

Date: 18/09/2024

ST NICHOLAS HURST PARISH CONSULTATION SHEET

Application Number: 242067

Land East of Lodge Rd, RG10 0EG

Proposed Development:

“Outline application for the proposed erection of up to 99 no. dwellings, green infrastructure, open space, pedestrian and cycle links, recreational facilities and other associated infrastructure and access points on Lodge Road and Tape Lane with required improvements. (All matters reserved except for means of access.)”

Consultation Period ends : 19th September 2024

WBC agreed extension to [25th September] for SNHPC comments

SNHPC objects to this application and requests WBC to refuse it for the following reasons:

Planning History

There have been many planning applications on this site as detailed in the applicants planning statement. This application is subsequent to the previous application (220458) refused by WBC in June 2022 and dismissed on appeal (APP/X0360/W/22/3309202) in March 2023, attached as Appendix 3. The applicant has made changes to the proposed development, in an attempt to address the reasons why the previous application was rejected by both WBC and the Planning Inspector. These changes include:

- Reduction in the number of houses proposed, from approximately 200 to “up to 99”.
- An increase the proportion of affordable housing in the development from 40% to 50%.
- A higher proportion of the site kept free from development and allocated as publicly assessable open space, including meadows and an orchard.
- An expanded package of benefits including a subsidised minibus service from Hurst to Twyford railway station at peak times.

The previous application (220458) for 200 houses on this site was rejected at appeal (APP/X0360/W/22/3309202) by the Planning Inspector for the following reasons:

1. Paragraph 133: “*I consider that the appeal proposal is in clear conflict with the spatial vision*” set out in WBC’s adopted development plan policies being a major development in a clearly designated Limited Development location.

2. Paragraph 137: *"In summarising the matters set out above, the starting point is the fact that the proposed development would be in conflict with key policies in the development plan. These policies have to be considered out-of-date, because the Council cannot demonstrate a deliverable 5-Year HLS and, as a result, the 'tilted balance' detailed in paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the Framework comes into play. However, notwithstanding this point, I have found that the policies which are most important for determining this proposal accord strongly with the requirements of the Framework, especially with regard to the need to promote and secure a sustainable pattern of development, and I have therefore concluded that these policies should still carry significant weight in this appeal".*
3. Paragraph 138: *"I have further found that the appeal proposal would not fully accord with the 3 objectives of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 8 of the Framework, and would not represent development in a location which can currently be considered sustainable, or could be made sustainable by the improvements and contributions offered by the appellant. The appeal proposal would therefore not represent sustainable development and does not benefit from the presumption in favour of such development."*
4. The development conflicted with key policies in the WBC Development Plan, in particular *"with regard the need to promote a secure and sustainable pattern of development"*.
5. Paragraph 139 : There would be an adverse impact *"on landscape character and in visual terms"*. Harm would also arise from the loss of Best & Most Valuable (BMV) agricultural land and the estimated 45% loss of on-site biodiversity.

The inspector concluded that *"whilst the proposal would give rise to some benefits"* the *"adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh these benefits"* and dismissed the appeal.

The applicant states in their Planning Statement that *"the inspector did not rule out that some level of development could be sustainable at this location"*, implying that the inspector might have allowed a smaller development. This is mis-leading - the inspector made no comments about any potential future development at this site in his 2023 appeal decision.

Current application

SNHPC recognises that the applicant has made changes to the previous proposal, in an attempt to address the reasons for the appeal dismissal in March 2023.

However, we firmly believe that all the reasons for the rejection by the Inspector of the previous proposal remain valid in respect of the new application.

In addition, several new factors since the previous appeal have served to strengthen the case against this application.

1. **Conflict with WBC development plan, spatial strategy and policies** including CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6, CP9 and CP11, CP17 and MDDL Policy CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21.

This application is not in accordance with the WBC Development Plan. The spatial strategy informing that plan seeks to concentrate development in locations that either already have

adequate infrastructure (services and facilities) or where the required level of infrastructure can be developed as part of the Development Plan.

Hurst, however, is a settlement which the Development Plan deems appropriate to accommodate only limited development, due to the lack of available services and facilities, and the limited potential to develop these. As a designated Limited Development location, Hurst is not able to support major developments such as the one proposed in this application. Moreover, this proposed development falls outside the settlement limits of Hurst, placing it further in conflict with WBC planning policies.

This application relies wholly on the fact that the WBC Development Plan is out-of-date and cannot currently demonstrate a 5-year Housing Land Supply. This means that under the National Planning Policy Framework the so-called “tilted balance” comes into effect, creating a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Indeed, the applicant states that “a 5-year housing land supply is not and will not be able to be demonstrated in the near future”.

However, a **relevant new development** is that a new WBC Development Plan covering the period 01/04/2023 to 31/03/2040 has now been published and agreed by the Council (19th September 2024) and is subject to public consultation (Regulation 19) before submission to the Secretary of State for approval.

This new Plan:

- a) Confirms the existing Spatial Strategy for development
- b) Maintains the designation of Hurst as a Limited Development area
- c) Leaves the Hurst settlement boundaries unchanged.
- d) Identifies no new sites for development in Hurst Parish
- e) Demonstrates a 5-Year Housing Land Supply.

It is highly likely that this Development Plan will be approved and come into force around the end of 2024 or early 2025. After that time there will be no presumption in favour of major developments that are not in the Development Plan, such as this one. The applicant is therefore seeking to exploit a very short window of opportunity for this major development, before the new WBC Plan takes effect.

The applicant’s statement regarding Housing Land Supply has clearly been overtaken by these recent events, greatly reducing the validity of the application and strengthening the case for its rejection by WBC.

2. Sustainable development strategy and the sustainability of the location

Sustainability is central to WBC’s development strategy and policies, and it has been clearly demonstrated, including at recent planning appeal hearings, that Hurst is not a sustainable location. The village has a limited range of facilities and services, no cycle lanes, roads with narrow footways, many of which are not continuous, and roads with no footways at all. There is little potential to develop Hurst’s services, facilities and infrastructure to accommodate a major development.

Transportation

WBC's sustainable development policies seek to promote a modal shift away from the motor car and towards other forms of transport.

Hurst's current bus service (128/129) is infrequent, not always reliable (Appendix 4), and has been demonstrated previously as not supporting a modal shift in Hurst residents' transport usage. This application includes provision for a new subsidised minibuss service between Hurst, Twyford Station and Piggott School, operating from 07:00 to 10:00 and 15:00 to 19:00, Monday to Saturday. This private service would utilise a 16-seater vehicle.

The round trip from Hurst to Piggott Secondary school and back would take at least 45 minutes during peak rush hour, and probably longer (due to traffic congestion in the centre of Twyford, and at the A4 roundabout, as well as time needed to pick up and drop off passengers). This means that there would only be three, at most four, services in and out of the village every morning, carrying an absolute maximum of 64 people across the three-hour period. There are currently 440 houses in Hurst village. The proposed development would increase this number by 23% to 540. In that context, one small minibuss would make very little difference to the modes of travel available to the vast majority of residents.

This private service would be funded by a combination of a developer subsidy for 10 years, a new residents' service charge, and current residents paying for each trip. This raises significant operational issues, such as the potential prioritisation of new residents if more than 16 people wanted to use a particular service, or the acceptance of bus passes on the new private service.

This proposed new bus service does nothing to improve access to Winnersh, Embrook, Wokingham, Binfield, Bracknell or Woodley.

The applicant's Transport Statement also proposes that the current 128/129 bus service be re-routed though the new development. Both the new private minibuss service and the existing 128/129 bus would use an "emergency vehicle and bus-only egress" from the new development onto Tape Lane. These buses would turn east out of the development onto a section of Tape Lane on which current residents' vehicles are parked, and then turn north onto the A321.

This would create a major highway safety issue. The 128/129 service operates full-sized buses, and egressing onto Tape Lane, on a bend, will necessitate the bus crossing the highway where current residents' vehicles are parked. The Transport Statement suggests that parking restrictions could be applied, which will penalise current residents in Tape Lane. A large bus turning out of Tape Lane onto Broadwater Lane (A321) will also be potentially difficult.

The application includes proposed improvements to pedestrian routes and cycleways, both within Hurst village and between Hurst and Twyford railway station. It is very difficult to see how these proposed improvements could be implemented in practice. The constraint is physical space and cost.

The aim to provide improved cycle links from Hurst to Twyford has gone through a number of proposals, including: dedicated cycle lanes; removal of the centre white line; ghost cycle lanes; implied cycle lanes; and introducing shared footways with pedestrians. It is unclear which option is being suggested by the applicant, but what is clear is that none of them

removes residents' road and footway safety concerns, in particular in respect of egress from their driveways. These concerns are supported by the applicant's own Transport Assessment Appendices, which show that around 90% of traffic is over the speed limit on Lodge Road B3030 and around 28% of traffic is over the speed limit on Hurst Road A321. Therefore, improving these cycle and walking routes is just not possible in practice.

The application contains a number of other proposed improvements to facilitate non-motor vehicle transportation, including relocating bus stops and adding new bus shelters, a "mobility hub", car share within the new development itself, and various financial incentives for new residents to use alternative forms of transport. There will be a significant service charge levied on the new residents to provide and maintain all of these new facilities. However, we believe that these are little more than window-dressing by the applicant, to try to create the impression that Hurst can be turned into a sustainable transport location. The reality is that it cannot be.

This plan additionally relies on third party agreements including the Parish Council's agreement to use the School Road playing field to provide rear access to the Village shop. There is no evidence that any relevant third party has been approached.

Flooding

The flood risk assessment submitted with this application "*confirms that the risk of all sources of flooding is low at this site*". This assessment is completely inaccurate, and our Appendix 1 contains photographs of the site flooded in 2017, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024. There was also severe flooding in Tape Lane, adjacent to the site, in 2023 and 2024.

The application includes a detailed drainage strategy, incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) with measures including permeable paving, a water detention basin, an attenuation pond, and a series of drainage ditches discharging into a main watercourse (Hatchgate Ditch). If these measures do succeed in reducing the risk that the site itself floods less frequently, they would do so only by pushing the problem of flood water to other vulnerable locations around the village.

This problem is clearly reflected in the **WBC Section 19 Flood Investigation Draft Report**, prepared in March 2024 and attached as Appendix 2 (including numerous photographs, as well as detailed flood and drainage map). This Report was written in response to floods in Hurst in March/April 2023 which damaged 3 properties in the village and caused multiple road closures. Flooding occurred on Tape Lane, School Rd, and Broadwater Lane (A321), all of which are relevant to this proposed development.

The Report concludes that **Hurst has a significant and growing flood problem, and that a flood event similar to that in 2023 will occur in 1 in 3 years**. Clearly this is another major reason why Hurst cannot be a sustainable location for major development.

Specifically addressing Hurst's Flood Zone 1 classification, the Report at 4.1 states that:

"It should be noted that the Flood Zones within the Flood Map for Planning represent undefended flood risk and therefore do not consider existing flood defences or the performance of assets. It is likely that hydraulic river models have not been developed for drainage networks and ordinary watercourses, and therefore the fluvial flood risk posed by

these systems is not represented in the Flood Map for Planning. Areas at greatest risk of fluvial flooding include the low-lying central regions of Wokingham Borough, including the areas of Whistley Green and Hurst."

The reasons for the flood risk in Hurst are varied, and together create the conditions which have led to the increased frequency and severity of flooding in recent years:

- The central village area of Hurst, known as Hurst River Terrace, is low and flat, with higher ground on three sides; the creation of the landfill hills to the west of the village before 2005 cut off the possibility of water draining in that direction into the river Loddon.
- The topography means the water table is high (e.g. no Hurst houses have cellars); heavy rain therefore generates surface water run-off; it cannot be absorbed by the ground.
- Paragraph 9.2.1 there is a lack of capacity along the "*main river and ordinary watercourse systems*".
- Paragraph 3.3 there is a "*vast drainage network*" of "*main rivers*" but there is just one exit route for all the surface water – Twyford Brook at the north.
- The condition of the drainage assets across the whole of the village is assessed, and at Paragraph 3.2.1 described as "*poor*" or "*very poor*". Watercourses, ditches, bridges and culverts are all badly maintained.
- Specifically, Thames Water's pumping station at the Twyford Brook "pinch-point" is judged to be "*woefully inadequate*" (The Plan item 4). Therefore, when there has been a lot of rain, water backs up from this single pinch-point, causing flooding in multiple locations around the village.

Hurst village has therefore become what has been described as a "surface water entrapment triangle". This proposed development would add substantially to the water caught in that trap and increase the probability of flooding around the village.

The problem would be exacerbated by the poor state of repair of the Hatchgate Ditch, into which much of the surface run-off from the development would flow. Recent surveys by residents suggest that Hatchgate Ditch no longer functions effectively as a main river for drainage purposes, and actually does not now exist in several places.

It should be noted that the EA opposed the original 2022 application at this site, pending hydraulic modelling of the nearby main river (Hatchgate Ditch) to appraise the flood risk.

The Section 19 Flood Investigation Report explicitly states that WBC's Flood Management Strategy Action Plan 5.3 is aimed at "*ensuring that planning decisions take full account of flood risk*". This application does not do that, and up to 99 new houses on the land between Lodge Road and Tape Lane would pile even more pressure onto assets that already do not provide adequate capacity, are poorly maintained, and allow frequent flooding.

3. Adverse impact on landscape and character

The proposed development would irreversibly change the landscape and character of the site. The measures proposed by the applicant, such as tree and hedgerow planting and retention of open green space, would not be able to disguise the fact that two areas of high-density housing would be built.

The proposed new development would fail to conserve the low-density pattern of development in Hurst village. The applicant's statement that the proposed development would "*integrate into the existing character*" does not stand up to scrutiny. The character of the site and surrounding area would be permanently transformed from rural countryside to suburban estate.

This was the view of the inspector in the dismissed appeal (APP/X0360/W/22/3309202 in 2023 in respect of the original application and one of the reasons for his dismissal of the appeal. Although the development currently proposed is of a smaller scale than previously, the visual impact on the areas of the site that would be developed would be the same, and very different to the rest of Hurst village.

The loss of the Land between Lodge Road and Tape Lane also known as the 'Inverted C' referred to by previous Inspectors is considered an important landscape character, would be a significant loss.

4. Loss of agricultural land and biodiversity

In the dismissed appeal (APP/X0360/W/22/3309202 in 2023 the inspector included the loss of Best and Most Valuable (BMV) agricultural land as a factor in his dismissal of the appeal. The applicant makes the case that the current development retains an area of BMV land as a proposed 'Common'. However, this does not change the fact that a substantial area of BMV would be permanently lost.

The applicant claims that a biodiversity net gain of 11.04% will be achieved as part of the proposals, with habitats deemed to be of low ecological importance more than compensated for through replacement tree and grassland planting.

We believe that this assessment is over-optimistic and that the proposed development would lead to a net loss of biodiversity on the site. In recent years some parts of the site have evolved into wild meadow and nearby residents report an increase in the abundance of many species of wildlife, as well as a more diverse flora and fauna. The existing hedgerows and ditches are thriving wildlife corridors, which would be disrupted by 99 new houses and the associated human activity. In short, there would be significant harm to the existing ecology, putting the proposed development in conflict with WBC policies on environmental protection.

Conclusion

This application would create a large-scale development in a fundamentally unsuitable location, causing permanent harm to the community of Hurst.

SNHPC therefore opposes the application and requests WBC to refuse it.

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Appendix 2 - WBC Draft S19 Flood Investigation Report for Hurst

Appendix 3 - Dismissed appeal Land East of Lodge Road for 200 dwellings
(APP/X0360/W/22/3309202) in March 2023

Appendix 4 – Bus Timetable and 2 letters confirming unreliability of service from Thames
Valley Buses

Objection to Planning Application Number 242067 : Housing development on land bordering Lodge Rd and Tape Lane Hurst

“Pictures are worth 1000 words”

The pictures enclosed in two parts were taken from Tape lane over the years and throughout the seasons to support of our written objection .They show Councillors and Council Officers :-

- 1.The impact this loss of green space and habitat would have on our village. It will be lost forever if this proposed development is approved.
- 2 .The extent of flooding on the proposed development site and in Tape Lane as far back as 2017 that throughout the winter months and spring often extends along the A321 to Wards Cross and Lodge Road due to the totally inadequate surface and foul drainage system serving Hurst that Thames Water refuse to upgrade .



The proposed development site : A tranquil oasis and attractive landscape in the centre of Hurst Village with hedgerows full of nesting birds and wildlife inc foxes, rabbits, a hunting ground for birds of prey, and substantial grazing pasture that can never be replaced.



Local amenity : Horses and donkeys have been grazing here or over 40 years to the delight of locals and children walking and cycling to and from school .



The tranquil winter Landscape



Glorious views of the pasture in the summer



The proposed development site is also a popular feeding and resting area throughout the seasons for flocks of wild birds and migrating Canada Geese



Flooding : The proposed development site /pasture and surrounding roads has a history of flooding that has got much worse in recent years.

Flooded 2017



Flooded 2021



Flooded 2022



Extent of flooding on Proposed Development Site 2nd January 2023



Extent of Flooding on Proposed Development Site 8th January 2023



Extent of Flooding on Proposed Development site 9th January 2023



**Still flooded
16th January 2023**



Proposed Development site flooded

1st February 2023



Still flooded 1st April 2023



Extent of flooding and sewage floating in Tape Lane looking East bound on 1st April 2023
Worst flooding in over 40 years



Development Site Flooded 9th January 2024



9th January 2024 :Substantial Flooding and sewage again in Tape Lane and surrounding area .



Development Site Flooded 14th January 2024



Still Flooded March 2024



Pictures taken by Derek Birtles : Ballacloan , Tape Lane Hurst

Wokingham Section 19 Flood Investigation

Draft Report

March 2024

Prepared for:

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Contract

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This report describes work commissioned by Wokingham Borough Council, by an instruction dated 13 October 2023. The Client's representative for the contract was Ray Drabble. Peter Rook and Grace Sheppard of JBA Consulting carried out this work.

Purpose and Disclaimer

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The conclusions and recommendations contained in this Report are based upon information provided by others and upon the assumption that all relevant information has been provided by those parties from whom it has been requested and that such information is accurate. Information obtained by JBA has not been independently verified by JBA, unless otherwise stated in the Report.

The methodology adopted and the sources of information used by JBA in providing its services are outlined in this Report. The work described in this Report was undertaken between (October 2023 and March 2024) and is based on the conditions encountered and the information available during the said period. The scope of this Report and the services are accordingly factually limited by these circumstances.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank staff from Wokingham Borough Council, the Environment Agency, Thames Water and local residents for their contributions and input into this investigation.

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Abbreviations

AEP Annual Exceedance Probability
AOD Above Ordnance Datum
BGS British Geological Society
WBC Wokingham Borough Council
DTM Digital Terrain Model
EA Environment Agency
JBA Jeremy Benn Associates
LiDAR Light Detection and Ranging
LLFA Lead Local Flood Authority
NGR National Grid Reference
PFR Property Flood Resilience
RMA Risk Management Authority
RoFSW Risk of Flooding from Surface Water (Environment Agency mapping)

Executive Summary

Background

Following flooding across Wokingham on 31 March 2023, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) is undertaking a formal flood investigation under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

Wokingham Borough is located in Berkshire, in southern England. Internal flooding is known to have occurred to at least 6 properties within the Borough as a result of the flood event on 31 March 2023; this includes three properties in the parish of Hurst, one property in the centre of Wokingham; and one property in Earley, east Reading. Hurst is the main hotspot for flooding due to the extensive river and ditch network present around the settlement. As the number of properties affected by flooding in March 2023 constitutes 'significant flooding' in accordance with its [Flood Investigation Policy](#), WBC is under a duty to investigate this flooding. WBC has appointed JBA Consulting to undertake this investigation on its behalf.

Stakeholder engagement

As part of the Section 19 investigation, JBA Consulting engaged with multiple local stakeholders in Wokingham, including residents, Council members and Risk Management Authority partners. The objectives of engagement were to gather facts, opinions, and data to aid the understanding of the investigation; and to enable the involvement of community representatives in the investigation. The results of the stakeholder engagement are set out in Section 2.

Catchment characteristics and long-term flood risk

Section 3 describes the watercourses, drainage network, topography and geology of Wokingham Borough. Section 4 outlines the existing long term flood risk information on the risk of flooding from rivers, surface water and groundwater.

There have been 8 recorded flood events in Wokingham since March 1947. More recent events have included 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013, and 2015, all of which caused flooding to highways and numerous properties around the Borough.

Flood Risk Management

Responsibility for flood risk can be divided into "flood risk management" and "emergency response". Section 5 describes the roles and responsibilities of the various bodies involved in flood risk management and emergency response. Section 5.3 describes the existing flood risk management activities undertaken in the Borough, which include channel maintenance and a flood warning system.

The storm event on 31 March 2023

During the month of March leading up to the event, rainfall was continuous, although extreme rainfall depths were not recorded. However, rainfall was high compared to March in previous years, meaning it is likely that antecedent conditions exacerbated flooding within

the borough. During the event on 31 March, an average rainfall depth of 30.2mm fell over 6.5 hours, which is approximately a 1 in 3 (33.3%) annual chance rainfall event.

Incident response

During the event, organisations worked separately in accordance with their operating instructions.

Correspondence between Wokingham Borough Council and its Highways contractor (VolkerHighways) indicated the need for road closures within the area, due to flooding. WBC received 32 call outs on the evening of 31 March 2023 regarding highway flooding issues, some of which were passed on to Volkers Highways Agency.

Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service received one call out related to this flood event, which involved internal flooding of a primary school in Sonning. They were able to pump the floodwater out of the building.

Source-pathway-receptor analysis

The sources, pathways and receptors of flooding during the event were as follows:

- Sources – extreme rainfall increasing water levels of local watercourses and ditches
- Pathways – exceedance of channel capacity in main rivers and ditches, causing water to flow along roads and footpaths
- Receptors – internal flooding to at least 5 properties, property garden flooding, flooding of roads causing restricted access.

Recommendations

Section 9.2 includes discussion of some recommendations for strengthening the management of flood risk in the affected areas of the Borough, based on observations from the 31 March 2023 event. Based on the identified causes and mechanisms of flooding, it is recommended that the following measures should be considered: watercourse maintenance and awareness of riparian responsibilities; Property Flood Resilience (PFR); and community flood resilience.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background to investigation

Following flooding in Wokingham on 31 March, Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) has undertaken a formal flood investigation under Section 19 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010.

It is a statutory requirement for LLFAs to investigate flooding to the extent that it considers it 'necessary or appropriate'. WBC has outlined its criteria for undertaking a Section 19 investigation in its [Flood Investigation Policy](#). WBC will investigate all flooding incidents reported by residents, or that otherwise come to its attention, that involve:

- *Internal flooding of habitable property (excluding garages and outbuildings)*
- *Flooding of any road that requires formal closure of that road and diversion of traffic*
- *Flooding of critical infrastructure that results in loss of service to consumers or potential loss of service*
- *Smaller "near miss" flooding incidents*
- *Smaller scale flooding and "ponding" on the highway*

Any investigations undertaken will seek to establish the likely causes of the flooding incident, the relevant Risk Management Authorities (RMAs), and any actions undertaken or proposed by the relevant RMA.

The flooding that occurred in Wokingham Borough on 31 March and 1 April 2023 caused internal flooding to at least 6 properties, with the most significant flooding impacts in Hurst Parish. Therefore, this meets the criteria for a Section 19 investigation. WBC appointed JBA Consulting to undertake this investigation on its behalf.

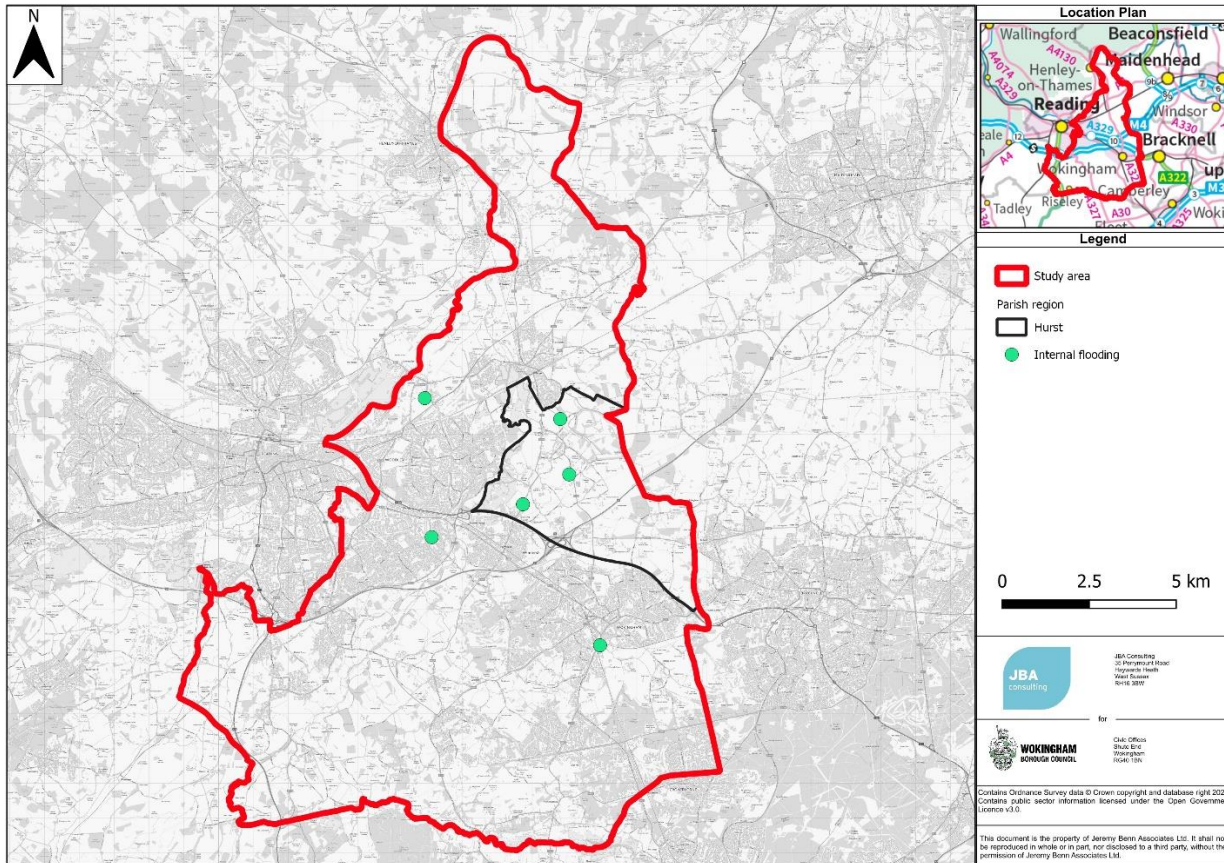


Figure 1-1: Internal flooding in Wokingham in March 2023

1.2 Site location

The borough of Wokingham is a Unitary Authority with borough status in Berkshire, England. The River Thames and the River Loddon flow through the borough and are identified as Environment Agency (EA) main rivers. There are a host of other streams and ditches, notably within Hurst parish that are also designated as Main Rivers.

1.3 Data collection

A wide range of data has been collected and assessed to inform the Section 19 investigation. This data has been used to understand the causes of flooding in Wokingham Borough, and includes the following:

- Open-source data from GOV.UK
- Photographs from a site visit, showing flood sources, pathways and receptors
- Correspondence with residents during site visits on 28 November 2023 and 18 January 2024. The site visits involved visiting four of the flooded properties in Hurst and Wokingham, where we talked to residents and members of WBC to understand more about the mechanisms of flooding on 31 March.
- Hydrometric data (rainfall and river level data)
- Information from authorities on drainage infrastructure, such as those managed by highways authorities and water companies

- Other data, such as photographs, newspaper articles and notes from the events

2 Stakeholder Engagement

JBA Consulting engaged with multiple local stakeholders in the Wokingham area including residents, community representatives, landowners, other Council departments, Council Members and RMA partners.

