

Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence

PINS Ref: APP/X0360/W/25/3371069

Wokingham Borough Council Ref: 243099

Volume 1: Text

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on behalf of

Dandra and Elstree Land

R001f_2509 Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence



Contents

Section 1: Introduction	1
Introduction of the Witness.....	1
Instruction	3
Declaration.....	14
Section 2: Settlement and Landscape Character - Baseline Situation	15
The Settlement of Arborfield and the Landscape Context	16
Valued Landscape.....	30
Section 3: The Proposals	38
Design and Delivering Landscape Benefits – Mitigation and Green Infrastructure.....	38
Section 4: Matters in Dispute	48
Scope of Landscape and Visual issues relating to the Council's Decision.....	48
Section 5: Likely landscape and visual effects	51
Landscape Effects.....	51
Visual Effects	55
Section 6: Analysis of the Council's Propositions.....	66
Section 7: Conclusions.....	73

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Indicative Land Use	4
Figure 1.2: Winter images from Reading Road (west to east)	10
Figure 1.3: Proportional area over which the development will have an influence (landscape and visual)	11
Figure 2.1: OS Berkshire LVI, surveyed 1871 to 1876, published: 1876 overlain on 2024 aerial photography	17
Figure 2.2: 'Landscape Wheel'	18
Figure 2.3: Elements characteristic of Reading Road and Church Lane	30
Figure 2.4: Relationship of the Appeal Site and draft Valued Landscapes	32
Figure 2.5: Draft Valued Landscapes and the Site's ZTV	33
Figure 2.6: Example views from Reading Road into the Site	36
Figure 5.1: Reading Road properties	60
Figure 5.2: Arborfield Cross Conservation Area – extracted from the Proposals Map	61
Figure 5.3: Views approaching ACCA from the west on Reading Road	65
Figure 5.4: View from ACCA looking west on Reading Road (location D).	65
Figure 6.1: Extract of published landscape character assessment	66
Figure 6.2: Views of properties on Reading Road	70

List of Tables

Table LP2.1: Commentary on Key Characteristics of the Arborfield River Terrace LCA	20
Table LP2.2: Commentary on Key Characteristics of the Arborfield and Barkham Settled & Farmed Clay LCA	25
Table LP3.1: Green Infrastructure Provisions	42
Table LP5.1: Magnitude of landscape change	52
Table LP5.2: Landscape Effects	55
Table LP5.3: Visual sensitivity	56
Table LP5.4: Visual magnitude of change	57
Table LP5.5 Visual effects	59

Volume 2: Appendices / Plans / Photosheets

Appendix LP1: Updated Zone of Theoretical Visibility

Appendix LP2: Baseline Photography

Appendix LP3: Accurate Visual Representations

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Section 1: Introduction

- 1.1 This Proof of Evidence replaces that submitted with the Appellant's Statement of Case when the appeal was lodged. The text and analysis has been updated following receipt of the Council's Statement of Case, expansion of the case through the Landscape Statement of Common Ground negotiations, updated offsite highways works and clarification from the appellant's arboricultural consultant in respect of the trees on the site's frontage.

Introduction of the Witness

Qualifications

- 1.2 I am Clare Brockhurst, Director of Leyton Place Limited. I have had a career in landscape architecture and landscape planning spanning more than 35 years. Within my technical area of expertise, I specialise in landscape and visual planning matters and the design of strategic Green Infrastructure (GI).
- 1.3 I have a BSc (Hons) degree in Landscape Management from the University of Reading, and a postgraduate diploma in Landscape Architecture from the University of Central England.
- 1.4 I completed and passed my professional practice examinations and became a Chartered Member of the Landscape Institute (CMLI) in 1997. In 2007, I was invited to apply for, and was awarded, Fellowship of the LI (FLI) in recognition of my contribution to the profession in the field of landscape planning.
- 1.5 I have sat on the Landscape Institute's (LI) Policy and Awards committees and have served as an elected member of Council. In June 2025, I was elected for a second time to sit on the LI's Council. I have been a judge for the LI on four occasions. I have been a guest speaker for the LI's Pathway Graduation Ceremony. I am a pathway mentor and examination moderator and support the development of newly qualified graduates.
- 1.6 I have been involved in the preparation of a number of the LI's policy and technical position papers in respect of Green Infrastructure and new housing, some of which I reference in my Proof of Evidence.
- 1.7 My professional experience and expertise have been sought by a number of organisations for the purposes of training and development, including:
- 1.7.1 In March 2020, I was invited to speak at the Planning Inspectorate's Annual Training Event held over two days. I assisted with the workshops on the latest visualisation guidance, sat on the panel discussing the landscape and visual assessment process and specifically addressed matters relating to the presentation of evidence at inquiries.
- 1.7.2 February 2021, I was invited to speak at the Landscape Matters Debate on the published Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – a virtual event that was recorded and uploaded to YouTube.
- 1.7.3 In October 2023, I was an invited speaker for the Southwest regional RTPi CPD training day.

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

- 1.7.4 In April 2025, I was approached by the LI to lead and organise an Expert Witness Masterclass for the professional membership. This event was sold out and held on the 30th June 2025. It is available online as a CPD resource for the LI membership.
- 1.7.5 Recently I have provided training to Town Legal in respect of the process of landscape and visual impact assessment and undertaking reviews of such documents.

Career and Employment

- 1.8 I started my career as an in-house Landscape Architect for Bovis Homes, where I gained an understanding of the house-building process and the effects of development on the landscape from a construction and operational perspective.
- 1.9 I joined Countryside Planning and Management (CPM) as a Graduate in 1997. I became Managing Director of Waterman CPM in 2007, after the company was acquired by Waterman Group Plc. During this time, I worked with numerous developers on a range of housing, commercial and recreation projects.
- 1.10 During my career with Waterman CPM, I was the lead landscape witness for the Countryside Agency at the year-long inquiry into the designation of the South Downs National Park (SDNP). As part of that inquiry, I gave evidence at over 250 informal hearings and a number of formal inquiry sessions. In respect of this project, I gained extensive knowledge of protected landscapes, landscape characterisation and the process of assessing valued landscapes. I also addressed issues related to the concept of 'setting' of statutorily designated landscapes.
- 1.11 I set up Leyton Place Limited after I sold my ownership in Tyler Grange LLP, where I was a founding partner. I continue to focus on delivering landscape planning consultancy services to clients, in particular as an expert witness.

Experience

- 1.12 In the last 35 years, I have been involved with over 60 Landscape and Visual Appraisals (LVAs) and over a hundred Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments (LVIAs), either as stand-alone reports or as chapters for Environmental Statements. I have been appointed by clients, including local planning authorities, to review and critique the work of others. My approach to LVAs and LVIAs has been subject to scrutiny through peer review and the public inquiry process over more than 25 years.
- 1.13 In addition to the yearlong SDNP inquiry, I have been called as an expert witness on more than a hundred occasions, including giving evidence on behalf of developers, private clients, district councils, and local community groups.
- 1.14 Specifically, as pertinent to this appeal I have appeared at inquiry in Wokingham Borough on a number of occasions, most recently:
- 1.14.1 **School Road, Hurst¹** – I was appointed by the Appellant to provide written and oral evidence at the hearing into the refusal by Wokingham Borough Council into for 23 dwellings and school parking spaces. My Proof of Evidence addressed issues relating to Landscape

¹ Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3342812 - Land between School Road and Orchard Road, Hurst, Reading, RG10 0SD

Character and Appearance, the Area of Special Character and relevant aspects of the planning policy context. The appeal was allowed.

- 1.14.2 **Land North of the A4, Twyford²** - I was appointed by the Appellant following refusal by Wokingham Borough Council for development of 230 new homes and infrastructure to the northwest of Twyford. My evidence dealt with issues of settlement integration (townscape character and evolution). The appeal was allowed.
- 1.14.3 **Land Between Lodge Road and Tape Lane, Hurst³** – I appeared on behalf of the Appellant in respect of development of 99 dwelling on the edge of Hurst, presenting evidence relating to the effects of development on the character and appearance of the area and the delivery of multifunctional Green Infrastructure. (Appeal Dismissed – the Inspector agreed with my conclusions on landscape and visual effects (**CD 10.6**)).

Instruction

- 1.15 I was approached by the Appellant in June 2025 to consider Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) reasons for refusal (Decision Notice, **CD 3.01**), the landscape officer's consultation response (**CD 2.22**), the Officer's Report to committee (**CD 3.02**) and review the LVA, (**CD 1.12**). The Appellant asked whether I could provide expert evidence for an appeal in support of the Appellant's case against the Council's Decision Notice.
- 1.16 Having reviewed the submitted material, completed a preliminary desktop study, and visited the Appeal Site, I concluded that I could appear on behalf of the Appellant. I consider the appeal proposals to be an acceptable form of development in relation to landscape and visual environment.
- 1.17 I come to this appeal with 'fresh eyes' and bringing different experience, so the evidence in my proof is based on my extensive professional judgment and informed opinions. My Proof of Evidence is primarily focussed on the allegations contained in the Council's Decision Notice to be considered in the determination of the appeal, and analysis of the matters pertaining to the allegations made by the Council against the proposal.
- 1.18 In preparing my Proof of Evidence, I have undertaken the following tasks (amongst other things):
- Reviewed the relevant material prepared by the Appellant's professional consultants, particularly the landscape and visual impact components.
 - Reviewed the consultation responses provided by the statutory consultees.
 - Reviewed the relevant policies, published material and the Council's landscape and evidence base;
 - Drafted and agreed the Landscape Statement of Common Ground; and
 - Visited the Appeal Site, day time and night time.
- 1.19 I considered the spatial arrangement of the development within the site to understand the ratio and distribution of developed/undeveloped land (**Figure 1.1**).

² Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/24/3350170 - Land to the North of the A4, New Bath Road, Twyford

³ APP/X0360/W/25/3364304 - Land Between Lodge Road and Tape Lane, Hurst, Wokingham, RG10 0EG

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026

Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield



Figure 1.1: Indicative Land Use

Submitted Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 1.20 The Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by Green Landscape Studio is an analysis of the baseline situation, with some exploration of landscape and visual receptor sensitivity. Unusually, it explicitly states that the assessment of landscape and visual effects would be undertaken at the reserved matters submission (CD 1.12.01, paragraph 1.3). The LVA provides information on the baseline situation and provides recommendations for mitigating any potential adverse effects. It was established during the correspondence relating to the draft Landscape Statement of Common Ground that the council disagreed with aspects of the appraisal but confirmed it did not request any further analysis or additional material be provided prior to determination of the application.
- 1.21 From the commentary and edits to the draft LSoCG it was made clear that the Council would not be providing an LVIA or LVA. It is clearly for the witness to provide the necessary evidence to inform the inquiry or the matters in dispute and to substantiate their case. There is no reason for the Council not to provide an assessment to substantiate its position and allegations of harm. At the Lodge Road and Tape Lane, Hurst⁴ the council's witness provided a full LVIA to support the Council's case where differences of opinion were expressed. There is no reason for the Council not to do so in this instance.

⁴ APP/X0360/W/25/3364304 - Land Between Lodge Road and Tape Lane, Hurst, Wokingham, RG10 0EG

- 1.22 I agree that the baseline situation is correctly described in the LVA, albeit as explained below the extent of likely effects is geographically limited and therefore the descriptions in the LVA go beyond what is necessary to determine the consequences of development on the landscape and visual receptors.
- 1.23 Despite the scope of the LVA, I have not prepared my own standalone assessment of landscape and visual effects for the following reasons:
- 1.23.1 The application was validated on the basis of the sufficiency of the submitted material.
- 1.23.2 This is a non-EIA project and the LVA format does not require the assessment of significant effects, but it does require a description of likely effects (GLIVA 3, Table 3.1).
- 1.23.3 In my opinion Ms Crafer did not criticise the submitted material in terms of methodology or scope of analysis, she referenced the appellant's LVA in her consultation response (February 2025). Disagreement occurs in the classification of value and sensitivity of the receptors, which is a matter of judgement rather than methodology.
- 1.23.4 During the determination period the Council did not request further information or suggest further analysis was required. The Council felt able to move to a recommendation (see committee report (CD 3.02)) on the basis of the submitted material, albeit noting that the LVIA (sic) does not fully assess the impact.
- 1.23.5 The wording in the reason for refusal does not suggest any inadequacies in the existing material or necessitate the preparation of an LVIA for any other reason.
- 1.24 Notwithstanding these comments in section 5 I provide an overview of the likely effects relevant to the determination of the appeal.
- 1.25 My Proof of Evidence is focussed on addressing the matters between the parties which flow from the reasons for refusal, and the provision of my judgements on the likely effects of the proposed development.

Supplementary Points

- 1.26 I include a short section on the consequences of the development, drawing on the submitted LVA as appropriate. To support my analysis, I have undertaken further work to expand upon, and supplement the contents of the LVA in the following matters:

Zone of Theoretical Visibility

- 1.27 Within the LVA the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) mapping provides a binary analysis of 'potential view' and 'no potential view'. Furthermore, it is noted that the analysis is based on surface topography only and does not take account of visual barriers in the form of vegetation, buildings or other man-made elements.
- 1.28 From my field observations the Appeal Site is physically contained by landform, vegetation and buildings. As a result, I have re-run the ZTV mapping, using up to date LiDAR 3D data which includes above ground structures (built and natural), this is appended at **Appendix LP1**. This mapping is included in all of my own LVIA's for planning applications, and I have presented this information at

inquiry on numerous occasions, the approach and presentation remains unchallenged through these forums and follows good professional practice.

- 1.29 The LiDAR data takes account of new development present in the landscape at the time of mapping, even if it is not shown on the OS map base.
- 1.30 The totality of those areas which are coloured on the plan at **Appendix LP1** are the locations from which and assumed maximum height of 2.5-storey development across the Appeal Site will be visible from. In effect this represents the Visual Envelope for the worst-case development scenario. The building heights will be primarily 2-storey. The different colouration represents the proportion of the development that will be visible from those locations within the Visual Envelope.
- 1.31 Those areas coloured red will experience >80% visibility of the development within the site, the counter point is that the blue colouration indicates that <20% of the development will be visible (for example this may be the case from close views where only the properties in the foreground are visible or from distant views only some of the roofscape may be observed).
- 1.32 Fieldwork has enabled me to confirm that the updated ZTV is a fair representation of the extent of the Visual Envelope.
- 1.33 In line with the Inspector's indication that any additional viewpoints that the Council were relying on for the inquiry should be shared immediately with the Appellant, I drafted and the appellant shared with the Council (15th January 2026) a draft Statement of Common Ground setting out the LVA viewpoints as being representative of the visual receptors. Through the negotiations for the Main Statement of Common Ground Ms. Carter for the council sought to include the viewpoints now listed at paragraphs 2.6.1.2 to 2.6.1.6 of the Landscape Statement of Common Ground (LSoCG, **CD 5.04**). I had expected the landscape witness to provide the necessary detailed information and considered these views to be a general planning description.
- 1.34 Ms. Taylor wrote to the Council on the 28th January 2026 asking for a first response to the draft LSoCG. Later that day a response was provided deleting all the text relating to the LVA viewpoints, AVR's and the locations of the most. The viewpoints now listed were included as a matter of disagreement, in relation to a general overarching point of a criticism of the LVA being made by the Council. The Council added the following:

In addition to viewpoints included in the LVIA and those outlined in Section 2⁵ of this Statement of Common Ground, other viewpoints and/or receptors may be brought to the Inspector's attention by the Council's Expert Witness through the written evidence for the Appeal.

