

2 Site and Local Context

2.1 Introduction

- 2.1.1 This chapter provides a description of the Site and its setting. Further details relevant to the proposed scope of the technical assessments are provided in Chapters 6 – 12.

2.2 Site Description

- 2.2.1 The Site is brownfield / previously developed land (PDL) comprising multiple large industrial type buildings and hardstanding which extends circa 13.119ha and is currently in operation as a film & television studio. The Site is located approximately 4.3 km southwest of Wokingham Town Centre and 8.8 km southeast of Reading Town Centre.
- 2.2.2 The Site is bordered by the existing Arborfield Green development on its southern and eastern boundaries. Langley Common Road (B3349) borders the Site to the northwest with pasture land to the northeast, an area which is currently designated as 'Countryside'.

Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location

- 2.2.3 The Site falls within the adopted Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location (SDL) (*Policy CP18 – Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location* of the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework: Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2010)) (shown in Figure 2.1), which sought to deliver 3,500 dwellings including affordable homes, employment, appropriate retail facilities, and social and physical infrastructure. Further to this, the Arborfield Garrison SDL Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (2011) was produced and adopted to guide development delivery at Arborfield Garrison.
- 2.2.4 Planning permission was first granted at Arborfield Garrison on 1 April 2015 for up to 2,000 homes (including up to 80 extra care), district centre, transport interchange, village square, car parking, neighbourhood centre, secondary school for up to 1,500 pupils, including sports pitches, up to three-form entry primary school, multi-use games area, creation of Sustainable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) plus other associated works (Application reference: O/2014/2280 [alternative application reference: 140977]), with Reserved Matters submissions coming forward in due course. See full description of development at endnote ⁱ below.
- 2.2.5 In February 2017, the application Site parcel was brought forward with permission for the change of use of land for filming for a 9-year temporary period (Ref. 162881). This converted a number of buildings on Site from Ministry of Defence (MoD) use into workshops, backlots, soundstages and offices. Through a Section 73 application (Ref. 251004), this was then extended for a further three year period, after which the use of the Site shall be discontinued and restored to its former condition on or before 1 February 2028.
- 2.2.6 This existing planning consent does not preclude residential development on the Site, and the application for the Proposed Development to which this ES relates will supersede this existing temporary permission.

Emerging Policy SS11: Arborfield Green Strategic Development Location

- 2.2.7 The *Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040* (2024) identifies the Site and the adjacent land to the south and east as the Arborfield Green SDL for a sustainable, well designed, mixed-use development. *Policy SS11: Arborfield Green Strategic Development* allocates for:

“3. Phased delivery of:

a) Around 3,047 dwellings comprising:

