

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	252934
Address:	Land at Lodge Road, Hurst, Wokingham, RG10 0SG.		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of 3 no. detached dwellings with associated access, parking and landscaping and creation of a balancing pond.		
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 Location and Setting

The site is located in the countryside outside of the Hurst settlement boundary and has not been identified for development in the Local Plan. As such the proposals are contrary to policy CP11 of the Core Strategy which seeks to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment. None of the exceptions to the policy apply.

Trees in the majority of the site (save for a narrow strip to the south, are protected by TPO1781/2021. The site is not within a Valued Landscape but it is just opposite the River Loddon Valued Landscape. The site is opposite an archaeological site. There is a drainage ditch adjacent to the eastern site boundary, and a stream on the opposite side of Lodge Road to the site, The nearest footpath is STNH34 to the SW, but there is a narrow footway from beyond the Old Lodge that continues to Sandford Country Park. There is no public footpath adjacent to the site, just a narrow highway verge.

Almost half of the southern part of the site is within Flood Zone 2.

The site is a small field parcel adjacent to open fields to the east that have been used for grazing in the past. Small areas of the site close to the field gate access on Lodge Road appear to have been used for recreation and storage. The centre of the

site is regularly mown but there are substantial areas of scrub including regeneration of Aspen and Blackthorn on the southern and eastern boundaries which are growing into the centre of the site.

Landscape Character

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA), dated November 2019, identifies a number of different landscape character areas (LCA's) across the Borough and provides key information regarding each of the LCA's. The site falls within C1 Hurst River Terrace but is very close to the eastern edge of LCA B1 'Loddon River Valley with Open Water'. The character of the site seems more akin to C1 LCA where key characteristics include;

- Simple agricultural landscape of mainly arable farmland, with pasture enclosed in relatively large straight-sided fields, including smaller areas of horse and pony paddocks.
- Villages located around historic cores including Whistley Green and Hurst, which has a Conservation Area. Newer linear development within these settlements is aligned along the network of roads and rural lanes. There is no strong local vernacular, although there are fine early buildings and building character is unified by the presence of red brick.
- A rural and tranquil area, with only southern edge affected by movement and noise of the M4 and its junction with the A329 (M) and crossed by pylons.

Each LCA has Valuable Landscape Attributes which for C2 in relation to the site include;

Peaceful open character of the undeveloped arable and pastoral landscape, rural settlement pattern of small villages with historic cores unified by red brick. A network of narrow rural lanes and characteristic roadside ditches which contribute to scenic quality. Small wetland habitats including drainage channels and numerous farm ponds valued for flora and fauna.

Key Issues affecting C2 LCA relevant to the site include;

- Hedgerow loss associated with past expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- Demand for residential development increasing linear development along rural lanes and continuing to push towards the amalgamation of close settlements Whistley Green and Hurst impacting rural character. Incremental suburbanisation of buildings.
- Increasing traffic on rural lanes has led to demands for upgrading the winding network of rural lanes with new signage, line painting and widening is threatening the intimate rural character of the lanes.

The Landscape Strategy for LCA C1 is to conserve and enhance the quiet rural and agricultural landscape. There are opportunities to enhance the landscape through

restoration and management of hedgerows. In terms of development the aim is to conserve the low density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green.

The Landscape Guidelines for C2 pertinent to the site include;

Conserve the open and rural qualities of the landscape, conserve and manage hedgerows and hedgerow trees for the links they provide across the landscape for wildlife. Maintain the sparse settlement pattern of villages controlling new development, and avoiding further spread of linear development. Conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the landscape between adjacent village centres and retain their sense of physical and visual separation. Maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes.

Arboriculture

There are mature and semi-mature native trees to the boundaries which contribute to the character of the countryside and screening within the site. Some trees extend into the site and include G35 on northern boundary comprising Ash, Cherry, Hawthorn, Oak, Field Maple and Walnut. Most of this group that extends into site are not compatible with development but are classified 'C' and are earmarked for removal.

