



Appeal Decision

Inquiry held on 17 - 19 and 24 February 2026

Site visits made on 16 and 20 February 2026

by David M H Rose BA(Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9th March 2026

Appeal Reference: APP/X0360/W/25/3361360

Land West of Limmerhill Road, Wokingham, RG41 4BY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Monopro Ltd against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Reference is 232621.
 - The development proposed is described as 'Outline Planning Application for up to 60 no. dwellings (use class C3) with associated public open space, landscaping, ecological enhancements, drainage and other supporting infrastructure, with access from Barkham Road (all other matters reserved)'.¹
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The outline planning application includes a suite of supporting plans. The parameter plans depicting building heights, movement, land use and green infrastructure define the nature of the development. The illustrative detailed masterplan, indicative landscape masterplan and contextual masterplan show a possible form of development based on the parameters. However, it is the parameter plans that provide the principal basis for assessing whether the site could be developed by up to 60 dwellings whilst ensuring compliance with relevant local and national planning policies and related guidance.
3. I held a Case Management Conference on 15 December 2025 to agree procedural and administrative matters for the Inquiry. The merits of the appeal proposal were not discussed.
4. I identified the preliminary draft main issues on the basis of the limited information available to me at that stage. These have been revised following the submission of the signed Statement of Common Ground and the Proofs of Evidence.
5. The application for planning permission cited ten reasons for refusal. The Statement of Common Ground confirms that reason for refusal 7: Biodiversity is no longer pursued; and reasons for refusal 9 and 10: Employment Skills and Affordable Housing are resolved through the Agreement pursuant to section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended).

¹ The description was amended by agreement with the Council to remove the reference to age-restricted housing – I have considered the appeal on that basis

6. It is also agreed that reason for refusal 8, Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, in light of Natural England's response dated 28 January 2026, can be met by a Grampian condition to secure mitigation before the commencement of development.
7. I undertook an accompanied site visit on the afternoon of Monday 16 February 2026 and an unaccompanied visit to the wider area on the same day. I also made an unaccompanied visit to the locality of the appeal site on the morning of Friday 20 February 2026.
8. Closing submissions were heard virtually on the morning of Tuesday 24 February 2026. I agreed a deadline for the engrossment of the Planning Obligation that was discussed in draft at the Inquiry.

Planning Obligation

(section 106 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended))

9. The Planning Obligation is made between Wokingham Borough Council and Monopro Limited. It is dated 4 March 2026.
10. The First Schedule provides for 40% of the dwellings on the site to be provided as affordable housing comprising 70% social rented housing (1 - 4 bedrooms) and 30% shared ownership dwellings (1 - 3 bedrooms). This reflects Core Strategy² Policy CP5 which requires a minimum of 40% affordable housing for sites outside of settlement limits.
11. Financial contributions are due under the Second Schedule for the provision of new allotments and/or enhancement of existing allotments in the Borough; offsite sports and recreation provision or enhancement; strategic access management and monitoring fee per dwelling; and a burial ground financial contribution. These are supported by the standards in Local Plan³ Policy TB08, indicative costings and off-site contributions calculated and secured elsewhere.
12. The Third Schedule requires either an employment skills contribution or the submission of an employment skills plan to encourage vocational training and local employment opportunities. This is underpinned by Local Plan Policy TB12 and supported by the Council's Employment and Skills Guidance.
13. The Fourth Schedule relates to the construction of estate roads; and financial contributions for improvements/enhancement of the Leopard Free Bus Service and the Council's Borough-wide 'My Journey' travel awareness initiative. The adoption of the estate road, or maintenance by a management company, is essential for highway safety and amenity. The 'My Journey' contribution is a Borough-wide sustainable transport initiative and replaces the need for a site-specific travel plan. The bus service contribution reflects the objectives of the Wokingham Bus Service Improvement Plan 2024 (2024-2040).
14. The Fifth Schedule would secure agreement on the terms and responsibilities of a management company, in the event of transfer of lands containing the estate roads and the open space and/or the play area.

² Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document (January 2010)

³ Wokingham Borough Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Document (February 2014)

15. The provision of open space and play areas, reflecting Core Strategy Policy CP2 and Local Plan Policy TB08, would be secured under the Sixth Schedule with clauses for completion, maintenance and management.
16. The Seventh Schedule contains the Council's covenants in relation to the application of the financial contributions.
17. Overall, I consider that the obligations meet the statutory and policy tests and are material considerations in the appeal.