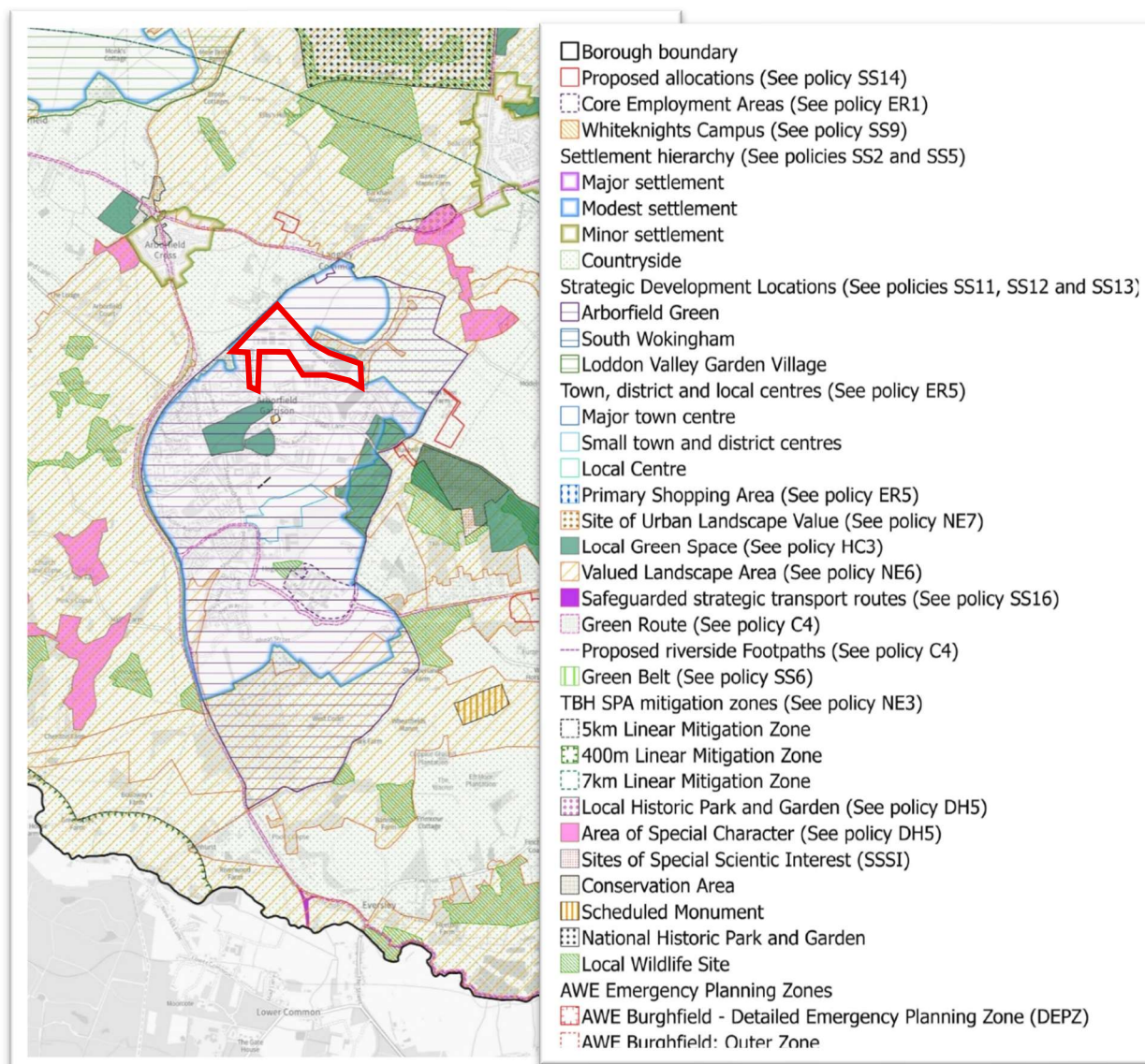
- i. 2,137 dwellings through completions, extant planning permissions, resolutions to grant planning permission;*
- ii. **300 dwellings by optimising development density at land currently occupied by Arborfield Studios;***
- iii. **600 dwellings on land to the north of Arborfield Studios, known as Barkham Square; and***
- iv. 10 dwellings at Westwood Yard, Sheerlands Road.*

and including:

- i. 40% affordable homes in accordance with Policy H3;*
- ii. 25 self and custom build service plots;*
- iii. 5 Gypsy and Traveller pitches; and*
- iv. Specialist accommodation, including accommodation for older persons.”*

- 2.2.8 The remainder of Policy SS11 allows for 6,000m² of employment floorspace, one 2-form entry (2FE) primary school, a district centre, two local centres, and a solution to mitigate impacts upon the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) through sufficient SANG provision.
- 2.2.9 The *Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update 2023-2040* is currently at examination. The inspectors' post-hearing letter (published 4 August 2026) noted that 'the requirement for each SDL to provide custom build housing onsite is unsound, as it is not justified by the latest evidence of need', and that the requirement should therefore be deleted.
- 2.2.10 The full and complete wording of Policy SS11 is included in full at Appendix 2.1 and shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Extract from Map D2 - Local Plan Update Proposed Submission Plan Policies Map (approximate red line boundary added)



2.2.11 Arborfield Studios (the Site) is identified at 3(ii) in Policy SS11 for '300 dwellings by optimising development density at land currently occupied by Arborfield Studios'. In the spirit of Policy SS11, and following further site capacity testing, it is the Applicant's intention that the Site will come forward with slightly more than 300 dwellings, full details of which are in Chapter 3 – Proposed Development.

