

MEMORANDUM

From:	Catherine Brimble Senior Landscape Officer		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	251892
Address:	Land lying to the East Side of Whitley Wood Road, Off Mitford Close, Shinfield, RG2 8JQ.		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of 4 no. dwellings in two semi-detached blocks with associated amenity space, landscaping, parking and access, plus works to the adopted highway and relocation of 1 no. streetlight.		
Type of Development:	Minor Dwellings (1-9)		
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
- ☐ No objection
- ☐ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
- ☐ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
- ☒ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

The site is located within the settlement boundary and currently consists of an open informal amenity space at the end of a cul-de-sac to the southern end of Mitford Close which backs onto the playing fields and open space associated with Crosfields School.

An extensive area woodland (Nores Hill Woods) extends to the south of the site. The trees growing within and on the edges of the site contribute to the wooded character and backdrop to the existing housing and the western boundary of Crosfields School, and some trees are protected by a TPO (097/1976). The land rises from the end of the turning head towards the eastern boundary by approximately 3m.

Arboriculture

The application is accompanied by an Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) by Andrew Day Arboricultural Consultancy dated 25th November 2024.

The trees are identified in the tree schedule and Tree Constraints Plan however the identification numbers given to the trees in this report are different to those shown on all other plans including the Proposed Block Plan and Landscape Plan. We will

need a coordinated approach across all drawings, so we understand which trees are affected by the proposals. It is noted in the AIA all trees within the site boundary will be removed and this is shown in a table on page 17 of the Design and Access Statement (DAS) where 11 individual trees are indicated to be removed although a number of these are grouped together in the AIA. The tree removal information is also shown on the Site Location Plan (Removed Vegetation) drawing but with different tree numbering to the AIA, so the location of the individual tree species is not clear.

The Tree Constraints Plan provided in Appendix 5 of the AIA indicates the current situation on site without development. Although we understand all the trees within the site are to be removed no plan is provided showing the proposed layout in relation to the trees showing how the root protection areas of the offsite trees including T4, T5 and T7 (large off-site Poplar) will be impacted.

The AIA suggests the TPO doesn't cover the trees within the red line boundary of the site as these trees are unlikely to have been there when the TPO was made in 1976. This may be the case however there are strong landscape arguments as to why the trees that have grown up in the site are important in terms of how they contribute to the character of the area. I also suggest that least two of the offsite trees (T4 & T5) are included under the TPO as these are growing close to the site boundary and within the TPO boundary. Tree T7 appears to be just outside the TPO area.

It appears from the way in which the AIA is written and the fact that it doesn't contain a proposed site layout, that the Arb Consultant didn't have a full understanding of the site proposals including the site layout. In the conclusion the AIA states the following:

The trees in third party ownership beyond the eastern boundary need to be considered in terms of how their canopy and RPA extends on the site. The indirect impact in terms of shadow cast, how any overhanging canopy could dominate on a scheme taking into account the issues this could create.

In my opinion I consider the site layout has not taken this into account. Plots 1 & 2 have short gardens with the canopies of trees T4, T5 and T7 substantially overhanging these gardens. Issues relating to the close proximity of the proposed dwellings to the trees will include the effects of shading and overshadowing of rooms and gardens which are likely to be heavily shaded for a significant proportion of the day / year gaining little natural light. Where trees are in close proximity to buildings such as in this case this can often cause some apprehension to occupiers which is exacerbated by seasonal nuisance such as leaf drop in the autumn and shedding of twigs in high winds resulting in pressure to reduce or remove the trees. These trees are important landscape features that contribute to the landscape character of the area and therefore their removal would be unacceptable.

Other information provided with this application show the rear gardens of the proposed dwellings will be terraced lowering ground levels within the RPA's of these trees. This will have a substantial detrimental effect on these trees and especially T7 which has an RPA of 14.5m radius extending nearly 10m into the site. The construction of the dwellings on plots 2 & 3 are also within the RPA of T7 and site

elevations indicate ground levels will need to be substantially lowered to construct both dwellings causing substantial root severance.

BS 5837 Section 5.3 'Proximity of structures to trees' states at 5.3.1 *'The default position should be that structures are located outside the RPAs of trees to be retained. However, where there is an overriding justification for construction within the RPA, technical solutions might be available that prevent damage to the trees'*. I see no overriding justification for the current proposals to develop within the RPA of important off-site trees and due to a reduction in existing ground levels there are not any *'technical solutions'* that can be implemented.

