4 Consultation, Alternatives and Design Evolution

4.1 Consultation

EIA Consultation

4.1.1 In December 2024, the University of Reading, Gleeson Land and Hatch Farm Land Ltd. submitted a joint request for the formal EIA scoping opinion of Wokingham Borough Council. The subsequent opinion was issued in February 2025 (Appendix 5.2). Further details of the formal EIA consultation process is set out within Chapter 5.

4.1.2 During the course of the EIA, the project team consulted with WBC to clarify elements of the scope where required. Details of technical consultation directly related to the EIA are provided in the methodology and baseline sections of each topic chapter.

4.1.3 Although the joint scoping request was submitted, this EIA relates solely to the University of Reading proposals.

Consultation with Wokingham Borough Council

4.1.4 Various pre-application discussions with statutory and non-statutory consultees and the local community all have an influence over the evolution of the design of the Proposed Development and the scope of the EIA. This section summarises the consultation process undertaken with key stakeholders and includes the key issues raised during these discussions.

4.1.5 Further details of this are provided within the Design and Access Statement (DAS) and Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) submitted as part of the suite of planning application documents.

4.1.6 There has been extensive pre-application engagement with Wokingham Borough Council, key stakeholders and local residents over the past 4 years. This extends back to November 2021; the point at which the Council published its Local Plan Update Revised Growth Strategy which proposed the Site for development. This engagement has included the following:

- Project meetings have been held on an approximately monthly basis since January 2022 with lead planning officers from WBC, to address the overall parameters and principle of development, form and delivery of Loddon Garden Village. This has encompassed the proposed draft LPU policy, as well as the evolving planning application matters.
- There have been periodic briefings to senior Members and officers of WBC at key stages in the evolution and preparation of the Local Plan Update.
- Pre-application meetings have been held with WBC planning officers in relation to specific design and masterplanning material submitted by the University at successive stages.
- Topic-specific workshops have been facilitated by WBC on a regular basis, to explore detailed environmental, technical and delivery matters with both planning officers and relevant specialist officers. These workshops have covered a range of topics including masterplanning, ecology, landscape, transport, education, sustainability, and infrastructure.
- Representatives of the University have met with Parish Councils on a regular basis over the past 3 years in relation to the LGV proposals as a whole.

- There has also been detailed engagement on an individual basis between specialists in the University's consultancy team and their relevant counterparts in WBC and other organisations as EIA-related technical work has been undertaken. This has included the Environment Agency, Natural England, Highways England and Historic England. Further details on this process are set out in the relevant chapters of the Environmental Statement submitted with this application.

4.1.7 The Proposed Development has evolved since conception and work has been undertaken by the project design team to address the comments raised during the engagement, where possible. A detailed explanation of how the scheme has evolved to take account of the consultation process is provided in the DAS. Details of how this evolution has been informed by environmental considerations is set out below.

Consultation with Other Landowners

4.1.8 All three landowners involved in the Scoping process have been in constant communication with one another to ensure a joined up approach for the whole allocation. This has formed part of a much wider ongoing process of co-operation between the landowners, going back to late 2021 when the site was first considered as a potential Local Plan allocation by WBC. Co-operation between the landowners has been extensive, in seeking to ensure a sustainable and comprehensive development for the site allocation as a whole. This has included direct joint working on design, technical and other matters, and a combined approach to public consultation. Regular meetings between the landowners and with WBC on overarching matters have been held for over 3.5 years in relation to the site.

4.1.9 Following receipt of the scoping opinion, it was agreed that the landowners would submit separate planning applications to WBC whilst also continuing to work closely with, and taking into account the effects of, the neighbouring proposals as they come forward.

Core Phase of Public Engagement, 2025

4.1.10 The Applicant has sought to involve the local community and stakeholders extensively to help shape the proposals.

4.1.11 The most substantial element of public-facing engagement at the pre-application stage has been a phase of consultation undertaken in Spring 2025, comprising a variety of different methods and channels. This allowed the general public to comment on the proposals at a stage at which they had been sufficiently progressed to allow for meaningful comment. This phase of consultation was programmed to take place after WBC's formal submission of the Local Plan Update for examination by the Secretary of State, as this represented an important milestone in the emerging allocation policy SS13, and enabled responses from the earlier Regulation 19 consultation (in Autumn 2024) to be taken into account.

