

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261842
Site Address:	Land at Forest Road, Wokingham, RG40 5SA
Expiry Date:	9 September 2026
Site Visit Date:	27 August 2026
Proposal: Permission in principle application for the proposed erection of 4no. residential dwellings.	

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 CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside) 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 TB05 – Housing Mix TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	M2 – Safeguarding sand and gravel resources
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU) (N.B. the LPU has not yet been adopted)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS10 – Meeting our housing needs C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C3 – Active travel C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way

and as such does not carry full weight. This is discussed in the Principle of Development section of the report.)	C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging H1 – Housing mix, density and standards H3 – Affordable housing FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity HC5 – Environmental protection
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document A Design for Hurst

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
213237	Full application for the proposed erection of an agricultural barn, with the insertion of 6 no. rooflights.	Refused – 20/12/2021

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health: No comments received
WBC Drainage: No objection to the principle of the proposed development
WBC Highways: **Object** on the following grounds – the application site is within a poorly accessible location that would fail to encourage a modal shift towards sustainable modes of transport.
WBC Landscape and Trees: **Object** on the following grounds – the application site lies within the countryside and would represent an encroachment into an undeveloped parcel that contributes to the rural character and openness of this section of Forest Road.
WBC Ecology: No objection
WBC Cleaner and Greener: No comments received

External

None consulted

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council object to the application on the following grounds: - The site lies outside the settlement boundary within the countryside, contrary to the development plan and spatial strategy. The proposal is also contrary to emerging Local Plan Update policy SS5 and there is no overriding housing need to justify development of
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	this countryside site. - The proposal would result in harmful encroachment into the countryside and erosion of the rural character landscape setting and Green Route. - The location is not sustainable, with future occupiers reliant on private car travel to access services and facilities. - Potential impacts on biodiversity, particularly the site's relationship with adjoining priority habitats and wildlife corridors. - Concerns regarding highway safety, including traffic speeds and volumes on Forest Road. - The application does not comply with PPG guidance as the number of dwellings is not expressed as a minimum and maximum range. <i>Officer's Note: The application form states a minimum of 4 dwellings and a maximum of 4 dwellings, while the stated numbers are not different, they are technically expressed as a range and the PPG does not explicitly state that the minimum and maximum numbers must be different.</i> - The submitted Context Plan (MLP02) is misleading as it depicts development proposed under application ref 261841 which has not been determined. The proposal would not constitute infill development. <i>Officer's Note: It is acknowledged that this application has been submitted in tandem with application ref 261841, with the same indicative drawings submitted for both. While submitted in tandem, the LPA has a duty to assess each application individually and on its own merits.</i> <i>Officer's Note: The principal issues raised that are relevant to the determination of Permission in Principle are the site's countryside location, compliance with the spatial strategy, sustainability of the location, effects on rural character and openness, and the cumulative effect of residential encroachment along this section of Forest Road. Detailed matters relating to highways design, visibility splays, layout and technical assessments would largely fall to any subsequent Technical Details Consent stage.</i>
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The site comprises 1 of 5no. agricultural paddocks which appear to have been established recently following the subdivision of an open field on land to the north of Forest Road, located outside of settlement limits to the north of Wokingham. These

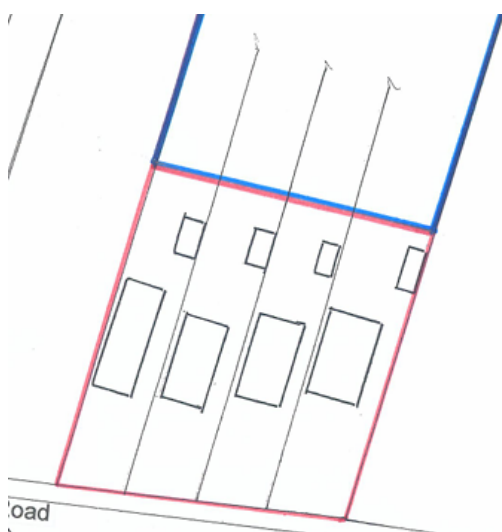
deep plots range in width and back onto Tippen's Wood, a designated Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland and Local Wildlife Site. The adjoining woodland contributes significantly to the character of the area protected under Tree Preservation Order No. 560-1992 and is also identified as a priority habitat within the Berkshire Habitat Inventory (lowland mixed deciduous woodland).

