

MEMORANDUM

From:	Stuart Ryder Landscape Architect (Consultant)		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	253122
Address:	Land at Cooks Hill Cottage, Bath Road, Knowl Hill.		
Proposal:	Permission in Principle applicaiton for the erection of up to 5 dwelling houses.		
Type of Development:	Minor Dwellings (1-9)		
Site Visit Made:	No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
☐ No objection
☒ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
☐ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
☐ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

1. Site Description

The application Site comprises Cooks Hill Cottage, associated outbuildings, Nissen huts and areas of hardstanding accessed from Bath Road (A4). The Site extends to approximately 0.72ha and contains a detached dwelling, agricultural Nissen huts, associated access drives and hardstanding, and mature tree cover. The land is broadly flat with a gentle fall toward the southern boundary adjacent to Bath Road. The Site lies within the Green Belt but comprises previously developed land (PDL).

2. Immediate Context to the Site

The Site sits between Knowl Hill and Kiln Green along the A4 corridor. The immediate surroundings comprise a mix of residential, commercial and rural uses, including the Bird in Hand public house, adjacent residential dwellings, Woodlands Farm, Castle Royale Golf Club, and agricultural land beyond the western boundary. The Site is visually influenced by roadside development and established built form and appears well contained by surrounding vegetation in summer conditions.

3. Landscape Designations and Landscape Character Area (LCA)

The Site is not located within or adjacent to a National Landscape and is not subject to any designated landscape constraints. From a valued landscape perspective (NPPF 187a) it is not a valued landscape in its own right but does contribute to the wider landscape character of the area.

The Site falls within the H1 – Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes LCA from the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2019 the summary of which is set below

SUMMARY

A gently sloping landform supporting a farmed landscape with an intimate mosaic of arable fields and pasture interspersed with small woodland blocks. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of rural hamlets, scattered farmsteads and large manor houses.

The area is located in the north east of Wokingham Borough and is bounded by four different character areas: D1: Remenham Wooded Chalk Slopes, E1: Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau, F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls and H1: Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands. The limits of the character area have been influenced by human landscape elements, and predominantly follow the line of fields and secondary roads. These mapped features indicate a change in land use activity coinciding with changing underlying physical landscape elements of topography and geology.

The valuable landscape attributes of LCA H1 are;

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- **Distinctly rural farmed and estate character** due to the mosaic of irregular fields of varied size, woodland blocks and sparse settlement pattern of hamlets, villages and manors connected by leafy rural lanes.
- **Numerous mixed and deciduous woodlands** including BAP priority habitats and semi-natural ancient woodland, which provides valuable habitats.
- **Distinctiveness of the historic built form** in the villages, farmsteads and manors.
- **Parkland landscapes and veteran trees** of large Georgian and Victorian manor houses which have a localised impact on landscape character and contribute to the sense of place.
- **Strong sense of intimacy and enclosure** due to undulating topography and scattered woodlands which subdivide the landscape.
- **Occasional views to the prominent wooded horizon** provided by F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls.

Whilst the landscape strategy is to:

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the *Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes* the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing character notably varied farmed landscape and field boundaries, scattered semi-natural woodlands, and parkland landscapes, the robustness of which has declined. Open views to the prominent wooded horizon provided by the adjacent character area F1: Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls should be maintained.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern and historic built form of the villages, hamlets, farmsteads and manors.

I have highlighted the last line regarding sparse settlement pattern. The Site in my judgement has some characteristics of a farmstead with its collection of barns, buildings and old Nissen Huts that were frequently re-purposed as farm buildings after WWII.

It is the Site's trees that form its most notable landscape asset with the building stock not architecturally striking or adding to the appeal of the area. The A4 I anticipate would add audible road noise to parts of the Site reducing the perception of tranquillity.

The Site is located within the proposed Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape (BHVL) as identified in the Wokingham Valued Landscape Assessment 2024 (Pages 87 to 96). Mapping indicates that the Bird in Hand pub to the east of the Site is not included within the boundary but the Site is. This adds additional value to the Site as a piece of landscape in its own right and for the contribution, particularly the tree stock adds to the wider BHVL.

Paragraph 4.20 from the Wokingham Valued Landscape Assessment 2024 is set below as digital extracts. 4.20 explains how development can respond positively to the local valued landscape designation. This appears to align with the purposes of the current NPPF.

- 4.20 Development proposals in these valued landscapes are expected to protect and enhance the valued landscapes as a whole. The council takes this to include protecting and enhancing their character, quality, attributes and their interpretation. This policy approach reflects national planning policy and has been supported at planning appeals, where Planning Inspectors have recognised that planning policies may seek to protect specific areas for their local landscape value. This approach also seeks to ensure that where development is proposed, sensitive design and planning enhances important features or attributes that contribute to making a valued landscape.

The ‘protect and enhance’ expectation is like the LCA H1 requirement to ‘conserve and enhance’ the existing character.

