

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	253122
Site Address:	Land at Cooks Hill Cottage, Bath Road, Knowl Hill
Expiry Date:	9 March 2026
Site Visit Date:	19 January 2026
Proposal: Permission in Principle application for the erection of up to 2 dwellinghouses	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP12 – Green Belt CP17 – Housing Delivery
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB01 – Development within the Green Belt TB02 – Development adjoining the Green Belt TB05 – Housing Mix TB06 – Development of Private Residential Gardens TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB25 – Archaeology
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS6 – Development in the Green Belt CE1 – Design principles for efficient buildings CE3 – Environmental standards for residential development CE7 – Low carbon and renewable energy generation

	CE8 – Protecting renewable energy generation C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C3 – Active travel C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging H1 – Housing mix, density and standards H3 – Affordable housing H12 – Residential development of existing private gardens FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE3 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity HC2 – Community infrastructure HC4 – Open spaces, sports, recreation and play facilities HC5 – Environmental protection HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution HC9 – Contaminated land and water
Other	National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Wargrave Parish Design Statement

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
201480	Prior approval submission for the proposed change of use of an agricultural Nissen building and land within its curtilage to a dwelling (Use Class C3) (Schedule 2 Part 3 Class Q of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015).	Prior Approval Refusal 11/08/2020, Dismissed at Appeal 26/10/2021
212557	Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed single storey front extension to form porch, single storey side extension, single storey rear extension, part garage conversion to create habitable accommodation, plus the insertion of 11no. roof lights and changes to fenestration.	Approved 23/08/2021

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No comments received

WBC Drainage – No objection subject to conditions

WBC Highways – No objection however further detail on the rights of access of the shared drive to the public highway is required at Technical Details stage.

WBC Landscape and Trees – No objections subject to conditions

WBC CIL - The proposed development will be liable for CIL as it involves the creation of 1 or more new dwelling

WBC Ecology – See main report below

WBC Waste Services – No comments received

WBC Cleaner and Greener - No comments received

External

Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received

Berkshire Archaeology – No objections subject to securing mitigation at TDC stage

REPRESENTATIONS

Woodley Town Council	Wargrave Parish Council objects to the application due to over development in the green belt.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	No comments received

APPRAISAL**Introduction:**

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

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

Proposal:

In this case, the PiP application is seeking permission for the erection of up to 2no. dwellings on the application site.

As a result of conflicts with the Priority Woodland to the east of the application site, the application proposals have been amended, reducing the number of dwellings proposed from 5 to 2. Cooks Hill Cottage was previously planned for demolition to facilitate the new dwellings but is now proposed for retention.

Site Description:

The site is situated between the built-up areas of Knowl Hill and Kiln Green, located to the north of the A4 Bath Road. The application site comprises a range of large agricultural buildings, including a Nissen hut, an agricultural barn, as well as Cooks Hill Cottage. The site is approximately 0.69 hectares. The southern part of the site comprises Cooks Hill Cottage, whilst the northern part of the site contains a paddock, where the Nissen Hut and agricultural barn is situated. There is existing access to the site via a road at the northern boundary of the access off the A4 Bath Road.

The site lies outside of any Settlement Boundary and is therefore classified as being within the Countryside.

Assessment:

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

Principle of Development:

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

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

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

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

- 1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and
- 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and

- 3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or
- 4) In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;
- 5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i) Bring about environmental improvements; or
 - ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
- 6) Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;
- 7) Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

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

Turning to the overall aim of Policy CP11, this is to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. While located outside of settlement limits, it is acknowledged that the site forms part of an established residential area and due to the scale of the proposal it would likely not compromise the separate identity of the settlements of Knowl Hill and Hare Hatch.

The Council is currently unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. In such circumstances, and in accordance with paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, policies most important for determining the application — including those relating to the supply of housing — may be considered out-of-date e.g. CP11. The presumption in favour of sustainable development is therefore engaged, and reduced weight is afforded to such policies. The extent of this reduction is a matter of planning judgement. Further assessment of these policy tensions against the benefits of the proposal is provided in the Planning Balance below.

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

Development of Private Residential Gardens

The application site is part of a residential garden and paragraph 75 of the NPPF states that 'local planning authorities should consider the case for setting out policies to resist inappropriate development of residential gardens, for example where development would cause harm to the local area'. Policy TB06 of the MDD Local Plan (Development of Private Residential gardens) states that proposals for new residential development

that includes land within the curtilage of private residential gardens will only be granted planning permission where:

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

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

Housing Land Supply:

The NPPF (Dec 2024) at paragraph 78 requires LPAs to identify a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than 5 years old. The latest published Five-Year Housing Land Supply Statement (at 31st March 2025) shows the Council is currently only able to demonstrate 2.5 years' worth of deliverable sites. Subsequently, those policies relating specifically to housing delivery in the borough's Core Strategy and MDD LP (and any made Neighbourhood Plans) are currently considered to be out of date. This does not mean they have no weight but is dependant on their consistency with the NPPF.

