

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261460
Site Address:	Woodland Glade adj to, 6 St. Michaels Cottages, Old Wokingham Road, Wokingham, Berkshire, RG403DU
Expiry Date:	27 July 2026
Site Visit Date:	09 July 2026
Proposal: Permission in principle application for the proposed development of 2no. self-build 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 CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
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 TB25 – Archaeology
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation
Wokingham Borough	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS3 – Development within or adjacent to major and modest settlements SS5 – Development in the countryside

Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS10 – Meeting our housing needs CE3 – Environmental standards for residential development C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C3 – Active travel H6 – Self-build and custom build FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE3 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design NE6 – Valued landscapes DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity HC5 – Environmental protection HC6 – Air pollution and air quality
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance Crowthorne Village Design Statement

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
221368	Outline planning application for the proposed erection of 4 no. detached properties with associated garages and access.(Access to be considered).	Application Withdrawn 12/07/2022
212154	Full application for the proposed erection of 4no. detached dwellings,including 2no. four bedroom dwellings and 2no. five bedroom dwellings,4no. detached garages, landscaping and new vehicular crossover.	Application Withdrawn, 19/10/2021
202093	Land between Pinewood Villas and St Michael's Cottages, Old Wokingham Road, Crowthorne, Wokingham	Replied, 07/09/2020
F/2005/4820	Change of use from woodland to residential curtilage.	Refused, 20/07/2005 Dismissed at appeal on 28/11/2005

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No objections.
WBC Drainage – No objections, subject to a condition.

WBC Highways – No objections, subject to conditions.
WBC Landscape and Trees – Objects to the proposed development.
WBC CIL - This development will be liable for CIL.
WBC Ecology – No comments received.
WBC Waste Services – No comments received.
WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received.

External

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received.

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council No comments received

Ward Member(s) No comments received

Neighbours Representations were received from the following properties:

- 4 St Michaels Cottages, RG40 3DU
- 6 St Michaels Cottages, RG40 3DU
- Helmsdale, RG12 0TA
- 100 Pinehill Road, RG45 7JR
- 45 Norwood Gardens, UB4 9LU
- 26 Butler Road, RG45 6QY
- 2 St Michael Cottages, RG40 3DU
- Pinewood Villas, RG40 3EH
- 9 Clayhill Close, RG12 9FQ
- Old Wokingham Road, RG40 3AQ (Wokingham Without Parish Council)
- 3 St Michaels Cottages, RG40 3DU
- 19 The Chase, RG45 6HT

The comments received are summarised as follows:

Woodland / Character

- Loss of established woodland and mature trees.
- Harm to semi-rural character and green buffer.
- Further erosion of remaining green space from ongoing development.
- Woodland loss considered irreversible.

Wildlife / Ecology

- Site supports bats, birds, deer, hedgehogs and other wildlife.
- Concern over loss of habitat and biodiversity.
- New planting would not replace mature woodland.

Trees

	- Concerns regarding impact on TPO trees. - Future pressure to remove retained trees. <u>Highways / Traffic</u> - Old Wokingham Road already busy. - Concerns over access, visibility and roundabout safety. - Two additional dwellings would increase traffic pressure. <u>Drainage</u> - Woodland currently helps absorb rainfall. - Concern that buildings and hard surfaces could worsen surface water flooding. <u>Cumulative Development</u> - Area has already seen significant housing growth. - Further development viewed as contributing to loss of countryside, increased traffic and pressure on infrastructure. <u>Planning / Design Concerns</u> - Lack of detailed plans and ecological information. - Concerns over unclear dwelling locations and tree impacts. - Parish Council notes site is outside settlement area. <u>Supporting Comment received by 19 The Chase – RG45 6HT</u> - Supports proposal as an opportunity for a self-build plot.
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APPRAISAL

Introduction:

The permission in principle (“PiP”) consent route separates the consideration of matters of principle for the proposed development from the technical details of the development. The scope of a permission in principle application is limited to location, land use and amount of development (stage 1). Other matters are considered at the technical details consent stage (stage 2).

The PPG advises that the scope of permission in principle is limited to location, land use and amount of development. Whether permission in principle should be granted should bear in mind the effects of the proposal’s location, land use and amount of development on material considerations that are required to be considered.