- 1.35 I responded that that was an unacceptable position, I had rejected the views now listed, on the basis that the point being made was about the assessment of effects and I had not understood the general points as being specific viewpoint locations. The Council has maintained its position and the views are those as now listed. I note that the Council's additional viewpoints are limited to locations on and

⁵ These are views now at 2.6.1 of **CD 5.04**

travelling along Reading Road and Church Lane. These two roads about the Site emphasising the limited geographic extent of the visual effects arising from this project.

- 1.36 On the 30th January 2026 the Council added the following text for the first time to the areas of agreement:

Additional highway improvement works would be visible from Arborfield Cross Conservation Area.

- 1.37 No viewpoint locations were provided as to which views were of concern for the Council, I moved this matter to the areas of disagreement. Despite emailing the landscape witness directly I have not had any correspondence from him, and all changes have been recorded as tracked by Ms. Carter. Mr. Hannington has signed the LSoCG.
- 1.38 The Council's viewpoints remain imprecise and unhelpful. I sought to agree some form of wording that the Council would provide its own photography in evidence, and this was deleted, as was a form of words that confirmed that the Council would not provide winter photography. I am unclear as to what information the Council will be relying upon, or the locations it considers to be significant in terms of visual effects. I reserve my position to provide rebuttal evidence to address the visual analysis provided by the Council due to this lack of clarity and engagement.

Photomontages

- 1.39 Given the enclosed nature of the Site, I consider that accurate representations of the likely changes to the views, and thereby the appearance of the Site as experienced from the limited accessible locations in the local area, would be of assistance in the assessment of effects.
- 1.40 I therefore instructed a visualisation specialist, Troopers Hill Limited (THL), to prepare these, which I include at **Appendix LP3** based on accurate baseline photography contained within **Appendix LP2**. THL have prepared all of the AVRs I have used at inquiry and in my own LVIA's. The approach to photography, modelling and presentation has been scrutinised through the appeal process and found to be robust and accurate for the purposes of decision making. The photography and resultant AVRs are compliant with the technical guidance contained in LI Technical Guidance Note 06/19 'Visual Representation of Development Proposals'.
- 1.41 On this matter I note that the AVR's submitted in 2025 did not present the scheme with the tree loss on the site frontage with Reading Road. This omission arose from an internal miscommunication. In Volume 2, Appendix LP3 I include the updated images, which also now include the recent changes arising from the offsite highways works. My assessment of effects in Section 5 takes account of these changes.
- 1.42 During the correspondence on the draft Landscape Statement of Common Ground a number of criticisms were made about the visual material. I address these below but reserve my position to comment further once the Council's evidence has been received.

1. Winter Photography

- 1.42.1 The Council noted a failure of the appellants assessment resulting from the lack of winter images. For reasons of timing in terms of instructions and submission dates, the photography

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

in the LVA and the AVRs did not include full winter images. However, as an experienced assessor practicing for more than 35 years (prior to having the technical capabilities to prepare AVR's) and having worked for a national house builder observing the construction and development of new houses, I can apply my knowledge and experience to interpolate the images, despite the presence of leaf cover.

- 1.42.2 Indeed, this is a matter address specifically in the LI's Notes and Clarification for GLVIA (CD 18.01) at point 6 (6), wherein it is recorded:

Regarding seasonal constraints, it is within the competence of a landscape professional to be able to describe how the landscape and views would vary with the seasons, and to take account of these changes in their assessment.

- 1.42.3 To assist the inquiry, I provide images taken in January 2026 at **Figure 1.2⁶**. These illustrate the visual appearance of Reading Road. Along the road views are typically experienced obliquely. In the winter months the density of vegetation and layering of thicket and scrubby vegetation forms a good visual barrier. Where gaps exist in the fabric of the shrub and tree cover these appear larger in the winter months.
- 1.42.4 Whilst the Council raises this matter against the appellant, through the correspondence in respect of the LSoCG it was made clear that the Council would not be providing winter photography of the viewpoints they are concerned with in their evidence.



Viewpoint locations for images in Figure 1.2

⁶ For expediency, due to the late comments made by the Council that it would be taking issue with the photography, these images were taken on my phone and are provided as an *aide memoir* and are not presented as accurate images.



A



B



C



D

Figure 1.2: Winter images from Reading Road (west to east)⁷

⁷ For expediency the images were taken with my iPhone and are provided as an aide memoir, they are not intended for use as accurate baseline images, they do represent the visual environment on the 30th January 2026.

2. AVR of the Site Entrance

- 1.42.1 As noted above, the preparation of AVRs is primarily to assist the assessment of likely effects. In this instance the visual experience is linear and formed of a sequence of views, with the eye passing through the landscape. There is no reason for anyone to visit or value the existing static view into the Site at this point. It is accepted that at the entrance the removal of trees and creation of the vehicular access will open up views and housing will be visible, an AVR is not necessary to evidence this inevitable conclusion.

Study Area

- 1.43 Having considered the ZTV mapping and the local landscape character areas (C1: Arborfield River Terrace and J2: Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay (**CD 7.26** and **CD 7.27**)), I am of the opinion that the area over which the development will have any notable influence (Study Area) is substantially less extensive than illustrated in the LVA. Within the LVA, the Study Area extends to include Shinfield, Bearwood College and Arborfield Green, the majority of the area shown with the LVA plans has little or no connection/association (physical, visual or perceptual) with the Appeal Site.
- 1.44 The area of influence, as shown in **Figure 1.3** wherein the effects of the development should be considered in the planning balance, in my professional judgement is both appropriate and proportional.



Figure 1.3: Proportional area over which the development will have an influence (landscape and visual)

Design Process

1.45 Paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 of GLVIA state:

*"Design plays an increasingly important part in the development planning process. This has been emphasised by the introduction of statutory requirements for the production of design statements, or design and access statements, for many planning proposals in different parts of the UK. Such Statements explain the design principles and concepts underpinning the proposal and process through which it has evolved. **This includes the ways in which the context of the development, including the landscape, has been appraised or assessed and how the design of the development takes that context into account in relation to its proposed use.**"*

*"EIA itself can be an important design tool. It is now usually an iterative process, the stages feed into the planning and design of the project. The iterative design and assessment process has great strength because it links the analysis of the environmental issues with steps to improve the siting, layout, and design of a particular scheme." (My emphasis **emboldened**)*

1.46 The LIs Clarification Notes (LITGN-2024-01) records:

The LVIA should set out how the landscape (or townscape or seascape), and visual context of the development has influenced the design of the development and what design changes have been made to mitigate adverse landscape and visual effects and provide landscape and visual enhancements.

In considering whether design elements constitute enhancement, clear separation must be maintained between project design aims and LVIA. For instance, the provision of a sports pitch may be an enhancement to local recreation facilities but still have adverse effects on landscape character.

1.47 In my own professional practice, I find explicit analysis of how the design responds to the landscape is a helpful component in the design process and analysing the scheme in the broader policy context. Whilst the LVA includes a list of mitigation measures (LVA, para 6.2) this is a summary of how the development responds to its context. I supplement this information in my Proof of Evidence.

Technical Approach and Structure of my Proof of Evidence

1.48 Within the landscape and visual evidence, and where appropriate, I refer to published best practice guidance for considering landscape and visual matters as contained in:

- Guidance for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, third edition, LI, and IEMA, 2013 (GLVIA 3)8 (CD 18.01).
- An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England (AALCA), October 2014. (CD 18.02).

⁸ A hard [clean] copy can be made available to the inspector if required.

- Townscape Character Assessment, Technical Information Note 05/2017, Landscape Institute, April 2018. (CD 18.03)
- Notes and Clarification on Aspects for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment Third Edition - Technical Guidance Note LITGN-2024-01 (CD 18.08).

- 1.49 These are standard documents for the landscape profession, and I refer to those matters pertinent to the issues before this appeal, quoting from the documents, as necessary.
- 1.50 At the outset of my evidence, I wish to make clear that I understand each development proposal needs to be determined on its own merits. In my evidence I refer to allocations, allowed appeals or consented developments near to the Appeal Site. I do this, not as a means of making a direct comparison of the landscape merits of that scheme, but to consider matters of consistency in decision making.
- 1.51 My Proof of Evidence is structured as follows:

Volume 1: Text

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Section 1: | Introduction |
| Section 2: | Settlement and Landscape Character - Baseline Situation |
| Section 3: | The proposals – an overview of the scheme from a landscape and visual perspective |
| Section 4: | Matters in dispute – providing the explanation as to which issues are addressed in my evidence. |
| Section 5 : | Likely Landscape and Visual Effects |
| Section 6: | Analysis of the Council's propositions |
| Section 7: | Summary and conclusions |

Volume 2: Plans and Appendices

Professional Judgement

- 1.52 As a matter of professional judgement, I do not take the stance adopted by some of my professional colleagues that change in and of itself equates to harm, or that simply seeing housing is a negative experience. Change arising from development is not synonymous with 'harm'. Notably, our townscapes have always resulted from change to the character of the landscape and the creation of new character areas (GLVIA, para 4.37, CD 18.01)
- 1.53 Therefore, whilst LVIA's which follow the approach outlined in the published guidance, reach conclusions that housing is an *adverse* effect, I consider that if the new housing complements and respects its context, the change can be neutral, or indeed positive in nature, as the housing becomes part of the characteristic townscape that it is intended to be.
- 1.54 The landscape profession does not shy away from, or take an in-principal objection to, the provision of new housing. It is supportive of development on the basis that it should respond to its context and become a positive component of the evolving landscape. I note that GLVIA 3 does not contain the word 'harm'. The guidance recognises that the landscape is changing, and development to meet the growing and changing population responding to drivers of change. Paragraph 4.26 notes that:

*"...It should also be remembered that well-designed new developments **can make a positive contribution** to the landscape and need not always be hidden or screened."*

(emphasis **emboldened**)

- 1.55 This Proof of Evidence contains my opinions and judgements on the landscape and visual consequences of the proposed development, which in turn are informed by my extensive professional experience associated with development of green and brownfield locations.
- 1.56 Given the volume of information before the inspector, I have sought to keep my Proof of Evidence focused on the key areas of disagreement. My silence on aspects of the landscape and visual context should not be taken to mean I have concerns and/or choose to set these matters aside. Having read the material and visited the Appeal Site I have drawn my own conclusions on the issues before this appeal. I have not identified any matters which indicate that development should be resisted on landscape and visual grounds.

Declaration

- 1.57 The evidence I have prepared represents my informed professional opinion on the objective and subjective aspects of the development for the Appeal Site. Based on my knowledge, the facts stated in this evidence are true and accurate and I have complied with my professional Code of Conduct.

Section 2: Settlement and Landscape Character - Baseline Situation

- 2.1 I note that in the Council's Statement of Case that the site location and description is limited and does not address the context to the Appeal Site, which is critical when considering the effects on the landscape and settlement character.
- 2.2 Reference is made in the Council's Statement of Case to settlement limits and defined settlements by reference to the Development Plan and how settlements are ascribed relating to policy. In reality from the character and appearance perspective this is not how landscape and the settled character is appreciated. Simply classifying land as countryside does not convey anything as to the character of the landscape beyond the settlement policy boundary.
- 2.3 The *European Landscape Convention – A Framework for Implementation*, October 2007, contains the short definition of 'landscape' and provides supporting text at paragraph 1.2, namely:

*"The ELC definition is short, yet comprehensive: 'landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors' The definition applies to the whole territory of states including all **urban** and **peri-urban** landscapes, towns, **villages** and rural areas, the coast, and inland areas. It applies to ordinary or even degraded landscape as well as those areas that are outstanding or protected."* (My emphasis **emboldened**.)

- 2.4 I record this definition to reinforce the importance of considering all components of the landscape. LVIA's and Landscape Character Assessments typically focus on the undeveloped landscapes. However, the Appellant's team worked together to understand the townscape and landscape character and qualities. This is relevant to the comments made in GLVIA 3 (paragraphs 2.13 to 2.15) wherein change is driven by the need for development to meet a growing and changing population.
- 2.5 New homes are important and fundamental components of our wider environment; they are places we live in and value. Indeed, we celebrate and protect some of our most urban and densely settled townscapes through the application of Conservation Area policies. Whilst this reflects historic elements, this does not mean only historic properties are attractive and do not cause 'harm'. New developments win awards and are celebrated by communities.
- 2.6 The landscape profession does not shy away from or take an in-principal objection to the provision of new housing; it is supportive of development on the basis that it should respond to its context.
- 2.7 I reiterate the point I made previously, GLVIA 3 does not contain the word 'harm', the guidance recognises that the landscape is not unchanging, and development to meet the growing and changing population responding to drivers of change. Paragraph 4.26 notes that:

*"...It should also be remembered that well-designed new developments **can make a positive contribution to the landscape** and need not always be hidden or screened."*

- 2.8 In *Townscape Character Assessment*, Technical Information Note 05/2017, Landscape Institute, April 2018 the positive attributes of settlements are acknowledged in paragraph 2.2:

The term townscape first came into popular use in the UK in the 1940's and 1950's, when there was a concern amongst some architectural critics that the identity of our villages, towns and cities was being eroded by poorly planned post-war reconstruction. They derived their definitions of townscape from the Roman "genius loci," which translates as "the prevailing character or atmosphere of a place." It does not mean preservation however, and townscape was used as a way of explaining how modern development could co-exist alongside historic buildings and areas, contributing positively to the evolution of a place. (My emphasis)

The Settlement of Arborfield and the Landscape Context

- 2.9 Within this section I refer to the matters raised by Ms Crafer (the Council's Landscape Architect). It is her observations and judgements which informed the case officer's analysis and ultimately fed into the report to committee and reason for refusal. I understand her colleague is appearing to present the landscape and visual evidence.
- 2.10 Factually, 'Development Limits' is not a term which is interchangeable with the built-up area or settlement boundary. The following assists in demonstrating the difference between the sense of place manifest by the settlement (its components and qualities) and the drafting of policies as a means of spatial planning and development control. The evidence from Ms. Brigid Taylor deals with the policy matters.
- 2.11 The existing settled elements in the immediate environs of the Appeal Sites, within the revised Study Area, are predominantly relatively recent additions to the landscape, resulting from development of former pasture and farmland (**Figure 2.1**)⁹ for housing, the farm shop (and parking) and other incidental built form. Notably the J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Framed Clay Landscape Character Area (LCA) in its title recognises and acknowledges the character is distinctly and characteristically settled.
- 2.12 Arborfield Village which the Site is physically, visually and perceptually associated with, as shown in **Figure 2.1**, is a distinctive settlement as acknowledged in the Neighbourhood Plan, which has expanded from its historic origins focussed on the Church and latterly Arborfield Manor. Arborfield Village typically comprises development set within a wooded framework, originating from the church and then extending along Church Lane (with redeveloped or expanded plots), with outliers on Greensward Lane and Walden Avenue. These outliers reinforce the sense of settlement to the landscape and mark the arrival to Arborfield Village from Reading Road.
- 2.13 Arborfield Cross is a settlement on the fringes of the Study Area and separate from Arborfield Village. Given the lack of inter-visibility between the Site and Arborfield Cross I do not address this settlement in any further detail.