The objectives of the engagement were to:

- Gather facts, opinions, and data to aid the understanding of the investigation
- Enable the involvement and buy-in of the community in the investigation
- Provide a more technical debrief of the event with RMA and operational partners
- Disseminate the findings of the investigation to the community

A list of key stakeholders and how we engaged with them is shown in Table 2-1. The engagement terminology is taken from the Environment Agency's 'Working with Others' (2013) methodology:

- Inform- provide information
- Consult- receive, listen, understand and feedback
- Involve- decide together
- Collaborate- act together
- Empower- support independent action

Table 2-1: Key Stakeholders

Role	Organisation	How to engage	Type of engagement
Residents	N/A	Consult	Site visit, online questionnaire, public engagement meeting
Parish/Town Council	Hurst Parish Council	Consult	Site visit, correspondence
Water and Sewerage Company (WaSC)	Thames Water	Involve	Invitation to contribute, correspondence, data provision
Highway Authority	VolkerHighways	Involve	Invitation to contribute, correspondence, data provision
Environment Agency	Environment Agency	Involve	Correspondence, data provision, site visit
LLFA	Wokingham Borough Council	Involve	Invitation to contribute, correspondence, online survey distribution, site visit, data provision
Council Members	Wokingham Borough Council	Consult	Invitation to contribute, site visit
Emergency Planning	Emergency Management Wokingham Borough Council	Consult	Invitation to contribute, correspondence

3 Catchment characteristics

3.1 Topography

A large proportion of Wokingham Borough is relatively low lying, particularly in Hurst Parish where the majority of the flooding occurred. Hurst is located within the centre of the district, north of Wokingham and south of Whistly Green. The area is characterised by low lying elevations, surrounded by steeper topographies to the north and south of the district. Areas of steeper topography include the town of Wokingham, southeast of Hurst, as well as Wargrave and Remenham, located in the northern part of the district. Figure 3-1 indicates that elevations within and surrounding the study area range between 1.22mAOD and 270.02mAOD.

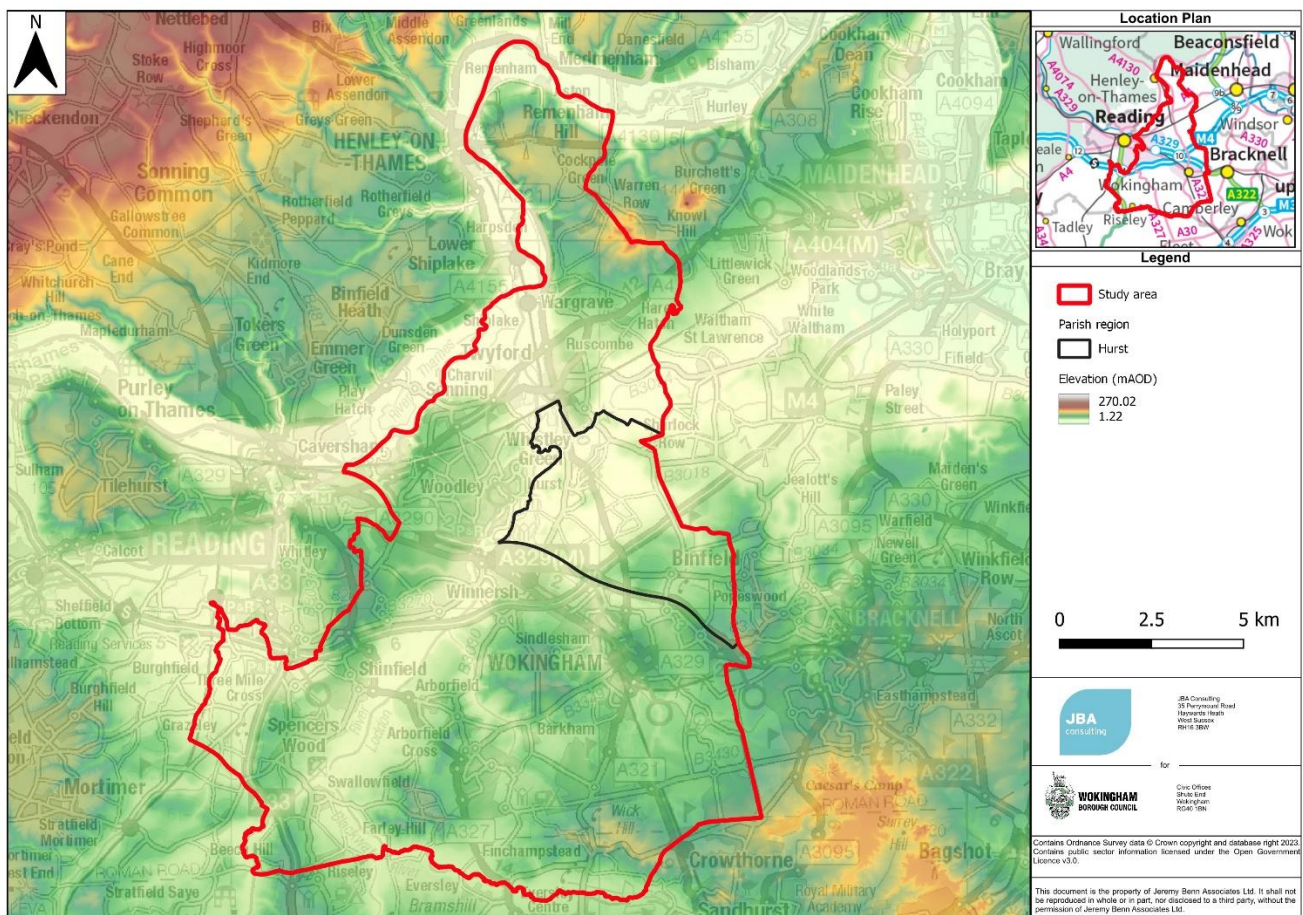


Figure 3-1: The topography of the study area

3.2 Geology and soils

British Geological Survey (BGS) 50-kilometre mapping shows that the Wokingham area is underlain by different types of bedrock. The north of the borough is underlain by chalk bedrock, classified as a principal aquifer, which indicates that the rock is very permeable. The south-east of the borough is characterised by bands of Bagshot, Windlesham and

Camberley (sand) and Claygate (sand, silt, and clay) bedrock. These rocks are not as permeable as chalk and may be influenced by fluvial food risk as they have reasonable water bearing potential, classed as secondary aquifers. This means that groundwater levels may rise with river level. Areas overlying either principal or secondary aquifers are at risk of groundwater flooding, if the water table reaches the ground surface. The low-lying area in the centre of the district is underlain by River Terrace deposits, characterised by silt, sand and gravel.

[Landis Soilscales Viewer](#) highlights that soil type varies within the Wokingham Borough. A significant part of the central study area (area north of Wokingham, including a southern part of Hurst) is characterised by slowly permeable, seasonally wet, slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils. These soils are considered to have impeded drainage. Additionally, the majority of Hurst and Wokingham is characterised by loamy soils with naturally high groundwater. These are considered to be naturally wet soils, with high water tables.

3.3 Drainage system and river network

Watercourses in England are designated as either 'main rivers' or 'ordinary watercourses' by the EA.

Figure 3-2 indicates the presence of extensive watercourse links within the Wokingham Borough. The River Thames flows eastwards along the northwestern borough boundary. A tributary of the Thames, known as the River Loddon, flows south, along the eastern fringes of Wokingham. An extensive watercourse network is present within the centre of the Borough (Whistley Green and Hurst area), characterised by tributaries of the River Loddon, including the Twyford Brook and Emm Brook. The Hurst area is distinguished by a vast drainage network, the majority classified as main rivers.

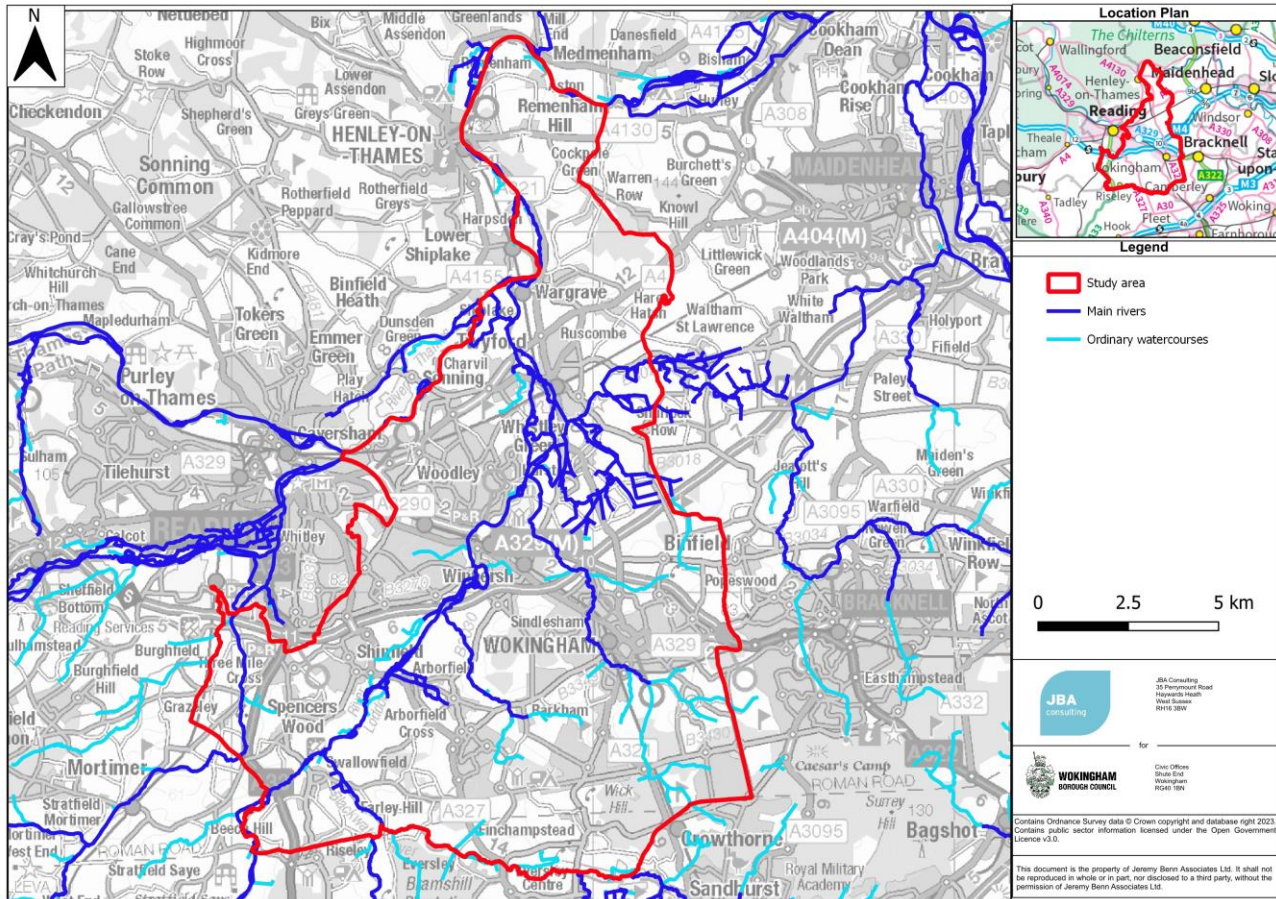


Figure 3- 2: Watercourses within Wokingham Borough



Figure 3- 3: Photographs of the Twyford Brook, a Main River in Hurst and Twyford

3.3.1 Assets

The EA'S AIMS database indicates that the average condition of assets within the Hurst area is classified under the Environment Agency asset condition grades as 'poor' or 'very poor'. These assets are located along many of the ditches in Hurst, specifically located in proximity to properties 1 and 2. Figure 3- 2 indicates that the majority of assets in the area are maintained by either the Environment Agency or private individuals/companies. The assets located near the properties are primarily bridges or culverts with a condition classification of 'fair' or below (Figure 3- 3), indicating the lack of maintenance and/or clearance of vegetation.

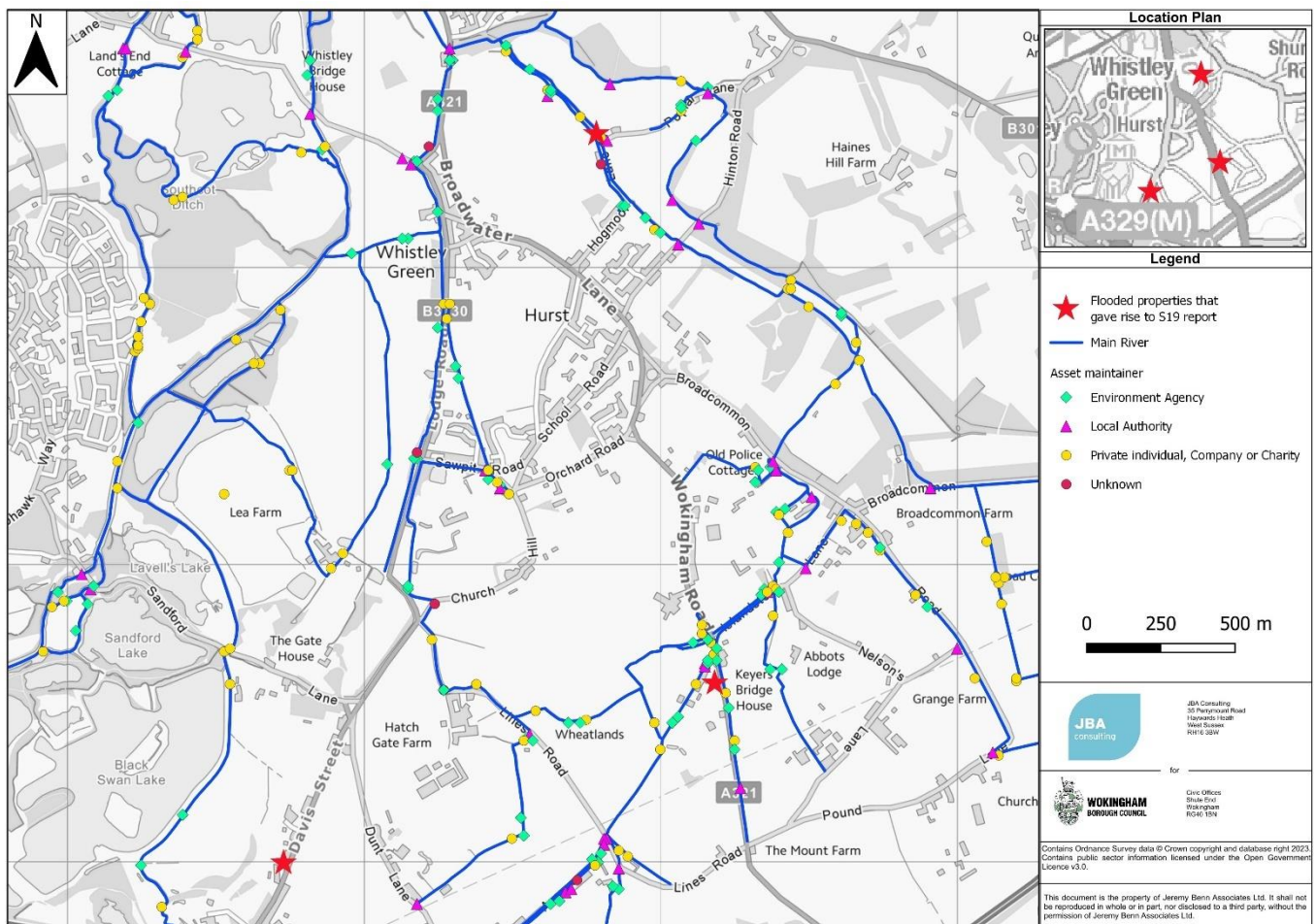


Figure 3- 4: Maintenance of assets in Hurst

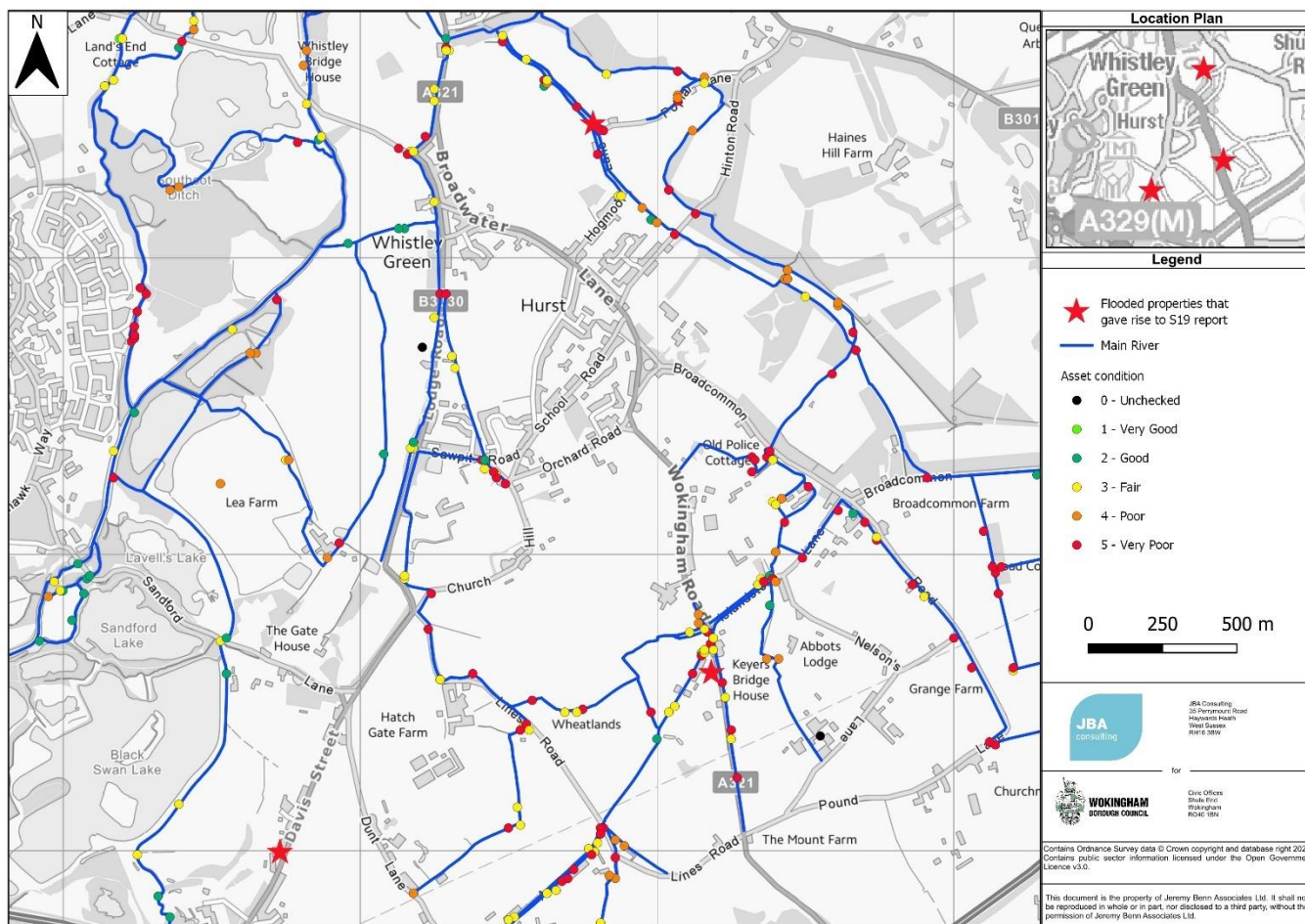


Figure 3- 5: Condition of EA assets in Hurst

4 Long-term flood risk information

4.1 Risk of flooding from rivers

The Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning, shown in Figure 4-1, defines areas at risk of flooding from fluvial and tidal sources. Land within Flood Zone 3 is defined as having a 1.0% or greater probability of river flooding in any given year. Areas within Flood Zone 2 have between a 1.0 % and 0.1% chance of river flooding in any given year. Flood Zone 1 refers to all remaining areas (land having less than 0.1% annual probability of river or sea flooding). It should be noted that the Flood Zones within the Flood Map for Planning represent undefended flood risk and therefore do not consider existing flood defences or the performance of assets.

It is likely that hydraulic river models have not been developed for drainage networks and ordinary watercourses, and therefore the fluvial flood risk posed by these systems is not represented in the Flood Map for Planning. Areas at greatest risk of fluvial flooding include the low-lying central regions of Wokingham Borough, including the areas of Whistley Green and Hurst.

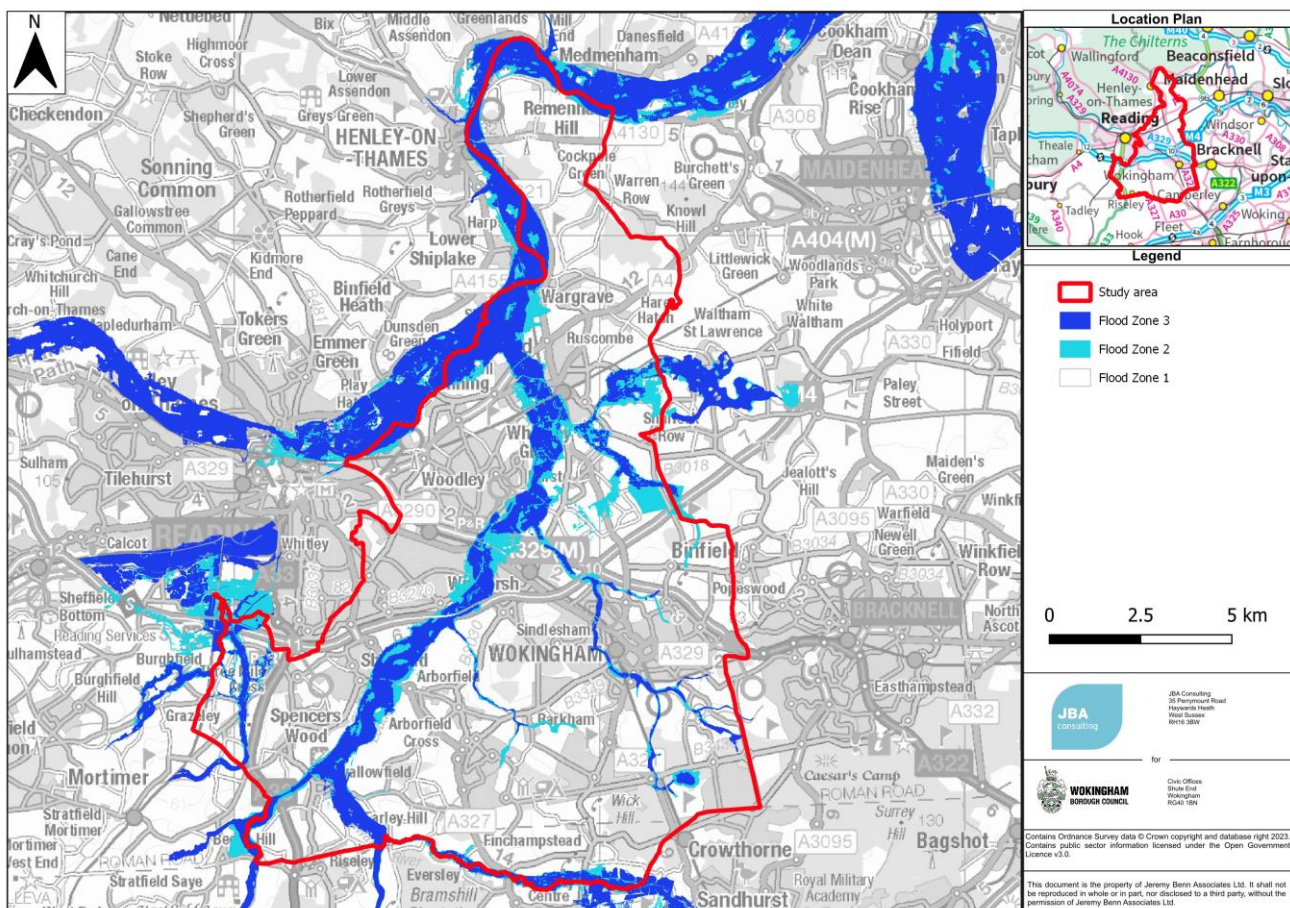


Figure 4- 1: Flood Map for Planning

4.2 Risk of flooding from surface water

Flooding from surface water is caused by intense short periods of rainfall. It often occurs when the natural (or artificial) drainage system is unable to cope with the volume of incoming water. Surface water flooding problems are inextricably linked to issues of restricted drainage (for example due to blockage of drainage systems by debris) and flooding on surface water sewer networks.

The Environment Agency has published the Risk of Flooding from Surface Water (RoFSW) national mapping dataset, which shows the risk of surface water flooding. Figure 4-2 shows the areas at risk of flooding in Wokingham Borough in response to rainfall events with the following percentage chance of an event occurring in any given year (Annual Exceedance Probability):

- High risk – greater than a 3.3% chance (1 in 30-year)
- Medium risk – between a 3.3% and 1.0% chance (1 in 30-year to 1 in 100-year)
- Low risk – between a 1.0% and 0.1% chance (1 in 100-year to 1 in 1,000-year)

4.3 Groundwater flooding

Flooding from groundwater occurs when the water table within the underlying rock or soil rises above ground level or interacts with properties or infrastructure below ground level. Figure 4-2 shows the risk of groundwater flooding in Wokingham Borough, indicating the varying levels of risk posed. Generally, a large proportion of the borough has a negligible risk of groundwater flooding, due to the nature of the geology. It is evident that the southeastern part of the district has a high risk of groundwater flooding, including a large area of Wokingham town. Additionally, localised areas of medium and high groundwater risk are identified within the centre of the district, in proximity to the extensive watercourse networks.

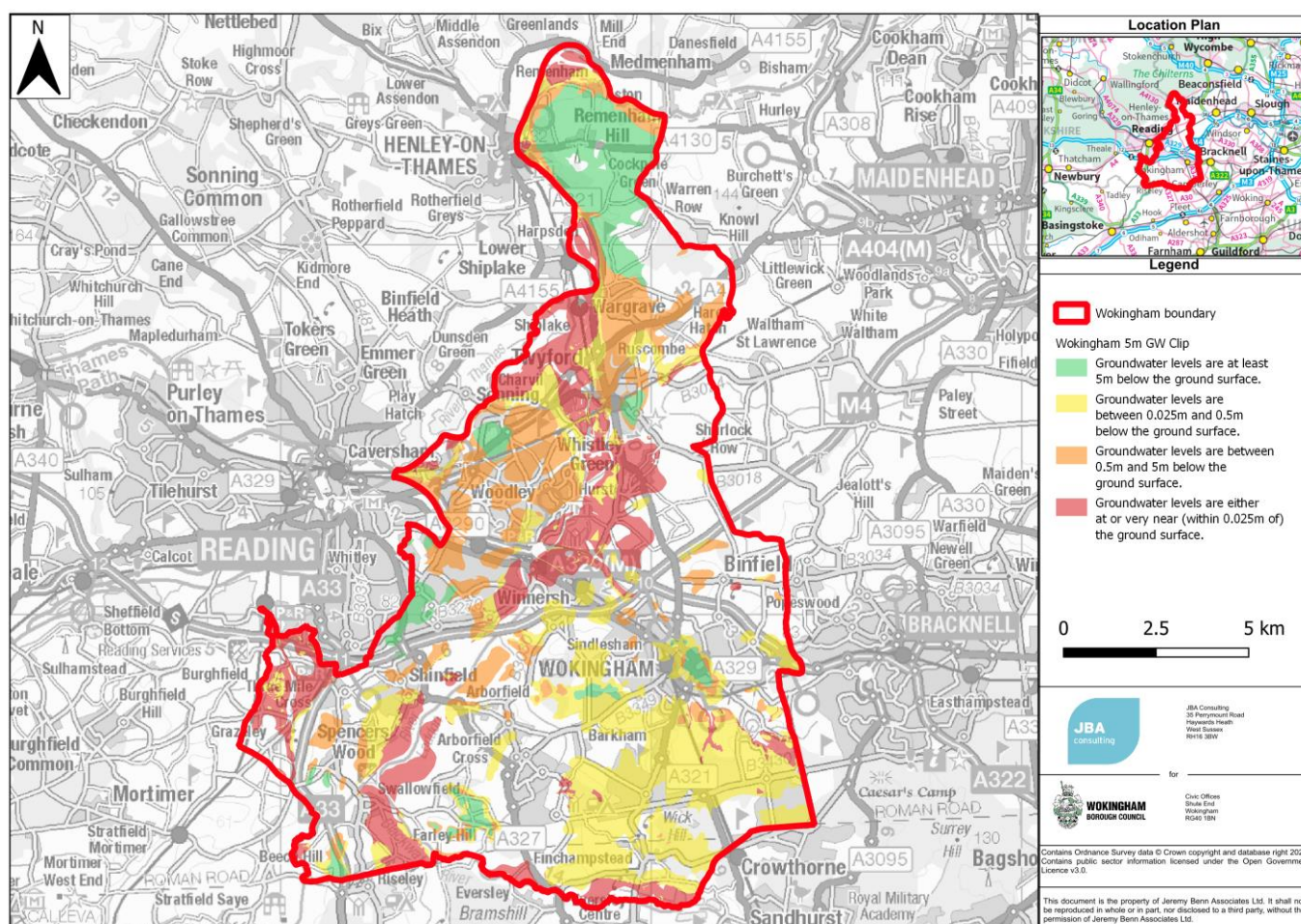


Figure 4- 2: Groundwater flood risk within the Wokingham Borough

4.4 Flood history

Wokingham Borough Council's Level 1 [Strategic Flood Risk Assessment \(SFRA\)](#), updated in 2020, indicates an extensive historical flooding record within the borough. Table 4-1 details the major flood events identified in the Level 1 SFRA, which were recorded by Wokingham Borough Council. Additionally, Table 4-1 details the flood events included within the EA Recorded Flood Outlines dataset.

