

# The Design Review Panel

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|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Site</b>            | Land North of Barkham Road, Barkham, Wokingham, Berks RG41 4TJ                                                                                                            |
| <b>Proposal</b>        | NPPF Paragraph 84(e) proposal for a single dwelling, detached garage and store building, and associated landscape enhancements including management of existing woodland. |
| <b>Local Authority</b> | Wokingham Borough Council                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Applicant</b>       | Mr and Mrs Draggon                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Planning</b>        | Axiom Planning Consultants                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Architect</b>       | Hawkes Architecture                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Landscape</b>       | PAD Landscapes                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Ecology</b>         | John Wenham Ecologists                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Arboriculture</b>   | B.J Unwin Arboriculture                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Review Date</b>     | 22 <sup>nd</sup> June 2026                                                                                                                                                |

The Design Review Panel is an independent and impartial body comprised of multidisciplinary expert volunteers. The Panel provides constructive feedback on development proposals. The role of The Design Review Panel is to offer objective and professional insights to assist Design Teams and local authorities in improving the quality, sustainability and appropriateness of the development proposals. Each session brings together a tailored group of expert volunteers who are selected because of their specialist expertise and relevance to the project under review. Details of The Design Review Panel volunteer members can be seen on our website using the following link <https://www.designreviewpanel.co.uk/team>. For this review, the Panel has included two Chartered Architects a dual qualified Chartered Architect and Town Planner and a Landscape Architect, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation from a range of professional perspectives.

This remote desktop design review panel session was booked by Hawkes Architecture, and this is the third time The Design Review Panel has reviewed this scheme. A previous in-person session incorporating a site visit was carried out on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2025 and a subsequent online session was carried out on the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2025. This feedback document should be read in conjunction with the previous feedback documents issued.

Paragraph 84 (e) of the National Planning Policy Framework, (NPPF), above states: -

# The Design Review Panel

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***“Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:***

***(e) the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:***

- is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and***
- would significantly enhance its immediate setting and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.”***

Paragraph 138 of the NPPF states: -

***“Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development ... For assessing proposals there is a range of tools including workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks ... These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes ... In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels. “***

Therefore, the Panel provides the following feedback: -

The Panel welcomes the further development of the proposal and notes the continued care with which the Design Team has engaged with the design review process. It is noted that the material now submitted shows a clear progression from the earlier stages of the scheme, both in terms of the supporting narrative and the refinement of the architectural and landscape strategies.

The Panel considers that the proposal now meets the very high bar set by Paragraph 84(e) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The Panel's view is that the design demonstrates exceptional quality, is sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area, and would significantly enhance its immediate setting. In reaching this view, the Panel recognises that some aspects of the submitted material may still benefit from clearer explanation and further detailed resolution, particularly in relation to the relationship between the building and the existing woodland structure, the rationale for the plan and roofscape, and the detailed expression of some architectural elements. However, the Panel considers these to be matters of refinement, presentation and detailed control, rather than matters that prevent the proposal from meeting the Paragraph 84(e) threshold. The comments and suggestions that follow are therefore offered to assist further refinement, presentation and delivery of the scheme for the benefit of the applicant and Design Team. They are not matters on which the Panel's view that the Paragraph 84(e) threshold is met depends.

The Panel considers that the overall concept of the “House of the Woods” has continued to become more convincing and more clearly articulated than at the previous review. The earlier direction of

# The Design Review Panel

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travel, based on a family of pavilion-like volumes within a woodland setting, is carried forward and strengthened through the current falling leaves narrative. The idea of smaller built elements arranged in a glade-like configuration beneath a layered, leaf-like roof canopy provides a clear conceptual framework for the dwelling. It also creates the potential for a rich sequence of internal and external spaces, framed views, filtered light, enclosure and openness. The Panel feels that this underlying idea gives the proposal a distinctive identity while remaining closely connected to the character of the site.

