

PLANNING REF : 252498
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 21 Wheatsheaf Close
: Sindlesham, Wokingham
: RG415PT
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Andrew Mitchell
DATE SUBMITTED : 13/01/2026

COMMENTS:

Consultation Response - Loddon Valley Garden Village Proposals

Including Proposed Traveller Site at Mole Road & Betty Grove Lane

I am a resident of Sindlesham and I am responding to this consultation on the Loddon Valley Garden Village proposals.

My response raises serious concerns regarding the proposed Traveller site at Mole Road / Betty Grove Lane and, more broadly, the wider Loddon Valley Garden Village proposals. These concerns relate to highway safety, flood risk, transport impacts, infrastructure capacity, heritage and archaeology, countryside loss, policy compliance, deliverability, and the transparency of the site-selection and consultation process.

Summary of Key Objections - Proposed Traveller Site at Mole Road & Betty Grove Lane

My primary objection within this consultation response relates to the proposed 20-pitch Traveller site at Mole Road / Betty Grove Lane. In summary, I object to this element of the proposals for the following key reasons:

- The specific location of the Traveller site was not included in the original masterplan or early consultation, preventing meaningful public input at the appropriate stage.
- The site relies on unsafe and unsuitable highway access, via a narrow single-track rural lane and a constrained junction.
- Critical highway safety evidence is missing, including a Road Safety Audit and swept-path analysis for caravans and emergency vehicles.
- The site represents a highly vulnerable use affected by flood-prone access routes, risking occupants being cut off.
- The proposal would result in a significant over-concentration of Traveller provision in and around Sindlesham.
- Site selection does not appear to be policy-led, with alternatives reportedly dismissed on cost or development-value grounds.
- The scale and intensity of the site would harm the rural edge of Sindlesham and local residential amenity.
- Claimed delivery timescales (2026/27) are not credible given the likely programme.

These issues are addressed in detail in Section A below. Section B sets out wider concerns relating to the Garden Village proposals as a whole.

SECTION A - PROPOSED TRAVELLER SITE AT MOLE ROAD & BETTY GROVE LANE

A1. Lack of Transparency and Inadequate Consultation

At a meeting held on Friday 9 January 2026 with representatives of the University of Reading and Wokingham Borough Council, it was confirmed that while the principle of Gypsy and Traveller provision forms part of the Local Plan strategy, the specific location of the proposed Traveller pitches was not included in the original masterplan and was not presented during the initial public consultation.

As a local resident, this meant I was unable to comment meaningfully at an early stage on a fundamental planning issue. The siting and scale of Traveller provision are central to considerations of settlement character, integration, cumulative impact and highway safety. The absence of this information significantly limited the effectiveness and fairness of the consultation process.

It was stated that the siting of the Traveller pitches arose either from consultation feedback or from direction by the Council. However, no documentary evidence has been provided to demonstrate that consultation responses required or supported locating the site at Mole Road / Betty Grove Lane. This raises concern that consultation is being relied upon retrospectively to justify a decision that was not transparently disclosed to residents.

A2. Highway Safety and Access - Impact on Me as a Resident

I regularly use Mole Road and the surrounding lanes. Betty Grove Lane is a narrow, largely single-track rural lane with no pavements, no street lighting, tight bends and poor visibility. It is not designed to accommodate frequent movements by vehicles towing caravans, refuse vehicles or emergency services.

Mole Road is already heavily trafficked, particularly at peak times, and the junction with Betty Grove Lane is constrained. Introducing a permanent 20-pitch Traveller site here would significantly increase the risk of vehicle conflicts, vehicles reversing onto Mole Road, and danger to pedestrians and cyclists.

I am particularly concerned that emergency vehicles would struggle to access the site safely during darkness, poor weather or flooding.

There is no clearly presented Road Safety Audit, swept-path analysis for car-and-caravan movements, or robust evidence demonstrating that this access arrangement can operate safely. Without this information, it is not possible to conclude that the proposal would not result in unacceptable highway safety impacts.

A3. Flood Risk and Highly Vulnerable Use

Permanent Traveller accommodation is classified as a highly

vulnerable use in flood-risk policy.

Local roads in the Loddon Valley have flooded repeatedly in recent years. Even if the pitches themselves lie outside the highest mapped flood zones, access routes such as Mole Road and Betty Grove Lane are vulnerable to flooding.

If access routes become impassable, occupants could be cut off and emergency services unable to reach the site. I am not convinced that the information provided demonstrates safe, dry access and egress for the lifetime of the development, particularly under climate-change conditions.

A4. Site Selection, Policy Compliance and Commercial Influence

During the January meeting, it was stated that alternative locations for the Traveller pitches were considered but dismissed primarily due to infrastructure costs and concerns that locating pitches closer to housing could affect the value or marketability of the development.

