

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261108
Site Address:	Land to the South of 6 Harvest Place, Wargrave, Reading, RG10 8AG
Expiry Date:	23 June 2026
Site Visit Date:	26 May 2026
Proposal: Permission in principle application for a residential development comprising the erection of a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 3 dwellings, including removal of existing outbuildings.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

Green Belt
Countryside
Bat Roost Suitability Habitat
Amber Risk Zone – Great Crested Newts
SSSI Impact Risk Zone
Flood Zone 1
1 in 1000-year risk extent of surface water flooding
Potentially Contaminated Land Consultation Zone

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP12 – Green Belt CP17 – Housing Delivery
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB01 – Development within the Green Belt

	TB05 – Housing Mix TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS4 – Development within or adjacent to minor settlements SS6 – Development in the Green Belt SS10 – Meeting our housing needs CE1 – Design principles for efficient buildings CE3 – Environmental standards for residential development CE7 – Low carbon and renewable energy generation C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C3 – Active travel C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging H1 – Housing mix, density and standards H3 – Affordable housing FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage FD3 – River corridors and watercourses NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity HC4 – Open spaces, sports, recreation and play facilities HC5 – Environmental protection HC6 – Air pollution and air quality HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution HC9 – Contaminated land and water HC10 – Odor, fumes and dust
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Wargrave Parish Design Statement

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
980794	Proposed Erection Of Six Detached Dwellings	Approved 05/08/1999
992052	Details To Comply with Conditions 25 & 26 Of Consent 980794 For the Approval of Provisions for Construction vehicles & clearing of mud & debris.	Approved 13/10/1999

990613	Proposed erection of non-illuminated hoarding (retrospective).	Approved 06/04/2000
002518	Details to comply with conditions 11-15 of consent 980794 for the approval of hard and soft landscaping, tree retention and landscape maintenance.	Approved 04/09/2000

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Property Services – No comments received
 WBC Environmental Health – No comments received
 WBC Drainage – No objections
 WBC Highways – No objections
 WBC Landscape and Trees – No objections
 WBC CIL – General CIL commentary
 WBC Ecology Newts – No objections
 WBC Ecology – No comments received
 WBC Waste Services – No comments received
 WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received

External

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received
 South East Water – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	No comments received
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site is approximately 0.45 hectares in size and predominantly consists of an undeveloped grassland field, plus a small section of no.6 Harvest Place's rear garden.

The site is located immediately south of Wargrave's settlement boundaries and therefore is consequently located within the Countryside and Green Belt. The site is well enclosed on all boundaries by dense, mature vegetation (unprotected) which gives a clear visual separation between the site and neighbouring land uses/roads.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks permission in principle for the erection of a minimum of 2 dwellings and a maximum of 3 dwellings on the site, including the removal of existing outbuildings in no.6 Harvest Place to facilitate vehicular access to the development.

The permission in principle ("PiP") consent route separates the consideration of

matters of principle for the proposed development from the technical details of the development. The scope of a permission in principle application is limited to location, land use and amount of development (stage 1). Other matters are considered at the technical details consent stage (stage 2).

The PPG advises that the scope of permission in principle is limited to location, land use and amount of development. Whether permission in principle should be granted should bear in mind the effects of the proposal's location, land use and amount of development on material considerations that are required to be considered.

Assessment:

The Planning Practice Guidance ("PPG") advises that the scope of permission in principle is limited to location, land use and amount of development. Whether permission in principle should be granted bearing in mind the effects of the proposal's location, land use and amount of development on the development plan and other material considerations are required to be considered.

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The site is located outside of and unconnected to any Settlement Boundary and is within a part of the borough which is designated as countryside. Policy CP9 'Scale and location of development proposals' relates to the scale and location of development proposals and seeks to focus development proposals within those identified as major or modest development locations.

As the site is located outside of settlement limits within designated countryside, Policy CP11 'Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)' is applicable in this instance. Policy CP11 refers to protecting the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. The supporting text also identifies that preventing the proliferation of development in areas away from existing development limits is important, as they are not generally well located for the facilities and services.

Policy CP11 states that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where certain criteria are met. The relevant criteria are highlighted:

- 1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and
- 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and
- 3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or
- 4) In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in

the scale, form or footprint of the original building;

5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:

- i) Bring about environmental improvements; or
- ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.

6) Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;

7) Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

The proposal comprises the erection of up to three market dwellings. It would not contribute to a rural enterprise, promote recreation in and enjoyment of the countryside, provide an essential community facility or affordable housing. Furthermore, the proposal is not for a replacement dwelling and neither for residential extensions. The proposal would therefore not accord with any exception criteria and is contrary to the development plan in this respect.

Turning to the overall aim of Policy CP11, this is to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. While located outside of settlement limits, it is acknowledged that the site is enveloped by residential development to the north and west, with the existing vegetated boundaries providing a clear visual distinction between the open Countryside/Green Belt to the south and Wargrave to the north; the development would be seen as a logical extension to the settlement of Wargrave, rather than visually or spatially detached from it. Therefore, it is not considered that the development proposed would affect the identity of Wargrave as a settlement and subject to conditions secured at TD stage, the quality of the environment could be maintained.

Notwithstanding this, Policy CP11 of the Local Plan is currently considered to be out of date given the Council's inability to demonstrate 5 years' worth of deliverable housing sites. As such, the weight afforded to Policy CP11 is reduced in accordance with paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF. Further assessment of these policy conflicts in relation to the benefits of the proposals will be included in the 'Planning Balance' section below.

Maintaining the quality of the environment would ultimately depend on how the proposed development would respond to the character of the area and its impact on the landscape. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers. This will be discussed further throughout the report below.

Development of Private Residential Gardens

A very small section of application site (vehicular access) is part of a residential garden (no.6 Harvest Place) and paragraph 75 of the NPPF states that 'local planning authorities should consider the case for setting out policies to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens, for example where development would cause harm to the local area'. Policy TB06 of the MDD Local Plan (Development of Private Residential gardens) states that proposals for new residential development that includes land within the curtilage of private residential gardens will only be granted

planning permission where:

- a) The proposal makes a positive contribution to the character of the area in terms of:
 - i. The relationship of the existing built form and spaces around buildings within the surrounding area;
 - ii. A layout which integrates with the surrounding area with regard to the built up coverage of each plot, building line(s), rhythm of plot frontages, parking areas, and
 - iii. Existing pattern of openings and boundary treatments on the site frontage
 - iv. Providing appropriate hard and soft landscaping, particularly at site boundaries.
 - v. Compatibility with the general building height within the surrounding area
 - vi. The materials and elevational detail are of high quality, and where appropriate distinctive and/or complementary.
- b) The application site provides a site of adequate size and dimensions to accommodate the development proposed in terms of the setting and spacing around buildings, amenity space, landscaping and space for access roads and parking
- c) The proposal includes access, which meets appropriate highway standards
- d) The proposal does not lead to unacceptable tandem development
- e) The design and layout minimises exposure of existing private boundaries to public areas and avoids the need for additional physical security measures.

A number of the above criteria would relate to considerations that would fall under the Technical Details Consent when the layout is finalised. However, the existence of policy TB06 does demonstrate that development of residential gardens can be accepted in principle. An assessment against this policy parts (a)(i)(ii) and (iii) will be undertaken within the character section of this report.

Housing Land Supply:

The NPPF at paragraph 78 requires LPAs to identify a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than 5 years old. The latest published Five-Year Housing Land Supply Statement (at 31st March 2025) shows the Council is currently only able to demonstrate 2.5 years' worth of deliverable sites. Subsequently, those policies relating specifically to housing delivery in the borough's Core Strategy and MDD LP (and any made Neighbourhood Plans) are currently considered to be out of date. This does not mean they have no weight but is dependent on their consistency with the NPPF.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking this means that where policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, permission should be granted unless:

- the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or

- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination

Firstly, in considering limb (i) of paragraph 11(d), the site lies within the Green Belt, which is a policy designation of clear importance. However, for the reasons set out in the 'Development within the Green Belt' section below, the proposal is assessed as not constituting inappropriate development under paragraph 155 of the NPPF, and in those circumstances Green Belt policy is not considered, in this case, to provide a robust reason for refusal. In considering ii), officers must assess as part of an application whether there are any adverse impacts generated by the development that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination. This is referred to as the 'tilted balance,' as harm and benefits are not weighed equally, but tilted according to paragraph 11(d)(ii).

In acknowledging the requirements of paragraph 11(d)(ii) and the tilted balance being engaged, it is necessary to consider whether there are any circumstances which affect the weight that can be given to the supply of additional housing.