Table 4-1: Flood history

Date	Source of flooding	Description of impacts
March 1947	Local drainage/ surface water	Flooding impacted the west of the Borough. No additional information was provided.
February 1990	Local drainage/ surface water	Flooding impacted the north of the Borough. No additional information was provided.
December 2000	Channel capacity exceedance/ surface water	Approximately 13 highways were flooded across the Borough. At least 10 properties were flooded externally, and 4 internally. Many of the properties affected were located around the urban centre of Wokingham.
December 2003/January 2004	Local drainage/ surface water/ sewer	The flood mostly impacted areas immediately adjacent to the Foudry Brook and River Loddon. No additional information was provided.
July 2007	Local drainage/ surface water	At least 58 highways and 120 properties were flooded externally including many gardens, driveways and garages. At least 80 properties were flooded internally.
2008	Surface water	At least 15 highways and 30 properties were flooded externally including many gardens. Over 25 properties were also flooded internally. Most reported incidences were clustered around Wokingham, Winnersh and Three Mile Cross.
2009	Surface water	One highway flooded in Earley.
January 2013	Local drainage/ surface water	Over 30 highway flooding incidents and 50 properties were flooded externally, mostly across the west of the Borough. At least 35 of the 50 properties were flooded internally.
2015	Surface water	4 highways were flooded in Wokingham and Arborfield. At least 6 properties were flooded in the area, although it is unclear whether the flooding was internal or external.

5 Flood risk management

Responsibility for flood risk can be divided into “flood risk management” and emergency response”. The following section describes the roles of the various bodies involved in flood management, with roles and responsibilities for emergency response described in Section 7.

It should be noted that the responsibility for reducing the impacts of flooding to any property remains with the owner of that property, not with any risk management authority. Wokingham Borough Council, the Environment Agency and other risk management authorities have the statutory powers to carry out works for flood risk management purposes or other works to reduce flooding but are under no statutory duty to do so.

5.1 Flood risk management roles and responsibilities

Flood risk in England is managed by a range of different RMAs). The Flood and Water Management Act 2010 places a duty on all Risk Management Authorities to co-operate with each other. The Act also provides Lead Local Flood Authorities and the Environment Agency with a power to request information required in connection with their flood risk management functions.

The risk of flooding from main rivers is managed by the Environment Agency, and they have permissive powers to maintain and carry out improvements to the watercourse. However, it is the responsibility of individual riparian owners, who own land on or next to a watercourse, to maintain main rivers and ordinary watercourses. The EA and LLFA have a responsibility to ensure that these landowners are undertaking their riparian responsibilities under the Land Drainage Act (1991), which include maintenance. The LLFA also has discretionary powers to undertake flood risk management works on ordinary watercourses.

5.1.1 Environment Agency

The Environment Agency is sponsored by the Government’s Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and is tasked with the protection and conservation of the water and environment in England, the natural beauty of rivers and wetlands and the wildlife that lives there.

The Environment Agency’s responsibilities include: water quality and resources; fisheries; conservation and ecology; and operational responsibility for managing the risk of flooding from main rivers. The Environment Agency has permissive powers (but not a duty) to carry out flood and coastal risk management work and to regulate the actions of other flood risk management authorities on main rivers along the coast.

Flood risk management work can include: constructing and maintaining ‘assets’ (such as flood banks or pumping stations); works to main rivers to manage water levels and make sure flood water can flow freely; operating flood risk management assets during a flood; channel maintenance on the river; issuing flood warnings; and responding to incidents.

The Environment Agency can also do work to prevent environmental damage to watercourses, or to restore conditions where damage has already been done. The strategies for flood and coastal erosion risk management show how communities, the public sector and other organisations can work together to manage this risk.

5.1.2 Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)

LLFAs are responsible for coordinating the mitigation of risk of flooding from surface water, groundwater (water which is below the water table under the ground) and ordinary watercourses (non-main rivers). The LLFA is also responsible for developing, maintaining and applying a strategy for local flood risk management in their area and for maintaining a register of flood risk assets. LLFAs also have a statutory duty to investigate significant flood events to the extent they consider necessary.

Wokingham Borough Council is the LLFA for the area of Wokingham.

5.1.3 Water and Sewerage Company

Water and sewage companies are responsible for managing the risks of flooding from surface water and foul or combined public sewer systems providing drainage from buildings and developed areas.

Thames Water is the Water and Sewage company for Wokingham.

5.1.4 Highway Authority

Wokingham Borough Council is the Highway Authority, this function is currently undertaken by VolkerHighways on behalf of WBC. It is responsible for maintaining the highway drainage system to an acceptable standard and ensuring that road projects do not increase flood risk. Correspondence with Volkers Highways Agency (agency/authority for trunk roads) also occurred on 31 March 2023.

5.1.5 Riparian landowners

Riparian landowners who own land or property next to a river, stream or ditch (including where this runs through a pipe or culvert), have rights and responsibilities over the land. This includes: a responsibility to let water flow through the land without any obstruction, pollution or diversion which affects the rights of others; keeping banks clear of anything that could cause an obstruction and increase flood risk; maintaining the bed and banks of the watercourse; and keeping structures clear of debris. There is more information on these rights and responsibilities in the Environment Agency online guidance '[Owning a watercourse](#)'.

5.1.6 Local residents

Local residents should find out about any flood risk in the area, sign up for the Environment Agency's free flood warnings and make a written plan of how they will respond to a flood

situation. Business owners should also make a flood plan for their business. There are measures that can be taken to reduce the amount of damage caused by flooding and properties at risk should be insured. Local residents can find out if their property is at risk, prepare for flooding, get help during a flood, and get help after a flood.

5.2 Emergency responsibilities

The emergency responsibilities of different organisations are outlined in Table 5-1 below. Please note that Parish and Town Councils do not have a legal obligation to respond to emergencies. Whatever service they provide is voluntary and unique to each Parish or Town Council.

Table 5-1: Roles and responsibilities in an emergency, during and after a flood event.

Local Authorities (Wokingham Borough Council)	
Coordinate emergency support within their own functions Deal with emergencies on 'non main rivers' Coordinate emergency support from the voluntary sector Liaise with central and regional government departments Liaise with essential service providers Open rest centres Manage the local transport and traffic networks Mobilise trained emergency social workers Provide emergency assistance Deal with environmental health issues, such as contamination and pollution Coordinate the recovery process Manage public health issues Provide advice and management of public health Provide support and advice to individuals Assist with business continuity	

Police Force	Utility Providers
Save life Coordination and communication between emergency services and organisations providing support Coordinate the preparation and dissemination	Attend emergencies relating to their services putting life at risk Assess and manage risk of service failure Assist with recovery process, that is, water utilities manage public health considerations

Fire and Rescue Service
Save life rescuing people and animals

Fire and Rescue Service

Carry out other specialist work, including flood rescue services

Where appropriate, assist people where the use of fire service personnel and equipment is relevant

Ambulance Service

Save life

Provide treatment, stabilisation, and care at the scene

Town and Parish Councils

Support emergency responders

Increase community resilience through support of community emergency plan development

Voluntary Services

Support rest centres

Provide practical and emotional support to those affected

Support transport and communication

Provide administration

Provide telephone helpline support

Environment Agency

Manage the risk of flooding from main rivers and the sea

Operate Environment Agency flood defence assets

Issue Flood Warnings and ensure systems display current flooding information

Provide information to the public on what they can do before, during and after a flood event

Monitor river levels and flows

Work with professional partners and stakeholders and respond to requests for flooding information and updates

Receive and record details of flooding and related information

Operate water level control structures within its jurisdiction and in line with permissive powers

Flood event data collection

Arrange and take part in flood event exercises

Respond to flooding incidents

Respond to pollution incidents and advise on disposal

Assist with the recovery process, for examples by attending flood surgeries

Advise upon and regulate flood risk activities on and within the flood plains of main rivers

5.2.1 Local Resilience Forum (LRF)

Local resilience forums (LRFs) are multi-agency partnerships made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the National Health Service (NHS), the Environment Agency and others. These agencies are known as Category 1 Responders.

LRFs are supported by organisations, known as Category 2 responders, such as the Highways Agency and public utility companies. They have a responsibility to co-operate with Category 1 organisations and to share relevant information with the LRF. The geographical area the forums cover is based on police areas.

The Local Resilience Forum is not a legal entity, nor does a Forum have powers to direct its members. Nevertheless, the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) and the Regulations provide that emergency responders, through the Forum, have a collective responsibility to plan, prepare and communicate for emergencies in a multi-agency environment.

The Local Resilience Forum for Wokingham is the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF). The forum has identified fluvial flooding and surface water flooding as very high risk. The aim of the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum is to facilitate multi-agency partners in fulfilling their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004). These include: co-operate with local responders; share information with other local responders; assess the risk of emergencies in the area; put in place arrangements to warn, inform, and advise the public in the event of an emergency.

5.3 Existing flood risk management activities

The Wokingham Borough Council [Local Flood Risk Management Strategy \(2015\)](#) details the various responsibilities of key stakeholders and organisations, and the existing flood risk management activities at the time of publication.

The strategy has set out a range of objectives, supported by an Action Plan, which list various management objectives to be achieved within three time frames: short (within 3 years), medium (within 6 years) and long (within 10 years) term. These objectives include: ensuring that planning decisions take full account of flood risk; continuing to improve knowledge and understanding of current and future local sources of flood risk within Wokingham Borough; and maintaining and, where necessary, improving local flood risk management infrastructure.

5.3.1 Flood warning service

The central area of Wokingham Borough (following the main river network) is covered by the Environment Agency's Flood Warning Service. This service provides communication of flood alerts and warnings by phone, text or email once registered through the government website. Figure 5-1 maps the location of the warning areas that cover Wokingham Borough.

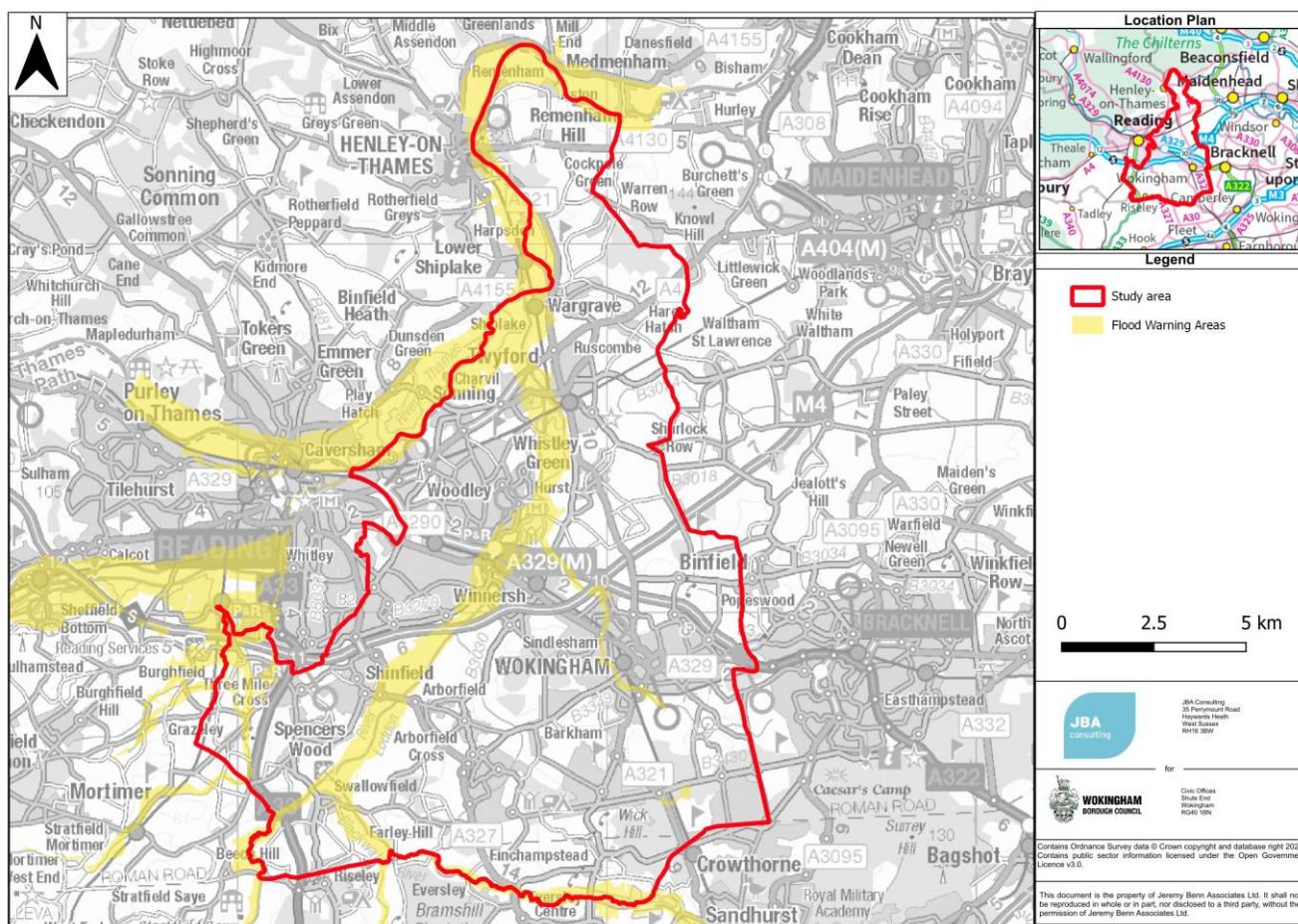


Figure 5- 1: Environment Agency Flood Warning System coverage in Wokingham Borough

5.3.2 Community flood plans

There is currently no Community Action Plan or Flood Plan for Wokingham. It is understood that there was previously a Flood Action Group for Wokingham that has since been disbanded.

5.3.3 Maintenance

Maintenance is an essential part of managing flood risk. Together with landowners, WBC and the EA are involved in the maintenance of watercourses, drains and similar infrastructure, as shown in Table 2-1.

The legal responsibility for maintenance of a watercourse lies with the riparian landowners (as set out in Section 5.1.5) rather than the Environment Agency or any other authority. The Environment Agency has permissive powers to carry out maintenance and improvement works on main rivers (such as the River Loddon); however, this is not a duty. The EA's powers allow them to carry out a variety of works to maintain main river channels, assets and structures in order to manage or reduce flood risk to people and property, and to safeguard the health and safety of staff or other river users.

Nationally, the Environment Agency's maintenance works can include weed and grass cutting by hand/machine, channel maintenance, obstruction removal, vermin control, tree/bush work, defence repair, flood reservoir work, structure maintenance and some works to improve habitat and biodiversity. Their maintenance work may include de-silting or dredging where this is proven to be the most cost-effective way of managing flood risk to people and property, without causing a deterioration of the water body as defined through the Water Framework Directive (WFD).

6 Hydrological analysis

6.1 Conditions at time of the event

Rain gauge data was obtained from the Environment Agency's [Hydrology data Explorer](#) service to determine the return period of the storm event on 31 March 2023, and the preceding conditions. The closest tipping bucket rain gauge is the Reading University gauge, located approximately 6km from the centre of Hurst. Additionally, data from the Bracknell rain gauge (located approximately 9km from the centre of Hurst).

The EA water report for the Thames area during March 2023 indicates the month was extremely wet with only three dry days (>2mm). High rainfall throughout the month saturated soils and caused soil moisture deficits (SMD's) to significantly reduce. Additionally, mean river flows increased at the majority of the indicator sites, with all sites except one, reporting a normal or higher flow.

The rain gauges at Bracknell and Reading University indicate that there was rainfall throughout the day of 31 March 2023 in both locations. Rainfall was relatively low and inconsistent until approximately 12:45. Although rainfall depths were low, the event was prolonged, lasting until 19:15 (6.5 hours), with the peak of the event occurring at 15:00 – 15:30. This pattern was consistent across both rain gauges.

The Environment Agency's [Hydrology data explorer service](#) indicates that amount of rain that fell during the month of March 2023 was relatively minimal, although fairly consistent. It is evident that rainfall was recorded at both the Reading University and Bracknell rain gauges, from 06 March 2023 until the storm event on 31 March 2023. Figure 6- 1 shows that the rain gauges recorded significantly greater rainfall levels in March 2023, compared to the same month for the preceding three years. Although the amount of rainfall varied throughout the month, it is likely that antecedent conditions exacerbated flooding within the borough. This is also confirmed by the information provided in the EA water report for the Thames area, which highlights high rainfall throughout the month of March, which led to saturated soils, increasing the likelihood of flooding.

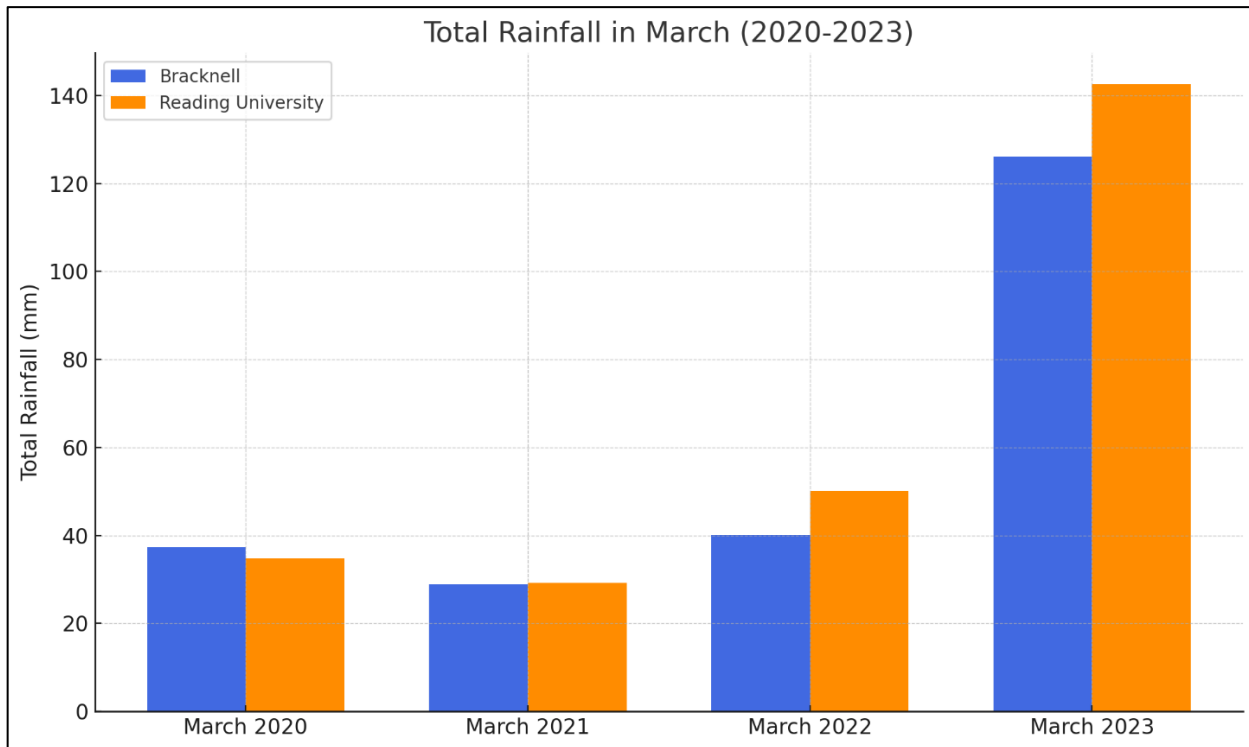


Figure 6- 2: Total rainfall recorded at both rain gauges in March 2023 and March for the preceding three years

6.2 Rainfall return period estimation for 31 March 2023

The rain gauges at Bracknell and Reading University recorded two rainfall peaks in the afternoon, where a significant amount more rainfall was recorded than earlier in the day. The largest peak in rainfall occurred at approximately 15:15 in both rain gauge locations, although analysis shows slight differences in amount of rainfall between these two gauges. The greatest rainfall depth recorded at the Bracknell rain gauge during the storm event was 6.25mm, compared to 4.38mm recorded at Reading University. However, both rain gauges recorded rainfall over the same time period, with an estimated storm duration of 6.5 hours, between 12:45 and 19:15. This indicates that the rainfall pattern recorded during this time period was similar across Wokingham Borough.

Table 6- 1: Rainfall totals in the Wokingham area on 31 March 2023

Rain gauge	Daily total on 31/03/2023 (mm)	Total for 12:45 – 19:00 on 21/03/2023 (mm)	Grid reference
Bracknell	37.35	28.92	485782, 171932
Reading University	41.48	31.49	473917, 171906

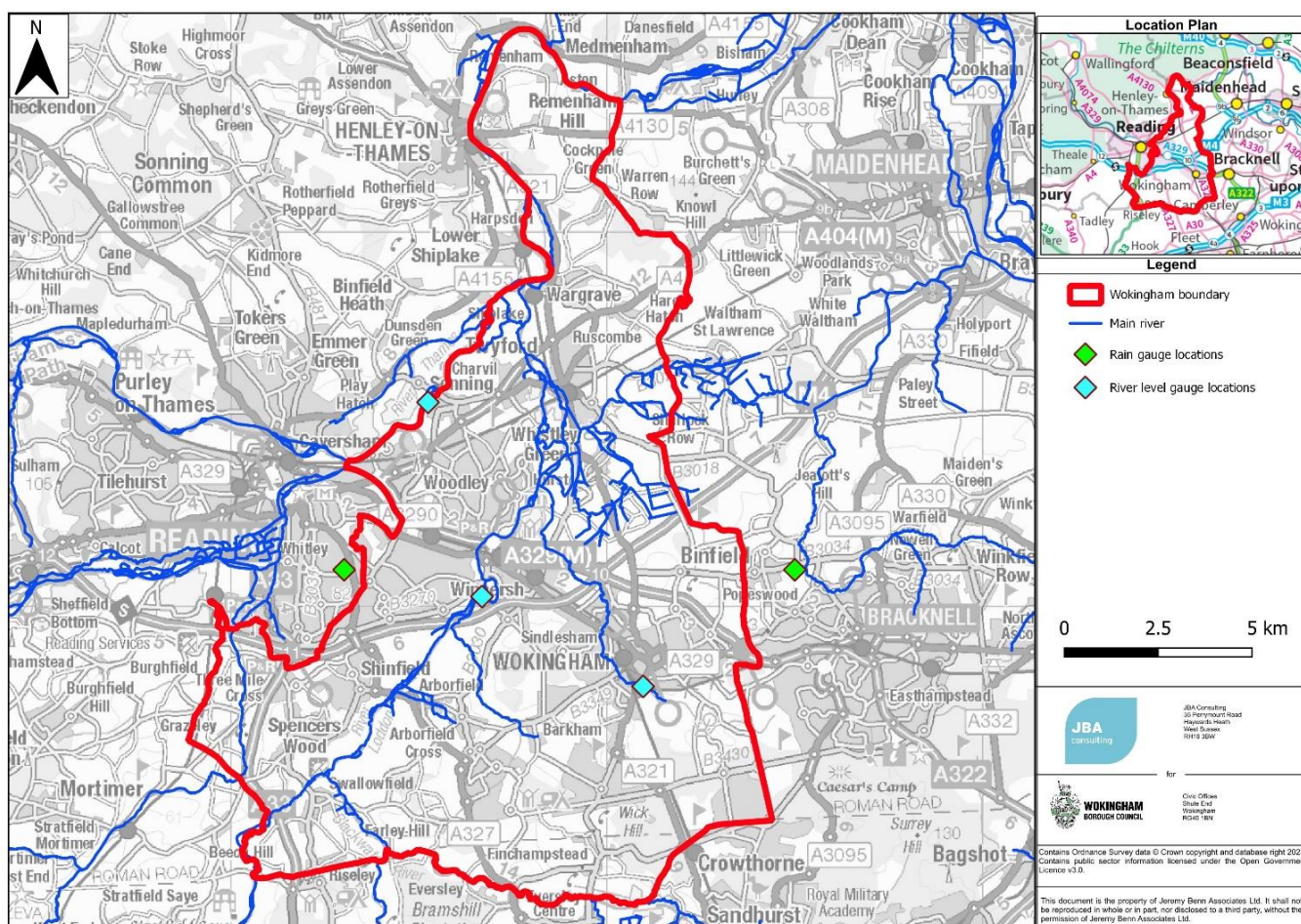


Figure 6- 2: Rain and river level gauge locations within and in vicinity of Wokingham Borough

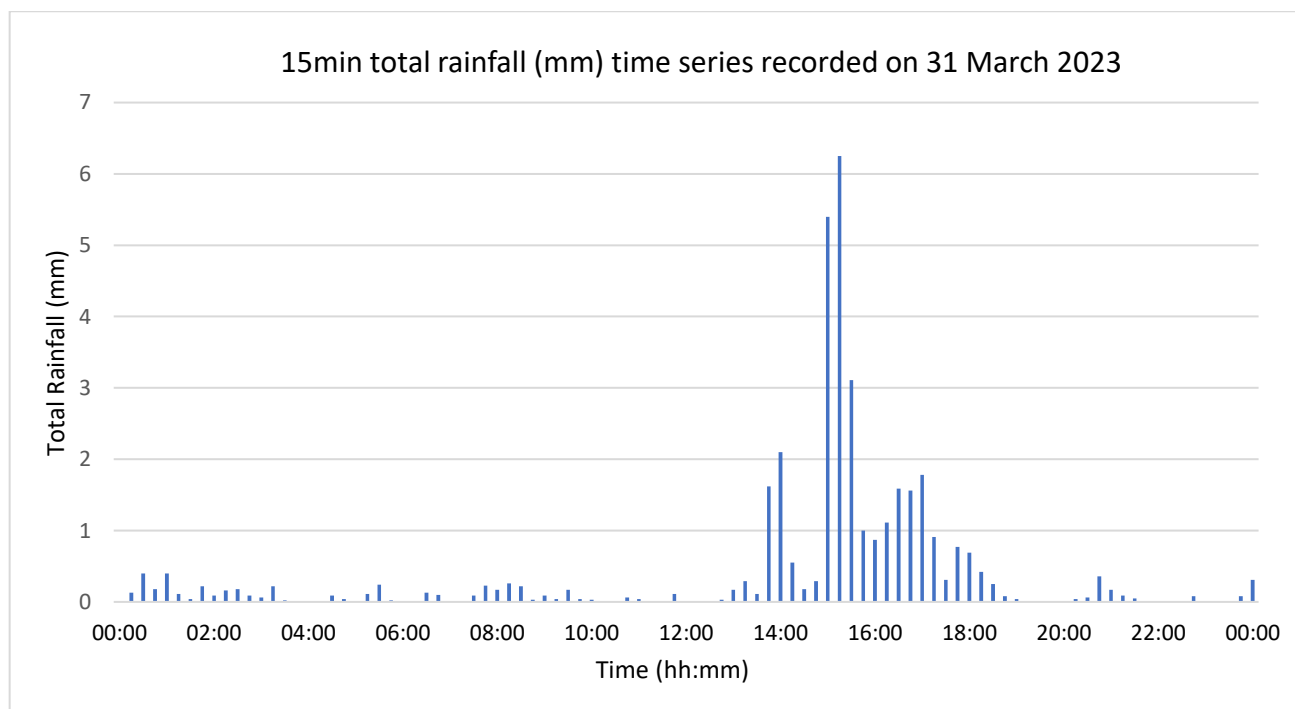


Figure 6- 3: Total rainfall on 31 March 2023 from the Bracknell gauge

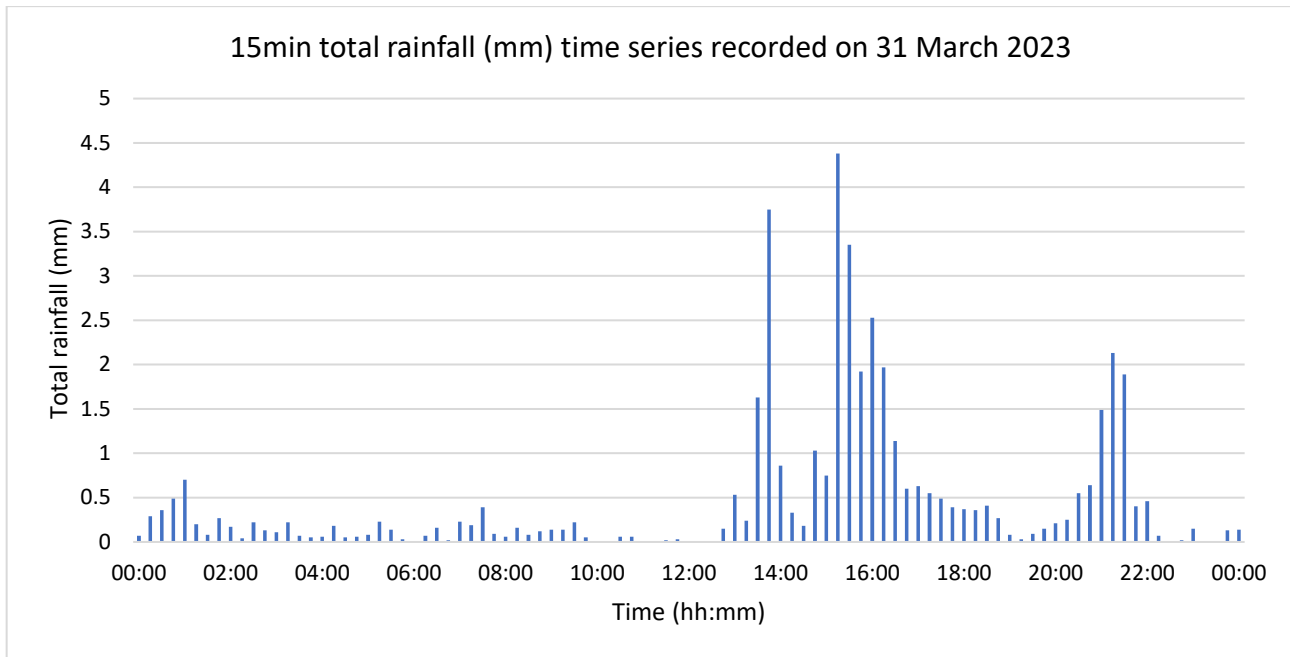


Figure 6- 4: Total rainfall on 31 March 2023 from the Reading University Gauge

In order to determine the rarity of the storm event on 31 March 2023, an average of the total rainfall recorded within the 6.5 hour storm duration was calculated. This provided an average of 30.19mm across the two rain gauges.