Site Description and Proposed Development:

The application site is located on the western side of Old Wokingham Road, close to its junction with Nine Mile Ride, to the north of Crowthorne village. The site comprises an area of woodland situated between a row of existing cottages to the south and No. 2 Old Wokingham Road to the north. It occupies a transitional position at the edge of the settlement, lying within designated countryside to the north whilst adjoining recently constructed residential development to the south, thereby forming the interface between the built-up area and the surrounding rural landscape.

Permission in Principle is sought for the erection of up to two residential dwellings, comprising one two-bedroom dwelling and one three-bedroom dwelling.

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Core Strategy Policy CP9 (Scale and location of development proposals) directs development to locations within development limits and 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”.

The site is not located within development limits and is not previously developed land. Therefore, the proposal is contrary to Policy CP9 in principle.

Development proposals within the designated countryside should be assessed against Core Strategy Policy CP11 (Proposals outside Development Limits). Policy CP11 states that development proposals will not normally be permitted in the countryside except where one or more of the specified exceptions apply:

- 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 application proposal does not meet any of these specified exceptions and is therefore contrary to the spatial strategy as a starting point.

The proposal does not meet any of the exceptions and therefore conflicts with CP11.

Turning to the overall aim of Policy CP11, this is to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. The supporting text also sets out that restricting development outside of settlements is also important because they are not generally well located for facilities and services and it helps to minimise people's reliance on private cars. The proposal would also conflict with the aims of the policy due to the failure to maintain the quality of the environment and the unsustainable location. These considerations are assessed further in this report.

In summary the principle of development in this location conflicts with the development plan.

Emerging Local Plan Update:

The Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023–2040: Proposed Submission Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by an independent Planning Inspector on Friday 28 February 2025. Part One hearing sessions were completed in November 2025 and Part Two hearing sessions finished on 10 July 2026. Adoption of the Plan is expected towards the end of 2026 or beginning of 2027.

Weight to be attributed to the emerging policy is informed by paragraph 49 of the NPPF 2024. This advises that weight can be applied according to the plan's stage of preparation, the extent to which there are unresolved objections, and the degree of consistency with the NPPF. However, due to outstanding representations as a whole, those policies relevant to the location of housing within the LPU are afforded limited weight.

Nonetheless, the site was not put forward as a Submitted Site for housing in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) (2021) which considered the broad suitability, availability and achievability of land promoted across the borough.

The site is not an allocated site in the Local Plan Update and therefore conflicts with the emerging Development Plan. This also weighs against this permission in principle application.

Sustainability:

Policy CP9 of the Core Strategy states *"the scale of development proposals in the 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:

‘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 text to 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.’

The Borough Design Guide SPD states “*if places are to be sustainable then the aim should be to create: Walkable neighbourhoods, with a range of facilities within 10 minutes walking distance of residential areas, which encourage people to travel on foot or by bicycle.*” Walkable neighbourhoods are defined in Manual for Streets (MfS) as those typically characterised by having a range of facilities within 10 minutes walking distance from residential areas. Manual for Streets clarifies that 10 minutes walking distance is roughly 800 metres. The Urban Design Compendium further advises:

‘People should be able to walk in 2-3 minutes (250 metres) to the post box or telephone box: the newsagent’s should be within 5 minutes (400 metres). There should be local shops, the bus stop, the health centre and perhaps a primary school within a walking distance of (say) 10 minutes (800 metres).’

The National Design Guide states that a walkable means ‘local facilities are within walking distance, generally considered to be no more than a 10 minute walk (800m radius)’.

The council’s Living Streets Guidance is based on The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) document. This advises that 400 metres is a desirable walking distance outside of city centres; 800 metres is stated as acceptable and 1,200 metres is the preferred maximum to certain facilities. The document however further states that these suggested walking distances are for pedestrians without a mobility impairment. The definition of a pedestrian in MfS includes people of all ages, sizes and abilities. Therefore, the maximum distance in the CIHT document does not take into account the disabled, elderly or small children and is referred to as an upper limit: the maximum threshold would not result in an inclusively located development

where people of all ages, sizes and abilities would be encouraged to walk to local services.