⁹ In addition to showing the settled elements this imagery also shows how the field pattern has been the subject of subdivision and fragmentation through farming operations and development.



Figure 2.1: OS Berkshire LVI, surveyed 1871 to 1876, published: 1876 overlain on 2024 aerial photography¹⁰

¹⁰ The evolution of the settlement is shown in Figures appended to the Appellant's Archaeological Desk-based assessment, November 2024

- 2.14 Landscape comprises a number of elements illustrated by Figure 1 in An Approach to Landscape Character Assessment, Natural England (AALCA), October 2014. This is typically referred to as the 'Landscape Wheel.'

Figure 1: What is landscape?



Figure 2.2: 'Landscape Wheel'

- 2.15 Critically, understanding the landscape relies on more than what can be seen and how policy is applied. Landscape is a concept that relies on perception and the manner in which features combine to create a sense of place.
- 2.16 Reference is made to the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA), 2019 by the landscape officer and in the committee report.
- 2.17 Firstly, it is helpful to understand what is typically meant by landscape characterisation as a matter of principle. This is a process whereby areas of similar character are classified, mapped, and described. It is non-judgmental process and does not imply or confer value or 'rank' landscapes. It is not a qualitative judgement, and it takes a holistic approach to a geographic area rather than focusing on special features. The output tends to describe a landscape with characteristics that combine to make a place distinctive, even where localised variations may be different. Furthermore, the characterisation process typically focusses on the undeveloped landscapes outside of settlements, in effect they are drafted with 'blinkers' on in respect of towns and villages which form the boundary of landscape character areas (LCAs). In respect of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment having identified key characteristics, the narrative explores the:
- Natural Landscape
 - Cultural Landscape
 - Perceptual Landscape
- 2.18 By reference to the WBLCA the Appeal Site lies at the interface of two LCAs; C1: Arborfield River Terrace and J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clayland. A summary description

of these LCAs is included in the landscape officer's consultation response. However, whilst part of the publication is extracted for the purposes of the officer's response there is no analysis by the officer as to the relevance of the text cited to the Appeal Site and consideration of the proposed development.

- 2.19 Published assessments cascade from the national through to the regional level, with the more local classifications and descriptions being of a finer grain and of great relevance.
- 2.20 However, reliance on these assessments should be caveated in this instance for the following reasons, bearing in mind the text in GLVIA, paragraph 5.13:

Existing assessments must be reviewed critically as their quality may vary, some may be dated, and some may not be suited to the task in hand. Before deciding to rely on information from an existing assessment a judgement should be made as to the degree to which it will be useful in informing the LVIA process...

It should be reviewed in terms of:

- *when it was carried out and the extent to which the landscape may have changed since then.*
- *its status, and whether or not it has been formally adopted, for example as supplementary planning guidance.*
- *the scale and level of detail of the assessment and therefore its suitability for use in the LVIA, while noting that larger-scale assessments can often provide valuable context.*
- *any other matters which might limit the reliability or usefulness of the information.*
- *Justification should be provided for any departure from the findings of an existing, established LCA.*

- 2.21 In this instance the level of detail contained within the WBLCA, as explored below in **Tables LP2.1** and **LP2.2** is insufficient for the assessment of a single, subdivided field within the context of a settled landscape. The scale and level of detail in the WBLCA is not sufficiently focussed to provide more than an overview of the landscape context.
- 2.22 Furthermore, I note that the landscape officer only cites a small number of the key characteristics as being relevant (these are **emboldened** in the tables below). In order to understand the potential for the LCA to experience change it is important to understand the extent to which key characteristics are unaffected by the proposals. For this reason, the follow tables show all of the published key characteristics identified in the Wokingham landscape assessment.

Arborfield River Terrace

- 2.23 It should be noted that the condition of this LCA is classified as moderate to poor in the Council's evidence base, which states:

Individual landscape components of the Arborfield River Terrace are generally in moderate-poor condition. The most intact components are the physical landscape, particularly the terrace landform, and the tranquil rural environment, although the area generally lacks a strong sense of place. The hedgerow network and historic field system have declined, many of the coppices are unmanaged and the vernacular architecture is being eroded by the introduction of unsympathetic components. The M4, Winnersh Relief Road and on-going construction of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road and expanding development north of the M4 will further fragment the agricultural landscape.

- 2.24 This acknowledges the impact of urbanisation within the area and the lack of management and resultant degradation of many key characteristics.

Table LP2.1: Commentary on Key Characteristics of the Arborfield River Terrace LCA

Published Key Characteristics	Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area
Gently undulating river terrace landform between 45-50m AOD to the east of the River Loddon floodplain. The area is underlain by London Clay and river terrace gravels which give rise to loamy soils which are better drained than the floodplain, and therefore intensively farmed.	The Site occupies a gentle slope rising from 48m AOB in the south west to 55m AOB in the north east. Mapping from the British Geological Society confirms the geology is as described for the wider area. 

Published Key Characteristics Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area

0%  100%

-  Alluvium - Clay, silt, sand and gravel
-  Head - Gravel, sand, silt and clay
-  River Terrace Deposits, 3 - Sand and...
-  River Terrace Deposits, 5 - Sand and...
-  London Clay Formation - Clay, silt a...

Small water features including tributary stream running through the Holt and drainage channels and ponds.

The site is not directly associated with the rivers or tributaries. However, there are drainage ditches in the field boundaries to the east of the site. These will be retained in the development proposals with the addition of new water features as part of the SUDs provision.

Two small ponds are present within the field margins to the north and south of the site.

The valued attribute of this characteristic is because surface water, including ponds, historic moats and drainage ditches, adds visual interest and provides potential for small-scale wetland habitats. The proposals provide for retention of the existing features and provision of new elements building on the valued attributes.

Intensive arable farmland with medium to large fields bound by indistinct boundaries, mainly post and wire fencing, with occasional gappy remnant hedgerows. Some horse paddocks present, and cattle grazing at the University of Reading farm and Centre for Dairy Research.

The Site is not intensively or even moderately managed farmland, in this regard it is not reflective of the wider LCA.

The site generally comprises unmanaged pasture with former field boundaries and more contemporary treed features on the boundaries of development parcels being unmanaged.

Temporary fencing is used for the grazing of horses and the grassland within the main body of the site reverting to scrub.

Small woodland and copses break up the agricultural plain.

BAP priority habitat mixed lowland deciduous woodland dominates, with some wet woodland designated as LWS (Cuckoo Pen, Gravel Pit Wood/The Holt, Loaders Copse, Winnersh Woodland). Pound Copse and Great Wood LWS also contain small areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland.

The ecological issues have been addressed in the appellant's submitted material. I agree that wooded features visually break up the appearance of the landscape. In respect of the Site these are primarily mature field boundary trees rather than areas of woodland or copses.

To maintain the valued attributes trees are retained, with new linear features to provide longevity of woodland in the landscape and increase connectivity of ecological enhancement.

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

Published Key Characteristics	Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area
Remnant historic parkland associated with the former Arborfield Hall. The presence of mature oaks provides a strong silhouette against the open sky.	This lies out with the Study Area and there is no relationship between the Site and the parkland, this is not a matter raised by the Council in objecting to the proposals.
Low-density settlement of farmsteads (typically red brick with weather boarded barns), manor houses and hamlets, except for the area north of the M4 where development has extended onto the river terrace on the edge of Winnersh.	Whilst across the LCA there is a low density of settlement, in the vicinity of the Site there are distinctive settlements (Arborfield Village and Arborfield Cross). In this respect the published description is addressing the distribution of settlements within the landscape rather than the density of dwellings within a settlement. The proposals seek to expand Arborfield Village and therefore will not change the density of settlements within the LCA.
Large, modern agricultural buildings are prominent features of the landscape.	There are a number of these features in the Study Area including: • Henry Street Garden Centre (in addition to the building there are glasshouses, and car parking) • Lockey Farm Shop • Cross Lanes Farm • Faulkners Business Park The degree of prominence is moderated by the inclusion of tree planting, whilst they are apparent as one moves through the landscape, they demonstrate the efficacy of tree planting in minimising visual and landscape effects.
Tree-lined narrow lanes, tracks, byways and footpaths allow recreational access to the river terrace, and access to the Loddon floodplain, as well as the Blackwater Valley Path.	The Site will be accessed from Reading Road, this is a primary route with pedestrian footpath and traffic calming measures, it does not reflect the key or valued attributes of this landscape. It is correct that Church Lane is relatively narrow, however, this part of the LCA description refers to the manner in which such routes allow access to the river terrace. In this respect there is a link to the River Loddon from the church which can be reached via Church Lane. This will be unaffected by the proposals.

Published Key Characteristics Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area



Clear long-distance views across the adjacent floodplain due to the unvaried topography. The spire of Arborfield Church provides a landmark feature in distant views.

As demonstrated by the ZTV mapping (**Appendix LP1**) there are no views across the River Loddon Floodplain from the site, the level of physical containment means it is not a component of the landscape which facilitates such views from the wider area.

Rural character and sense of remoteness, due to the predominance of narrow lanes and tracks and very low-density settlement. This is interrupted by the transport corridors in the north of the area, the M4, and new Winnersh Relief Road, as well as the proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road in the centre of the area.

I do not agree that the Site demonstrates a sense of remoteness. It is approached from Reading Road, with the housing on Walden Avenue, north of Reading Road, Greensward Lane and Church Lane generating a settled and connected sense of place.

Reading Road provides an important connecting route negating any sense of remoteness.

The valued attribute of this characteristic is the sense of remoteness by being removed from roads and visual intrusion of settlement. Both roads and settlement exist and abut the Site.

In respect of rurality which is implied to engender the sense of remoteness this quality has been eroded by the manner of property expansion in the area. Even as recently as 2003 (Image 1) small properties typical of a relatively rural location occupied the land south of Church Lane. Since 2003 properties have been extended and creating a more suburban character to

Published Key Characteristics Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area

the settled character with large dwellings, and gated driveways (2025, Image 2).



Image 1



Image 2

- 2.25 Overall, the characteristics highlighted in Ms Crafer's consultation response are either not reflected in the Site or will be unaffected by the proposals.
- 2.26 Given the interface between the two LCAs it is unsurprising there are a number of observations that are common to both character areas. However, for completeness these are provided for Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay LCA below.

2.27 The condition of this landscape is recorded as:

The landscape is in overall moderate condition, due to the pattern of arable and pastoral fields, and remnant wetland influences associated with Barkham Brook. However, the hedgerow network is fragmented and the introduction of further development through the Arborfield Garrison SDL and associated infrastructure will further fragment the rural settlement pattern altering the character of the area.

Table LP2.2: Commentary on Key Characteristics of the Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay LCA

Published Key Characteristics	Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area
A gently undulating landscape between 50m and 65m AOD, underlain by London Clay with localised areas of River Terrace Gravels. Shallow wooded valleys follow the course of the Barkham Brook, which is geologically marked by areas of alluvium.	The Site occupies a gentle slope rising from 48m AOB in the south west to 55m AOB in the north east. Mapping from the British Geological Society confirms the geology is as described for the wider area.
Consistent pattern of water bodies including streams, drainage channels, ditches and open water bodies of various sizes resulting from the clayey and loamy soils which impede drainage	See Table LP2.1 . Further, the valued attribute of this characteristic is stated as being specifically the Barkham Brook and associated wetland which provide important ecological habitats including wet meadow and BAP priority habitat wet woodland. This is not a component of the landscape associated with the Site.
Wooded context provided by characteristic mature hedgerow and in-field trees, combined with woodland belts, with BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills. This creates a loose sense of enclosure.	See Table LP2.1 . In addition, for this LCA the arable and pastoral fields are valued for the separation functionality they provide. In this respect the fields which separate Arborfield Village (and the outlying clusters of development that current existing in the landscape are the fields east of the Site, albeit a number of these contain extensive development (agriculture and horticulture) as shown in image 3.

Published Key Characteristics

Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area



Image 3

Arable farming dominates, with pasture on higher ground and horse paddocks near settlement. Fields are large and geometric, bound by fragmented hedgerows supported by post and wire. Fields used for paddocks are often subdivided with horse tape.

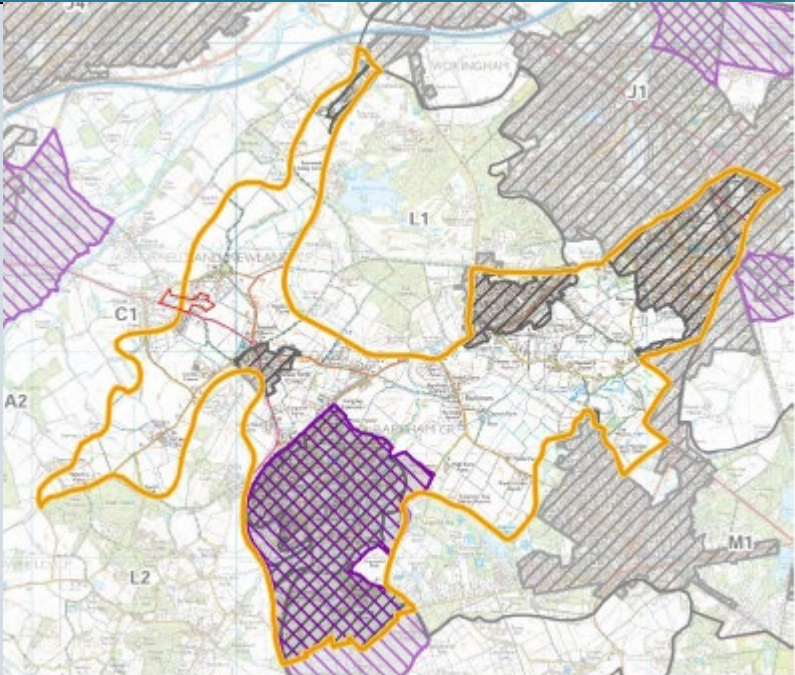
The Site reflects this description.

Small-scale wet woodland and wetland habitats scattered on the edge of the area, often designated as LWS. BAP priority habitat wet woodland is found at Bottle Copse and The Moors, with wet meadow and wet grassland found at Brook Farm Meadow LWS.

Not relevant to the Site and the application details.

A dense settled character influenced by modern development including the new garden village on the site of

This LCA whilst encapsulating the majority of the Site is 'skewed' by the extensive settlement to the east and south (Image 4).