Using FEH22, which considers the catchment characteristics in Hurst; a 6.5 hour storm with a 30.19mm rainfall depth is estimated to have a return period of approximately 1 in 3 years. This indicates that the rainfall event was relatively frequent and would not be considered an extreme storm event.

6.3 River level conditions

River level gauge data was also obtained from the Environment Agency's Hydrology data explorer service. Table 6- 1 provides information on three river level gauges in the vicinity of Wokingham Borough which have been used to analyse the occurrence of fluvial flooding on 31 March 2023.

Table 6- 2: Locations of river gauges assessed for the investigation

Gauge	River	Grid reference
Wokingham	Emm Brook	480970, 167890
Sindlesham Mill	River Loddon	476670, 170280
Sonning Lock	River Thames	475231, 175468

Data shown in Figure 6- 3 indicates that river levels were relatively consistent between 15 March and 30 March 2023. Gauge data highlights that at all three locations, river levels peaked on 31 March or within a few days following the storm event. It is evident that the

Emm Brook in Wokingham experienced the most significant rise in water levels, reaching a daily maximum water level of 1.74m on 31 March 2023. Further analysis shows that river levels decreased to pre-event levels on approximately 04 April 2023.

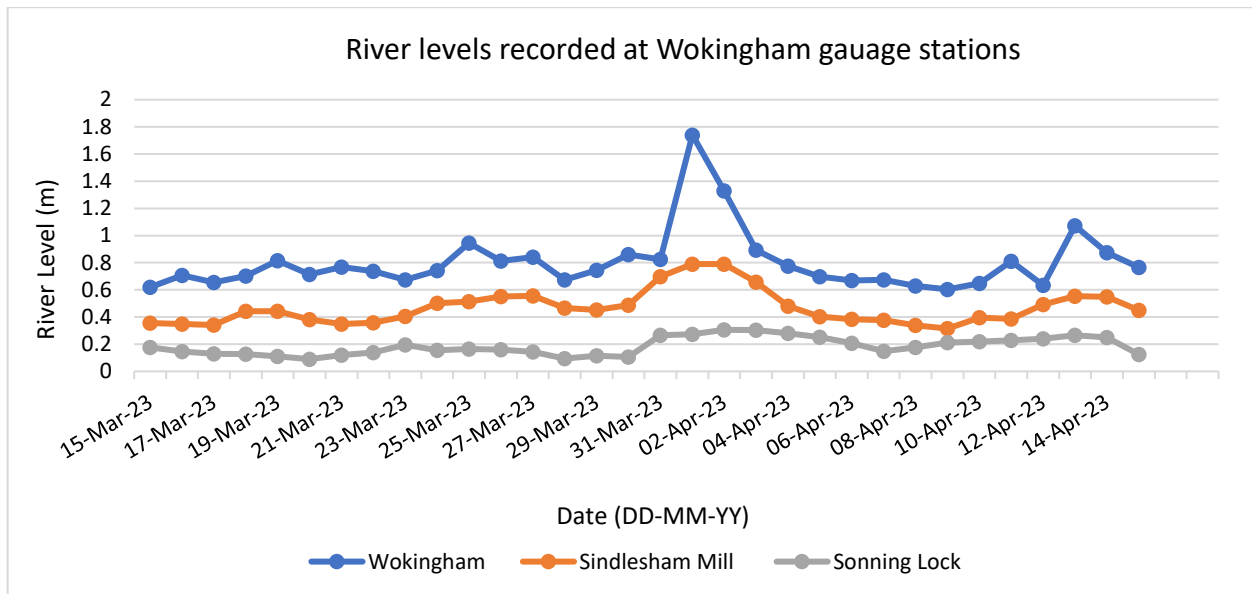


Figure 6- 5: Comparison of river level data between 15 March and 15 April 2023

7 Incident response

Several agencies responded to the flooding event in Wokingham on 31 March 2023, including Wokingham Borough Council, WBC's Highways team, VolkerHighways, the Environment Agency and the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. A timeline of incident response is provided in Table 7- 1.

The Met Office issued weather warnings corresponding with the periods of flooding. These warnings were as follows:

- 30th March 2023: Yellow warning of rain issued at 10:01am. Valid between 06:00am and 18:00pm on 31st March.
- 31st March 2023: Yellow warning of rain issued at 20:36pm on 31st March 2023. Valid between 20:36pm and 23:59pm.

The Environment Agency issued a Flood Warning in the evening of 31 March, notifying residents that the Emm Brook was likely to flood as a result of heavy rainfall. Some areas within the Loddon catchment are covered by this Flood Warning Service. However, many of the properties which experienced flooding are located outside of this the Flood Warning Area, indicating that some areas were unaware of the high possibility of fluvial flooding.

The first response to the flooding involved correspondence between Wokingham Borough Council and Volkers Highways Authority, with WBC requesting the closure of Sandford Lane and Hurst Road (A321) due to highway flooding. Additionally, WBC also responded to the flooding by delivering sandbags to affected properties.

Wokingham Borough Council received at least 32 calls from residents between 17:15 and 23:45 during the evening of 31 March, identifying highway flooding issues within the Borough. The majority of these calls were passed on to Volkers Highway Authority, who dealt with the issues accordingly. An additional 10 calls were made on -4 April, between 08:26 and 18:06, with residents identifying further highway flooding issues.

Records of calls to the emergency services in response to flooding indicates that the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service were called out to Sonning Church of England Primary School due to internal flooding. The Fire and Rescue Service deployed pumps to divert floodwater out of the school. There are no other records of calls to the Fire and Rescue Service in response to flooding during March or April 2023.

Table 7- 2: Timeline of incident response

Date	Time	Activity/event	Agency
31/03/23	Unknown	Intense rainfall causes internal flooding to at least 6 properties in Wokingham	N/A
31/03/23	Unknown	Highway flooding – Sandford Lane and Hurst road closure	Volkers Highways Authority
31/03/23	Unknown	Pumping out of floodwater from Sonning Primary School	Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
31/03/23	17:15 – 23:35	Reports of highway flooding from residents – at least 32 calls	Wokingham Borough Council- passed to Volkers Highways
31/03/23	Unknown	Sandbags delivered to properties	Wokingham Borough Council

8 Source-Pathway-Receptor analysis

8.1 Hust – Property 1

8.1.1 Source

Following correspondence with residents from Hurst Parish, it is evident that flooding occurred along Hogmoor Lane due to the exceedance of channel capacity of the ditches running parallel, as well as blockage of an existing culvert located where the road bends northwards. Property 1 is located where Hogmoor Lane meets Poplar Lane and is surrounded by a ditch network (designated as main rivers) which diverges around the east and west sides of the property. The resident has identified that flooding of the watercourse that flows through the garden of the property did not occur, although water levels did rise significantly.

8.1.2 Pathway

The volume of water flowing towards Property 1 was reported to exceed the capacity of the culvert located on Poplar Lane, and floodwater flowed towards the property. Correspondence with the resident indicates that floodwater originated from the ditches surrounding the property.

Hogmoor Lane acts as the main pathway conveying flood water towards the property, with a fall in gradient from the western end of the road (approximately 37mAOD) to the northern end of the road (approximately 36mAOD). This resulted in the accumulation of floodwater in the centre of Hogmoor Lane, as well as around Property 1. Photographic evidence from the event shows significant volumes of water located on Hogmoor Lane and surrounding fields east of the road (Figure 8- 2).

8.1.3 Receptor

Property 1 experienced internal flooding on 31 March 2023. Photographic evidence indicates that floodwater flowed along Hogmoor Lane and towards the property, causing internal and external flooding. As a result of the flooding, the resident has since installed large capacity channel drains along the driveway on the western side of the property. Additionally, sheet piling has been installed on the banks of the watercourse that runs through the garden of the property, to manage bank erosion. The resident noted that this section of the watercourse did not flood during the event, and that flooding originated from the watercourse on the opposite side of the highway.

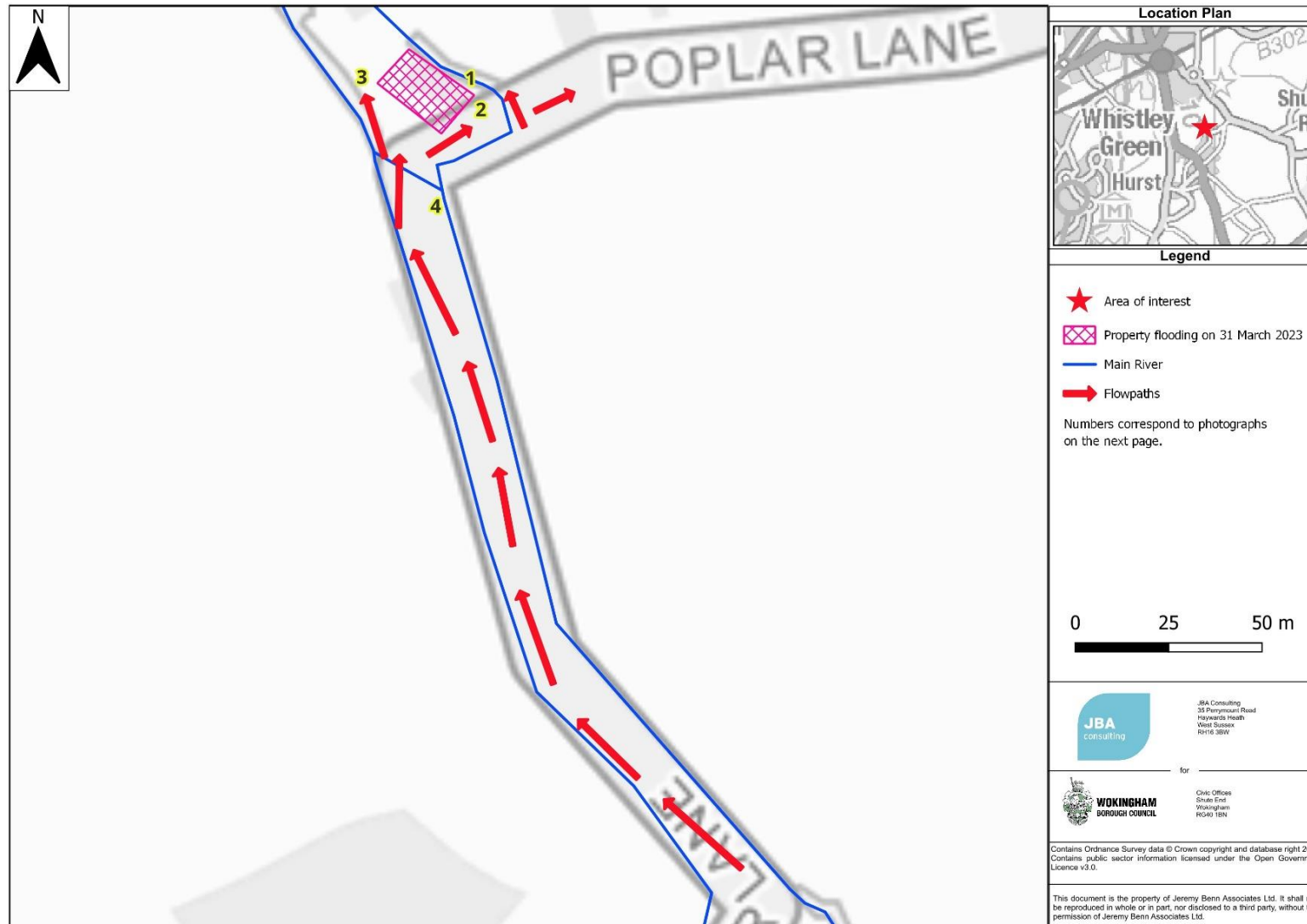


Figure 8- 1: Source-Pathway-Receptor mapping for Hogmoor Lane and Property 1 in Hurst



1. Flood water encroaching onto owner's land, up to front of property.



2. Flooding of ditch and field adjacent to Hogmoor Lane



3. Flooding of Hogmoor Lane and adjacent ditch



4. Surface water pooling outside property

Figure 8- 2: Photographs of flooding in Hurst on 31 March 2023

8.2 Hurst – property 2

8.2.1 Source

Correspondence with residents indicates that intense rainfall experienced on 31 March 2023 significantly increase water levels in ditches and rivers, causing them to overflow and flood surrounding areas. The watercourse located on the eastern side of Wokingham Road (designated as a main river) was unable to cope with the volume of water, resulting in flooding of the main road and Property 2, as shown in Figure 8- 3.

Correspondence with residents highlights the issue of vegetation and debris along the ditch and watercourse network in Hurst, which limits the volume of water that can be stored within the ditches. Extreme rainfall combined with restricted channel capacity results in exceedance of channel capacity and flooding to the surrounding areas.

8.2.2 Pathway

Floodwater from surrounding ditches, especially from the densely vegetated watercourse located on the eastern side of Wokingham Road would have flowed westwards towards the property, causing external and internal flooding. Flooding was exacerbated by the low-lying topography of the area, and a slight northwards slope along the A321, which resulted in floodwater being conveyed towards the property.

8.2.3 Receptor

Property 2 (shown in Figure 8-3) is the second property in Hurst to have recorded internal flooding on 31 March 2023 as a result of intense rainfall. A video recording taken by the resident shows how flooding affected Wokingham Road, with water encroaching onto a significant proportion of the driveway and garden, as well as up to the front of the property, where internal flooding occurred. This event, as well as 3 previous occasions of flooding to the property, have caused major concern for the resident.

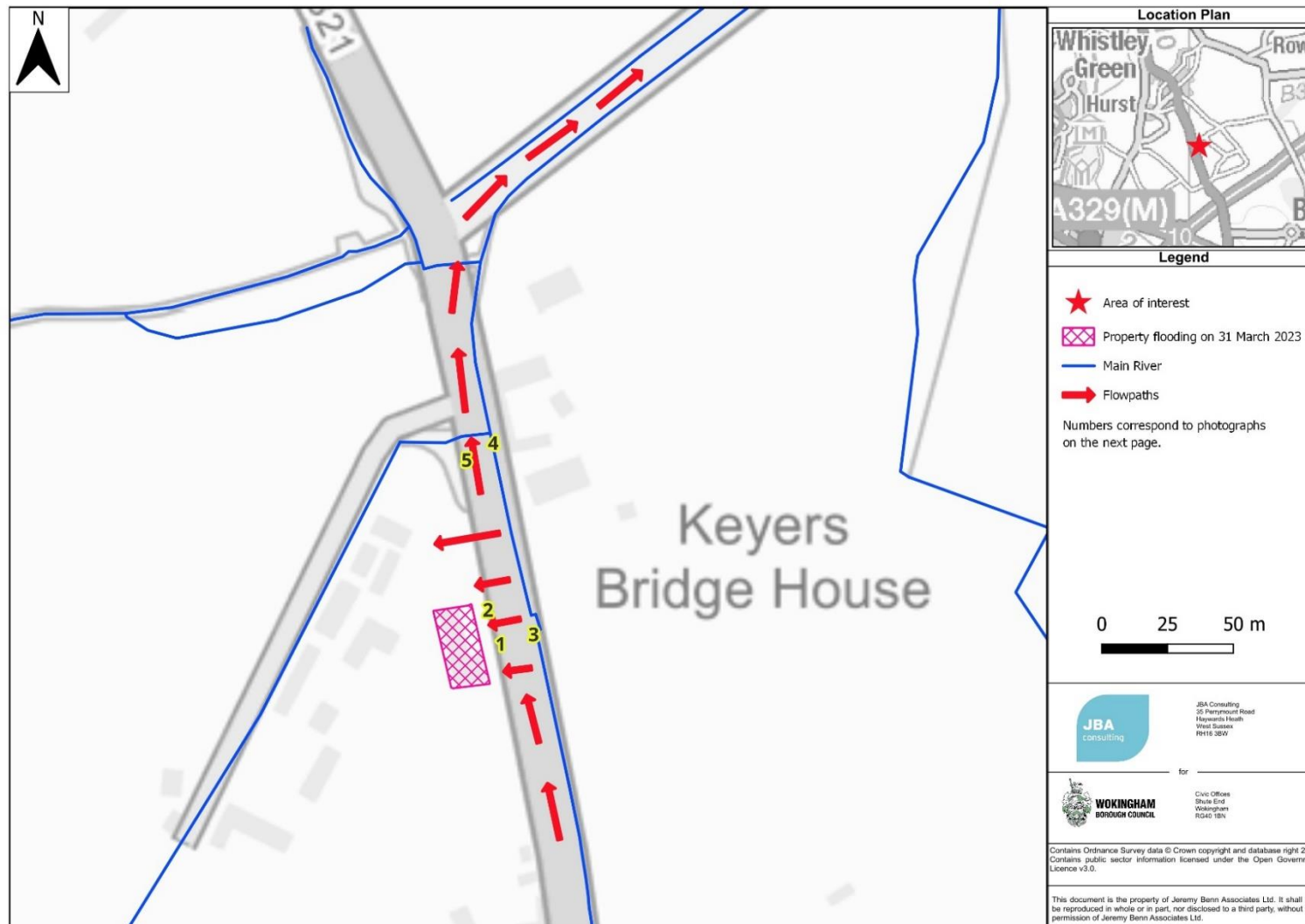


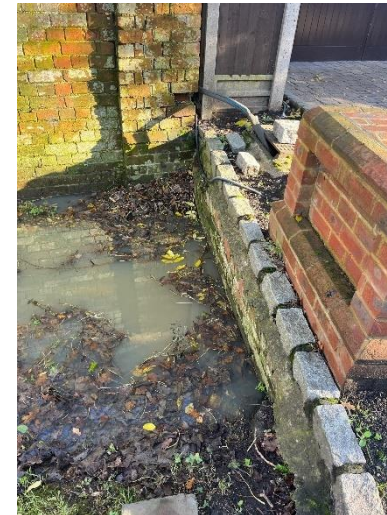
Figure 8- 3: Source-Pathway-Receptor mapping for Wokingham Road Property 2 in Hurst



1. Flooding of Wokingham Road and Front drive of property on 31 March 2023



2. Flooding of driveway on 31 March 2023



3. Site visit - high water levels in ditch on east side of the property (taken on 28 November 2023)	4a. Site visit - blocked culvert north of the property (taken on 28 November 2023)
	
4b. Site visit - ditch downstream from culvert (taken on 28 November 2023)	5. Site visit – ditch on western side of Wokingham Road, north of the property (taken on 28 November 2023)

Figure 8- 4: Photographs taken during the flooding event and on the site visit

8.3 Hurst- property 3

8.3.1 Source

The source of flooding at the third property in Hurst was identified to be the ditch (ordinary watercourse) located along the western side of the property. The alignment of the ditch has been estimated in Figure 8- 4, as the watercourse is non-main river, and is therefore not included on national river mapping datasets.

Heavy rainfall on 31 March 2023 caused the ditch to overflow onto the adjacent footpath. From discussions with residents, it is likely the channel exceedance may have been caused or exacerbated by the condition of this watercourse. It has been noted that the watercourse is partially blocked with tree roots downstream of the property (Figure 8- 5) which has resulted in leaves and debris building up within the channel.

8.3.2 Pathway

Figure 8- 4 demonstrates the pathways of floodwater during the storm event of 31 March 2023. It is evident from photographs taken during the site visit that the ditch is narrow, with limited capacity. As a result, during periods of heavy rainfall, water overtops the banks and flows onto the footpath and towards Property 2.

The topography of the land is flat, with an elevation of approximately 40mAOD along the footpath and on the western boundary of the property. Due to the proximity of the property to the ditch (approximately 7m) and the low elevation, flood water flows directly towards the property.

8.3.3 Receptor

Floodwater from the exceeded ditch flowed towards the property, causing internal flooding on 31 March 2023. Damage to the wooden flooring within the ground floor of the property was reported by the resident, and concrete floors have subsequently been installed. Due to the build-up of vegetation and debris experienced within the watercourse, the property owner now frequently removes vegetation from the ditch, in order to reduce the likelihood of future flooding to the property.

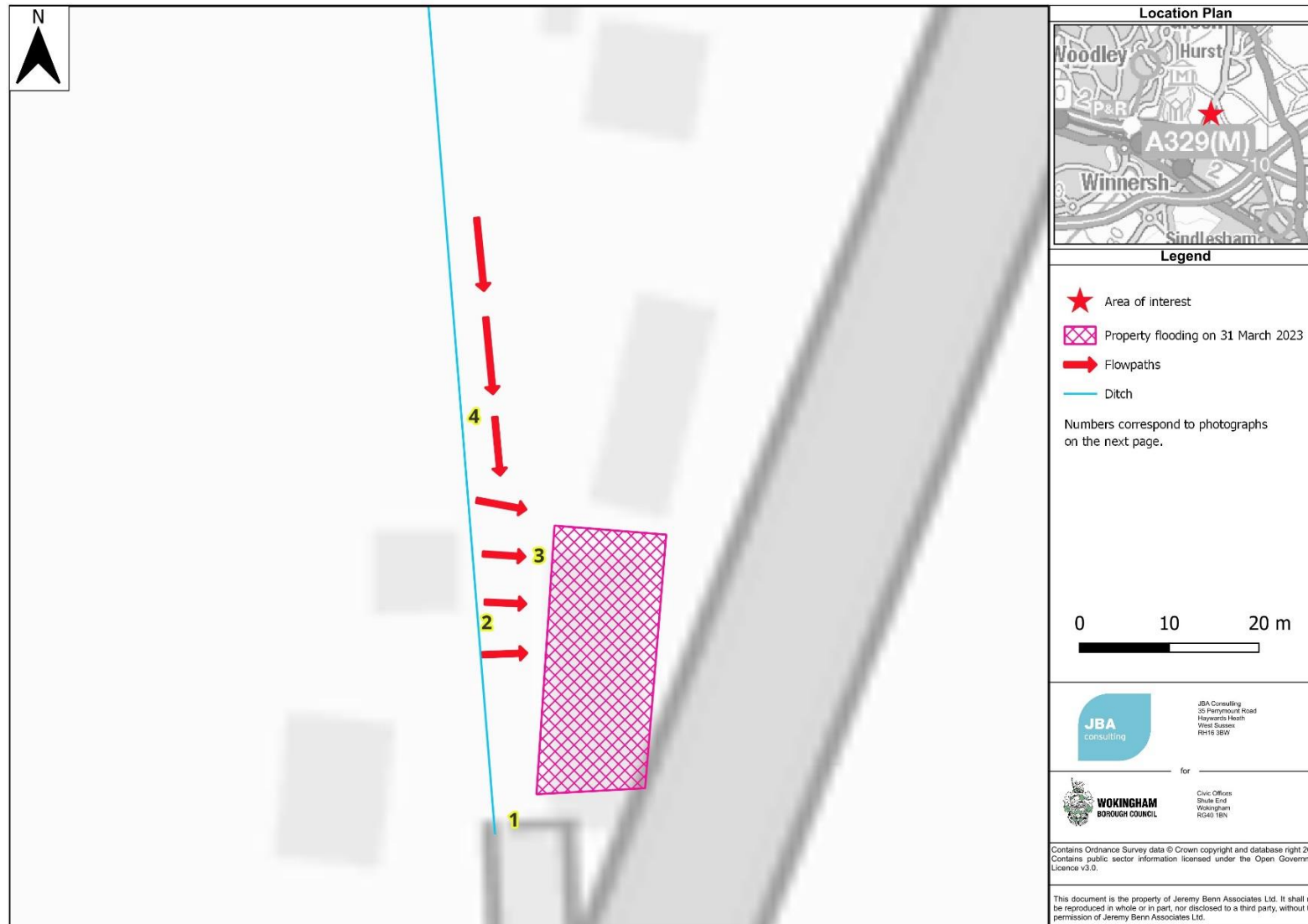


Figure 8- 5: Source-Pathway-Receptor mapping for property 3 in Hurst

	
1. Footpath and ditch from the south of the property	2. Ditch on the western side of the property
	
3. Western side of property, adjacent to the footpath and ditch	4. Ditch on the western side of the property

Figure 8- 6: Photographs of the property and surrounding ditch taken on 28 November 2023

8.4 Wokingham town centre – Property 4

8.4.1 Source

The Emm Brook, a tributary of the River Loddon, was the source of flooding on 31 March 2023 to Property 3, in Wokingham town centre (shown in Figure 8- 5). As a result of intense rainfall, river levels rose, and water overtopped the banks. The Emm Brook flows in a southeasterly direction, approximately 5m away from the eastern side of the property.

8.4.2 Pathway

The flow path of floodwater is likely to have originated from the Emm Brook on the eastern side of the property. Water then flowed southwest towards the roundabout along Finchampstead Road, where significant surface water pooling occurred. Additionally, water followed the natural topography towards the property, causing internal flooding. It is likely that water from the Emm Brook flows along the footpath on the south side of the property creating an additional pool of floodwater southeast of the premises.

8.4.3 Receptor

These flow paths caused internal flooding to the property on 31 March 2023 after significant rainfall. The entire ground floor was damaged as a result of the flooding, and the residents were forced to move out of the property. Flooding also impacted the roundabout, which became inundated. It is evident that the property located adjacent (northwest) to Property 3 was not affected by flooding on 31 March 2023 as this is located closer to the main road, where there is a slight increase in elevation.