An underlying reason in the context of Wokingham Borough is the historic oversupply of housing against both the requirement set in the Core Strategy local plan and the scale of local housing need as calculated by the previous standard method which remains a key contributing factor to the current lack of the required deliverable housing land supply and this will be considered in the planning balance section at the end of the report.

Having established the tilted balance is engaged, Paragraph 11d(ii) requires the proposal to be considered against the policies of the NPPF taken as a whole.

Emerging Local Plan Update:

The Local Plan Update (LPU), the plan which will supersede the Core Strategy and MDD Local Plan, was published in October 2024 (Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Plan). It was subsequently submitted for examination on 28 February 2025. Two independent Inspectors were appointed, with Part 1 examination hearings held in November 2025. The Inspectors have now written to confirm the examination can progress to Part 2 hearings, which commenced in March 2026.

The LPU sets out the development strategy and proposed site allocations to meet housing needs to 2040.

Weight to be attributed to the emerging policy is informed by paragraph 49 of the NPPF 2024. This advises that weight can be applied according to the plan's stage of preparation, the extent to which there are unresolved objections, and the degree of

consistency with the NPPF. However due to outstanding representations as a whole, those policies relevant to the location of housing within the LPU are afforded limited weight.

The site was not put forward as a Submitted Site for housing in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA) (2021) which considered the broad suitability, availability and achievability of land promoted across the borough.

Sustainability of Location

Policies CP1, CP4, CP6, CP9 and CP11 of the CS permit development where it is based on sustainable credentials in terms of access to local facilities and services and the promotion of sustainable transport. Expanding on this, paragraph 4.57 in the Core Strategy aims to prevent the proliferation of development in areas away from existing development limits as they are not generally well located for facilities and services and would lead to the increase in use of the private car.

The NPPF states that housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities and seeks to ensure the growth of sustainable transport in managing development and approval of planning applications. More specifically, it seeks to promote sustainable travel in decisions.

In the context of the application site, it has already been highlighted that the application site would lie adjacent to the settlement boundary of Wargrave. Within a 1-mile radius of the application site, there is walkable access to a local school, public house, and a variety of other amenities including shops along Wargrave high street. Public transport infrastructure is adequate, with four bus stops within 500 metres of the site and Wargrave train station is a 0.9 mile (20 min approx.) walk westwards.

Overall, in the context of the scale of the development, the site is considered to be in a sustainable location due to the prevalence of amenities and public transport links within close proximity to the site.

Development within the Green Belt:

The application site is located within designated Green Belt and outside of settlement limits in the open Countryside. The government attaches great importance to Green Belts with national policies for the protection of Green Belt land covered by Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that, "The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence". Paragraph 143 of the NPPF states that the Green Belt serves 5 purposes:

- (a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- (b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- (c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- (d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- (e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land."

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that, “Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.” When considering any planning application, LPAs must ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Paragraph 153 further states that, “Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of its inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.”

Paragraph 155 of the NPPF then goes on to say that “The development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should also not be regarded as inappropriate where all the following apply:

- a. The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;
- b. There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed;
- c. The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to [paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework]; and
- d. Where applicable the development proposed meets the ‘Golden Rules’ requirements set out in paragraphs 156-157 below.”

Prior to assessing Paragraph 155, it is important to understand what is meant by the grey belt. Annex 2 of the NPPF provides the following definition:

“For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, ‘grey belt’ is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143.”

The LPA’s assessment against these three criteria are summarised in the table below:

Criteria	Assessment
a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;	LIMITED CONTRIBUTION - Wargrave is a modest development location and falls under the definition of a village, rather than a town. Furthermore, it cannot reasonably be seen as a ‘large’ built-up area. Notwithstanding this, the application site and its associated vegetated borders acts as an already established visual and spatial boundary, separating the open Countryside/Green Belt to the south from Wargrave to the north. The development would be seen as a logical extension to the settlement of Wargrave, rather than visually or spatially detached from it.