If the proposals had been submitted with a proportionate Landscape and Visual Appraisal this would have identified the existing landscape character information and used it to shape give guidance to the outline scheme. It is not too late to undertake a LVA during the Detail Design phase to illustrate how the proposals ‘protect and enhance’ not only the Site as a piece of landscape but also how it relates to the rest of BHVL which lies more to the north and west.

4. Summary of Tree Information

An arboricultural report has been prepared by Duckworth Arboriculture. It has been produced to recognised methodologies and adopts the A to C tree classification system with U also marked as unsuitable for retention. It correctly identifies an Area TPO – TPO-1639-2018. There are 75 No individual trees on Site and 12 No Groups. Most of the trees are Category B or C with no Category A trees and a handful of Category U that do not appear disproportionately high for a Site of this size.

The Site contains mature beech trees along the northern boundary, mixed native and ornamental trees internally reflecting its earlier development, and dense boundary vegetation along eastern and southern edges. Retention and protection of these trees will be critical to maintaining visual containment.

5. Landscape Effects and Potential Betterment

The proposal seeks redevelopment of the existing cottage and Nissen huts to provide up to five dwellings. As the Site contains permanent structures and hardstanding, redevelopment is presented by the Applicant as reuse of PDL. Potential effects include intensification of built form and localised change to internal character. However, redevelopment is unlikely to fundamentally undermine wider landscape character.

Opportunities for betterment include removal of now degraded huts, rationalisation of built footprint, reinforcement of boundary planting, native hedgerow restoration, biodiversity enhancement, and open water/wetland from the final drainage strategy. The betterment opportunities appear limited and taking the broader LCA G1 Landscape Strategy to ‘*conserve and enhance*’ and effort may be better directed to embedded mitigation relating to building appearance and arrangements so that they carry forward the appearance of farmsteads or more rural buildings rather than introducing more urban building form and materials.

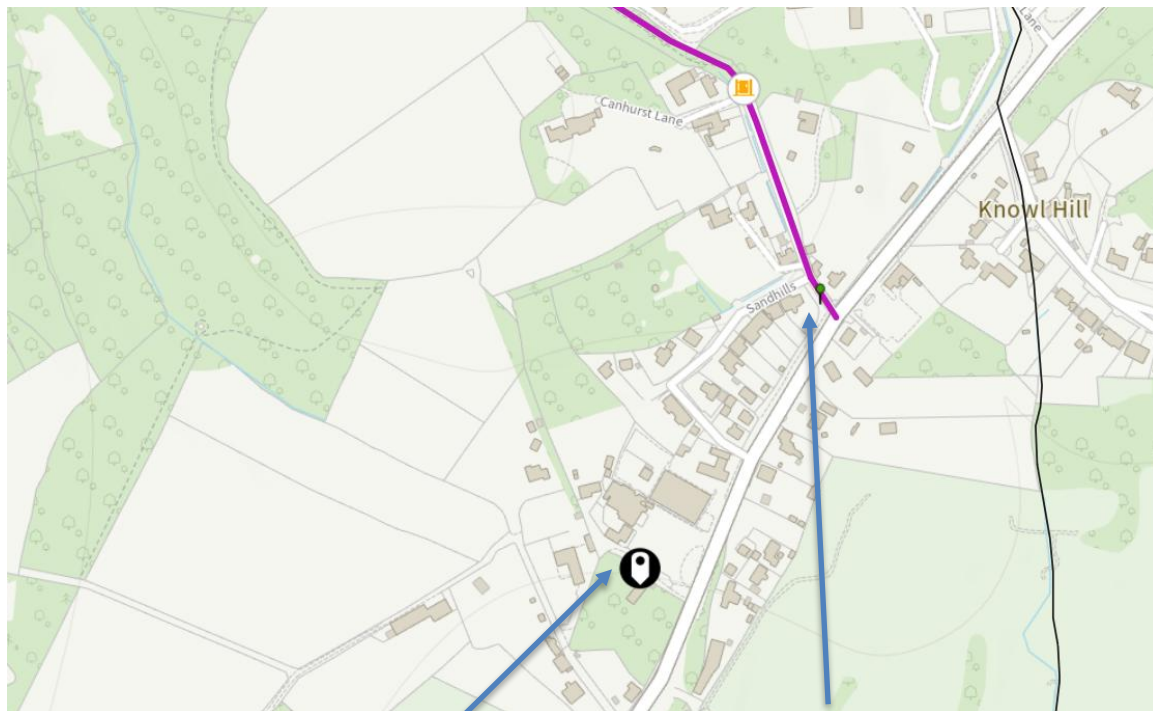
6. Visual Effects and Potential Betterment

Key visual receptors include users of A4 Bath Road, patrons of the Bird in Hand public house, and adjacent residential properties. Views into the Site are generally

filtered by vegetation. The Site does not occupy a prominent ridgeline or form part of long-distance vistas. It appears Development within the established Site envelope, combined with retention of boundary vegetation, is likely to result in localised visual change rather than significant visual intrusion. Removal of Nissen huts and introduction of appropriately scaled and detailed residential buildings may provide visual improvement but that will be subject to detail design.

