

MEMORANDUM

From:	Catherine Brimble Senior Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	242066
Address:	Ascot House, Finchampstead Road, Wokingham, RG40 2NW.		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed raising and modification of the roof of the existing building plus the erection of an extension to form additional first, second and third floor accommodation in order to create 10 no. additional dwellings with car parking, cycle parking, refuse stores, landscaping and associated works.		
Type of Development:	Major Dwellings (10+)		
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 application site is located within Wokingham Town Centre boundary area with the Elms Field and Carnival Pool developments recently completed to the north and north-west of the site separated by Finchampstead Road and Denmark Street. This includes significant changes to the built form at the southern end of Wokingham Town Centre including the constriction of the Premier Inn, Aldi supermarket and new leisure centre at the Carnival Hub.

The application site is located to the east of Finchampstead Road and Denmark Street directly adjacent to a roundabout defining the edge to this area. Although the site is included in the town centre boundary it also strongly relates to the adjacent residential areas of Kendrick Close, Norton Road and Carey Road and forms a transitional area from the commercial areas of the town centre to the more urban residential areas to the north and east where the majority of these dwellings are two storeys in height.

The existing building on the site has recently been converted from offices to 24 residential units across the basement, ground floor and first floor of the building. It is important to note that the part of the building closest to the adjacent roundabout consists of a basement and ground floor level where the floor levels are staggered

against the remaining part of the building which has a ground floor and first floor. The proposed development for 10 additional apartments includes first, second and roof level extensions for the existing part of the building above the basement (equivalent of 2.5 storeys), whereas the remainder of the building will be increased in height by 1.5 storeys. There will also be an extension of the southern elevation at first floor level and above to create amenity space for three floors which will also extend the roofline over this area creating an additional 3 storeys in this area.

The design process has been set out in the DAS including the form and materials of the extensions. This indicates the second floor will be set back on two of the elevations to reduce the dominance of this upper floor and to increase visual separation to existing adjacent dwellings. A number of 3D images showing the proposed changes to the existing building to create the upper floors and sections are also provided, which is helpful in assessing the proposal.

The application is accompanied by a Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (TVIA) prepared by Bryand Landscape Planning and dated March 2024. This document considers the effects of the proposed development on the surrounding area and is accompanied by a number of Accurate Visual Representations (AVR's) for all viewpoints. For two of the viewpoints (1 & 3) rendered AVR's have been provided giving an indication of how the development is likely to be perceived from these particular viewpoints. Details of all AVR's are shown in Appendix B.

The TVIA indicates the most visible changes will be seen either from Kendrick Close, Wellington Road roundabout or further west along Wellington Road. There will be no views from Wokingham Town Centre Conservation Area. As the proposals indicate a 2.5 storey increase on the part of the building closest to the roundabout, there will be a change in view from viewpoints 1, 3, 5 and 7 with the upper floor and roof visible above the existing vegetation growing on land adjacent to Wellington Road and which currently screens the majority of the building in views 3, 5, and 7. The TVIA considers the visual effects from viewpoints 1, 3 and 7 to be moderate and neutral. From viewpoint 5, minor and neutral. It is not clear from the methodology in Appendix A what the definition of 'moderate' is in relation to the effect given in Table A.7. If the effect is neutral as listed in Table A.8 where the effect is indiscernible on the existing visual amenity of the four viewpoints as listed, how can this change be 'Moderate' as well. The 'Moderate' definition will need further explanation.

In my opinion I don't agree that the change will have an indiscernible effect on the views listed above, as the proposed taller building will be seen above the existing vegetation on the western boundary of the site and so will become a significant structure on the skyline above a mostly well vegetated horizon. I consider this to be of detriment to the edge of the town centre where it transitions to the residential area of mainly individual dwellings rather than apartments. The change in scale of the building can be clearly seen in representative View 1 on page 31 of the TVIA. It is noted that the existing residents of Kendrick Close have a view of the current extent of Ascot House, however this will increase in size which may feel overbearing from some outlooks although it is understood that the set back of the second floor should alleviate some of those concerns.

The application is also accompanied by a Landscape Design Strategy and Landscape Masterplan. Due to the requirement for additional parking bays and limited space around the site, the scope for substantial additional planting to mitigate and visually soften the increased height of the building, is severely limited. The landscape scheme will include a small number of trees however, these are not proposed to be ultimately large growing trees due to the close proximity of the trees to the buildings and so therefore will not be a large mitigating factor to the increased the height and massing of the building.

A Construction Method Statement has been provided with the application which provides some information as to the site setup during the construction period. Although not strictly a landscape issue I find it very difficult to understand how the additional storeys will be constructed without having a materially negative impact on the existing residents of Ascot House. Not only will the construction works have substantial detrimental environmental effects on the existing apartments through issues such as, noise, dust, vibration and smell, but also the limited external space to the rear of the building for a site compound will have an impact on the existing residents parking. The CMS does talk about parking for construction workers, however it is clear from the plans submitted with the document that this cannot be accommodated on site.

In conclusion I consider that there will be some adverse visual effects from the proposed increased in height of the existing building, however these effects will be limited to a few near viewpoints. The form of the development will be larger than the existing building and will be seen above the existing vegetated skyline when looking towards the site from the west along Waterloo Road, however the proposals will be seen in the context of other larger buildings such as Carnival Hub and the Premier Inn. The main detrimental visual effects will be in relation to the existing dwellings in Kendrick Close and Norton Road and will be a matter to be considered in the wider planning balance.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

If the application is considered acceptable the following condition will need to be included:

CL4 – Landscaping small scale but also to include reference to hard materials.

Date:

14th November 2024

Signed:

C. Brimble