The mature and unmanaged hedgerow to the western boundary with Lodge Road is suffering from Ash dieback to varying degrees. Most of these trees are categorised as 'C', which BS5837:2012 says should not be a constraint to development, but some trees notably along Lodge Road, are recommended for removal; T9, T10, T11, T12. These trees are growing within a large area of hedgerow/scrub which is shown in an outline on the Arboricultural Impact Assessment drawing Sept. '25, but there is no more detail about it other than it will be retained.

The western site boundary adjacent to Lodge Road is set back by behind a 2m wide verge but is noticeably very close to the road edge and a proportion of it is in the Visibility Splays for the site entrance which at its widest point is 17m wide reducing to 4.8m inside the site. At this point along Lodge Road, there is a section of very straight road, where traffic gathers speed and appear very close to the site edge.

The trees within the western boundary hedge vary in height from 10m to 17m. Some of the boundary hedge is 4- 5m in height and some maintained at a lower height but there is no information on the species. The hedge is deciduous although there are significant areas of Ivy growth on the taller stems. To the north of the site entrance are 2 Ash category 'U' and to the south are a further 2 Ash category 'C' Ash trees shown to be removed. There are no replacement trees proposed for the Ash, which means that a large section of the western site boundary will be opened up and there will be clear views into the site and of the large detached dwellings proposed, which is out of character within the settlement gap.

The site entrance is proposed along a straight section of Lodge Road where there is no viable verge/path and mature hedgerow is located less than a metre from the road edge. Parts of the tree screen will be lost due to Ash Dieback, and the lower

hedges inevitably will conflict with the introduction of visibility splays but neither the hedges or the visibility splays are shown on the 'Arboricultural Impact Assessment' September 2025 drawing. We need to understand the impact on existing vegetation from achieving visibility splays and the amount of vegetation that will be removed, and the opportunities for replacement trees.

The Landscape and Visual Appraisal – Ref. FOR1578lva April 2025

Landscape Appraisal

The LVIA describes the site as a 'scrubby' field bound by hedgerows and trees where some of the hedgerows are in better condition. Noise can be heard from Lodge Road. The LVA describes the site as sitting in a pocket of residential dwellings having development on 3 sides; south the dwellings from Nursery Close, and single large detached dwellings to the west and north inferring that the site is within an area of development where there is visual connectivity.

The LVA states although there are some features of landscape value, the site lacks a coherent composition, that the landscape features are commonplace with frequent presence of man made elements, human activity including road noise. As such the site has a susceptibility of change considered medium, and the site's landscape value is also medium and the overall sensitivity is considered medium. The proposal for 3 dwellings on the site is considered to be consistent with the surrounding context and with further mitigation the proposals would further integrate with its setting.

Visual Appraisal

Carried out end April when trees are in leaf. The visual impact will be more obvious in winter months as most of the trees are deciduous. A change to the view (from 2019) is the timber post and rail fence that replaces the original field gate at the northern end of the site, and the field entrance is now at the southern end of the site. A small shipping container still on site just by the horse rider warning sign, and the central area of the site viewed from shows maintained lawns and appear to be in use for recreation.

6 Viewpoints are identified which includes Lodge Road at access to Nursery Close, 4 views along Lodge Road, and 1 view from Tape Lane. Receptors are all road users and the sensitivity of the receptor is thought to be medium.

Assessment of the current application when compared to the most recent appeal on site from 2019 – APP/X0360/W/18/3194044

The site has been the subject of 2 recent appeals in 2018 and 2019, the second of which was a result of previous 'decision' having no legal basis and was heard in 2019. Both appeals were dismissed.

In relation to the character and appearance of the site Inspector Major (2019) (direct quotes in italics) noted the following about the location of the site in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment Area C2 'Hurst River Terrace'; a flat/undulating topography, with a scattered settlement linked by rural roads and lanes. A working agricultural landscape with fields of varying sizes, ditches, hedgerows, wooded horizons, a degree of openness.