The supporting documentation is considered to be clear, thorough and generally robust. The Panel notes in particular that the Design Team has sought to explain the proposal through concept diagrams, visual material, landscape information, technical development and precedent analysis. This is helpful in demonstrating that the scheme has been iteratively tested and refined. Because this review is undertaken as a Remote Desktop review, the clarity of the submitted material carries particular importance. Matters that might otherwise have been explored through presentation and discussion need to be evident within the submission itself. In that context, the Panel feels that the final planning material may benefit from a still clearer explanation of how the woodland itself shapes the plan, massing, orientation and roofscape. This is important because the project's central proposition is not simply that the dwelling sits within woodland, but that the woodland informs the form, arrangement and experience of the dwelling.

The Panel welcomes the provision of a drawing that overlays the proposed building with a detailed tree survey and feels this demonstrates the relationship between the proposed house and the trees. This helps demonstrate why the building is located where it is, how the principal volumes respond to the existing tree structure, how views and gaps are generated, and how the woodland has shaped the placement and orientation of the different parts of the house. This drawing helps avoid any impression that the dwelling has simply been placed into a clearing, rather than formed in response to the particular qualities of the wood.

It is also suggested that the rationale for the five principal volumes may benefit from slightly greater explanation. The plan arrangement now appears coherent in itself, and the subdivision of the building into smaller elements continues to be welcomed. However, the submission may benefit from a more explicit account of the factors that generate those volumes, their relative positions and their orientations. This could include the client brief, the movement sequence, outlook, light, existing trees, canopy structure, enclosure, arrival and the relationship between the building and its immediate woodland setting. A clearer explanation of these matters may help the Local Planning Authority and other readers understand that the architectural arrangement is a direct response to the site and brief, rather than a formal composition located within woodland.

The landscape strategy is also considered to have progressed positively. It is noted that the landscape material prepared for this review is thorough and carefully considered, and that it relates well to the proposed dwelling. The emphasis on a naturalistic woodland setting, rather than a conventional domestic garden, is considered appropriate to the concept and to the site.

# The Design Review Panel

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It is felt that the success of the proposal is likely to depend in part on the long-term stewardship of this landscape. It may therefore be helpful for the submission to explain clearly how the proposed naturalistic character is to be established, maintained and protected over time.

The Panel notes the reference in the submitted material to the client enjoying mowing the lawn. This is understood as a personal and domestic detail, but it also highlights a possible tension between a closely mown lawn with crisp edges and the more complex, seasonal and naturalistic environment that appears appropriate for this site. The Panel does not regard this as a design objection, but suggests that it may be helpful for the Design Team and applicant to ensure that the intended landscape character is fully understood and capable of being sustained. The woodland setting may appear looser, more varied and at times more informal than a conventional maintained lawn. This character is likely to be part of its value. The Panel therefore feels that the landscape management strategy may benefit from clear wording and visual material explaining where any mown areas are appropriate, where a more naturalistic sward or understorey is intended, and how the scheme avoids becoming over-domesticated through future maintenance.

This matter is particularly important because the sensitivity of the proposal to the defining characteristics of the area is closely tied to the proposed woodland and naturalistic landscape treatment. The scheme appears capable of being sensitive to those characteristics where the landscape is delivered and managed in a manner consistent with the submitted concept. It may be helpful for the final material to show the seasonal character of the landscape, the intended maintenance regime, the edge conditions between domestic and non-domestic areas, and the way in which understorey planting and woodland management contribute to the setting of the house. This would help reinforce that the landscape is not simply a setting around the architecture, but an integral part of the Paragraph 84(e) case.

The Panel continues to support the broad architectural strategy of a cluster of smaller volumes rather than a single large form. This approach helps reduce the perceived scale of the dwelling and reinforces the idea of moving through and between spaces within the woodland. The relationship between the pavilion-like arrangement and the layered roof canopy is central to the character of the proposal. The Panel feels that the falling leaves concept is a clear and engaging design idea, and that it has the potential to give the scheme a distinctive and site-specific architectural language. The internal spaces appear capable of offering a varied sequence of views, light, enclosure and movement, and the Panel notes the intention to create a close relationship between interior and woodland.

