

Our ref: 2522477

Wokingham Borough Council,
Planning Department,
Civic Offices,
Shute End,
Wokingham.
RG40 1BN

21 March 2025

Dear Planning,

**LAND NORTH OF SCHOOL ROAD, ARBORFIELD CROSS.
OUTLINE APPLICATION FOR THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF UP TO 70 DWELLINGS
PLANNING PORTAL REFERENCE: PP-1387688**

Introduction

On behalf of Croudace Homes, Vortal Homes Limited and Falcon Developments (SE) Limited (our "Client") please find enclosed an application seeking outline planning permission for the proposed development of Land north of School Road, Arborfield Cross (the "Site").

The description of Proposed Development is as follows:

"Proposed residential development of up to 70 dwellings together with landscaping, open space, access and associated works. Means of Access to be considered (with Appearance, Landscaping, Layout and Scale to be reserved)".

The application comprises the following supporting drawings and technical reports, which is also set out in the accompanying drawings schedule:

- Location Plan
- Parameters Plan
- Illustrative Masterplan
- Design and Access Statement
- Planning Statement
- Statement of Community Involvement
- Economics Benefit Statement
- Wokingham Affordable Housing Need Technical Note
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- Arboricultural Implications Report
- Heritage Impact Assessment
- Phase 1 Geo-Environmental Desk Study

- Transport Assessment
- Designers Response Road Safety Audit
- Framework Travel Plan
- Framework Construction Management Plan
- Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy
- Ecological Assessment
- Habitat Regulations Assessment
- Agricultural Land Classification and Soil Resources

Payment of the relevant application fee of £xx has been made online via the Planning Portal.

Background

Our Client has previously submitted an application on this Site and an adjoining parcel on 24 September 2024 for a proposed development of up to 95 dwellings (ref: 242421). Wokingham Borough Council (the “Council”) refused this application on 20 December 2024.

Whilst our Client reserves the ability to appeal this decision, it was considered that the reasons for refusal as stated were capable of resolution and therefore the decision was taken to immediately pursue a local decision on a revised scheme. Whilst many of the reasons for refusal were capable of resolution simply via updated reports and the completion of a Section 106 Legal Agreement, other matters required formal and informal discussions with the Council to determine the preferred approach to the Site. These have occurred positively in the intervening period, as set out within this letter, which the Council should be commended for.

Our Client has therefore sought to work proactively with the Council in order to devise an amended scheme which seeks to address previous areas of concern, with a view to seeking a local decision that will enable this Site to contribute to the Council’s housing requirements

Planning balance and Five Year Housing Land Supply

The planning balance was considered during the determination of the previous application by the Council, however, it is felt that greater consideration could be given to the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) on 12 December 2024, and particularly the further implications of the revised Standard Method and associated increase in Local Housing Need (LHN) for Wokingham Borough.

On 30 January 2025 the Council published its Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement, which sets out housing completions at 31st March 2024 and the supply of deliverable sites for the subsequent five year period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2029. Given the increase in LHN for Wokingham Borough (748 to 1,336 dwellings per annum) the Council confirms it is now able to demonstrate a housing land supply position of just 1.7 years; a highly significant shortfall.

It is acknowledged that the Council submitted its Local Plan Update (LPU) to the Secretary of State on 28 February 2025. Notwithstanding, the LPU remains silent on the increase in LHN, despite

transitional arrangements in Paragraph 236 of the NPPF requiring the Council to immediately being work on a new local plan, given it proposes to meet less than 80% of its LHN in the submitted LPU.

Whilst matters of weight are discussed within the application or LPU? submission, it is clear that the Council's current position requires a significant number of homes to be brought forward in order to rectify the chronic shortfall that currently exists; a factor in the planning balance which we expect to be robustly considered.

Officer discussions and associated changes to the Proposed Development

The previous application received several supportive comments which have been carefully considered to refine and enhance the Proposed Development. Whilst the case officer's report associated with the previous application provided detailed commentary, an initial meeting was held with officers to discuss a scope for a revised scheme. Fundamentally, the Council considered that the development of the eastern parcel was unlikely to be supported and it was suggested that this was considered strongly by our Client. As a result, the revised scheme now only proposes dwellings on the western field. A revised masterplan was prepared, which was then shared with officers, having also considered other areas of concern within the previous decision.

