, such as tree cover, plus more broad objectives such as maintaining visual separation between the human and natural environment. Overall, the development complies with relevant planning policy by achieving a balance between necessary residential renewal and the continued protection of this Valued Landscape.

For the reason stated above, it is not considered that the comments from the T&L Officer sufficiently set out the specific reasoning for why the replacement dwelling would be harmful to the countryside setting or the Valued Landscape. As such, the objection from the T&L Officer does not adequately justify a reason for refusal on character grounds, with the acceptability of the proposal having been detailed throughout this section of the report.

TPO Woodland:

The proposal would result in a greater scale of residential development/activity amongst the surrounding TPO woodland area, which has raised an objection from the T&L Officer.

Unfortunately, the objection does not refer to the submitted arboricultural information, comprising an arboricultural impact assessment, method statement and tree survey/protection plan, which are considered to comprehensively address and provide mitigation for any potential harm to the surrounding trees. The arboricultural information discusses the different phases of development and includes protective measures at pre, post and during construction.

Despite its greater footprint, the replacement dwelling has been sited in a position away from the root protection of the surrounding trees, with the associated garden space utilising an area of existing open land, where trees are absent.

Notwithstanding the above, and as acknowledged within the AIA/AMS, the driveway would cross over the root protection areas of some adjacent trees. Although this was the case with the previously approved access, pertaining application 231383, the extent of incursion is now greater due to the increased parking area. That said, the context of the land is one where a no-dig surface can be installed onto a cellular confinement subbase to avoid excavating tree roots and will allow them to continuously grow. This is an extremely important aspect of the proposals when considering the mitigation for the surrounding woodland.

Having comprehensively reviewed the arboricultural report, it is agreed that the installation of the access lane and parking area, the majority of which benefits from an extant permission, can be undertaken in a way to reduce harm to the TPO woodland. A condition will be imposed that would ensure the development is undertaken in accordance with the AMS so to minimise harm. Further conditions relating to a scheme of landscaping, and details of boundary treatment will be required to provide mitigation for the development.

In summary of the above, it is acknowledged that the development would result in some

level of harm to the TPO woodland, including the removal of a protected tree. However, there are factors that weigh in favour of the proposal such that a refusal of the application on these grounds is not considered justifiable.

Notwithstanding the above, if not appropriately controlled, it is likely that the development could result in added pressure for future development work within the root protection areas, or even the removal of protected trees. As such, it is considered prudent to impose a condition restricting PD rights for any future buildings, enlargements or alterations to the property, to allow the council verification that any additional work is not going to result in adverse harm to the on-site/adjacent TPO woodland. This is consistent with previous approaches taken by the Council, where new or replacement development is situated in close proximity to protected sites.

Neighbouring Amenity: The proposal would introduce a number of habitable windows at first floor level, which would give rise to a wider outlook than the existing ground floor windows of the existing bungalow. Notwithstanding, the separation distances to the existing dwelling on site and other neighbouring properties would prevent any overlooking concerns.

In similar fashion to the above, despite the increase in bulk, the replacement dwelling would be sufficiently distant from nearby properties due to the extensive plot, thus preventing any potential loss of light or overbearing impact to neighbouring sites.

One objection letter has been received from a neighbouring resident expressing concerns regarding the proximity of the access lane to the shared boundary. The primary issues raised relate to the potential for damage to the boundary fencing and the vegetation on the neighbouring property. While the concerns of the adjacent resident are acknowledged and taken seriously, the submitted plans clearly demonstrate that all proposed development is contained within the application site's boundaries. Therefore, withholding planning permission on these grounds would not be justified. It is important to remind the applicant that the granting of planning permission does not confer any rights to access or carry out works on, over, or under neighbouring land or property without prior consent. Additionally, the applicant must comply with the provisions of the Party Wall etc. Act 1996 where applicable.

Highway Access and Parking Provision: The proposal will demolish the existing dwelling and replace it with the proposed dwelling with 6 habitable rooms. No additional traffic impact is anticipated from the replacement of dwelling.

Sustainability

In view of the site is already in use for the existing dwelling, Highways have no objection on site sustainability for the replacement of dwelling.

Access

The existing vehicular access will be retained. A new driveway of 3m width is proposed for the proposed dwelling, which is considered as an improvement to the existing access arrangement. The Highways expect that there will be no negative impacts on vehicle manoeuvring. No negative impacts on the manoeuvring of a fire tender vehicle entering and leaving the site access are expected. The driveway would have sufficient spaces for car turning, which is acceptable.

Parking

Three driveway parking spaces are proposed, which is in accordance with WBC Car Parking Standards.

EV Charging Points

Each new dwelling is expected to provide a minimum of one EV Charging Point under the latest Building Regulations (Approved Document S). The Highways Officer requested that an updated plan is provided that indicates this, however, as the provision would be covered by building regulations, it is considered unnecessary to request an amended plan for this purpose.

Cycle Provisions

A 1.9m x 1.2m cycle storage is proposed. It shall be noted that the proposed cycle store is not practical to accommodate the minimum requirements of three cycles, but it is considered acceptable for this application due to the improved provision compared to the existing development.

Flooding and Drainage: The proposal is situated within Flood Zone 1, and the Drainage Officer has no objection to the principle of development. However, the Officer notes from the application form that surface water from the development will discharge to a watercourse, while foul will be managed via a package treatment plant. The flood risk summary (FRA) report provided does not cover drainage details for the development and based on that and the above, a condition requiring further details in this respect is deemed necessary.

Ecology: A series of bat and bird surveys were carried out on the existing dwelling, as a result of the property being located within a bat roost habitat. The surveys concluded that the property was used for roosting bats and for foraging and commuting. The building was also deemed to be of high potential to support nesting birds due to the presence of suitable nesting features. Overall, the ecological value of the building was considered to be high by the Ecologist, and therefore it is recommended that a license for development works from Natural England is obtained for the works to be carried out lawfully. This can be secured via condition.

The application site contains suitable habitats for great crested newts, including a wet ditch which runs through the site. However, OS mapping indicates a lack of suitable waterbodies within 250m of the site boundary. It is therefore considered unlikely that great crested newts are present within the site and Nature Space are satisfied that if this development was to be approved, it is unlikely to cause an impact on great crested newts and/or their habitats. As some small risk remains that great crested newts may be encountered during site clearance and construction activities, an informative has been included to advise the applicant on the necessary steps to take.

Environmental Health: Although comments have not been provided by WBC Environmental Health in this instance, it is noted that the site lies within a gas consultation zone for the nearby former landfill site at Kings Mere. As such, an investigation into whether any gas protection measures are required for the replacement dwelling is required. An unexpected land contamination condition as an additional protection measure as the historic use of the site is unknown.

Conclusion: For the reasons set out above, the proposal would not undermine the intended purpose of Policy CP11. It would not have an unacceptable impact on the character of the area and on the amenities of neighbouring residents and there are no other material considerations that would warrant a refusal of the application. It is therefore acceptable, and the application is recommended for conditional approval.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL): When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approve
Date:	30 September 2025
Earliest date for decision:	16 January 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	01.10.25