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

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

Firstly, in considering i), the site is not located within a protected area or relate to an asset of particular importance which provides a strong reason for refusing the development. In considering ii), officers must assess as part of an application whether there are any adverse impacts generated by the development that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination. This is referred to as the 'tilted balance,' as harm and benefits are not weighed equally, but tilted according to paragraph 11(d)(ii).

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

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

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

Emerging Local Plan Update:

The Local Plan Update (LPU), the plan which will supersede the Core Strategy and MDD Local Plan, was published in October 2024 (Regulation 19 Proposed Submission Plan). It was subsequently submitted for examination on 28 February 2025. The LPU sets out the development strategy and proposed site allocations to meet housing needs to 2040.

Weight to be attributed to the emerging policy is informed by paragraph 49 of the NPPF 2024. This advises that weight can be applied according to the plan's stage of preparation, the extent to which there are unresolved objections, and the degree of consistency with the NPPF. However due to outstanding representations as a whole, those policies relevant to the location of housing within the LPU are afforded limited weight.

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

Sustainability of Location

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

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

The following extract from the applicants Planning Statement refers to the locational sustainability of the site:

“The appraisal concludes that whilst the Site is outside a defined settlement boundary, there is a range of local service and amenities within walking distance of the site. The Site is also well served by public transport, which enables a wide range of services within Twyford, Maidenhead and Reading to be reached by sustainable modes of transport. In addition, existing residential development along the Bath Road (A4) would however set a precedent for the potential of the Site being a sustainable development location. The closest bus stop is located approx. 150m to the north of the Site and the closest convenience store approx. 200m away. The Locational Sustainability appraisal concludes that, in accordance with paragraphs 110 and 115 of the NPPF, the Site is within a sustainable location.”

Section 4.4.1 of the Manual for Streets by the Department for Transport states that ‘Walkable neighbourhoods are typically characterised by having a range of facilities within 10 minutes (up to about 800 m) walking distance of residential areas which residents may access comfortably on foot.’

Using this statement, the development is situated a circa 200-250 metre walk from the nearest bus stop dependent upon the direction of travel. There are some services and facilities within the immediate location such as petrol station, pub and golf course wherein larger shops/supermarkets are set within the larger towns within the Borough. However, the proposal is not considered in this instance to constitute an isolated or unsustainable location.

Development within the Green Belt:

The application site is located within designated Green Belt and outside of settlement limits in the open Countryside. The government attaches great importance to Green Belts with national policies for the protection of Green Belt land covered by Chapter 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states

that, “The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence”. Paragraph 143 of the NPPF states that the Green Belt serves 5 purposes:

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

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

Paragraph 154 states that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless certain exceptions apply. The proposed development does not fall within these exceptions.

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

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

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

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

The application site should be considered as being within the grey belt. Whilst the whole of the site is not considered to constitute previously developed land, the application site does not strongly contribute to preventing the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas as the application site is located on the edge of a small settlement (point (a) of Paragraph 143). The site does not prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another as the application site is not located within a town (point (b) of Paragraph 143).

And lastly, the application site is not within a historic town or within the setting of (point (c) of Paragraph 143). Therefore, the land is not contributing to purposes (a), (b) or (c) of the Green Belt as per Paragraph 143, thus the application site is defined as grey belt.

With regards to Paragraph 155 of the NPPF, it is made clear that all exceptions must apply for development to be considered as not inappropriate development. Looking at the assessment made in the paragraph above, the development proposal would utilise grey belt land and therefore the proposal complies with point 'a.' of Paragraph 155.

The Council does not have a 5-year housing land supply, there is a need for the type of development proposed (new dwellings), and therefore the proposal complies with point 'b.' of Paragraph 155.

Whilst it is recognised that a countryside setting is not the most sustainable location for a new dwelling, being located outside of settlement does not mean that the location is inherently unsustainable. In this instance, the site is located along the A4 which provides good access to wider transport networks, and as such the site is deemed as being in a reasonably sustainable location meaning the proposal complies with point 'c.' of Paragraph 155.

Paragraph 155(d), read with paragraphs 156–157, does not apply here because the proposal is for up to 2 dwellings and therefore would not constitute major development involving housing.

The three relevant exceptions (a, b and c) of Paragraph 155 all apply and are met and therefore the proposal is considered as not inappropriate development within the Green Belt. The principle of development is therefore acceptable.