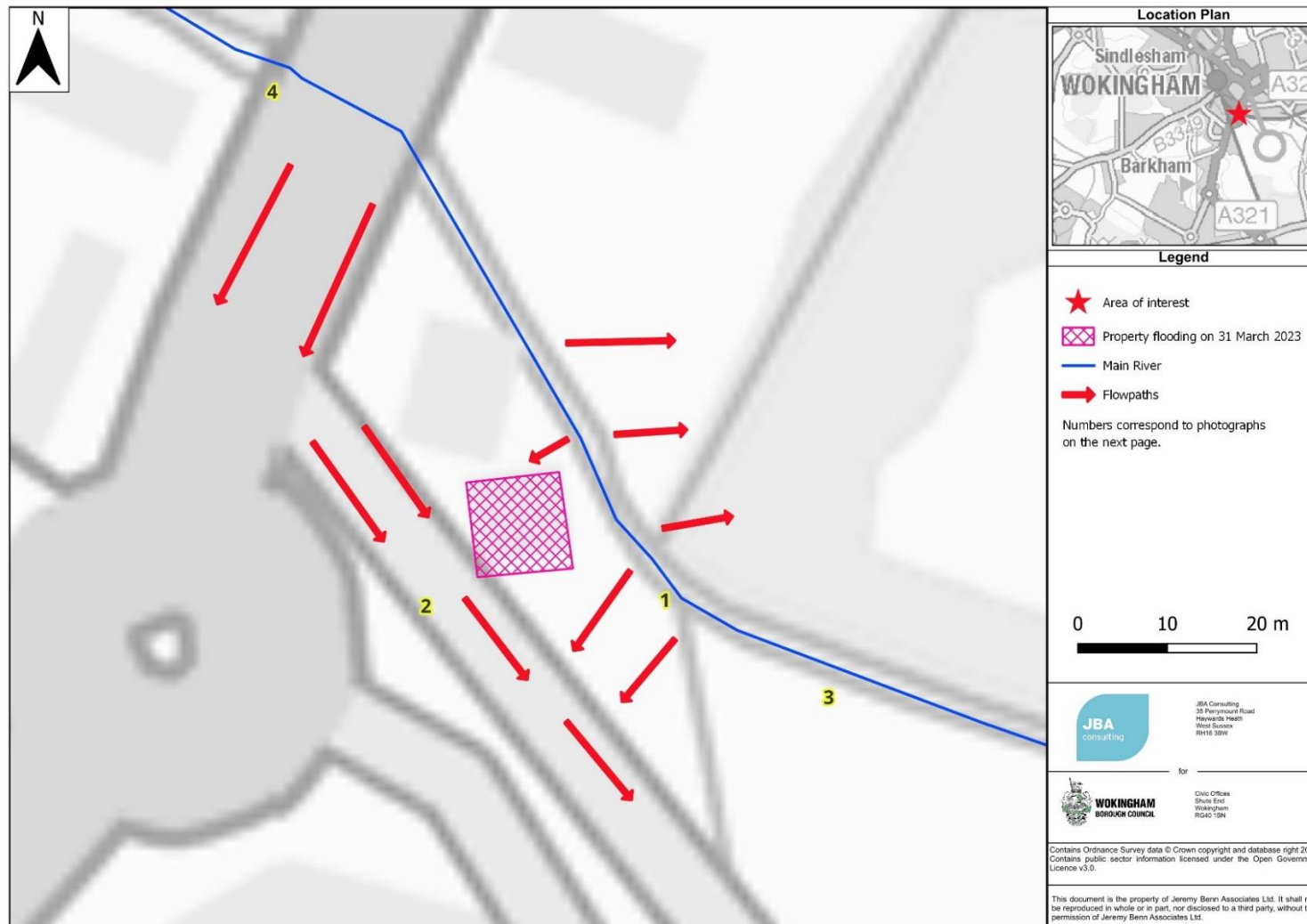


Figure 8- 7: Source-Pathway-Receptor mapping for property in Wokingham town centre

	
1. The Emm Brook River flowing eastward alongside the property	2. Footpath with a shallow ditch southwest of the property
	
3. River level gauge station located southeast of the property	4. The Emm Brook river from the bridge on Finchampstead Road

Figure 8- 8: Photographs of the property in Wokingham and surrounding area taken on 28 November 2023

8.5 Earley – Property 5

8.5.1 Source

The source of flooding at Property 4 in Earley on 31 March 2023 was heavy rainfall exceeding the channel capacity of a watercourse (tributary of the River Loddon) which flows westwards across the settlement, . The watercourse is located approximately 30m north of the property.

8.5.2 Pathway

Figure 8- 9 identifies the pathways of surface water on 31 March 2023. This indicates that floodwater flowed along Mill Lane from the watercourse, pooling within the boundary of the property and in surrounding areas. Across the area of Earley, it is evident that significant flow paths of fluvial flood water form along many roads and lanes, which result in less extensive pooling of water, due to the steeper topography of the area.

8.5.3 Receptor

Internal flooding of Property 4 in Figure 8- 9 occurred during the mentioned storm event. It is unknown whether the property was damaged as a result of this flooding incident. Roads, including Mill Lane, were also affected by flooding.

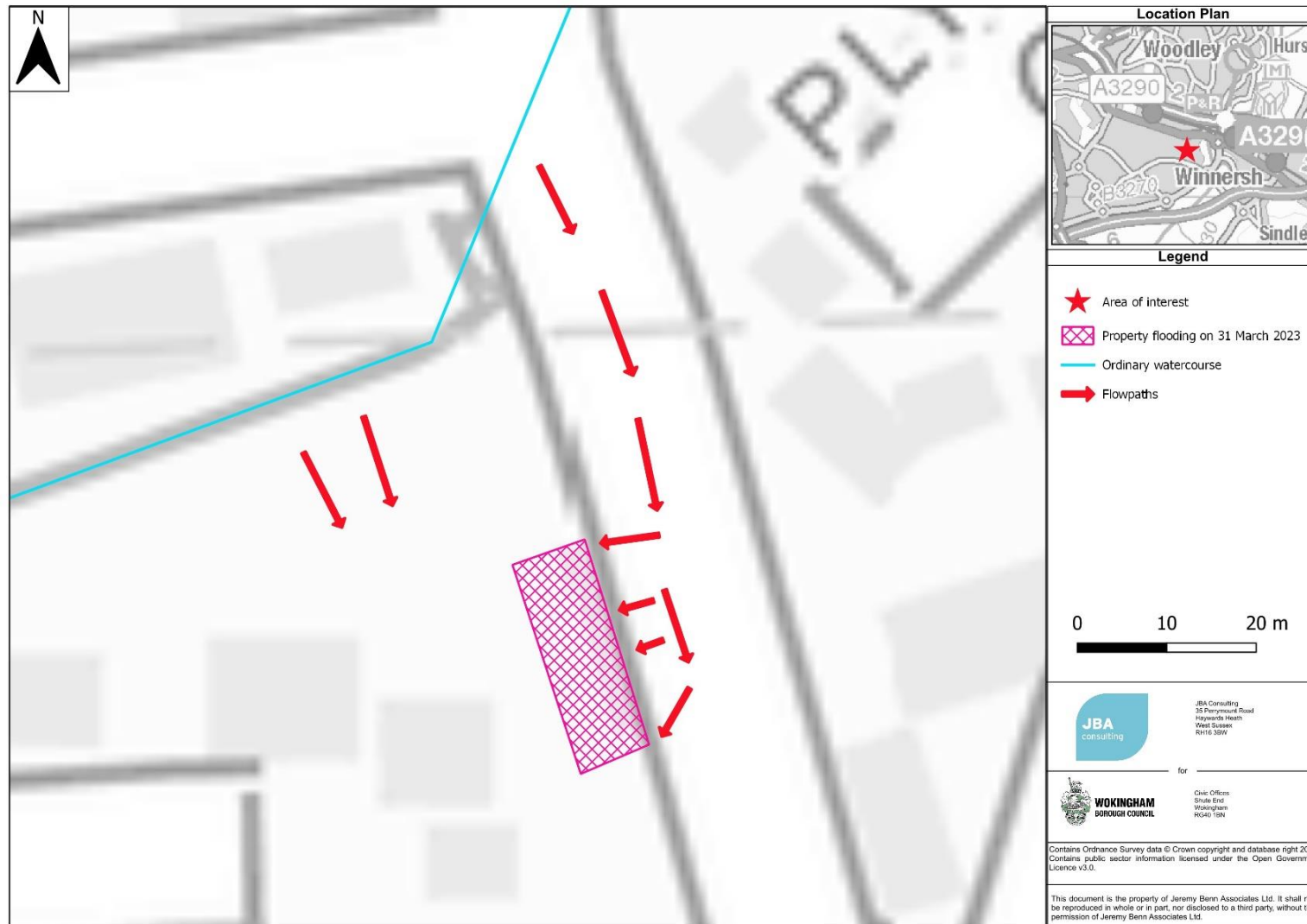


Figure 8- 9: Source pathway receptor mapping for Property 4 in Earley

8.6 Additional property flooding

In addition to the property flooding detailed in this section, the storm event on 31 March 2023 is likely to have caused internal flooding to further properties. Berkshire Fire and Rescue service recorded internal flooding of the Sonning Church of England Primary School, which is located in Sonning near Reading. However, it is unknown whether flooding occurred to additional properties in the Wokingham Borough during this rainfall event, due to the absence of further flooding reports.

9 Conclusions and Recommendations

9.1 Conclusions

The flooding that occurred in Wokingham on 31 March 2023 caused internal flooding to at least 6 properties, the majority of which were located in the parish of Hurst. Wokingham Borough Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, has exercised their power to undertake a Section 19 investigation, as the event fulfilled its criteria of '*Internal flooding to habitable property*'. The Council appointed JBA Consulting to undertake this investigation on its behalf.

Analysis of rain gauge data from the 6.5 hour storm event that affected Wokingham on 31 March 2023, indicates that the storm is estimated to have a return period of approximately 1 in 3 years. This is therefore considered to be a frequent, relatively insignificant rainfall event. However, the catchment was highly saturated prior to the event due to high levels of rainfall throughout March 2023. The rainfall experienced in Wokingham caused an increase in river and ditch levels around the Borough, particularly the area of Hurst. This resulted in the exceedance of channel capacity and the blockage of culverts by debris conveyed in the channel, leading to flooding of surrounding roads and properties. Correspondence with residents during the site visit on 28 November 2023 highlighted several problems with extensive vegetation growth and lack of maintenance on main rivers within the Borough.

The main flood pathways in Hurst originated from the extensive ditch network within the area. It is evident that roads, footpaths, and property gardens acted as conduits, channelling water to towards the affected properties. It is indicated that water flowed northwards along Hogmoor Lane, before pooling at the junction of Poplar Lane, where flooding occurred at Property 1, as detailed in Section 8. Additionally, a significant pathway formed along Wokingham Road, flowing in a north easterly direction towards Island Stone Lane. At this location, flooding of the ditch (classified as a main river) on the eastern side of Wokingham Road caused internal flooding to Property 2 in Hurst. A further flooding incident in Hurst was recorded with flooding of a smaller ditch, causing internal flooding of a third property. The majority of flooding in the Borough during the 31 March 2023 event appears to have been concentrated in Hurst, although two further properties in Wokingham town centre and Earley were also affected by flooding.

Wokingham Borough Council received a significant number of calls concerning the flooding and consequent highway issues. Incident calls were received between 17:15 and 23:45 on the evening of 31 March 2023, the majority of which were passed onto VolkerHighways and dealt with accordingly. Additionally, Flood Warning and Met Office Weather Warnings were issued, but the residents affected by the flooding were outside of fluvial flood warning areas. Only one 'flooding' call out was recorded to the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service during the event, where flood water entered a Primary School in Sonning, Reading, and was subsequently pumped out.

9.2 Recommendations

Based on the identified causes and mechanisms of flooding, potential options to mitigate flood risk and/or damage to property have been considered. This includes consideration of measures such as watercourse maintenance and riparian awareness, flood attenuation, community flood preparedness and Property Flood Resilience (PFR).

It should be noted that landowners have prepared a plan to better manage flood risk in Hurst 'Addressing Flooding in Hurst', this has been attached as Appendix A. An additional site visit was undertaken on 18 January 2024 by WBC, the EA, ward and parish councillors and key landowners to explore these options in more detail.

9.2.1 Watercourse maintenance plan and riparian awareness

It is recommended that Wokingham Borough Council as LLFA, identify riparian owners in Hurst and advise of riparian responsibilities. The Environment Agency, in partnership with the riparian owners, should consider an enhanced maintenance schedule for the extensive watercourse systems within the parish.

This is the most important recommendation detailed in this section, as the flooding experienced in Hurst on 31 March 2023 was strongly linked to a lack of capacity along main river and ordinary watercourse systems, due to the presence of debris or heavy vegetation growth, as shown in Figure 9- 1. Therefore, taking preventative measures towards managing vegetation and debris along the watercourses is a key priority, to prevent a similar event happening in the future.

One of the suggestions of the report prepared by landowners is the importance of maintaining flow in the Twyford Brook. The report recommends that all obstructions within the Twyford Brook, especially from the A321 (Hurst Road) bridge to Twyford station, to prevent water backing up towards Hurst should be cleared. This Section 19 reiterates the importance of this as the Twyford Brook will play a key role in allowing flows from watercourses upstream to be discharged.

It is recommended that residents, WBC as LLFA works in partnership with the EA and local residents to develop a riparian maintenance plan, and ensure that riparian awareness is acknowledged and understood.



Figure 9- 2: Photographs showing presence of vegetation growth in watercourses in Hurst

9.2.2 Flood attenuation

Options for providing flood attenuation in the affected locations is also recommended, in order to slow down the flow of water reaching properties. By diverting some of the river flow out into storage ponds, a proportion of the flood water is stored during the periods of highest flow, and slowly released back into the river once there is capacity again. This reduces the volume of river flow reaching downstream properties and other receptors. Attenuation of floodwater can also be achieved by using natural flood management techniques. Examples include planting hedgerows and trees in upper catchments, to allow water to be intercepted before it reaches rivers, as well as installing woody debris dams within channels, which slow the water by increasing resistance to flow.

Controlling the water flow by reducing dredging efforts in the Haines Hill area, which lies east of Hurst could lead to improvements in managing flood risk. This approach aims to slow down the water, allowing Twyford Brook to handle excessive volumes more effectively during periods of heavy rainfall. Additionally, installing a weir at Stanlake is proposed to provide attenuation and reduce flood risk. Providing flood attenuation will require the cooperation of local landowners, who would need to agree to occasional flooding of their lands as part of the effort to slow the water's advance toward Hurst.

As a result, it is recommended that Wokingham Borough Council, works in partnership with local landowners and the Environment Agency, to investigate the feasibility of flood attenuation measures in Hurst, to mitigate flood risk in the area.

9.2.3 Community flood preparedness

Residents are encouraged to find out about possible flood risk in the area and to find out if their property is at risk¹. It is recommended that the individuals at risk of flooding make a personal flood plan, which sets out a list of actions which can quickly be put in place during a flood event to minimise the disruption caused. Guidance and a personal flood plan template is provided by the Environment Agency and can be found on the Government website^{2, 3}.

Communities can also work together to improve their resilience and plan for future flood events. Wokingham Borough Council could assist communities in Hurst, Wokingham and Earley in setting up a Flood Action Group, to plan and prepare for flooding.

9.2.4 Property Flood Resilience

It is also recommended that WBC and the Environment Agency investigate funding opportunities for installing PFR measures at the flooded properties in Hurst and the wider

1 [Check the long term flood risk for an area in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/check-the-long-term-flood-risk-for-an-area-in-england)

2 [How to plan ahead for flooding - Check for flooding - GOV.UK \(check-for-flooding.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/how-to-plan-ahead-for-flooding)

3 [Personal flood plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/personal-flood-plan)

area. This recommendation is also an important mitigation measure, as it reduces the likelihood of localised property flooding.

PFR measures include implementing barriers for doorways, portable puddle sucker pumps and sump pumps with associated drainage outlets. As the properties are isolated and have flooded from different sources, PFR may be an appropriate solution (where the property construction is suitable for such measures).

9.2.5 Improved asset maintenance regime

It has been identified that a significant contributing factor to the flooding on 31 March 2023 was the blockage of culverts and other assets as a result of high rainfall and significant debris and vegetation growth within channels. Regular clearance and maintenance of assets is important to ensure the effective flow of water through these structures.

It is evident from the EA's AIMS dataset that the average condition of assets within the Hurst area is classified under the Environment Agency asset condition grades as 'poor' or 'very poor'. The condition of bridges/ culverts located in proximity to the affected properties in Hurst is classified as 'very poor', indicating the lack of maintenance/ clearance of vegetation.

Increased asset maintenance in priority areas could help to mitigate flood risk to the affected properties, by reducing the amount of water leaving watercourses and ditches and flooding roads and properties. Areas of interest for improved maintenance of watercourses and ditches include:

- Wokingham Road, towards Island Stone Lane
- Hogmoor Lane and Poplar Lane

A Addressing flooding in Hurst

Addressing flooding in Hurst

January 2024

If the threat of flooding in Hurst is to be addressed during periods of intense rainfall, the amount of water pooling in the village needs to be mitigated. Whilst the nature of the local *topography* (flat, with limited elevation above sea level) and the *geology* (heavy clay sub-soil) make it likely that flooding will never be eradicated, an initiative bringing together local landowners to help solve the problem has produced a practical plan. This essentially comprises the following:

- A. The flow of water **downstream** from Hurst must be vastly improved (ie. via the Twyford Brook and onwards to the River Loddon). This will ensure floodwater is taken away from the village as efficiently and as quickly as possible.
- B. The water **upstream** from Hurst – which otherwise exacerbates any flooding issues in the village – needs to be held back when there is excessive rainfall.

DOWNSTREAM: All the water to the east of Hurst flows into the Twyford Brook (a watercourse that flows to the south of Twyford's *Broad Hinton* area, then northwards past Twyford station, and eventually into the River Loddon. NB: Up until around 1925 the Brook was known as the "*River Broadwater*", hence the name of Broadwater Lane in Hurst). There is a single pinch-point (**Point A** on the map below, where the Brook runs under the Hurst Road, the A321) where all of this water amasses before travelling northwards to the station. If the Twyford Brook from Point A past the station, is not functioning efficiently, all of this water has nowhere to go and inevitably backs-up in the direction of Hurst.

UPSTREAM: The surface water that affects Hurst (either directly as it passes Hurst; or because blockages in the Twyford Brook cause it to back-up towards the village) comes in the first place from two directions:

1. From the **M4 motorway** (ie. from the south, **through Haines Hill**).
2. From the low-lying **Ruscombe Lake** area (ie. from the east, **through Stanlake**). [NB. Bracknell's rainfall historically fed into Ruscombe Lake].

THE PLAN

To mitigate Hurst's flooding, the following will be necessary:

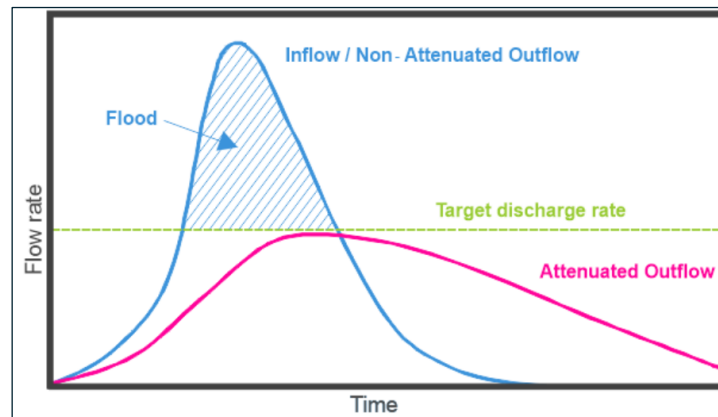
1. **Twyford Brook:** Remove all blockages in the Twyford Brook, in particular from the A321 (Hurst Road) bridge along the stretch northwards to Twyford station.
2. **Stanlake:** Install a weir at **Point B**. This will control the flow of water through Stanlake at times of excessive rainfall, effectively creating an attenuation reservoir to the east of Point B, allowing the Twyford Brook to better handle the excessive demands placed on it at these times.
3. **Haines Hill:** Attenuate the flow of water through Haines Hill by avoiding excessive dredging of Haines Hill's ditches (intended in Spring/Summer 2024). This is NOT in Haines Hill's interest as it means Haines Hill's fields will be flooded at times of intense rainfall (effectively creating an attenuation reservoir). This in turn means Haines Hill's farming enterprise cannot crop these fields. However, it will allow the Twyford Brook to better handle the excessive demands placed on it at these times.
4. **Thames Water:** It is widely recognised that Thames Water's pumping station is woefully inadequate for the job, resulting in drains overflowing and adding to the flooding issues in Hurst. Therefore, WBC should deal with Thames Water to find a resolution for this problem.



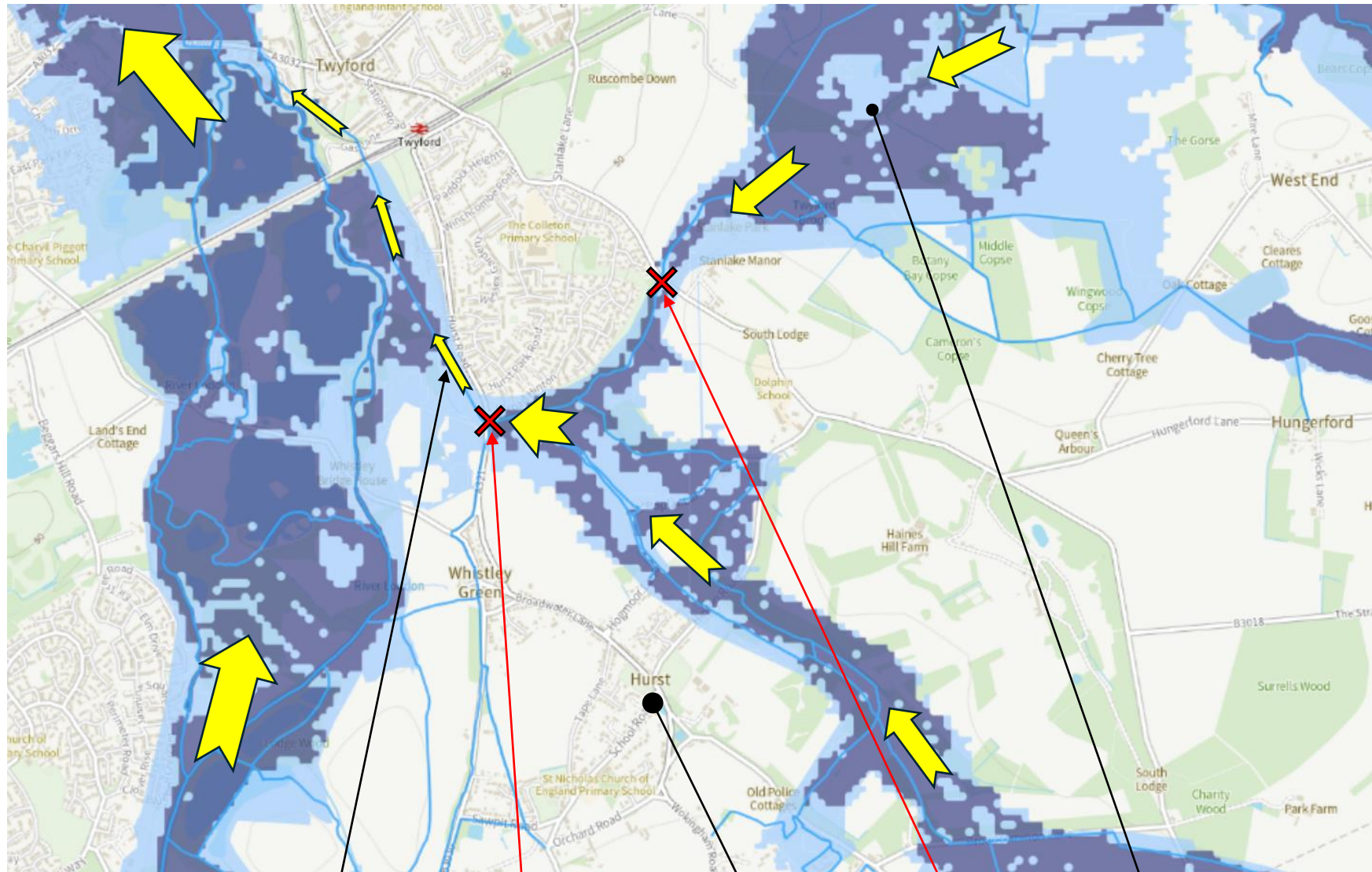
Twyford Brook severely restricted (January 2024)

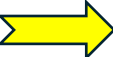


Thames Water pumping station ineffective

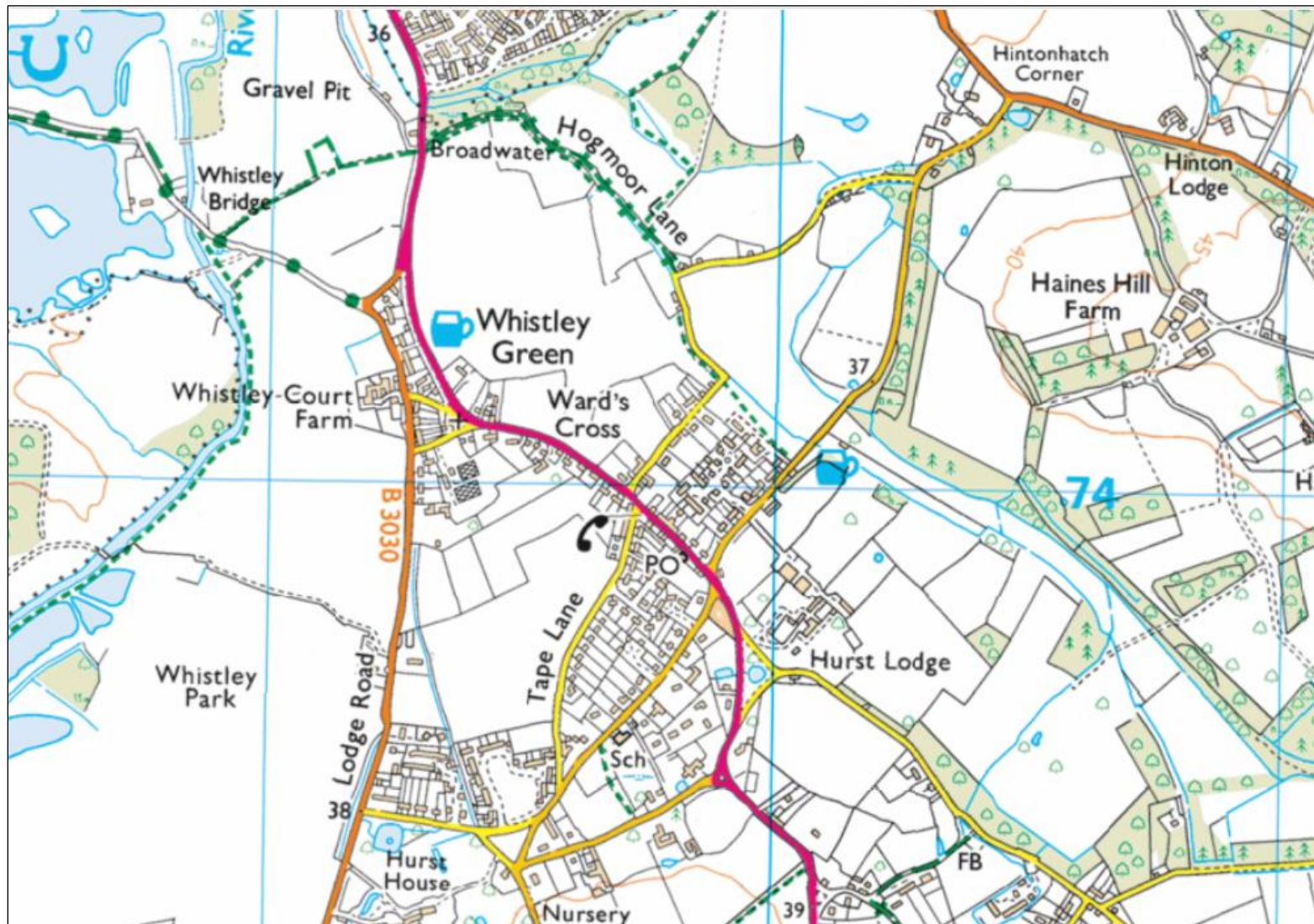


Attenuation at Stanlake and Haines Hill, requiring agreement to flood their land at times of intense rainfall, to slow the water reaching Hurst



Direction of flow: 
 Blockage
 Point A (Pinch-point)
 Hurst village
 Point B (Weir?)
 Ruscombe Lake (originally)

ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP AROUND HURST *(shows zero contours = very flat)*





