

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	243226
Address:	Land west of Stanbury House, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood, Reading, RG7 1AJ.		
Proposal:	Screening Opinion application for an Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed development of up to 63 dwellings with associated access and landscaping.		
Type of Development:			
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

I provided pre-application comments on this site on 21.2.24.

The site is located in the countryside and in 'Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment' (WBLCA) 2019 - Area J3 'Spencer's Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' a landscape of moderate quality and sensitivity and a modest capacity for change

The site is included in the 'Valued Landscape' 'Spencers Wood Southern Ridge' which includes the A2 'Loddon River Valley' and J3 'Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay' LCAs. (see updated 'Valued Landscape Topic Paper' 2024 VLTP).

Regardless of the screening opinion there are many sensitive issues on the site and its periphery that have not been addressed in the pre-application and an updated Landscape Visual Impact Assessment is required that takes into consideration the key sensitive issues as recognised in the WBLCA and within the Valued Landscape Topic Paper 2024 for 'Spencers Wood Southern Ridge' VL. The main issues of sensitivity are detailed below;

- The VLTP '24 describes the southern part of the J3 LCA as '*rural with a number of woodlands, remnant parklands and open pasture*', in good condition. Its scenic quality is derived from the rolling clay ridge, its sandy plateau of 66mAOD and views of surrounding lowlands comprising of small scattered woodland blocks and copses, fragmented unimproved meadow habitats, arable fields and some pasture and an intact hedgerow network with hedgerow Oaks, remnant parkland, scattered settlement and traditional farmsteads with strong vernacular character.
- The landscape quality of the southern part of J3 LCA is high, therefore the 'Spencers Wood Valued Landscape' is high quality seen from users of footpaths, residents, vehicles, but particularly on foot, clearly illustrated within selected 'viewpoint locations' within the submitted LVIA.
- The rarity, or sensitivity to change/recreatability of landscape elements of local importance are; historic field patterns, mature hedgerows and mature Oak standards and sensitivity of ancient trees and woodland, pasture and the sense of elevation and associated views.

Although the appeal decision for the 57 unit scheme predates the VL Topic Paper, it is important to note the valued landscape attributes and ensure that the LVIA is aware of the location of the site within the 'Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape' which should be used to inform a suitable Landscape Strategy for the site.

The NPPF indicates that these landscapes will need to be protected and enhanced, so therefore it is not clear how development on this site can address this aspect.

I cannot see any reference in the LVIA to the inclusion of the site within the Valued Landscape '*Spencers Wood Southern Ridge Valued Landscape*', and no evidence demonstrating the scheme does not harm the valued landscape or elements therein.

The elements of the valued landscape are listed as attributes and contained within the WBLCA 2019 J3 and those pertinent to the site include;

Remnant historic parklands and visually prominent parkland trees, including many Wellingtonias, especially the avenue of this species which provide time-depth, visual diversity and a sense of orientation to the landscape.

Pattern of arable and pastoral fields, which provide a rural character away from the urban areas and provide an important separation between settlements.

Small-scale woodlands provide visual diversity in the landscape, as well as ecologically important habitats.

Strong hedgerow network with standard oaks provides a wooded character and visual interest within the rural landscape.

Network of rural lanes bordered by water-filled ditches provide evidence of the original settlement pattern.

Views to the surrounding lowlands provide a sense of place and of orientation.

Open area of former common land to the west of Basingstoke Road at 'Highlands'.

The landscape is in good condition.

The Landscape Strategy is to;

- To **conserve and enhance the rural character of the agricultural landscape.** The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the ***pattern of hedgerows, remnant parkland, trees and avenues,***
- In terms of development, **the aim is to conserve the rural character of the landscape and gaps between settlements** while maintaining the integrity of settlement identity.

There are significant tree and hedge features on the site which includes trees identified on the Ancient tree Inventory as 'Veteran'. Existing hedges create structure and can contribute to the layout – but as I observed large sections are to be removed to facilitate development.

A more sensitive layout that includes more retained vegetation and less incursion into existing trees and is mindful of the other valued landscape attributes such as field boundaries will need to be incorporated into the layout.

There are many sensitive issues concerning the site as detailed above, and as part of a full planning application we require a full description of the Valued Landscape as found across and to the site periphery and a well considered approach to avoid harm to the landscape. We would expect this to be part of the LVIA, and to also take into consideration the nearby built environment such as 'Area of Special Character' known as 'The Square' Spencers Wood.

To conclude, regardless of a screening opinion we require a fully updated LVIA that fully describes the sensitive issues of the Valued Landscape and can demonstrate these are clearly taken forward into the final proposals.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Date:	13.1.25	Signed:	B. Crafer
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