

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	251233
Address:	Warren Crest Farm, Wick Hill Lane, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3PY.		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of 3no. dwellings following demolition of existing dwelling, outbuilding and agricultural barns.		
Type of Development:	Minor Dwellings (1-9)		
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No		

Summary Of Recommendations

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

Comments On Proposal

Site is located in the countryside adjacent to Wick Hill Lane FINC 25 a restricted byway which leads northwards to Nine Mile Ride, and FINC 15 a PRoW which links to FINC 14 enabling pedestrian access to Finchampstead Church Conservation Area to the SW, thus avoiding the busy Jubilee Road. Access for waste collection is via Nine Mile Ride, and the existing access into the site from Wick Hill Lane is retained.

The site is located within the 'Forest and Rides Valued Landscape' (see 'Valued Landscape Assessment' 2024) Valued Landscapes in the borough are defined on the Policies Map, are designated as valued landscapes in recognition of their distinctive character to the borough's landscape. Development proposals located within or affecting a valued landscape should have particular regard to the following attributes:

- a) Landscape quality (condition);
- b) Scenic quality;
- c) Rarity;
- d) Representativeness;
- e) Conservation interests;
- f) Recreation value;

- g) Perceptual aspects; and
- h) Associations.

Development proposals affecting Valued Landscapes will only be supported where they protect, and where appropriate, integrate with and/or enhance the special features, characteristics and qualities of the landscape, unless the benefits of the development in that location clearly outweigh the harm.

The site is within Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2019 (WBLCA) – area N2 ‘Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland’, a landscape of high quality and sensitivity with the lowest capacity for change. Priority habitats exist within and in close proximity to the site and include an area of Improved Grassland/Traditional orchard as identified by the Berkshire Habitat Inventory to the northern site boundary and an area of Ancient woodland is located a short distance from the site to the east which overlaps further woodland priority habitat.

Each landscape type has recognised ‘**Valued Landscape Attribute**’ which for LCA N2 that are pertinent to the site include;

- ***Rural character of the pattern of pastoral fields interspersed with scattered woods and hedgerow oaks which provide visual diversity as well as continuity with the adjoining forested landscape of the Finchampstead Ridges.***
- ***Scattered mixed and broadleaved woodland, including ancient woodland, and small wetland areas which provide valued ecological habitats including BAP priority habitats.***
- ***Coherent settlement pattern of historic manors, farmsteads and the landmark church of St James located in elevated positions on the ridgeline, which provide a link with the past.***
- ***Remnant parkland landscapes with veteran trees associated with grand manor houses which have a localised impact on landscape character and contribute to sense of place.***
- ***The network of winding sunken lanes and local footpaths which provide access to and enjoyment of the countryside.***
- ***Peaceful and rural ambience with an experience of dark skies which provides an escape in close proximity to the urban population.***
- ***The route of the Roman Road and associated archaeological features from that period which follow the topography of the ridgeline.***

Key Issues affecting LCA N2 pertinent to the site include;

- ***Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.***
- ***The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses and loss of grassland habitats.***
- ***Conversion to equestrian activities, particularly at settlement edges, leading to loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees and a decrease in rural intactness.***

- **Loss or changes in native deciduous woodland** structure through decline in species diversity in the traditionally coppiced woodlands have occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management.
- Effect on tree health or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and **climate change**.
- **Lack of the recruitment of young trees** (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.
- This **character area contains a reservoir of dark skies** and light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.

The **Landscape Strategy** for LCA N2 is

To conserve and enhance the quiet rural character and dark skies. The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the hedgerow network and the woodland habitats.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the coherent pattern of settlement and avoid the spread of urban built form including roads into the area.

The Landscape Guidelines pertinent to the site include;

- **Conserve and protect pasture** and encourage appropriate restoration and management of grassland to restore lost grassland habitats.
- **Conserve hedgerows** as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of woodlands as coppice, with standards left to form future timber trees. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.
- **Conserve and increase the extent of native deciduous woodland**, including BAP priority habitats, using natural regeneration or by planting native species in order to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- **Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.**
- **Restore, conserve, enhance and manage parkland landscapes associated with history manor houses**, planning for the next generation of parkland trees with a programme of tree planting.