British
Geological Survey

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

BGS ID: 433072 : BGS Reference: SU87SW32

British National Grid (27700) : 481050,174150

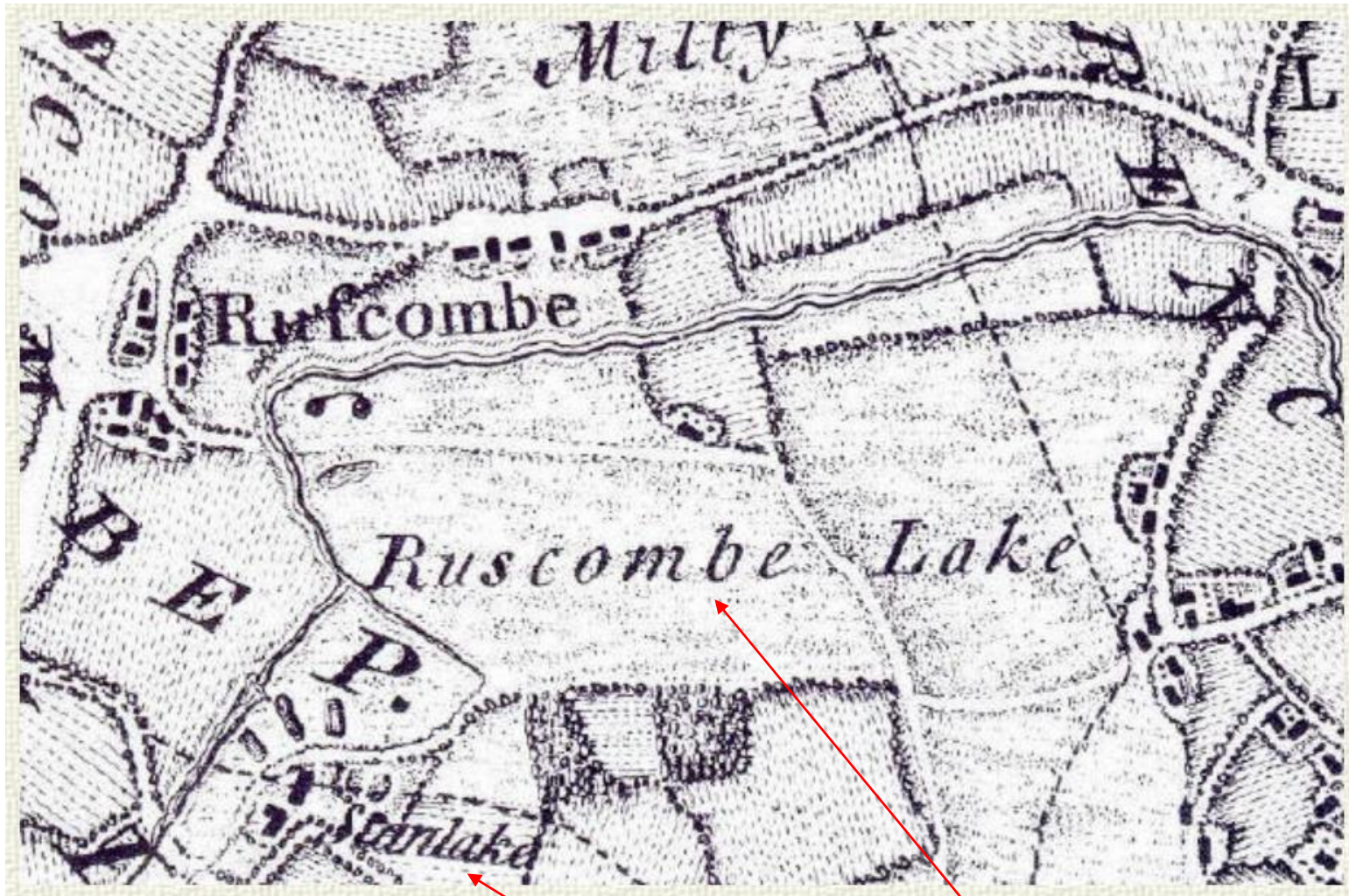
[Report an issue with this borehole](#)

<< < Prev Page 3 of 7 ▾ Next > >>

(2) (For Survey use only) GEOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION	NATURE OF STRATA If measurements start below ground surface, state how far	THICKNESS		DEPTH	
		Feet	Inches	Feet	Inches
Drift	TOP SOIL	1	0	1	0
	STONE & CLAY MIXED	7	0	8	0
London	GREY & BROWN CLAY	6	0	14	0
Clay	BLUISH CLAY	10	0	24	0
Reading Beds	READING BEDS	80	0	104	0
Upper Chalk	CHALK	146	0	250	0

16 feet of thick clay

Historic Map of Ruscombe



Stanlake Park

Ruscombe Lake

Offices at

Bristol
Coleshill
Doncaster
Dublin
Edinburgh
Exeter
Glasgow
Haywards Heath
Isle of Man
Leeds
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Newcastle upon Tyne
Newport
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ISO 45001:2018



Appeal Decision

Inquiry opened on 31 January 2023

Site visit made on 9 February 2023

by David Wildsmith BSc(Hons) MSc CEng MICE FCIHT MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 9th March 2023

APPEAL REF: APP/X0360/W/22/3309202

Land East of Lodge Road, Hurst, Reading

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mactaggart and Mickel Homes England Ltd ('the appellant') against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council ('WBC' or 'the Council').
 - The application Ref 220458, dated 16 February 2022, was refused by notice dated 23 June 2022. The development proposed is approximately 200 homes, open space, pedestrian and cycle links, recreational facilities (Class E) and other associated infrastructure including the formation of a new highway access road from Lodge Road located adjacent to the existing field access to be closed.
 - The Inquiry sat for 8 days on 31 January to 10 February 2023.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary and procedural matters

2. The application was submitted in outline, with only access to be determined at this stage. As originally submitted the development description referred to the primary vehicular access being "*via the existing Lodge Road gated access*". However, this did not accord with the location of the proposed access shown on the detailed drawing in the appellant's Transport Assessment¹ (TA). To address this point the appellant sought to amend the description as set out in the header above, and also submitted amended plans to show this revised access location, along with consequent changes to various parameter plans submitted for approval.
3. Other amendments were also made to the submitted plans, but in my assessment these did not materially alter the scale or nature of the proposed development. In any case, the appellant undertook a consultation exercise on the revised plans and, accordingly, I am satisfied that no-one with an interest in this proposal would be unduly prejudiced by me determining the appeal on the basis of the revised plans².
4. A range of supporting documents, detailed in the Statement of Common Ground³ (SoCG) between the Council and the appellant accompanied the application, and can be found as un-numbered documents at CD 2. Planning obligations were submitted to the Inquiry by the appellant in the form of a Unilateral Undertaking⁴ (UU) made under section 106 (S106) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, as amended. I deal with these obligations in more detail under the seventh main issue.

¹ One of the un-numbered Core Documents (CD) at CD 2

² CD 2.1, supplemented by CD 79

³ CD 1.5

⁴ Document (Doc) 29

5. I carried out unaccompanied visits to the site and the surrounding area on 30 January 2023 and on 9 February 2023. On this latter date I also undertook an accompanied site visit in the company of representatives of the appellant, the Council and a Rule 6(6) Party, the St Nicholas Hurst Parish Council (SNHPC).

Site description, surrounding area and details of the appeal proposal

6. The appeal site comprises some 10.68 hectares (ha) of undeveloped greenfield land, mostly consisting of a single, large, fairly level field, currently used for the grazing of horses and ponies. It lies outside but immediately abutting the Development Limits of Hurst, with development in Whistley Green to the north and Hurst to the east and south. It extends from Tape Lane in the east to the tree-lined Hatchgate Ditch which borders the southern length of the site's western boundary. A ditch also runs along the site's southern boundary, with dwellings in Martineau Lane, and allotments, beyond. The northern site boundary is marked by sporadic mature trees, with further undeveloped land immediately to the north. A smaller field abutting Lodge Road comprises the north-western part of the appeal site. Two trees at the southern boundary of this smaller field were removed in March 2021, some time before this planning application was submitted⁵.
7. There are established trees and hedgerows along most of the site boundaries, but there are also some more open lengths of boundary including to the Martineau Lane dwellings and allotments in the south, and along parts of the northern boundary. The site is private land, not accessible to the public, with no Public Rights of Way (PRoW) crossing it. There are 2 existing private access points to the site; one from Lodge Road to the west and the other from the northern stretch of Tape Lane to the east. Some 5.9ha of the site is Grade 3a agricultural land, which is classified as best and most versatile (BMV). The site lies within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore in the 'very low' surface water flood risk category, although there are some very small areas of 'low' surface water flood risk.
8. The site is located about 4 miles north of Wokingham, 3 miles north-east of Winnersh and 1.5 miles south of Twyford. The Rail Station at Twyford has mainline services to Reading and beyond to the west, and to London Paddington to the east. The Elizabeth Line/Crossrail also serves Twyford, providing further services between Reading and London. In addition, bus services provide access to Reading, Twyford, Wokingham and High Wycombe. Dinton Pastures, a 350ha Country Park, is located about 1.6 kilometres (km) south-west of the appeal site and can be reached by means of a permissive footpath on the west side of Lodge Road and Footpath 34 to the south.
9. Under the appeal proposal the site would be developed by the construction of about 200 new homes of mixed types and tenures, predominantly houses but with a small number of apartments. 40% of the new homes (some 80 units), are proposed as affordable housing. The SoCG states that all homes will be no higher than 2 storeys, in keeping with the surrounding area. The scheme would also include parks and gardens, natural/semi-natural green space, amenity space, a tennis court, play areas and community orchards, with the landscaped areas incorporating a sustainable drainage scheme (SuDS).
10. The proposal would not require the removal of any trees but some existing hedgerow along Lodge Road would need to be relocated, to provide the sole vehicular access for the proposed development. The existing field access would be

⁵ Section 7 and Appendix 18 of CD 8.3.2

closed and replaced by new hedgerow. An emergency vehicle access, which would also serve as an access for pedestrians and cyclists, would be provided onto Tape Lane in the north-eastern corner of the appeal scheme. Footway improvements would be provided at the southern end of Tape Lane, at the School Road junction.

11. The scheme would include a network of formal and informal on-site footpaths and cycle routes. On-site vehicle and cycle parking would be provided in accordance with WBC standards, along with electric vehicle charging provision for each dwelling. Nine further parking spaces would be provided to serve the existing allotments adjacent to the site's south-eastern corner.

Main issues

12. The Council refused planning permission for 10 reasons, but in the run-up to the Inquiry, and as a result of discussions and the signing of subject-specific SoCG relating to highways matters, sustainability and ecology⁶, a number of these reasons for refusal were either withdrawn, or not defended by the Council at the Inquiry. The SNHPC did, however, maintain an objection on highway safety grounds, notwithstanding the Council's satisfaction on this matter.
13. With these points in mind, and having regard to the evidence submitted by all parties, I consider the main issues in this case to be:
 - The extent to which the proposed development would be consistent with the development plan for the area, and the weight to be given to relevant policies;
 - The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the appeal site and the surrounding area, in landscape and visual terms;
 - The effect on trees and hedgerows;
 - The effect on BMV agricultural land;
 - Whether the appeal site represents a sustainable location;
 - The effect of the proposed development in terms of highway safety; and
 - Whether the submitted planning obligations would satisfactorily address the impact of the proposed development.
14. Following my assessment of the main issues I look briefly at other matters raised, before moving on to assess the benefits and disbenefits of the proposal. I then carry out a final planning balance and reach my overall conclusion.

Reasons

Main issue 1 – Consistency with the development plan, and policy weight

15. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The development plan in this case includes the Wokingham Borough Local Development Framework Core Strategy⁷ (CS), adopted in January 2010, and the Wokingham Borough Development Plan Managing Development Delivery Local Plan⁸ (MDDL), adopted in February 2014.
16. The National Planning Policy Framework ('the Framework') is an important material consideration which not only provides national policy guidance, but also sets out the decision-taking process that should be adopted when considering planning

⁶ Appendices 1, 2 & 3 to CD 1.5

⁷ CD 5.1

⁸ CD 5.2

proposals. It explains in its paragraph 11(c), that development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan should be approved without delay. But in situations where the development plan policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date – which includes circumstances where the Council cannot demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites, with the appropriate buffer – paragraph 11(d) of the Framework makes it plain that planning permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

17. At the time the Council determined this application it considered that it could demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing land, in accordance with the requirements of the Framework. However, this was disputed by the appellant and although this matter had not been fully agreed between the parties at the time the SoCG was finalised, by the opening of the Inquiry the Council accepted that it could only demonstrate a deliverable housing land supply (HLS) of 3.95 years.
18. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is also an important material consideration in the determination of this appeal, as are a number of the Council's adopted Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), as detailed in the SoCG.
19. There is no dispute between the main parties that this proposal is not in accordance with the development plan, taken as a whole. This is because by seeking to develop this countryside location, outside the Hurst settlement boundary, for a large-scale housing scheme, the proposal would be at odds with the spatial vision for the Borough, set out at Section 3 of the CS, and would clearly conflict with a number of adopted policies such as CS Policies CP9 and CP11, as well as MDDL Policy CC02.
20. In summary, the spatial vision explains that in order to deliver the necessary development within the Borough the Council has identified a number of high quality Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) where the majority of the 13,230 new houses to be delivered in the CS Plan period will be located. This approach seeks to locate schemes where they can provide easy access to existing facilities or where improvements are readily deliverable. In addition, the spatial vision seeks to concentrate development in those towns and villages that either have a significant range of infrastructure including facilities and services now – or will have them as a result of the development proposed through the CS. Development is stated to be less likely in locations where these facilities and services will not be available.
21. With these points in mind a number of areas are identified as being the most appropriate locations for growth, and the vision also details '*other locations with facilities and services together with access to the major locations*', and identifies these as appropriate for modest levels of development. Hurst, along with 8 other settlements, falls into the '*other settlements*' category of the spatial vision. Such settlements are deemed appropriate to accommodate limited development, to support the vitality of existing local services.
22. I consider that this spatial vision accords with the requirements of paragraph 11(a) of the Framework as it promotes a sustainable pattern of development which seeks to meet the development needs of the area; align growth and infrastructure; and

make effective use of land in urban areas. These matters are carried forward in CS Policy CP9, which states that the scale of development proposals in Wokingham Borough must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility. It identifies Hurst as one of nine 'Limited Development locations', where development proposals within development limits will be acceptable. The policy's supporting text explains that such locations are those which contain a basic range of services and facilities and are physically and socially cohesive; and that within such settlements limited development would be acceptable, including affordable housing to meet identified local needs.

23. The appeal proposal, however, seeks to develop land outside the development limits of Hurst and, as such, is in conflict with CS Policy CP11 which explains that in order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits (including countryside), will not normally be permitted. Whilst this policy does allow for some exceptions to this approach, these do not apply in this case.
24. Whilst not directly referred to in any of the reasons for refusal, CS Policy CP17, dealing with Housing Delivery, is also of relevance. It provides a breakdown of how the CS intends to provide for the development of at least 13,230 dwellings in the Borough in the period 2006-2026, indicating that a total of 100 dwellings are expected to be delivered in the Limited Development locations, where they should generally not exceed 25 dwellings from any single site. The appeal proposal clearly would not accord with this policy.
25. Moreover, by seeking to site a significantly-sized new housing scheme outside the development limits of Hurst the appeal proposal would be at odds with the MDDL, which aims to carry forward the approach and objectives set out in the CS by, amongst other things, maintaining the distinct and separate identity of the Borough's settlements through confirming development limits. In this regard MDDL Policy CC02 states that development limits for each settlement are defined on the Policies Map, and then goes on to only discuss development within development limits for locations other than the SDLs.
26. Notwithstanding this development plan conflict, the appellant maintains that there are a number of key considerations which indicate that planning permission should be granted. The first of these is the fact that the Council cannot demonstrate a deliverable 5-year HLS, a matter which, as already noted, the Council does not dispute. The Framework indicates that in such circumstances the policies which are most important for determining the application have to be considered out-of-date, meaning the so-called 'tilted balance' of paragraph 11(d)(ii) comes into play.
27. The most important policies in this case are agreed to be those referred to in the reasons for refusal, but being considered out-of-date does not mean that these policies can carry no weight in the determination of this appeal. The Framework itself clarifies this point in its paragraph 219, where it explains that due weight should be given to development plan policies according to their degree of consistency with the Framework. The closer such policies are to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given to them.
28. There is no dispute between the parties that the housing requirement set out in the CS is out-of-date, and that the policies and settlement boundaries detailed in the CS and the MDDL to achieve delivery of this quantum of housing, discussed above, must similarly be regarded as being out-of-date. But it does not automatically follow that the development plan is failing to accord with the requirement in

paragraph 60 of the Framework to significantly boost the supply of homes; nor does it mean that the spatial vision set out in the CS should not still carry weight.

29. On the first of these points, I have been mindful of the Council's evidence which shows that over the 16-year period from 2006/07 to 2021/22 it has achieved a total of 12,465 housing completions compared to a CS Policy CP17 cumulative requirement⁹ of 10,738 new dwellings – an excess or 'over-supply' of some 1,727 dwellings¹⁰. This is a factual position, and I see no reason to dispute the Council's interpretation that it demonstrates a clear boosting of housing delivery to date, in line with Framework requirements.
30. I acknowledge that within this 16-year period there were more years when the actual completions fell behind the policy requirement than exceeded it. But as the appellant accepted in its closing submissions¹¹, such a delivery profile is not unexpected where the bulk of housing delivery relies on a small number of very large sites – the SDLs in this case – which can be slow to start delivering houses, and where housing delivery may be unreliable and 'lumpy'.
31. On this point I have noted the Council's assertion that further housing delivery from the SDLs is very likely to add to the housing supply over the next 5-year period¹², but whilst this may prove to be the case I can place no weight on this matter as things currently stand, as such sites clearly do not fall within the Framework's definition of deliverable. However, I do not consider it unreasonable to have regard to the Council's assertion that if projected completions over the remainder of the CS plan period to 2026 were to be taken into account, then total completions would be 15,448 compared to the CS requirement of 13,230 dwellings, resulting in an excess of some 2,218 dwellings and representing a 16.2% oversupply¹³. In this case the dwellings concerned clearly are considered deliverable and there is no good reason to doubt that they will be completed and add to the housing supply within the overall CS period.
32. In view of these points, and even though the Council is currently unable to demonstrate a deliverable 5-year HLS, falling short by some 863 dwellings, I do not consider it reasonable to ignore the bigger picture, which is that there is a very strong likelihood that the Council will achieve a significant oversupply of dwelling completions over the whole CS period. To my mind this does not signify a Council that is failing in terms of housing provision, but rather one which is performing well and managing to boost the supply of housing over that which it planned for.
33. Reinforcing this view, I note that since the standard method of calculating Local Housing Need (LHN) was introduced in 2018, evidence from the Council shows that housing completions have consistently and significantly exceeded the LHN figure for each of the 4 years in question, providing some 5,391 new dwellings compared to a LHN requirement of 2,166 dwellings¹⁴.
34. Turning to consider the CS's spatial vision, I see nothing in the evidence placed before me to indicate that the Council's chosen method of distributing new housing throughout the Borough has prevented it from achieving satisfactory housing delivery to date. Whilst the Council's inability to demonstrate a deliverable 5-year

⁹ Based on the average annual requirement figures set out in CS Policy CP17

¹⁰ Table 1 in CD 8.2.2

¹¹ Paragraph 10 of Doc 34

¹² Paragraphs 3.26 & 3.27 in CD 8.2.2

¹³ Paragraph 3.6 in CD 8.2.2

¹⁴ Paragraphs 3.15 - 3.17 in CD 8.2.2

HLS is clearly a matter of concern, no persuasive evidence has been placed before me to indicate that the most sensible or appropriate way to address this issue is to grant planning permission for a significantly-sized development which would run counter to this spatial vision, as would be the case with this appeal proposal.

35. Having regard to all the points set out above, I consider that CS Policies CP9 and CP11, and MDDL Policy CC02 should still carry significant weight in this appeal.
36. Turning to other policies from the reasons for refusal, CS Policy CP1, entitled 'Sustainable Development', sets out a number of criteria which development proposals should comply with in order to be granted planning permission. This policy covers a wide range of topics, and I consider that it is in broad accordance with the Framework. However, whereas Policy CP1 specifically requires new development to avoid BMV land, the Framework only requires that development proposals recognise the economic and other benefits of such land. This means, in my opinion, that the policy cannot be given full weight. But because of the otherwise good consistency with the Framework requirements, I consider it appropriate to accord this policy reduced but still significant weight in this appeal.
37. Sustainable development is also the subject of MDDL Policy CC01. It makes reference to 'relevant' policies, whereas the current version of the Framework uses the phrase "*policies which are most important for determining the application*", but otherwise the policy seems to reflect Framework requirements. As such I consider that it, too, should carry significant weight in this appeal. The sustainability requirements detailed in CS Policy CP1 are built upon in CS Policy CP2, which seeks to ensure that new development contributes to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities (including the provision of community facilities) to meet long term needs. No evidence has been submitted to suggest that anything other than full weight should be given to this policy.
38. General principles for acceptable development proposals are set out in CS Policy CP3, and whilst these seem to be in broad accordance with the requirements of the Framework, I note that amongst other things the policy requires development proposals to have no detrimental impact upon important landscape features. This does not fully align with Framework paragraph 174(b), which simply requires the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside to be recognised. Again, this indicates to me that this policy cannot be given full weight, but that its otherwise good consistency with the Framework means that it should carry reduced, but still significant weight in this appeal.
39. CS Policy CP6, entitled 'Managing Travel Demand', states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that, amongst other things, provide for sustainable forms of transport to allow choice; are located where there are or will be at the time of development choices in the mode of transport available and which minimise the distance people need to travel. As such, this policy is broadly in accordance with the requirements of the Framework, although it does not recognise that the opportunities available to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, as detailed in paragraph 105 of the Framework. Nonetheless, the policy's general consistency with the Framework means that in my assessment it should carry significant weight in this appeal.
40. MDDL Policy CC03 deals with green infrastructure, trees and landscaping and, amongst other things, requires development proposals to demonstrate how they have considered and achieved a number of listed criteria within scheme proposals. These include the need to protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other

landscape features, as well as incorporating high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme. I consider this policy accords with the Framework and should therefore carry full weight.

41. The Council is updating its Local Plan but there have been problems and delays with this, and there was general agreement between the parties that this emerging plan should carry no weight in this appeal. I share that view.
42. Drawing all the above points together, I conclude that the proposed development would be in conflict with the development plan. In particular it would be at odds with CS Policies CP9 and CP11, and MDDL Policy CC02. Other policy conflicts are explored under later main issues. Notwithstanding the Council's inability to demonstrate a 5-year deliverable HLS, for reasons already stated I further conclude that significant weight should still be given to CS Policies CP1, CP3, CP6, CP9 and CP11, and to MDDL Policies CC01 and CC02; and that full weight should be given to CS Policy CP2 and MDDL Policy CC03.

Main issue 2 – the effect on character and appearance

43. The appeal site lies within the C2 Hurst River Terrace Landscape Character Area (LCA) as defined by the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment¹⁵ (WBLCA). In summary, the C2 LCA is described as a relatively flat lowland agricultural landscape lying to the east of the floodplain of the River Loddon with arable fields which tend to be large, with areas of horse and pony grazing. The area has a strong connection to the river valley, with water-filled ditches and ponds throughout. A network of rural roads connects farms and the small settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst. The LCA is considered to be a landscape of moderate condition and sensitivity, with moderate capacity for change.
44. The WBLCA lists a number of key characteristics of the C2 LCA, many of which clearly relate to the appeal site and its immediate environs. These include a simple agricultural landscape of mainly arable farmland, with pasture enclosed in relatively large straight-sided fields, including smaller areas of horse and pony paddocks; an open character with relatively few boundaries marked by vegetation, with hedgerow or roadside trees being relatively scarce and scattered; a network of water features, including deep drainage ditches around fields; and a rural and tranquil area, with only the southern edge affected by movement and noise of the M4 and its junction with the A329(M).
45. A further key characteristic is noted to be villages located around historic cores including Whistley Green and Hurst. Newer linear development within these settlements is noted to be aligned along the network of roads and rural lanes and whilst there is no strong local vernacular there are fine early buildings, with building character being unified by the presence of red brick.
46. In order to maintain the landscape character of the C2 LCA, the stated landscape strategy is *"to conserve and enhance the quiet, rural and agricultural landscape with its scattered rural farmsteads and small red brick villages connected by narrow rural lanes"*. The strategy goes on to say that *"there are opportunities to enhance the landscape through restoration and management of the hedgerows"*, and that *"in terms of development, the aim is to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green"*.

¹⁵ CD 5.5. See also CD 5.5.1 & CD 5.5.2

47. The A321 Wokingham Road/Broadwater Lane forms the main road through the developed area and I saw at my site visit that houses and other buildings line more or less its complete length, although the development is somewhat sparser to the immediate north-west of Hogmore Lane, with some open fields to the north-east of Broadwater Lane. Because of this it is my view that although the 2 former separate villages of Hurst and Whistley Green do now read as one, the Council's description of 'lightly touching', expressed by Mr Hannington, seems to be more appropriate than any suggestion of full coalescence. Be that as it may, the fact remains that development in the area is characterised as being in the shape of a 'reversed C', wrapping round the appeal site and other adjacent, undeveloped land, from Sawpit Road in the south to Whistley Green in the north.
48. The appeal site is not covered by any qualitative landscape designations at a national or local level, but Mr Hannington drew attention to the fact that other Inspectors determining earlier schemes in this general area had referred to the open land within the 'reversed C' as having an enhanced significance as a countryside gap between Lodge Road and Tape Lane¹⁶. He maintained that this landscape has sufficient features and characteristics of quality to set it above the ordinary, such as attractive and available views over the land, the presence of woodland, trees and hedgerows, terrace landform, field-scape, walks adjacent to the land along country lanes, an absence of built development and a relative tranquillity. Because of this he argued that it should be regarded as a valued landscape for the purpose of paragraph 174(a) of the Framework.
49. However, I do not share that view. I am not persuaded that any of the features referred to by Mr Hannington could be considered as raising this land above 'ordinary' countryside. It is clear that this open area is valued locally, but it seems to me that its value arises more from its current condition as undeveloped land and from the setting it provides for this western side of the settlement, than from any specific features or physical attributes it may possess. None of the features referenced are unusual or special, and in my assessment they do not elevate the land into the category of a valued landscape as referred to in paragraph 174(a) of the Framework.
50. The appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment¹⁷ (LVIA) concludes that the baseline character of the appeal site is strongly influenced by the surrounding well-vegetated and suburban fringe local context. It acknowledges that the change which would arise from the proposed development would be permanent and irreversible, explaining that at construction stage the significance of the landscape effect would be modest adverse, with the same being the case at operational stage. It states that there would be a reduction in the magnitude of landscape impact over a 15-year assessment period as a result of mitigation measures, including the provision of green infrastructure. Accordingly, the LVIA considers that when compared to the current landscape baseline of fields in equestrian/pastoral use, the appeal proposal would result in beneficial landscape features being created.
51. The construction activities would result in a large magnitude of change in visual terms, resulting in a major/moderate adverse significance of effect. This would also be the case at operational stage, with 7 of the 8 assessed viewpoints experiencing adverse visual effects, with the remaining viewpoint subject to neutral effects. After

¹⁶ CDs 9.8, 9.8.2 & 70

¹⁷ Carried out in accordance with the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Third Edition (GLVIA3), produced by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment. It can be found as one of the un-numbered documents at CD 2

15 years, as a worst case, moderate adverse visual effects would be likely from 4 of the 8 assessed viewpoints. However, the LVIA comments that this change would not be adverse but rather would be 'different', because the mitigation measures would have established and created additional linear woodland and parkland that would create enclosure to views from the wider landscape, although it is likely that some limited views from proposed access points would remain.