4.1.12 Full details of this process are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), prepared by Meeting Place Communications, which accompanies this application. In summary, the major elements of this process have been as follows:

- 11 March: Formal launch of consultation, including publication of press release, and distribution of newsletter
- 17 March: Webinar for Stakeholders;
- 27 March: Shinfield public engagement event, Shinfield School Green Centre;

- 28 March: Earley public engagement event, Meadow Suite, University of Reading, White Knights Campus;
- 29 March: Arborfield public engagement event, Arborfield Village Hall;
- 3 April: Arborfield and Barkham area stakeholder meeting, Arborfield Village Hall;
- 3 April: Earley area stakeholder meeting, Radstock Lane Community Centre; and
- 23 April: Winnersh area stakeholder meeting, Crone Plaza, Winnersh Triangle.

4.1.13 Feedback was received in multiple ways, including:

- feedback form (paper and online);
- an interactive map;
- emails to comments@meeting-place.uk;
- Freephone calls to 0800 148 8911;
- letters to Freepost, Meeting Place Consultation; and through the stakeholder engagement meetings and public events.

4.1.14 Over the six-week consultation period the University received written feedback from over 400 people, via 376 feedback forms, 14 comments on interactive map, ten emails and two letters. Around 350 people attended the meetings and events, with:

- over 274 at the three public consultations;
- a total of 45 attending the four area stakeholder group meetings; and
- 34 the webinar for Stakeholders.

4.1.15 At the public engagement events there was praise for the quality of consultation, especially the range of specialist consultants present to answer questions at events.

4.1.16 The theme that generated the most feedback and concern from residents and stakeholders was transport, because of the perceived impact on everyday lives. Existing traffic congestion across the local area was mentioned frequently, the common concern being whether this would worsen with further development, despite proposed road upgrades. Concern over ongoing disruption during construction was also a common concern.

4.1.17 Flooding, drainage and sewage concerns were raised many times, as well as for healthcare provision. There was a strong desire for stewardship over the planning application process and the delivery of wider infrastructure, with key role of the University of Reading being recognised and maintained. People were keen to see a mix of housing, with truly affordable housing and provision for key workers.

4.1.18 Part 2 of the SCI provides responses to the key issues raised by during the consultation and engagement process, taking account of the detailed work undertaken by the University through the preparation of this planning application. The key themes responded to including:

- Housing;
- Community facilities;
- Employment and education;
- Sustainability and environmental considerations;
- Transport; and
- Vision and values.

4.1.19 The University is grateful to all those who participated in the consultation process, particularly local residents giving up their time to provide their input, which has been very helpful in shaping the proposals ultimately applied for in this application.

4.2 Alternatives and design iteration

Alternative Sites

4.2.1 The Local Plan Update (currently under Examination) includes the Site within a Strategic Development Location proposed allocation under Policy SS13 – Loddon Valley Garden Village (LVGV - full policy wording is provided in Appendix 6.1). In summary, this policy allocates for the whole of the LVGV for:

- Residential Development: Approximately 3,930 dwellings will be constructed, with a minimum of 2,700 expected by 2040, including 40% affordable homes, custom self-build plots, Gypsy and Traveller pitches, and specialist accommodation.
- Employment: 100,000m^2 of research and development floorspace or equivalent trip generating activity within the use class E(g), B2, B8 and other complementary uses,.
- Educational Facilities: The development will provide two primary schools and one secondary school.
- Community Services: A district centre will provide various services, alongside two local centres and a country park for recreational use, ensuring accessibility to all residents.
- The Environment: Provision of a multi-functional country park and a sufficient Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

4.2.2 The Site was initially identified in the Revised Growth Strategy Document (November 2021) for a minimum of 4,500 dwellings with expansion of the Thames Valley Science Park.

4.2.3 An extensive evidence base has informed the Local Plan Update and included technical assessments on sustainability appraisal (SA), strategic environmental assessment (SEA), habitats regulations assessment (HRA), housing, economic development, placemaking and design, infrastructure, transport, viability, landscape and Green Belt, green spaces, heritage, climate change, flood risk and environmental sustainability. This included reviewing the most sustainable potential sites within the Borough.

4.2.4 Following this assessment, as part of the Local Plan preparation, the Site was proposed to be allocated in the Wokingham Local Plan Update which was submitted for Examination on the 28th February 2025, following a Regulation 19 consultation in Autumn 2024.