The Development Plan

18. The Development Plan includes the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document (January 2010) (the 'Core Strategy'); and the Wokingham Borough Adopted Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Document (February 2014) (the 'Local Plan').
19. Core Strategy Policy CP17 sets out the housing requirement for the plan period, derived from the former South-East Plan, averaging some 660 dwellings per annum. This is significantly less than the current standard method assessed need of 1,316 dwellings per annum and the pre-December 2024 National Planning Policy Framework (the 'Framework') figure of 748 dwellings per annum. It also predates the Framework's ambition to boost the supply of housing.
20. Local Plan Policy CC02 establishes settlement boundaries (development limits) to accommodate the development needs of Core Strategy Policy CP17. Core Strategy Policy CP9 secures the scale and location of development proposals either within development limits or in identified Strategic Development Locations.
21. In turn, Core Strategy Policy CP11 indicates that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted in order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. The Council accepts that the rigid application of Policy CP11 would thwart the provision of a 5-year housing land supply, and greenfield sites are essential to meeting housing needs. It is agreed that the current level of supply is 2.5 years with a shortfall of 3,454 dwellings against the standard method.
22. It is evident that these spatial strategy policies are out-of-date and are deemed to be out-of-date absent a 5-year housing land supply. However, paragraph 232 of the Framework indicates that '*due weight*' should be given to the policies, according to their degree of consistency with the Framework. In this regard, the policies are founded on the principles of balancing competing needs, for example, directing development to sustainable locations and maintaining the quality of the environment.
23. These policies taken together have a measure of affinity with the Framework and it is important to note that Wokingham's housing delivery scores since 2018 have ranged between 157% and 205% as a result of sites (generally reflecting the spatial strategy) delivering earlier than anticipated.
24. Nonetheless, given the origins of the plan and the current shortfall in housing land supply, against the mantra of meeting future housing needs, I give limited to moderate weight to the above spatial strategy policies. I will return to the degree of conflict with these and other policies in due course.

25. Importantly, Local Plan Policy CC01 sets a presumption in favour of sustainable development, setting out that where relevant policies are out-of-date permission will be granted unless any adverse impacts of planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole. Whilst its wording is not identical to that in the Framework, the thrust of the policy carries full weight.
26. At this juncture it is appropriate to reflect on the emerging Local Plan Update. Although Part 1 of the examination has been completed, key matters to be assessed in Part 2 include the spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy, proposed settlement boundaries and policies for development outside those boundaries. The Council's housing trajectory, which is not disputed by the Appellant, confirms that housing land supply will be between 6.7 and 7.5 years on anticipated adoption at the end of 2026.
27. However, the plan has been prepared under the provisions of paragraph 234b of the Framework, with a locally derived housing need figure between 748-795 dwellings per annum. In this regard, the local planning authority will be expected to begin work on a new plan to address the current standard method figure of 1,316 dwellings per annum with adoption in the first part of 2029. This is likely to lead to the release of more greenfield sites through a review of settlement boundaries and/or new strategic allocations.
28. On this basis, the weight to be attributed to the emerging Local Plan Update is very limited.

Main Issues

29. The main issues at the beginning of the Inquiry were:
 1. The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area including landscape and visual effects.
 2. The effect of the proposal on the existing pattern of settlement; and the separate identities of Barkham and Wokingham.
 3. Whether the characteristics of the site and the parameters of development would result in a well-designed place.⁴
 4. Whether the location is, or can be made, sustainable through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of travel modes.⁵
 5. Other material considerations.
 6. As the policies which are most important for determining the application are agreed to be out-of-date, would the adverse effects of granting planning permission significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

⁴ Round Table discussion at the Inquiry

⁵ Written Statements and Inspector's site visits

Reasons

Issue 1:

The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area including landscape and visual effects

30. The appeal site lies on the south-western edge of Wokingham, separated from the most part from the built-up area by Limmerhill Road, a recently registered public bridleway.
31. The northern, generally well-vegetated, frontage of Barkham Road, to the south, contains Ye Olde Leathern Bottel pub, immediately to the west of Limmerhill Road, three frontage dwellings and a backland plot before running into Blandford Drive, Barkham. Bottel Copse occupies the southern side of Barkham Road with a recent permission for the construction of a new access road through it to serve proposed residential development beyond the woodland.
32. The western boundary of the appeal site is well defined by vegetation and, in turn, links into Fox Hill Wood to the north-west. A cluster of large dwellings sit within the apex of Limmerhill Road to the north.
33. The appeal site, comprising of two fields separated by a riparian hedgerow, takes the form of a shallow valley. It is grazed by horses with the main equine paraphernalia to the rear of the public house. An electricity pylon and transmission lines dominate the south-western corner of the site.
34. The appeal site lies within, but on the outer edge of, Landscape Character Area (LCA) J1.⁶ The LCA encompasses large areas of urban development with small areas of arable fields and open space separating settlements. The site lies adjacent to LCA L1 which is described as '*A gently undulating landscape, principally in agricultural use with smaller fields of sheep pasture and horse paddocks close to settlements*'. Inevitably, LCAs tend to merge into one another with transitional characteristics. Both LCAs contain guidelines seeking to conserve and enhance the integration of urban edges. The expositions in the written evidence are informative but not pivotal to the determination of landscape effects.
35. A further initial point arises as to whether the site is to be considered as a 'valued landscape' for the purposes of paragraph 187a) of the Framework. In this regard, the site has been identified as part of the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape in the emerging Local Plan Update.
36. However, the Council acknowledges that the site in isolation does not have sufficient attributes to be judged as a valued landscape, albeit it is common ground that the adjacent Fox Hill Wood has the appropriate qualities. As the matter of designation, or otherwise, remains a matter for the Local Plan examination, I do not seek to prejudge the matter. In any event, the Council's views of the high/medium value of the appeal site is not contingent on inclusion.
37. In terms of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments, there is very little between the parties as tabularized in the Landscape Statement of Common Ground. At its highest, based on the Council's position, the effect on the character of the site and its immediate context at year 1 (post development) would be major/moderate adverse reducing to moderate adverse (permanent) at year 15. This is not unusual where a greenfield site gives way to housing.