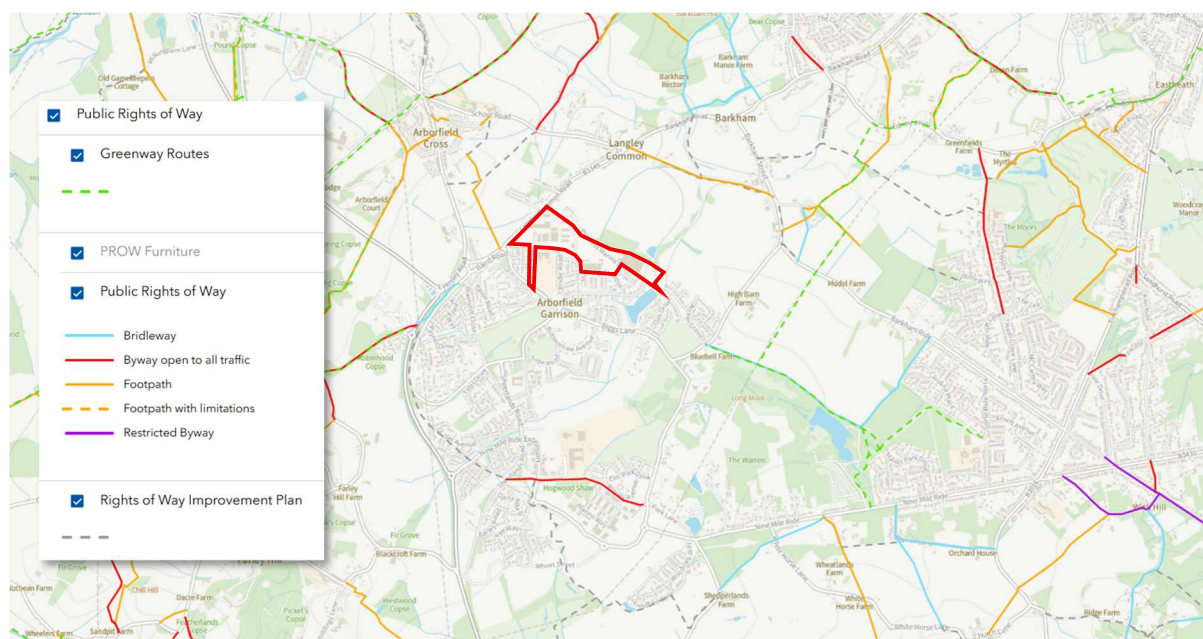
2.2.12 Additionally, the area of land to the northeast of the Site (currently identified as countryside) is identified as '*Barkham Square*' at 3(iii) in Policy SS11 for '600 dwellings on land to the north of Arborfield Studios, known as Barkham Square'.

2.2.13 At the time of writing, the proposals for Barkham Square were being developed for a planning application submission and technical chapters were based on assumptions made in the EIA Scoping Request. However, during preparation for the application, this has now been submitted and is a live application for 660 dwellings and 70-bed elderly care dwellings (Ref. 261059). As such, due to the similar submission timescales, this Environmental Statement will consider the impacts from Barkham Square separately as part of the Cumulative Assessment (See endnote ⁱⁱ for full description of development).

Site Access and Public Rights of Way

- 2.2.14 The Site is well connected in terms of local highways and pedestrian infrastructure and benefits from close connections to Arborfield Green and the wider facilities in the area including Farley Hill Primary School, Arborfield Green Leisure Centre and the local centre, including a supermarket.
- 2.2.15 The M4 motorway is approximately 3.5km north providing good connections to the wider network with Central London and London Heathrow Airport, utilising the M25, in the east; Oxford, utilising the A34, to the north; Bristol, utilising the M4, in the west; and, Hampshire and Dorset, utilising the M3, in the south west.
- 2.2.16 The local area has a high level of pedestrian, cycle and equestrian connectivity, due to the investment at Arborfield Green as well as at the surrounding area at Shinfield and the Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP).
- 2.2.17 At present, the Site has three access points. The main access point is off Langley Common Road (B3349), to the northwest, with further accesses off Baston Road, in the southwest, and Princess Marina Drive, in the southeast. All of these access points are currently gated or fenced off to deter vandalism of the Site.
- 2.2.18 The main bus link is the Number 3 route which runs (approximately every 30 minutes) from Reading Town Centre, through Shinfield and the TVSP, a loop through Arborfield Green to Finchampstead, and then to Wokingham Town Centre. The nearest bus stops are along Biggs Lane, approximately 250m southwest of the Site boundary.
- 2.2.19 The nearest rail station is Wokingham, approximately 4.30km northeast of the Site, which provides regular services to Gatwick Airport, Reading and London Waterloo. Reading Station, which forms an important hub on the national rail network, is approximately 9.04km to the north.
- 2.2.20 There are no Public Rights of Way (PROW) within the Site (see Figure 2.2), however, some routes are within close proximity (c.1km) of the Site boundary:
- Footpath ARBO14 1, approximately 170m west;
 - Footpath BARK15 1, approximately 200m west;
 - Byway ARBO10 2, approximately 415m north;
 - Footpath BARK7 1, approximately 500m northeast;
 - Footpath BARK8 2, approximately 750m east;
 - Bridleway BARK11 1, approximately 900m east;
 - Bridleway BARK11 2, approximately 900m east;
 - Footpath BARK8 1, approximately 900m east;
 - Footpath BARK9 1, approximately 900m east;
 - Footpath BARK10 1, approximately 1km east;
 - Footpath BARK10A 1, approximately 1km east;
 - Byway ARBO15 4, approximately 800m southwest.

