

PLANNING REF : 261625
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 43 Harcourt Drive
: Earley, Reading, Berkshire
: RG6 5TL
SUBMITTED BY : Jerry and Carey Moreton
DATE SUBMITTED : 02/08/2026

COMMENTS:

We wish to register our very strong objection to the above Planning Application to convert a 3-bedroomed family home into an 8-bedroomed HMO. The proposal is wholly inappropriate for a street of predominantly family homes, in terms of its size, relative scale, and its proposed use. As such, we believe it does not comply with the relevant current Council policies for sustainable and sympathetic development (Emerging Local Plan H8 ELPH8, WBC Core Strategy

Development Plan 2010 CSDP, Wokingham Borough Design Guide (Supplementary Planning Document) 2012 WBDG). Furthermore, regarding some 'material planning considerations', the application seems short on robust evidence, containing several assumptions that would appear insufficiently substantiated to merit approval.

As immediate neighbours, we object to this development on the following grounds:

1. Detrimental impact: Overlooking, Overbearing, Loss of Light, Loss of Privacy
(Refs: ELPH8/1,a,b, CSDP CP1(i), CP3(a), WBDG 4.13 1&2)

The applicant proposes to convert a regular family home into a disproportionately large building with facilities equating to a small block of flats or a hostel. It will be the largest HMO on the street with the highest intensity of unrelated occupants (8, or potentially 16, with partners). The scale of the proposed design does not respect the character and appearance of the existing building and therefore does not comply with H8/1(a) and the relevant parts of the policies and guidance also listed above.

Specifically, the very recent addition of a substantial, protruding rear loft extension now towers above our garden at the back. It is overbearing and due to the increased height, breadth and depth, dwarfs our property. It overlooks most of our space, giving future tenants clear sightlines. It already significantly invades our privacy and impacts on our enjoyment of this private amenity.

The proposal to add a further two-storey side/rear extension will only exacerbate this. The applicant states that the 'majority' of houses on Harcourt Drive have such two-storey side extensions, suggesting that this proposal is therefore acceptable since they are not uncommon. A quick visual survey suggests that this is not the case. Within the 50sqm area cited by the applicant to demonstrate HMO saturation, for example, only 33% have such extensions. On the whole of Harcourt Drive, it is 44% (28 of 64 houses).

The height and scale of the proposed RHS 1 and 2-storey extensions will also reduce light levels entering our kitchen through its only window. It will also reduce our outlook from this window onto brick walls built right up to the boundary.

2. Detrimental Impact on the Street and the Area: Over-concentration, Intensity of Occupation

i) Density of HMOs currently (Ref:ELPH8/1(f))

We understand the need for housing and are not against a mixed pattern of tenants and owner-occupiers. However, Harcourt Drive already has three registered HMOs (Nos 1,4,& 39), one of which is currently being extended. No.39 directly adjoins the new proposed HMO site, putting the immediate vicinity under particular, additional pressures. It officially houses 5 tenants but we have observed this to increase periodically, with the associated noise and nuisance.

Without clear justification, the applicant relies on a very narrowly-defined 50m radius around no.41 to demonstrate compliance with the Emerging Policy H8/1(f) in terms of HMO concentration, stating that there is currently only one HMO within that area. The objection is that, taken together, these adjacent properties that would normally house 6 or 7 family members may now house at least 13 independent, unrelated occupants and periodically up to twice that. This represents a significant intensification of occupancy in our immediate vicinity and will impact hugely on the street, as a whole. As such, the application does not comply with ELPH8/1(f).

ii) Density of HMOs going forward

If planning permission is granted, No 41 will be the 4th - and substantially the largest - registered HMO on Harcourt Drive. These are the HMOs that are known of but residents suspect that there may be more. No. 39 was originally submitted as a householder application (241876), before then becoming an HMO. There is substantial development ongoing on the street and a number of properties have recently sold. We are concerned at the capacity of the street to be able to sustain these numbers.

The situation is not helped by the proximity of the Borough boundary on Pepper Lane, c100m from Harcourt Drive. Reading Borough Council's adoption of the Article 4 Direction is likely to push development companies seeking to establish HMOs, to the WBC side of the Whiteknights campus. This renders Harcourt Drive, Falstaff Ave and similar streets particularly vulnerable at a point when the existing local amenity, highways and infrastructure are already over-stretched. We respectfully ask that this planning application be considered in this context.

iii) Social Impact (Refs: CSDP CP3(a), WBDG 4.13 (1,2 & 11)).

Harcourt Drive is currently an attractive road typically comprising settled residents in family homes. The intensification of high-turnover occupancy rates through HMOs such as no.41 will erode the community feel of the street and, inevitably, change its fundamental character. Tenants on short-term contracts (typical of HMOs), are naturally less likely to have 'buy-in' and connection to the area and its community. Day-to-day activity levels during the day and night, and noise and disturbance levels, will inevitably increase, as has been the case over the past year with No.39. If the application is approved and a single-family house is replaced with min 8 independent occupants plus associated visitors coming and

going, the negative social impact will be even greater. The likely impacts will be felt way beyond the immediate neighbours. The applicant does not consider these matters other than the assertion that 'it is not anticipated that there will be any increase in noise' (Design & Planning Statement 8.7), a statement unsupported by any actual evidence.

