

MEMORANDUM

From:	Catherine Brimble Senior Landscape Officer
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees
App No:	260117
Address:	Manor Farm, Longwater Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3SE.
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed conversion of barn to 3no. residential dwellings and associated changes (C3).
Type of Development:	Other Change of Use
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

The site is located in the countryside and within Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment – Landscape Character Area N2 - Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland which is a landscape in good condition. The relevant Valuable Landscape Attributes identified for this area are as follows:

- *Elevated ridgeline which provides a backdrop to the wider lowland landscape in the Blackwater Valley as well as expansive views out over the surrounding landscapes.*
- *Rural character of the pattern of pastoral fields interspersed with scattered woods and hedgerow oaks which provide visual diversity as well as continuity with the adjoining forested landscape of the Finchampstead Ridges.*
- *The network of winding sunken lanes and local footpaths which provide access to and enjoyment of the countryside.*
- *Peaceful and rural ambience with an experience of dark skies which provides an escape in close proximity to the urban population.*

The Landscape Strategy for N2 in relation to development is:

.....to conserve the coherent pattern of settlement, and avoid the spread of urban built form including roads into the area.

The relevant Landscape Guidelines are as follows:

- *Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of woodlands as coppice, with standards left to form future timber trees. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.*
- *Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.*
- *Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity in the landscape, including the experience of ‘dark skies’, through the management of development.*

This application is for the conversion of an existing agricultural barn (barn A) which currently has permission to house 2 caravans. The barn is located centrally within and intensively farmed area growing soft fruit. A separate caravan is located to the front of the barn A with several others to the east of barn A. There is an existing hedgerow (Yew) growing to the rear of the barn A with a number of trees growing in the hedgerow to the west of barn A.

The Site Plan shows very limited information with no reference to the existing hedgerow which is only shown on the Proposed Foul Water Drainage Layout drawing. The Planning Statement under paragraph 5.19 relating to trees and landscape states - *The site does not contain trees and will not be impacted by its landscape.* There is no mention of the existing hedge either in the Planning Statement or on the Application Form, or how the proposals will be appropriately integrated into the landscape.

The proposals show that each of the dwellings will have a rear garden, however this will require the existing hedgerow to be removed. I presume that the rear gardens will be enclosed by fencing which will have a cumulative detrimental impact on the wider landscape character. We will need the following additional information in order to understand how the proposed application complies with Local Plan policies CC03 & TB21:

1. Details of the existing vegetation within and adjacent to the site and the full extent of removal and retention of the existing hedgerow. The existing trees to the west of barn A will also need to be indicated as being retained.
2. Appropriate landscape treatment around barn A to mitigate the change of use of the barn to three additional dwellings, in an agricultural setting. The policies cited above require that the application should demonstrate that any application within the countryside addresses the requirements of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment and also retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to that landscape. In addition to this there needs to be a replacement hedgerow shown.
3. Details of any new fencing / boundary treatment either to the rear or side of the dwellings. This should be in keeping with the countryside character and therefore closeboarded fence would not be acceptable as it is an urbanising feature. A more appropriate solution would be post and rail fence with associated native hedgerow and hedgerow trees.

Other aspects of the application that are not clear and therefore require further details, are as follows:

4. Are the proposed dwellings to be open market or for the use of agricultural workers and tied to the soft fruit business? I would suggest this is quite important to understand as it is not explicit within the application.
5. Identification of the exact numbers of caravans within and immediately adjacent to the site and whether these will be removed as part of the proposals. It is important we understand this as the retention of the caravans in combination with the possible proposed dwellings will have a cumulative urbanising effect on the countryside.

I request that additional information to address points 1 – 5 as listed above is provided in order that the application can be properly assessed against the relevant planning policies. However, if these details are not provided then I would object to the application due to insufficient information.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Possible conditions following additional information.

Date:	13 th May 2026	Signed:	C. Brimble
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