Cumulative visual effects may occur with Ynys Cottage redevelopment (Application No. 253123) to increase the sense of wider visual change and domestication of the area. The level of intervisibility between the two Sites would need to be assessed on Site.

Public Rights of Way (ProW) are limited in the area as illustrated on the plan below and there will be no visual change experienced from the nearest Restricted Byway – WARG40.



Site position

Restricted Byway WARG40

7. Overall Conclusion on Acceptability of the Proposals

The Site comprises previously developed land within a Green Belt location that currently is largely physically and visually contained by treed boundaries. At Outline Planning stage, and subject to detailed design safeguards and tree retention, the proposals are not considered likely to result in unacceptable landscape or visual harm. The principle of redevelopment for up to five dwellings is therefore considered acceptable in landscape terms.

This overall conclusion is presented with several caveats that should be addressed through the use of suitably worded Reserved Matters;

- Final acceptability is dependent on detailed design at Details Design stage.
- Loss of mature boundary vegetation would materially increase visual impact and the TPO tree protection should be retained..
- Increased building height or bulk beyond existing structures could alter openness assessment.

- If inappropriate built form is brought forward it could adversely affect the emerging Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape that is proposed as part of the Local Plan Update.
- Landscape mitigation and biodiversity enhancement that are appropriate to the Site and future homeowner management.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

As well as typical Reserved Matters addressing landscape treatment another Reserved Matter has been included to consider how the proposals 'conserve and enhance' the local landscape character.

Landscape Visual Appraisal

Submit as part of the detail design information a proportionate Landscape and Visual Appraisal to consider the following:

- Local landscape character information both adopted and emerging to explain how the proposals 'conserve and enhance' the G1 – Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes;
- The associated 'protect and enhance' requirement of the Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape;
- Address cumulative landscape and visual effects in combination with the nearby development at Ynys Cottage and any other recent housing proposals for the area; and
- Identify the landscape design principles and treatments to be brought forward in the detailed proposals within the character and layout of the built form and the associated both hard and soft landscape works.

Reason – to demonstrate the 'conserve and enhance' nature of the works on the Site and to the wider G1 – Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes and the emerging Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape.

Landscaping

Prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority a scheme of landscaping, which shall specify species, planting sizes, spacing and numbers of trees/shrubs to be planted, and any existing trees or shrubs to be retained.

Planting shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the building(s).

Any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the date of the planting (or within a period of 5 years of the occupation of the buildings in the case of retained trees and shrubs) die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species or otherwise as approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason - To ensure adequate planting in the interests of visual amenity. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21 (and TB06 for garden development)

Retention of trees and shrubs

No retained tree shall be cut down, uprooted or destroyed, nor shall any retained tree be topped or lopped other than in accordance with the approved plans and particulars, without the written approval of the local planning authority. If within a period of five years from the date of the planting of any tree that tree, or any tree planted in replacement for it, is removed, uprooted or destroyed or dies, another tree of the same species and size as that originally planted shall be planted at the same place, unless the local planning authority gives its written consent to any variation.

Reason - To secure the protection throughout the time that development is being carried out, of trees, shrubs and hedges growing within the Site which are of amenity value to the area. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21

Protection of trees

a) No development or other operation shall commence on Site until an Arboricultural Method Statement and Scheme of Works which provides for the retention and protection of trees, shrubs and hedges growing on or adjacent to the Site in accordance with BS5837: 2012 has been submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. No development or other operations shall take place except in complete accordance with the details as so-approved (hereinafter referred to as the Approved Scheme).

b) No operations shall commence on Site in connection with development hereby approved (including any tree felling, tree pruning, demolition works, soil moving, temporary access construction and or widening or any other operation involving use of motorised vehicles or construction machinery) until the tree protection works required by the Approved Scheme are in place on Site.

c) No excavations for services, storage of materials or machinery, parking of vehicles, deposit or excavation of soil or rubble, lighting of fires or disposal of liquids shall take place within an area designated as being fenced off or otherwise protected in the Approved Scheme.

d) The fencing or other works which are part of the Approved Scheme shall not be moved or removed, temporarily or otherwise, until all works including external works have been completed and all equipment, machinery and surplus materials removed from the Site, unless the prior approval in writing of the local planning authority has first been sought and obtained.

Reason - To secure the protection throughout the time that the development is being carried out of trees shrubs or hedges growing within or adjacent to the Site which are of amenity value to the area, and to allow for verification by the local planning authority that the necessary measures are in place before development and other works commence Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21

Landscape management

Prior to the commencement of the development a landscape management plan, including long term design objectives, management responsibilities, timescales and maintenance schedules for all landscape areas, other than privately owned, domestic gardens, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The landscape management plan shall be carried out as approved.

Reason - In order to ensure that provision is made to allow satisfactory maintenance of the landscaping hereby approved. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21

Date:	13/2/26	Signed:	Stuart Ryder
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