The AIA suggests there will be opportunities for new tree planting within the site which I will discuss in detail in the landscape section, however due to the limited space available within each plot there is not sufficient space to replace the 11 trees that are proposed to be removed.

Overall, the proposals on the site will have a detrimental effect on three off site trees, two of which are protected by a TPO. This, along with the proposed removal of the 11 other trees within the site, will have an adverse effect on the wooded character this end of Mitford Close which provides a wooded backdrop in views along the road as well as the loss of an informal amenity space. This is contrary to Local Plan Policy CC03.

Layout

The proposed location of the four dwellings is on an area of informal green amenity space which will be lost as a result of these proposals. The loss of this space is not in accordance with NPPF paragraph 88 which indicates planning decisions should enable the retention of open space. Local Plan Policy CC03 requires development proposals should protect and enhance green infrastructure networks and those proposals that lead to the loss of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable.

The proposed built development area to accommodate four dwellings on such a small site will be extensive. There is a need to amend the turning head so that two parking spaces to the fronts of plots 3 & 4 can be provided, and there is no external parking for plots 1 & 2 which only have a garage space each. Like Highways I am concerned that this parking provision is completely inadequate for 4 three-bedroomed dwellings and in my opinion I consider this is likely to lead to the removal of the only areas of planting at the fronts of plots 1 & 4 to provide necessary additional parking once residents move in.

All of the four dwellings have garden lengths shorter than the minimum of 11m as required in the Wokingham Borough Design Guide (WBDG), several of these are substantially shorter than the minimum. The proposed house plans and elevations indicate that all the plots will need their rear gardens terraced to accommodate the change in level as the ground rises to the east, with plots 3 & 4 requiring steeper terraces. Short terraces such as these will significantly limit the usability of these gardens and not allow for variety of activities that a family garden needs to provide, as required by urban design principle R16 of the WBDG.

The DAS indicates that there will be level access to the dwellings from the front, however this cannot be achieved for all parts of the rear gardens, there will only be level access to the small patio immediately adjoining the back of each of the dwellings.

The construction of the retaining walls for the garden terraces and reduction of ground levels overall to achieve the proposed layout will have a detrimental impact on off-site trees as already discussed. It also appears that a retaining wall will be required between the proposed garden on plot 4 and the existing garden at No. 26 Mitford Close, which may have a detrimental effect on the vegetation within this private off-site garden.

Overall, the development layout does not relate to the scale, built form, or character of the existing area and will be detrimental to the amenities of the adjoining land users and open space. This is contrary to Core Strategy policy CP3 requiring high quality design.

Landscaping

Due to the cramped site layout, there is very little space for a high-quality landscape scheme as required by Local Plan policy CC03.

The landscape proposals are indicated on a number of different landscape plans. All three of the drawings show the space to the fronts of the dwellings washed over with a green colour, however the majority of this area will consist of permeable paving only, allowing a small area of planting to the front of plot 1 & 4 and in a narrow strip (0.5m wide) at the end of the turning head. Other very small areas of planting are shown between paving stones required gain access to the front entrances and rear of the dwellings but also these areas need to accommodate proposed waste storage for plots 1 & 4 and cycle storage for plot 4.

Eight new trees are proposed as part of the proposals, four at the front and four proposed in the rear gardens. Only one of the four trees to the front of the dwellings (i.e. to the front of plot 1) will have sufficient space to grow, although due to lack of parking, this area could be considered as a possible additional parking space for residents, as discussed earlier in my comments. The other three proposed trees to the front of the dwellings have very little space to mature so it is likely that only very small garden trees will be appropriate to plant in these locations.

The ambition as set out on the landscape drawings to create a lush woodland style planting to the fronts of dwellings is not achievable as described, due to the complete lack of space available for an appropriate level of soft planting in keeping with the existing wooded character of the area.

In my opinion the space available for planting adjacent to the public realm to mitigate and compensate for the loss of amenity space and the removal of 11 existing trees and which needs to reflect the wooded character of the area, is wholly inadequate. This is contrary to Core Strategy CP3, Local Plan policy CC03 and urban design principle R14 of the WBDG.

Conclusion

I am unable to support this application due to the loss of informal amenity space, loss of trees, detrimental impact on off-site trees including two TPO trees, cramped site layout and inadequate space for a high-quality landscape scheme to mitigate and compensate for these changes. In my opinion this is contrary to NPPF paragraph 88, Core Strategy policy CP3, Local Plan policy CC03 and urban design principles R14 and R16 of the WBDG.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

N/A

Date:

9th October 2025

Signed:

C. Brimble