

Planning application: 261624

Site: Land west of Hogmoor Lane, Hurst

Proposal: Permission in Principle for a minimum of one and maximum of two homes, including access from Hogmoor Lane

To: Planning Officers, Wokingham Borough Council

I **object** to application 261624 and ask the Council to refuse Permission in Principle.

Although smaller than the earlier proposals for the wider field, the scheme does not overcome the fundamental objection to residential development in this location. The site remains agricultural countryside outside Hurst's settlement boundary and forms part of a substantial open frontage to Hogmoor Lane.

At Permission in Principle stage, the Council must decide whether the location, land use and amount of development are acceptable. The issues below therefore go to the principle of development and should not simply be deferred to a later Technical Details Consent application.

1. Conflict with the spatial strategy

The applicant accepts that the site lies outside the settlement boundary and within the countryside. The proposal therefore conflicts with the adopted development strategy.

Wokingham's housing-land-supply shortfall is an important consideration, but it does not make every site adjoining a settlement suitable for housing. The benefit would be limited to one or two market dwellings, with no identified affordable housing contribution.

The Council must weigh that modest benefit against the site-specific harm caused by extending residential development into the countryside.

2. The proposal is not genuine infill

The applicant describes the site as limited infill between existing homes. The submitted plans do not support that description. The red-line boundary has been drawn around part of a larger agricultural field. Its western side does not follow a strong existing landscape boundary, and the land remains open to the wider countryside. The illustrative layout shows two substantial residential plots extending deeply into the field, with houses, garages or outbuildings, gardens, drives and parking.

This is not the modest filling of a small gap in an otherwise continuous frontage. It would be the conversion of 0.48 hectares of agricultural land to residential use.

The 1999 appeal decision remains relevant. The Inspector identified the frontage as a substantial gap contributing to the semi-rural character of Hogmoor Lane. Although planning policy has changed, the physical and visual function of the land remains.

3. Urbanisation of Hogmoor Lane

The impact would extend beyond the footprints of two houses. Residential use would introduce:

- driveways, parking and garages;
- domestic gardens and boundary treatments;
- lighting, refuse storage and utilities;
- a new engineered access and culvert;
- regular domestic activity; and
- pressure to alter or manage existing vegetation.

The present sequence of rural lane, verge, ditch, hedge and open field would be replaced by domestic development. This is a consequence of the proposed land use and location, not merely a matter of detailed design.

4. Effect on the Area of Special Character

The site directly adjoins the Village Centre (Hurst) Area of Special Character. The applicant's case places too much emphasis on the AoSC's buildings and too little on its wider rural setting. The significance of the area also derives from its historic settlement form, rural lanes, trees, hedges, open land and relationship with the surrounding countryside.

The agricultural field, roadside ditch and vegetation help preserve the distinction between the historic village and the countryside. Residential development, lighting, parking and a new access would alter that relationship.

The site also adjoins Long Barn, which contributes to the historic character of this part of Hurst. The proposal would change its setting from an agricultural building beside open land to one increasingly enclosed by residential curtilages.

5. The heritage evidence assesses a different scheme

The submitted Heritage Statement was prepared for the earlier proposal for up to seven dwellings on a site of approximately 0.95 hectares extending to Broadwater Lane. It does not assess the present 0.48-hectare scheme or its new Hogmoor Lane access.

The current proposal has a different boundary, layout, access and relationship with Long Barn, roadside vegetation and the AoSC.

The applicant states that a scheme-specific heritage assessment would be submitted only at Technical Details Consent stage. That is inadequate where heritage

considerations affect whether this location is suitable for residential development in principle.

6. The access has not been properly demonstrated

The Transport Note estimates that two homes would generate little traffic, but it does not provide a detailed design or visibility assessment for the proposed site access onto Hogmoor Lane.

It does not demonstrate:

- achievable visibility splays;
- access geometry and gradients;
- the extent of vegetation removal;
- turning and manoeuvring;
- interaction with pedestrians and cyclists; or
- refuse and emergency access.

Low traffic volume does not itself establish that an access is safe.

