



Head of Development Control
Wokingham Borough Council

23.01.26

(by email only)

AM2P Ref: J.153
LPA Ref: Appl 253113

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Application 253113 – Replacement Dwelling at Clear View Cottage, Whistley Green, Hurst

I write on behalf of the residents of Whistley Green Farmhouse, neighbours of the above property, in order to object to the above planning application. As will be explained, the proposal is in clear conflict with relevant development plan policies, is not supported by any material considerations, and should be refused accordingly.

It is acknowledged that due to the application site lying within the settlement boundary, the principle of a replacement dwelling would typically be appropriate and I should clarify that the residents of Whistley Green Farmhouse would not wish to prevent the redevelopment of the site with an appropriate replacement dwelling. However, for the reasons set out below, the current proposal is far from appropriate.

Adverse impact upon local character

Policy CP3 of the Council's Core Strategy sets out the general principles expected of new development, including that they;

'Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life'.

In this instance the mass, built form and height are not appropriate to the character of the area.

As is apparent from the submitted Location & Block Plan, which shows a comparison of the existing footprint of the house, compared to that proposed, there will be a substantial increase in the mass of the proposed dwelling. A

comparison of existing and proposed elevations also demonstrates that the proposed scheme would be substantially larger and of significantly greater mass than the existing dwelling on site. The height is also proposed to increase by a significant 2.75m. This will result in the building appearing notably higher than its immediate neighbour in the streetscene, Whistley Green Farmhouse. A very unbalanced relationship will result when viewed from the street, with the proposed dwelling towering above its neighbour, and appearing notably different to the current relationship.

This substantial proposed increase is further apparent through the resulting floorspace. The existing floorspace of approximately 180 sq m will be more than trebled to a proposed 580 sq m. To provide some context, a typical large 2 bedroom apartment is in the region of 70 sq m. The proposed scheme in this instance could accommodate 9 x 2 bedroom apartments – it is the scale of a considerable apartment block or small Nursing Home.

Such a disproportionate increase might be considered appropriate if most of the surrounding properties, and underlying character of the area, was made up of substantial detached dwellings with a floorspace nearing 600 sq m. It is very clear from the submitted Location Plan, or from visiting the area, that this is not the case. There are some good-sized detached properties nearby, but nowhere near the scale of that which is currently proposed. Even the run of nearby terraced properties and pairs of semi-detached properties are of a smaller mass combined than the individual proposed replacement dwelling.

As the Planning Statement submitted by the Applicants acknowledges (at 5.29), they are attempting to introduce a 'large manor-style dwelling'. However, as the DAS and Planning Statement also refers to at several points, this is a suburban environment. The introduction of a large Manor-style dwelling, over three times larger than the house it replaces, in a suburban environment of notably smaller houses is quite clearly not appropriate to the character of the area.

Such a conflict with Policy CP3 would be sufficient to refuse the application by itself. However, in this instance there is further justification due to the site directly adjoining an 'Area of Special Character' relating to much of Whistley Green and Hurst. It is not clear why neither the DAS or Planning Statement submitted by the Applicant make any reference to the 'Area of Special Character' given it is clearly designated on the Council's Policy Map for both the adopted and emerging Development Plans. Given that the proposed development will be very apparent from the Area of Special Character, it clearly has the potential to have an affect upon such a designation.

Policy TB26 of the Council's MDD Local Plan advises that planning permission will only be granted for proposals affecting Areas of Special Character where they demonstrate that they retain and enhance the traditional, historical, local and special character of the area and its setting. The above commentary has already explained why the substantial scale and appearance of the proposed dwelling, out of proportion with all nearby houses, will detract from the local character.

This is all the more relevant given the adjoining 'Area of Special Character' and results in conflict with Policy TB26.

Of further relevance is recent work undertaken by the Council in submitting the emerging Local Plan. A 'Historic Environment' Topic Paper was issued by the Council in September 2024, in support of the Local Plan Update. The paper re-confirms at Appendix C, the 'Area of Special Character' designation at Whistley Green and Hurst. It also includes a list of buildings at page 95 that are considered to be '*Undesignated heritage assets that positively contribute to the AoSC*'. The list includes both Clearview Cottage and Whistley Green Farmhouse.