The site is relatively flat and is well screened from the highway by a high continuous hedgerow. To the west is a linear form of development comprising a mix of detached and semi-detached residential dwellings which vary in architectural form, style and age sited on relatively narrow but deep plots. To the immediate south and east is another primarily linear form of development on the opposite side of Forest Road including Binfield Vineyard. The wider area comprises loose clusters of residential development and commercial uses reflective of its rural setting. The closest settlement, Binfield, is located circa. 900m to the east.

Proposal:

This application is for permission in principle, as provided for in the Town and Country Planning (Permission in Principle) Order 2017. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) advises that this is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for housing-led development which separates the consideration of matters of principle from the technical detail. Planning permission does not exist unless both the Permission in Principle (PiP) and the Technical Details Consent (TDC) are approved. This application relates to the first of these two stages. As the application does not relate to technical details and as such, the submitted context and indicative layout principles plans are to be taken to be illustrative only.

PiP is sought for the erection of a minimum of 4 dwellings and a maximum of 4 dwellings. This plan has been considered solely for the purpose of understanding the broad development capacity of the site. No approval is sought or granted for the illustrated siting, layout, access arrangements or building disposition. The assessment of Permission in Principle is based on the location, land use and amount of development proposed and does not depend upon the particular illustrative arrangement shown.



Extract of the submitted context plan showing the application site.

It is acknowledged that this application has been submitted in conjunction with a separate PiP application (ref 261841), which proposes the erection of up to 4no. dwellings on a separate plot of land to the west of this site. It is understood that both plots are owned by separate parties. Notwithstanding the relationship between both plots and their potential joint contribution to housing delivery, they are separate proposals and as such they must be assessed independently of each other. However, whilst each application must be determined on its own merits, the potential cumulative effects of application 261841 remain a material consideration. The assessment below therefore takes account of the combined potential extension of residential development along this undeveloped frontage, without assuming that either proposal will be permitted.

The PPG advises that the scope of PiP is limited to location, land use and amount of development. Determining whether permission in principle should be granted requires an assessment of material considerations relevant to these 'in principle' matters. Other matters should be considered at the technical details consent stage.

Principle of Development:

The statutory starting point in the determination of planning applications is Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which requires decisions to be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For Wokingham Borough, the Development Plan consists of the adopted Core Strategy (2010), the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) and any relevant made Neighbourhood Plan. The National Decision-Making Policies contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (2026) are a material consideration in any determination and must be read alongside the Development Plan. However, they do not change the statutory status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making.

Development Plan

Core Strategy 2010

The spatial strategy for the borough is contained within the Core Strategy. A priority is to steer new housing to the most sustainable locations within settlement boundaries and limit development within the countryside. This is, among other reasons, to promote sustainability, maintain the quality of the environment, protect the separate identity of settlements and provide certainty regarding how the Borough will be developed.

The site is located outside of and unconnected to any Settlement Boundary and is within a part of the borough which is designated as countryside. Policy CP9 'Scale and location of development proposals' relates to the scale and location of development proposals and seeks to focus development proposals within those identified as major or modest development locations.

As the site is located outside of settlement limits within designated countryside, Policy CP11 'Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)' is applicable in this instance. Policy CP11 refers to protecting the separate identity of settlements and

maintain the quality of the environment. The supporting text also identifies that preventing the proliferation of development in areas away from existing development limits is important, as they are not generally well located for the facilities and services.

Policy CP11 states that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where certain criteria are met. The relevant criteria are highlighted:

- 1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and**
- 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and**
- 3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or**
- 4) In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;
- 5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i) Bring about environmental improvements; or
 - ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
- 6) Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;
- 7) Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

The proposal comprises the erection of three to four markets dwellings. It would not contribute to a rural enterprise, promote recreation in and enjoyment of the countryside, provide an essential community facility or affordable housing. Furthermore, the proposal is not for a replacement dwelling and neither for residential extensions. The proposal would therefore not accord with any exception criteria and is contrary to the development plan in this respect.

Turning to the overall aim of Policy CP11, this is to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. While located outside of settlement limits, it is acknowledged that the site is not isolated from neighbouring development within this section of Forest Road, and due to the scale of the proposal it would likely not compromise the separate identity of the neighbouring settlements (Hurst to the north-west, Wokingham to the south and Binfield to the east).

Maintaining the quality of the environment would ultimately depend on how the proposed development would respond to the character of the area and its impact on the wider landscape. The proposal would result in the encroachment of development beyond the existing building line bookended by 'Tailend' to the west into the open countryside and potentially harm the sparse ribbon pattern of development within the area. This is discussed in more detail in the landscape and local character section of the report.

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014

Policy CC02 of the MDD Local Plan states that development at the edge of settlements can be acceptable where it is demonstrated that it is within development limits and respects the transition between the built-up area and the open countryside, taking into account the character of the adjacent countryside and landscape.