Figure 2.2 Existing Public Rights of Way¹



Ground Conditions

- 2.2.21 The wider Arborfield Garrison was historically used by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) as a horse remount division for the Army prior to WW1. The farm buildings formed the northwestern part of the parcel, having historically been occupied by open agricultural land. These buildings were subsequently retained for veterinary facilities as part of the military use (now converted to offices). As such, the breeding, training and health checking of horses for military use was not considered to be a potentially significant contaminated land use.
- 2.2.22 Following this, the Site was subsequently re-purposed as an Army school of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering (EME). A substantial phase of expansion and development ensued, including the construction of a range of vehicle workshops, stores, classrooms, office and administration buildings, accommodation buildings and ancillary buildings. As part of these works, additional Petrol, Oil and Lubrication (POL) stores were created with a number of substantial underground fuel tanks together with several above ground fuel and oil tanks and waste oil stores with oil and water interceptors. As such, in combination with the EME use on Site there is a potentially significant contaminative history by virtue of the use, storage and potential leakage and spillage of a wide range of oils, fuels, greases and solvents as part of the on-site activities.
- 2.2.23 Furthermore, six localised areas of potential contamination concern have been identified with respect to a proposed residential end use (assessed in Chapter 9 – Ground Conditions and Contamination).
- 2.2.24 The underlying ground formation beneath the development parcel consists of London Clay soils (confirmed by a comprehensive ground investigation (see Appendix 9.1)). Publicly available

¹ Wokingham Borough Council (2025) Wokingham Borough Council: Public Rights of Way [Online] Available at: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/countryside-parks-and-conservation/footpaths-and-bridleways/find-public-right-way> (Accessed 08 December 2025)

information indicates the Site is underlain by unproductive strata with respect to groundwater and that there are no abstraction wells located nearby.

2.2.25 The Site is not shown to be within an area affected by radon.

2.2.26 See Chapter 9 – Ground Conditions and Contamination for further detail.

Arboriculture

2.2.27 The Site contains a number of mature and semi-mature trees, hedges and hedgerows belonging to native species both within or immediately adjacent to the Site, with the most commonly found species being English Oak and common lime. A significant belt of trees can be found along the Site's northern boundary with the adjacent farmland, with remaining vegetation scattered throughout the Site.

2.2.28 There are a number of TPOs present on Site covering Oak, Lime, Alder and Ash trees. Two areas of ancient woodland adjoin the Site to the northeast, forming part of the wooded area once known as Kigdem Copse. However, no trees that can be classified as ancient or veteran are present within the Site (NE reference: 52839).

Archaeology and Built Heritage

Archaeology

2.2.29 No archaeological assets are located within the Site. The closest archaeological assets are the Mounted Site North of the Moat House Scheduled Monument, located approximately 0.5km to the south of the Site, and the Infirmary Stables, located approximately 1.0km south of the Site.

2.2.30 No World Heritage Sites, Registered Battlefields, or Protected Wrecks are located within 1 km of the Site.

Built Heritage

2.2.31 Three non-designated heritage assets are present on-site, all of which were approved for demolition under the 2014 outline planning permission. The non-designated heritage assets are listed as follows:

- Langley Common Farmhouse (to be retained);
- The Stables (to be demolished);
- The Water Tower (to be demolished).