	The site's vegetated borders naturally contain the sprawl of development away from the settlement of Wargrave. The development of the field would not represent an outward extension of the urban area, result in a physical connection between urban areas, or lead to the danger of a subsequent coalescence between such settlements.
b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;	LIMITED/NO CONTRIBUTION – As outlined above, Wargrave is not a town. The nearest neighbouring settlement boundary is Twyford (also a village, not a town) which is located over 750 metres south of the application site. Considering the distance between the site and neighbouring land uses, and the fact the relevant settlements are not defined as towns, the application site makes a very negligible contribution in this regard.
d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and	LIMITED/NO CONTRIBUTION – As outlined on numerous occasions above, Wargrave is not a town. Therefore, the site has no direct role in achieving the aim of section d) of paragraph 143 of the NPPF. Whilst the above is acknowledged, the undeveloped nature of the land, given the context of its surroundings, is not a key area of green infrastructure that is necessary to retain the historic character of Wargrave.

Overall, whilst the site is not previously developed land, it is assessed as not strongly contributing to Green Belt purposes (a), (b) or (d) in paragraph 143 of the NPPF and is therefore treated as grey belt land for the purposes of this decision.

With regards to Paragraph 155 of the NPPF, it is made clear that all exceptions must apply. Looking at the assessment made in the paragraph above, it is clear that the development proposal would utilise grey belt land and therefore the proposal complies with point 'a.' of Paragraph 155. In addition, having regard to the site's contained relationship with existing development to the north and west, and to its very small scale of 2–3 dwellings, the proposal is not considered to fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the Wokingham Borough plan area taken as a whole. The Council's latest published housing land supply statement confirms a deliverable supply of 2.5 years at 31 March 2025 against an identified requirement of 1,316 dwellings per annum plus the applicable buffer; that evidence demonstrates an unmet need for additional housing, to which a proposal for 2–3 dwellings makes a modest contribution.

The site is also considered to be in a sustainable location as outlined above. As such, the site and proposals are deemed to be compliant with point 'c.' of Paragraph 155.

Paragraph 155(d) – ‘Golden Rules’, read with paragraphs 156–157, is not engaged here because the proposal is for 2–3 dwellings and therefore would not constitute major development involving housing.

The three relevant exceptions (a, b and c) of Paragraph 155 all apply and are met and therefore the proposal is considered as appropriate development within the Green Belt. The principle of development within the green belt is therefore accepted in this instance.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to the impact on character and appearance of the area:

Section 12 of the NPPF ‘Achieving well-designed places’, reinforces the importance of good design in achieving sustainable development, by ensuring the creation of inclusive and high-quality places. Paragraph 130 of the NPPF includes the need for new design to function well and add to the quality of the surrounding area, establish a strong sense of place, and respond to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

The Government’s National Design Guide 2019 (NDG) is clear that well-designed places contribute to local distinctiveness. This may include introducing built form and appearance that adds new character and difference to places.

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale, mass, layout, built form, height and character of the area and must be of high-quality design. R9 and NR5 of the Borough Design Guide SPD note that height, bulk and massing should respond to the local context and the prevailing heights in the area.

Harvest Place, and the adjacent School Road, are characterised by a variety of detached and semi-detached dwellings, predominantly set within generous residential curtilages and enclosed by mature vegetation, giving a semi-rural and verdant character to the locale. In particular, Harvest Place was permitted in 1999 (consent 980794) and is characterised by a verdant access road leading to a ‘pocket’ of detached properties that are enveloped by dense mature vegetation.

As per the indicative site plan, the proposed development would adopt a similar character to that of Harvest Place. That indicative material is afforded only limited assistance at this stage; the Council’s conclusion is not that a particular layout has been approved, but that the location of the site and the proposed amount of 2–3 dwellings are capable, in principle, of being accommodated without unacceptable character harm, with detailed design, layout, scale and landscaping reserved to technical details consent. The vehicular access would extend from Harvest Place through the rear of no.6 Harvest Place’s garden, leading to the driveways for the properties. The development would have a private, verdant character, similar to that of nearby residential development.

The size and detached nature of the houses would also be in-keeping with the area. The LPA also consider that in either circumstance (2 or 3 dwellings), the quantum of development would be commensurate with the locale and would have an

acceptable impact on the character of the area.

As outlined above, the utilisation of this greenfield site for residential development is a logical extension to the settlement of Wargrave, rather than being visually or spatially detached from it. The site's existing borders would keep the development well contained, and the TD stage will ensure that it can be protected and retained long-term.

Overall, the location, land use and amount of development proposed would have an acceptable impact on the character of the area.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to impact on neighbouring amenity:

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development shall be without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users.

