

MEMORANDUM

From:	Lindsey Abbott Tree & Landscape Officer		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	260689
Address:	Brandywell, Spring Lane, Swallowfield, Wokingham, RG7 1SU.		
Proposal:	Application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the use of land as residential garden.		
Type of Development:	Other Certificates of Lawful Development		
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

The Council's Tree and Landscape Officer objects to the application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the use of land as residential garden. The Officer objects to the proposed certificate because the removal of trees over a decade plus has eroded the existing woodland on this Site and the recent installation of paths with low level lighting within the woodland has likely caused harm to the roots of protected trees as well as diminishing the dark-sky qualities associated with this rural landscape. These actions suggest the applicant does not wish to contribute to or enhance the natural and local environment, the woodland. Further explanation is detailed below.

The Site is located in the parish of Swallowfield and lies in open Countryside. The Site has frontage along Spring Lane, which a country lane lined by hedgerows, trees, including some veteran trees nearby to the west, and other vegetation typically associated with countryside road verges. A large arable field lies to the Site's north as well as a small, wooded parcel and the rear garden associated with neighbouring Balcombe Lodge. A small arable field is directly east of the Site with a small housing development further beyond. There are three medium-to-large arable fields separated by hedgerows to the south and west. Immediately to the west of the Site is the neighbouring Balcombe Cottage. The Site sits in a wooded context—a protected woodland TPO 2003/2025—approximately 350m north of public byway SWAL23.

Woodland TPO

To the south-southeast within the rear parcel, the Site contains both formal lawn, considered the rear residential garden curtilage of this Site, and a large, protected woodland, as referenced above. Google Earth aerial footage from March 2017 shows the main dwelling under construction with the adjacent lawn area populated with some trees and approximately 20m in length, where dense woodland begins. By July 2025, the aerial footage shows a very open lawn area with just a few trees along the eastern edge of the lawn area provide visual screening from the neighbour at Balcombe Cottage. The lawn area has increased to approximately 40m in length (until the woodland starts) in the July 2025 aerial photography.

Woodland TPOs protect all variety and parts of trees that they contain as well as the ground flora within the woodland's floor. Photographs taken on 15th April 2026 during a site visit by the Planning Officer, Claire Moore, indicate recent works including metal edged footpaths surfaced in gravel with electrical lighting units bordering the footpath in places. The laying of paths under tree canopies may have caused damage to the tree roots below (which typically mirror the canopies above); tree roots are protected by TPOs. Lawn also appears to have been maintained as the understory of this woodland, which is not the usual flora found under the canopies of trees in a woodland. Lawn suggests a maintenance regime that has likely disturbed the natural growth patterns of a woodland. Any additional works would not be acceptable including any further formalisation of the woodland.

As per Local Plan Policy CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping 2 d, any development should “protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features.” (p.14)

Landscape Character

More broadly, the Site is situated on rural land between the busy A33 and the B3349 Basingstoke Road, both designated Green Infrastructure Routes. It falls within the Risley Woods Valued Landscape and is situated within the L3 Stanford End Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Landscape Character Area (WBC LCA 2019). The Landscape Character Assessment gives details of the quality, strategy, sensitivity, key characteristics and issues, valuable landscape attributes, etc for this Landscape Character Area.

On Landscape Condition of this WBC LCA (2019) states:

‘The pattern of arable and pastoral fields with mixed woodland, linked by rural lanes and little settlement is intact and in overall good condition. The busy A33 is a detracting element, and disturbs the rural character and tranquility of the area. There are opportunities for woodland and hedgerow habitat recreation and strengthening’.

Key Characteristics of this LCA include: *‘Very sparsely populated, with scattered modern red brick farmhouses’ and ‘Tranquil and remote character, which has dark skies, locally interrupted by the busy A33, which bisects the area, isolating the western half from the rest of the borough’.*

This is echoed by the list of Valuable Landscape Attributes which include: *‘Rural farmed character due to the mosaic of irregular fields of varied size, woodland and sparse settlement’, ‘Strongly tranquil and remote character, with experience of dark skies due to sparse settlement’ and ‘The wooded skyline which provides a distinctive backdrop to surrounding areas, including in adjacent boroughs’.*

The Landscape Strategy for this LCA gives a list of key aspects to be conserved, including conserving the surrounding landscape, the rural character, mixed woodland and ancient woodland, sparse settlement and rural lanes, dark skies and relative tranquillity away from the A33.

The Site, and indeed the protected woodland, make a strong contribution towards the key characteristics of the above described LCA. Therefore, the protected woodland portion of the Site is more in keeping with the countryside than formal residential garden. Local Plan Policy TB21 - Landscape Character requires that development should “retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.”

The application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the use of land as residential garden is contrary to the policy criteria noted above, the Officer therefore recommends refusal.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)			
Date:	12/05/2026	Signed:	L. Abbott