The site being a small field does not have openness that is found elsewhere but has a strong vegetated boundary which provides some enclosure when seen from Lodge Road. The site appears as an overgrown paddock with some minor structures present. The site has no formal designation, *'In my judgement the site is an important component of the open space that separates the northern and southern arms of the settlement of Hurst/Whistley Green. It is, however, not exceptional in itself and cannot be described as Valued Landscape for the purposes of NPPF187a When travelling between the northern arm (Whistly Green), and the southern arm approaching Sawpit Rod the clear character is that of a rural and largely undeveloped tract of land to the east of Lodge Road.'*

Regarding Badgers Bottom a dwelling to the north of the site Inspector Major states *it is no more than a minor intrusion into the rural scene... I find it stretching a point too far to describe the land to the north of the appeal site as being developed in the sense of it being related to the settlement pattern. It is simply a concealed country house in extensive grounds...*

The Old Lodge on the western side of Lodge Road is located outside of the open space between Whistley Green and Sawpit Road and does not have significant impact on the character of that open space. With regard to Nursery Close, Inspector Major states that *Nursery Close to the south, and houses beyond that are the first real sign of the 'built up' and it is here that they delineate the settlement boundary as set out in the development plan. It is only at its southern boundary where the appeal site comes close to existing development within the settlement. I therefore reject any notion that the appeal site is developed on three sides..'* and it is noted here that there is also a narrow landscape buffer between the southern site edge and the nearest dwelling 'Sandford' which is in Flood Zone 2 and liable to flood.

The appeal report description of the site character and its location in relation to the settlement boundary remains unchanged in 2026.

The site faces Lodge Road, a country road that along with other country roads around Hurst connect to the village, Twyford and Wokingham. The composition of the site landscape features is that of traditional small field in the countryside with mature and standard trees with hedgerows mostly lining the boundaries. There is some evidence of tree planting and self set trees within the interior. The only detracting element is the shipping container that can be seen from walking along the verge next to the site. The description of the site of 'lacking coherent composition' is rather misleading alluding to the fact that the field at some time has been 'designed'/developed, whereas since the site was first recorded on the historic maps its field character remains largely unchanged. The current overgrown character of the site's edges is from lack of management / grazing and has in the last 10 years and more, been subject of speculative development.

I agree that the overall sensitivity of the site to this type of change is medium, but due to its function as part of the wider settlement gap I believe it is on the high side of medium when assessing the site as a valuable component of the undeveloped tract of land east of Lodge Road, which stretches from Whistley Green to Sawpit Road, and eastwards to Tape Lane. This identified area serves a purpose in

retaining the rural character along Lodge Road where development would be keenly felt. The LVA states the magnitude of change would be moderate leading to an overall moderate/adverse impact on the character of the landscape in this location. The LVA considers the landscape effect to be minor and the visual impact to be major/moderate.

On assessing the site, I find its visual function is to form part of a gap between developed areas. The boundary trees and hedgerows to Lodge Road are an attractive feature although where it is composed partly of Ash, some trees may need to be replaced with an alternative species, although Ash readily sets seed, it is liable to Ash Die-Back. Users of the permissive path will be sensitive to any changes on the site that will be significant locally and viewed as an extension to the developed area, of 3 large houses set back from a front facing cul de sac. The dwellings will be seen from the wider landscape along Tape Lane which will serve to emphasise the extension of built development in the countryside, despite installing a landscape scheme that will take many years to establish and will not be totally hidden in the view. I agree the visual impact is likely to be of major/moderate harm.