The Hogmoor Lane/Broadwater Lane junction also remains unresolved. Three materially different options are presented:

1. no alteration;
2. entry-only and exit-only arrangements requiring traffic restrictions; or
3. substantial reconstruction as a single junction.

No option has been selected or shown to be approved and deliverable. The drawings describe the highway boundary as assumed and are feasibility proposals only.

7. Flood risk and drainage remain unresolved

The Flood Risk Assessment confirms mapped surface-water flood risk along the Hogmoor Lane ditch, which the proposed access must cross.

The report argues that the risk is overstated and proposes a larger culvert than those assumed downstream. However, it does not fully assess:

- blockage by vegetation or debris;
- downstream restrictions and backing-up;
- overtopping and exceedance flows;
- cumulative effects of another culvert; or
- safe access during an extreme event.

Residents are well aware, with photographic evidence to substantiate, that Hogmoor Lane routinely floods at times of high rainfall, with flood water flowing North and then being pumped back up to Broadwater Lane, which also floods. Both roads have been

closed to traffic on several occasions over the last 20 years we have lived in Hurst, with 'no passing' restrictions in place on both roads for 3-4 days at a time.

A complete drainage strategy has not been provided. There are no confirmed infiltration tests, runoff calculations, attenuation volumes, discharge rates, exceedance routes or maintenance arrangements.

The applicant has therefore not shown that houses, drives, access, drainage, landscaping and biodiversity measures can all be accommodated without increasing flood risk.

8. The tree report is also for the earlier scheme

The submitted arboricultural report assesses the previous seven-home proposal on a larger site. It does not assess the current access, drainage works or layout.

The current plans do not show a coordinated relationship between:

- trees and Root Protection Areas;
- visibility requirements;
- culvert and drainage works;
- utilities;
- construction access; and
- proposed buildings and gardens.

The report nevertheless confirms that the land has remained agricultural, that historic tree-lined boundaries survive, that the soils have naturally high groundwater and are susceptible to compaction, and that protected trees are present on or adjoining the wider site.

9. Overlap with the current appeal

The application overlaps land included within the developer's larger five-to-seven-dwelling proposal, which remains at appeal.

The Council should consider the present application in the context of that wider proposal and should not treat the red-line boundary as an isolated, naturally contained plot.

Granting Permission in Principle would establish residential use on part of the field while the applicant continues to pursue a larger development over overlapping land. This raises a legitimate concern about piecemeal or incremental development and the cumulative implications for the wider field.

10. The PiP route is poorly suited to this site

Although Permission in Principle is legally available for a proposal of this scale, it is not well suited to a site where access, drainage, heritage, trees and landscape constraints are fundamental to deciding whether the location is acceptable.

Conditions cannot be attached to Permission in Principle. Yet the applicant seeks to leave many essential matters until Technical Details Consent, including the precise access, drainage strategy and scheme-specific heritage and arboricultural assessments.

The Council is therefore being asked to establish residential use before it has been shown that a coherent and acceptable scheme can actually be delivered.

Planning balance

The proposal would provide one or two additional homes. Against that limited benefit, it would:

- conflict with the countryside spatial strategy;
- convert part of a wider agricultural field to residential use;
- fail to constitute genuine small-gap infill;
- erode the open rural frontage to Hogmoor Lane;
- affect the setting of the AoSC and Long Barn;
- rely on heritage and tree reports prepared for a different scheme;
- leave access and junction arrangements unresolved;
- introduce a culverted access across a mapped surface-water route; and
- establish residential use on land already included within an outstanding appeal.

These harms concern the principle of development and cannot all be remedied through later design details.

The site is not a small infill plot but part of a wider agricultural field outside the settlement boundary. Residential development would urbanise Hogmoor Lane, harm the rural setting of the Village Centre Area of Special Character and alter the relationship between Long Barn, the settlement edge and the surrounding countryside.

The applicant has also failed to provide current, coordinated evidence demonstrating that safe access, drainage, tree protection, heritage protection and landscape mitigation can be achieved.

For these reasons, the adverse effects would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited benefit of one or two additional dwellings, and I urge refusal of this application.

Thank you,

Nick Willson

Hurst resident and NHVS Planning Lead