2.2.32 There are no listed buildings within the Site; however, designated heritage assets within c.1km of the Site are as follows:

- Moated Site north of the Moat House - Scheduled Monument, approximately 300m southwest;
- Moat House - Grade II Listed, approximately 350m southwest;
- Langleypond Farmhouse – Grade II Listed, approximately 400m north;
- Infirmary Stables, Arborfield - Scheduled Monument, approximately 650m southwest;
- Barkham Square - Grade II Listed, approximately 750m east;
- Arborfield Cross - Conservation Area, approximately 775m northwest;

- Barkham Manor – Local Historic Park and Garden, approximately 925m northeast;
- Moated site and associated enclosure at Church Farm – Scheduled Monument, approximately 930m east;
- Church of St.James – Grade II Listed, approximately 950m east;
- Church Cottage – Grade II Listed, approximately 950m east;
- Sparks Farmhouse – Grade II Listed, approximately 1km northeast;
- The Bull Public House and Smithy – Grade II Listed, approximately 1.1km northeast;
- Barkham Manor – Grade II Listed, approximately 1.2km northeast.

Flood Risk and Drainage

2.2.33 The Site is supported by existing drainage infrastructure associated with the wider Arborfield Garrison development.

2.2.34 The Site is within fluvial Flood Zone 1, which has a very low probability of flooding (less than a 1 in 1,000 annual probability of river or sea flooding), even with an allowance for climate change (2070 to 2125).

Figure 2.3 Environment Agency Fluvial Flood Risk Map (Figure 5.1 of Appendix 12.1)

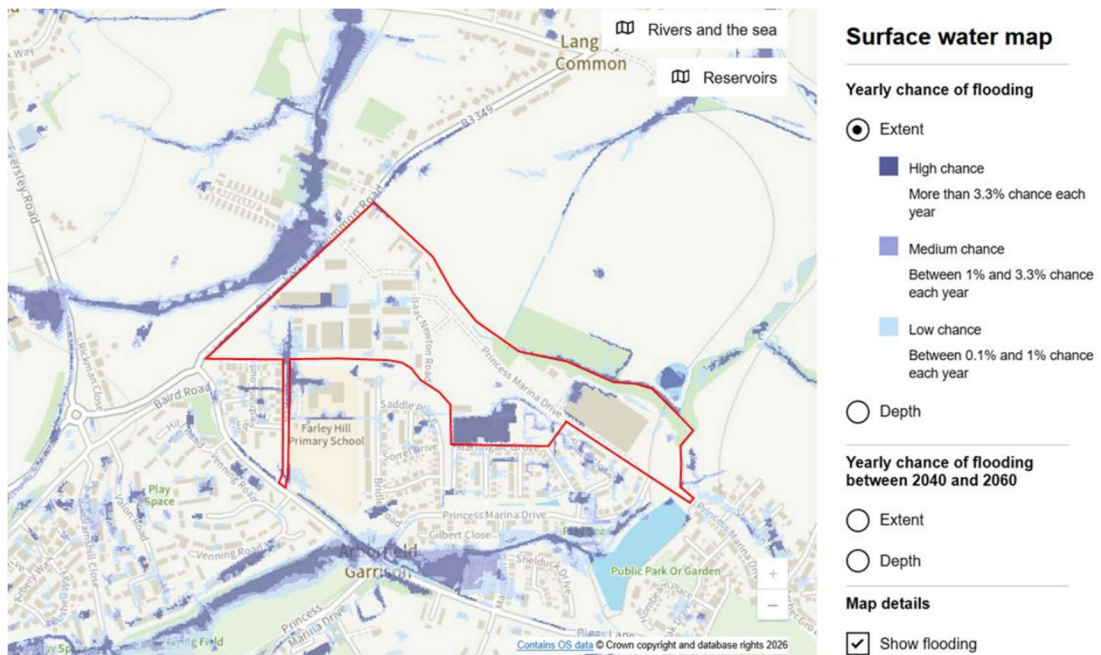


Figure 2.4 Environment Agency Fluvial Flood Risk Map (2070 to 2125) (Figure 5.2 of Appendix 12.1)



2.2.35 The majority of the Site is shown to be located in an area of very low (less than 0.1%) chance of surface water flooding in a given year. Again, this is very similar when Climate Change (2040 to 2060) is taken into account. There are also some localised areas of surface water flooding present to the northwest, centre and southeast of the Site.

