

PLANNING REF : 261825
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Dane Croft
: Blakes Lane Hare Hatch, Reading, Berkshire
: RG10 9TA
SUBMITTED BY : Mr David Tudor-Morgan
DATE SUBMITTED : 03/09/2026

COMMENTS:

David Tudor-Morgan MRICS & Claire Tudor-Morgan

Dane Croft, Blakes Lane, Hare Hatch, Berkshire RG10 9TA

3rd September 2026

Planning Department
Wokingham Borough Council
Shute End
Wokingham RG40 1BN

By online portal

Re: Objection to Planning Application 261825 - Land between
Merchiston and Glebe House, Blakes Lane

Dear Sir/Madam,

We live at Dane Croft, Blakes Lane, the second property along the lane from the application site. We object to this application and ask that planning permission be refused. In short, the proposal is unsuitable for this Green Belt site for the following main reasons:

the site is in the Green Belt and, in our view, has not been properly justified as Grey Belt or previously developed land; the proposed dwelling is far larger than the temporary structures it would replace, and its enormity in terms of a single dwelling would significantly harm openness and countryside character in this precious green belt section between the villages of Wargrave and Hare Hatch; the ecological assessment erroneously relies on a post-clearance baseline, after most of the site's trees and large shrubs were suddenly cut down in March 2026 (on a day when wild birds had already started nesting in our own garden along the lane); the drainage strategy has not been shown to be deliverable or safe for neighbouring land; and the location and lane conditions raise highway and sustainability concerns.

1. Green Belt and Grey Belt status

The application site lies within the Green Belt, and we do not accept that it qualifies as "Grey Belt" under the current National Planning Policy Framework. The former polytunnel, greenhouse and associated hardstanding were lightweight, non-permanent structures in agricultural/horticultural use, which do not meet the NPPF glossary definition of previously developed land. That use ceased more than ten years ago, and in that time the site was left to become genuinely overgrown rather than simply dormant, with no attempt made to maintain the structures or resume the use. On any fair reading, the previous lawful use has long since been abandoned and cannot be

relied upon as a fallback position capable of immediate implementation.

Even if elements of the site were accepted as previously developed, the wider 0.42-hectare application site plainly is not, and the Council should not allow the applicant's own characterisation of the site to substitute for a proper assessment against the national policy tests.

2. Scale, openness and character

The proposed dwelling is very substantially larger than the structures it would replace - in the order of a five-fold increase in footprint, a height of approximately 9.3 metres, and six bedrooms with eight bathrooms. A development of this scale would cause serious harm to the openness of the Green Belt, which is precisely the kind of harm Green Belt policy exists to prevent. It would also be markedly out of keeping with the rural countryside character of this part of Blakes Lane, between the villages of Wargrave and Hare Hatch, and would introduce a substantial and highly visible domestic form of development into the current green stretch.

We note that a previous planning appeal concerning this same site (APP/X0360/W/17/3184577, decision dated 6 March 2018) was dismissed, with the Inspector finding harm to Green Belt openness and to countryside character even in respect of a considerably smaller two-bedroom dwelling. The current, much larger proposal should be assessed against that site-specific precedent, and we do not consider the harm previously identified has in any way reduced.

3. Design quality

Even setting aside its Green Belt status, we do not consider the design of the proposed dwelling is acceptable in this setting. National policy only supports isolated new homes in the countryside where the design is truly outstanding and would raise the standard of design in the area - the submitted scheme falls well short of that bar. It reads as a standard large-house design rather than anything exceptional, with a mass and roofline that take no real cues from the surrounding properties.

The scale and proportions are simply wrong for this stretch of Blakes Lane. The bulk of the building would dominate the lane rather than sit comfortably within it, and no amount of landscaping or tree retention around the boundary changes that fundamental mismatch of scale.

4. Ecological baseline

Our estimate is that approximately 90% of the trees and large shrubs on the site were cleared in March 2026 - before the ecological survey was carried out - and that this was done without any consultation with neighbouring residents. This matters because the site was not simply dormant beforehand: having gone unused and unmanaged for at least ten years to our knowledge, it had developed into genuine scrub, rough grassland and mature tree cover of real ecological

value in its own right, not merely a derelict yard awaiting redevelopment. The amount of wildlife supported was considerable. We are concerned that the ecological assessment does not reflect that decade-plus of undisturbed habitat, and that its conclusions on bats and habitat

value significantly understate the true ecological impact of the proposal. The scale of clearance, its timing so shortly before the survey, and the absence of any neighbour consultation before it took place, should all be a matter of concern to the Council. We would ask that the pre-clearance baseline be properly reconstructed, using aerial imagery and any other available evidence covering this longer period, before reaching a conclusion on ecological impact and biodiversity net gain.

As near-immediate neighbours we are familiar with the extensive wildlife using this site and the surrounding land, and we do not consider the submitted ecological appraisal reflects the level of activity we have observed. In particular:

Bats - we have very often observed bats foraging over the site at dusk, consistent with the roost potential already noted in the applicant's own ecology report.

Badgers - we have observed badgers on and around the site at nighttime.

Owls - we often hear owls on or very near the site.

Breeding birds - the site has been used as a breeding ground for wild birds, and indeed nesting had already begun in our own garden before the date of the main clearance in March.

Roe deer - we often see deer crossing in and out of this site.

Several of these species benefit from specific legal protection which is directly relevant to this application. Bats are European Protected Species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Owls, along with all wild birds, are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and it is an offence under section 1 of that Act to intentionally damage or destroy an active nest. It is inconceivable that no active nests were destroyed in this

wildlife-rich haven in the March clearance.

We do not consider a single post-clearance site visit is sufficient to rule out harm to these species. We ask the Council to require a proportionate further survey and, if necessary, mitigation before the application is determined, and to treat this as a substantive matter rather than a formality.

5. Drainage and flood risk

We have serious concerns about the deliverability of the proposed drainage strategy, which relies on pumping surface water to a ditch at the highest point of the site. We are not satisfied that the applicant has demonstrated a right to discharge into that ditch, nor that the receiving watercourse has the capacity to accept the proposed discharge without increasing flood risk to neighbouring land,

including our own property which already sees occasional flooding to the bottom section of the garden. Given the topography of the site and surrounding land, we ask that the Council require independent verification of the drainage strategy, including ownership and rights over the receiving ditch, before any permission is

considered.

6. Highways and sustainability of location

Blakes Lane is a narrow, largely unlit country lane running between the villages of Wargrave and Hare Hatch, without footways but already used by pedestrians, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders as well as vehicles. The site is not within reasonable and safe walking distance of a station, school, shop or other everyday services. A dwelling of this scale would be likely to generate a material increase in vehicle movements, particularly during construction, adding to existing safety concerns on the lane.

7. Precedent

Permitting a development of this scale on this site would, in our view, materially increase the pressure for similar redevelopment of other countryside and Green Belt plots around the local villages of Wargrave and Hare Hatch, undermining the strategic Green Belt function that the Council's own evidence recognises for this part of the parish.

Conclusion

The grounds set out above describe a scheme that does not belong in the Green Belt: a disputed claim to Grey Belt status, a dwelling many times the scale of what it would replace and out of all proportion with its neighbours, a disputed ecological picture - assembled after most of the site's trees had been strategically removed, and a drainage strategy that has not been shown to work. We live close enough to this site to fully understand the implications of such a development and we do not believe this application should be allowed to proceed. We ask that it be refused.

Yours faithfully,

David Tudor-Morgan MRICS
Claire Tudor-Morgan