⁶ Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment 2019

38. Looking in more detail at the landscape character effects, despite the presence of existing development within the vicinity of the site, and the use of the land for horse grazing, the Appellant's characterisation of the appeal site as 'urban fringe' is somewhat disparaging.
39. Although the term 'urban fringe' typically relates to a transitional zone where urban and rural areas meet, the characteristics of the interface are inevitably site specific. To my mind, the small valley topography, tree and hedgerow cover in and around the site, sweeping views from parts of Limmerhill Road and the incidental nature of built form firmly define the site as countryside.
40. Whilst the western part of the site would remain free from built form and the area proposed for development would occupy only some 30% of the site, the two fields would nonetheless undergo fundamental change with, according to the Parameter Plans – Land Use, two residential land parcels and additional areas given over to highways and green infrastructure. In my opinion, the concept of countryside character would be lost and the proposal would appear as a poorly related adjunct to the existing urban area. The effects would be restricted to the site and its immediate surroundings, amounting to harm of a moderate nature.
41. Turning to visual effects, it is common ground that the site is well contained and relevant views, where they exist, are highly localised. Both the Appellant and the Council assess the degree of effect from viewpoints 1 - 3 on Limmerhill Road at year 15 to be moderate adverse, with the Council identifying a major/moderate adverse effect in the view facing south-west based on a medium/high value of the view. Taking account of boundary vegetation, I prefer the Appellant's assessment.
42. The public views along the length of Limmerhill Road, before it turns away from the site, are of understandable value to local residents in providing contrast, respite, interest and enjoyment. A '*moderate adverse effect*' translates into a '*clear deterioration in the view*'. In my opinion, however well-laid out, designed and landscaped, the proposed development would result in a qualitative loss of rural views and their related attributes.
43. Taking in the additional viewpoint provided by the Council's landscape witness, from the edge of Fox Hill Wood, the development would have a lesser immediate impact as a consequence of distance from the viewer, the evident filtered backdrop of Wokingham and the opportunity for meaningful landscaping.
44. Finally, although an open aspect from the residential properties bounding the northern edge of the site is cherished, it is common ground that none of the dwellings would be rendered unattractive places to live in the public interest. The submission of reserved matters, should permission be granted, would give the Council the opportunity to fully assess potential impacts having received detailed drawings of the layout, massing and orientation of dwellings.
45. Whilst it is claimed that '*the impacts that one sees from this development are exactly what would be expected for appropriate edge of settlement development*', I disagree. Such a sweeping assertion belittles the site specific considerations taking account of the characteristics of the site and its surroundings and public access immediately to the east and north-east of the land.
46. Overall, I consider that the proposal would result in moderate harm to the character and appearance of the area including landscape and visual effects.

Issue 2:-

The effect of the proposal on the existing pattern of settlement; and the separate identities of Barkham and Wokingham