The roof remains the most technically and architecturally sensitive component of the design. The Panel recognises that the roof concept is ambitious and that structural proof-of-concept work has already been undertaken, which is welcomed. However, because the roof is such a dominant element in the composition, the Panel feels that further architectural testing and explanation may be helpful to ensure that the underlying idea remains clear through later design stages. The current roof geometry has considerable potential, but its complexity means that junctions, rooflights, fascia depth, soffit treatment, drainage and structural expression all have the potential to influence the success of the

# The Design Review Panel

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final building. It may therefore be helpful for the Design Team to provide further drawings or studies showing how the roof planes meet, how the triangular rooflights are resolved, how water is managed, and how the detailing remains durable and refined.

The Panel notes that the leaf-like concept depends on a delicate balance between boldness and lightness. At present, the external expression of the roof edge, fascia and rafters may risk reading as more visually dominant than intended. This may in part be a consequence of lighting, rendering contrast or the way the images are presented, but the Panel suggests that it would be helpful to test whether the rafters can read more recessively within the overall composition. The analogy of leaf veins supporting a leaf surface may provide a useful conceptual reference, with the supporting structure present and legible but not visually overpowering. This may allow the roof to retain its role as the principal design idea without the detail of the supporting elements becoming too assertive.

In a spirit of helpfulness, it is suggested that there may be benefit in testing whether the external wall and façade treatments could sit more quietly beneath the roof. The precedent material appears to rely in part on a strong relationship between a bold roof form and a calmer wall treatment. In the current proposal, the façade composition, louvres and expressed roof structure could risk competing with one another in some views. It may be useful to explore whether the roof overhangs can provide more of the necessary shading function, thereby reducing reliance on additional façade elements where possible. This may help the roof read as the primary architectural gesture, while allowing the wall treatment to form a calmer backdrop within the woodland.

The Panel also notes that the legibility of the roof geometry may benefit from further careful consideration. The roof is intended to appear layered and complex, but it may still need to read as controlled, durable and understandable in the round. It is suggested that the Design Team may wish to test whether the corners, overlaps and junctions of the roof forms are sufficiently clear when seen from different viewpoints. This may be particularly relevant where triangular rooflights and intersecting planes are introduced. The aim would be to protect the clarity of the falling leaves concept and avoid the roof becoming visually or technically over-complicated at later stages.

The garage is considered to have improved since the previous review. It is noted that the reduction in massing and the move towards a more recessive expression are positive steps, helping the garage sit more comfortably in relation to the house. The Panel feels that it remains important that the garage does not compete with the dwelling on approach, either through its roof form, height, door treatment or principal elevations facing the driveway and house. It may be helpful for the Design Team to provide further imagery of the garage elevations and arrival views to demonstrate how the garage door, timber cladding and roof form are integrated. A garage door that reads as part of a timber wall, rather than as a visually separate domestic or utilitarian element, would appear consistent with the intended hierarchy.

In a spirit of helpfulness, the Panel also suggests that the garage roof may benefit from further consideration in relation to both arrival and drainage. One possible approach may be for the roof to have its lowest point on the approach side and to drain towards the rear corner closest to the

# The Design Review Panel

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watercourse. This could allow the garage roof to fall away from the arrival sequence, reinforce the hierarchy of the house, and create a more enveloping and recessive character on approach. This would also appear to have some conceptual relationship with the drainage philosophy of the main house, where water collection is integrated into the wider architectural and landscape narrative. The Panel does not seek to prescribe this solution, but feels that further testing of the garage roof form may help ensure that this secondary building remains clearly subordinate.

The driveway approach is considered to be improved. The Panel welcomes the fact that the approach now allows a little more of the dwelling to be seen, while the planting strategy appears to strike a reasonable balance between screening, reveal and arrival. This balance is important because the house needs to feel discovered within the woodland without becoming either hidden to the point of ambiguity or exposed in a manner that weakens the woodland concept. It is considered that the arrival sequence now has the potential to be engaging and coherent, particularly if the garage remains visually quiet and the relationship between planting, driveway, water and built form is carefully controlled.

The Panel has no objection in principle to the altered design of the water collection elements. The integration of water management into the architectural and landscape story remains a positive part of the scheme. It may still be helpful for the final material to explain the water strategy in a consolidated way, including roof drainage, collection, the visible water elements and the relationship with the watercourse. This would help demonstrate that water is not treated as a technical afterthought, but as part of the environmental and experiential character of the proposal.