Principle Summary:

The site is located outside of settlement limits in the countryside. The proposal fails to meet any of the specified exceptions for development outside of settlement. When turning to the overall aim of the policy, the proposal would not result in settlement coalescence. When assessing as to whether it would maintain the quality of the environment, this will be considered in light of other material considerations (particularly landscape/ character of the area considerations) with a final assessment being made at the end of this report.

In terms of locational sustainability, Officers do not deem the site a truly sustainable location, however, Paragraph 84 of the NPPF seeks to avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances. The site is located close to existing dwellings on three sides and is situated amongst other built form. As such, the proposal will not result in an isolated new building and would comply with paragraph 84 of the national planning policy.

Paragraph 124 of the NPPF encourages planning policies and decisions to promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes. Paragraph 125 outlines the need for planning policies and decisions to promote and support the development of under-

utilised land, especially if this would help to meet identified needs for housing where land supply is constrained.

The site is also located in a reasonably sustainable location with reasonable access to alternative means of transportation and is therefore somewhat accessible. Officers, however, acknowledge the tilted balance is engaged, as per paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the NPPF. The tilted balance will be returned to at the end of this report.

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

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

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

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

The site is located at the edge of Knowl Hill, within the countryside set off of the A4. The proposed dwellings are proposed to replace several existing former agricultural buildings on the north side of the site. The indicative arrangement of the proposed dwellings would be contrary to the prevailing character of the area wherein the majority of dwellings front Bath Road itself. However, there are examples of sporadic dwellings within the area wherein 'back land' development would not be significantly out of keeping with the character of the area, especially when taking into consideration the approval of 4no. dwellings to the immediate east under application 253123. However the backland pattern of development is dwellings with large gardens in a non-uniform pattern therefore this should be taken into consideration in the technical details stage as the indicative arrangement showing two dwellings is relatively uniform.

The indicative plan is afforded only limited assistance at this stage; the Council's conclusion is not that a particular layout has been approved, but that the location of the site and the proposed amount of up to 2 dwellings are capable, in principle, of being accommodated without unacceptable character harm, with detailed design, layout, scale and landscaping reserved to technical details consent. The technical details consent stage will need to ensure that the development remains in the northern area of the site and does not extend to the south so as to not harm the character and appearance of the area and reduce the development's visibility from the A4.

The site lies within a character area known as 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' as identified by the Council's Landscape Character Assessment (2019). It is a landscape within moderate condition and with moderate sensitivity to change. In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern and historic built form of the villages, hamlets, farmsteads and manors. WBC Landscape and Trees have raised no objections from a landscape character perspective; the limited scale of the residential development proposed, and the fact it would replace several existing buildings on the site, would adequately retain the sparse settlement pattern of the area and would not affect the historic built form of the nearby villages, hamlets, farmsteads and manors. There would be an increase in the intensity of the site's use through the addition of two residential units but overall, the impact on the wider landscape would be limited.

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

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

The nearest neighbours to the property are Melbury House to the west Waterloo Cottage to the south west and Woodlands House to the north. However, given the separation distances between the proposed placement of the dwellings and neighbouring properties, it is considered unlikely that the proposal would cause harm in this regard. There are some concerns raised with regards to the use of the access and the impacts this could have upon the neighbouring properties especially when used in conjunction with a neighbouring PIP application 253122, however, given the limited number of dwellings overall, it is considered unlikely this would be detrimental. As part of any TDC application, it would however, need to be proven the access arrangements would be suitable.

The site is in close proximity to other residential uses, the principle of this land use changing is acceptable in relation to neighbouring amenity. The proposal is for a maximum of two dwellings, the amount of development and intensity of the land use is not considered to result in substantial harm to neighbours in terms of increased noise from domestic life.

The final layout would be subject to technical detail consent where further assessment in relation to neighbouring amenity would be carried out (in terms of the positioning of the dwellings and their windows in relation to neighbouring outlook, light etc).

The neighbouring properties are considered to be located sufficient distances away from the site. The WBC Design Guide requirements regarding neighbour amenity, separation distances and privacy can be met at technical details stage limiting concerns on neighbouring amenity and any further impact could be mitigated through careful internal arrangements/window placements and any landscaping details at technical details stage.

It is considered that the principle of the development as proposed in relation to neighbours is acceptable for permission in principle stage.

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

Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy states that development should not lead to highway problems, along with providing for sustainable forms of transport.

Policy CC07 states that sufficient parking shall be provided as part of development proposals.

WBC Highways did not raise any concerns regarding the location and amount of development on the highway network, in principle, nor was an objection raised on the sustainability of the location.