Published Key Characteristics	Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area
Arborfield Garrison and the southern edge of Wokingham which incorporates an industrial estate. There is little consistent style or form.	 Image 4 My observations on the general pattern and character of settlement in Table LP2.1 is most relevant to the Site; however, this does illustrate that settlement is an influential component of the landscape in this locale.
Older scattered settlement of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages at Barkham and Arborfield Cross. The buildings have traditional vernacular of timber framing and clay tiles, exemplified by the Conservation Area at Arborfield Cross. A number of farmhouses are listed, including Grade II* Barlett's Farmhouse.	In this respect the valued attribute of this characteristic is the rural settlement pattern of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages outside the urban area which provides a rural character and a link to the past. Barkham and Arborfield Cross are noted specifically, however I recognise that Arborfield Village is valued by the local community and described in the Neighbourhood Plan as a settlement. As set out above many of the 'rural' properties on Church Lane have been extended and enlarged eroded the historic links to the past rural communities.
A network of busy local roads cross the area. They tend to be rural in character, with ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees, sometimes opening directly onto the arable fields. The A327 adds noise and movement to the area.	See Table LP2.1

Published Key Characteristics	Observations/Commentary in respect of the Site and Study Area
Public rights of way run between the settlements and provide access for recreational use.	There are few links between settlements within the vicinity of the Site (image 5), walking routes are primarily provided via pedestrian footpaths and lanes.
A rural character away from development and roads, with views across to adjacent character areas including across the Loddon Valley.	 Image 5 See Table LP2.1
A historic road, now represented by footpaths, lanes and Victorian carriageways, that appears on Norden's map of 1607, connecting Swallowfield Park via Arborfield Cross and the Coombes (in LCA L1), with Wokingham.	Not relevant to the Site

- 2.28 Again, this analysis illustrates why published material should be interrogated in order to determine the relevance to the project and the implications and consequences of the development.
- 2.29 Relevant to the baseline situation and character and appearance of Reading Road, in light of the matters raised when negotiating the Landscape Statement of Common Ground, is the effect of highways structures. To be clear, the baseline situation in respect of the road is characterised by the presence of speed control measures, including islands, signage and illumination. There is kerbing, junctions and openings with views of housing. The roadside is mixed, with native trees, close board fencing, walls, ornamental shrubs and managed hedgerows (**Figure 2.3**).
- 2.30 Similarly, Church Lane is not a pristine rural lane, large properties are set behind a variety of boundaries, with areas of large hard standing/driveways. Speed control measures are present in the

carriageway. Many of the properties have external lighting which casts light beyond the property into the lane, with notable lighting on the apron of the drive.



A



B



C

Figure 2.3: Elements characteristic of Reading Road and Church Lane

Valued Landscape

2.31 I note that Ms Crafer, accepts in her consultation response that the Appeal Site is not in a Valued Landscape (her response (CD 2.22), page 2). However, she proceeds to state that:

*The site is **trapped** between the valued landscapes and is therefore heavily influenced by them. (my **emphasis**)*

2.32 Having reached this conclusion in Section 4.1 of her response Ms Crafer goes on to seek to elevate the value of the landscape for the purpose of assessing likely sensitivity of the landscape.

2.33 In my opinion the consultation response is selective and does not following the type of analysis that has the transparency promoted by the Landscape Institute through GLVIA (Box 5.1) and 'Technical Guidance Note 02/21: Assessing Landscape Value outside national designations' which developed and expanded on the contents of GLVIA Box 5.1 (prepared in 2013). The latter is the most up to date approach to evaluating value.

2.34 In the High Court judgement¹¹ handed down on the 15th November 2023 the judge made clear the distinction in respect of NPPF paragraph 187 and the sub paragraphs (a) and (b). Valued Landscapes are to be 'protected' and 'enhance' whereas other countryside is to be 'recognised' for its intrinsic character and beauty. 'Recognising' has some level of protection, however the level of

¹¹ R (Bramley Solar Farm Residents Group) v Secretary of State LUHC [2023] EWHC 2842

protection afforded to valued landscapes is plainly higher. This is the reason 'value' is important to assess properly for the purposes of the planning balance.

2.35 All landscapes have some valued to one or more communities for one or more of its assets, having value and being valued are different concepts. Local value is at the lower end of the spectrum, with National Parks and AONBs being at the highest end of the spectrum.

2.36 Landscape value is rated, for the purpose of my Proof of Evidence, which I have used in previous Proofs of Evidence and LVIA's, on the following scale:

National/International – Designated landscapes which are nationally or internationally designated for their landscape value – including National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, World Heritage sites, Heritage Coast and National Scenic Areas.

District– Locally or regionally designated landscapes (e.g. Areas of Attractive Landscape (AALs) or Local Landscape Areas (LLAs)); also, areas which local evidence (such as tourism guides, landscape character assessments or other documentary information) indicates as being more valued than the surrounding area.

Local – 'everyday' landscape which is appreciated by the local community but has little or no wider recognition of its value.

2.37 This grain of analysis is appropriate for the consideration of the likely effects of development. The Appeal Site is of local value on this scale. The position between two 'valued landscapes' has no relevance to those landscapes or sites which are not within such landscapes. Whilst land in the transitional between landscape character areas may 'borrow' some of the characteristics of the adjoining landscape, the value of the landscape does not confer any value on the land which adjoins. Each landscape unit needs to be assessed against the criteria which contribute to value.

2.38 However, the use of the word 'trapped' is misleading, as can be seen in **Figure 2.4**, the Appeal Site is located within a swathe of land which is not considered to be a Valued Landscape.

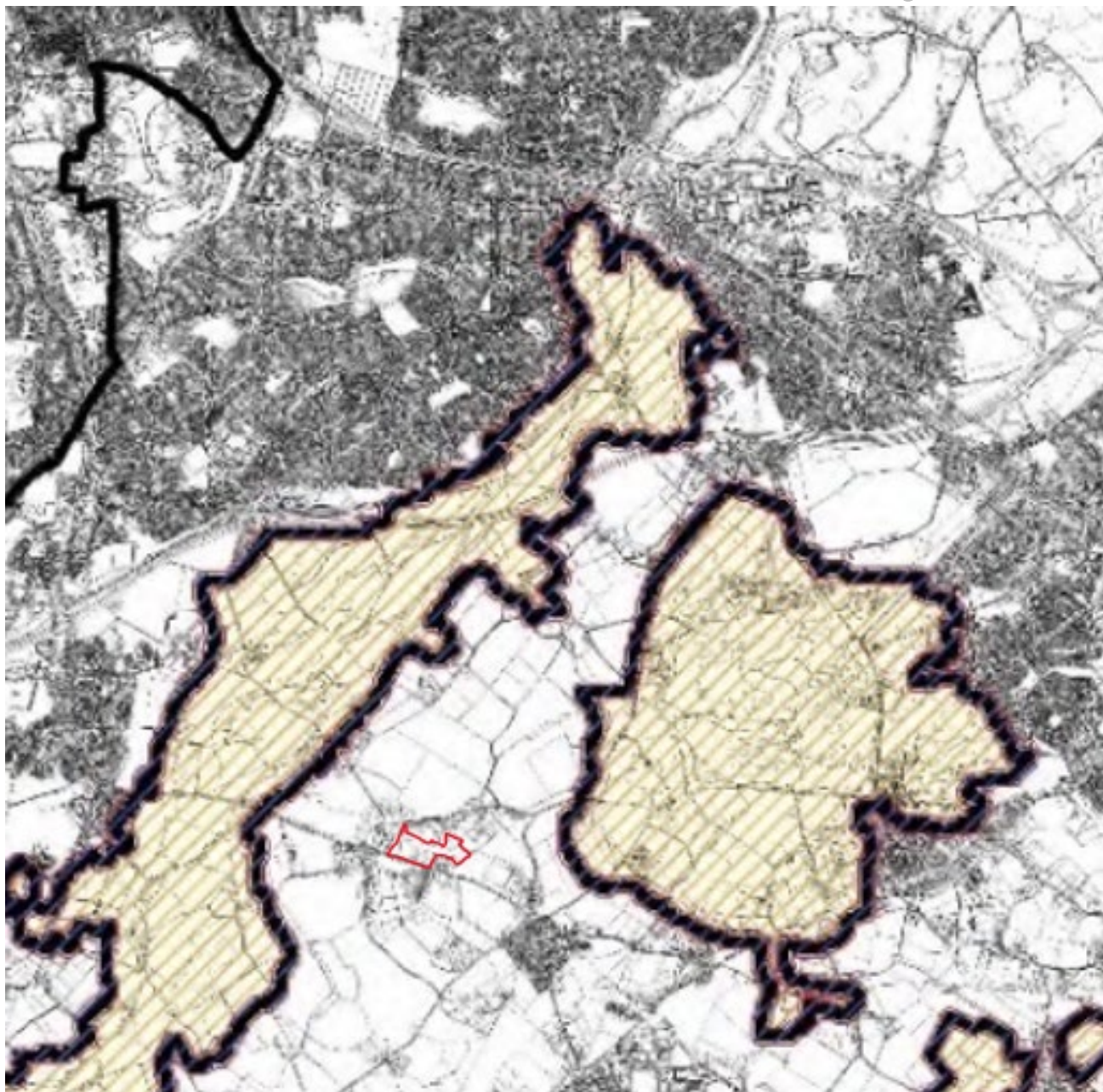


Figure 2.4: Relationship of the Appeal Site and draft Valued Landscapes

- 2.39 The lack of influence of the valued landscapes on the Appeal Site is further demonstrated by the lack of intervisibility when one places the ZTV of the Site into the context of the draft Valued Landscapes evidence base (CD 7.23) (Figure 2.5).

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

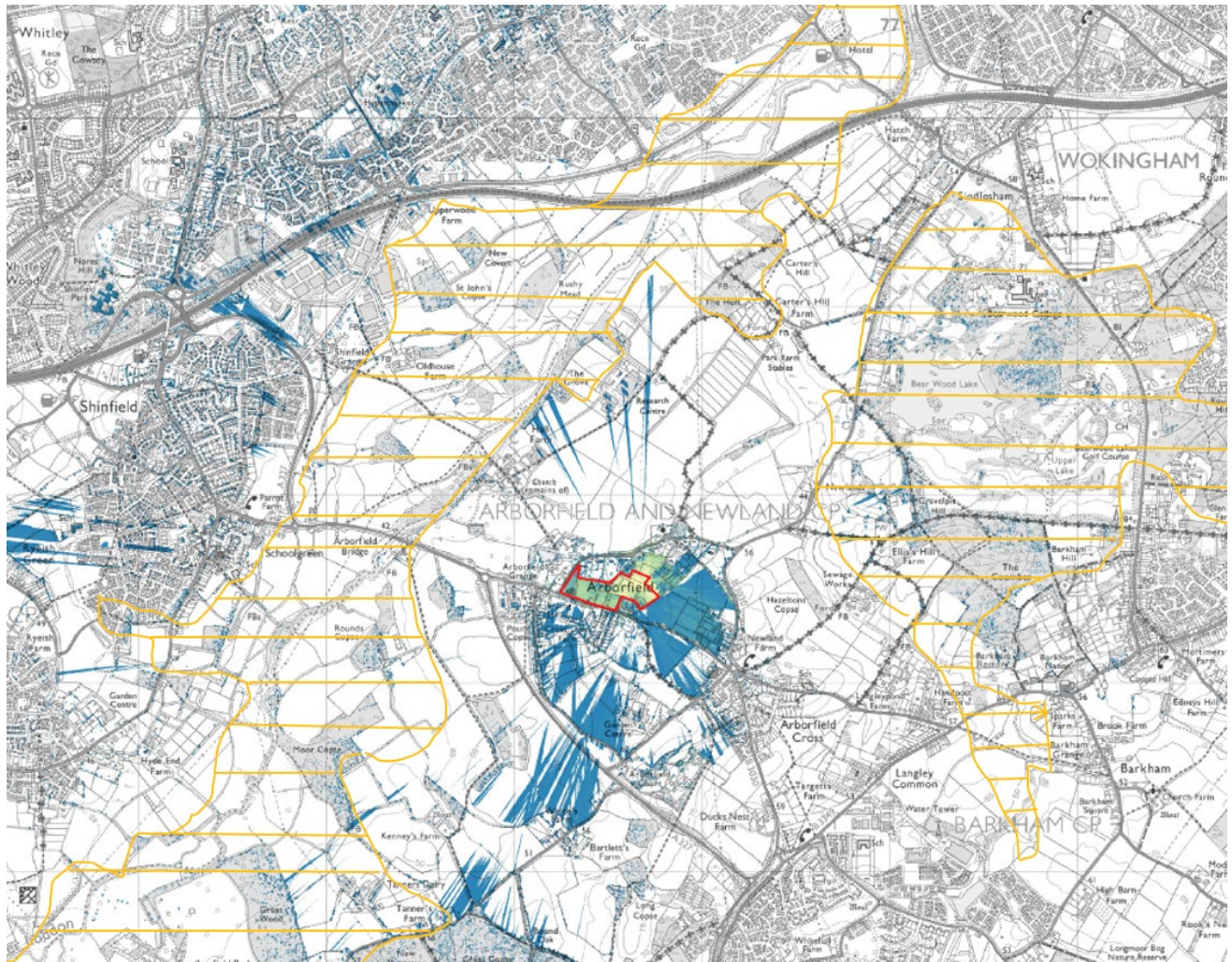


Figure 2.5: Draft Valued Landscapes and the Site's ZTV¹²

2.40 I disagree that the emerging 'Valued Landscapes' have a strong influence on the Appeal Site and in my opinion the Appeal Site is not influenced by these landscapes in terms of character or value. I disagree with the allegations made by Ms Crafer. The Appeal Site is not a component of a Valued Landscape for the purposes of paragraph 187 of the NPPF.

Valued landscape factors¹³

2.41 As noted above all landscapes have value, as accepted by the Council the Appeal Site is not a valued landscape, either as part of a wider landscape or in its own right. However, when assessing likely effects, it is important to establish the level of value to be applied to the landscape resource. I undertake this analysis by reference to the the aspects of value set out in Technical Guidance Note 02/21.

¹² The boundary is approximate as the maps contained in the evidence base (Valued Landscapes Assessment September 2024 Wokingham Borough Council) are not GPS referenced and use out of date mapping.

¹³ Source of factors: Assessing landscape value outside national designations, 2021 Table 1

- 2.42 The analysis uses the same 'factors' as those presented in Table 4.1 of the LVA, I provide greater detail in my analysis to assist the inspector.

Natural heritage

- 2.43 The site is not subject to any ecological designations. Features such as the mature hedgerows, scrub and tree have a functional and inherent value to wildlife through the provision of habitats and connectivity. However, this is not unique to the landscape of the river terrace and settled and farmed clay landscapes.
- 2.44 There are five veteran trees¹⁴ within the Appeal Site which in their own right have a relatively higher value than the other tree stock and are protected in national planning policy. However, their contribution to the character and value of the Appeal Site is masked by the other boundary trees.

Cultural heritage

- 2.45 The site does not contain any designated built heritage assets. On the Landscape Strategy Plan the land to the west of the Appeal Site is annotated as a 'locally valued heritage asset', this is not a classification which is protected by any development plan policy. The heritage officer's consultation response does not indicate any heritage value associated with the Appeal Site and those assets beyond the Site will not be impacted by the proposals.
- 2.46 This is not a landscape with clear evidence of archaeological or historic interest which contributes positively to the landscape.

Landscape condition

- 2.47 The Council's evidence base records the following:

Arborfield River Terrace

*Individual landscape components of the Arborfield River Terrace are generally in **moderate-poor condition**. The most intact components are the physical landscape, particularly the terrace landform, and the tranquil rural environment, although the area generally lacks a strong sense of place. The hedgerow network and historic field system have declined, many of the coppices are unmanaged and the vernacular architecture is being eroded by the introduction of unsympathetic components. The M4, Winnersh Relief Road and on-going construction of the Arborfield Cross Relief Road and expanding development north of the M4 will further fragment the agricultural landscape.*

Settled and Farmed Clay landscape

*The landscape is in **overall moderate condition**, due to the pattern of arable and pastoral fields, and remnant wetland influences associated with Barkham Brook. However, the hedgerow network is fragmented and the introduction of further*

¹⁴ Three identified in the woodland Triss' online Ancient Tree Inventory (2x Veteran and 1x Notable) and two additional veteran trees identified by the appellant's arboricultural advisor.

development through the Arborfield Garrison SDL and associated infrastructure will further fragment the rural settlement pattern altering the character of the area.