4.2.5 The Local Plan process assessed alternatives sites as part of a comprehensive site selection and Sustainability Appraisal process considering potential development options (and combinations of options) around Wokingham Borough as a whole. From this process, WBC concluded that the Site was suitable for development and that its allocation via a strategic Local Plan policy (along with other sites) would represent a sustainable approach in order to fulfil identified housing needs. This process took into consideration an array of social, environmental and economic factors, and the consideration of reasonable alternatives.

4.2.6 Hence alternative sites have not been considered further by the Applicant or assessed in the EIA as these would not be deliverable and would contradict the spatial strategy and related allocations in the Local Plan Update.

Alternative development scenarios and design iterations

4.2.7 Schedule 4, paragraph 2 of the EIA Regulations requires Environmental Statements to include:

'A description of the reasonable alternatives (for example, in terms of development design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects.'

4.2.8 Given the nature and purpose of the Proposed Development, the assessment of reasonable alternatives to the development presented in the ES considers options within the following categories.

- **Do Nothing:** under this scenario no development is implemented at the Site and baseline conditions continue in their current trends. This option would not result in the delivery of a substantial part of the LPAs emerging housing need in a sustainable location thereby contradicting emerging planning policy and the benefits from the Proposed Development would not be realised.
- **A Different Design:** under this scenario the Proposed Development is realised with alternative scales and layouts, often in the context of developmental constraints present at the Site. This option is discussed further below.

4.2.9 The design of the Proposed Development has been developed to minimise the environmental impact and, where possible, deliver environmental enhancements.

Summary

4.2.10 Through an iterative design process, evolution of the Illustrative Masterplan and the parameters of the Proposed Development, including building layout, height, density and land use, were informed by emerging WBC and evolved through consultation with key stakeholders. A series of consultation events, as laid out above, were held to review and progress the design objectives, key principles and layout of the Masterplan. This included inputs from the technical project team to ensure, where possible, embedded environmental mitigation was factored into the designs.

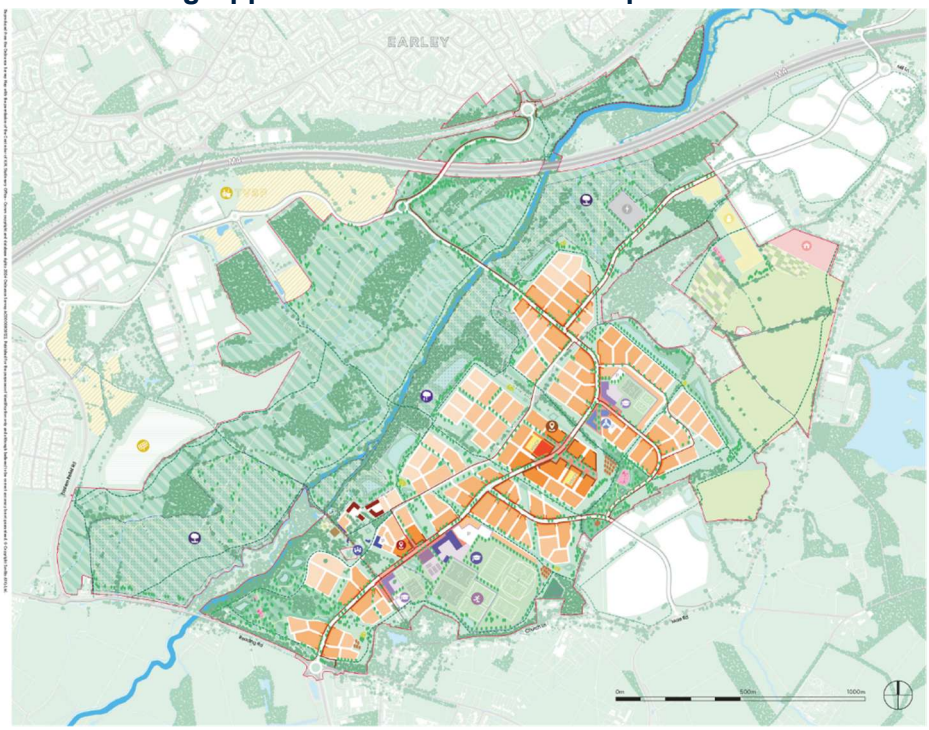
4.2.11 Delivery of the proposed scale and quantum of development on a single site has been identified as necessary in order to ensure comprehensive, integrated and sustainable delivery with a high quality of place-making. The components of this application could not be disaggregated and provided elsewhere on separate sites as this would not achieve the objectives of a Garden Village required in policy.