In this case, the site is not located within development limits and therefore does not satisfy the locational requirements of Policy CC02. The policy's underlying objective of directing development to appropriate locations within development limits is therefore not met.

Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan 2023

The site is not located in an area where geological data suggests there are potential sand and/or gravel reserves. Therefore, the policies of the Central and Eastern Berkshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan do not apply to this proposal.

Emerging Local Plan Update

The Local Plan Update ("LPU"), the plan which will supersede the CS and MDD LP, was published for Regulation 19 consultation in October 2024 and submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in February 2025. The examination hearing sessions have now concluded, and the Inspectors issued a Post Hearings Letter on 4 August 2026.

The Inspectors have advised that, at this stage, the Plan is likely to be capable of being found sound and legally compliant, subject to the preparation, consultation and consideration of Main Modifications, together with updated Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulations Assessment work. The Inspectors make clear that their conclusions remain subject to consultation on the Main Modifications and consideration of any representations received before a final report is issued.

Whilst the Inspectors identify a number of amendments to the housing trajectory and certain allocations within Policy SS14, they also conclude that no additional housing allocations are required for the Plan to be sound. Furthermore, they confirm that the housing land supply assumptions are broadly robust and justified, subject to specified adjustments. Additionally, no required amendments are identified in relation to policy SS2 which sets out the spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy, wherein the application site would remain outside of settlement limits within designated countryside.

NDMP DM4: *Emerging development plan proposals* states that weight may be given to relevant policies in emerging development plans according to:

"(a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
(b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and

(c) the degree of compliance of the relevant policies in the emerging plan with the policies for plan-making in this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in this Framework, the greater the weight that may be given to them)”

In this case, the LPU has progressed through examination hearings, and the Inspectors have indicated that it is likely to be capable of adoption subject to Main Modifications. Although those Main Modifications have not yet been published or consulted upon, the LPU has reached a very advanced stage in its preparation.

The emerging LPU has reached an advanced stage and attracts moderate weight as a material consideration. It continues to direct development towards defined settlements and provides strong support for the conclusion that the site is not an appropriate location for residential development.

Development Plan Summary

As set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and NPPF, the starting point for assessment is against the development plan and the proposal conflicts with the development plan policies and the spatial strategy therein.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF 2026 came into effect on 17th August 2026 and introduced National Decision-Making Policies (NDMPs). The introduction of NDMPs alter the way national and local policy interact in decision-making. The adopted Core Strategy and Managing Development Delivery Plan remain part of the statutory Development Plan and continue to provide the principal local policy framework for assessing development proposals. However, the NPPF 2026 makes clear that local policies should be considered alongside the relevant NDMPs, and where a development plan policy is materially inconsistent with an NDMP, significant weight will ordinarily be afforded to the national policy.

The assessment is therefore no longer focused on whether Development Plan policies are "up-to-date" by reference to their age. Instead, the application of the presumption in favour of sustainable development, including Policies S4 and S5, depends on the circumstances of the proposal and the relevant policy tests, including matters such as location, the extent to which identified development needs are being met, and relevant infrastructure and transport considerations. The weight given to individual policies is therefore a matter for the decision maker, based on their consistency with the NPPF rather than the age of the Development Plan itself.

Policy S3 establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For proposals outside settlements, Policy S5 provides the decision-making framework for applying that presumption for sites outside of a defined settlement boundary. Annex B of the NPPF defines 'settlement' for national policy purposes and clarifies that settlements do not include hamlets and scattered groups of houses located outside predominantly built-up areas, unless specifically defined as a settlement in the development plan. The site does not fall within a defined settlement and is located outside a predominantly built-up area. Therefore, policy S5 is applicable to this

assessment.

Policy S5 states that only certain forms of development should be approved outside settlements. The forms of development listed under the policy should be approved, unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects when assessed against the NDMPs. The listed forms of development which are potentially relevant to this proposal are assessed below.

e. Limited infilling within groups of houses

The proposal would expand development away from the end of an existing row of dwellings into open land. While there are dwellings on both sides within this section of Forest Road, the application site is not located between existing development and therefore the proposal would not constitute filling a small gap within a built-up frontage. The proposal would extend, rather than infill within, the existing group of houses and does not constitute 'limited infilling within groups of houses' for the purposes of Policy S5(1)(e). The proposed development would therefore not fall within this category supported in principle by policy S5.

j. Development which would address an evidenced unmet need (including, but not limited to, development proposals involving the provision of housing where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites or scores below 75% in the most recent Housing Delivery Test), and where the development would:

- i. Be physically well-related to an existing settlement (unless the nature of the development would make this inappropriate) and be of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure; or...*

Policy HO3(1)(a) requires the Council to maintain a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide at least five years' worth of housing against the applicable housing requirement, together with the relevant buffer. The purpose of the policy is to ensure a continuous supply of housing land capable of meeting identified needs and to support the delivery of homes throughout the plan period.