At the permission in principle stage, the question is whether the site's location and the proposed quantum of 2–3 dwellings raise any obvious in-principle amenity constraints. Based on the information submitted with this application, such fundamental concerns have been identified; matters of detailed siting, scale, separation, levels, fenestration and boundary treatment fall to the technical details consent stage.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to the highway network:

Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy states that development should not lead to highway problems, along with providing for sustainable forms of transport. Policy CC07 states that sufficient parking shall be provided as part of development proposals.

WBC Highways raise no objections to the proposals in principle. Matters of vehicular access, vehicle and cycle parking provision, EV charging and refuse collection will be dealt with at the TD stage.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to flood risk:

Policy CC09 of the MDD states that all sources of flood risk, including historic flooding, must be taken into account at all stages and to the appropriate degree at all levels in the planning application process to avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding.

The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is at low risk of surface water flooding. WBC Drainage raise no objections to the development in principle subject to securing a drainage strategy, the likes of which will be addressed at the TD stage.

Location, land use and amount of development in relation to the impact on the natural environment (trees and ecology):

Landscape and Arboricultural Matters:

Policy CC03 of the MDD states that development shall protect existing trees and hedges and incorporate high quality landscaping.

Policy TB21 of the MDD Local Plan states that proposals must demonstrate how they

have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues. Proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

From an arboricultural perspective, there are no protected trees on or adjacent to the site. The indicative site plan indicates the retention of the large majority of the sites vegetated borders which is supported, and more specific protection methods will be appropriately secured at the TD stage.

From a landscape character perspective, the site is located within the LCA character area H1 'Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands' as per the Council's Landscape Character Assessment 2019. To maintain the landscape character of the Wargrave-Twyford Arable Chalk Lowlands the following strategy is required: to enhance existing landscape character. In terms of development, the aim is conserve the rural setting and gaps between settlements and maintain the integrity of settlement identity, particularly enhancing the character along the A4 Bath Road.

The character of the application site, as expressed above, provides a natural border between the open Countryside/Green Belt and the settlement of Wargrave. The development of this greenfield site for residential purposes would not harm the rural setting and gaps between settlements and would maintain the integrity of settlement identity. WBC Landscape and Trees have also raised no objections on these grounds. The impact on the wider landscape character would be limited, with final details of landscaping dealt with at the TD stage.

Ecological Matters:

Policy CP7 of the Core Strategy states development:

- a) Which may harm county designated sites (Local Wildlife Sites in Berkshire), whether directly or indirectly, or
- b) Which may harm habitats or, species of principle importance in England for nature conservation, veteran trees or features of the landscape that are of major importance for wild flora and fauna (including wildlife and river corridors), whether directly or indirectly, or
- c) That compromises the implementation of the national, regional, county and local biodiversity action plans

will be only permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, that no alternative site that would result in less or no harm is available which will meet the need, and:

- i) Mitigation measures can be put in place to prevent damaging impacts; or
- ii) Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided.

Policy TB23 of the MDD Local Plan states that Planning permission for development proposals will only be granted where they comply with policy CP7 – Biodiversity of the

Core Strategy and also demonstrate how they:

- a) Provide opportunities, including through design, layout and landscaping to incorporate new biodiversity features or enhance existing
- b) Provide appropriate buffer zones between development proposals and designated sites as well as habitats and species of principle importance for nature conservation
- c) Ensure that all existing and new developments are ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors, which shall be integrated and linked to the wider green infrastructure network.

The application site is located within a Bat Roost Suitability Habitat and is located within an Amber Risk Zone for Great Crested Newts. WBC Ecology and Ecology Newts raise no objections to the development's acceptability in principle, subject to securing appropriate mitigation and enhancements at the TD stage.

Affordable Housing:

CP5 of the Core Strategy relates to the provision of affordable housing. It states:

"Planning permission will be granted for residential development providing a mix and balance of densities, dwelling types, tenures and sizes. Affordable housing must reflect the sizes and types that meet the proven needs of people who are not able to compete in the general housing market.

All residential proposals of at least 5 dwellings (net) or covering a net site area of at least 0.16 ha will provide up to 50% of the net additional units proposed as affordable dwellings, where viable. The Council will negotiate the tenure, size and type of affordable units on a site by site basis having regard to housing needs, site specifics and other factors."

The application site exceeds 0.16 hectares in size and is situated outside of settlement limits. As the site is greenfield land, the proposal would be subject to a 40% affordable housing contribution. Due to the limited number of market dwellings proposed, the only reasonable way of securing this would be via a commuted sum.