47. Starting with the existing pattern of settlement, Limmerhill Road, for the most part, provides a clear edge to built development reinforced by established landscaping. The houses on its eastern side, in Linden Close and Rowan Close, although relatively close, stand behind imposing trees bordering the road. In turn the Limmerhill Amenity Area, again well treed, detaches the houses served by Swallow Way.
48. Whilst the proposed development would have a semblance of affinity with nearby properties, and it would not be remote or isolated in the sense of being distant from Wokingham, it would, seemingly appear as a standalone pocket of development beyond the containment of Limmerhill Road.
49. Whilst greenfield sites, notably Blagrove Lane, are to be developed on the edge of Wokingham at far greater scale, individual site characteristics influence the degree of synergy with the existing pattern of settlement. Here, as a matter of planning judgement, it would be lacking.
50. Moving on to Core Strategy Policy CP11, its principal focus is to protect the separate identity of settlements and to maintain the quality of the environment. The Council acknowledges that the policy does not seek to protect openness between settlements for its own sake. In effect, the policy is a spatial tool to prevent coalescence and has to be considered in the context that settlements in the immediate and wider locality are frequently close to each other.
51. At the present time, Fox Hill Wood, the appeal site and the land to the south of Barkham Road provide separation between, and reinforce the separate identity of, Barkham and Wokingham. The Inspector in the Blagrove Lane appeal acknowledged that *'Introducing a new access on Barkham Road between the two settlements would signify a new road junction and introduce a new corridor of movement, which would be regularly and routinely used, and a perception that the road leads to somewhere between the two settlements. That would alter people's current experience of departing/arriving at Barkham and Wokingham even though none of the proposed residential development would be visible from Barkham Road'*.
52. The journey along Barkham Road between Wokingham and Barkham, based on the agreed entry/exit of Barkham and the different, but largely inconsequential, interpretation of the entry/exit of Wokingham, and the residual experience of being 'in between', is relatively short. Two viewpoints form the basis of assessment.
53. First, in relation to the vicinity of the public house, although the trees on the northern boundary of the car park preclude views into the site, based on the summer viewpoint photograph, seasonal change and loss of leaf cover opens views across the site exposing Thatched Cottage and its associated garage on the southern side of Limmerhill Road. Although the realigned access to serve the development would be orientated to avoid direct views into the site, the outline of two storey buildings beyond the car park would be readily apparent, notably in winter months.

54. The second viewpoint is across the side garden of 229 Barkham Road. Currently, several dwellings beyond the site on Limmerhill Road can be seen nestling in a wooded backdrop. Given that the land falls away behind no. 229 and there would be potential for new landscaping, it is anticipated that nothing more than the rooflines of new dwellings would be discernible.
55. Importantly, in the journey along Barkham Road, due to vegetation and road alignment, the respective settlements are not intervisible and that would remain unchanged both physically and perceptually with the proposed development.
56. The Council made play on a number of appeal decisions, where development had been refused fronting on to Barkham Road, in order to demonstrate the importance of the gap and maintaining separation. However, the characteristics and effects of the then proposed road frontage plots lack meaningful comparison as the appeal site, save for the two transient viewpoints, is largely obscured from Barkham Road.
57. Looking next from Limmerhill Road, whilst current users of the bridleway would justifiably perceive the proposed development as moving Wokingham beyond well-defined confines towards Barkham, the public open space within the western part of the appeal site, albeit of different land cover, would provide meaningful physical separation between the western edge of the development and Barkham itself.
58. From within the site, the landscaped buffer between the two settlements would have clearer affinity with the proposed new housing in terms of extent, proximity and accessibility. The dwellings on the eastern side of Blandford Drive would be a minor element in relation to the swathe of land running to the west of the site and into Fox Hill Wood. Concerns about the public open space having urban association could be minimised at reserved matters stage through sensitive design and planting. Whilst it would no longer be open countryside, the green edge setting and separate identity of Barkham would remain sufficiently apparent.
59. Finally, the relocation westwards of the access to the public house, its increased width and geometry, limited loss of vegetation and introduction of lighting would, like the Blagrove Lane scheme, give the impression of leading to somewhere. Although new houses would be apparent on the appeal site, unlike the Blagrove Lane proposal, they would not materially alter the sense of separation between Wokingham and Barkham along the Barkham Road corridor.
60. In summary, the proposed pocket of development would extend the outer limits of Wokingham beyond a well-defined natural 'soft' settlement edge amounting to moderate harm. However, the separate identities of Wokingham and Barkham would remain, consistent with Core Strategy Policy CP11.

Issue 3:-

Whether the characteristics of the site and the parameters of development would result in a well-designed place

61. Core Strategy Policy CP1 (1) seeks to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment and CP3 (a) and (f) seeks development that is designed to reflect the character of the area, contribute to a sense of place and integrate with their surroundings.