- 2.48 Consideration of the historic mapping shows that the Appeal Site and its context has undergone change and fragmentation. It is not in a good physical state, its condition is towards the lower end of the spectrum as features have become eroded and modified so that the landscape elements do not exhibit good intactness. Reading Road and suburbanisation of the development to the north on Church Lane influence the perceived condition in the term of the Technical Note criterion.

Associations

- 2.49 There are no known cultural or artistic associations with the site.

Distinctiveness

- 2.50 The rural character is diminished, and the site is appreciated as a component of the widely settled context. The published character assessment recognises the lack of unity in the character of the area. The sense of place is diminished by the lack of positive management and agricultural use, the road corridor and the properties backing on to the Site, it is appreciated as a remnant area which one passes rather than have a strong sense of place or contribution to the character and appearance of the landscape.

Recreational

- 2.51 The recreational value is limited through the lack of footpaths within the Appeal Site. The pedestrian footpath alongside Reading Road which connects the settled area is separated from the Site by the field boundaries, so the Site makes a limited contribution to the recreational experience for those walking through the area.

Perceptual (scenic)

- 2.52 In respect of the site and its immediate context the scenic qualities are substantially reduced through the proximate land uses. The opportunity to experience open skies is a positive attribute of the landscape, but this is tempered by the detracting features, including pylons, large scale development, and the general perceptual sense of urban qualities.
- 2.53 Ms Crafer records that views of the site from Reading Road of the vegetation of the interior are enhanced by the *"sun, mist, and brooding skies, that captures the senses in terms of its scenic quality and sense of wildness that comes from its abandoned unmanaged character"*.
- 2.54 Whilst this may be the experience of Ms Crafer on her visit, however, this is not a description I can make based on my site visits. In reality views into the site are restricted by the vegetated boundaries, security fencing, housing and traffic on the road between the view and the Site boundary (**Figure 2.6**). In addition, low voltage wires and poles detract from the aesthetics of the view.
- 2.55 There are undoubtedly views into the Site, however, they do not make a positive contribution to the visual environment beyond having a 'green' appearance. There are no long-distance views across the Site and views are not associated with any memorable or distinctive landmarks.



Figure 2.6: Example views from Reading Road into the Site

Perceptual (Wildness and Tranquility)

- 2.56 There is no evidence that the site and local area have any qualities that indicate they possess 'wildness.' Wildness has been defined in professional guidance as:

"The presence of wild (or relatively wild) character in the landscape which makes a particular contribution to sense of place¹⁵."

2.57 The tranquility of the area is diminished through the presence of the settlement, disturbance by traffic and night-time lighting from traffic on the road, street lighting in the cul-de-sac and illumination of the signs set within the carriageway.

2.58 The landscape in the vicinity of the site is neither wild nor tranquil.

Functional

2.59 In the Landscape Institute's Technical Guidance Note 02/21 when considering the 'functional' factor when assessing landscape value.

Landscape function can influence value, but the presence of a spatial designation (e.g., Green Belt or Green Gap) is not in itself an indicator of high landscape value.

2.60 In that document the example indicators of a functional landscape are noted as being:

Landscapes and landscape elements that contribute to the healthy functioning of the landscape, e.g., natural hydrological systems/ floodplains, areas of undisturbed and healthy soils, areas that form carbon sinks such as peat bogs, woodlands and oceans, areas of diverse landcover (benefits pest regulation), pollinator-rich habitats such as wildflower meadows.

Areas that form an important part of a multifunctional Green Infrastructure network.

Landscapes and landscape elements that have strong physical or functional links with an adjacent national landscape designation or are important to the appreciation of the designated landscape and its special qualities.

2.61 With the exception of the presence of the drainage ditches, two small ponds and wooded/scrub vegetation the Site does not make a positive contribution to the healthy functioning of the landscape, its functionality is not outstanding.

2.62 Overall, my analysis indicates that the value of the landscape is local and with the exception of the veteran trees there is nothing that elevates the landscape to having a value as a whole or in respect of the specific attributes that reaches a level beyond a low, local value. In this respect I agree with the findings of the LVA and strongly disagree with Ms Crafer that the value is medium to high.

¹⁵ Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Countryside Agency, 2002. Paragraph 7.22

Section 3: The Proposals

- 3.1 Typically, for landscape and visual issues in the application and appeal process, much time is invested debating the methodology and terminology used and judgements reached in the respective LVIA/LVIAs, particularly relating to the significance of effect. This draws attention away from the scheme proposals and the approach to delivering positive outcomes when providing well-designed new homes.
- 3.2 In this section I consider the embedded mitigation measures and the delivery of Green Infrastructure, a policy requirement, as part of the scheme of development.
- 3.3 The appellant's Design and Access Statement (DAS, **CD 1.04**) sets out a summary of the process which has resulted in the development parameters. The scheme proposals were informed by a range of technical consideration and an understanding of the local area and context (**CD 1.04.01**, pages 6 to 12) to generate a scheme which complements its context and is appropriately assimilated into the landscape.

Design and Delivering Landscape Benefits – Mitigation and Green Infrastructure

- 3.4 The provision of new homes within Wokingham Borough is reliant on development of greenfield locations as illustrated by the adopted and emerging Local Plan and recent appeal decisions¹⁶ and is explored in the appellant's planning evidence. All of these developments will result in the partial or wholesale change of small to large tracts of open landscapes, from countryside to urban areas. The appeal proposals are not unique, nor is the magnitude of change incongruent or at odds with the prevailing strategy for housing delivery and the nature of change accepted by the Council and PINS via the appeal route.
- 3.5 In the context that development of greenfield locations inevitably will result in changes to the character and appearance of the landscape, it is important that scheme proposals are brought forward cognisant of the likely effects and incorporate measures to minimise or address the unavoidable consequences.
- 3.6 There are a number of attributes of the development location which assist with moderating the potential effects:
- Avoidance of designated or sensitive assets and limited environmental constraints.
 - Avoiding Valued Landscape;
 - Aligning with the prevailing pattern of growth; and
 - Designing in a manner which would not represent an illogical or incoherent extension to the village.

¹⁶ For example, Land at Sandford Farm (allocated greenfield development), South Wokingham (Strategic Development allocation), School Lane (appeal), Hall Farm/Loddon Valley – emerging strategic allocation), Arborfield Garrison new garden Village.

- 3.7 In my opinion, a comprehensive analysis of the mitigation measures is an important consideration considering the planning balance; therefore, I provide the following text to supplement the LVIA contents and inform the planning analysis in the evidence of Ms Brigid Taylor.
- 3.8 Mitigation measures are those measures, both incorporated into, or dismissed during the design process to:
- Prevent/avoid adverse effects,
 - Reduce effects; and, where possible,
 - Offset or remedy (or compensate for) any significant adverse landscape and visual effects.
- 3.9 Enhancement measures are subtly different, as they seek to improve the landscape resource and the visual amenity of the Appeal Site and its wider setting, over and above its baseline condition.
- 3.10 The masterplanning of the Appeal Site has been landscape-led and the provision of blue and green infrastructure (**CD 1.04**, pages 15 to 17)

Prevention/Avoidance

- 3.11 As a point of fact, the Appeal Site is not covered by specific landscape policies listed in the NPPF, paragraph 11, footnote 7, (**CD 8.01**) including:
- Local Green Space.
 - National Landscape.
 - National Park.
 - Heritage Coast.
- 3.12 Furthermore, the Appeal Site is not covered by the following additional policy constraints in Wokingham Borough
- Conservation Area/Area of Special Characters
 - National Historic Parks and Gardens
 - Valued Landscapes (emerging)
- 3.13 Specific to the Appeal Site and its context the
- Development is set back from the eastern portion of the site to avoid impacting on the most ecologically interesting area and impacts with the off-site Locally Valued Heritage Asset.
 - Positioning of the access to avoid impacting on the Notable Tree (T21)
 - Veteran Trees are retained with appropriate clearance from development to avoid loss of these arboricultural assets.
- 3.14 This ensures that the development **avoids** adverse impacts on those landscapes and features with ecological, cultural or landscape value. This is a significant part of the mitigation measures, particularly in a highly constrained borough.

Reduction

3.15 There are a number of measures which have been incorporated into the scheme proposals to ensure that potential adverse effects are reduced through the placement and design of the proposed development. This is addressed in terms of landscape and visual mitigation firstly through the placement of dwellings and spaces (**CD 1.04**, pages 18 and 26). Some of these 'reduction' measures are set out in Subsection 6 of the LVA, in the Landscape Strategy Plan and shown on the Illustrative Masterplan, although I am of the opinion that a number of measures have not been fully articulated in this material, for completeness 'Reduction' measures include:

- Placing development in that portion of the Appeal Site most closely associated with the surrounding settled context.
- Providing open space to the east of the Site to facilitate a transition between the expanded Arborfield Village the rural area.
- Utilising the site levels to reduce the potential for development to be prominent from views from the wider area.
- Retaining and enhancing the principal and historic field boundaries to reduce the visibility of the development from Reading Road. The retained and mature trees ensure a level of immediate landscape structure which cannot be achieved through new planting for a number of years.
- Inclusion of street trees within the development parcel to break up scale of buildings when viewed internally and break up the scale of the roof scape from external views. The inclusion of trees will reflect the residential development adjoining the Appeal Site.
- Limit the building height parameters to 2.5 storeys maximum to reflect the surrounding built form and be assimilated in the visual composition and townscape character.

3.16 Further measure to reduce visual prominence and ensure appropriate assimilation of the development will need to be considered in the detailed design phase/RMA, such as building materials, particularly avoiding bright or white render which can be visually prominent and at odds with the prevailing architectural finishes in the locale.

Offset/Remedy

3.17 Off-setting opportunities are limited within the Site, with the exception of the new tree planting which will compensate for those trees lost to accommodate the development.

Enhancement

3.18 Notably as set out in my analysis in Section 2 above, the provision of accessible open spaces and routes is currently limited in the local area. The proposals provide 2.051ha of open space comprising:

3.18.1 0.67ha play area (in east of site)

3.18.2 1.98ha other space including SUDS.

3.19 Policy CP3 requires a total provision of 1.24ha, therefore the proposals exceed the policy requirements, this is explored in more detail in the Planning Proof of Evidence.

- 3.20 It is recognised within the landscape and wider planning profession that Green Infrastructure (GI) should be integral to the design and layout of new areas of housing. Furthermore, Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan requires development proposals to demonstrate how they have considered and achieved specified GI criteria. The first element of Policy CC03 (2) a) in consideration and achievement of the overarching objective in itself is not a criterion but a GI objective, namely:

Provide new or protect and enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development

- 3.21 The appeal proposals and wider design approach includes new GI assets and increases the functionality of the landscape beyond the limited contributions made by the land currently.
- 3.22 To assist in this regard GI is explored in the Landscape Institute's position papers (2009, 2011 and 2013) which I contributed to. The concept of GI is to provide multifunctional landscapes and landscape assets. The following table (**Table LP3.1**) summarises the GI enhancements as shown on the Landscape Strategy plan and within the DAS (**CD 1.04**, pages 33 to 25). These new assets and functionality are deliverable through the identified parameters and in line with the indicative strategy and design approach. There is scope of further enhance the GI provision in the detailed design phase of the project.
- 3.23 Policy CC03 has a limited number of criteria, when compared to the approach by the LI, and adopted its professional members, not all of the C003 criteria relate to functionality of the elements to be retained and provided. Notably, CC03 3). Records:

Development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation, or isolation of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable.

- 3.24 On this point I note that the Landscape Strategy Plan clearly shows that the provision of new GI assets within the appeal scheme will benefit from a consolidated form and arrangement (spatially) which in turn are connected internally and is contiguous with other areas of GI and linear features, such as hedgerows, for the purposes of wildlife corridors.
- 3.25 Overall, the proposals deliver GI enhancements which are:
- 3.25.1 In compliance with MDD Policy CC03; and
 - 3.25.2 Exceed and increase GI functionality beyond the policy requirements.
 - 3.25.3 A betterment when measured against the baseline situation.

Table LP3.1: Green Infrastructure Provisions

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality¹⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
<i>Climate change adaption – Even a modest increase in tree canopy cover can significantly reduce the urban heat island effect via evapotranspiration and shading, as well as improving air quality, which often suffers because of higher temperatures</i>	CC03 d) Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features	There are a limited number of trees within the Site (see Habitats Map – Ecological Assessment and Arboricultural Assessment)	Tree loss within the Appeal Site will be minimal (Arb Assessment, paragraph 7.2), by contrast new tree planting will be distributed through the Site, particularly within the open space and on the perimeter of the development parcels. Overall, there will be an increase in trees and canopy coverage (increasing overtime as the trees mature). As noted in the Arb Assessment, para 7.6: <i>The proposed landscaping scheme prepared by Green Landscape Studios Limited will serve to serve to significantly improve the age, species diversity and bio-diversity value and long-term future of the tree resource whilst providing an attractive environment for future residents.</i> This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals.

¹⁷ GI Functionality taken from the Landscape Institute's Green Infrastructure Position Paper 2009

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality¹⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
<i>Climate change mitigation, well-designed and managed GI can encourage people to travel in a more sustainable way, such as cycling and walking.</i>	CC03 e) Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.		The geographic location of the Site, in close proximity and adjacent to the existing pedestrian footpath which links to Arborfield Cross, and the bus routes means occupants of the new development have the option to walk to local places within the villages and connect to the wider area. Matters of sustainability are addressed in the evidence of other members of the Appellant's team.
<i>Water management GI is a good approach for managing flood risk. This can involve placing sustainable drainage systems (SUDs) in developments to attenuate surface water runoff and enhance biodiversity and recreation.</i>	No relevant CC03 criteria	Limited to ditches on the boundary and two small ponds	The Proposed Development retains the existing ditches and ponds incorporates a new pond and there is further capacity to include Swales and other SUDs measures as part of the water management strategy. The approach to the design will be part of a Reserved Matters Application (RMA). Sensitive, natural forms of ponds and swales are highly valued by engineers, ecologists and landscape architects. The inclusion of these features can ensure a sensitive, attractive, and positive feature in the landscape and an important asset for the community to enhance the amenity value of the landscape. The profile of the pond can be designed to deliver a variety of new ecological habitats and incorporate different plants to enhance the visual amenity of the feature. Provision of seating within the open space will benefit the local community and make a positive contribution to the sense of well-being. Whilst the pond is part of the drainage strategy for the development, they also enhance water management for the area and increase water management resilience, wildlife habitats and amenity aspects of the landscape.