For the above reasons we object to the application as it does not sufficiently respect the amenity and character of Harcourt Drive generally. Therefore in addition to ELPH8/1(f) it does not accord with key general principles for development in the CSDP (e.g. CP3(a)) nor with important components of the Residential Design Checklist in the WBDG (e.g. 4.13, (1,2 & 11)).

iv) Environmental Impact (Wildlife and Ecology)

This development has already led to loss of green space at the back of the property, with associated detriment to wildlife. If approved, the proposed further works - at the front - will adversely affect the 'green' character of the street. We strongly object to the planning application on this basis.

During the initial 'permitted development' (?) phase, we saw the removal and loss of c10m length of mature hedge which marked the boundary between our properties at the back, and was a site for nesting birds. This was replaced with a wooden fence. This not only dramatically affected the aesthetic of our garden but also represented permanent loss of a green feature, a point which has not been raised in either the Planning Application Form or the Design and Planning Statement. Our understanding of the current Biodiversity Net Gain guidance is that, had it been included in the proposal, the removal of a linear hedgerow exceeding 5m would have necessitated a full BNG calculation.

To the front of the house, the proposal is to remove 20m² of front garden to create 2 x parking bays (Design & Planning Statement 6.7). This is a not insignificant area of green space on the street frontage of the site, resulting in the removal of the major part of the current front garden and a reduction in the area of the Council-owned verges (one being c3m wide at this point) so as to allow vehicular access. In the original Planning Application Form (Ref PP-15069596) (Statement on Bio-diversity Net Gain) the applicant states that the only area of vegetation to be removed comprises this 20m² of 'relatively young bedding plants'. This is not the case. We knew the previous owner of No.41 well, having lived at no. 43 for nearly 14 years. Her front garden comprises a mix of long-established shrubs and lawn. The applicant's proposal to offset the loss of green space by means of the planting of a single urban tree and mixed planting, cannot be deemed to fully address the collective loss of habitat (front and back), nor meet biodiversity targets.

v) Environmental Impact (Waste Management, Environmental Health, Streetscape)

Our experience of no.39 has been that bins are often overflowing, leading to scavenging by cats and foxes, and an increase in litter, odour, and risk of vermin infestation. We have no reason to believe that this larger proposal will be any different.

Regarding the streetscape, the replacement of much of the front garden with parking bays and the proposal to widen the access drive and drop the kerb, would render the street more urban in character rather than suburban, as presently. The addition of a large, multi-waste bin storage unit and 2 bicycle stands in plain view at the front of the property will signal more a student residence or hostel than a family home.

We therefore hold that the proposal, in terms of its poor integration with the environment, does not adequately meet the requirements of ELPH8/1(b) CSDP CP3(a)&(f) or WBDG 4.13,1,2,11 & 24)

vi) Parking, Transport, and Impact on Highway. (Ref: CSDP CP6(d)&(g) or WBDG 4.13,(4))

To propose only 2 parking spaces for an 8-bedroomed HMO is wholly inadequate when there is the likelihood that its occupants could generate anything between an additional 8 and 16 cars (due to partners, visitors etc.) Over the past year, this has been observed to be the case at no.39, the adjoining HMO. To suggest that the parking provision for no.41 will result in no, or a minimal, increase in traffic or journeys on Harcourt Drive is unsubstantiated. The same applies to the impact on parking and vehicular access. The road is extremely congested, particularly during term-time when both students and commuters use it as a car park (picking up the bus into town from the end of the road). Residents can struggle to park now and vehicular access to drives is often very difficult, with impeded and unclear sight-lines. This results in more residents having to park on the road, rather than on their drives. There is also, already, evident overflow into surrounding roads, especially Falstaff Avenue and the end of Copperdale Close. There is no evidence to suggest that the proposed parking provision is anywhere near sufficient, nor that residential amenity and highway safety won't be affected.

The applicant suggests that occupants are unlikely to have cars and will cycle, walk, or take the bus. However, regarding student tenants, a recent survey on cycling (sos-uk.org, Students, bicycles and cycling, 2021), showed that only 6% of respondents actually cycled to university, with 64% saying that traffic makes them afraid of cycling. 24% said that they drive to their place of study.

We hold that the impact of increased parking demand has not been adequately considered and that this proposal does not comply with CSDP CP6(d)&(g) or WBDG 4.13,(4)

Conclusion

We politely request that this planning application be refused as an inappropriate development. We ask that our objections be fully considered, and would invite the Council's planning officer to visit and see the situation for themselves.

Please keep us informed as to progress and any relevant Planning Committee dates regarding this application. Many thanks for your time and attention.

* * *