This suggests that site selection may have been influenced by commercial considerations rather than by a transparent, policy-led assessment of reasonable alternatives. Local and national planning policy requires decisions to be based on planning merits, proportionality and settlement character, not on protecting development value.

A5. Over-Concentration and Impact on the Settled Community

There are already existing Traveller pitches in and around Sindlesham. Adding a further 20 pitches at this location would create a very high concentration of provision in one small area.

The cumulative scale and placement of the proposed site raise clear concerns about over-concentration, domination of the nearest settled community and lack of genuine integration, contrary to national Planning Policy for Traveller Sites.

A6. Landscape, Character and Amenity Harm

The proposed Traveller site would introduce hardstanding, lighting, buildings and increased activity into an area that currently forms part of the rural edge of Sindlesham.

This would erode landscape character and harm residential amenity through increased noise, traffic and light pollution, undermining the transition between village and countryside.

A7. Deliverability and Timing

It was asserted that the Traveller site is required to contribute to early Local Plan delivery targets, with reference to delivery by 2026/27.

Given the anticipated programme, including the likely timing of any outline planning application for the wider scheme, this timetable does not appear credible. It is inconsistent with the Local Plan approach, which relies on smaller, non-strategic sites for early delivery.

SECTION B - WIDER LODDON VALLEY GARDEN VILLAGE PROPOSALS

B1. Transport Impacts and Daily Effects on Residents

The proposed Garden Village of around 2,800 homes would generate a substantial increase in traffic, directly affecting roads I rely on daily, including routes towards Winnersh, Lower Earley, the A327 and the M4.

These routes already experience congestion. Additional traffic would increase delays, encourage rat-running through villages such as Sindlesham, and reduce road safety.

Transport modelling relies on optimistic assumptions about modal shift. From my experience, public transport options are limited and unreliable, and car dependency is likely to remain high.

B2. Reliance on Major Infrastructure and Risk of Severe Impacts

The transport strategy relies heavily on major infrastructure, including new bridges over the M4 and the River Loddon and upgrades to M4 Junction 11.

There is a real risk that these schemes are delayed or under-funded while development proceeds, leading to severe congestion and unacceptable impacts on the local road network.

B3. Flood Risk, Drainage and Safe Access

Large parts of the site and surrounding road network lie within or near flood-risk areas. I am not convinced that safe access and egress can be guaranteed for residents during extreme flood events.

Concerns also remain about the long-term performance, maintenance and funding of proposed Sustainable Drainage Systems.

B4. Heritage Assets and Archaeological Impact

The site includes or lies close to important heritage assets, including the ruins of the old St Bartholomew's Church (a Scheduled Monument and Grade II listed ruin), listed farm buildings, historic moated sites, and the setting of nearby listed buildings and registered historic parkland.

The area is identified as having extensive archaeological potential, including Roman, medieval and post-medieval remains and WWII GHQ Stop Line features.

While some investigation has been undertaken, it is not clear that all high-potential areas have been adequately evaluated. Given the scale of the proposals, reliance on partial investigation is not acceptable. National policy requires great weight to be given to heritage conservation and harm to be avoided wherever possible.

B5. Loss of Countryside and Risk of Coalescence

The proposals would result in the permanent loss of a large area of open countryside between Shinfield, Arborfield, Sindlesham and Earley.

This would significantly reduce separation between settlements, increase the risk of coalescence, and fundamentally alter the rural character of the Loddon Valley, contrary to the spirit of local and neighbourhood planning policies.

B6. Loss of Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

There is strong evidence that significant parts of the site comprise Best and Most Versatile (Grade 3a) agricultural land.

National policy requires decision-makers to take account of the benefits of such land. Once developed, it is lost permanently. I am not convinced that sufficient weight has been given to avoiding this loss or to exploring reasonable alternatives.

B7. Biodiversity Net Gain and Long-Term Management

While proposed biodiversity net gain is positive in principle, it depends on long-term management, monitoring and secure funding.

There is insufficient clarity on who will manage habitats in perpetuity, how this will be funded, and what mechanisms exist if biodiversity targets are not met.

B8. Wastewater and Utilities Capacity

Local wastewater and utility systems are already under pressure. There is no binding assurance that upgrades will be delivered and operational before new homes are occupied.

Proceeding without certainty risks pollution incidents, service failures and environmental harm.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above particularly the unsuitability of the proposed Traveller site, highway safety and flood-risk concerns, lack of transparency, policy conflicts, over-concentration of Traveller provision, transport impacts, heritage and countryside harm, loss of agricultural land and infrastructure uncertainty I urge the Council to reconsider these proposals.

At a minimum, the Traveller site should be removed or relocated, and the wider proposals should not progress further until these fundamental issues are resolved through a transparent, policy-led process.