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality¹⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
<i>Dealing with waste, GI assets can deal with waste in a sustainable way. A good example of this is the use of reed beds which remove pollutants from water.</i>	No relevant CC03 criteria		This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals. There is potential to explore a variety of measure to manage the natural environment through the detailed design phase. The ponds and swales can incorporate marginal species that are approach for the location which provide environmental benefits.
<i>Food production Creating space for food production through allotments and community gardens and orchards, increases access to healthy food, provides educational opportunities, contributes to food security, and reconnects communities with their local environment. Connecting local communities with these assets via footpaths and cycleways can encourage this reconnection further.</i>	No relevant CC03 criteria	Grazing pasture for horses and donkeys – no food value	The open space is positioned in close proximity to the community it serves and is accessible to the wider residential population through the provision of a network of footpaths. Subject to approval by WBC, the scheme can be designed to incorporate fruiting species (trees and shrubs, fruits, and nuts) to enhance the type of local cropping available to the community and provide a link to the former use. The functionality will be changed and the potential grazing for food production lost, albeit the land is not used as part of an agricultural unit and in this respect this functionality is not realised. However, the nature of the food production delivered through the development will be direct and accessible to residents and therefore minimises food miles and provides learning opportunities for food production, processing and management. Connectivity with the community beyond the Site is provided through new footpaths to allow wider access to these resources. Overall, an increase in this function.
<i>Biodiversity enhancement - corridors, and linkages. The role of GI in providing wildlife habitat in both urban and</i>	No relevant CC03 criteria	See the Appellant's ecological assessment and BNG report	Given the lack of management of the vegetation within the Site, poaching of the grassland by grazing and presence of relatively invasive species such as bramble and non-native Canada golden, the proposals provide a suite of ecological enhancement measures to be delivered including:

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality¹⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
<i>rural areas is well established but taking a landscape-scale approach to the planning, design and management of connected GI assets provides the framework within which species migration can more readily occur in response to environmental pressures such as climate change.</i>			- Retention and provision of new native plants and those of wildlife importance into landscaping scheme to provide foraging opportunities for a range of protected and priority fauna such as bats, birds and invertebrates. This can be achieved through the proposed creation of 'other neutral' grassland, tree planting, SuDs features (bioswale) and pond creation as well as and enhancement and management of onsite woodland and trees. - Tree management for species and age diversity, with a particular focus on veteranisation and specialist management to ensure the longevity of the veteran trees and deadwood habitats on site. - The creation of new ponds and bioswales represents an enhancement within the local landscape for breeding amphibians and aquatic invertebrates as well as foraging opportunities for predators such as reptiles, bats and birds. - Provision of new bat roosting and bird nesting opportunities within new buildings and retained mature trees (numbers and specification to be determined at detailed design stage) and creation of habitat piles for invertebrates and reptiles and deadwood habitat creation for notable saproxylic invertebrates. - Provision of hedgehog gaps in new fencing to promote habitat connectivity across and within the Site. Overall, the proposed development of the Site would, subject to detailed design and confirmation through the RMA, lead to a net gain in biodiversity.
<i>Recreation and health, accessible GI provides</i>	CC03 b)	No existing recreational benefits	The appeal proposals provide the following recreational activities:

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality¹⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
<i>important opportunities for informal and active recreation. Ensuring that these assets are provided in close proximity to people's homes, are maintained properly, and are designed with the needs of local communities in mind, is critical to their positive role in public health and wellbeing.</i>	Promote accessibility, linkages and permeability between and within existing green corridors including public rights of way such as footpaths, cycleways and bridleways		• Pedestrian routes (linear and circular) within the site and providing opportunities to walk through green spaces as an alternative to local vehicular roads and lanes. • Pedestrian links to Arborfield Village and connecting Arborfield Village to Arborfield Cross through safe pedestrian routes. • Equipped play area • General open space for informal play and recreation. This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals.
<i>Economic values Quality green space can have a major positive impact on land and property markets, creating settings for investment and acting as a catalyst for wider regeneration.</i>	No relevant CC03 criteria		The open spaces form a focus to the eastern and western areas of development, delivering an open and high-quality green environment that provides the immediate setting for the new homes. This arrangement has the potential to contribute positively to this function. There is potential to enhance this function of the landscape
<i>Local distinctiveness Well-designed and managed GI assets, particularly those that engage local communities, and which relate to landscape character and heritage, can enhance local sense of</i>	CC03 c) Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside		The layout and use of materials reflecting the local vernacular can make a positive contribution to the character of Arborfield Village and its outlying developed clusters and create a distinctive sense of place within the settled environs. There is no strong local vernacular to the village, although buildings are unified by the presence of red brick in the townscape. This function is maintained.

<i>Landscape Institute's GI recognised functionality¹⁷</i>	<i>Policy CC03 criteria (where applicable)</i>	<i>Existing GI functionality</i>	<i>My Observations</i>
<i>place and foster community spirit.</i> <i>Stronger communities</i> <i>GI can help in meeting a wide range of community needs. The spirit of the GI approach means that social, environmental, and economic potential is considered and optimised.</i>	No relevant CC03 criteria		With the assets and attributes noted above there are opportunities to build homes which can integrate with the existing community in terms of townscape, spatial links and the provision of new places to meet and recreate. The provision of new footpaths in proximity to the existing community has the potential to encourage social integration and enhance the sense of place experienced by the new residents. This functionality will increase with the appeal proposals.

Section 4: Matters in Dispute

Scope of Landscape and Visual issues relating to the Council's Decision

4.1 In section 6, I consider a number of propositions. These propositions have been identified from the following sources:

- The Decision Notice and wording in the reason for refusal.
- The key landscape matters discussed in the delegated officer's reports.
- The response of Ms Crafer
- The Council's Statement of Case

Decision Notice

4.2 My Proof addresses the third reason for refusal (CD 3.01), namely:

Impact on the landscape and countryside

The proposed development will have a detrimental impact on the landscape and character & appearance of the area by reason of the loss of fields, paddocks and green infrastructure in the countryside and the erection of a large housing development that is out of keeping with the locality, contrary to policies CP1, CP3, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, IR2, AD1 and AD3 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan, the Borough Design Guide SPD, the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment and sections 12 and 15 of the NPPF.

4.3 In respect of this reason, the propositions addressed will be:

Proposition 1: The implication that the landscape character is determined by the fields and paddocks within the Appeal Site and that housing is not a component of the landscape;

Proposition 2: The degree of harm¹⁸ asserted by WBC as being 'detrimental' is such that the landscape harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits^{19,20}.

Proposition 3: The degree to which the changes will alter the character, and appearance and has an effect on the 'area'.

Officer Report

4.4 The officer recommended refusal of the application for the 10 reasons listed in the Decision Notice (CD 3.01), specifically concluding, in respect of the landscape character and appearance:

¹⁸ My opinion on the use of the word harm to describe landscape and visual change is noted above in my introduction. I include this word the context of the Council's position and use of 'harm' as a planning term.

¹⁹ NPPF, paragraph 11 (b) (ii)

²⁰ As set out below I do not undertake the planning balance but provide the information which informs the planning consideration.

As stated, due to the scale, quantum and spatial location that is unrelated to existing settlement limits, the impact on the landscape and character & appearance of the area would be significant.

In addition to the above, it appears that suitable visibility splays could only be achieved by the removal of additional trees, which include a category B oak Tree (T14). This is considered further in the Highway Safety section of this report, but this would further impact the character and appearance of the area.

In summary, the proposed development will have a negative and detrimental impact on the landscape and character & appearance of the area by reason of an unplanned loss of undeveloped open green fields in countryside for a large-scale urbanizing development, along with the incongruous setting and scale of development away from established settlements limits.

- 4.5 The issue of how the new housing relates to the character of the landscape will be explored in Proposition 1.

Proposition 4: The removal of two trees at the site entrance add to or further the effects of the housing development.

- 4.6 My proof is prepared to assist with the planning balance, in the context of the lack of a 5-year housing land supply, the relevance of the 'settlement limits' is a matter for addressed in the evidence of Ms. Brigid Taylor.

Landscape Officer's Consultation Response

- 4.7 The landscape officer's response (CD 2.22) covered a number of issues. The following topics addressed by Ms. Crafer are not discussed in my evidence as they are addressed by the appropriate specialist evidence:
- Arboriculture and Veteran Trees (covered by the Appellant's submissions)
 - Scrub and water features, BNG and ecological matters (covered by the Appellant's submissions)
- 4.8 The comments made by Ms. Crafer which relate to landscape character and appearance can be summarised as:
- The land being 'trapped' between to Valued Landscapes;
 - Listing the key characteristics of the character areas with a focus on the hedgerow trees and hedgerows;
 - Likely impacts on the tranquility of the landscape;
 - The role the land serves in separating settlements;
 - An assessment of the landscape and visual receptors in terms of value, susceptibility and overall sensitivity.

Proposition 5: That by being located between emerging Value Landscapes the Appeal Site has a higher level of value than ordinary countryside.

Proposition 6: That the Appeal Site is, and is within, a tranquil and wild landscape

Proposition 7: That the Appeal Site contributes to the separation of settlements and its development would remove this separation.

- 4.9 Although not a proposition in itself, there is no assessment of the landscape and visual effects of the proposed development by either the Appellant or the Council. In Section 5 I set out observations and narrative regarding the likely effects which informs my conclusions on the various propositions.

Council's Statement of Case

- 4.10 Within the Council's Statement of Case, it appears that, despite the wording of the reason for refusal WBC have limited objection on landscape grounds, and these are limited not to the character and appearance of the landscape but:

4.10.1 Impacts on Reading Road, based on its function as a Green Route (Statement of Case, paragraph 5.3.3);

4.10.2 The visual effects on people in the local area because of the development of the Site, but not the change in character *per se* (paragraph 5.3.4).

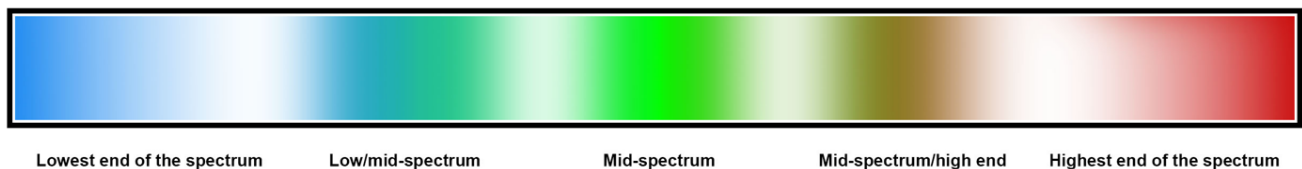
- 4.11 I address the likely visual and landscape effects in Section 5.

Landscape Statement of Common Ground

- 4.12 The Council's Case was amplified and expanded during the correspondence relating to the Landscape Statement of Common Ground.
- 4.13 I have addressed the issues relating to the methodology and presentation of visual matter in my introduction. The matters pertaining to the effects and mitigation are addressed in the earlier sections of my proof and covered by the propositions listed above.
- 4.14 The most recent allegation of harm relates to the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area, it is suggested that the offsite highways works will harm views into and out from the Conservation Area. I address this matter in Section 5. Unfortunately, this matter was raised after I had completed my field work, images relating to the matter have been extracted from google street view, they are provided as an *aide memoir* to assist the inspector.

Section 5: Likely landscape and visual effects

- 5.1 The assessment of likely effects follows a simple structure:
- 5.1.1 Understanding the baseline situation;
 - 5.1.2 Ascribing sensitivity of the receptor (landscape or visual) by reference to its value and susceptibility to the specific change proposed;
 - 5.1.3 Identifying the magnitude of the impact on the resources; and
 - 5.1.4 Making a judgement on the likely effects (a function of the sensitivity of the resource and the magnitude experienced).
- 5.2 Whilst the assessment of effects addresses the change to each receptor, the magnitude of the change relates to the size and scale of the change and the extent of the area over which it occurs. GLVIA (CD 18.01, paragraph 6.24) makes clear that the nature, composition and characteristics of the existing views experienced at the viewpoint, including the direction of view and visual characteristics and elements which may influence the views are important in the consideration of the likely effects.
- 5.3 Reflecting the guidance in GLVIA, the judgements expressed below, underpinned by the informed professional experience of the author, are made on where the value, susceptibility, sensitivity, magnitude lie on a spectrum ranging from low to high. To assist the reader the 'grading' relating to the spectrum will refer to:
- Lowest end of the spectrum;
 - Low/mid-spectrum;
 - Mid-spectrum;
 - Mid-spectrum/high end; and
 - Highest end of the spectrum .
- 5.4 Given the multiple criteria which inform each judgement there is no single and fixed threshold between categories.



Landscape Effects

- 5.5 The relevant landscape character areas and landscape components are set out in Section 4 of the LVA (CD 1.12) and Section 2 in this proof of evidence. I am aware that on-going discussions with the Council relate to the access onto Church Lane and amendments to the arrangements on Reading Road to accommodate an emergency access. Having considered these I have reached a conclusion, based on my professional experience with projects of this type, that the scale of the

modifications are insignificant in terms of the character and appearance of the landscape and the extent of visibility. They do not affect my analysis set out below and are not determinative of the appeal proposals in the context of the landscape and visual objection.

- 5.6 By reference to the key characteristics of the Arborfield River Terrace (**Table 2.1**) and Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay (**Table 2.2**) LCAs the relevant characterise features are²¹:
- 5.6.1 Water bodies;
 - 5.6.2 Pasture;
 - 5.6.3 Wooded character – including trees, hedgerows, copses and woodland features;
 - 5.6.4 Settlements including hamlets and nucleated settlements.
- 5.7 The value of the landscape of the Appeal Site and the wider landscape is at the lower end of the spectrum, in this respect I agree with the judgement expressed in the LVA (**CD 1.12**, para 4.28)
- 5.8 I accept that some of the trees may have greater value, individually this is matter for the arboricultural evidence. From a landscape perspective the issue is the wooded character of the area generated by the cumulative effects of groups of trees in the landscape.
- 5.9 The susceptibility is the ability of the landscape to accommodate housing and open spaces without undue²² negative consequences. In a landscape which is characterised by settlements and and which is subject to change from large scale housing elsewhere within the character areas, it is clear that the landscape context and the Appeal Site has greater resilience to change in this respect than a rural unsettled landscape. The susceptibility to the changes proposed is at the mid to low range of susceptibility.
- 5.10 The sensitivity of the landscape and the receptors therein is therefore low, due to low value and mid-low susceptibility.
- 5.11 The proposals, as relevant to the assessment of effects, are explored in Section 3 above. In terms of the magnitude of change which will be experienced **Table LP5.1** sets out the magnitude of change and the explanation which underpins these judgements.

Table LP5.1: Magnitude of landscape change

Receptor	Magnitude	Explanation
Arborfield River terrace character area	Negligible	Both character areas apply to a wide area of the borough, the changes within the Appeal Site will not be experienced or impact upon the areas beyond the site. The prevailing and key characteristics will be unchanged.
Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and	Negligible	

²¹ Other published characteristics do not apply for the reasons set out in Tables LP2.1 and LP2.2.

²² Unwarranted or inappropriate because excessive or disproportionate (online dictionary definition). Disproportionate, or excessive (Oxford dictionary).