A meeting was held in February 2025 with feedback provided by officers suggesting that changes to the Illustrative Masterplan were made, alongside an alternative consideration of how the Site responds to its landscape context. It should be noted that the suggested changes proposed an alternative design solution, however, our Client made these and shared a revised masterplan with officers for comment.

Feedback was provided by officers in March, which indicated the Council welcomed the further changes to the Site layout and further queries were raised on elements of detail and design. Our Client has therefore now prepared a third iteration of the masterplan which is considered to have addressed the reasons for refusal from the previous application and the Council's helpful feedback in the intervening period.

The main updates to the Proposed Development can be summarised as follows:

- Stronger village character and integration – The proposed development is now focused on the western parcel, which reflects the existing settlement pattern and provides a gap to the now distant Listed Building to the east..
- Enhanced Landscape & Visual Integration – The masterplan now incorporates stronger green buffers, an improved open space network, and additional structural tree planting, reinforcing a distinct landscape-led approach.
- New Central Open Space – The open space has been relocated to the heart of the development, creating a focal point for the community, allowing overlooking and ensuring accessibility for all residents.
- Site access and connectivity – The proposals continue to ensure safe and efficient connections with local services and facilities. This includes moving the pedestrian and cycle

link further south west along Cole Lane to reduce the distance to the village. The proposed emergency link along this route has been removed to minimise the impact on arboriculture and to ensure a better environment for users.

- Green Route improvements – The scheme sets out a range of suggestions which would allow School Road to better align with its Green Route status. This includes removing the speed cushion and some signage which would no longer be required with the new access design and replacing the build outs with wildflower planting.
- Biodiversity Net Gain [34.48%] and ecological enhancements – The proposals exceed biodiversity net gain requirements, creating a strong green infrastructure network that supports local habitats.
- Re-designed green and blue infrastructure – The scheme now proposes a range of flood risk mitigation measures, integrating sustainable drainage solutions in line with best practice whilst also increasing ecological habitats.
- Provision of additional design details – The DAS now includes assessment of design considerations including density, layout, surveillance opportunities and garden sizes
- Provision of additional supporting information – The application pack responds to the feedback from the previous application and further clarification is provided on a range of topics including agricultural land classification, a pedestrian audit, the Council's Housing Land Supply position.

Key benefits of proposed development

The key benefits the Proposed Development will bring can be summarised as follows:

- Up to 70 new homes, delivering a mix of dwelling sizes to meet local housing needs
- 40% affordable housing (to up to 28 homes), ensuring a range of tenures to support local families and key workers
- Creation of a high-quality residential development to provide new housing for the village and help the Council meet its chronic undersupply
- Provision of new public open space and play areas
- Provision of 34.48 % Biodiversity Net Gain achieved through habitat creation of high ecological value, which could include new native woodland planting, wildflower meadows and a community orchard.
- New pedestrian and cycle links, improving connectivity with the village and enhancing sustainable transport modes in the area

- A comprehensive Sustainable urban Drainage Strategy, which could include swales, rain gardens attenuation basins and permeable surfaces
- An improved road layout on School Road, designed to ensure safe and efficient movement
- A landscape-led development, featuring enhanced green buffers, a centrally located public open space and improved biodiversity
- Retention of existing hedgerows and trees where possible with additional planting to minimise visual impact
- Contribution of an additional population and financial contributions to support local services and facilities (in excess of £2.5m).

Conclusion

On behalf of our Client Croudace Homes, Vortal Homes Limited and Falcon Developments (SE) Limited Marrons is pleased to submit this revised application which address previous reasons for refusal and directly responds to officer discussions which have taken place. It is clear that the Council has been willing to engage, with a view to working collaboratively towards a local decision for a revised scheme and our Client has engaged in this process in good faith.

It should be noted that the scheme remains in outline and both the level of detail provided and the level of discussion that has taken place is considered to go well beyond the requirements of an outline application. Notwithstanding, this has been undertaken simply in order to provide reassurance that certain design requirements can be met, not with a view to these being considered at this outline stage.

Our Client looks forward to working with the Council throughout the determination of this application to achieve a local decision.

Marrons trusts that the above information is clear and helpful. Should the Council wish to discuss any aspects of this application in more detail please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully

Craig Pettit
Planning Director

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