

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect	To (Case Officer):	Adriana González
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	241567 Rev. A
Address:	Land East of Longwater Road, Longwater Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3TS.		
Type of Development:	Major Dwellings (10+)		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of 40no. dwellings (Use Class C3), together with associated outdoor space and landscaping, drainage infrastructure, hard and soft landscaping, parking, access, and associated works.		
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ Recommend approval but with condition(s) & reason(s) **stated below**;
- ☐ Recommend approval with no conditions
- ☐ Recommend refusal for the reason(s) **stated below**;
- ☐ Negotiate the amendments **stated below**; or
- ☐ Request further information before determination as **stated below**.

Comments On Proposal

Site Location

The site is located south of the settlement edge which is currently formed by Wood Moor housing area to the north of site which is bound by Cricket Hill to the east and Longwater Road to the west. The development would highlight a further expansion beyond the settlement edge into the countryside well beyond the village hub.

The site acts as a physical and landscape buffer between the edge of the settlement and the flood zone of the river Blackwater and the Moor Green Country Park. The site contributes to a sense of separation between the settlements of Finchampstead and Eversley Cross to the south.

Landscape Character

The site is identified in Wokingham Borough's 'Landscape Character Assessment' WBLCA (2019) within area B2 'Blackwater River Valley with Open Water', this is a landscape of moderate quality and sensitivity overall, with a modest capacity for change. The WBLCA identifies 'Valued Landscape Attributes' of LCA B2 the majority of which relate directly to the site;

- **Rural riverine character of the Blackwater River and restored floodplain** provide a sense of space.
- **Ecologically valuable wetland habitats** including BAP priority habitat eutrophic standing waters, lowland mixed deciduous woodland and floodplain grazing marsh, as well as remnant wet meadow and ancient woodland e.g. at Longwater Lane Meadow and Fleet Copse not affected by mineral extraction, which provide an important environment for flora and fauna.
- **Restored gravel pit lakes** which provide important ecological habitats and support a diverse range of birds, as well as opportunities for recreation.
- **Undeveloped character of the valley**, particularly in the floodplain, which provides a sense of naturalness and remoteness.
- **Quiet rural lanes bordered by hedgerows** which provide access to the area and enjoyment of the countryside.
- **Recreational value of the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve** and the public rights of way including the promoted Blackwater Valley and Three Castles Paths which give access to the area and enjoyment of the river valley.
- **Localised areas of tranquillity and peacefulness, with an experience of dark skies**, particularly around the restored lakes, and away from the B0136.
- **Views to the wooded backdrop** of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges create an enclosed and secluded character, particularly around the Moor Green Lakes

The Landscape Strategy in the WBLCA for LCA B2 is:

*To maintain the landscape character of the Blackwater River Valley with Open Water the following strategy is required: **to conserve and enhance wetland and woodland habitats. The key aspects to be conserved, enhanced and actively managed are the River Blackwater corridor, the wetland habitats associated with the river and former gravel works, the woodland (particularly the ancient woodland) and the perceptual characteristics including the peaceful setting and dark skies.***

*In terms of development, the aim is to **conserve the sparse settlement pattern** and retain the views to the wooded backdrop provided by Fleet Copse and M2: Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands.*

The site is also within the 'Blackwater River Valley Valued Landscape' (see Valued Landscape Assessments – 2024). The emerging policy NE6: Valued Landscapes states;

Development proposals located within or affecting a valued landscape should have particular regard to the following attributes, and these have been tested in the LVA Addendum.

- a) Landscape quality (condition);
- b) Scenic quality;
- c) Rarity;
- d) Representativeness;
- e) Conservation interests;
- f) Recreation value;
- g) Perceptual aspects;
- h) Associations.

The forthcoming policy states;

'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'.

In the WBLCA B2 the *Valuable Landscape Attributes*, landscape strategy and landscape guidelines very much focus on the scenic quality and naturalistic character of the remote river corridor and the restored gravel pit lakes with their associated tranquillity and sense of remoteness which is rare in the borough. The gravel pits to the south of the site, will be restored in due course and will become integral to Moor Green Lakes Country Park south and east of the site – see Policy SAL 6 of LP. In order to achieve these positive outcomes it is essential that development remains sparse in the area, the character of tree lined country lanes are maintained and not adversely affected by increase in traffic volumes, views are maintained, but also **that the buffer** between settlement and the river corridor is retained so that the rare qualities can flourish.

The recently adopted *Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan 2022-2038* Plan includes the following in relation to development;

'Our objective is to avoid unplanned speculative development with no infrastructure improvements and instead, to deliver development in a structured and planned manner through which the community has made a positive, proactive and meaningful contribution and around which infrastructure can be proactively planned and delivered'.