Along with distances, the movement framework should be safe, convenient and inclusive. This is set out in CS policy CP2, Manual for Streets and the National Design Guide.

Policy CP6 refers to encouraging a modal shift away from the use of private motor vehicles. Therefore, whilst the upper walking distances recommend what could be deemed walkable, the policy aim is not just to locate development where some individuals may choose to walk: it is to locate development in areas with best access to existing good services to actively encourage a modal shift where the whole community would be encouraged to utilise sustainable modes of transport.

Assessment:

The site is located on a section of Wokingham Road away from the existing development to the south and as a consequence, the pedestrian infrastructure in the immediate location is limited. There is only a footpath on one side of the road which is narrow and adjacent to a well trafficked road. There is also limited passive surveillance along this section of the road which impacts the desirability of walking. This does not provide an attractive walking route for all pedestrians or promote walking.

Notwithstanding the outline planning permission granted by Bracknell Forest Council for up to 1,000 dwellings at the former TRL site to the south (BFC reference 13/00575/OUT), the application site remains, in its current context, poorly served by public transport and day-to-day facilities. There are limited facilities within 800 metres of the site, and the applicant has provided no clear evidence to demonstrate otherwise. While some facilities exist further within the settlement limits, the walking routes to those facilities appear to exceed recommended distances. In the absence of robust supporting information from the applicant, it has not been demonstrated that future occupiers would have convenient access to local services by sustainable modes of transport.

In terms of access to local services and facilities, a public house is approximately 0.5km from the site and a primary school is approximately 0.85km away. However, other essential facilities, including healthcare, employment opportunities and secondary education, are more than 1.3km from the site. This further limits the ability of future residents to access day-to-day services conveniently by walking, cycling or public transport.

There are two bus stops near the site which are served by buses 125A and 125B providing routes into Wokingham, however the frequency does not meet the good service criteria as set out in policy CP6:

'a) At least a thirty minute service frequency during peak times (7:00 to 9:00 and 16:00 to 19:00 Monday to Saturday); and

b) At least an hourly service frequency during off-peak hours (9:00 to 16:00 and 19:00 to 22:00 Monday to Saturday and between 7:00 and 22:00 on Sundays).'

In practice, there are no Sunday services, weekday peak services do not operate at a 30-minute frequency, and off-peak services operate at intervals exceeding one hour. Furthermore, there are no evening services, with the last buses towards Wokingham operating at approximately 6:00pm. The nearby bus stops are also not equipped with shelters or seating, reducing their attractiveness and accessibility, particularly during adverse weather conditions.

With regard to cycling, there is currently no dedicated cycling infrastructure along this section of Old Wokingham Road, with only limited provision available along Nine Mile Ride. The section of road fronting the site is subject to a 40mph speed limit, increasing to the national speed limit approximately 45 metres south of Sawpit Road. Consequently, cyclists would be required to share the carriageway with general traffic.

Under Local Transport Note 1/20 (LTN 1/20), such conditions are categorised as ‘mixed traffic’. LTN 1/20 identifies mixed traffic environments with speed limits of 40mph as being suitable for few users, with potential safety concerns and the likelihood of excluding many potential cyclists. The guidance advises that cycling infrastructure should provide a level of safety and comfort suitable for most users.

Accordingly, the surrounding highway environment provides limited opportunities for safe and attractive cycling. The absence of dedicated infrastructure, combined with the speed and nature of the surrounding road network, means cycling is unlikely to represent a realistic or attractive transport choice for future occupiers.

Overall, the site currently has limited accessibility by sustainable transport modes. Future occupiers would be likely to rely on private motor vehicles to access essential services and facilities, which would conflict with the sustainable transport objectives of the Development Plan and the aims of national planning policy to reduce reliance on the private car.

Character of the Area:

Core Strategy Policy CP1, Sustainable Development, states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that “maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment”.

Core Strategy Policy CP3, General Principles for Development, states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that are appropriate in scale, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character for the area.

Policy CC03, Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping, of the MDD Local Plan states that development proposals resulting in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of green infrastructure will not be acceptable. The supporting text explains that green infrastructure includes countryside.

MDD Local Plan Policy TB21, Landscape Character, states that proposals should retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape. The policy also requires proposals to address the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment.