62. Local Plan Policy CC02, whilst not strictly applicable to the appeal proposal as it relates to development within development limits, identifies the need to respect the transition between the built-up area and the open countryside by taking account of the character of the adjacent countryside and landscape.
63. The Framework urges the effective and efficient use of land, balanced with, amongst other things, the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting and the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places. It acknowledges that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development.
64. The National Design Guide identifies ten characteristics which contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the Framework. The Council's Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (June 2012) seeks to promote good design in its widest sense.
65. A fundamental principle of good design is to understand context and how a proposal would relate to the site and its surroundings. It is said that in this case *'The design worked from the outside in, in which the landscape and green infrastructure framework was established first (to ensure, primarily, that the separation between Barkham and Wokingham was maintained) with the residential parcels then defined within the remaining space. From this, the total quantum of homes was established – which then gives rise to the "density figure".'*
66. That density figure, based on a development of up to 60 dwellings, is 30 dwellings per hectare (dph) and centred on the Borough Design Guide's 'Informal suburban' character. The initial high-level settlement-wide review was followed by a more detailed local and site-specific assessment.
67. This identified 10 dph to the north of the site; 33 dph to the north-east of the Limmerhill Amenity Area; 22 dph for the Magnolia Way development; and 29 dph for Folly Court. The Blagrove Lane development will have an average density of approximately 30 – 33 dph.
68. The figures are not agreed as the Council's assessment focuses on more condensed areas with 8 dph to the north and 15.5 dph for Magnolia Way, Rowan Close and Linden Close. Nonetheless, I shall adopt the wider perspective as it is common ground that density figures alone do not determine whether a proposal will fit into a place. Further, well-designed places do not need to copy their surroundings in every way and in some instances increased densities can be appropriate.
69. In this instance, ignoring the houses to the north on Limmerhill Road, the appeal site stands distinctly apart from the residential areas relied on by the Appellant and its comparator of the prevailing density of the surrounding settlement as a whole. This is a well contained countryside site where existing development to the north and east sits within a strong sylvan framework, with the further definition of Limmerhill Road, to form a transition into the rural landscape.
70. Although the majority of the land would remain undeveloped, the inherent character of the site, taking account of the topography, the riparian hedgerow within it, and the superficial association with the majority of surrounding development, provides no real justification for the Appellant's claim that *'The proposed density reflects that of adjoining residential areas and does not introduce a step change when considered in its wider settlement context'*.⁷

⁷ Proof of evidence - Design paragraph 8.17

71. Whilst it is argued that the overall use of the site is notably restrained, with a density of 10 dph on the land as a whole, this serves to confirm that density alone is not a reliable proxy for assessing design quality. On the contrary, the most important consideration is that of context, both site specific and the relationship with its surroundings. To my mind, the Appellant has failed demonstrably to understand and respond to context and has placed an undue emphasis in seeking to maximise the number of dwellings on the parcels identified for development.
72. As to the suggestion that density could vary across the site, with scope to loosen the density to the north considerably, this would, however skilfully conceived, serve to reinforce the drawbacks described elsewhere within the site. Further, despite the scope for extensive landscaping, the development as a whole would fail to respond, or contribute positively, to the underlying character and quality of the local area. In short, the proposed development would not sit comfortably with the site and its setting and it would fail to integrate with its surroundings.
73. A further point arises from the nature of the access road into the site in terms of the length of highway frontage without overlooking dwellings. This is clearly a factor of the site constraints in terms of taking access between the public house car park and 227/229 Barkham Road and the internal riparian corridor. Whilst the illustrative detailed masterplan suggests a lack of surveillance, I am satisfied that by the careful positioning and orientation of buildings, this could be minimised through the submission of reserved matters.
74. Drawing together these threads, there is inevitably tension between making the optimum use of land to deliver much needed housing whilst maintaining environmental quality and ensuring that new developments are well-grounded in their locality. In this instance, the Appellant has misunderstood or misinterpreted the fundamental characteristics and context of the site and as a consequence the parameters of the development would not result in a well-designed place. Accordingly, conflict with the development plan and the related guidance leads me to the conclusion that the proposal would cause harm of very significant magnitude.

Issue 4:-

Whether the location is, or can be made, sustainable through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of travel modes

75. The underlying aims of the Development Plan, through Core Strategy Policies CP1 (11), CP2 and CP6 (a, b and c), in particular, are to promote sustainable development, inclusive communities and to manage travel demand. The National Planning Policy Framework in chapters 8 and 9 promotes healthy and sustainable communities and sustainable transport.
76. In terms of walking, there is a broad range of guidance available. Living Streets – A Highways Guide for Developers in Wokingham (2019) sets out some walk distance ranges to key destinations. It classifies accessibility as low, medium or high and expects developments to fall within the high to medium categories of accessibility to be sustainable.
77. Manual for Streets (2007) explains that *‘walkable neighbourhoods are typically characterised by having a range of facilities within 10 minutes’ (up to about 800 m) walking distance of residential areas which residents may access comfortably on foot. However, this is not an upper limit and (the former) PPS13 states that walking offers the greatest potential to replace short car trips, particularly those under 2 km’.*