Highway considerations would also be reviewed at technical details stage once the layout finalised. Recommendations include a sustainability assessment, swept path analysis, vehicle and cycle parking and a demonstration that acceptable visibility splays from the proposed access onto the highway can be achieved.

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

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

The application site is located in Flood Zone 1 which is the lowest risk of flooding. There is no incompatibility between the proposed location, use and amount of development and flood risk. The Drainage Officer has requested further information including a detailed drainage strategy; however, this is not applicable at this stage. Full drainage details and a flood risk assessment would be required at technical consent stage.

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

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

There are several notable trees in close proximity to or located on the application site, a large amount of which fall within an area of land recognised as a Priority Habitat (Woodland/Orchard) as designated by the Berkshire Habitat Inventory (shaded in green):



There are concerns over the potential impact of the development on the longevity of this habitat, should any of the proposed dwellings be located within this area of the site. From an ecological perspective, its retention cannot be appropriately enforced should it fall within a dwelling's residential curtilage or garden.

However, as the final layout of the development and scale of the development is unknown at this stage and the site is sufficiently large to accommodate up to 2 dwellings without impacting this area (it is a matter for technical details stage) this could have the potential to be mitigated/not cause any adverse impact. For example, the indicative site layout indicates a clear avoidance of the priority habitat through the siting of up to 2no. dwellings in the north-west of the application site.

The entire site is also covered by an area TPO that protects all species (TPO-1639-2018). It is not clear at this stage as to whether trees would need to be felled/lopped or otherwise as the layout is not finalised but in principle, the LPA consider there to be sufficient space to the north of the site up to 2 dwellings, with the ability to either avoid or mitigate any adverse impacts on any TPO trees. If any trees require removal, equivalent (considering species, size etc.) replacement will be expected in any Technical Details Consent.

A detailed arboricultural report and arboricultural impact assessment would be needed at technical details stage. Additionally, a construction method statement showing the mitigation and may be required to measures including tree protection measures, soil management, and any other steps to avoid damage to root zones or canopies to ensure the boundary trees are protected.

All species of bats receive special protection under UK law and it is a criminal offence under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and The Conservation of

Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (The Habitat Regulations), deliberately or recklessly to destroy or damage their roosts, or to disturb, kill or injure them without first having obtained the relevant licence for derogation from the regulations from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (the SNCO - Natural England in England).

The site is identified as a bat suitability area, and is also within a Red Risk Zone for Great Crested Newts (closest pond being located 225 metres west of the site). Whilst the development could have an impact on these protected species, the impacts in this regard could be appropriately dealt with at TD stage through mitigation, method statements for construction/demolition and other enhancements.

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

From an environmental health perspective, the site is located within an area of potentially contaminated land, primarily due to its proximity to historic agricultural uses. The potential need for a contamination assessment and subsequent mitigation can be adequately dealt with at TD stage, as it can inform the designs of developments.

Archaeology:

The application site lies within a consultation zone for an area of archaeological interest. Berkshire Archaeology raise no objections to the proposals, subject to securing an archaeology evaluation at TDC stage.

Thames Basin Heath Special Protection Area:

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

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

Housing Land Supply:

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

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

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

Planning Balance:

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

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

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

Residential development in this location is considered unacceptable in principle with the local plan as the site is located outside settlement limits within land designated as Countryside. However, whilst the site is located within the Green Belt, it falls within the definition of grey belt land, and as justified within the 'Development within the Green Belt' section of this report, the proposal would not be viewed as inappropriate development within the Green Belt according to national policy. Additionally, whilst the proposal somewhat conflicts with the character of the area, the addition of up to two dwellings would not significantly harm the predominantly linear development along the A4. Therefore, only limited weight can be attributed to the harm on the countryside setting and impact upon the landscape character when considering the planning balance.

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

Regarding the social role, the provision of two new dwellings would make a limited contribution to the housing supply. Whilst the site is located outside of settlement, it is deemed to be in a reasonably sustainable location by virtue of its connections to key highways networks. Therefore, the provision of up to two new dwellings holds limited weight in the balance.

Regarding the environmental role, where the site is deemed as being moderately sustainable, there would still be an over reliance on private motor vehicles to access basic amenities and services. Overall, the environmental performance of the development is neutral.

When engaging the tilted balance, the benefits associated with the proposed development are considered to demonstrably outweigh the limited areas of harm raised above. Therefore, Permission in Principle is recommended for approval.

Conclusion:

For the reasons outlined above, the proposal for up to two dwellings is acceptable and as such, is recommended for approval.

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

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

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Approve

Date:	17 July 2026
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	17 July 2026