The latest published Five-Year Housing Land Supply Statement (at 31st March 2025) shows the Council is currently only able to demonstrate 2.5 years' worth of deliverable sites. This represents a substantial shortfall against the requirement of policy HO3 and demonstrates that the development plan objective of maintaining a five-year supply is not currently being met. As such, the proposal would contribute towards and fall within the form of development supported by S5(1)(j) if it would be well related to an existing settlement and be of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure.

In this case, the application site is located within the open countryside approximately 1.7km from the settlement boundary of Wokingham and 900m from the western edge of Binfield (within Bracknell Forest Borough). While the site is not physically isolated away from development, the proposal would not form a logical and readily identifiable extension to the nearest defined settlement and therefore would not fall within this

category supported in principle by policy S5.

For the reasons given above, the proposal would not fall within any of the forms of development supported in principle by policy S5. Policy S5(4) states that development proposals which do not fall within one of the categories set out in this policy should only be approved in exceptional circumstances, where the benefits of the proposal would substantially outweigh the adverse effects, including to the character of the countryside and in relation to promoting sustainable patterns of movement. Whether there are any exceptional circumstances which weigh significantly in favour of approving the proposed development will be weighed up against any identified adverse effects within the overall planning balance carried out in the 'Planning Balance and Conclusion' section of the report.

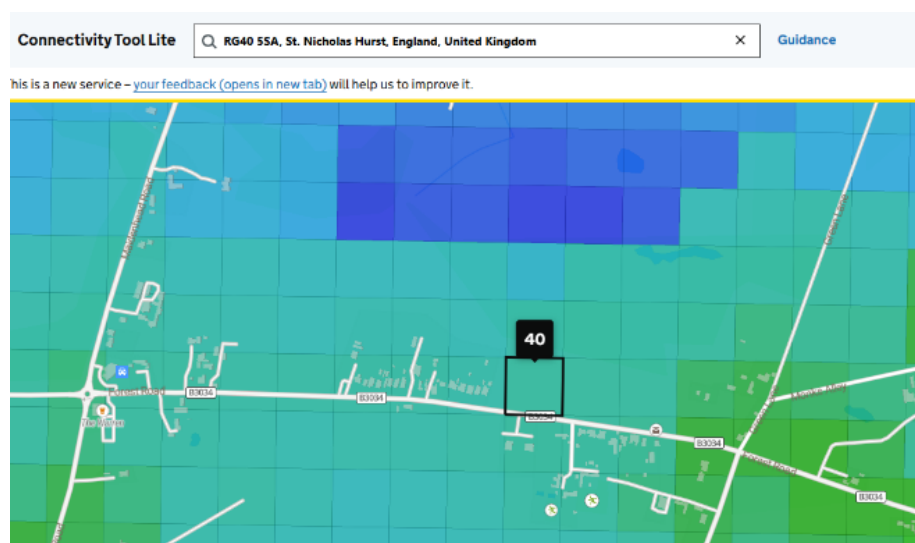
Location, land use and amount of development in relation to locational sustainability (accessibility to services and facilities):

NDMP TR3 relates to locating development in sustainable locations, listing 5 principles development proposal should reflect to support sustainable patterns of movement, enable good accessibility for different users and make the most of existing and proposed transport infrastructure, while taking into account the vision for the site, the type of development and its location. The stated principles include:

- a. Development proposals which could generate a significant amount of movement, in the context of the area within which they would be situated, should be in locations that are sustainable (or which can be made so, taking into account planned improvements, including any provided for as part of the development itself). This means the location should limit the need to travel, particularly by private car, and offer a genuine choice of transport modes for residents and users, unless the nature of the development would make this impractical;*
- b. Opportunities should be taken to utilise existing or proposed transport infrastructure in optimising the amount or density of development which can be accommodated in different locations, especially where this can support more walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use;*
- e. In rural areas, opportunities to improve walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport and enhance the connectivity of an area should be taken where they exist and can be supported by the development proposed.*

Policy TR3 also refers to the Government's Connectivity Tool. The Connectivity Tool gives each square a connectivity score from 0 to 100. The score helps users understand how well-connected a square is to locations of interest by walking and wheeling, cycling and public transport, compared with other squares across England and Wales. Connectivity scores should always be interpreted comparatively. This is because the score tells users how a square's connectivity compares to other squares, rather than whether its connectivity is "good" or "bad" in isolation. This tool does not provide an absolute measure of connectivity – it shows how places compare to other places. Consequently, the Connectivity Tool score should be considered alongside the wider evidence base, including the accessibility of local services and facilities, opportunities for sustainable travel, and the characteristics of the proposed development and professional judgement. In this case, the site's location is given an

overall connectivity score of 40.



