

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	253110 Rev. A
Address:	Bunninghams Farm, Heath Ride, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3QJ.		
Proposal:	Full planning application for the proposed erection of seven two-storey dwelling houses with a central access road, associated parking, landscaping and ancillary works, following the demolition of existing workshops and light industrial buildings and the clearance of associated hardstanding and landscaping.		
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

Site Location

The site is rectangular in appearance 63m E-W and 270m N-S and covers 672 sqm. Its an old farm site with a large barn and outbuildings. The site has a derelict appearance and covered with vegetation, mostly trees and scrub to varying degrees. There is an area of recognised Japanese Knotweed within the site and a report is submitted with the application which includes a location plan for the knotweed and a biological control area, as well as a methodology for its removal. The proposed site area includes an area outlined in blue at the front of the site, reason unknown.

The site is in the countryside and located along Hatch Ride a restricted byway and is one of the forest rides that criss cross the extended Windsor Forest and are typically found in Finchampstead and Crowthorne. The rides are known as non-designated heritage assets.

The flood map indicates areas of the site at risk of flooding including the front adjacent to Heath Ride and along the western boundary. The site is bounded by wet ditches.

The development proposes 7 No. 2 storey dwellings that are located facing north and placed side on the internal access road. There are 3 different house designs.

Valued landscape

A number of Valued Landscapes within Wokingham Borough were initially identified through a Topic Paper on Valued Landscapes by WBC dated January 2020 to respond to paragraph 187 (a) of the NPPF and prepared as part of the evidence base for the Emerging Local Plan Update and associated Policy NE6. Further work has recently been undertaken to make refinements to the boundaries of the valued landscape areas to update the assessment and this has now been published in the Valued Landscapes Assessment dated September 2024 as part of the evidence studies produced for the current consultation related to the Local Plan Update: Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19).

it is noted that (a proportion of) the application site falls within *Forests and Rides* Valued landscape. The NPPF indicates that these landscapes will need to be protected and enhanced, so therefore we will need to understand how development on this site can address this aspect.

Landscape Character

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA), dated November 2019, identifies a number of different landscape character areas (LCA's) across the Borough and provides key information regarding each of the LCA's. The site falls within LCA M1 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands' a high quality landscape of high sensitivity and the lowest capacity for change. LCA M1 is characterised by its densely wooded context which creates a strong sense of enclosure. The woodland is varied with semi-natural areas and forestry plantations. The low density settlement is arranged along the linear rides of Finchampstead and Crowthorne. The landscape has a remote but accessible character.

Key Characteristics of the M1 LCA relating to the site include;

- Large swathes of interconnected forestry and mixed woodland containing mature trees dominate the area, which are important ecological habitats and provide a sense of place and history. There is little farmland. Woodland consists of large coniferous plantations as well as mixed woodlands with sandy heaths. Stands of Scots Pine and exotic species are particularly distinctive.
- Long straight historic roads such as Nine Mile Ride (which originated as historic 'rides' created through the historically open landscape of the Royal Forest of Windsor) give a strong linear character to the landscape. Characterised by roadside rhododendron 'hedges' and occasional colourful patches of gorse and heather.
- Strong settlement character, with a low density pattern of detached houses in large plots and notably the occasional wooded gaps between areas of settlement lining the historic rides, which have provided a framework for

settlement. Residential properties of relatively unremarkable post-war and modern suburban character in a variety of styles.

- Localised areas of remoteness within woodlands and smaller areas of pasture, mire and heath, which provide a sense of tranquility.
- A highly enclosed landscape created by the often continuous swathes of dense woodland, except for framed views along the rides.

Note the underlined text which refers to the Valued Landscape Attributes of the M1 LCA which relates to the site.

Key issues affecting the M1 LCA include;

The effects of climate changes in deciduous woodland structure through loss of species diversity and spread of exotic species such as Sycamore, Rhododendron and Cherry Laurel. Changes in management affecting or causing loss of heathland or wetland habitats. High demands from recreation leading to erosion and loss of tranquillity. Pressure for new residential development, infill and densification within existing settlements particularly at Crowthorne leading to loss of open pasture, heathland and woodland habitat and potential amalgamation of adjacent settlements. There is also pressure for backland development to the rear of properties of Nine Mile Ride.

The Landscape Strategy for LCA M1

In order to maintain the landscape character of Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands, the following strategy is required; to conserve and enhance the existing character, with key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the characteristic trees and woodland, the rarer open landscapes and important wildlife habitats; historic landscape features associated with the Royal Forest. 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.