The treatment of glazing and window dressings is another detail that may benefit from further explanation. The Panel notes the extent and importance of the principal glazed areas, and the way in which these contribute to views, light and the connection between the house and woodland. It may be helpful to consider how curtains, blinds or other window treatments are integrated so that they remain compatible with the exterior architecture when viewed from the outside. This is a detailed point, but given the emphasis on visual permeability and the relationship between inside and outside, the treatment of window dressings could affect the character of the elevations, particularly in evening conditions.

Overall, the Panel considers that the proposal has continued to improve through the design review process and now demonstrates the level of quality required by Paragraph 84(e) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The core concept is clear, the architecture and landscape are now more closely integrated, and the proposal is capable of making a significant positive contribution to its immediate setting. The Panel's suggestions in relation to the tree-survey overlay, plan rationale, roof refinement, garage hierarchy, landscape management, water strategy and window dressings are intended to strengthen the clarity, refinement and deliverability of the scheme. They do not alter the Panel's view that the proposal now meets the relevant policy threshold.

In conclusion, the Panel is supportive of the proposal. The Design Team has responded constructively to the earlier design review stages, and the current scheme is considered to be a coherent, carefully

# The Design Review Panel

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developed and contextually sensitive response to the site. The “House of the Woods” concept is sufficiently established to provide a convincing basis for the dwelling, and the landscape strategy appears capable of significantly enhancing the immediate setting where it is delivered and managed in accordance with the naturalistic approach presented. The Panel feels that the proposal meets the high bar of Paragraph 84(e), and that the remaining comments are matters of refinement, explanation and detailed control rather than matters that prevent the policy test from being met.

## **SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & SUGGESTIONS**, (to be read in conjunction with the above)

In summary, the main conclusions of the Panel are: -

- The proposal has continued to progress positively through the design review process.
- The Panel feels that the proposal now meets the very high bar of Paragraph 84(e) of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- The comments and suggestions made by the Panel are intended to assist further refinement, presentation and delivery, and are not matters on which the Panel’s policy view depends.
- The “House of the Woods” concept has continued to become more convincing and more clearly articulated.
- The falling leaves narrative provides a clear framework for the architecture and landscape.
- The pavilion-like arrangement beneath a layered roof canopy is felt to create a distinctive and appropriate response to the woodland setting.
- The final submission may benefit from a clearer overlay of the proposed building with the tree survey, to demonstrate how the woodland shapes the plan, massing and orientation.
- The rationale for the five principal volumes may benefit from further explanation, including the influence of the client brief, existing trees, light, views, movement, enclosure and arrival.
- The landscape strategy is thorough and appropriate, but the long-term management of the naturalistic setting may benefit from clear explanation.
- It may be helpful to clarify the relationship between mown areas, naturalistic sward, understorey planting and woodland management, to avoid the site becoming over-domesticated through future maintenance.
- The roof concept has considerable potential, but further testing of roof geometry, rooflights, junctions, drainage, fascia depth, soffit treatment and structural expression may help protect the clarity of the idea through delivery.
- The rafters and roof edge may benefit from a more recessive expression so that the falling leaves concept remains visually clear.
- The façade treatment and louvres may benefit from further testing so that they sit quietly beneath the roof and do not compete with the primary roof concept.
- The legibility of the roof geometry may benefit from further testing, particularly where triangular rooflights and intersecting planes are introduced.
- The garage is improved, with reduced massing and a more recessive character, but further imagery may help demonstrate how the garage door, cladding, roof and arrival elevations remain subordinate to the dwelling.
- Further testing of the garage roof form and drainage strategy may help reinforce the hierarchy between garage and house.

# The Design Review Panel

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- The driveway approach is improved, with a better balance between screening, reveal and arrival.
- The altered water collection elements are acceptable in principle, and the wider water strategy may benefit from being presented as part of the architectural and landscape narrative.
- Window dressings to the principal glazed areas may benefit from careful integration so that they remain compatible with the external architectural character.
- Overall, the Panel is supportive of the proposal and feels that it meets the Paragraph 84(e) policy threshold, with the remaining points relating to refinement, explanation and detailed control.

## The Design Review Panel

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