**Arboricultural Impact Assessment (incorporating tree protection measures)
EDP ref. 4070_r013a**

The addendum addresses concerns raised in the my original comments and since then, a revised site layout Option 2 has been worked up to form the basis of the re-submission. My chief concern was the lack of recognition of the Veteran trees on site, evaluated from my site visits and backed up by the comments in the Tree Survey Schedule submitted in the *Arboricultural Impact Assessment (incorporating tree protection measures) Doc. Ref. edp4070_r013a*.

It appeared to me that tree nos. T2, T5 were potential veteran trees, and T3, T8 'notable' trees. The Arboricultural Consultant does not recognise them as 'Veteran' although they have been classified as Category A 1– 3 as per Table 1 in BS5837:2012 – which indicates the trees are of Veteran.

My calculations for the Veteran tree 'Buffer Zone' for trees T2 and T5 were 19.2m and 18m respectively, working on 15 times the diameter of the trunk and applying the guidance in the PPG on Veteran trees, and the protection area for these 2 trees will now comply with paragraph 186c of NPPF.

I also flagged up that trees T3, T4 and T8 as being notable trees all A 1,2,3 quality

I also raised an objection to the removal of the Oak trees T22-T25 being removed. Its clear that trees do need to be removed from the wester site boundary to facilitate the development entrance, but I queried the removal of T22 and T23, as they appear to be on the line/edge of the Visibility Splay although there is still no drawing that I have seen that is 100% clear. The design layout is still showing the removal of all 4 trees and these trees cannot be replaced along the boundary, and so the development will be more noticeable in the view for some time whilst new successional planting within the hedgerow starts to grow. The same applies to the section of H931 hedgerow that will be removed. The replacement hedgerows are not clear on any of the landscape drawings sent in but must be included in planting proposal plan.

I note that in the Arboricultural Addendum is the latest 'Tree Protection Plan' Dwg. Ref. edp4070_d014c 18.11.24 does not show the tree protection fencing around the Veteran tree buffer zone (marked on the plan) so is unacceptable.

I am still concerned by many trees along the southern boundary being outside of the site boundary, many of which are growing in or on the banks of the ditch. The trees are protected and hopefully will be retained in perpetuity, as they contribute to the landscape character of the southern boundary.

Land to the East of Longwater Road, Finchampstead LVA Addendum edp4070_r016b

Referring to the following drawings;

Site layout – CATE230603 – SL01 – Rev. B

Coloured Site Layout – CATE – 230603 – CSL01 – Rev. B

LVA Addendum – Document Ref. edp 4070_r016b

Following submission of the Landscape comments in early September 2024, the applicant fielded 3 alternative layouts that were discussed at a meeting with the Council later in September 2024 and Option 2 was thought to be the greatest improvement on the original design.

Following the meeting a revised and updated application was submitted in early December 2024, the addendum to the original LVA has been submitted which addresses the reasons the scheme failed in terms of landscape impact, particularly in relation to Policy TB21 of the Local Plan.

Summary Issues raised by LTO;

- Extends the settlement but fails to integrate with the settlement edge, does not relate to the B2 LCA
- The experience of the PROW is diminished by the proximity of the site entrance to a development dominated by built form, hard landscape and unnecessary footpaths
- The proposals do not integrate with the quality of the landscape and its valued landscape attributes, most of which are found to the site periphery,
- Landscape guidelines for B2 LCA cannot be implemented without fundamental changes to the layout.

- A softer approach to hard landscape materiality needs to be factored in to suit the character of the space
- The layout does not address any public internal spaces or key vistas, lack of permeability through the site/visual connection to the wider landscape
- The scheme does not protect and nurture the key aspects of the local character such as the views, and high quality existing features, such as the Veteran trees have insufficient Veteran tree protection
- The location of the entrance governs the position of the road and site layout which whilst this is largely within the northern part of the site the proportion of built form to soft is too high.

The principle changes to the layout include;

- Reduction of the overall units from 40 to 38;
- The repositioning of built development away from T2 (Vet. Tree) on the eastern boundary. All development footprint is now located outside of the 19.2m offset, as requested;
- Setting back of built development from the southern and western boundaries
- The number of dwellings located along the southern edge of the scheme has reduced from 13 to 6, enhancing the transition from urban to countryside;
- A re-configuration of the internal layout to provide views through development and provide more space for internal tree and shrub planting.
- Reduction in hardscape, including superfluous footpaths and removal of potential connection to the future country park;
- Increased landscape planting around (SuDS) to improve its aesthetics and integrate it more into its surroundings;
- Increased planting around the proposed access to minimise impacts on the users on Longwater Road and the (PRoW)
- A re-location of trees from the northern boundary to reduce over-shadowing issues for neighbouring properties.

