

PLANNING REF : 252498
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Hughes Green Arborfield
: Wokingham
: RG2 9JF
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Matthew Conquer
DATE SUBMITTED : 12/11/2025

COMMENTS:

I am writing to lodge a formal objection to the above application for the proposed Loddon Garden Village development at Hall Farm, Wokingham. This objection is grounded in legal, environmental, and procedural concerns and reflects serious issues with sustainability, infrastructure suitability, and the principle of development on this land.

2. Background and Land Status

Hall Farm is historically University of Reading agricultural land, widely understood to have been gifted or endowed for agricultural and educational purposes. If confirmed, such land is subject to restrictive covenants or trust obligations limiting its use to agricultural research and education, not residential or commercial development.

We call upon Wokingham Borough Council to disclose and review the deed history and verify whether covenants or endowment restrictions exist, as proceeding against them may constitute a breach of trust law and undermine public confidence in both the Council and the University.

3. Legal and Policy Framework

Under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), development on greenfield or agricultural land should only proceed where:

It demonstrably meets a sustainable need;

Infrastructure and services are adequate; and

Alternatives have been considered in line with the Sequential Test.

This proposal fails on all counts:

It represents unnecessary greenfield encroachment when viable brownfield alternatives exist.

It creates a disproportionate impact on local transport networks, especially Mole Road and the A327, which are already beyond sustainable capacity.

It conflicts with Wokingham's own Core Strategy Policy CP1 and CP3 (Sustainable Development and Green Infrastructure).

4. Infrastructure Inadequacy (Mole Road and Local Access)

The proposal relies heavily on Mole Road, a narrow rural connector road, not built or maintained for the volume and weight of traffic this development would create. Even with "planned improvements," the projected increase from an additional 2,800 dwellings and associated facilities would represent thousands of daily additional car

movements, breaching safe capacity thresholds and increasing accident risk.

Additionally:

The site's proximity to the M4 and River Loddon introduces significant construction, drainage, and floodplain access challenges.

Access proposals such as the new bridges over the M4 and River Loddon create engineering, environmental, and cost burdens that contradict the "low-impact" claims in the Environmental Statement.

Air quality and noise pollution would increase, breaching DEFRA and WHO guidelines near existing residential areas.

5. Sustainability and Environmental Concerns

Despite the "Garden Village" label, the scheme does not represent sustainable development:

It would destroy over 50 hectares of active farmland, contradicting national policy on food security and agricultural preservation.

The proposal relies on extensive SUDS systems in known flood-risk zones near the Loddon Valley, putting future residents at long-term risk.

The carbon-neutral claims lack evidence of enforceable net-zero mechanisms; proposed EV charging and heat-pump installations are non-binding aspirations within an outline consent.

6. Overdevelopment and Cumulative Impact

The Hall Farm proposal cannot be viewed in isolation. Within a 10-mile radius, major housing developments have already been approved or constructed, including:

Arborfield Green (3,500 homes)

Shinfield Parish Development (2,500 homes)

North Wokingham (2,000 homes)

South Wokingham SDL (2,500 homes)

This cumulative growth far exceeds the Housing Need targets allocated to the borough under the Wokingham Local Plan and Government standard methodology.

Another 2,800 homes at Hall Farm represents disproportionate concentration of development in a single geographic corridor, violating principles of balanced regional distribution.

7. Alternatives Outside the Borough

Contrary to the assertion that "every area faces the same housing

pressure," viable large-scale alternatives exist outside Wokingham's immediate boundary that would:

Offer better infrastructure alignment (rail, major roads, utilities);

Minimise environmental and agricultural loss; and

Deliver regional balance across the Thames Valley.

Examples include:

Didcot and Harwell growth zones (Oxfordshire) - designated for expansion under Oxfordshire 2050 framework;

Bracknell Town Centre regeneration - existing brownfield capacity for over 4,000 units;

Reading's urban infill and high-rise residential programmes, supported by active transport and public infrastructure.

No convincing evidence has been provided that these options have been properly assessed before proceeding with irreversible greenfield loss in Hall Farm.

8. Profiteering and Lack of Genuine Local Benefit

This proposal appears to prioritise financial gain and asset monetisation by the University of Reading and associated developers (including Gleeson Land Ltd) rather than long-term community or sustainability goals.

While described as "community-building," the development primarily serves as a commercial land release, with profits directed to private stakeholders.

Given the University's charitable status, this raises concerns under the Charities Act 2011, as land disposal for non-educational purposes must demonstrate clear public benefit which this proposal does not.

9. Socioeconomic and Community Impact

The proposed scale (up to 2,800 dwellings, 2 primary schools, and 1 secondary) will create an artificial urban sprawl between Shinfield, Arborfield, and Earley, eroding distinct village identities and placing unsustainable pressure on:

GP and healthcare services (already at capacity);

Local road networks and public transport;

Water and sewage infrastructure, where Thames Water have acknowledged current capacity deficits.

This does not constitute sustainable community growth but forced urban expansion incompatible with Wokingham's rural character.

10. Conclusion and Requested Action

Given the above, I formally request that Wokingham Borough Council:

Reject planning application 252498 on grounds of unsustainability, covenant breach, and infrastructure insufficiency.

Commission an independent legal review of Hall Farm's land title and any existing agricultural covenants or charitable trust restrictions.

Suspend further consideration until a transparent public consultation is held with legal clarity on land ownership obligations.

If approved, this scheme would set a dangerous precedent for the unchecked commercialisation of protected and agricultural land across Berkshire, directly contradicting the Council's stated commitments to environmental stewardship and sustainable development.