

PLANNING REF : 250733
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Adrian.Betteridge@wokingham.gov.uk
:
:
SUBMITTED BY : Councillor Adrian Betteridge
DATE SUBMITTED : 14/05/2025

COMMENTS:

I object to this application on the basis that it is unsustainable, fails on a number of accessibility grounds, significantly impacts the settlement gap between Arborfield Cross and the Arborfield Strategic Development Location (SDL) and has other individual issues.

The application claims to promote the objectives and principles of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan. The response from the parish council is clear that this has not been achieved.

The application is outside of the defined boundary of the Arborfield SDL, a boundary whose original purpose included preventing the creeping urbanization of a previously rural setting. It seeks to be a "new neighbourhood" for Arborfield Green, but is entirely separated by a busy main road with inadequate ability to cross.

Sustainability of Local Facilities

- The application depends almost entirely on the proximity of the Arborfield Green SDL for its claimed sustainability. The facilities in the SDL have been sized for the agreed addition of 3,500 homes, and are already being expected to accommodate an additional 1,000, 900 via the local plan update and two additional developments of circa 50 houses. There is no indication that any of these additional developments will provide additional local facilities and this application offers no such facilities other than the SANG.

- The primary and secondary school in the SDL are both oversubscribed with children in closer existing housing having to attend schools further afield. The schools offer no capacity to accommodate housing in this application. Arborfield is identified as one of only 2 locations with an anticipated shortage of primary places in the most recent School Places Strategy.

- There is a severe shortage of medical primary care facilities in the area for which there are no firm plans of improvement. The application refers to an Arborfield Surgery. This is a satellite occasional facility which undertakes limited consultations only. Neighbouring facilities such as Swallowfield are oversubscribed with many local residents having to register in Wokingham Town and all nearby surgeries are inaccessible in practical terms other than by car.

Accessibility of SDL
Facilities.

- All of the SDL facilities are the far side of a busy road with a speed limit of 40mph, rising to 50mph. Traffic can be continuous at peak times. The proposal makes an unrealistic assertion that pedestrians and cyclists will make a 200m+ diversion

to utilize a controlled crossing of Eversley Road rather than cross the main road directly to reach the district centre, sports facilities and secondary school.

- A section of pavement shown in the Design and Access statement to access this crossing does not currently exist and the further section is narrow and poorly surfaced, though currently only lightly used. It is outside of the site boundary and it is unclear who is expected to improve it. No other assistance in crossing the main road is apparent.
- The application makes multiple references to the underpass on Langley Common Road. My understanding is that this may not be available once the proposed controlled crossing has been installed.

Cumulative Impact of Road Congestion

- Congestion is already a significant issue in the area, in particular on the Barkham Road towards Wokingham, where traffic routinely queues for 0.7 miles in peak times. This is the principle direction for commuters taking children to secondary schools and to the closest train station. Approximately 2,000 additional houses are yet to be added which will contribute to further congestion and there are no viable proposals to provide alternative car routes in the Wokingham direction. The development of Loddon Garden Village will further exacerbate this issue, particularly for traffic from this location heading north on Observer Way.

Site Access

- The proposed access from Observer Way, a 50 mph road with a design that supports higher speeds, is a concern. Traffic turning in and out of the site is likely to conflict with other road users.
- The proposed additional access from the adjoining roundabout is tightly spaced between 2 other exits with only a few metres of actual roundabout external kerb. The drawing included in the Design and Access Statement appears to have remodelled the roundabout, removing one lane from the approach road to achieve the access.

Inter-Settlement Separation

- There is no question that development of the site would impact the separation of settlements between Arborfield Cross and the Arborfield Strategic Development Location. This has already been put at risk by the smaller development recently approved north of Langley Common Road and would be fundamentally changed by this significantly larger development. The inclusion of a SANG to the north partially mitigates but does not remove this issue. The SANG will not "enhance the natural characteristics of the site" as claimed.

Prior Assessment Within the Local Plan

Ducks Nest Farm was assessed as unsuitable for development in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment that informed the current Local Plan Update for the above reasons and more. The HELA stated that:

- The proposed development would be out of character with the existing settlement form and would have a significant adverse impact on the physical and perceived separation of settlements.
- Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) - The site falls within the Farley Hill Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills (L2) and Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay (J2) LCAs. It notes that the J2 LCA is a gently undulating landscape, comprising large arable fields and smaller fields of sheep pasture and horse paddocks, which provide a rural character away from settlement, and create an important separation between settlements. The area comprises Barkham Brook and mature hedgerow trees which provide a wooded character. It notes that the L2 LCA is a discrete landscape of small hills and knolls and wooded skyline which form a backdrop in the wider landscape. Patterns of pastures, woodland and arable farming interspersed with vernacular settlements provide a strong sense of place and perceptual qualities of seclusion and remoteness.
- Wokingham Borough Valued Landscape Assessment - The site is situated in the proposed Farley Hill Valued Landscape area where it gains much of its identity from the wooded hills, recreation and agriculture, with a number of notable large houses, timber-framed and brick built cottages and farmhouses, linked by a network of rural lanes. The Valued Landscape occupies slopes and high wooded ground, centred on the Registered Park and Garden and Grade II listed buildings at Farley Hall.
- Overall, the context of the site is considered inappropriate, being inappropriate in terms of established settlement form and pattern, and landscape character.
- ... direct access onto the A327 is not advised given the 50mph speed limit.

A Transport Assessment would be required to assess the impact on the local road network, including roundabouts on Eversley Road/Observer Way, and at Arborfield Cross, where there is localised congestion. The cumulative impact of any other development in the area would also need to be assessed.

In summary, as was the assessment when previously examined, this proposal continues to have severe shortcomings that will harm the local rural environment and fails on a number of sustainability and accessibility grounds. I believe that it should not be approved for these reasons.