Extract from the Government's Connectivity Tool. The application site lies within a square which scores 40 overall.

NDMP TR4 states that to contribute to creating well-designed places, transport considerations should be integral to the design of development, including:

- a. Give priority first to walking, wheeling and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating easy access to high quality public transport, with layouts and densities which maximise the catchments for bus or other public transport services;*
- b. Incorporate or contribute towards appropriate features to support this prioritisation, such as permeable street networks, continuous footways and segregated cycle facilities which are adequately lit, sufficient secure and accessible cycle parking, regularly spaced public seating and good quality waiting facilities for public transport;*

NDMP CC2 states that in order to contribute to climate change mitigation and the transition to net zero, development proposals should, where relevant to the proposal: “A. Accord with policies TR3 and TR4 so that sustainable patterns of movement are prioritised, opportunities are taken to improve walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport, and infrastructure is provided to support the transition to zero-emission vehicles” and “B. Support good access to facilities in order to limit the need to travel, whether through the development’s location, through development densities which improve catchment populations for local services, or by incorporating community facilities and premises to support local employment opportunities”.

The overarching goals of these national policies are reflected in the local development plan. Policy CP9 of the Core Strategy states that ‘the scale of development proposals in Wokingham borough must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility.’ Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that:

- a) *Provide for sustainable forms of transport to allow choice;*
- b) *Are located where there are or will be at the time of development choices in the mode of transport available and which minimise the distance people need to travel;*

The supporting information in policy CP6 states:

'Paragraph 2.16 recognises that the borough has one of the highest car ownership rates of any English local authority. To reduce the likelihood that these vehicles will be used and to encourage modal shift, it is important to ensure all proposals achieve sustainable development.'

'To help achieve sustainable development, proposals likely to generate significant demands for travel movements should be located in areas with best access to existing good services. This means that people can have the widest range of choice in selecting transport modes and help reduce the use of the private car. The availability of good existing public transport services has been considered in drafting the strategy for the Borough.'

As already established, the site is located outside settlement limits within designated countryside. While the site is not isolated in the spatial context of neighbouring development, it does not adjoin any settlement boundaries and is not well located for facilities and services. The Council's Highways Officer has subsequently objected to the proposal on the grounds of the site's unsustainable location.

The closest day-to-day local facilities located circa. 1.5km to the east within Binfield Village Centre, with no access to a bus service or any alternative public transport mode to connect future residents with the nearest settlements. Additionally, Forest Road does not provide a safe and attractive environment for considering walking due to the absence of street lighting and any crossing points between the intermittent footpaths on the northern and southern sides of the road. Cyclists would be reliant on the road which the LTN1/20 Cycle infrastructure design guidance defines as 'mixed traffic' conditions. Mixed traffic conditions with speed limits of 40mph are considered suitable for few people, excluding most potential users and/or have safety concerns.

Therefore, future occupiers would be heavily reliant on private vehicles to access day-to-day local facilities and services resulting in very poor accessibility. While it is noted that the proposal is fairly modest in scale at 4 dwellings and would unlikely have a significant traffic impact on the wider highway network, most required amenities and services would be inaccessible other than via the private motor vehicle. As such, the proposed development would fail to support sustainable patterns of movement or enable good accessibility for different users.

The proposed development would result in a high level of car dependency contrary to the aforementioned policies and the sustainability goals of the NPPF and the development plan.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to impact on landscape and the character and appearance of the area:

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy requires developments to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high-quality design. R1 of the Borough Design Guide SPD requires that development contribute positively towards and be compatible with the historic or underlying character and quality of the local area.

While it is acknowledged that the submitted drawings are indicative at this stage, with regard to well-designed places NDMP DP3 states that development proposals should respond to their context (the history, character and features of their site and its setting), so that they integrate with and enhance their surroundings.