I find that the proposals for 3 dwellings will have the same effect as the 5 or 12 dwellings previously proposed. The site would not respect the transition between the built settlement area and the countryside. Although the area of open land north of Badgers Bottom is undeveloped it would not be sufficient to offset the harm caused by the site. Although the development proposals are for 3 dwellings instead of the 5 considered at the previous appeal, the impact on the character and appearance from the site remains unchanged in my opinion from Inspector Major's observations, and because the site is an important component of the settlement gap north-south as well as east to west. As a result the proposals will not conserve or enhance the high quality of the environment or retain the sense of place which would have a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the setting.

Site Layout

There is no 'Landscape Strategy Plan' within or appended to the LVA, but written mitigation for the scheme is included in Section 7.

The characteristics of the overall proposals are included in Section 6 which outlines how proposals will minimise potential impacts and provide optimal benefits for landscape of the development and wider setting. The principle objectives include;

- Minimise views from residential areas
- Assist visual integration of the development
- Provide an internal site landscape structure and enhance internal road corridors –
- Reinforce the opportunity to maintain wildlife corridors at the site boundaries.

In order to achieve this the mitigation would include;

- Management and retention of the native tree and hedgerow planting that sits around the site boundary;
- Additional ornamental planting within residential frontages to encourage year round interest and pollinators;

- The heights of the proposed dwellings to reflect those of the surrounding dwellings;
- Built form set back from boundaries to allow growth of boundary vegetation;
- The use of materials for the external envelope of the buildings which minimise potential visual intrusion and follow the local vernacular to aid visual blending

When assessing the proposed mitigation above against the 'Proposed Site Layout P78/104 A it is difficult to relate it to the plan.

The large areas of scrub on the site appear to be retained to their current extent – but may be replaced by tree/shrub/hedge planting in rear gardens that in some cases are fenced to not include these areas and sometimes these areas appear to be included such as Plot 1.

Several trees are proposed for removal, and proposed tree symbols are on the plan in an illustrative fashion that appears to be focussed around the edges of these areas of scrub. A balancing pond is located outside and to the south of the boundary of Plot 3, and there are large areas of wildflower meadow. Who will maintain these areas outside of the Plot boundaries, will it be a management company? Some trees are proposed for removal to the front of the site with Lodge Road, but there are no tree replacements proposed although the large area of scrub to the SW of the site is retained.

There is no single plan that clearly shows the existing planted character of the site. Large areas of scrub / hedge / trees are not included in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment drawing with clear information about the species present. A more informative plan indicating all of these areas and the type of vegetation within would have usefully shown an area of woodland to the south east. Although the PEA goes into more detail about the species which includes Bramble, Elder, Oak, and large areas of Blackthorn to the eastern boundary and SW boundary. There is no basis for understanding the landscape proposals, how they will be managed and by whom. The proposals as they are currently shown will only be sustainable if future residents buy into the low key proposals. It is common practice that residents naturally want to heavily manage/tidy natural vegetation and replace it with ornamental shrubs that are 'easier to manage'.

There is no Landscape Strategy drawing, and the mitigation does not mention SUDS but there is Drainage Strategy drawing within the Flood Report that shows the surface water sewer draining into the balancing pond. The SW woodland is prone to flooding, and there is some flooding in a depression within the rear garden of Plot 3, how will this be dealt with? As almost half of the site is within Flood Zone 2 – a strategy is required as surface water flooding will affect rear gardens but it isn't clear if SuDS will include rear garden of Plot 3 .

There is insufficient information about the existing vegetation on the site which makes it difficult to understand what the actual landscape strategy is, whether the written strategy in the LVA actually relates to the site, and has the drainage strategy been developed in tandem with the site and landscape proposals.

Although the application is for 3 dwellings (as opposed to 5 at the last appeal) the impact of development within the settlement gap and countryside is the same, with the same adverse impacts that cannot be adequately mitigated, as demonstrated in the submitted documents. I am unable to support the proposals.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)			
Contrary to CS, LP, specifically Policies CP1, CP3, CC02, CC03, TB21			
Date:	17.2.26	Signed:	BRC