

PLANNING STATEMENT
HIGHLANDS AVENUE, BARKHAM RG41 4SP

AUGUST 2024



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1. Introduction

1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application submitted to Wokingham Borough Council for the installation of nine street lights on land adjacent to Highlands Avenue, Barkham. It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying plans together with an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Tree Report that are submitted with the application. This is a retrospective application with the nine street lights having already been installed.

2. The Site and the Proposed Development

2.1 The application relates to a narrow strip of land that lies adjacent to Highlands Avenue, which is a private drive off Bearwood Road. This parcel of land measures approximately 20sqm in area and forms part of a woodland area that is owned by the applicants. The site lies beyond any defined settlement boundary so that it is defined as open countryside. The land has no specific landscape designations although the site is covered by two woodland Tree Preservation Orders, ref TPO-0020-1973 and TPO-0199-1981-W2.

2.2 The streetlights that have been installed were recycled from Windsor and Maidenhead Council where they were formerly located within Windsor town centre.

3. Planning History

3.1 A planning application (ref 240343) for the installation of a footpath and nine streetlights on this and adjacent land was refused on 6 June 2024 for the following reason:

The development represents inappropriate development in the countryside that is outside of, and unrelated to, any defined settlement boundaries. The development has adversely impacted the character of the landscape setting by virtue of its inappropriate siting within a TPO woodland, valued landscape and countryside location. The proposal has resulted in an adverse impact on TPO woodland through the removal of seedlings and vegetation, and will continue to harm the woodland by restricting the natural spread of trees self-seeding and regenerating in the area of the Woodland TPO. The proposal would be contrary

to chapters 180 (a) and (b) of the National Planning Policy Framework, CC03 & TB21 of the MDD Local Plan and CP1, CP3 & CP11 of the Core Strategy.

This application is the subject of a planning appeal (ref APP/X0360/W/24/3347228) that has yet to be determined.

4. Planning Policy Context

4.1 Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 provides that, in dealing with an application for planning permission, regard is to be had to the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act requires that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2 At the local level the development plan for Wokingham Council consists of the following documents:

- Core Strategy (January 2010) (CS)
- Managing Development Delivery (February 2014) (MDD)

4.3 The following policies of the CS are considered relevant to the application: Policies CP1, CP2, CP3 & CP6. These policies are summarised below:

Policy CP1 – Sustainable Development:

This policy sets out a set of criteria where planning permission will be granted. Criteria 1 refers to development proposals that maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. Criteria 10 refers to proposals that provide attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes.

Policy CP3 - General Principles for development:

Policy CP3 provides a set of criteria where planning permission will be granted. This includes proposals that provide a functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable scheme with no detrimental impact upon important ecological or landscape features

Policy CP6 – Managing Travel Demand

This policy states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that enhance facilities for pedestrians and enhance road safety.

Policy CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits

Policy CP11 seeks to restrict proposals outside development limits to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. It states that development will be permitted only where it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside and does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from existing buildings.

4.4 There are not considered to be any policies within the MDD that are considered specifically relevant to the proposed development.

4.5 The Development Plan is also supported by the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Section 2 General Principles of the SPD includes the following:

- G1- Development must respond positively to its site and local context including existing landscape features such as mature trees;
- G4 – Development should connect places together, in particular providing safe pedestrian and cycle links between residential areas;
- G8 – Development proposals should minimise their environmental impact

4.6 At the national level, Para 8 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), identifies that there are three sustainable development objectives that the planning system must aim to achieve:

- An economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy
- A social objective - to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities; and
- An environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment.

Section 8 of the NPPF refers to promoting healthy and safe communities with para 96 stating that planning decisions should aim to create inclusive and safe places that promote social interaction and create safe and accessible places, in particular through legible pedestrian routes.

4.7 Regarding the two woodland TPO's covering the site, TPO ref TPO-0020-1973 confirmed in 1973 covers the entire site with a description of mixed hardwoods consisting of mainly birch, chestnut and oak. Woodland TPO ref TPO-0199-1981-W2 confirmed in 1982 covers the western section of the site with a description of sycamore, alder, sweet chestnut, ash, birch, oak, rowan, horse chestnut, scots pine, norway, spruce, hazel. The appeal site concerns a very small part of the southern end of each TPO, both of which include the extensive area of woodland that extends between Bearwood Road and the built-up area of Wokingham to the east known as Fox Hill Wood.

5. Planning Considerations

5.1 The recycling centre at Highlands Avenue is owned and operated by the applicants who reside at Highlands House adjacent to the entrance to the recycling centre. The applicants also own Highlands Avenue, which is a private drive. Highlands Avenue provides access from Bearwood Road to the recycling centre with significant commercial traffic flows to and from the recycling centre including HGV vehicles.