Forest Road is defined as a Green Route under Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan which aims to protect green infrastructure networks including Green Routes, promote linkages between public open space and the countryside, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping. Policy TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan states that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues. Proposals should retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

The site is within the Landscape Character Area I1 known as 'Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland':

'A simple farmed landscape dominated by open arable fields and some pasture, with mature hedgerow trees marking former hedge lines. Wooded horizons created by large deciduous blocks line a subtle ridgeline, cut by a network of small tributary streams. Settlement is focused on ribbon development along the local roads, scattered farmsteads and manor houses. The strong rural character is only affected by the M4 and A329 (M) which cut through the area'

The Landscape Strategy is to conserve and enhance the existing rural character. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are the characteristic wooded ridges and woodland, including ancient woodland. In particular there are opportunities to restore coppice management, and reinstate and repair key hedgerows with hedgerow standards. In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern through controlling development.

This application seeks Permission in Principle only. Matters relating to layout, scale, appearance, landscaping and the precise position of buildings are not under consideration at this stage and would be assessed as part of any subsequent Technical Details Consent application. The submitted plans are therefore indicative at this stage. Nonetheless, the principle of residential development and its relative impacts on local character and the historic environment (and surrounding built environment) can be considered at this stage.

The site forms part of a wider undeveloped frontage along Forest Road which contributes to the verdant character of this designated Green Route. Whilst detailed

landscaping matters fall to Technical Details Consent, the principle of replacing part of this undeveloped frontage with residential development would diminish the rural qualities which the designation seeks to protect.

With the exception of fencing on the site's side boundaries, the site comprises an undeveloped parcel of land which is well screened by a mature native hedgerow on its southern boundary facing the highway. As a result, the site appears synonymous with the open countryside to the east and the woodland to the north. The hedgerow appears to stretch across the entire frontage of the undeveloped fields on the northern side of Forest Road and as such is an important landscape feature which contributes significantly to the Green Route and the verdant character of the area.

The development to the west is mainly formed of detached and semi-detached dwellings on narrow, deep plots, arranged along a staggered building line fronting Forest Road. 'Tailend' (also known as 'Rosenhurst') marks the end of this row. Beyond its eastern boundary is a substantial gap, largely free of built form apart from boundary fencing, extending for approximately 370m to the point where the access to 'Saxon Forest Court' meets the highway. On the southern side of Forest Road, development within this section broadly follows the same linear pattern and continues the prevailing character to the west.

Given the approximately 66m gap between the site and the existing linear development to the west, beginning with 'Tailend', the proposal would read as a standalone development rather than a natural continuation of the existing ribbon pattern. However, it would also be seen in the context of development on the southern side of Forest Road, which forms a loose cluster of predominantly linear development.

The proposed change of use of the land to residential and the erection of 4 dwellings would result in permanent buildings, plus any associated hardstanding and residential paraphernalia, extending further to the east away from the existing cluster of development to the east and subsequently contribute to the erosion of the open countryside within this section of Forest Road. The reduction of this gap and views across the landscape is a primary concern raised in the objection from the Council's Landscape Architect, who states that the proposal would contribute to the gradual erosion of the open countryside character between existing development and the edge of Binfield.

Whilst the consultee also raises concerns regarding tree protection, hedgerow retention, access arrangements and the absence of supporting technical assessments, these matters relate primarily to the detailed design and implementation of development and would be more appropriately considered at the Technical Details Consent stage. The principal issue arising from the consultation response at the Permission in Principle stage is therefore whether residential development of this countryside site represents an appropriate location for housing in respect of impact on the wider landscape character.

The visual impact of any detailed development proposal would depend upon the specific design, scale and landscaping proposed at Technical Details Consent stage.

However, the introduction of residential development onto this undeveloped parcel would, in principle, extend built form further east along Forest Road and reduce the extent of undeveloped countryside that currently contributes to local character. If both current PiP proposals were implemented, the cumulative effect would be a greater eastward extension of built form and a corresponding reduction in the undeveloped frontage. This reinforces, but does not materially alter, the moderate landscape harm identified for the present application considered on its own merits.

Notwithstanding the submitted indicative layout principles drawing which shows three detached dwellings on the site, if the maximum of four dwellings were proposed the plot sizes would be comparable to the neighbouring semi-detached dwellings in terms of their width. However, the degree of harm to the character of the area and the wider landscape character would be highly dependent on the design, appearance and scale of the proposed dwellings which cannot be considered in full at this stage. Whilst the site immediately adjoins existing residential development, this relationship alone does not render it appropriate for residential development in principle. The site forms part of an undeveloped parcel which contributes to the transition between the existing ribbon development and the wider countryside.