Trees

The Tree Survey identifies 68 individual trees and four groups were surveyed. Due to their proximity to the proposed development across the site, 9 C grade fruit trees and one B grade tree (Mulberry) will be lost as a result of the proposals, but they are internal to the site and their removal will not have a negative impact on the character of the surrounding area. All the remaining trees can be retained and adequately protected during the works and it is considered that the proposals are compatible with their existing and future growth.

The Arboricultural Consultant recommends that all the trees proposed for removal can be replaced and I have reflected this within my comments.

It should also be noted that there are 3 important Oak trees on the site, likely Notable /Veteran trees T22, T54 and T59. Trees T22 and T59 have been provided with the 15m protection area/buffer zone in the tree survey according to Government Standing Advice of Veteran tree as well as NPPF paragraph 193c;

development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons⁷⁰ and a suitable compensation strategy exists;

No development or activity should occur within the 15m buffer zone.

Please ensure that the compost bin is removed from the RPA of T22 and no mowing occurs within the buffer zone. Proposed planting is acceptable but should be native and overseen by the retained Arboriculturalist.

The LVIA includes in the Policy Section the relevant policies from the current adopted Local Plan, and includes policies included from the Local Plan Update.

The site perimeter is defined by field boundaries of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. More ornamental style planting is found in the residential garden. There are many good quality Oak trees on the site. The south east boundary consists of a mature overgrown hedgerow with a large mix of species including Hawthorn, Holly, Ash, Field maple. This hedgerow links into the surrounding field network. The south-west boundary is open with a large gap along half of its length. The northern boundary is enclosed with a shelterbelt of woodland 13m wide and contains a variety of mature native species.

The site is generally flat but gently slopes from west to east with the highest point located west of the house.

The design proposals are based on the concept of a farmstead with a simple rectangular form and pitched roof of traditional proportions at 2.5 storeys high.

I agree with the assessment of effects on the landscape character as being slight with the ability to improve the setting and site boundaries according to the guidelines contained in the WBLCA N2, and within the landscape proposals. The visual assessment identified 4 views (2, 5, 10 and 11) out of the 11 selected where they would be potential views of the site. I largely agree with the assessment.

The Landscape and Ecological Proposals include;

- All existing landscape elements of value will be retained and enhanced with additional tree planting along the northern boundary of the application site which will assist in screening and soften the replacement buildings, whilst enhancing biodiversity.

- Introduction of a ha-ha along the southern boundary to create an unobtrusive boundary. Ornamental garden areas (including lawns) will be restricted to small areas directly adjacent to the dwelling.
- The remainder of the site will be composed of informal landscaping incorporating the existing retained trees and newly created wildflower meadow(s).
- Strengthening of the existing vegetated boundaries with under-storey and hedgerow planting.
- The ongoing conservation of existing and proposed features through regular management interventions. to enhance and positively contribute to the biodiversity on the site to support a variety of flora and fauna.

The Landscape Plan – 1822- PWL-ZZ-XX-DR-L-1001 P05 7.3.25 is submitted. I can see that the existing grassland is retained and improved – although we would require more detail on the management of the grassland to achieve the effect of the simplicity of the house sitting in a wider meadow, which we had discussed at a previous meeting and can be included in more detailed Planting Plans required as a condition of planning permission. I would like to see replacement of all the trees removed – and there is scope to add fruit trees as part of this as discussed in the LVIA. I would like to see a cross section detail of the ha ha, I think this is a great addition to the scheme. The driveway is still large – but will be screened some of the year by the meadow.

NB The compost area to be moved outside of the canopy of the T22 a Veteran tree which requires a 15m buffer to development with no development in that buffer zone Please ensure that the plans are updated to reflect this. .

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

CL5 – Hard and soft landscape proposals include method of planting in the Veteran tree Buffer zone included in the specification.

Date:	17.7.25	Signed:	BRC
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