52. The LVIA's overall conclusion is that the proposal would result in no substantial adverse impacts, but rather would offer beneficial landscape features to the landscape baseline at a residual stage. Although there would be change, this would be seen in the context of a similar settlement fringe pattern with substantial creation of green infrastructure elements and publicly accessible space. The change would be experienced only in close proximity to the site boundary and only very limited change would be perceptible from beyond the roads that bound the site. Therefore the LVIA concludes that the scheme would be acceptable on landscape and visual grounds. The findings and conclusions of the LVIA were supported and echoed by the appellant's landscape witness, Mr Friend, who also submitted a number of Accurate Visual Representations¹⁸ (AVRs), to which I refer later.
53. However, whilst not undertaking a similar GLVIA3 assessment, Mr Hannington for the Council took a significantly different view, arguing that the proposal would harm the landscape character and appearance of the area and undermine a number of valuable landscape character attributes of the C2 Hurst River Terrace LCA. He maintained that the proposals would not reflect the rural settlement pattern of small villages with historic cores and farmsteads but rather, by introducing some 200 new houses, would be a huge bolt-on extension increasing the size of this settlement by some 45%, thereby undermining and urbanising the peaceful and open character of the landscape. The proposed development would also undermine the overall landscape strategy for the C2 LCA which is to "*conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green*".
54. He also maintained that the proposed screening planting would be alien in such an open landscape and that the clutter of buildings, access roads, lighting, parked cars and all the other paraphernalia of suburban life would be incongruous in a landscape where one of the key features is the open and clear views across the landscape. In addition, he considered that the proposed vehicular access with its visibility splays, road markings, widened carriageway, new footways and associated signage would be an intrusive feature which would have an urbanising effect on Lodge Road, which is particularly rural between Hurst and Whistley Green at the open end of the 'reversed C'¹⁹.
55. In assessing this proposal I have had regard to the findings of the LVIA and the evidence of the respective landscape witnesses, but I have also relied on my own observations of the appeal site and the surrounding area made at my accompanied and unaccompanied site visits. With all of these points in mind, I consider it reasonable to ascribe a moderate or medium baseline value to the appeal site.
56. The Illustrative Masterplan²⁰ indicates that the existing boundary vegetation is to be retained, strengthened and managed, with development set back behind new planting and an internal footpath which would run along the eastern, southern and south-western boundaries. It also shows that areas of public open space (POS)

¹⁸ CDs 8.4.1 & 8.4.2

¹⁹ Paragraphs 29 - 47 in Mr Hannington's Summary PoE at CD 8.2.3

²⁰ See CD 2.1

would be provided centrally and elsewhere within the site, to include a tennis court, play areas and orchards, along with the drainage attenuation areas. Public footpaths and cycle paths would link onto Tape Lane, and would also provide a link across the site to Lodge Road.

57. I saw at my site visit that glimpsed views of the appeal site are available from public vantage points along Tape Lane, through gaps in the roadside vegetation, through the gated access close to the site's north-eastern corner, and from areas of public space at Martineau Lane. Further glimpsed views are also available to those travelling along Lodge Road, such as walkers on the permissive paths, the carriageway and grassed verge, as well as drivers and other vehicle occupants. These visual receptors will currently experience the open, undeveloped nature of this landscape within the 'reversed C', predominantly comprising the appeal site, which makes a significant contribution to the rural setting of Hurst.
58. Residential development already exists close to the appeal site, so the proposal would not introduce an alien form of development into this settlement edge area. It would, however, transform the appeal site from an undeveloped field of medium/moderate landscape value, outside the settlement boundary, to a relatively densely-developed residential area. The wire-frame representations shown on the AVRs indicate that the new dwellings would be very noticeable in glimpsed views from the surrounding roads and the Martineau Lane open space, despite the proposed landscaping. This would appreciably change the experience of users of these nearby roads and open spaces and would inevitably lessen the rural feel of the overall area. Like the Council, I consider that this would be particularly noticeable in the vicinity of the proposed vehicular access on Lodge Road.
59. This road joins the 2 ends of the 'reversed C', from the existing houses fronting Lodge Road close to Sawpit Road in the south, to those at Whistley Green in the north. But the general absence of development in between – with the exception of the 2 isolated houses at The Old Lodge and Badger's Bottom – means that this linking section has a strong rural feel and appearance, with no footways or street-lighting and with grassed verges, hedgerows and trees lining the road, with some trees overhanging the road in places. Widening the road to provide a ghost right-turn lane into the site, introducing a new junction and new northbound footway on the eastern side, and having to remove and replace existing hedging to provide necessary visibility splays would all serve to introduce a much more urban feel to this stretch of road. This would be compounded by the presence of new dwellings which, although set back into the site behind existing and new vegetation and behind the new access road, would still be visible as shown in the submitted AVRs.
60. As such, I consider it self-evident that the appeal proposal would have an adverse impact on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site, and would inevitably have an adverse impact on the visual experience of users of Tape Lane and Lodge Road by bringing a more developed feel to the whole area. Because of the scale of the proposed development and the fact that its impact would be experienced from many different locations, albeit within fairly close proximity to the site itself, I share the view of my colleague Inspector who determined an earlier appeal at Lodge Road²¹, that the harm caused in landscape character and visual terms should be categorised as being at the upper end of the moderate scale.
61. Drawing the above points together I therefore conclude that the appeal proposal would have a moderate adverse impact, at the upper end of the scale, on the rural

²¹ CD 9.8 – Appeal Ref APP/X0360/W/18/3194044

character and appearance of the appeal site and surrounding area, and would fail to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green as set out in the C2 LCA landscape strategy. I weigh these harms against the benefits of the appeal proposal in the planning balance section of this decision.

62. As a result of these harms I further conclude that the appeal proposal would conflict with CS Policies CP1 and CP3 to which I have already referred. Whilst these policies do not fully accord with the Framework, for reasons already given I consider that they should both carry reduced, but still significant weight in this appeal. Moreover, as I do not consider that the appeal proposal would retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape, I also find it to be at odds with MDDL Policy TB21, which I consider should carry full weight in the determination of this appeal.

Main issue 3 – the effect on trees and hedgerows

63. This matter was included as a main issue for the Inquiry because the Council indicated, in its reasons for refusal, that insufficient and contradictory information had been submitted that did not demonstrate that the proposed development would have an acceptable impact on existing trees and hedgerows which contribute positively to the character and appearance of the area²². In this regard it is of note that the appeal site is covered by a recently imposed Tree Preservation Order²³ ('TPO'), with a further TPO having been imposed on land on Lodge Road²⁴.
64. Whilst acknowledging that the application was for outline planning permission, with most of the detail to be agreed at reserved matters stage, the Council was nevertheless concerned to see that the submitted plans, albeit illustrative, showed that there would be unjustified incursions into the root protection areas ('RPAs') of protected trees, including veteran trees. However, during the course of the appeal the appellant demonstrated, through the evidence of Mr Hartley²⁵, that the proposal could be designed in a way which would acknowledge the likely shape and extent of the RPAs, and which would ensure no unjustified intrusions into them.
65. As such, the Council is content that this matter could adequately be addressed by means of an appropriate planning condition. I share that view, and conclude that the appeal proposal would not have an unacceptable impact upon protected trees and hedgerows. Accordingly, it would not be at odds with the development plan policies or other documents referred to in the reasons for refusal.

Main issue 4 – The effect on BMV agricultural land

66. Both the appellant and the Council engaged agricultural consultants to investigate and report on issues relating to BMV agricultural land²⁶. As a result there is agreement between these main parties that the appeal site contains some 5.6ha (about 52%) of Subgrade 3a land (BMV), located mainly in the western part of the site, with most of the remainder being Subgrade 3b land (43%), with a small amount (5%) along the western boundary shown to be non-agricultural land.
67. The appellant states that the site is farmed as a single block and has always been managed as Subgrade 3b land. Some farming activity was undertaken on the land

²² Paragraph 1.6 of CD 1.5

²³ Ref: 1781/2021

²⁴ Ref: 1869/2022

²⁵ CD 8.7. See also CDs 80 & 81

²⁶ Reading Agricultural Consultants (RAC) and Simmons & Sons on behalf of the appellant; and White & Sons for the Council. See Appendix 23 in the appellant's Statement of Case – CD 1.3; Appendix 7 in CD 8.1; Appendix G in CD 8.2.1; and CD 8.10

in the 1970s and early 1980s, including cereal production, growing grass for silage and hay, and grazing by cattle and horses but the appellant's evidence is that none of these activities could successfully be carried out, largely because of difficulties with trespass and vandalism. As a result, farming activities ceased and the land has been grazed by some 30 horses, ponies and donkeys for about the past 40 years, with the occasional cattle also grazed.

68. The farmer has confirmed that the site suffers from surface ponding following heavy rainfall, and states that this water retention is a clear limitation to the possible agricultural use of the land. Arable cropping is also limited due to the enclosure size and the short working lengths. As such, the appellant maintains that the agricultural use of, and benefit from, the land is very limited.
69. The consultants for the appellant also looked at the possibility and viability of using the land for sheep production, summer finishing of cattle, and hay production but concluded that the land cannot be considered viable as a stand-alone holding, or as a holding for farming purposes even as a starter unit, as other off-site supporting land would be required to supplement it and provide hard standing, winter housing, storage buildings and supplemental dry grazing.
70. However, after reviewing the appellant's reports, the Council maintained that whilst it had no doubt been convenient to graze horses on the land now and in the past, the land could be cultivated. It considered that it would be possible to grow a range of arable or horticultural crops as is the case on other farmland surrounding Hurst, and that such uses would not be restricted by flooding from the River Loddon. The Council further maintained that in light of food supply chain disruptions caused by the Covid pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine, BMV land has a particularly significant economic value, as well as a health and social value in producing local, healthy and high quality food products. Because of this the Council argued that BMV land is of even greater importance now, and that land of less good quality should be brought forward for housing needs where they exist.
71. I have considered these differing views and have also had regard to CS Policy CP1 which requires development proposals to avoid areas of BMV agricultural land; and the aforementioned Framework paragraph 174(b) which, amongst other things, requires development proposal to recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of BMV agricultural land. As can be seen, CS Policy CP1 is not in full accordance with the Framework, and I have to therefore give this aspect of this policy reduced weight, as already noted.
72. I consider that the appellant has undertaken a far more rigorous and detailed assessment of the potential agricultural or horticultural uses of the land than has the Council, and I therefore give the appellant's position and conclusions more weight. It seems clear that viability is a key issue, and whilst the potential of BMV land is recognised, there is no strong evidence to indicate any likelihood of an agricultural use starting up again on this land. Times do change, however, and it is clear that if this development proposal goes ahead, the land would be lost for any future agricultural use. Because of this I conclude that the loss of some 5.6ha of BMV agricultural land would be a disbenefit of this proposed development, and would be at odds with both CS Policy CP1 and paragraph 174(b) of the Framework. But for all the reasons set out above, I consider that this should only carry modest weight against the proposal.

Main issue 5 – Whether the appeal site represents a sustainable location

73. The appellant argues that the settlement hierarchy set out in the CS is out of date, not simply because the Council is in the process of updating its Local Plan to meet current needs, but also because the hierarchy was established before the introduction of the Framework and before relevant infrastructure changes such as the opening of the Elizabeth Line at Twyford station. However, whilst these matters are factually correct, I am not persuaded that it automatically follows that the CS settlement hierarchy should be seen as out-of-date, as noted earlier.
74. The Council is clearly going to have to give serious thought to where it wishes to see future development taking place in the Borough as it progresses its new Local Plan to adoption. But I consider that the locational principles guiding the existing CS spatial vision broadly accord with the guidelines and requirements of the Framework, detailed below, and notwithstanding the current shortfall in the 5-year HLS appear to have served the Council well over the CS period to date.
75. Framework paragraphs 104 and 105, in the section entitled 'Promoting sustainable transport' are of particular relevance in this regard. Paragraph 104 states that transport issues should be considered from the earliest stages of plan-making and development proposals. This is so that, amongst other things, opportunities from existing or proposed transport infrastructure and changing transport technology and usage are realised – for example in relation to the scale, location or density of development that can be accommodated; and opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use can be identified and pursued.
76. Paragraph 105 makes it clear that the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of these objectives, explaining that significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. This paragraph also recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, stating that this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making. Taken together, these Framework paragraphs indicate that regard should clearly be had to matters of scale when sustainability is being considered.
77. However, the appellant's case, put simply in its closing submissions²⁷, is that the scale of the proposed development is irrelevant to the key question in Framework paragraph 105. On its interpretation of the evidence, the appellant argues that the appeal site lies in a sustainable location and offers a genuine choice of transport, with no capacity issues with regards to walk, cycle or bus, such that all residents of the proposed development would have the same genuine opportunities to walk, cycle and use the bus to access local village facilities and those further afield.
78. I do not share that view. Whilst the opportunities to use alternative modes of travel may be the same whether a few houses are involved – as was the case in the recent Sawbridge Road appeal for 4 dwellings²⁸ – or a couple of hundred houses, as here – the implications of people not being able to take advantage of those opportunities, for whatever reasons, could well differ significantly. Small housing developments are only likely to have a modest impact if new residents need to use the private car, for reasons such as convenience or expediency, whereas larger, more significant developments, possibly housing several hundred people, are likely

²⁷ Paragraph 60 in Doc 34

²⁸ CD 9.7 – Appeal Ref APP/X0360/W/21/3280255 – dated 4 August 2022

to have a much greater impact if these large numbers of people use unsustainable modes of travel. In summary, therefore, I am satisfied that the question of scale of development is an important determinant when the sustainability of a location is under consideration.

79. In CS terms the status of Hurst as a Limited Development Location carries with it the implicit assumption that it contains what the CS refers to as a *"basic range of services and facilities"*. Both the Council and the SNHPC maintained that this is a fair descriptor of what is available within Hurst, whereas the appellant considers that the village has a good range of facilities, echoing the view of the Inspector who determined the Sawbridge Road appeal by the written representations method.
80. That said, any such assessment has to be subjective, at least to some degree, and be based on the facts and evidence available at that time. I do not know the detail of the evidence placed before my colleague Inspector who determined this Sawbridge Road appeal, but I see from his decision that he listed Hurst as having a Post Office and village store, primary school, pre-school, public house, church and village hall, with secondary schools and medical surgeries located further afield.
81. These points led that Inspector to conclude that Hurst offers a *"good range of local facilities to address many everyday needs which are available by walking and cycling"*, but that it would be *"inevitable that there will be demands for travel outside of the village, to higher order settlements in the local area, or to alternative service centres that can offer facilities that Hurst does not"*. He commented that these essential services and facilities, including railway stations, local and supermarket shopping, a General Practitioners (GP) surgery, and employment were provided in Twyford, Reading, Winnersh and Wokingham, which were accessible from the bus stops in the proximity of the site under consideration in that appeal.
82. However, dealing first with the facilities available within the village, I accept that those listed by my colleague Inspector are all within a reasonable walking or cycling distance from the currently proposed development. However, it is not just distance which has to be considered, but also the standard of the network available to pedestrians. Put simply, the existing network of footways within this settlement is not good. As I saw at my site visit, and as is clearly demonstrated in the evidence of Cllr Smith²⁹, many lengths of road within the village either have no footways at all, or only on one side of the road, with these footways being of varying standard and width, with most being well less than 2.0m wide.
83. This is not untypical of rural settlements, but whilst it is clearly an accepted fact of life for existing residents, I am not persuaded that it is the sort of network which should simply be expected to absorb and accommodate the additional usage likely to arise from a further 200 dwellings. I acknowledge that the appeal proposal would bring with it a good quality of pedestrian and cycle paths within the development itself, and would also provide a length of new footway on Lodge Road, a small amount of new footway at the Tape Lane/School Road junction and some additional areas of tactile paving on these roads. But these improvements seem very modest in the context of the village as a whole, and would do little to improve the walking network to the local facilities to which I have already referred.
84. Furthermore, with regards to the facilities themselves, I consider that not all of them could be said, realistically, to cater for everyday needs. Whilst the Post Office, village store and the Elephant and Castle Public House may well fall into that

²⁹ Appendices 6 - 10 in CD 8.3.1

category, it seems to me that many of the other facilities referred to would only cater for a limited number of the village residents, and only on a limited number of occasions. On this point I note that the Bakery is only open infrequently – as was confirmed at my site visit; and that of the 2 additional public houses referred to, the Castle Inn lies somewhat outside the main village and is only accessible from the village by means of roads with no footways and no street lighting; whilst the Green Man, at the north-eastern extremity of the village, is currently closed.

85. Although reference was made to the village also having a Gospel Hall, cricket, football and bowling clubs, with tennis courts available at the Dolphin School some 1.8km away, these would only be of use to a limited number of people and, again, could not be said to satisfy everyday needs. In light of these points I consider that the range of facilities and services within Hurst has to be categorised as basic rather than good, especially when seen in the context of the size of the village, put at some 439 dwellings in the Council's evidence³⁰.
86. Turning to consider how easy and convenient it would be for future residents of the proposed development to travel to more distant facilities and services I note, firstly, that the Colleton Primary School in Twyford, Twyford Rail Station, secondary schools, supermarkets and GP surgeries could not reasonably be reached on foot. This is because they lie outside the preferred maximum distance of 1.2km applicable in this case, and also outside the preferred maximum distance of 2.0km considered appropriate for commuting and school trips. Furthermore, whilst several of the facilities referred to, such as Twyford Station and the various secondary schools do lie within acceptable cycling distances, no specific evidence was placed before me to show that cycling to such facilities could reasonably be seen as attractive and viable options.
87. Rather, the submitted evidence highlighted a number of potential problems including Cllr Smith's unchallenged comments that "*Twyford Station is notorious for bike theft with very few lockers available. Winnersh Station is not fully manned and only has 23 Sheffield hoops in a very public area*³¹". Moreover, the route to Waingels College is mostly along Whistley Mill Lane, a country road with a 60mph speed limit and a ford, whilst the route to Piggott School passes through Twyford and would require crossing a busy roundabout junction with the A4. I was not made aware of any specific provision for cyclists on the nearby roads, and although I note that the updated TA³² referred to a proposed package of pedestrian and cycle improvements to enhance the existing networks in and around Hurst, the only relevant item in the S106 UU³³ seems to relate predominantly to footpath and bridleway improvements, rather than any specific improvements for cyclists.
88. Notwithstanding these problems I acknowledge that cycling could well be a viable travel option for some future residents, if the appeal proposal was to proceed, and I accept that the Illustrative Development Framework Plan³⁴ shows provision for cyclists within the proposed development, with cycle links to both Tape Lane and Lodge Road. However, that appears to be more or less the full extent of any specific cycle provision. I therefore find it difficult to see how the appeal proposal could be said to have identified and pursued opportunities to promote cycling as is required (amongst other things), by paragraph 104(c) of the Framework.

³⁰ Table at paragraph 6.20 in CD 8.2.1

³¹ Paragraph 6.5 in CD 8.3.1

³² CD 10

³³ Docs 28 & 29

³⁴ See CD 2.1

89. The remaining modes of transport to be considered are bus and rail. The only bus route serving the village is that provided by the 128/129 services, which run between Reading and Wokingham, and also serve Twyford and Winnersh. Cllr Smith provided timetable details³⁵ of these services, which the Council described in closing submissions as 'poor'³⁶. The appellant acknowledged that the buses on these services are 'not plentiful'³⁷, but maintained that they are usable. That said, the extent to which they will be used is likely to depend on their frequency, and in this regard Cllr Smith summarised the services³⁸ as not providing a 30 minute frequency during peak times nor an hourly service during off-peak hours, with no bus leaving the village between 07.32 and 09.23 to Twyford or Reading, and just a limited service to Winnersh. He further stated that these routes do not have an evening service and only provide a 2 hourly skeleton service on Saturdays, with the 129 service not running on a Saturday, and no services at all on a Sunday.
90. Mr Whittingham, for the appellant, did show how it would be possible to catch the bus to and from Twyford Station to suit traditional working hours, but the fact remains that there is still only one weekday morning bus service to Twyford Station likely to be suitable for most commuters. Furthermore, there have been reliability issues with the 128/129 services in recent years, as was made clear in the letter from Thames Valley Buses, submitted to the Inquiry in response to a specific query from a local resident³⁹. My reading of this bus company response is that reliability is an ongoing issue with this service. I acknowledge that live tracking of buses can be undertaken using the internet or an app on a mobile phone – but not all travellers have access to such facilities, which could well be of limited benefit anyway, if the bus element was part of an overall time-critical journey.
91. Mr Whittingham also maintained that the 128/129 bus services pass relatively close to the secondary schools both north and south of Hurst, and set out in some detail how children's journeys to these schools would feasibly work. However, the Piggott School and Waingels College are more than a 20 minute walk from the nearest bus stop, and to reach the nearest bus stop for the return journey back from Emmbrook School and the Holt School would require walks of 20 minutes and 30 minutes respectively. I share the Council's view that the bus timetable does not align well with most of the schools' finishing times, meaning that there is the potential for children to have to endure a long and inconvenient wait at the bus stop.
92. A final point raised by Cllr Smith and others is that there is only one bus service a day to the GP Surgery in Twyford, at 15.46, with no return journey. Using public transport in such circumstances would clearly be problematic, and like the Council I consider that the limited timetable and the consequent long intervals between services has the potential to cause significant inconvenience and long waits for travellers. A bus service contribution is included within the UU, but as the Council's Mr Adam confirmed, this contribution would not make the service financially self-sustaining, but would simply serve to reduce the funding gap.
93. Having regard to all the above points, I share the view of both the Council and the SNHPC that the 128/129 bus service is unlikely to be seen as an attractive alternative to the private car, and therefore would not offer residents a genuine choice of transport modes.

³⁵ Appendix 13 to CD 8.3.1

³⁶ Paragraph 37 in Doc 33

³⁷ Paragraph 56 in Doc 34

³⁸ Paragraph 4.5 in CD 8.3.1

³⁹ CDs 71 & 72

94. In terms of rail services, reference has already been made to Twyford Rail Station which provides mainline Great Western Railway (GWR) services to Reading to the west and London Paddington to the east. Twyford is also served by the Elizabeth Line/Crossrail, also serving Reading and Paddington, along with stations in between and further east within London. From evidence provided to the Inquiry, including from Hurst residents who regularly commute into London, it was generally accepted that commuters from Twyford are more likely to opt for the pre-existing GWR services through Maidenhead and Slough for journeys east, which are significantly quicker than the Elizabeth Line's stopping service. The main benefit of the Elizabeth Line was seen to be the improved connections for journeys into central London beyond Paddington Station.
95. With these points in mind I share the Council's view that the arrival of the Elizabeth Line does not appear to have overly benefitted Twyford commuters, and that it has not made any dramatic difference to the sustainability of Hurst because of the difficulties of reaching the station by means of transport other than the private car, as detailed above.
96. Drawing the above points together, I conclude that the appeal site is not a location which can currently be considered sustainable for a development of the size and scale proposed through this appeal, nor do I believe it would be made sustainable by the improvements and contributions offered by the appellant through the appeal proposal itself, and the obligations within the UU. Accordingly I further conclude that the proposed development would be at odds with CS Policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6 and CP11, MDDL Policies CC01 and CC02, and Section 9 of the Framework.

Main issue 6 – The effect of the proposed development on highway safety

97. As already noted, the Council has reached agreement with the appellant on matters of highway safety, subject to the imposition of appropriate planning conditions and legal obligations. The Council's concerns had primarily related to the proposed site access on Lodge Road, but the appellant is proposing that the 30mph speed limit on this road be extended further south, past the proposed site entrance to just south of The Old Lodge access, with a consequent reduction in the sight line requirements at the site access⁴⁰. A Road Safety Audit has been undertaken in respect of this access and has been approved by the local highway authority. The Council has raised no other highway safety or highway capacity concerns, and accordingly felt able to enter into a Highways SoCG with the appellant⁴¹.
98. The SNHPC did, however, maintain its opposition to the appeal proposal on highway safety grounds, although it did not raise any specific objections to the design or operation of the proposed new vehicular access on Lodge Road, or to the proposed emergency access on Tape Lane, or indeed to any of the proposed pedestrian and cycle access points on Tape Lane. Rather, the SNHPC's objection took the form of a generalised concern that the proposed development would worsen what are already considered to be unsafe conditions within the village, arising from such things as the poor quality footway network and the fact that vehicles have been recorded speeding through the village⁴². Indeed, Cllr Smith confirmed to the Inquiry that speeding is the number one issue he deals with as a Parish Councillor.
99. However, existing speeding through the village is a matter which needs to be addressed by enforcement measures and is not a valid reason to oppose the appeal

⁴⁰ CD 79

⁴¹ Appendix 1 in CD 1.5

⁴² Appendices 18 & 19 in CD 8.3.1

proposal. The same goes for the complaints made by residents that Tape Lane is used as a through route, whereas it should be used for access only. Moreover, although Cllr Smith and residents who spoke at the Inquiry expressed the view that the roads and footways within Hurst are not safe, this is not supported by hard evidence such as reliable Personal Injury Accident (PIA) information. Indeed, data for the latest available 5-year period show just 3 PIAs within the study area of the village, all at different locations on Lodge Road, with two classified as 'slight' and the other being 'serious'. The information provided shows that these accidents were due to driver error or weather conditions leading to a slippery road surface, and do not indicate any inherent problems with the highway network.

100. Although Cllr Smith did provide a Road Traffic Accident Map⁴³ covering the period 2001 to 2021, no details of these accidents were given and it is therefore difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from this information. The one accident for which Cllr Smith did provide further details relates to a motorcyclist crashing into a parked car on the A321 near the junction with Tape Lane in December 2022, and receiving serious injuries. But whilst this was clearly an unfortunate incident, no evidence has been submitted to suggest that the cause of this accident was anything other than driver error.
101. I have noted the SNHPC's criticisms of the treatment of highway safety by the appellant in its updated TA, but in light of the PIA data already referred to and the absence of any objection from the local highway authority, it is difficult to see what more the appellant could have done. General concerns about the safety of pedestrians on the village's roads are difficult to address when there is no accident data to highlight or identify specific problem areas. The speed limit and footway improvements which the appellant is proposing along Lodge Road, the new length of footway at the Tape Lane/School Road junction and the introduction of tactile paving at a number of crossing points may have limited impact within the village itself, but such measures could only improve highway safety, not worsen it.
102. In summary, for reasons set out above, I conclude that the proposed development would not have an adverse impact on highway safety. Accordingly I find no conflict with the relevant parts of CS Policies CP1, CP3 and CP6, nor with the relevant parts of sections 9 and 12 of the Framework.

Main issue 7 – Planning obligations

103. The Council's ninth and tenth reasons for refusal contended that in the absence of a completed legal agreement the proposal would be in conflict with a number of listed development plan policies and sections of the Framework, as it would fail to secure opportunities for training, apprenticeships and other vocational initiatives to develop local employability skills; and would also fail to make adequate provision for affordable housing. The appellant had intended to enter into a S106 agreement with the Council to address these matters.
104. The agreement was also intended to deal with the matter of off-site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), as part of the appellant's response to the Council's seventh reason for refusal. This maintained that the appellant had failed to demonstrate that the proposed development would have an acceptable impact on ecology and biodiversity, by reason of the impact on protected species, wildlife, and habitats. However, further discussions between an Ecology Officer for the Council and Mr

⁴³ Appendix 16 in CD 8.3.1

Goodwin for the appellant led to these parties signing an Ecology SoCG⁴⁴, prior to the opening of the Inquiry.

105. In this SoCG the Council accepted that necessary and appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures to address its concerns regarding habitats, BNG and protected species could be secured by planning conditions or a legal agreement. Accordingly, the Council withdrew its seventh reason for refusal and agreed that this was not a matter which needed to be discussed at the Inquiry. Moreover, having reviewed the appellant's ecology Proof of Evidence (PoE) the SNHPC indicated that it did not maintain an objection to the appeal proposal on ecology grounds. This meant that Mr Goodwin did not appear at the Inquiry, although his PoE and Appendices remained before the Inquiry as written evidence⁴⁵.
106. But notwithstanding the above points, the Council and the appellant could not reach agreement on issues relating to securing the use of off-site mitigation during the discussions on an intended S106 agreement. Because of this the appellant decided, instead, to secure all necessary planning obligations by means of a S106 UU⁴⁶. I return to this off-site BNG matter shortly.
107. In summary, the UU makes provision for the following specific contributions and obligations:
- A 'Bus Service Contribution' of £106,000 towards the 128/129 bus service;
 - A 'Bus Stop Contribution' of £25,000 towards upgrading bus stops serving the appeal site;
 - An 'Employment Skills Contribution' of £52,500;
 - A 'My Journey Contribution' of £540 per dwelling towards implementation of WBC's My Journey initiative in respect of the proposed development; plus £100 per dwelling towards the provision of bus vouchers for residents of the proposed development; plus £100 per dwelling towards the provision of Car Club vouchers for residents of the proposed development;
 - A 'PRoW Contribution' of £85,032.50 towards any required works towards improvements of ROWIP37 east to west from Lodge Road to the River Loddon, and ROWIP118 south alongside Lodge Road from Sawpit Road to connect to Footpath 34;
 - A 'Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) Contribution' of £6,000;
 - The provision of 40% of the proposed dwellings to be delivered as affordable housing units;
 - The provision of Open Space, a Play Area and Tennis Courts⁴⁷;
 - A variety of Commuted Sums to cover annual maintenance of the relevant parts of the Open Space, the Play Area and the Tennis Courts, for 20 years maintenance;
 - The provision of Off-Site Habitat in accordance with an Off-Site Habitat Creation and Management Plan;
 - The provision of a Sustainable Drainage Scheme (SuDS) in accordance with a Drainage Management and Maintenance Plan;

⁴⁴ Appendix 3 in CD 1.5

⁴⁵ CD 8.8

⁴⁶ Doc 29

⁴⁷ The definition of 'Tennis Courts' in the UU is "*a minimum of 3 tennis courts*", although only a single court is referred to in the Design and Access Statement and the Planning Statement, and only a single court appears to be shown on the Illustrative Masterplan

- The establishment of a Management Company, if necessary and applicable, to hold the legal interest in and have the management and maintenance responsibilities for the Estate Roads, the Open Space, the Play Area, the Tennis Courts and the SuDS.