78. The National Design Guide (2019) defines *'walkable'* as *'local facilities are within walking distance, generally considered to be no more than a 10 minute walk (800m radius)'*.
79. The propensity for an individual to walk will be influenced by a variety of factors including mobility, age, time of day, the nature and purpose of the journey, the characteristics of the route and alternative modes of travel. None of the above guidance is to be interpreted prescriptively.
80. The Transport Statement which accompanied the application sets out a range of facilities and amenities that could typically be required by future residents and their approximate distances from the centre of the site and the estimated walking and cycling times.
81. Ye Olde Leathern Bottel pub, a playground, bus stops and a veterinary practice are located within 400m and are considered to have *'high accessibility'* based on Living Streets. Thereafter supermarkets, convenience store, medical facilities, Molly Millars business park, primary school, and day nursery are located in the range of 1.3km – 1.5km from the site placing them in the *'low accessibility'* category by up to 300m. The railway station involves a walk of some 1.5km and falls within *'medium accessibility'*. Wokingham town centre is in the order of 2km distant and there are no secondary schools within 2km.
82. Walking routes are variable, with the hospital and railway station directly along Barkham Road. Bus stops serve both facilities as an alternative. In terms of the walkable journey, Barkham Road is an important route into Wokingham and is described by the Council as *'a heavily trafficked busy B Road'*. It is also noted that some sections of the footway fall below the recommended minimum footway width of 2m defined by Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. Nonetheless, I did not perceive the route to be uncomfortable or deficient to the extent that it would discourage walking to a significant degree.
83. The Woosehill Medical Practice, Morrisons Supermarket and Windmill Primary School have the option of a relatively free traffic route from Limmerhill Road. However, these facilities cannot realistically be said to be reasonably accessible on foot for those with young children or shopping.
84. The facilities served by Molly Millars Lane include the business park, Lidl and Bright Horizons Day Nursery and Preschool, with the option of a route predominantly away from Barkham Road. Of these, walking to work would be the most credible opportunity.
85. For those choosing to walk to Molly Millars Lane, although Barkham Road lacks a signal controlled or zebra crossing, there is a defined crossing point with dropped kerbs and tactile paving. Visibility along Barkham Road in both directions is sufficient to allow safe crossing. The Council's concern about crossing Molly Millars Lane appears unfounded in that there is a light controlled pedestrian crossing directly opposite Lidl.
86. Moving on to cycling, all of the facilities referred to above are within a comfortable cycling distance. It is recognised that none of the roads within the vicinity have dedicated facilities and all journeys would seemingly be on the carriageway. However, I see no reason why this should be a significant deterrent to the experienced cyclist making relatively short journeys.

87. In terms of public transport, paragraph 4.37, following Policy CP6, of the Core Strategy states:
'In line with the WLDP definition, good public transport services meet the following requirements:
 - a) *At least a thirty minute service frequency during peak times (7:00 to 9:00 and 16:00 to 19:00 Monday to Saturday); and*
 - b) *At least an hourly service frequency during off-peak hours (9:00 to 16:00 and 19:00 to 22:00 Monday to Saturday and between 7:00 and 22:00 on Sundays).'*
88. Barkham Road is served by bus route Leopard 3 connecting Reading Station to Wokingham via Royal Berkshire Hospital, Shinfield and Arborfield. Since May 2025 the service has been operating (Mondays to Fridays) with services out of Wokingham at 05:57, 06:47 (06:57 in school holidays), 07:17, 07:51, 08:29, 08:58, and then half hourly with subsequent services at 16:03, 16:37, 17:08, 17:40, 18:10 and 18:27, followed by six evening services up to 23:05.
89. The outbound Saturday service is broadly hourly from 06:17 to 08:51, and from 09:04 runs roughly on the half hour until 19:13 and five further services up to 23:05. Sunday services are generally hourly from 09:02 until 19:52.
90. Inbound (taking St James Road, Barkham as the nearest point on the timetable), services run at 06:16, 06:47, 07:22, 07:59, 08:33, 09:06, 09:28, 09:56, followed by two services per hour⁸ until 18:58 and five evening services.
91. Saturday services are timed at 06:46, 07:34, two services between 08:00 and 08:59, three services between 09:00 and 09:59, two each hour until 17:54 and six evening services up to 22:44. On Sundays, there is an hourly service from 08:40 until 20:30.
92. Whilst the route frequency does not meet the Council's terminology of 'good', it is notable that the Council's definition does not have formal policy status. In any event, the discrepancies are very limited and I am satisfied that Leopard 3 provides for sustainable transport to allow choice. Whilst there is only immediate access to a single route, the journey into Wokingham is short and provides the opportunity to link with train journeys and other bus services. The contributions arising through the Planning Obligation related to public transport are a material consideration.
93. The criticism that the northern part of the site falls outside a bus stop catchment of 300 metres for less frequent routes,⁹ is based on specific guidance as opposed to prescription. In any event, there is nothing to suggest that the additional distance would render the journey unwalkable. It is noted that the absence of a shelter and seating at the nearest bus stops is a drawback.
94. In light of the various guidance on accessibility to services, facilities and public transport, the final analysis is one of planning judgement considered in the round. The Framework acknowledges that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. In this instance, typical of an edge of settlement location, there are very limited immediate facilities and services.

⁸ Mid-afternoon times are 14:57, 15:31 and 16:09

⁹ As advocated by the Chartered Institution of Highway and Transportation, in its publication Buses in Urban Developments

95. Nonetheless, I am satisfied that the longer distances and the nature of the routes would not be an outright impediment to walking and/or cycling. Further, there would be realistic opportunities for bus travel as a single journey or connection to other bus and rail services to a variety of destinations. I am therefore satisfied that the site is in a broadly sustainable location and there would be no material conflict with the relevant development plan policies.