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

Receptor	Magnitude	Explanation
Farmed Clay character area		The scale of the development within each character area is small so that the balance and distribution of characteristics will be unaffected.
Water bodies	Low to mid-range, beneficial	The existing ditches and pond will be retained, and a new water features will be created. These features are consistent with and result in a qualitative and quantitative enhancement of a key characteristic of the landscape. The detailed design and form the new water features will be subject to the RMA, there is no reason why the scheme will not deliver a visually attractive and positive landscape element in the context of new homes and accessible space for the community.
Pasture	High, adverse (localised to the Appeal Site)	The proposals will result in the loss of a large area of grassland within the Appeal Site, albeit whilst some grassland is retained, its character will be different from pasture. The impact will not extend beyond the site.
Wooded character	Mid to low range of change, neutral	It is agreed that some tree and scrub will be removed to accommodate the development. This is an adverse impact. What is noticeable about the wooded character of the landscape character areas is that this is evident and apparent even though there are large areas of open farmland with limited boundary trees and woodland. In the case of the appeal proposals, many of the boundary trees will be retained, new tree planting will be directed to the current open eastern boundaries, creating and reinforcing the wooded enclosure, ensuring a scheme which is characteristic of the area and specifically the context to the Appeal Site. New planting will be provided I the open spaces to the west and east of the site and along the southern boundary to strengthen

Receptor	Magnitude	Explanation
		the existing features and enhance the wooded character. Street trees will make a minor contribution to the character as they will be set within the housing. The new tree planting will be a benefit to the wooded character and the longevity of this characteristic aspect of the landscape.
Settlement	Mid-range, neutral	The introduction of housing into a greenfield location is an adverse consequence of delivering the national and local housing delivery targets. However, the appeal proposals direct such impacts to an acknowledged settled landscape and will introduce housing in a location contained by existing housing. This will consolidate the nucleated character of the existing settled components of Arborfield and on Reading Road, the form of which is characteristics of the landscape²³. The housing will not extend in any direction beyond the established settled presence of Arborfield to the north and west, and the housing off Reading Road to the east and south.

5.12 Based on my analysis of the landscape sensitivity and the magnitude of change my judgement on effects is set out in **Table LP5.2**.

5.13 It is important to acknowledge that the GLVIA, paragraph 3.33, states:

"It is not essential to establish a series of thresholds for different levels of significance of landscape and visual effects, provided that it is made clear whether or not they are considered significant."

²³ The published character assessment accepts that settlements are nucleated in these landscapes as opposed to dispersed or linear settlements.

Table LP5.2: Landscape Effects

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Effect and commentary
Arborfield River terrace character area	Low	Negligible	No effect – this is not a factor determinative of the appeal.
Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay character area	Low	Negligible	
Water bodies	Low	Low to mid-range, beneficial	Not a significant effect – this is a consideration, but not determinative of the appeal in respect of landscape character and appearance.
Pasture	Low	High, adverse (localised to the Appeal Site)	A significant effect – this is a matter to be weighed in the planning balance.
Wooded character	Low	Mid to low range of change, neutral	Not a significant effect – this is a consideration, but not determinative of the appeal in respect of landscape character and appearance.
Settlement	Low	Mid-range, neutral	Not a significant effect – this is a consideration, but not determinative of the appeal in respect of landscape character and appearance.

- 5.14 It is important to note that the loss of the pasture within the Appeal Site does not change the character of the receiving landscape the description of the character area remains valid and accurate in respect of this landscape element. The effect is entirely limited to the Appeal Site; this impact will not affect the character and appearance of the area.
- 5.15 In respect of the settlement element, this is not determinative as settlements (including larger towns and villages) are characteristic of the relevant landscape character areas.

Visual Effects

- 5.16 The extent of visibility and visual baseline is explored in the LVA (Section 5), my own analysis at **Appendix LP1** indicates that the relevant people likely to experience visual change as a result of the appeal proposals is limited to (by reference to the viewpoints in the LVA, Table LP5.1):

- 5.16.1 Those people travelling on Reading Road (viewpoints 1, 2, 3, 6, 9 and 17);
- 5.16.2 Residents on Reading Road (Viewpoint 2);
- 5.16.3 People walking on PRoW ARB019 (Viewpoints 4 and 5)
- 5.16.4 Those visiting Church Lane (Viewpoints 15 and 16).
- 5.17 Given the Council's Statement of Case (paragraph 5.3.3) it appears that the views of greatest concern relate to Reading Road.
- 5.18 I agree with and adopt the visual sensitivity ascribed in the LVA (Table 5.1), in summary relating to the pertinent visual receptors the sensitivity is:

Table LP5.3: Visual sensitivity

Visual Receptor	Sensitivity
Those people travelling on Reading Road	Low
Residents on Reading Road	High
People walking on PRoW ARB019	High
Those visiting Church Lane	High

- 5.19 In line with GLVIA (paragraphs 6.38 to 6.41), the criteria which inform the professional judgement on the magnitude of change, are:
- Scale of change – proportion of view affected and components therein;
 - Degree to which the change is consistent with the baseline composition;
 - Duration of the visual change (as part of the journey);
- 5.20 At the lower end of the spectrum the visual change may be small scale with no notable loss or addition to the view, the change is consistent with the baseline context and will not give rise to a contrast in elements, form, colour, and line, whilst the views are likely to be fleeting, glimpsed, or viewed infrequently; and
- 5.21 At the higher end of the spectrum the changes will be large scale, with losses of key elements in the view and/or additional features which may be incongruent in the composition. There is likely to be a contrast in scale, form, line and colour and the changes will affect a sizable proportion of the view, be fully visible. The duration of the view is likely to be prolonged and frequent.
- 5.22 On this basis the magnitude of change for each receptor group is as follows:

Table LP5.4: Visual magnitude of change

Receptor	Magnitude	Explanation
Those people travelling on Reading Road	Low, neutral	For those travelling on Reading Road, housing is already a component of the visual experience. The prominence of the housing from the road, varies with some clearly evident (see Figure 6.2). The changes as illustrated through the AVRs contained in Appendix LP3 illustrate that the visual change will be limited by the placement of dwellings behind the tree line, and future reinforcement planting proposed alongside the existing hedgerows. The main point of access will provide the most open and unmitigated view of housing, when viewed as part of the linear journey on Reading Road the views of the housing will soften over time with the growth of new trees and maturation of the open spaces and verges. The offsite highways works are consistent with the baseline situation. The carriageway already includes speed control measures, fixed signs and painted markings. The inclusion of these elements as part of the appeal proposals will not alter the character and appearance of the Reading Road. The change is consistent with the baseline situation, and the duration of the change is limited to a short section of the road, and by the speed of those driving, cycling and walking. The changes will only affect a small portion of the visual experience and field of view as one passes the Site. The greatest change will be experience at the site entrance, again, seeing housing from Reading Road is consistent with the baseline situation.
Residents on Reading Road	Mid to high, adverse	Although the gardens to these properties will ensure a degree of offset of new dwelling in the views the residents will have their visual

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

Receptor	Magnitude	Explanation
		context foreshortened and the character of the views altered from open pasture to new housing.
People walking on PRow ARB019	Low, neutral	From this footpath there may be glimpsed views of the roof tops of the new housing. The wooded context prevents open views into the Appeal Site.
Those visiting Church Lane	Low, neutral	Visual change will be most notable during the winter months, although such visual change will be glimpsed and experience over a short section of the lane. The foreground of the views from Church Lane will remain open and wooded in character with housing present as a back drop to the visual composition, albeit filtered in the view by the existing and supplemental tree and shrub cover in the foreground. The visibility of housing from Church Lane is consistent with the baseline situation, albeit the existing housing is more prominent in the visual composition in views from the lane, due to the proximate relationship of the properties to the road and as buildings tend to front onto the road, with the frontage dominated by parking and boundary walls and fences.

- 5.23 Overall, the proposals do not introduce elements or characteristics that are not a component of the existing baseline visual composition. There are no impacts on profile of the skyline, the visual focus travelling on Reading Road and Church Lane will be unchanged, the form of the treed corridor will remain, the break in tree cover will replicate other openings from the road into areas of housing,
- 5.24 Based on my analysis of the visual sensitivity and the magnitude of change my judgement on effects is set out in **Table LP5.5**.

Table LP5.5 Visual effects

Receptor	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Effect and commentary
Those people travelling on Reading Road	Low	Low, neutral	Not a significant effect – this is a consideration, but not determinative of the appeal in respect of visual impacts.
Residents on Reading Road	High	Mid to high, adverse	A significant effect – this is a matter to be weighed in the planning balance. There is no impact on residential amenity.
People walking on PRow ARB019	High	Low, neutral	Not a significant effect – this is a consideration, but not determinative of the appeal in respect of visual impacts.
Those visiting Church Lane	High	Low, neutral	Not a significant effect – this is a consideration, but not determinative of the appeal in respect of visual impacts.

- 5.25 In respect of the visual effects on the residents of Reading Road, the effect is limited to a small number of dwellings (**Figure 5.1**) and their rear façade. However, even for these limited number of visual receptors the private gardens are relatively long and contain a number of trees so the views of the new dwellings which provide a strong degree of existing visual enclosure, the properties do not have an open visual aspect to the rear. Whilst changing the composition of the outlook these properties are not isolated from other properties to the front; they overlook the housing on Walden Avenue and Reading Road. Based on my extensive experience the visual effects are common place where existing properties overlook a greenfield locations. The front aspect (illustrated by Image A, **Figure 6.2**) of each property provides for car parking, some landscape features and overlook Reading Road, the road being in closer proximity to the dwellings.
- 5.26 I should also observe that if this were to be a legitimate landscape objection to development, it would have substantial implications with regard to the push for new houses adjacent to existing settlements/dwellings.



Figure 5.1: Reading Road properties

5.27 Finally, on the issue of visual effects I address the most recent allegation of harm, which relates to views into and out from the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area (ACCA). I do not address the heritage issues; I have focussed my response on the visual changes. As noted above the Council have not advised as to the precise views which they rely upon in substantiating the allegation of visual harm. I reserve my position to comment further once I have seen the evidence. This matter arose from text provided by the Council through the correspondence relating to the LSoCG. The text introduced is now in paragraph 2.3.2 of the LSoCG. On receipt of this new text the appellant sought clarification as to the scope of the matter via email on 30th January 2026

Joanna

I note in the latest version of the landscape SOCG (issued by the Council 14:37) that the Council appears to be introducing impacts on heritage assets. This is unacceptable given heritage is not a reason for refusal and nor was it identified in the Council's statement of case. Please confirm as a matter of urgency if this is a further Additional Issue which the Council intends to pursue?

Many thanks
Brigid

The Council's officer responded on the 30th January with the following:

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield

Brigid,

The recently proposed new road enhancement will impact on views in and views out of the conservation area. These impacts and effects need to be assessed in landscape terms. These effects have arisen as a result of the post-submission amendments to the Scheme by way of introduction of highway works first mentioned in the Highways Proof of Evidence. The designation was highlighted by the list of designations produced by Appellant's Consultant in the Landscape SoCG. We are merely responding to what the Appellant's Landscape Consultant has included in the list of constraints within the SoCG. I can confirm however that the Council does not consider that the highway works would have any impact on the heritage significance of the Conservation Area.

Kind Regards,
Joanna

- 5.28 The reference to views in and out of the Conservation Area were not supported by any specific or even generalised viewpoint locations.
- 5.29 The changes proposed through the offsite highways works are to widen the southern footway and provide lighting columns on Reading Road, on the approach to Arborfield Cross roundabout (Milestone Drawing 23103/001/02D).
- 5.30 The ACCA has been the subject to significant alteration through the creation of the roundabout (**Figure 5.3**), The 'cross' is no longer apparent as the road converge onto the roundabout, removing the historic legibility.



Figure 5.2: Arborfield Cross Conservation Area – extracted from the Proposals Map

- 5.31 The existing approach and arrival at ACCA is characterised by the presence of highway infrastructure, kerbing, footways, lighting and signage (**Figure 5.3**). The edge of the CA is characterised by the car

parking in the foreground of views of The Bull Inn. I do not consider that the new lighting columns will alter the composition or visual experience of views into the CA. The ability to see the buildings, roundabout etc will remain.

- 5.32 What is evident with regards to the lighting columns is they do not obscure or interrupt views into the CA.



Locations of views in Figure 5.3

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield



A



B

Appellant's Landscape and Visual Proof of Evidence February 2026
Land north of Reading Road, Arborfield



C



D



E

Figure 5.3: Views approaching ACCA from the west on Reading Road

- 5.33 Turning to views out of the Conservation Area; from the edge of the CA by the car park, the views already contain lighting in the immediate foreground, with the traffic calming visible and the pylons and overhead cables creating a notable focus to the skyline character (**Figure 5.4**).



Figure 5.4: View from ACCA looking west on Reading Road (location D).

- 5.34 The introduction of new columns will not create a barrier to views out from the CA, nor will they introduce incongruent vertical elements to the view. They are placed further away from the CA than the current lighting and in my opinion the change to the visual composition will be *de minimis*.
- 5.35 I do not consider these visual effects to be determinative of the appeal in respect of landscape and visual effects

Section 6: Analysis of the Council's Propositions

- 6.1 The Council's propositions addressed below and the rationale for their consideration are identified in Section 4 above.

Proposition 1: The implication that the landscape character is determined by the fields and paddocks within the Appeal Site and that housing is not a component of the landscape.

- 6.2 As explored in the Council's published landscape character assessment and set out in my evidence, the Appeal Site lies in a settled landscape, housing is a defining characteristic of the relevant landscapes.
- 6.3 The degree of settlement in the Arborfield and Barkham **Settled** and Farmed Clay landscape (within which the majority of the new housing is proposed) is evident in the Local Character Area plan contained within the LVA (**Figure 6.1**).
- 6.4 This level of settlement is a notable contrast to other landscapes such as the Loddon River Valley. Furthermore, the Council has a Strategic Development allocation within the Arborfield and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay landscape at Arborfield Garrison.

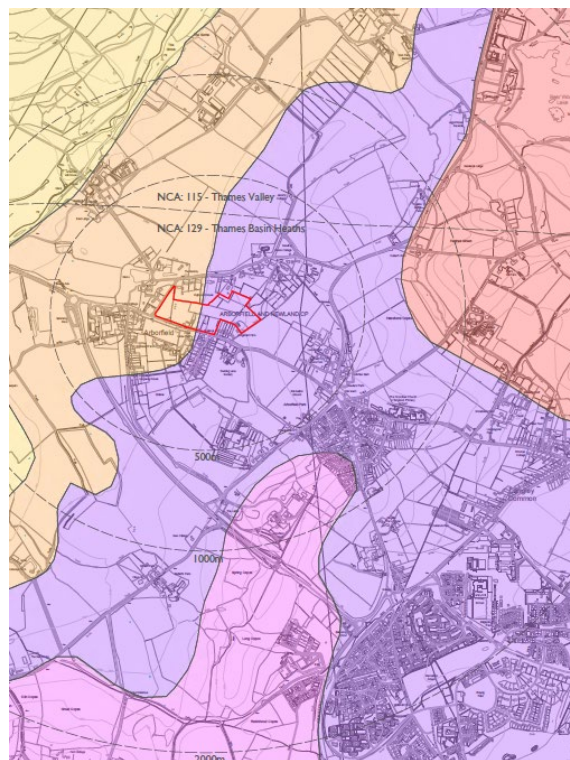


Figure 6.1: Extract of published landscape character assessment

- 6.5 Clearly, the provision of new housing within Wokingham will occur in greenfield locations, which in themselves are absent of housing. This is why contextual analysis is important. Housing and settlement is a characteristic component of the landscape of this landscape.

