

PLANNING REF : 251486
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Villa Field
: Barkham Road, Wokingham, Berkshire
: RG414TG
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Chris Heyliger
DATE SUBMITTED : 19/08/2025

COMMENTS:

I wish to strongly object to this planning application on the following grounds.

1.Green Wedge/ Rural Character/Visual harm/ Landscape

This site lies outside the Development Settlement limits and as an important Green Wedge is the last remaining Green Space in Barkham and serves as a visible break on Barkham Road. Any development on the site will cause irreversible harm to the rural character and visual openness of the area, much valued by Barkham Residents. Yet section 2.3.9 of the Landscape and Visual appraisal document totally ignores that by stating there will be "no detrimental impact on Landscape, character and scenic beauty" With a development like this how can there be no impact?

As clearly set out in the Barkham Village Design Statement (VDS), the real character of Barkham lies in its diversity, together with the attractive landscape comprising farmland and woodland that still covers the majority of the parish where the countryside softens the impact of buildings and this is very important to those that choose to live in the parish. The loss of this site would replace the rural influence on this location with continuous building.

The land is on a steeply sloping site on the landscape and any houses built there will be highly visible, especially from further up the hill on Edney's Hill and this too will change the character of the area. As specifically stated in the VDS "From the footpath crossing Edney's Hill there are splendid panoramic views from the brow of the hill" and any development on this site will be viewed as an undesirable blot on the Landscape.

2.Planning Applications dismissed at appeal

Since the 1950's several Planning applications on this site have been refused and since 1999-2019 there have 8 applications all dismissed at appeal (not 4 as incorrectly stated in the planning Statement) In all cases the Inspectors have made comments citing for example "the significant harm that will be caused to the character and appearance of this strategic Green Wedge for residential use, which would compromise the undeveloped appearance and seriously erode its open aspect due to its prominent location" . This remains the current position, and it should be noted the previous applications have ranged from just ONE dwelling in 1999 to 5-8 dwellings in 2017, whereas this application is now for 16 dwellings, double the number.

3.Scale, form and design of Dwellings being out of Character

(i)The Planning Statement (6.4.1) states that 'the scale, form and pattern of the proposed scheme reflects and responds to the ESTABLISHED form of development within its surrounds' Clearly this

is out of character with many of the neighbouring houses, which are either Chalet style Houses, or one and a half storey houses. The designs proposed are therefore not in keeping with the Architectural features (see section 8) in The VDS which says "One and a half storey houses with dormer style upper windows within the roof spaces should be encouraged as this reflects the architecture common in Barkham

Houses where high ridgelines should be discouraged as they tend to dominate their surroundings"

It should also be noted that Flats are not a feature within this area of Barkham

(ii) The Planning Statement (6.45) states "In relation to design, the proposed properties reflect the established character of this part of Barkham Hill with a traditional architectural design using materials that form part of the local vernacular. These include good quality red brick, black stained weatherboarding on car ports and slate and plain roof tiles" Whilst Red tiles are common among most neighbouring houses, slate roofs do not appear to be a feature often used on Barkham Hill and black weatherboarding is out of character and not a feature seen on car ports on Barkham hill.

4. Local Infrastructure capacity

(i) The Planning statement (6.57) states that the site is in a good location to promote sustainable and frequent transport (5.3 Travel plan). This is incorrect as there is a restricted bus service which takes over an hour to Reading through a very convoluted route.

(ii) The Travel plan (5.3) states there are 'great pedestrian and cycling infrastructure' and in 2.8 it says that "given the low speed and large width of Barkham Road its conducive for on-road cycling". This is misleading as in reality Barkham Road is a very busy road with an average of over 5000 cars per day. Once houses are fully completed on Arborfield Green and Blagrove Meadows, this will inevitably add to the traffic load as the main traffic artery road into Wokingham. This potentially increases the risks and challenges to cyclists. I know as I often cycle on that road! Interesting to see from Figure 2 of the Travel Plan that PROW BA19 located adjacent to the site is shown as open to all traffic and can be accessed via Barkham Road along Aggisters Lane towards Bearwood Road. That fails to recognise this road has been blocked with bollards at the far end for over 20 years and its unmade surface is poor, making it hard to cycle
The Development is not within easy walking distance to Supermarkets, Schools, Medical Centres or other services and amenities. The only amenity within 800M (10 mins walk) is a small Village Store and Post Office

5. Access to Edneys Hill

(i) The proposed access onto Edney's Hill is very close to the roundabout on Barkham Road. This is already a narrow, windy road with blind bends and several pinch points and poor sight lines. There are no pavements and a speed limit of 60mph making it very dangerous, especially as motorists often use this as 'Rat run' coming from

Wokingham. Traffic safety on this road is already a concern to neighbouring residents, especially walkers who regularly use the road to connect to the greenways further up the hill.

(ii) It has been noted that a previous planning application (ref 220991) in 2022 requesting a rear access to Edneys Hill from a Garage for just ONE vehicle was refused citing limited sightlines and

substandard visibility splays. Whereas on close examination and measurements taken the sight lines there are considerably better in both directions than the access proposed for this development, which is for 16 properties and possible as many as 30 cars per day. For vehicles turning right into the site when travelling south from the Junction with Barkham Road it will be potentially very dangerous from oncoming traffic coming down Edneys Hill around a blind bend, which starts less than 43M from the access.

(iii) It's noted the visibility splay assessments have been determined using statistic information taken in 2016 (Ref PA 161412) as stated in Section 3.3 of the Transport plan. Given the increase in traffic volumes and speeds since then, the accuracy of those measurements which were taken 9 years previously must be questionable.

6. Impact to housing shortfall

The planning statement states that the dwellings proposed will make a valuable 'windfall' to the housing shortfall, but 16 dwellings are not significant. In the grand scheme this will have a negligible impact on the Borough's identified shortfall in its housing delivery. So given the minimal difference this will make why take away such an important strategic piece a green wedge which serves to protect Barkham's separate identity.

Wokingham has other areas for sustainable development which are much closer to shops and other amenities and are far better suited to meet the economic and social benefits required.

7. Disruption to Wildlife/Biodiversity

It will have a devastating impact on the habitats of important wildlife.

Deer, Badgers, Foxes, Red Kites, Bats and Owls are frequently seen on the land. It's difficult to see how the proposed development will maintain or enhance biodiversity in an area that is being replaced by a residential development with human and traffic

activity close to the existing hedgerows and other habitats (Policy CP7)

Yet section 4.11 of the planning statement states that as one of the benefits of the scheme "it will facilitate the delivery of a

biodiversity gain
through the creation of new onsite habitat opportunities" but then

section 6.70 states in terms of habitat units the statutory 10% biodiversity net gain is not achievable, and an offsite credit will need to be purchased, which is understood a last resort. This will not help the wildlife there now

8. SURFACE WATER/DRAINAGE

The site is on a steep slope with a 9 M drop and there is concern that the runoff of surface water will cause a significant flooding risk to the environment and the neighbouring properties below. Despite a couple of measures suggested to control surface water discharge, this does not appear to fully mitigate this concern, especially following a heavy rainfall. Drains in the vicinity are continually blocked and the sewage network is believed to be already operating at near capacity. None of these concerns appear to be adequately addressed for any future development.

9. CONCLUSION

The provision of 16 dwellings is unlikely to have much effect in reducing the housing shortfall and in the context of the considerable harm this development will cause, as identified above, this should significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited social and economic benefits of this development on which the tilted balance in paragraph 11 (d) is referenced in the NPPF.

I therefore ask that all the above points be carefully considered so that this application can be refused.