Issue 5:-

Other material considerations

Best and Most Versatile Agricultural Land

96. Policy CP1 (7) of the Core Strategy has the effect of requiring new development to avoid areas of best and most versatile agricultural land. However, this is inconsistent with the Framework's narrower recognition to be given to the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land.
97. Reason for refusal 5 cited a failure to demonstrate that there would be no loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. The subsequent Statement of Common Ground records the outcome of a Report on Agricultural Land Classification and Soil Resources, submitted with the appeal, identifying 46% (3.1ha) of the site as Grade 2 (very good quality), 47% (3.2ha) Subgrade 3a (good quality) and 7% (0.5ha) non-agricultural. The parties agree that the loss is to be weighed in the planning balance.
98. The site is currently used for equestrian purposes and has the benefit of a planning permission for mixed agricultural and equine use. It is divorced from any wider agricultural holding and the loss of 7 hectares of best and most versatile agricultural land within a Borough with a high proportion of best and most versatile agricultural land would be minimal. Moreover, the emerging Local Plan Update recognises that the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land would be inevitable in order to meet the population growth and economic needs of Wokingham.
99. On this basis the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land in the circumstances of this case is to be given very limited weight.

Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

100. The Statement of Common Ground: SANG¹⁰ states: *'The appeal site, Land West of Limmerhill Road, Wokingham, is located within the 5km to 7km linear mitigation zone for the National Site Network site Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBH SPA). Natural England have advised that, alone or in combination, a net increase of 50+ dwellings within 5km to 7km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA could lead to likely significant effects via the recreational pathway.'*
101. It is agreed that the Blagrove Lane development will deliver spare SANG capacity with the required quantity for the proposed development capable of being made available. The parties and Natural England agree that the matter can be resolved through the imposition of a Grampian condition, subject to my determination from the versions discussed at the Inquiry.
102. Accordingly, there would be *'no conflict with the Regulation 63 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 as amended, Article 6(3) of Directive 92/43/EEC, Policy NRM6 of the South East Plan, and Policies CP8 and CP4 of the Core Strategy, as cited in the reason for refusal'*.

¹⁰ Strategic Area of Natural Green Space

Highway Matters Raised by Interested Persons

103. The application for planning permission was supported by a Transport Statement and a Transport Technical Note to address matters raised by the Council. The Officer Report confirms that *'Overall, the proposed development would have an acceptable impact on highway safety'*.
104. The claimed comparison with the Folly Avenue access requirements lacks substance in terms of road geometry, traffic flow, number of dwellings and the different direction of travel for vehicles turning across the opposing traffic stream into the respective sites. The design of visibility splays corresponding with 85th percentile speeds reflects established technical guidance.
105. In terms of parking demand for the public house, and the loss of some 12 car parking spaces, the evidence before me is inconclusive, but not of concern to the Highway Authority.
106. The width, condition and use of Limmerhill Road is to be considered consistent with its status as a public bridleway giving access to a limited number of dwellings. Vehicle speeds along it are severely constrained and I do not regard there to be inherent conflict between different users.

Issue Six:-

As the policies which are most important for determining the application are agreed to be out-of-date, would the adverse effects of granting planning permission significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination

107. The relevant legislation requires that the appeal should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is common ground that the proposal would be contrary to the development plan when read as a whole.
108. However, the most important policies for determining the application are out-of-date, most notably in relation to a significant shortfall in the 5-year housing land supply. Housing delivery has exceeded that planned for in the development plan, and the emerging Local Plan Update will provide in excess of a 5-year supply. That plan, and the 5-year supply will be of short duration, and its successor will have to identify considerably more land to meet what will be a more challenging housing target. Over-supply and anticipation of a short-term 5-year supply against a dated requirement are to be given only **limited weight**.
109. As the Council accepts that there is a housing crisis in Wokingham and delivery is to be forward facing, I attribute **very significant weight** to the provision of market housing.
110. In terms of affordable housing, it is telling that the Council's Affordable Housing Topic Paper for the emerging Local Plan Update identifies 1,160 people registered on the Council's housing register of which 582 were considered to be in the most urgent and exceptional need for housing. The Topic Paper admits that *'..... delivering the 352 additional homes per year identified by the LHNA¹¹ is unlikely to be achievable'*.