- 6.6 The wording in the reason for refusal appears to place emphasis on the assertion that the proposals comprise a large housing development. The evidence of Ms Brigid Taylor addresses the scale of the proposals, but from a landscape and visual perspective the issue relates to how the development is assimilated into the landscape.
- 6.7 As set out in the LVA, DAS and my evidence; the proposals have been prepared cognisant of the landscape and have been brought forward in a manner that responds to the context and provides a number of enhancement measures which will make a positive contribution to the local landscape and associated communities.
- 6.8 The effects of the development, both in respect of the character and visual environment will be highly localised to the Appeal Site. The approach to developing the masterplan means the scale of the development will not change the characteristic elements of the landscape or alter the primary qualities and balance of elements of the LCA.
- 6.9 For these reasons and following the analysis in my evidence, I do not agree with this proposition.

Proposition 2: The degree of harm asserted by WBC as being 'detrimental' is such that the landscape harm would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits .

- 6.10 Notably, the consultation response provided by Ms Crafer when considering the landscape strategy seeks to diminish or downgrade the nature of benefits. In doing so she seeks to mis-represent the LVA, for example the LVA notes:

Dwellings should be offset from Reading Road and Church Lane to minimise built form immediately adjacent to the site boundary, this will minimise visibility of the built form, as well as retain the wooded character (particularly that associated with Church Lane).

- 6.11 Ms Crafer, expresses this as the appellant trying to 'hide' the development, implying the need to 'hide' the development means it is acceptable.
- 6.12 This is not correct; there is no need to 'hide' the development. Housing set within a wooded framework is consistent with the baseline situation and an appropriate design response. The placement of development and provision of new tree planting is part of good practice in terms of the design approach.
- 6.13 In terms of effects on the landscape and visual environment there will be adverse consequences in respect of the following:

Landscape Effects

- 6.13.1 Changes to the character and land cover within the Site at the construction phase.
- 6.13.2 Loss of open land, limited to the development (43% of the Appeal Site) post construction.

Visual Effects

- 6.14 As shown by the ZTV mapping at **Appendix LP1**, the potential visual effects are geographically localised. Furthermore, as shown by the colouration used in the mapping, from those accessible

viewpoints from where the development may be visible the degree of visual change will be limited. This is supported by the AVRs included in **Appendix LP3**. The AVR's demonstrate that for the greatest number of people, i.e. those passing on Reading Road the change is limited to the points of access. In other respects, the character and appearance for those passing through the landscape will be relatively unchanged.

6.14.1 During the Construction phase there will be visual effects through the presence of vehicles and elements which are incongruent with the baseline situation.

6.14.2 Post-construction visual effects will remain primarily for those overlooking the Site from existing properties.

6.15 From the pedestrian route on Reading Road there will be an open view of housing from the access, this is consistent with the current visual experience of the housing directly abutting the road. Other views are glimpsed through the existing, and over time, the maturing boundary planting. The change to the visual composition is consistent with the existing situation and the effects will be neutral.

6.16 To inform the planning balance, it is important to acknowledge and recognise the landscape benefits of the proposals which are set out in detail in Section 3, and **Table LP3.1**. These beneficial effects include:

Locational Benefits

6.16.1 Avoiding development in protected and sensitive landscapes.

6.16.2 Associated (visually, perceptually and physically) with urban forms in terms of road infrastructure and existing settled elements.

6.16.3 Providing development in a mature landscape framework, thereby not having to rely on new planting which may be the case in open landscape.

6.16.4 Avoids impacting on the acknowledged views and vistas set out in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.

Enhancement Benefits

6.16.5 Provision of extended and enhanced Green Infrastructure including increased and improved functionality in respect of:

- Climate change adaptation
- Climate change mitigation
- Water management
- Food production (potentially)
- Biodiversity
- Recreation and health
- Economic values
- Strong communities

6.16.6 These enhancements are in accordance with the requirements of Policy CC03

- 6.17 Ms. Brigid Taylor addresses the planning balance and the extent to which this proposition is correct.

Proposition 3: The degree to which the changes will alter the character, and appearance and has an effect on the 'area'.

- 6.1 The third reason for refusal ascribes any likely harm to being in respect "...of the area." In fact, that 'area' is limited to the Site and its immediate environs, as demonstrated by the information contained with the LVA and my evidence.
- 6.2 There are no wider effects, and these effects do not impact on relevant LCAs. The general description of the LCA will continue to apply to the landscape of the area post construction of the appeal proposals.
- 6.3 This proposition is not substantiated by reference to the features that limit the area over which change will be experienced. **I do not agree with the proposition**

Proposition 4: The removal of two trees at the site entrance add to or further the effects of the housing development.

- 6.4 In the context of the wider proposals the removal of the trees to create the site access is *de minimis* on the character and appearance of the locale.
- 6.5 The ability to experience direct views of housing from Reading Road is consistent with the existing situation (**Figure 6.2**).



A



B



C

Figure 6.2: Views of properties on Reading Road

- 6.6 In respect of the appeal proposals the new dwellings will be set back from the road behind the retained tree belt, with enhancement planting.
- 6.7 I do am of the opinion that the change arising from the loss of the trees to accommodate the access will result in a change which is entirely consistent with the existing situation, **I do not agree with this proposition.**

Proposition 5: That by being located between emerging Value Landscapes the Appeal Site has a higher level of value than ordinary countryside.

- 6.8 As set out in Section 2 of my evidence the Appeal Site is not influenced by the Valued Landscapes. It is separated from these areas by land that does not meet the threshold to be classified as part of a valued landscape and is not valued in its own right.
- 6.9 **I do not agree with this proposition.**

Proposition 6: That the Appeal Site is, and is within, a tranquil and wild landscape.

- 6.10 There is no evidence that the site and local area have any qualities that indicate they possess 'wildness.' Wildness has been defined in professional guidance as:

"The presence of wild (or relatively wild) character in the landscape which makes a particular contribution to sense of place²⁴."

- 6.11 The tranquility of the area is diminished through the presence of the settlement, disturbance by traffic and night-time lighting.
- 6.12 The landscape in the vicinity of the site is neither wild nor tranquil. **I do not agree with this proposition.**

Proposition 7: That the Appeal Site contributes to the separation of settlements and its development would remove this separation.

- 6.13 The issue of the 'settlement limits' is addressed in the evidence of Ms Brigid Taylor. In terms of the landscape character there are clearly clusters of development to the west, north and south of the Appeal Site.
- 6.14 Notably, there is no Local Plan policy which seeks to protect gaps between settlements.
- 6.15 The proposals will not extend development north being limited by the properties on Church Lane. There will be no loss of separation with Sindlesham or Reading.
- 6.16 The western boundary of the development parcel is set back from Arborfield Village, there will be no loss of separation between the village and Shinfield.
- 6.17 The eastern edge of the Site includes an area of open space to reduce the impact of development on this part of the landscape. In any event the development does not extend beyond the hedgerow that

²⁴ Landscape Character Assessment: Guidance for England and Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Countryside Agency, 2002. Paragraph 7.22

defines the eastern edge of the row of housing north of Reading Road. There will be no loss of separation with Arborfield Cross.

- 6.18 There will be no physical incursion into land beyond the extent of the existing settled framework.
- 6.19 As demonstrated by the ZTV mapping (**Appendix LP1**), there is no intervisibility between the site and the surrounding settlements. There will be no erosion of a visual gap.
- 6.20 Due to the presence of development to the north and south of Reading Road perceptually the site frontage is perceived as part of the settled corridor. However, the open land to the east and west allows those passing through to register a break between settlements. This will be unaffected by the proposals.
- 6.21 I do not agree with this proposition.

Section 7: Conclusions

- 7.1 Development of the Appeal Site will avoid change occurring in respect of any protected, valued and important landscapes at both a national, borough and local scale.
- 7.2 In respect of the natural environment, as a point of fact, the site is not covered by specific policies listed in the NPPF, paragraph 11, footnote 7, including:
- SSSI.
 - Habitat Sites.
 - Green Belt
 - National Landscape.
 - National Park.
 - Heritage Coast.
 - Irreplaceable habitats.
 - Areas at risk of flooding or coastal change; and
 - Designated heritage assets.
- 7.3 It is not an NPPF Valued Landscape, nor is it in an area considered to be of value in the council's emerging Valued Landscapes evidence base, as confirmed in the Landscape Officer's consultation response.
- 7.4 Landscape and visual impacts beyond the immediate environs of the Appeal Site would be minimal. The character and appearance beyond the limits of the Site will be unchanged.
- 7.5 In respect of the policies cited in the third reason for refusal (**CD 3.01**), specifically, Core Strategy policies CP1 and CP3²⁵, and MDD Policies CC03 and TB21 having drafted my evidence I make the following points:

CP1 – Sustainable development

- 7.5.1 This high-level policy seeks positive outcomes from development across a number of aspects of the built and natural environment.
- 7.5.2 Pertinent to landscape and visual matters is clause CP1 1) which seeks to “*Maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment*”. As I record in paragraph 4.1 landscape is not a term that applies solely to undeveloped greenfield locations. Landscape includes townscapes and urban environments. Therefore, whilst there will be a change to the landscape within the Site, there will be diversification and an enhancement of the functionality of the existing and new landscape assets.
- 7.5.3 Change is not in and of itself harmful, place creation is an important element when considering this policy.

²⁵ In respect of the Decision Notice, Mr. Slatter deals with Core Strategy policy CP11 and MDD Policy C002 as spatial development control policies. The extent of the Development Limits and application of the policy related to policy boundaries regardless of landscape character.

- 7.5.4 Conclusions on compliance with this policy is not wholly based on consideration of the landscape outcomes.

CP3 - General Principles for development

- 7.5.5 Similarly, this policy is addressing high level concepts associated with the landscape and visual environment.
- 7.5.6 In terms CP 3 a), Ms. Brigid Taylor deals with the appropriateness of the scale, massing etc.
- 7.5.7 With reference to CP3 c) and the need to have no detrimental impact upon important landscape features, as noted above the proposals avoid impacting on important landscapes and landscape assets. The impacts which result from the appeal proposals are localised.
- 7.5.8 Also relevant is CP3 h) and the need to 'Contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities.' In this respect the proposals will provide linked natural environments assessable to the existing and new communities.

MDD Policy TB21 – Landscape Character

- 7.5.9 As set out in the DAS (CD 1.04), the LVA and my evidence, it is clear that the appeal proposals have taken account of and recognised the character of the landscape (NPPF, para 187 b)), and specifically the elements and qualities of the site.
- 7.5.10 Important features have been identified, in this instance these include the trees, hedgerows, grassland and grain and form of the contemporary settlement edge. There are retained and incorporated/supplemented in the appeal proposals.
- 7.5.11 Key features have been retained, and new landscape measure will enhance the condition and functionality of the landscape and increase the diversity of landscape assets in a positive manner.

MDD Policy CCO3 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping

- 7.6 Reading Road is a Green Route (Policy CC03, 1), this is defined in the glossary to the MDD as:

Roads into settlements that are lined with trees and other vegetation which make a significant contribution to character and environment of the area and contribute to the Borough's network of wildlife corridor.

- 7.7 This definition makes clear that the green routes are re associated with settlements and the settled environment. They are not rural lanes. In the case of the existing green route on Reading Road this includes trees, scrub, and grassland with incidental breaks comprising closed boarded fencing, and breaks in the tree line for access to housing. These features are present on the green route and have not required the route to be classified as a Green Route Enhancement Area – a route which has the potential to be a green route.
- 7.8 Part 2 of the policy sets out that development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieved the listed criteria.

- 7.9 Turning to the listed criteria, CC03 2a, records that development proposals can provide **new** or protect and enhance the Boroughs Green Infrastructure²⁶ networks, these networks include a ;large variety of GI assets, including but not limited to green routes (paragraph 2.12, **CD 6.02**).
- 7.10 The Council's allegation that the requirement is to 'protect and enhance' green routes is a misrepresentation of the policy requirements, there is no requirement that green routes are protected and enhanced, they are only one component of the GI network. Table LP3.1 sets out the degree to which the GI functionality is either maintained or enhanced through the delivery of the proposals.
- 7.11 The proposals provide new GI assets through accessible open space, delivering a GI functionality which is not well represented in the landscape. The GI network is protected, primarily through the retention of the boundary features, it will also be enhanced by new landscape planting, ensuring longevity of the network, diversification of the functionality and variety of habitats and land uses.
- 7.12 The green route will be maintained, it will continue to be a road into a settlement, it will be lined with trees, with new tree and shrub planting to enhance this quality of the route and it will continue to be connected to and link with other GI assets ensuring the GI network is protected and enhanced.
- 7.13 In respect of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (NHP) I have the following observations

POLICY IRS1: PRESERVATION OF SEPARATION OF SETTLEMENTS

- 7.14 As set out in Sectio 5, there will be no erosion of the physical, visual or perceptual gap between the settlements.
- 7.15 The character and appearance of the landscape beyond the Appeal Site and within the gap with Arborfield Cross will remain as farmland with farm buildings.

POLICY IRS2: RECOGNISE, RESPECT AND PRESERVE IDENTITY AND RURAL SETTING OF SETTLEMENTS

- 7.16 This policy primarily focusses on the manner in which the scheme is brought forward at the RMA stage. There is sufficient scope in the scheme proposals to deliver positive outcomes in respect of the materials, tree planting and achieving the objectives of the Village Design Statement.
- 7.17 The site is well contained and there will be no impacts on the views identified in the NHP.

POLICY IRS3: PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND GREEN SPACES and POLICY AD3: HIGH QUALITY DEVELOPMENT WITH GENEROUS OPEN SPACE, PROPERLY LANDSCAPED

- 7.18 As set out in Section 2 of my evidence, the proposals respond positively to the local landscape character and delivery of new multifunctional Green Infrastructure.
- 7.19 Overall, the issue is not whether there is a change, development of greenfield locations inevitably leads to changes in landscape character and visual effects, a matter that is not an absolute

²⁶ Defined in the glossary as "A network of multi-functional green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities."

impediment to granting consent and allocating land for new housing. From a landscape planning perspective, the key issue is whether the development results in undue²⁷, ²⁸ and significant effects.

- 7.20 In my professional opinion the proposals are consistent with the existing context, through their incorporation of accessible greenspace, inclusion of dwellings in a form consistent with the existing situation and response to the settlement pattern, grain and form that prevails in this location. They are neither excessive nor disproportionate.
- 7.21 Critically the proposals adhere to the Council's guidelines in respect of Green Infrastructure delivery (MDD Policy C003 explored in detail above in Section 3). Furthermore, the proposals conserve and enhance the landscape on the settlement edge through the delivery of:
- 7.21.1 New areas of accessible multifunctional green infrastructure.
 - 7.21.2 Increased tree cover and softening the edge of the settlement, ensuring the longevity of the wooded components of the landscape.
 - 7.21.3 Provision of accessible space and connectivity to bring community cohesion for the village and outlying development clusters.
- 7.22 In conclusion, the landscape aspects of the third reason for refusal are unsubstantiated and provide no basis for refusing the appeal proposal.

²⁷ Unwarranted or inappropriate because excessive or disproportionate (online dictionary definition). Disproportionate, or excessive (Oxford dictionary).

²⁸ GLVIA, paragraph 5.40 (CD 18.01)