5.2 Highland Avenue is also a public right of way (PRoW) linking from Bearwood Road to the south and Fox Hill Wood to the east and is frequently used by dog walkers. Highlands Avenue does not have a separate footpath and was not lit prior to the installation of the streetlights.

5.3 The streetlights have been installed in order to provide some low level lighting to assist with highway safety, including the safe movement of pedestrians, and to discourage anti-social behaviour along this road. In addition to the dog walkers using Highlands Avenue, the applicants have children and young grand-children living in Fernview Cottage, which is the adjacent property to Highlands House, and at Beechwood House at the southern

corner of Highlands Avenue and Bearwood Road so that Highlands Avenue provides the formal means of pedestrian access between these properties for the extended family.

5.4 The applicants have advised that anti-social behaviour occurs relatively frequently on Highlands Avenue. Highlands Avenue is a cul-de-sac with few houses and low traffic movements when the recycling centre is closed, so that vehicles using this road are generally not observed during evenings and hours of darkness, thereby making it an attractive environment for anti-social behaviour.

5.5 The social context for installing the street lighting is very much supported by planning policy. At the national level Para 96 of the NPPF promotes inclusive and safe places. At the local level, policies CP1, CP3, and CP6 support proposals that provide a functional, accessible, safe and secure environment through road safety, providing that there is no detrimental impact upon important ecological or landscape features so that the high quality of the environment is maintained. Policy CP11 also refers to the physical impact of development and seeks to control proposals outside development limits to maintain the quality of the environment.

5.6 The streetlights are powered by electricity and operate at 470 lumens. This is a very low level of lighting, in particular given that streetlights typically range from 600 to 1200 lumens. A low level lighting solution was also sought by the applicant to provide sufficient lighting of Highlands Avenue for traffic without having adverse consequences on the natural environment. It is noted that there was no objection to the previous application (ref 240343) for the erection of a footpath and nine streetlights on this and adjacent land on grounds of impact on fauna.

5.7 The Council considered that the previous application adversely impacted the character of the landscape setting by virtue of its inappropriate siting within a TPO woodland, valued landscape and countryside location. The streetlights themselves are of an attractive design, and are discreetly positioned adjacent to existing landscaping along the western side of Highlands Avenue. Physically, they are not considered to have an adverse impact upon the quality of the environment.

5.8 The Installation of the lights involved localised hand dug excavations to form pads for the lights with the installation of underground electric cabling. There was no direct loss of any significant trees as a result of the installation of the lights, with no facilitation pruning works. Whilst there has been some clearing of Rhododendron, this is an invasive/exotic species that detracts from the locally distinctive species compositions of this woodland area, so that its removal, if anything, has had a positive impact on the environment by improving the context of the existing deciduous woodland.

5.9 It was also considered that the previous application resulted in an adverse impact on TPO woodland through the removal of seedlings and vegetation, and will continue to harm the woodland by restricting the natural spread of trees self-seeding and regenerating in the area of the Woodland TPO. The installation of the lights essentially concerned cutting back the Rhododendron that had spread throughout the immediate woodland and dominated the vista along Highlands Avenue rather than removing any seedlings and vegetation.

5.10 An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) is submitted with the application and considers the potential long-term impact of the installation of the lights on the existing trees. The AIA recommends improving the structure of the soil and increasing the organic content to address any possible impacts on tree vitality, increase tree vigour and ensure long-term retention of the retained trees. To enable this, the AIA provides a range of mitigation measures that will ensure the soil is more capable of holding nutrients and moisture. A supporting Tree Protection Plan is provided showing the specific locations where these measures are to be implemented.

5.11 The AIA concludes that if the suggested remedial mitigation measures are implemented over a five year period there will be no long term impacts on tree vigour or long term tree retention as a result of the installation of the lights.

6. Conclusion

6.1 There are very clear social reasons supporting the installation of the streetlights. Specifically, these reasons are to create safer pedestrian and vehicular access and

discourage anti-social behaviour along Highlands Avenue. These social objectives are supported by national and local planning policy.

6.2 Planning policy further requires that the installation of the lights should not have any adverse consequences on the natural environment. The streetlights provide a very low level of lighting that will not have any adverse impact upon local fauna. They are discreetly positioned adjacent to Highlands Avenue with no harm to the quality of the environment and their installation has not resulted in the loss of any trees with no facilitation pruning works required. Their installation has essentially required cutting back Rhododendron that had spread up to Highlands Avenue. An AIA has been submitted with the application setting out remedial mitigation measures that can be implemented over a five year period, to ensure that there will be no long term impacts on tree vigour or long term tree retention as a result of the development.

6.3 On this basis, it is considered that the lights that have been installed comply with local planning policy and with no other material considerations to suggest that the application should be determined other than in accordance with the development plan, it is requested that planning permission be granted.