Design Evolution

4.2.12 The first set of land use and masterplan proposals for Loddon Garden Village was set out by Wokingham Borough Council in November 2021 as part of an early consultation on the Local Plan Update. From that starting point the University and their consultant team, collaborating with HFLL and Gleeson Land, has developed and refined the Illustrative Masterplan for the Proposed Development based on three years of technical studies and design development, culminating in the plans set out in the DAS and the supporting Parameter Plans.

4.2.13 The proposals are consistent with the indicative Concept Plan for the LGV published by WBC in the Regulation 19 Local Plan Update and are based around an illustrative Masterplan that has been developed to take account of technical site assessment and the extensive pre-application engagement.

Figure 4.1 Outline Planning Application Illustrative Masterplan



4.2.14 The key changes made to the illustrative Masterplan during its development are summarised below:

1. **The Spine Road** – This will serve as the main transport route through LGV and is designed to minimise environmental impacts by supporting sustainable travel options through public transport, cycling and walking. The Spine Road provides a key connection over the M4.

2. **Facilitating better community and health infrastructure** – the relocation of the District Centre incorporating community facilities from the north of the Site toward the centre allows for better access by users of the Site. A Health Hub has been provided at the southern Local Centre. By locating these hubs centrally, this encourages the use of sustainable travel modes and improves outcomes in health, employment and education.

3. **A dedicated Sports Hub** – The masterplan includes a dedicated Sports Hub co-located with the Secondary School. This will reduce pressure on other sports facilities in the area featuring various pitches and community spaces, thereby improving socio-economic outcomes on the Site and in the nearby area.

4. **Density** – Building heights and densities are concentrated along the Spine Road, gradually reducing towards the edges to minimise the impact on surrounding areas and protect key views across the Loddon Valley lessening the impact from a landscape and visual impact perspective.

5. **Landscape-led SuDs** – Surface Water will be managed using nature-based SuDs solutions such as raingardens, bioswales, and ponds. These landscape-led measures ensure ecology and biodiversity also boost local biodiversity and support ecological connections across the wider area.

4.2.15 Table 4.1 outlines further how environmental constraints and consideration of potential impacts have influenced the design of the Proposed Development.

Table 4.1 Key Design Changes/Influences

Environmental Topic	Change and influence on Environmental Impacts / Effects.
Air Quality	Sensitive uses within the Proposed Development have been located away from local pollution sources (e.g. M4). The increased distance from key pollution sources reduces the concentration of air borne pollutants at sensitive receptors within the Proposed Development (through increase dispersion). This results in an avoidance of potential adverse air quality impacts on human health. Provision of sustainable transport options embedded and promoted through the design of the Proposed Development will result in a reduction in the number of external vehicle trips that are made during the operational phase of the Proposed Development and therefore air quality impacts related to transport emissions.
Archaeology	The layout of the Proposed Development has been designed to avoid physical impacts on below ground heritage asset. This includes the Scheduled Monument of St Bartholomew's Church on site and areas of open space around other archaeological receptors in the southern part of the Site. Beyond the Scheduled Monument, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the archaeological features on the study Site are of such significance to preclude development.
Built Heritage	With the exception of the spine road, the lack of built development to the northwest of the River Loddon will preserve the setting and significance of the Grade II listed buildings (refence LB13 – LB17 and BH1 in Chapter 9). Hall Place Farmhouse, Simonds Family Tomb and St Bartholomew's Old Church are retained. The Proposed Development includes separation of new built development from St Bartholomew's Church. The retention of agricultural land in the areas to the north of Mole Bridge Farmhouse and The Glen, preserving the setting of these two built heritage receptors. On the eastern boundary, built development is set away from Bearwood Park, West Lodge, Park Lodge and Mole Lodge Gasworks thereby protecting their settings. Retention of built heritage assets and locating built development away from sensitive receptors reduces the adverse impact on the setting and significance of these assets.
Climate Change & GHG	Habitat creation will counterbalance environmental impacts for vegetation and soil carbon lost during construction. By promoting sustainable travel measures, the operational phase of the development will contain embedded mitigation through car clubs, mobility hubs, EV charging, cycle hire, cycle parking, electric bicycle charging infrastructure, dedicated pedestrian and cycle routes within the Site.

