

PLANNING REF : 261839
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Arborfield Green Community Centre
: Arborfield, Reading
: RG2 9ND
SUBMITTED BY : Barkham Parish Council
DATE SUBMITTED : 11/09/2026

COMMENTS:

Barkham Parish Council objects to this application and respectfully requests that planning permission be refused for the following reasons.

1. Development Outside Settlement Limits and Contrary to the Spatial Strategy

The application site lies outside the defined development limits and within the open countryside. The proposal therefore conflicts with Core Strategy Policy CP11, which seeks to resist inappropriate development beyond settlement boundaries except in strictly defined circumstances. The principle of residential development in this location has previously been found unacceptable and the site remains undeveloped countryside.

The Parish Council notes that considerable debate has arisen regarding whether Bridge Cottages constitutes a settlement and whether the proposed dwelling should be regarded as an "isolated home" for the purposes of national policy. However, irrespective of those arguments, the application must ultimately be assessed on its environmental consequences and its impact upon the countryside. Even if the applicant were able to demonstrate compliance with the exceptional design provisions of national policy, that would not outweigh the substantial ecological and landscape harm that would arise from developing this sensitive site.

2. Harm to a Sensitive Ecological Corridor

The application site, comprising both the red-lined and blue-lined land, forms part of a wider network of fields, woodland and watercourses that provide an important buffer between residential development and the nationally and locally important habitats surrounding The Coombes Ancient Woodland and Local Wildlife Site.

The site is immediately adjacent to habitat of recognised ecological importance and lies within the wider Barkham Brook corridor. The brook and associated watercourses are relied upon by a wide variety of wildlife species for drinking, feeding, shelter and movement. Objectors have highlighted that, during periods of drought, wildlife increasingly depends upon the watercourse bordering the application site when other nearby stretches become dry. The introduction of a dwelling, domestic garden, lighting, vehicle movements and associated human activity in such close proximity to the brook would inevitably reduce the value of this habitat and discourage wildlife from using it.

The Parish Council strongly disagrees with the assertion within the Design and Access Statement that the site is of low ecological value. Such an assessment fails to consider the site's role within the wider ecological network and its function as part of a continuous wildlife corridor linking woodland, watercourse and open countryside habitats.

The conclusion on page 32 of the LDAS that the site is 'of low

ecological value' is not supported by the findings of the updated PEA or reptile survey. It seems that the LDAS is referring just to tree species when applying the term 'ecology', which is not only a very narrow use of the term but also not supported by the findings of the separate tree survey, which identifies a diverse range of native tree species present. BPC suggests the conclusion in the LDAS is therefore unsound. On the wider matter of ecology and biodiversity, BPC would point out that this site has provided undisturbed wildlife habitat for many years and residents report sightings of a variety of species being present on it. The updated PEA cites the presence of slow worms, bats and does not exclude the possibility of other protected species being present. The absence of grass snakes, when compared to a previous survey performed, does not mean they are absent permanently from the site, simply that none were found on the days when the survey was conducted. The general proposition that this or any other area of natural environment inevitably deteriorates in terms of their biodiversity value over time if left unmanaged is contrary to evidence from rewilding projects such as the Knepp Castle Estate, where allowing habitats to revert to their natural state has resulted in significant gains. In conclusion, BPC considers the site to be of ecological value in its present condition, particularly as a wildlife corridor between the Coombes ASNW to the north of the site and open agricultural land to its south.

3. Impact on Wildlife Movement and Biodiversity

The site currently provides an undeveloped transition between ancient woodland, open countryside and residential areas. Wildlife species, particularly fauna, can only flourish where movement between habitats remains possible. The proposed development would introduce a permanent residential presence into an area that currently functions as a relatively undisturbed ecological corridor. Noise, domestic activity, vehicle movements, external lighting and increased human presence have the potential to create a significant barrier effect, deterring wildlife movement between habitats and fragmenting ecological connectivity. The Council is concerned that the application underestimates these impacts and gives insufficient weight to the importance of maintaining uninterrupted wildlife corridors in accordance with the objectives of NPPF policies relating to biodiversity conservation and nature recovery, together with Core Strategy Policy CP7.

4. Loss of Trees and Woodland Character

The proposal would require the removal of a significant number of trees to facilitate development. This is particularly concerning given the site's woodland character and proximity to designated ecological assets.

The applicant seeks to justify much of the proposed tree removal on the basis that certain trees are dead, dying or of poor

quality. The Parish Council considers this reasoning to be fundamentally flawed. Standing deadwood and decaying timber are themselves important ecological resources, supporting insects, fungi, birds and mammals, while playing a vital role in nutrient cycling and woodland biodiversity. The widespread removal of trees and deadwood risks undermining the ecological value of the site and replacing a natural woodland environment with one managed primarily for residential amenity. The Council is concerned that approval of this proposal would create ongoing pressure for additional tree works and woodland clearance in the future.

5. Impact on Ancient Woodland and Protected Species

The site lies in very close proximity to The Coombe s Ancient Woodland, a habitat recognised as irreplaceable under national planning policy. The Council is concerned that the ecological assessments submitted do not adequately recognise the potential impacts on species associated with the woodland and Barkham Brook corridor.

Local residents regularly observe bats, birds, mammals and other wildlife in and around the site. Increased lighting, noise and domestic activity would inevitably affect species that currently benefit from the site's dark and undisturbed character.

The Parish

Council considers that insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that protected species and ecological networks would not be adversely affected by the proposal.

6. Flood Risk Concerns

The application site lies adjacent to Barkham Brook, which has a known history of flooding. Local knowledge confirms that flooding has

occurred within the area on a number of occasions and that parts of the wider site are susceptible to flood events.

The Council is

concerned that the proposed residential use would place built development and associated infrastructure in close proximity to an area vulnerable to flooding at a time when changing weather patterns are likely to increase the frequency and severity of such events. Furthermore, the presence of a residential dwelling in this location may create future pressure for flood defence measures and intervention within the natural watercourse corridor, resulting in additional ecological harm.

7. Failure to Enhance the Countryside Setting

The applicant argues that the proposal would enhance the site through woodland management and ecological improvements. The Parish Council is not persuaded by this argument.

The site already performs valuable landscape and ecological functions in its undeveloped state. Allowing land to deteriorate through a lack of management and then presenting development as the only means of securing environmental improvements is not an approach that should be supported. The Council considers that appropriate woodland management could be undertaken without introducing residential development into this sensitive countryside location.

Conclusion

For these reasons, Barkham Parish Council objects strongly to Planning Application 261839.

The proposal:

- Lies outside the defined development area and conflicts with Core Strategy Policy CP11;
- Would result in unjustified residential development in the countryside;
- Would harm the ecological function of an important wildlife corridor adjacent to The Coombes Ancient Woodland and Barkham Brook;
- Would restrict wildlife movement and fragment habitats;
- Would result in the loss of a substantial number of trees and woodland habitat;
- Risks adverse impacts upon protected species and biodiversity;
- Raises significant concerns in relation to flood risk; and
- Fails to demonstrate that the environmental harm would be outweighed by any public benefit.

Accordingly, Barkham Parish Council respectfully requests that planning permission be refused.