The Application submission has chosen to make no reference to the existing building being confirmed as an undesignated heritage asset that positively contributes to the AoSC. This is not surprising, given that it brings into question whether any replacement dwelling at all would be appropriate in this instance. As expressed earlier, the neighbours at Whistley Green Farmhouse do not wish to prevent the introduction of an appropriate replacement dwelling at Clearview Cottage. However, the fact that Clearview Cottage is listed as one of only a few specific buildings in Whistley Green that positively contribute to the AoSC, brings even greater scrutiny to any proposals for the site's redevelopment. For reasons set out above, the proposal would significantly detract from the character of the area, and this becomes all the more relevant given the adjacent AoSC designation and the fact that Clearview Cottage in its existing form, has been confirmed as contributing positively to the AoSC.

Adverse impact upon residential amenity

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy relates to the general principles of new development, requiring that proposals;

'Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life'.

In this instance it is considered that the proposed development will cause detriment to the amenities of the neighbouring occupiers at Whistley Green Farmhouse and their quality of life.

At present, the rear outlook from Whistley Green Farmhouse is open either side, with fencelines and planting marking the side boundaries, but no built development immediately beyond. The scale and re-siting of the proposed replacement dwelling will result in the eastern side of the rear garden being enclosed by a substantial two storey building along its whole depth. It is entirely reasonable and expected to be able to see other buildings in such a location, but to have one introduced that will run the full depth of the garden in such proximity will have an obvious detrimental and overbearing impact.

Also of great concern is the lack of privacy that will result. Due to the unusual relationship proposed between dwellings, any first-floor windows in the western elevation of the proposed dwelling will look directly into the garden area and private rear windows of Whistley Green Farmhouse. There are currently three proposed window openings in the western elevation at first floor level. The central opening is a full two-storey height glass atrium! Given that the depth of the proposed dwelling is a staggering 29m, it is inevitable that rooms in the house will need to be served by far more side windows than would typically be required.

Whilst the impact of a single small side window serving, for example, a toilet, might be addressed by a high hanging design and obscure glazing, such restrictions cannot be applied here. The scale of windows that will be necessary to provide the needed light into the rooms means that there will always be a sense of overlooking from such windows, even if obscurely glazed. The two storey-height glass atrium will provide a constant and considerable feel of being overlooked whether or not the glass is obscured.

As is apparent from the submitted Block Plan, the Applicant has control of all of the land that is between the proposed building and the garden of Whistley Green Farmhouse. It is therefore not possible for the neighbours to be in control of any planting in such areas, and even if planting was introduced it would not prevent first floor overlooking (unless the introduced planting was itself inappropriate).

The DAS includes at page 9 a CGI indicating how the proposed west elevation will be viewed from the rear garden of Whistley Green Farmhouse. At present, there is no built development where the bulk of the proposed building appears, so it is indisputable that a significant change will result. The CGI simply confirms all of the above concerns ie an overbearing, enclosed impact will result with direct overlooking into private garden areas and windows.

The indicated 'shadow' trees on the CGI will not be practical. The below image shows the actual view from the garden of Whistley Green Farmhouse as existing. The two existing trees beyond the boundary are not shown as being retained on the plans. They would either need to be removed due to the resulting inappropriate relationship with the proposed dwelling, or would not offer any screening. Any replacement planting would similarly have an unacceptable relationship with the new dwelling, or not be sufficient to prevent overlooking. The siting of the proposed dwelling and windows within the proposed western elevation would therefore result in an unacceptable relationship that could not be effectively resolved through the introduction, or retention, of planting.



View from Whistley Green Farmhouse rear garden towards the application site

Conclusion

The proposed replacement dwelling, which will more than triple the floorspace of the existing, will result in a new house that bears no relationship with the existing dwelling and how it sits within and contributes towards the established built environment. Whilst the principle of a replacement dwelling is not objected to, the proposed scale, siting, mass, height and built form put forward will significantly detract from the character of the area. This is all the more relevant given the 'Area of Special Character' designation of the adjoining land, plus the identification of Clearview Cottage and Whistley Green Farmhouse as undesignated heritage assets that currently contribute positively to the Area of Special Character.

A combination of the siting, scale and layout of the proposed dwelling, will result in a significant and detrimental impact upon the residential amenity currently enjoyed by the neighbouring occupants.

Given the above, the proposed scheme is in clear conflict with Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy and Policy TB26 of the MDD Local Plan and should be refused unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this case, the most relevant material consideration is the listing of the two relevant properties in the Council's Historic Environment Topic Paper, which provides further reason to refuse the application.

Finally, it is requested that when visiting the application site, Officers include a visit to the rear garden of the neighbouring property at Whistley Green Farmhouse, to enable a proper understanding of the impact that the proposed replacement dwelling will have upon it. Please contact me so this can be arranged.

Yours sincerely,



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Director

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