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, among other matters, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

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 application site comprises an undeveloped greenfield parcel within designated countryside, occupied by mature woodland, scrub and grassland mosaic. The site is bounded to the east and west by broadleaved ancient woodland and forms part of the wider woodland landscape identified within Landscape Character Area M1 – Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands. This landscape is characterised by extensive woodland cover, a strong sense of enclosure and a distinctly rural, tranquil character. Although the site adjoins the northern edge of recent residential development to the south, it nevertheless forms part of the transitional landscape between the defined settlement and the open countryside beyond.

The Council's Trees and Landscape Officer objects to the proposal on the basis that the site lies within protected woodland covered by Tree Preservation Order (TPO) 1483/2014. The Officer advises that the woodland designation seeks to protect the woodland as a whole, including its natural regeneration and ecological function. The indicative development would necessitate the removal of woodland vegetation, including Poplar and Holly, together with the loss of deadwood associated with mature Oaks, all of which contribute to the biodiversity and character of the woodland. Furthermore, the indicative layout places one of the proposed dwellings within the Root Protection Area of Tree T23, identified as a notable tree with veteran potential, without providing an appropriate buffer.

Whilst the detailed layout is not for consideration at this stage, the principle of introducing two permanent dwellings within this woodland setting remains a material consideration. The site currently forms part of a continuous wooded landscape which provides an important visual and physical transition between the urban edge of Crowthorne and the surrounding countryside. Its undeveloped nature contributes positively to the landscape character and reinforces the distinction between the settlement and the wider rural area.

The introduction of residential development in this location would inevitably result in the loss and fragmentation of woodland and associated green infrastructure, together with the introduction of domestic built form, residential paraphernalia, hardstanding, access arrangements and associated activity into an otherwise undeveloped woodland setting. Collectively, these changes would erode the verdant character of the site, diminish its role as a transitional landscape, and extend the influence of built development further into the countryside. The proposal would therefore represent an urbanising encroachment that would fail to conserve or enhance the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

The proposal is also considered to conflict with the objectives of Policy CC03, which seeks to resist the loss, fragmentation or isolation of green infrastructure, and Policy TB21, which requires development to retain and enhance the landscape character of the Borough. Similarly, the proposal would fail to satisfy Core Strategy Policies CP1 and CP3, which seek high quality development that responds appropriately to its surroundings, and would not accord with paragraph 187 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which requires planning decisions to recognise and enhance the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Accordingly, notwithstanding that the application seeks Permission in Principle only, Officers consider that the principle of residential development on this site would result in unacceptable harm to the character of the countryside and the wider woodland landscape. The proposal is therefore considered to conflict with Policies CP1, CP3, CC03 and TB21 of the Development Plan, together with the relevant provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

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 two dwellings raise any obvious in-principle amenity constraints. Based on the information submitted with this application, no fundamental concerns have been identified as the site is of sufficient size to accommodate two dwellings.

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

Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy seeks to ensure development does not result in highway problems and promotes sustainable travel.

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 two 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 flooding and Drainage:

Policy CC09 of the MDD requires all sources of flood risk, including historic flooding, to be taken into account at all relevant stages of the planning process, in order to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding.

The site lies within an area where groundwater levels are predicted to be between 0.025m and 0.5m below ground level. Within this zone, there is a risk of groundwater flooding to both surface and subsurface assets, with the potential for groundwater to emerge locally at the surface.

Paragraph 023 of the Planning Practice Guidance advises that all forms of flooding should be treated consistently with river and tidal flooding when mapping probability and assessing vulnerability, so that the sequential approach can be applied to all areas of flood risk.

The Council's evidence base supporting the emerging Local Plan includes a document entitled the Sequential and Exception Test. This identifies the circumstances in which sites may be regarded as being at low risk of flooding and whether a Sequential Test is required. The application site does not meet the criteria for a low-risk site, as more than 75% of the site falls within the second highest groundwater flood risk category identified by the JBA Groundwater Mapping, where groundwater is predicted to be between 0.025m and 0.5m below ground level during a 1 in 100-year event.

Paragraph 173 of the NPPF states that *“the sequential test should be used in areas known to be at risk now or in the future from any form of flooding”*.