Figure 2.5 Environment Agency Surface Water Flood Risk Map (Figure 5.3 of Appendix 12.1)



2.2.36 It should be noted that the Flood Mapping is generated using a broad methodology applied at the national scale. The model utilises generalised information on infiltration, sewerage infrastructure, rainfall events and catchment topography to route rainfall over a ground surface model. As such, the analysis does not take account of site-scale factors / characteristics that may exert an influence upon surface water flood depths and extents. The map therefore only provides a guide regarding the areas that may be vulnerable to this source of flooding.

2.2.37 There is a very low risk of flooding from rivers and sea, groundwater and reservoirs.

2.2.38 Further details on hydrology, flood risk and drainage and their assessment are provided within Chapter 12 – Hydrology (including Flood Risk and Drainage).

Ecology and Nature Conservation

2.2.39 There are no environmental designations on the Site. There are no National Landscapes (formerly known as AONB), National Parks, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), or Ramsar Sites within 5km of the Site boundary. However, a number of designated sites are within 5km of the Site, as follows:

- Longmoor Bog Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), located approximately 570m southeast – notable for its base-poor valley mire, its main features being a well-developed carr of alder, grey willow, downy birch and alder buckthorn and an area of wet heathland dominated by purple moor-grass and cross-leaved heath²;
- Bramshill SSSI, located approximately 3.4km southwest – notable for a series of shallow acid ponds and associated mir, which support a rich assemblage of dragonfly and damselfly, and rotationally felled conifer plantation, which provides habitat for internationally important populations of nightjar, woodlark and Dartford warbler³;
- Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA), located approximately 3.4km southwest – a composite site located across Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. The open heathland habitats overlie sand and gravel sediments which give rise to sandy or peaty acidic soils, supporting dry heathy vegetation on well-drained slopes, wet heath on low-lying shallow slopes and bogs in valleys. The site consists of tracts of heathland, scrub and woodland, once almost continuous, but now fragmented into separate blocks by roads, urban development and farmland⁴;
- Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI, located approximately 5km west - designated for a series of traditionally-managed seasonally waterlogged hay meadows, and a 4 km stretch of the River Loddon, a tributary of the River Thames. The Site is of interest particularly for nationally important populations of two rare plants: the fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris*, a native bulb of unimproved damp meadows now mainly confined to scattered localities in southern Britain, and the Loddon pondweed *Potamogeton*

² Natural England (1986) Designated Sites View: Longmoor Bog – Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 [Online] Available at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1001502&SiteName=longmoor%20bog&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAra=>

³ Natural England (2000) Designated Sites View: Bramshill SSSI – Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 [Online] Available at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1003946&SiteName=Bramshill%20sssi&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAra=>

⁴ Natural England (2014) European Site Conservation Objectives for Thames Basin Heaths SPA (UK9012141) [Online] Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4952859267301376>

nodosus, a very rare aquatic species for which this length of the River Loddon is the national stronghold⁵.

2.2.40 As the Site is within the 5-7km buffer of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA, Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) will be required to mitigate any impact of development on the nearby Thames Basin Heath. A SANG strategy is submitted with this application, to include some additional 'off-site' land.

2.2.41 There are also four Local Nature Reserves within 5km of the Site:

- Longmoor Bog LNR, located approximately 570m southeast;
- The Marshes LNR, located approximately 3.7km southwest;
- Swallowfield Meadow LNR, located approximately 4.1km southwest; and
- Holt Copse & Joel Park LNR, located approximately 4.3km northeast.

2.2.42 Further details on ecological sites and habitats are provided within Chapter 8 – Ecology.

Air Quality

2.2.43 Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) has one Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) within Wokingham Town Centre, due to high levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution from road traffic. The AQMA was declared on 9 December 2015; however, the Site is not within this designated AQMA.

2.2.44 Further details on Air Quality and its assessment are provided within Chapter 7 – Air Quality.

Noise

2.2.45 Due to the urban fringe location of the Site, there are likely to be a number of existing noise sources within the vicinity of the Site from existing road traffic at Langley Common Road and construction activities taking place at Arborfield Green. However, over time the construction activities at Arborfield Green will reduce and eventually cease due to construction activity progressing toward the south of the allocation area.