	Potable water efficiency and flood risk management / SuDS will be incorporated.
Ecology	The delivery of habitats and ecological buffers would ensure habitats of ecological value are present post-development and reduce adverse ecological effects. Retained habitats will be buffered during construction to prevent damage with semi-natural buffers created during operation. For example, ancient woodlands will be subject to 15m buffer zones. Tree Root Protection Zones of a radius 15 times the diameter of the tree or an area reaching 5 m beyond the tree's outermost canopy to avoid compaction and other adverse impacts. Access Management through the provision of Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) will avoid adverse impacts on Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Additionally, attractive alternative recreational spaces will also be provided for new and existing residents in the local area. Both methods will draw visitors away from potentially sensitive sites. Provision of greenspaces are incorporated into the Proposed Development including the EcoValley; natural greenspace; amenity greenspace and parks and gardens.
Hydrology (Flood Risk & Drainage)	A sequential approach to the layout was applied during Masterplanning the Site such as avoiding indicative surface water flows, floodplain areas and setting back built development from Main Rivers and Ordinary Watercourses. A surface water drainage strategy incorporating SuDS will include infiltration and conveyance, attenuation and controlled discharge of surface water runoff. Additionally, finished floor levels (FFLs) will be above the design flood event including an appropriate allowance for climate change. The Proposed Development includes design considerations to help realise opportunities for water efficiency measures and the on-Site foul water strategy utilises topography and layout where practicable to minimise foul water pumping stations. The Drainage Strategy will prevent pollutants and sediments travelling off-Site and maintain volume of discharge at current greenfield runoff rates.
Landscape & Visual Impact	The Illustrative Masterplan prioritises the retention of existing trees, woodlands, hedgerows, and historic avenues, minimising losses to only those necessary for access or safety. Ancient and veteran trees, as well as areas covered by Tree Preservation Orders, are protected with appropriate buffer zones and root protection measures. Historic features like Hall Place Farmhouse and the Arborfield-Hall Farm avenue are preserved within green corridors. Large open spaces, including those within the EcoValley and SANG areas, are maintained and enhanced with new planting, water features, and recreational amenities. Development is concentrated on arable land without trees; building heights are kept modest, especially near sensitive river and ecological areas.

	Sports facilities, natural play areas, and sustainable drainage features are integrated as landscape positives and to maintain views of local landmarks. Green spaces and corridors are interwoven throughout the site to ensure easy access, landscape integration, and biodiversity enhancement. Taller buildings would be located to the centre of the Site up to 5 storeys. Elsewhere on Site, building heights are at 3.5 storeys (less than 12m) with buildings along sensitive edges at no more than 2.5 storeys (less than 9m).
Noise & Vibration	An offset from the M4 has been incorporated to reduce the influence of noise on proposed future residential receptors.
Socio-economics	Disruption to existing businesses, employment uses, amenity spaces and residents would be controlled and managed through the implementation of the CEMP. Essential infrastructure and services are to be delivered to ensure those who occupy the development in the early phases of the project are adequately served. To meet the needs of new residents the provision of 2 x 3 FE primary schools and 1 x 12 FE secondary school would meet the needs of new residential units. Comprehensive green infrastructure including a Country Park, landscaping and public open space, and ecological enhancement measures which would help meet the needs.
Transport & Access	Promotion of sustainable travel options including by bus, cycling and walking, which will have the effect of reducing impacts on the surrounding road network, whilst contributing towards high quality of life.

Summary

4.2.16 The Illustrative Masterplan for Loddon Garden Village focuses on creating a well-connected and sustainable community. Key features include a multi-modal Spine Road network to support a diverse range of transport modes , dedicated community and health hubs for accessible services, and a sports hub incorporated co-located with the secondary school. Building densities are highest along the main road and decrease towards the edges to ease transitions with neighbouring areas. Surface water mitigation uses nature-based solutions like rain gardens and SuDs to enhance biodiversity. Ongoing community engagement and stewardship models are being considered to ensure local involvement and social value in the development's future management.

4.2.17 As set out above, the Illustrative Masterplan has been adapted and updated to take into account the received comments received during extensive consultation and consultation.

4.2.18 The technical work undertaken as part of EIA process has identified key environmental constraints which has feed into the design seeking to avoid and reduce adverse environmental impacts.