In summary, the site comprises an undeveloped parcel of countryside which contributes to the rural character of Forest Road, the setting of the Green Route and the sparse pattern of development that characterises this part of the borough. Whilst the detailed appearance and visual effects of the proposed development cannot be assessed in detail at the Permission in Principle stage, the introduction of residential development on the site would nevertheless extend built form into an area that is presently undeveloped and would erode, to some degree, the spaciousness and countryside character of this section of Forest Road. This harm attracts moderate weight in the assessment and reinforces the conflict identified with the spatial strategy and countryside policies of the development plan.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to impact on neighbouring amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development shall be without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users.

At the Permission in Principle stage, the question is whether the site's location and the proposed quantum of up to four dwellings raise any obvious in-principle amenity constraints. Based on the information submitted with this application, no in-principle amenity constraints have been identified that would prevent the amount of up to four dwellings being accommodated, subject to satisfactory layout, scale and separation details at Technical Details Consent.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to the highway network:

Core Strategy policy CP6 concerns issues relating to highway safety and access, stating that planning permission will be granted for schemes that, amongst other requirements, provide appropriate vehicular parking, enhance road safety and do not cause highway problems. Policy CC07 and Appendix 2 of the MDD Local Plan set out

the recommended minimum parking requirements for development proposals.

The Highway Authority has reviewed the application having regard to the limited scope of Permission in Principle and raises no objection on technical highway matters. The Highway Authority also advises that the traffic associated with four dwellings would not have a significant impact on the wider highway network.

Matters relating to access arrangements, parking provision and detailed highway design fall outside the scope of the current application and would be considered at Technical Details Consent stage. Accordingly, the proposed location, land use and amount of development are considered acceptable in relation to highway matters.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to impact on the natural environment (trees and ecology):

Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan aims to protect green infrastructure networks, promote linkages between public open space and the countryside, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping. Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan requires the incorporation of new biodiversity features, buffers between habitats and species of importance and integration with the wider green infrastructure network.

The red line boundary is located a minimum of circa. 58m from the edge of Tippen's Wood to the north. Tippen's Wood is an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, an irreplaceable habitat, which is also protected by a Tree Preservation Order (No. 560-1992). The woodland is also an identified priority habitat (Woodland: broadleaved, semi-natural) which is defined as a Habitat of Principal Importance. Given the separation distance between the site and the woodland these constraints would not prevent the site being considered suitable for residential development in principle.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (John Wenman Ecological Consultancy, June 2026) has been submitted in support of the application. It is acknowledged that the parcel of land assessed in the report is larger in depth than the application site and includes the edge of Tippen's Wood to the north; however, this does not preclude an assessment of this application from an ecological perspective.

No ecological constraints have been identified which would prevent the site being considered suitable for residential development in principle. Nonetheless, there is potential for the proposed development to adversely affect protected and priority species without appropriate mitigation. However, given that this application seeks Permission in Principle only, it is considered that these matters could be appropriately addressed at the Technical Details Consent stage through updated ecological surveys, appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures, and the submission of construction and habitat protection method statements, where necessary. The Council's Ecology Officer raises no objection to this approach.

The site contains no protected trees and so there is no ground to conclude that the site is unsuitable for development in principle in this respect. Trees/ vegetation is also located on the boundaries as opposed to centrally in the site, and as such trees are not a constraint to development to conclude it is unsuitable in principle for development, despite an absence of an Arboricultural report.

The proposed development would result in the fragmentation of the mature native hedgerow on the site's southern boundary. Any loss of vegetation identified at Technical Details Consent stage should be appropriately compensated for elsewhere on site to ensure there would, at the very least, be no net loss of landscaping as required by policy CC03. There is also an opportunity to enhance landscaping within the site's frontage to soften any proposed development, and this could be considered at the Technical Details stage.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is not a requirement at the PIP stage, as this stage is limited to consideration of the location, land use, and amount of development only. Matters relating to biodiversity, including potential impacts on ecology and the requirement to demonstrate a minimum 10% net gain, will be fully assessed at the Technical Details Consent stage. At that stage, the applicant will need to submit the necessary ecological assessments and biodiversity metric calculations to demonstrate how the proposals will achieve the required net gain or alternatively demonstrate that the development would be exempt from BNG. If required, mitigation and enhancement measures will be secured via planning conditions or S106 agreement.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to flood risk and drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD Local Plan requires consideration of flood risk from historic flooding and policy CC10 requires sustainable drainage methods and the minimisation of surface water flow.

The site and access thereto is located within Flood Zone 1 and the proposal represents no additional fluvial flood risk or vulnerability. In principle, the proposal is therefore acceptable in terms of Policy CC09 and as such the Council's Flood Risk & Drainage Officer has raised no objection to the application.