The option 2 layout has succeeded in reversing many of the issues I raised, but the key issue still remains which is that of development in the countryside and the narrowing of the buffer of open space between the river corridor and the Moor Green development, the loss of a continuous green strip that extends to the west beyond Longwater Road and to the east towards Sandhurst.

The LVA Addendum includes a table to address the scenic quality of the site (based on Box 5.1 of the GVLIA 3rd ed. and Policy NE6), however, it does not acknowledge that the site itself is within the River Blackwater VL (RBVL) due to it not being over and above that of mere countryside, and not part and parcel of the RBVL. The defined edges of the VL take into account buffer zones and the site falls into this category.

The LVA regards the site as a transitional area with the southern part of the site being more akin the countryside whereas the northern part is akin to the settlement edge to support the redesign of development being pushed further to the northern part of the site.

The transition from settlement to countryside is experienced by users (pedestrians and vehicles alike) of Longwater Road. and enhanced by the landscapes to the west including a grazing field and PRow extending into the extension of the country park and the landscape setting of the south of Finchampstead village.

I have not changed my view of the impact of development being Major/Adverse – but I acknowledge that the applicant has listened to suggestions made by the LTO and the PO at the end September meeting. However, there are still issues that cannot be overcome by the change of layout.

Pushing development further to the north widens the gap between development to the south and the edge of the site – which opens up a space of 30m at its widest point narrowing to 17.5m wide to the west. How usable the space around it will be, although it will be an asset to the site in terms of landscape feature and biodiversity.

The location of the housing inevitably removes views across the field from the users of the PRow and residential views from upper windows. We asked for N-S streets within development so some permeability and snapshot views can be retained and is included in the new layout.

The updated layout also removes the previous road loop and reduces the amount of adoptable road – although there is not a lot of reduction in hard surfacing the type of surfacing is now mixed which seems to be tarmac, and block paving – although the access road to the pumping station should be in a grasscrete type of product so that it blends into the surroundings and minimises visual impact. The number of paved footpaths have also been reduced.

The location of the new entrance is unavoidable as is the sense of urbanisation that will come from its width, the engineering, loss of trees and part of a hedgerow, the impact of lighting, and the increased noise from the increased vehicular activity which will be concentrated as there is no other regular means of transport to be used other than a car.

The number of dwellings proposed has reduced by 2 to 38, more planting is proposed – although there is the issue of the internal and external visibility splays that may potentially affect the extent or the type of planting where it needs to be maintained at no higher than 600mm within the splays.

I cannot see where native hedgerows will be reinstated / repaired as there seems little scope for this.

The Site Layout shows boundary treatments but only brick walls are included. I assume the rest are close board fencing – another urban treatment – but some mitigation can be implemented by using trellis tops of 300mm over 1.5m high internal fencing.

The Illustrative Landscape Strategy edp 4070 d005L 28.11.24 includes the following;

1. Replacement planting around the site access outside the visibility splays Maintain and enhance bramble scrub and mixed native hedge
2. No new tree planting north of the PRow to not overshadow existing south facing gardens
3. New tree planting proposed – (but is constrained to areas outside of the easement – what is the offset for tree planting and which species are not permitted??)
4. Semi-natural greenspace around site periphery and badger exclusion zone, new meadow with retained grassland
5. Attenuation area part of semi-natural green space
6. Hedgerows retained and reinforced and brought into management
5m riparian offset.

Queries on Design Strategy:

- I note that the drainage proposals show an easement for foul and surface water which takes up a considerable area of the southern site, which will be a constraint to tree planting. We need to know detail of how far away from the easement that trees can be planted and the type of tree species that are not permitted.
- The proposed pump house is a considerable size at over twice the size of nearby dwellings. Is it above or below ground?
- The Landscape Design Rationale – Dwg. No. edp4070_d038d 28.11.24 shows the area along the southern boundary as a 5m wide riparian zone' to protect the existing watercourse habitat, and protect otter and water vole habitat (although the area is generally unsuitable for these species), how will the proposed riparian area be protected will it be fenced off?
- The same query springs to mind with the land within the Veteran tree buffers, which are surveyed as being of moderate to low quality grassland. How will the buffer be managed and will it be fenced off – as many Veteran trees are to protect the ground beneath the canopy from compaction, or to protect people from trees shedding branches? By fencing these areas off they are being taken out of use as open space within the development.
- The attenuation basin takes up quite a large part of the POS in the SE of the site. It is a seasonally wet basin for flood storage. The southern part of the site is wetter than the northern, but the areas of open space are in the southern part.
- The significant area of POS introduced in new Option 2 layout is actually quite small at 12m x 5m

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Date:	20.1.25	Signed:	B. Crafer
--------------	---------	----------------	-----------