Paragraph 174 of the NPPF further states that:

“The aim of the sequential test is to steer new development to areas with the lowest risk of flooding from any source. Development should not be allocated or permitted if there are reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas with a lower risk of flooding.”

The requirements of paragraphs 173 and 174 of the NPPF are reinforced by Policy CP9 of the Core Strategy and Policy CC09 of the MDD. Together, these policies require development to be directed to areas at the lowest risk of flooding through application of the sequential approach. National policy is clear that avoiding flood risk is the primary objective.

No Sequential Test has been submitted with the application. It has therefore not been demonstrated that there are no reasonably available and suitable alternative sites at a lower risk of flooding. In the absence of that evidence, the Local Planning Authority cannot be satisfied that the development has been directed to an area of lowest flood risk, as required by national and local planning policy.

The Lead Local Flood Authority has also requested additional information, including a Surface Water Drainage Strategy. Although detailed drainage design would usually be considered at the Technical Details Consent stage, the identified groundwater flood risk raises fundamental concerns about the feasibility and effectiveness of sustainable drainage solutions, including infiltration-based SuDS. The need for further flood-risk

evidence reinforces that flood risk is a principal consideration affecting the suitability of the site for development.

The absence of a Sequential Test in an area at risk of flooding goes to the heart of the principle of development and whether the site is appropriate for residential development. It is not a matter that can properly be deferred to the Technical Details Consent stage. The same approach was taken by the Inspector in a recent Permission in Principle appeal, reference 6009352, where they stated:

“Accordingly, I find that the proposal would result in an unacceptable risk from flooding. In the absence of both a Sequential Test and a site-specific FRA, it has not been demonstrated that the development would be directed to land at the lowest risk of flooding, that it would be safe for its lifetime, or that it would not increase flood risk on the site or elsewhere. Furthermore, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that surface water arising from the development could be managed in a sustainable manner. The proposal therefore conflicts with Chapter 14 of the Framework and Policies CC09 and CC10 of the MDD Local Plan, which seek to ensure that all sources of flood risk are appropriately assessed and that development is directed away from areas at risk of flooding.”

The application site is located within an area identified as being at risk of groundwater flooding. In the absence of a Sequential Test, the applicant has failed to demonstrate that there are no reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas at a lower risk of flooding. The Local Planning Authority is therefore not satisfied that the principle of development is acceptable on this site. The proposal is consequently contrary to paragraphs 173 and 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy CP9 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy and Policy CC09 and CC10 of the Managing Development Delivery Plan, which seek to ensure that development is directed away from areas at risk of flooding and that all sources of flood risk are appropriately assessed through application of the sequential approach.

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

All species of bats receive special protection under UK law and it is a criminal offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (The Habitat Regulations), deliberately or recklessly to destroy or damage their roosts, or to disturb, kill or injure them without first having obtained the relevant licence for derogation from the regulations from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (the SNCO - Natural England in England).

Whilst the application site is not identified as lying within a bat roost alert area on the Council's mapping system, a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal submitted in support of a previous pre-application indicates that the application site has the potential to support protected species and priority habitats. As such, there is potential for the proposed development to affect ecological interests. 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.

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. 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 Habitat development (Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area) (TBH SPA):

The application site is located within the 5km zone of the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area. The Thames Basin Heath is a qualifying European site. Policy CP8 of the Core Strategy focuses on the Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area and outlines when mitigation is required. In the 5km zone, all residential proposals that include a net increase of 1 or more dwellings are required to provide mitigation for the TBH SPA.

Under Article 5B of the Town and Country Planning (Permission in Principle) Order 2017 (as amended), permission in principle must not be granted for habitats development. In this case, the Local Planning Authority cannot, at the permission in principle stage, conclude that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. The proposal therefore constitutes habitats development, for which permission in principle is expressly prohibited.

The case law established at *People over Wind and Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta* ECLI:EU:C:2018:244 requires the decision maker, when considering the effect that a proposal may have on such a European Site, to consider mitigation within an appropriate assessment rather than at screening stage. Accordingly, where development is likely to have a significant effect on a qualifying European Site without any mitigating measures in place, it is necessary that an appropriate assessment should be undertaken before the consideration of the grant of permission in principle. This is stated in the PPG (Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 58-005-20190315).