Policy CC10 of the MDD Local Plan requires sustainable drainage methods and the minimisation of surface water flow. If the application was otherwise acceptable, the required submission of a drainage strategy would be considered at the Technical Details Consent stage.

Other Matters:

There are no Environmental Health constraints such as noise or land contamination which indicate that the application site is not suitable for residential development. Any detailed matters relating to the layout and design of the development, construction activities, lighting, noise or other amenity considerations can be assessed, where necessary, at the Technical Details Consent stage.

Planning Balance and Conclusion:

The proposed development is unacceptable in principle and conflicts with several policies within the development plan and the NPPF that go to the heart of sustainable development. NDMP S5(4) states that where a development proposal is located

outside a settlement and does not fall within one of the listed categories, as is the case with this application, should only be approved in exceptional circumstances, where the benefits of the proposal would substantially outweigh the adverse effects, including to the character of the countryside and in relation to promoting sustainable patterns of movement.

It is recognised that small sites can make an important contribution to the Council's housing supply. The proposal would provide three to four additional market dwellings in circumstances where the Council's published assessment identifies a significant shortfall in deliverable housing land. Given the small number of dwellings, this housing-delivery benefit attracts moderate positive weight. Temporary construction employment and additional household expenditure would provide further, but limited, economic benefits.

Set against those benefits, the proposal would conflict with the spatial strategy of the development plan. The site lies outside defined development limits, within designated countryside, and the proposal does not satisfy any of the exceptions set out in Policy CP11, or the categories listed in NDMP S5. Residential development in this location is therefore unacceptable in principle and would undermine the plan-led approach to directing growth to sustainable locations. Weight is also given to the fact that the site is not allocated for development in the emerging Local Plan Update and would conflict with its emerging spatial strategy.

The development would be located within an unsustainable location with limited sustainable transport options. As such, future occupiers would be reliant on private motor vehicles to access basic amenities and services. This conflict with the local development plan and the NPPF holds significant weight against the proposed development in the balance.

The introduction of residential development onto this undeveloped countryside parcel would, in principle, cause moderate harm to the character and appearance of the area by extending built form eastwards, eroding the undeveloped frontage and weakening the sparse settlement pattern along this section of Forest Road. Whilst the precise extent of visual harm would depend on the detailed design of any future scheme, the principle of introducing residential development onto this currently undeveloped parcel would nevertheless result in some erosion of the existing rural character and openness. This harm attracts moderate weight in the planning balance and forms part of the adverse effects to the countryside identified within NPPF policy S5(4).

Whilst not a benefit, no natural environment constraints have been identified for development in principle (in relation to trees and ecology), flood risk and drainage or environmental health matters and accordingly these are not given weight.

The harm identified above is significant and would be long lasting. While there are limited economic and social benefits associated with residential development of the site, they do not outweigh the significant harm that would result from the identified conflicts with the Development Plan and NPPF which includes the requirement that development is located in sustainable locations, with the aim that future occupants do not rely on the private car and have a genuine choice of transport modes for

residents.

Applying Policy S5(4), the identified benefits do not substantially outweigh the significant locational-sustainability harm and moderate countryside-character harm. The exceptional-circumstances test is therefore not met. Separately, applying section 38(6), the material considerations identified do not justify a decision contrary to the development plan when read as a whole.

For these reasons and having regard to the development plan as a whole, as well as the NDMPs contained in the NPPF (2026), the proposal does not represent sustainable development and no material considerations have been identified which would weigh substantially in favour of approving the application. The principle of residential development on this site is therefore unacceptable, and planning permission in principle should be **refused**.

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 reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. 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:	N/A
Recommendation:	Refuse
Date:	8 September 2026
Earliest date for decision:	28 August 2026

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	09/09/26

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

- Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Countryside
- Green Route (Forest Road)
- Landscape Character Assessment Area – Ashridge Farmed Clay Lowland
- Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone – Green
- Tree Preservation Order No. 560-1992 (adjacent to the northern boundary of the field)
- Ancient & Semi-Natural Woodland – Tippen's Wood (adjacent to the northern boundary of the field)
- Local Wildlife Site – Tippen's Wood (adjacent to the northern boundary of the field)
- Berkshire Habitat Inventory – Priority Habitat (Woodland: broadleaved, semi-natural) (adjacent to the northern boundary of the field)
- Berkshire Biodiversity Opportunity Area – Waltham to Binfield Woodlands and Parklands (adjacent to the northern boundary of the field)
- Thames Basin Heaths SPA 7km Linear Mitigation Zone