Landscape Guidelines applicable to the site include;

- Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape, increase the extent of BAP priority habitat, lowland mixed deciduous woodland and forested areas using locally occurring native species to create a more mixed woodland character. Promote appropriate management through natural regeneration and control of non-native species and coppicing as a management tool for neglected woodland.
- Enhance a sense of place through careful planning and design (include siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape minimising impacts of potential new development on valuable landscape attributes.
- Use appropriate tree planting to integrate roads, encourage retention of wooded edges and boundaries along roads, whilst retaining existing views to open countryside. Minimise fencing and other boundary structures.

Any application will need to be accompanied by a landscape and visual impact assessment to support new development within the countryside as required by the planning policies CC03 and TB21. The LVIA will need to fully consider how the

proposals address the key characteristics of this landscape character area and specifically how the impacts of the development can be reduced and mitigated by sympathetic and appropriate design principles. No LVIA has been received.

Assessing the location of the site within the 'Forests and Rides' Valued Landscape in relation to Box 5.1 ;

The site is within the M1 LCA which is a high quality landscape in good condition, due to the well managed nature of the woodlands and forest, with many trees and areas of woodland protected by TPO, and to the south large expanse of accessible woodland owned by the National Trust known as the Finchampstead Ridges , and adjacent to the site the LWS known as Simon's Wood and Heath Pond.

The undoubted scenic quality that accompanies the woodland setting of the site and is experienced when travelling along Heath Ride where trees and hedges help to frame the views along the ride and form the backdrop to dwellings often set within a wider wooded setting.

Heath Ride is one of the historic rides which form strong and distinctive elements in the landscape and recall the use of the forest as a royal hunting ground, and representative of this landscape since the early 19C.

There are stands of Scots Pine within the site which include mature specimens, along with several A2 quality Oak trees which contribute to the landscape quality. Nearby there is Wellingtonia Avenue where all of the trees are considered 'notable' on the Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Inventory and travelling along Wellingtonia Avenue there are important vistas that provide a sense of place. Indeed, the site location in itself and its position along Heath Ride, a PRow maintained by its residents is a localised area of tranquility and remoteness removed from the main roads and urban settlement.

Arboriculture Information

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment drawing – 40967843_AIA01_01 Jan '26 which shows a proposed site layout overlaying the tree survey plan and identifies trees to be removed, incursions from structures and hard surfacing.

Tree Protection Plan – 25050/PL/01_01 – Jan. 2026 shows areas of ground protection, Arboricultural Supervision 'No Dig' and Arboricultural Supervision-Excavations, Demolition, as well as the tree protective fencing. There are no visibility splays on the drawing so impact on boundary trees to Heath Ride is not known.

Arboricultural Method Statement – BF01 Ltd. 20.1.26 document which includes a Tree Survey Schedule, lists the impact from development on retained trees and identifies trees and groups of trees to be removed, as well as proposed treeworks, tree protection during demolition of existing building, built formations.

Where foundations are proposed within the root protection area of 5 trees identified, specialist foundation design is required to be designed by structural engineer with the retained arboriculturalist. Recognised methods of construction of foundations

and paving within RPAs are included – although they will be site specific dependant on the final design layout. Typical section drawings are included in the AMS using Cellweb. Soil amelioration is also proposed. The report is acceptable but will need to be updated dependant on the final site layout.

Site Layout

The Site layout plan shows the primary vehicular entrance to the far western end of the site which is the existing double farm gated access. Placing the upgraded access in this location will result in the partial removal of G01 part of a boundary hedge comprising Beech and Lawsons cypress. A pedestrian path is also proposed further along the northern frontage which results in the removal of T01 and T05 both 'U' quality Beech trees. The proposed driveway curves into the site where dwellings are laid out - side on in pairs with the road between them.

Where the landscape character of the site consists of large areas of tree groups inevitably there is some conflict from development on the existing vegetation such as Plot 1 G19 where an area of over half is removed, and the remainder is retained but within the rear garden, where it takes up quite a lot of the available space. G19 consists of 6 Willow trees with shrubbery and brambles beneath. These are small trees 8m high maximum.

The boundary to Plot 1 is a linear group of 9 offsite trees that consist of Lawsons cypress, Leylandii, Birch and Oak at 20m high. These trees will need to be maintained on the owners side of Plot 1. The ornamental conifers can be challenging to maintain and cutting back into the wood will result in unsightly die-back. Would this treeline act as the boundary or would a close board fence be used against the boundary?

Plot 2 has a number of mature trees along the eastern boundary all of which are being retained except T14. These trees consist of; T16 Scots Pine, T17 Crack Willow, T15 Goat Willow, T13 Silver Birch, T12 Oak, T11 Spruce, all 'B' category trees.