Within the Government PPG, paragraph 005 in full reads:

Can local planning authorities grant permission in principle to sites that have been subject to a Habitats assessment?

Permission in principle must not be granted for development which is habitats development. From 28 December 2018 habitats development means development which is likely to have a significant effect on a qualifying European site or a European offshore marine site, referred to as [habitats sites](#) in the National Planning Policy Framework (either alone or in combination with other plans or projects); is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site, and; the [competent authority](#) has not given consent, permission, or other authorisation in accordance with [regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#). This means for sites where development is likely to have a significant effect on a qualifying European site or a European offshore marine site without any mitigating measures in place, the local planning authority should ensure an appropriate assessment has been undertaken before consideration of the grant of

A legal agreement to secure the necessary SPA mitigation cannot be completed at the Permission in Principle stage, as confirmed by Planning Practice Guidance (Reference ID: 58-022-20180615). As the likely significant effect on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA arises from matters determined at this stage, namely the site's location, the proposed residential use and the amount of development, the Council must be satisfied before granting Permission in Principle that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of the protected site. In the absence of a mechanism to secure mitigation at this stage, that conclusion cannot be reached. This matter therefore cannot be deferred to the subsequent Technical Details Consent stage.

This position was also recently confirmed in an appeal (ref: 6009352) for a PiP within the borough that was located in the 5km TBH SPA zone. The Inspector concluded:

“Furthermore, the PPG advises that Permission in Principle must not be granted for habitats development. Where development is likely to have a significant effect on a qualifying European site in the absence of mitigation measures, the decision-maker must be satisfied, before granting Permission in Principle, that any likely significant effects can be appropriately avoided or mitigated. In this case, no avoidance or mitigation measures have been secured. Consequently, I have no substantive basis upon which to conclude that the recreational impacts arising from the proposal would be avoided or mitigated, and it has not been demonstrated that the proposal would not adversely affect the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. This is not a matter that can be deferred to the Technical Details Consent stage.

Therefore, adverse effects on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA cannot be ruled out. In the absence of any secured mitigation mechanism, the proposal conflicts with Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan (May 2009) and Policies CP4 and CP8 of the Core Strategy. Given my conclusions on the main issues, it is neither necessary nor proportionate for me to undertake a formal Appropriate Assessment or pursue the matter further.”

Hence, notwithstanding the potential mitigation framework outlined in the Appropriate Assessment, such measures cannot be secured or relied upon at the Permission in

Principle stage and therefore cannot be taken into account in determining this application.

Archaeology:

The application site lies within a consultation zone for an area of archaeological interest. Berkshire Archaeology raise no objections to the proposals, subject to securing an archaeology evaluation and mitigation at TDC stage.

Environmental Health:

No contaminated land constraints have been identified from the Council's Environmental Health records. Accordingly, the Council's Environmental Health Officer raises no objection to the proposal in principle on contaminated land grounds.

Housing Land Supply:

The NPPF (Dec 2024) at paragraph 78 requires LPAs to identify a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than 5 years old. 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 impact is considered further in the Planning Balance section below.

Self Build:

The description of development refers to self-build plots but this would be a technical matter and cannot be secured at the first stage of a permission in principle application. No conditions or legal agreement can be imposed or tied to this first-stage application. In addition, the Council Topic Paper on Self-build and Custom Housebuilding lists the number of people who joined Part 1 of the self-build register between 1 April 2016 and 30 October 2023, which totalled 97. Table 2 of the paper highlights that the Council permitted 250 self-build CIL exemptions within the same period, which is significantly greater than those on the register.

Planning Balance:

The proposal would provide up to two additional dwellings and would make a limited contribution to housing supply at a time when the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing land. It would also generate limited economic benefits through construction activity and future household expenditure. These benefits attract positive weight, but that weight is limited given the small scale of the development proposed.

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. 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 proposal would also cause harm to the character and appearance of the countryside. The site forms part of a wider wooded landscape and provides a transition between the built-up settlement and the surrounding countryside. The introduction of residential development would result in the loss and fragmentation of woodland and green infrastructure, together with built form, domestic activity and associated residential features. This would materially harm the rural character and appearance of the site and its surroundings.