2.2.46 Further details on Noise and its assessment are provided within Chapter 10 – Noise and Vibration.

Utilities

2.2.47 The existing water network located within the Site is a wholly private network, which is not adopted by Thames Water.

2.2.48 SGN asset records show an existing medium pressure gas network entering the Site from Langley Common Road, which supplies several buildings within the Site boundary only.

⁵ Natural England (1987) Designated Sites View: Stanford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI – Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) notified under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 [Online] Available at: <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteDetail.aspx?SiteCode=S1002963&SiteName=stanford%20end%20mill&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&SeaArea=&IFCAAarea=>

- 2.2.49 Scottish & Southern Electricity (SSE) Network's asset record shows an existing high voltage electricity network entering the Site from Baston Road to feed an 'intake' substation. This substation then supplies a private network across the Site.
- 2.2.50 Asset records provided by Openreach show existing network is located entering the Site from the southern, eastern and western boundaries. Asset records provided by Virgin Media show existing network crosses into the Site from the south between Saddle Place & Martingale Grove.
- 2.2.51 Full details of the existing utilities on and around the Site are provided within Appendix 3.3 – Utilities Assessment.

2.3 Summary of Sensitive Receptors

- 2.3.1 As described in the following technical scoping chapters, a number of sensitive receptors have been identified that have the potential to be significantly affected either directly or indirectly by the Proposed Development. These receptors will be considered in the design and the assessment of the scheme and are outlined below.
- occupiers of existing dwellings and commercial premises in proximity to the Site;
 - the local population in respect of local services, schools, employment opportunities, etc.;
 - users of local roads, transport services and public rights of way both on and in proximity to the Site;
 - ecological habitats and species present both on and in proximity to the Site;
 - surface and groundwater regimes both on and in proximity to the Site, including Site drainage characteristics;
 - the landscape character of the Site and its surrounding environs;
 - sensitive receptors that would be introduced to the Site as a result of the Proposed Development, including site workers and future residents, potentially school children, tenants and other site users who would be present during the later phases of construction; and,
 - effects on climate through GHG emissions during the construction and operation phase.
- 2.3.2 Consideration of whether these receptors are likely to be affected, and if so, to what extent, is provided in each technical assessment chapter (Chapters 6 - 12).

ⁱ Full description of development for O/2014/2280 [alternative reference: 140977]: *OUTLINE PERMISSION FOR: Demolition of buildings and phased redevelopment of Arborfield Garrison and adjoining land for: Up to 2,000 new dwellings (including up to 80 units of extra care housing). District centre comprising a foodstore up to 4,000 sq m gross with up to a further 3,500 sq m (gross) floor space within Classes A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, B1, D1 and D2 (with residential above - Class C3)), and transport interchange, village square, car parking, servicing and drop off area. Up to a further 1,500 sq m (gross) floor space within Classes D1 and D2. Neighbourhood centre to provide up to 300 sq m (gross) floor space within Classes A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, B1, D1 and D2, with parking/servicing area. Secondary school for up to 1,500 pupils (Class D1) including sports pitches, flood-lit all-weather pitch, and indoor swimming pool and parking areas. Up to three-form primary school (Class D1) with sports pitch and parking areas. Associated phased provision of: car parking; public open space including sports pitches, informal/incidental open space, children's play areas including multi-use games area (MUGA), skate park, community gardens/allotments; landscaping/buffer areas; boundary treatments; new roads, footpaths, cycleways and bridleways; sustainable urban drainage systems, including flood alleviation works. PART 2 - FULL PERMISSION FOR phased development of: Creation of two new areas of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANGS) (In the north-eastern part of the application site ("Northern SANGS") and at West Court ("West Court SANGS") including car parking areas, path/walkways, fencing and associated landscaping; re-use of existing MoD gymnasium for sports/community uses/centre (Classes D1/D2; new roundabout junction to A327 Reading Road; junction improvements to Langley Common Road, Baird Road and Biggs Lane; junction improvements and new access at Biggs Lane/Princess Marina Drive; re-use and improvements to existing site accesses from Biggs Lane.*

ⁱⁱ *Outline application (with all matters reserved except for access) for residential development (Up to 660 residential dwellings) (Use Class C3), plus elderly care dwellings (Use Class C2/C3), associated open space, allotments, green and blue infrastructure including the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and other associated works.*