Plots 3 and 4 are located behind Plots 1 and 2 where a significant group of trees is located in the rear garden of Plot 3 - G18 which consists of Birch, Willow, Oak, native tree species, and a group of 3 'C' Oak quality trees within the site, and 2 mature 'B' quality trees to the western boundary Willow and Scots Pine.

Plot 4 includes G10 a densely vegetated area consisting of Willow, Birch, Oak, that will be halved, with a small area remaining in the SE corner. A partial area of trees from group G09 consisting of Willow, Birch, Oak, Leylandii, will be retained along the eastern boundary.

A similar situation is present to the rear of Plots 5, 6 and 8.

Retaining the vegetation is important and including it as an integral part of the rear gardens helps to conserve and enhance the M1 LCA, but it is important to be realistic and consider how sustainable this will be in the long term, as without protection orders on the site the retained vegetation is unlikely to survive.

Fell - T01, T05, T14, T19, T20, T21, T22, T23, T24, T25, T26, T27, T33, T34, T59, T63, T72, T73, G01, G04, G05, G08, G12, G19
Prune - T02, T10, T37, T78,

Partial removal of - G01, G07, G09, G10, G17, G18,

Visual Impressions drawing

This sheet shows the proposed site layout with very large, contemporary style dwellings, showing overlooked rear gardens with no sense of privacy at all. The illustration does not show the retained areas of woodland to the rear gardens of all the dwellings. The impressions do not match that of the Tree Protection Plan. The very impressionistic elevational drawing tries to echo the ordered character of recently improved dwellings closer to Heath Ride such as 'Crimble' and 'Victoria House', but fails to show the characteristic tree and hedge cover, which is very natural and reminiscent of the surrounding woodland character, predominating along and deep into plots along Heath Ride.

A balance needs to be made in approach to development that provides modern convenience without compromising the scenic quality and tranquility provided by the natural arboreal setting – which may be perceived as 'untidy' by urban dwellers, where a desire to control natural elements ends up removing the very reasons for settling in a semi-rural environment.

The 'Proposed Landscape Plan' shows retained trees in contrasting green shades, and proposed native hedgerows to line the properties along the access road. Rain gardens are included on plot and a swale is proposed along some of the western boundary and between dwellings. A beige colour as well as pale green seems to be indicating the areas of retained trees and woodland and there is an area of communal grassland at the southern end of the site. How will this area be managed and by whom? Is it really necessary for the fully made up road to extend well beyond plot 8.? Has management of the retained woodland been considered along with management of other areas of landscape within the site?

Retained trees appear to be the boundary treatment to all the boundaries but where there is a boundary between neighbouring dwellings what is the boundary treatment will it resort to a fenced boundary – is there scope within the RPA or is there an existing treatment that will need to be replaced?

The on plot driveways take up a similar footprint to the dwellings themselves – is there a chance that the area can be reduced/ the edges staggered with planting? For example why does the shingle drive of plot 1 extend beyond the line of the house?

The use of Rain Gardens is a good idea considering the potential issues with drainage.

A document 'Bunningham Farms – Landscape Design Principles' is submitted with the application and discusses a vision for a greener landscape with the aim to establish as carefully considered and contextually sensitive environment that

reinforces the established character of Heath Ride, delivering measurable biodiversity enhancements and providing proportionate tree replacement, whilst creating high quality private gardens and communal open spaces. A concept drawing would be useful in understanding the 'Balanced landscape strategy' and enhancing wildlife connectivity.

Assessing the important tree cover with a tree survey should help to identify potential areas for development. I note that the a good deal of the trees are retained within the rear gardens. It will be impossible to replant all the trees lost to development in a coherent proposal. The important issue is to retain the character and appearance of the site and its immediate location along Heath Ride.

The Proposed Landscape Plan is a loose strategy plan that could have more clarity with regard to boundary treatment, areas of hard landscape, and the aspirations of the Landscape Design Principles, is a Landscape Architect involved in the project team?.

Summary

The proposal is for a regimented layout of a small number of very large dwellings set back from Heath Ride into the significant woodland of the site which although is shown as retained, is not conveyed in its entirety within the proposed layout and where the practicalities of management and longevity have not been considered. The area of Japanese knotweed has not been shown on the tree plans.

The proposed layout does not match the character of the prevailing settlement pattern and fails, to protect and retain existing trees hedges and other landscape features. The proposals have failed to address the requirements of the Council's landscape character assessment and do not convincingly retain or enhance the character and features that contribute to the layout and is contrary to Policies CC03, TB21, CP3

As it stands the proposal would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the area and fail to protect or enhance the valued landscape of the 'Forest and Rides' VL. This is contrary to paragraph 187 (a) of the NPPF.

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);

b) recognising 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;

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Policies CC03, TB21, CP3

Date:	24.2.26	Signed:	BRC
--------------	---------	----------------	-----