The site is situated in the countryside and is not connected to the defined settlement limits. Future occupiers would be likely to rely on private motor vehicles to access day-to-day services, facilities and employment opportunities. The proposal therefore conflicts with the objectives of Policies CP6, CP9 and CP11, which seek to promote sustainable patterns of development and reduce dependence on the private car.

In addition, the proposal constitutes habitats development because the site lies within the zone of influence of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area. In the absence of mitigation secured at the Permission in Principle stage, the Council cannot conclude that the proposal would avoid an adverse effect on the integrity of the SPA. Permission in Principle must not be granted for habitats development where such effects cannot be excluded. The proposal therefore conflicts with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, Policy CP8 and national policy. This matter weighs decisively against the proposal.

The proposal is also unacceptable in flood risk terms. The site is located within an area identified as being at risk of groundwater flooding and no Sequential Test has been submitted. It has therefore not been demonstrated that the development would be directed to land at the lowest risk of flooding, contrary to national and local planning policy.

As the proposal affects a habitats site, which is an asset of particular importance identified in Footnote 7 to the Framework, Paragraph 11(d)(i) of the NPPF is engaged and provides a strong reason for refusing permission. Whilst the council cannot demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply, this impact disengages the tilted balance. The proposal is contrary to the development plan and unacceptable in a flat planning balance.

The site is also within an area at risk of groundwater flooding. The failure to submit a Sequential Test is contrary to national flood risk policy, which seeks to avoid flood risk in the first instance by directing development to areas of lowest risk. This provides a further strong policy reason for refusing permission and Paragraph 11(d)(i) of the NPPF is also engaged for this reason.

Even if paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the NPPF were engaged, the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the limited benefits when assessed against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole.

For these reasons and having regard to the development plan as a whole, the proposal does not represent sustainable development. The conflicts with the development plan, national flood risk policy and the statutory habitats protection regime are substantial and overriding. 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.

Reasons for refusal:

1. The proposed development is outside of and unconnected to development limits and within the countryside, contrary to the spatial strategy and objectives of the development plan and to Policies CP1, CP3, CP6, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, Policies CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan and sections 2, 4, 9 and 15 of the NPPF.
2. The application site is within a poorly sustainable location that would not encourage a modal shift towards sustainable modes of transport, by reason of the countryside location outside of settlement limits, distances to facilities and services, lack of good public transport links and poor quality of the walking/cycling environment, contrary to Policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, Policies CC01 and CC02 of the MDD Local Plan and sections 8 and 9 of the NPPF.
3. The proposal would result in unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area by introducing residential development into an undeveloped woodland setting. The development would erode the site's role as an important transitional area between the urban edge and the surrounding countryside, which currently contributes positively to the rural character and visual quality of the area. This would be contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy, and Policies CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment and section 15 of the NPPF.

4. In accordance with the National Planning Policy Guidance, permission in principle must not be granted for development which is habitats development. The application site lies within the 5km zone of influence of the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, which is a qualifying European site. The proposal fails to provide avoidance measures for the adverse effect on the integrity of the European protected site which renders the proposal as habitats development. As such, the LPA is unable to satisfy itself that the proposals include adequate mitigation measures to prevent the proposed development from having an adverse effect on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, in line with the requirements of Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended and Article 6(3) of Directive 92/43/EEC. The proposal would be contrary to Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan, Policies CP8 and CP4 of the Core Strategy.

5. The application site is located within an area identified as being at risk of groundwater flooding. In the absence of a Sequential Test, the applicant has failed to demonstrate that there are no reasonably available sites appropriate for the proposed development in areas at a lower risk of flooding. The Local Planning Authority is therefore not satisfied that the principle of development is acceptable on this site. The proposal is consequently contrary to paragraphs 173 and 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy CP9 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy and Policy CC09 and CC10 of the Managing Development Delivery Plan, which seek to ensure that development is directed away from areas at risk of flooding and that all sources of flood risk are appropriately assessed through application of the sequential approach.

RECOMMENDATION	
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Conditions agreed:	Not required
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Recommendation:	Refuse
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Date:	16 July 2026
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Earliest date for decision:	14 July 2026
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>MC</i>
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Date:	27.07.2026
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