For present purposes, affordable housing has not formed part of the basis for granting permission in principle. Any affordable housing requirement, delivery mechanism and viability considerations (if relevant) would need to be addressed, if necessary, at the technical details consent stage and/or through any associated planning obligation.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is not a requirement at the PIP stage, as this stage is limited to consideration of the location, land use, and amount of development only. Matters relating to biodiversity, including potential impacts on ecology and the requirement to demonstrate a minimum 10% net gain, will be fully assessed at the Technical Details Consent stage. At that stage, the applicant will need to submit the necessary ecological assessments and biodiversity metric calculations to demonstrate how the proposals will achieve the required net gain. If required, mitigation and enhancement measures will be secured via planning conditions or S106 agreement.

Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area:

Policy CP8 states that residential development proposals located within 5 km of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA must demonstrate that appropriate mitigation measures are in place to avoid adverse impacts on the SPA.

The application site is located outside the 5km and 5-7km linear mitigation zone for the Special Protection Area of the Thames Basin Heaths. As such, the need for an appropriate assessment is not required.

Housing Land Supply:

The Council is currently only able to demonstrate that it has 2.5 years' worth of deliverable sites, rather than a five-year supply as required by the NPPF. Subsequently, the Local Development Plan is considered out of date in accordance with paragraph 11 of the NPPF. Paragraph 11 states that where policies which are most important for determining an application are out of date, permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in the Framework that protect area or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii. any adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

Firstly, in considering i), it must be recognised that the proposed development is outside of settlement limits, being located within designated countryside, and additionally, the site is located within the Green Belt. When considering the proposal under ii), it must be determined as to whether there are any adverse impacts generated by the development that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. This is referred to as the 'tilted balance', as harms and benefits are not weighed equally, but tilted against any adverse impact. The tilted balance required by paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF is laid out below.

Tilted Balance/Conclusion:

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out that achieving sustainable development means that development should satisfy three overarching objectives in relation to economic, social and environmental benefits.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that where a local authority is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, the most important policies relating to the application may be viewed as being out of date. It continues to advise that unless there are specific policies in the NPPF protecting the land subject to the application, that permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF (tilted balance).

In considering the weight to be attached to the various benefits and adverse impacts of a proposed development under the NPPF and the development plan, any planning application must be considered in context.

Residential development in this location is considered unacceptable in principle with the local plan as the site is located outside settlement limits within land designated as Countryside. However, whilst the site is located within the Green Belt, it falls within the definition of grey belt land, and as justified within the 'Development within the Green Belt' section of this report, the proposal would not be viewed as inappropriate development within the Green Belt according to national policy. The site is also considered to be in a sustainable location and is not isolated as per paragraph 84 of the NPPF.

Returning to the three objectives of sustainable development, economically the proposed development would enable job creation during the construction period, although this would be limited given the scale of the development. The inhabitants of the new dwellings would also contribute to the economy through consumer spending. However, only three dwellings are proposed, and this holds limited weight in the planning balance. Furthermore, job creation and consumer spend are residual consequences of any housing development.

Regarding the social role, the provision of up to three new dwellings would make a limited contribution to the housing supply. Whilst the site is located outside of settlement, it is deemed to be in a reasonably sustainable location by virtue of the reasons raised above. Therefore, the provision of up to three new dwellings holds limited weight in the balance.

Regarding the environmental role, the site is located in a sustainable location and is unlikely to cause any adverse harm to protected species or the wider landscape character, subject to details secured at TD stage.

The adverse impacts identified in this case are best summarised as: conflict with the spatial strategy and countryside policies insofar as the site lies outside settlement limits; limited conflict with the plan-led distribution of housing growth; and the loss of a presently undeveloped greenfield site. Those harms attract limited to moderate weight in light of the Council's 2.5 year housing land supply position and the conclusion that the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt under paragraph 155 of the NPPF.

When engaging the tilted balance, those adverse impacts (as set out in the foregoing) as a result of the proposed development are not considered to outweigh the benefits of this scheme when assessed against the framework as whole. Therefore, Permission in Principle is recommended for approval.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):

When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approval
Date:	19 June 2026
Earliest date for decision:	18 June 2026

Recommendation agreed by:	
(Authorised Officer)	
Date:	19/06/26