¹¹ Local Housing Needs Assessment

111. The appeal scheme, through the Planning Obligation, would deliver 40% of the dwellings as affordable housing with 70% for social rent with the remainder shared ownership housing.
112. It follows that the provision of affordable housing should also attract **very significant weight**.
113. In terms of biodiversity net gain, the submission of the planning application predated the duty to provide a minimum 10% net gain. However, it is said that significant biodiversity gain of 13.08% for habitats and 35.41% for hedgerows could be achieved and secured by planning condition. On this basis, the ecological enhancements would merit **moderate weight**.
114. As to economic benefits, the development would generate local employment and increased local spending reinforced by the Planning Obligation to support local employment. These benefits are to be given **moderate weight**.
115. The scheme would deliver in excess of the normal requirement for public open space and be capable of serving the wider community, again amounting to **moderate weight**.
116. In terms of the counter balance, the weight to be given to the conflict with relevant development plan policies, other than Core Strategy Policy CC01, is necessarily **limited** and the conflict with the Local Plan Update is **very limited**.
117. The harm to the character and appearance of the area, including landscape and visual effects, attracts **moderate weight**.
118. The effect of the proposal on the existing pattern of settlement would represent harm of **moderate weight**; and as the separate identities of Barkham and Wokingham would be retained this is a **neutral consideration**.
119. In terms of the third main issue, the proposal would cause harm of **very significant weight** by its failure to achieve a well-designed place having regard to the characteristics of the site and the parameters of development.
120. I have found the site to be in a broadly sustainable location, having acknowledged some drawbacks, leading to **neutral weight**.
121. The loss of best and most versatile land is attributed **very limited weight**.
122. The weighing of all of these elements is not a mathematical or binary exercise. It relies on planning judgement. The government's urgency and mandate to meet housing needs is but one, albeit very important, element of sustainable development. Making effective use of land, and ensuring that homes are not built at low densities, are central considerations.
123. The Framework also outlines that '*Good design is a key aspect of sustainable developmentdecisions should ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area are sympathetic to local character including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting'*
124. Whilst the Appellant claims that the development parameters are informed by a detailed understanding of the prevailing context, my analysis as set out above shows that the broad-brush dwellings per hectare assessment of the wider area pays insufficient regard to the intrinsic context and character of the site.

125. Without an accurate understanding of context it cannot be said, as the Appellant alleges, that *'the scheme responds positively to the established settlement pattern and density of neighbouring residential development*'. In my opinion, the proposal would be unduly harmful and as an outline scheme it would fundamentally fail the ambition of a *'well-designed place'*.
126. Paragraph 139 of the Framework confirms *'Development that is not well designed should be refused*'. Whilst this is but one element of the planning balance, I consider that this, and the other harms arising from the proposal, lead me to the firm conclusion that the adverse effects of granting planning permission significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.
127. The presumption in favour of sustainable development in Local Plan Policy CC01 is significantly and demonstrably outweighed for the same reason.

Conclusion

128. For the above reasons, and having considered all other matters raised, the appeal is dismissed.

David MH Rose

Inspector

ANNEX A: APPEARANCES

For Monopro Ltd

Andrew Parkinson, Barrister

Instructed by Pegasus Group

He called

Jonathan Evans
BA(Hons) PGDip CMLI

Senior Landscape Planning Director
Pegasus Group

Thomas Harris
BA(Hons)

Associate Urban Designer
Pegasus Group

Katie Holden
BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

Principal Planner
Pegasus Group

Katie Stock BA(Hons)¹²
MSc CTPP MCIHT MTPS

Senior Director
Pegasus Group

Haroon Khan¹³

Partner, Knights

For Wokingham Borough Council

Anjoli Foster, Barrister

Instructed by Amanda Pierce¹⁴
Solicitor for the Council

She called

Stuart Ryder Landscape
BA(Hons) CMLI

Director
Ryder Landscape Consultants Ltd

Mark Croucher
BA(Hons) MSc

Planning Team Manager
Wokingham Borough Council

Duncan Fisher¹⁵

Green Infrastructure Manager
Wokingham Borough Council

Grace Blizzard¹⁶
MSc MCIHT CMILT

Associate at WSP

Interested Persons

Dr Rex Lucas

Limmerhill Road Residents Association

Councillor Lou Timlin

Evendons Ward Councillor, Town Councillor
and Local Resident

Dr David Youle

Local Resident

¹² Written statement

¹³ Section 106 Round Table

¹⁴ Section 106 Round Table

¹⁵ Written Statement, Planning Conditions - re Strategic Area of Green Space (SANG)

¹⁶ Written Statement

ANNEX B: DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED AT AND AFTER THE INQUIRY

INQ 1	Appearances for the Appellant
INQ 2	Opening Submissions on behalf of the Appellant
INQ 3	Opening Submissions on Behalf of Wokingham Borough Council and Appearances
INQ 4	CIL Compliance Statement Version 2; Appendix 2 & Appendix 3
INQ 5	Revised Draft Conditions & email from the Appellant
INQ 6	CIL Compliance Statement Version 3
INQ 7	Revised Draft Conditions and the Council's response to the Appellant
INQ 8	Council's Closing Submissions
INQ 9	Closing Submissions on behalf of the Appellant
INQ 10	Section 106 Agreement dated 4 March 2026