108. All of the above contributions would be index linked, as appropriate, and leaving aside the issues relating to the provision of off-site habitat for BNG mitigation purposes I am satisfied that the other obligations meet the requirements of paragraph 57 of the Framework and Regulation 122 of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulations 2010⁴⁸.
109. However, with regards to the off-site provision of land to secure BNG, the Council expressed its concerns that because the freehold owner of the off-site land is not a party to the UU, the proposed off-site habitat mitigation would not be secure. In these circumstances the Council maintains that there is a risk that the appellant's lease of the off-site land could be brought to an end within the 30-year monitoring period set out in the UU. The surrender of the lease, or the appellant going into administration or liquidation – all of which the Council contends are foreseeable and plausible scenarios – would result in there being no one to enforce this obligation against. The covenant would not be enforceable against the freeholder, whose title is superior to the leaseholder⁴⁹.
110. I share the Council's view that certainty regarding the provision and security of this off-site mitigation land is important, as according to the appellant's BNG calculations⁵⁰, without off-site mitigation the proposal would result in a net loss of area biodiversity of 45.5%. This means that off-site compensation is necessary in order to make this proposal acceptable in ecological and biodiversity terms.
111. The appellant, however, argues that the requirement to implement and maintain the off-site BNG land is enforceable against the owner/developer of the appeal site, who will have contractual arrangements which enable them to ensure that the third party landowner of the off-site BNG land will carry out what is required. The appellant further points out that the Council's concerns that companies can become insolvent and disappear is a risk inherent in the whole S106 statutory scheme, but that this is not an objection taken by the Council to the rest of the UU.
112. But whether or not the appellant is correct in its approach on this matter, the fact that the freeholder of the off-site mitigation land is not a party to the UU does seem to me to introduce an uncertainty into the provisions of the UU which could reasonably have been avoided. As such I consider there to be a lack of clarity as to whether the UU would adequately secure the off-site mitigation, and a consequent lack of clarity as to whether the appeal proposal would have an acceptable impact on ecology and biodiversity.
113. Taking a precautionary approach on this matter, I am not satisfied that this aspect of the UU would, indeed, ensure the provision of the off-site BNG mitigation land for the full 30-year monitoring period. In these circumstances I have to conclude that in this regard the appeal proposal would be at odds with the relevant provisions of CS Policies CP1, CP3 and CP7, and MDDL Policies CC01 and TB23. Because of this I further conclude that, overall, the submitted UU would not satisfactorily address the impact of the proposed development.

⁴⁸ See Doc 28

⁴⁹ Section 106(3) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990

⁵⁰ Table 2 in CD 8.8

Other Matters

Flood risk and drainage

114. The Council did not refuse planning permission for any reasons relating to flooding or drainage, but these were matters raised by many interested persons in written representations and also by many of those who spoke at the Inquiry. In summary, the concerns included that flooding and sewage discharge are frequent problems in the village; that the appeal site has a high water table and frequently has standing water on parts of it; that the appellant's proposed drainage strategy is simplistic and wholly reliant on discharging water away from the development site (including into ditches owned by neighbouring landowners), thereby compounding flooding elsewhere; and that on-site drainage problems could not simply be addressed by raising floor levels of the proposed dwellings.
115. However, whilst I understand and appreciate these concerns, I note that the Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and Drainage Strategy⁵¹ was prepared in accordance with guidance in the Framework and the PPG, and that the proposed drainage strategy takes account of existing ground conditions and other relevant matters. The overall strategy seeks to attenuate surface water on-site and release it off-site at a restricted rate that would be in accordance with the greenfield run-off rate. To this end there would be an interconnected network of SuDS features, including detention basins, to accommodate some of the surface water run-off from the site, as well as a network of swales which would also provide surface water attenuation and conveyance. In addition, many hard-surfaced areas would use permeable pavements, providing a further opportunity for surface water attenuation and pollution mitigation. These details have been approved by the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA). Water butts are also recommended for each property, further providing for small amounts of surface water storage.
116. The drainage strategy notes that existing watercourses on the southern and western boundaries of the appeal site currently serve as receptors for surface water falling on the undeveloped site. As such, they have been identified as the natural and most appropriate discharge points for surface water from the developed site. The appellant indicated that there is the expectation that existing riparian owners deal with drainage matters responsibly and this does not seem to be an unreasonable assumption, as landowners have a responsibility to maintain their ditches. Undisputed calculations show that the attenuation features on site would provide for the storage of about 3,823m³ of surface water, well in excess of the calculated storage requirement of between 2,627m³ and 3,518m³. In terms of foul water drainage Thames Water has confirmed that there would be capacity in its foul water network to accommodate the proposed development on the appeal site⁵².
117. The Environment Agency (EA) has, however, maintained an objection to this proposal⁵³, despite being provided with additional information by Pell Frischmann on behalf of the appellant, which adopted a precautionary approach. The EA's position is that a hydraulic model of the nearby Main River should be carried out to determine a suitable flood level to appraise risk and identify suitable mitigation. However, the appellant maintains that the submitted FRA is proportionate to the scale of development and has been prepared having regard to the criteria for site-specific flood risk assessments as outlined in paragraph 167 of the Framework.

⁵¹ One of the un-numbered documents in CD 2

⁵² Section 8 and Appendix L in the Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy – within CD 2

⁵³ CDs 22, 25 & 27

118. As such, and in light of further guidance in the PPG⁵⁴, the appellant considers that the construction of a detailed hydraulic model would not be proportionate to the anticipated scale and nature of risk from the watercourse, considering the published information. It further argues that any areas of localised flood risk or residual risk could be secured through appropriate conditions, such as measures outlined in the illustrative layout, comprising suitable standoff from the watercourse, and raising of finished floor levels above current ground levels⁵⁵.
119. Having regard to the points set out above, and noting that both Thames Water and the LLFA are content with the proposals, and that the EA's concerns could be addressed by the conditions discussed at the Inquiry, I consider that matters of flood risk and surface water management should not weigh against this proposal.

Minerals

120. The Council's third reason for refusal commented that the application was for the development of land with sand and gravel deposits, and that insufficient information had been submitted to demonstrate that the sterilisation of mineral deposits would be acceptable. As such, the Council alleged that the proposal was in conflict with Policy 2 of the Replacement Minerals Local Plan for Berkshire (incorporating the alterations adopted in December 1997 and May 2001) and section 17 of the Framework.
121. However, following the submission of further information by the appellant, prior to the opening of the Inquiry, the Council agreed that it was unlikely that the site would be promoted for mineral extraction in the future, and this reason for refusal was removed and not defended by the Council. These points were confirmed in the SoCG⁵⁶, and elaborated upon in the PoE submitted by Ms Jones for the appellant⁵⁷. In light of these points, this topic was not discussed at the Inquiry, and it is therefore not a matter which has any bearing on this appeal.

Government planning consultation

122. There was some discussion at the Inquiry about the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' ongoing consultation into the proposed updating of the Framework. However, as the outcome of this consultation is not yet known, it can have no bearing on the determination of this appeal.

Benefits and disbenefits

Benefits

123. I have assessed the benefits likely to arise if the appeal proposal was to proceed, in the context of the 3 overarching objectives for achieving sustainable development set out in paragraph 8 of the Framework. In terms of the economic objective it would provide some economic benefits as a result of the construction and subsequent occupation of some 200 new dwellings. The undisputed figures put forward by the appellant⁵⁸ indicate that the benefits would amount to about £46 million from construction investment, with 164 construction jobs per year, plus a further 160 net additional jobs across Wokingham and a Gross Value Added uplift for Wokingham's Economy of £38 million.

⁵⁴ Paragraph: 021 Reference ID: 7-021-20220825

⁵⁵ CD 8.9

⁵⁶ Table at paragraph 6.2 in CD 1.5

⁵⁷ Paragraphs 2.11 - 2.15 of CD 8.1

⁵⁸ Paragraphs 5.114 - 5.119 and Appendix 6 of CD 8.1

124. If the new dwellings were to be built and occupied there would be an additional local resident expenditure of about £3.6 million per year, with 55 jobs supported by local spend and 44 net additional jobs across Wokingham. The appellant also points out that that the proposed development would also give rise to £6.2 million in CIL payments, £500,000 in Council Tax per year; an employment skills contribution or training provision of £52,500; S106 contributions for transport and access improvements of about £300,000; and £500,000 in New Homes Bonus payments.
125. However, the benefits during the construction phase would only be for a temporary period, and both these and the longer-term benefits which would arise from new residents' increased spend in the local economy, the Council Tax receipts and the New Homes Bonus payments would also be available with any similarly-sized, development plan-compliant scheme. Furthermore, although the appellant is correct in pointing out that there would be CIL payments and other contributions secured through the UU, these are required to make the development acceptable, and cannot therefore be seen as benefits of the scheme. That said, I do accept that some of the contributions would benefit the wider village community, not just the new residents. Because of this, and for the reasons just given, I consider that the economic benefits should attract moderate weight.
126. The provision of 200 new dwellings, to include 80 affordable houses, would assist in furthering the social objective of sustainable development, but again I am mindful of the fact that such benefits would also arise from any similarly-sized development plan-compliant development. Nevertheless, in view of the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of housing I consider it only right to attribute substantial weight to the provision of the market housing, and as there is an under-provision of affordable housing across the Borough substantial weight should also be given to the provision of the proposed 80 affordable units.
127. However, I am not persuaded that the other matters claimed to be benefits under this social objective heading should carry anything like the amount of weight suggested by the appellant. The provision of new amenity space is a requirement of the development itself and so can hardly be seen as a material benefit. Moreover, although the tennis court and trim trail would be benefits, it seems to me that these were simply the facilities which the small number of respondents⁵⁹ indicated they would most like to see, if the proposed development went ahead.
128. Furthermore, whilst the appeal proposal could result in greater accessibility to Dinton Country Park, no evidence was placed before me to indicate that existing access is problematic and needs improving. A similar situation arises with the proposal to provide additional car parking for the existing Tape Lane allotments. Whilst this could well be a benefit, I was not made aware of any pressing need for additional parking for the allotments. Finally, although the appellant claimed that the appeal proposal would help to sustain the local Primary School from within the catchment, there is no evidence to suggest that the school would have to close if the proposed development does not proceed. Taken together, I consider that these additional matters should carry only very limited weight.
129. With regards to the environmental objective, I share the Council's view that any benefits under this heading have to be considered limited. In terms of BNG, the appellant's own evidence shows that although on-site linear hedgerow-based

⁵⁹ It appears that only some 21 - 23 persons responded in total, with just 10 putting an outdoor gym as their first preference, with 9 first preference votes for a tennis court

habitat units would be increased by some 93%⁶⁰, without off-site mitigation the proposal would result in a net loss of area-based habitat units of almost 46%⁶¹. This is not surprising, as much of the currently undeveloped fields would have to accommodate some 200 houses, associated parking areas and new roads.

130. This means that off-site compensation is required to make this proposal acceptable in ecological and biodiversity terms, and I have already indicated my concerns that the failure of the off-site mitigation site landowner to be a party to the UU introduces some uncertainty into the deliverability and security of this BNG. So, whilst it is the case that with this off-site mitigation land the scheme would produce BNG beyond that required to compensate for any habitat lost on site, and also beyond any level required in existing policy or future statutory requirement, this benefit needs to be tempered because of the uncertainty just detailed. Because of this I consider that it can only be given limited weight.
131. I accept that allowing access to the appeal site by means of paths through the site would be a benefit of the scheme, with these paths available not just to new residents of the proposed development but also to other Hurst residents, and I give this modest weight. But I do not consider that the proposed SuDS could be considered a benefit as clearly it is a necessary consequence and requirement of the proposed development. Moreover, although the appellant contends that a benefit of the proposal would be that it would reduce the need to release Green Belt land for development in the short to medium term, no evidence was put forward to support the claim that there is pressure on Wokingham's Green Belt for development to meet housing needs. This matter cannot, therefore, carry any weight in the proposal's favour.
132. The appellant's intention for all of the new dwellings to have electric vehicle charging points is to be welcomed, but in the short to medium term, when petrol and diesel engine vehicles are still likely to predominate, I am not persuaded that this would offer any material environmental benefit.

Disbenefits

133. As already noted, the spatial vision set out in the CS makes it plain that the planned distribution of new housing development over the plan period is based on a hierarchy of settlements, dependant on the facilities and services they contain or have ready access to, by sustainable means of travel. Hurst is a Limited Development location, at the bottom of the settlement hierarchy. The intention to implement this spatial vision is set out in a number of adopted development plan policies, including CS Policies CP6, CP9 and CP11, and MDDL Policy CC02. For reasons set out earlier in this decision, I consider that the appeal proposal would be in clear conflict with this spatial vision and the aforementioned policies, which I have already concluded should carry significant weight in this appeal, notwithstanding the absence of a deliverable 5-Year HLS. This weighs very heavily against the appeal proposal.
134. The harm just described would also work against both the economic objective of sustainable development and the social objective, as the proposal would not represent land for development of the right type in the right place, and it would not result in a strong, vibrant and healthy community as it would not have accessible services to meet the communities' current and future needs.

⁶⁰ From 12.66 to 24.99

⁶¹ From 60.55 to 32.98

135. There would be a moderate adverse impact, at the upper end of the scale, on the rural character and appearance of the appeal site and surrounding area. The proposal would also fail to conserve the low-density pattern of settlement centred around Hurst and Whistley Green as set out in the C2 LCA landscape strategy. These disbenefits should carry moderate weight. As a result, the appeal proposal could not be said to protect and enhance the natural environment and this aspect of the environmental objective of sustainable development is therefore not achieved.
136. A further disbenefit of the proposal is that it would result in the loss of some 5.6ha of BMV agricultural land. This harm carries modest weight against the proposal.

Summary, planning balance and overall conclusion

137. In summarising the matters set out above, the starting point is the fact that the proposed development would be in conflict with key policies in the development plan. These policies have to be considered out-of-date, because the Council cannot demonstrate a deliverable 5-Year HLS and, as a result, the 'tilted balance' detailed in paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the Framework comes into play. However, notwithstanding this point, I have found that the policies which are most important for determining this proposal accord strongly with the requirements of the Framework, especially with regard to the need to promote and secure a sustainable pattern of development, and I have therefore concluded that these policies should still carry significant weight in this appeal.
138. I have further found that the appeal proposal would not fully accord with the 3 objectives of sustainable development as set out in paragraph 8 of the Framework, and would not represent development in a location which can currently be considered sustainable, or could be made sustainable by the improvements and contributions offered by the appellant. The appeal proposal would therefore not represent sustainable development and does not benefit from the presumption in favour of such development.
139. I consider that substantial harm arises from the fact that the appeal proposal is plainly in conflict with the Council's spatial vision set out in the adopted development plan policies to which I have already referred. This harm is added to, at the upper end of the moderate scale, by the adverse impact which the proposed development would have on landscape character and in visual terms. Modest harm also arises from the loss of BMV agricultural land. In addition, and taking a precautionary approach on this matter, some further harm arises as a result of the lack of clarity as to whether the appeal proposal would have an acceptable impact on ecology and biodiversity. Whilst the appeal proposal would give rise to some benefits, as detailed above, my clear conclusion is that the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh these benefits, such that the proposal should not succeed.
140. I have had regard to all other matters raised, but find nothing sufficient to outweigh the considerations which have led me to conclude that this appeal should be dismissed.

David Wildsmith

INSPECTOR

APPEARANCES

FOR THE COUNCIL

Mr Matt Lewin of Counsel

instructed by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)

He called:

Mr Chris Hannington
BSc MPhil CMLI MRTPI
Mr Ian Church
BA(Hons) MA MRTPI
Mrs Fiona Jones
BSc(Hons) BTP MRTPI
Mr Gordon Adam
BA DipEcon MA FCIHT MILT

Team Manager, Trees and Landscape (Development Management) Team, WBC
Team Manager, Growth and Delivery Team, WBC
Cameron Jones Planning Ltd

Principal Development Control Engineer, Highways Department, WBC

FOR THE APPELLANT

Mr Rupert Warren KC

instructed by Boyer Planning Limited

He called:

Mr John-Paul Friend
HND (LGD) BA(Hons) PGDipLA CMLI
Mr Daniel Allum-Rooney
BSc(Hons) MSc MCIWEM
Mr Andrew Whittingham
BSc(Hons) MSc CEng MICE
Miss Alyson Jones
BSc(Hons) MPhil MRTPI
Mr Jon Hartley
BSc(Hons) MArborA

Director, LVIA Ltd

Technical Director, Pell Frischmann

Director, Motion

Director, Boyer Planning Limited

Principal Arboricultural Consultant, Arbtech Consulting Ltd

FOR THE ST NICHOLAS HURST PARISH COUNCIL (SNHPC) (RULE 6 PARTY)

Mr Alex Shattock of Counsel

instructed by the SNHPC

He called:

Cllr Wayne Smith

Chairman, SNHPC and WBC Borough Councillor

INTERESTED PERSONS OPPOSING THE PROPOSAL

Mr Andrew Alsop	Local resident
Mrs Clare Woodward	Local resident
Mr John Osborne <i>BSc(Hons) MSc</i>	Local resident and spokesperson for The Hurst Village Society Committee
Mrs Frances Davis	Local resident
Mrs Jessica Lake	Local resident
Mr Graham Welch	Local resident
Mr John Edwards	Local resident
Mr Alastair Lyon	Parish Councillor for SNHPC and local resident, speaking on his own behalf, and also on behalf of Mr & Mrs Dolinski
Mr Paul Martin	Local resident

Mr Jonathan Norris	Local resident
Mr John Vimpany	Local resident
Mr Geoff Manning	Local resident
Mr Huw Griffiths	Local resident
Ms Aisling Humphries	Local resident
Mr Victor Boardman	Local resident
Dr Gemma Moore	Local resident and Associate Professor at University College London
Mrs Sarah Barnard	Local resident
Mrs Katherine Howe	Local resident
Dr Heidi Hamer	Local resident
Ms Ged Humphries	Local resident

CORE DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN THIS DECISION

CD 1.3	Appellant's Statement of Case, with Appendices
CD 1.5	SoCG with appendices
CD 2 - un-numbered documents relating to the original planning application submission	Design & Access Statement – Feb 2022
	Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) - Form 1
	Planning Statement with Appendices
	Outline Application Form
	Arboricultural Assessment & Method Statement – 3 Dec 2021
	Ecological Impact Assessment – Dec 2021
	Historic Environment Desk-Based Assessment – Nov 2021
	Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – Feb 2022
	Framework Travel Plan – 9 Feb 2022
	Transport Assessment – 9 Feb 2022
	Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy – 10 Feb 2022
	Desktop Subsurface Utility Report
	Statement of Community Involvement – Feb 2022
	Energy Strategy Statement – Dec 2021
CD 2.1	Plans for Approval and Key Illustrative Plans
CD 5.1	WBC Core Strategy – Jan 2010
CD 5.2	WBC Managing Development Delivery Local Plan – Feb 2014
CD 5.5	WBC Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) (extracts)
CD 5.5.1	WBC extract from LCA – C2 – Hurst River Terrace
CD 5.5.2	WBC extract from LCA – B1 – Loddon River Valley with Open Water
CD 8.1	Appellant's Planning PoE, Summary and Appendices – Miss Jones
CD 8.2.1	WBC Planning PoE and Appendices – Mrs Jones
CD 8.2.2	WBC Planning Policy PoE and Appendices – Mr Church
CD 8.2.3	WBC Landscape and Trees PoE, Summary and Appendices – Mr Hannington
CD 8.3.1	Rule 6 Party's Sustainability and Transport PoE, Summary and Appendices – Cllr Smith
CD 8.3.2	Rule 6 Party's Landscape Character and Locality PoE, Summary and Appendices – Cllr Smith
CD 8.4.1	Appellant's Landscape and Visual PoE– Appendices Cover Note
CD 8.4.2	Appellant's Landscape and Visual PoE – Appendices – Accurate Visual Representations

CD 8.7	Appellant's Arboricultural PoE – Mr Hartley
CD 8.8	Appellant's Ecology PoE, Summary PoE and Appendices – Mr Goodwin (<i>treated as written submissions – Mr Goodwin was not called to present evidence</i>)
CD 8.9	Appellant's Flood Risk PoE – Mr Allum-Rooney
CD 8.10	Appellant's Agricultural BMV Rebuttal – Reading Agricultural Consultants
CD 9.7	Appeal decision APP/X0360/W/21/3280255 – 2022 - Land at Junction of Sawpit Road and School Road, Hurst, Berkshire
CD 9.8	Appeal decision APP/X0360/W/18/3194044 – 2020 - Land at Lodge Road, Hurst - Redetermination
CD 9.8.2	Appeal decision APP/X0360/W/18/3194044 – 2018 - Land at Lodge Road, Hurst
CD 10	Transport Assessment, 18 Nov 2022
CD 22	Response Note: Matters Raised by Environment Agency – Dec 2022
CD 25	Environment Agency Consultation Response – Sep 2022
CD 27	Email exchange between WBC and Ecology Solutions, BNG and Bats – Dec 2022
CD 70	Appeal decision APP/H0330/A/89/114279 and 114065/P7 – 1990 – Land between Pool House and Sandford, off Lodge Road, Hurst
CD 71	Mr Dolinski's request to Thames Valley Buses for information
CD 72	Thames Valley Buses Letter 24 Jan 2023
CD 79	Proposed Ghosted Right Turn Lane Drawing 2101015-01 Rev 5
CD 80	Arbtech Arboricultural Impact Assessment Arbtech AIA 02 Rev 7 A (sheets 1-4) (Oct 2022)
CD 81	Arbtech Tree Protection Plan Arbtech TPP 02 Rev 7 A (sheets 1-4) (Oct 2022)

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED AT THE INQUIRY

Document	1	Opening submissions on behalf of the Appellant
Document	2	Opening submissions on behalf of the Council
Document	3	Opening submissions on behalf of SNHPC
Document	4	Statement submitted by Mr Andrew Alsop
Document	5	Statement submitted by Mrs Clare Woodward
Document	6	Statement submitted by Mr John Osborne
Document	7	Statement submitted by Mrs Frances Davis
Document	8	Statement submitted by Mrs Jessica Lake
Document	9	Statement submitted by Mr Graham Welch
Document	10	Statement submitted by Mr John Edwards
Document	11	Statement submitted by Mr Alastair Lyon
Document	12	Statement submitted by Mr Andrew & Mrs Jean Dolinski
Document	13	Statement submitted by Mr Paul Martin
Document	14	Statement submitted by Mr Jonathan Norris
Document	15	Statement submitted by Mr John Vimpany
Document	16	Statement submitted by Mr Geoff Manning
Document	17	Statement submitted by Mr Huw Griffiths
Document	18	Statement submitted by Ms Aisling Humphries
Document	19	Statement submitted by Mr Victor & Mrs Jennifer Boardman
Document	20	Statement submitted by Dr Gemma Moore, with attachment
Document	21	Statement submitted by Mrs Sarah Barnard
Document	22	Statement submitted by Mrs Katherine Howe
Document	23	Statement submitted by Dr Heidi Hamer

Document	24	Statement submitted by Ms Ged Humphries
Document	25	Letter submitted by Ms Liz Chaderton, dated 24 January 2023
Document	26	Written submission from Mr Duncan Kendall
Document	27	Schedule of Draft Conditions as discussed at the Inquiry
Document	28	Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulation 122 Compliance Schedule, submitted by the Council
Document	29	Certified copy of the signed and completed S106 Unilateral Undertaking
Document	30	Closing Statement made by Mr Huw Griffiths
Document	31	Closing Statement made by Dr Gemma Moore
Document	32	Closing Submissions on behalf of SNHPC
Document	33	Closing Submissions on behalf of the Council
Document	34	Closing Submissions on behalf of the Appellant

Wokingham | Winnersh | Twyford | Sonning | Woodley | Reading
Wokingham | Winnersh | Twyford | Sonning | Reading

128
129

Mondays to Fridays except public holidays

	129	129	129	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	129	129	129	129	129
Wokingham Broad Street (Westbound)				0707		0915	1022	1127	1232	1337	1442	1532	1550	1655	1730	1805
Emmbrook Dog & Duck				▼		▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	1558	1702	1737	1812
Winnersh Crossroads				0715		0925	1032	1137	1242	1347	1452	1545	1607	1711	1746	1820
Hurst School Road South				0722		0931	1038	1143	1248	1353	1458	1551	1616	1720	1755	
Twyford Burton Close	0607	0642		0726		0935	1042	1147	1252	1357	1502	1556	1621	1725	1800	
Twyford Amberley Drive	▼	▼	0710	▼		▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	1605	▼	▼	▼	
Twyford Crossroads	0614	0649	0715	0736	0835	0943	1050	1155	1300	1405	1510	1611	1630	1735	1810	
Charvil Wee Waif	0617	0652	0719	0740	0840	0947	1054	1159	1304	1409	1514	1615	1633	1739	1814	
Sonning opp Fire Station	0620	0655	0723	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	1619		1743	1818	
Sonning nr High Street	0621	0656	0724	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	1621		1745	1820	
Sonning adj Fire Station	▼	▼	▼	0745	0844	0950	1057	1202	1307	1412	1517	▼		▼	▼	
Woodley Chequers	▼	▼	▼	0753	0852	0958	1105	1210	1315	1420	1525	▼		▼	▼	
London Road The Drive	0627	0702	0734	0801	0859	1006	1111	1216	1321	1426	1531	1633		1754	1829	
Reading Friar Street	0636	0711	0748	0815	0911	1016	1121	1226	1331	1436	1541	1645		1806	1841	

Services 127/128/129 are provided with financial support from Wokingham Borough Council

Reading | Woodley | Sonning | Twyford | Wokingham
Reading | Sonning | Twyford | Wokingham

128
129

Mondays to Fridays except public holidays

	129	129	129	129	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128	128
Reading Friar Street (Stop FC)	0640	0715	0720	0755	0820	0915	1020	1125	1230	1335	1440	1545		1650	1810	1845
London Road The Drive	0650	0727	0731	0809	0833	0926	1031	1136	1241	1346	1451	1559		1704	1824	1857
Woodley Chequers	▼	▼	▼	▼	0839	0933	1038	1143	1248	1353	1458	1605		1710	1830	1903
Sonning opp Fire Station					0846	0939	1044	1149	1254	1359	1504	1611		1717	1836	1908
Sonning High Street (Westbound)	▼	▼	▼	▼	0849	0940	1045	1150	1255	1400	1505	1612		1719	1838	1909
Sonning High Street (Eastbound)	0655	0733	0736	0816	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼		▼	▼	▼
Sonning adj Fire Station	0656	0734	0737	0818	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼		▼	▼	▼
Charvil Wee Waif	0700	0738	0741	▼	0855	0945	1050	1155	1300	1405	1510	1617	1637	1727	1845	1915
Twyford Amberley Drive	0706	▼	▼	0833	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
Twyford Crossroads	0704	0744	0746	0839	0901	0950	1055	1200	1305	1410	1515	1623	1644	1734	1850	1920
Twyford Burton Close		0751	0752	0844	0907	0955	1100	1205	1310	1415	1520	1629	1650	1740	1856	1925
Hurst School Road South		0757	0757	0849	▼	1000	1105	1210	1315	1420	1525	1633	1654	1744	1900	1929
Winnersh Crossroads		0806	0806	0857	▼	1007	1112	1217	1322	1427	1532	1640	1701	1751	1907	1935
Wokingham Broad Street (Eastbound)		▼	▼	0905	0919	1015	1120	1225	1330	1435	1540	1648	1709	1758	1913	1941
Wokingham Rectory Road		0817	0817													

times in red run on school days only
times in blue run on school holidays only

This journey serves Twyford Crossroads before Amberley Drive

Services 127/128/129 are provided with financial support from Wokingham Borough Council

Maidenhead | Upper Wargrave | Twyford | Sonning | Woodley | Reading
Wokingham | Winnersh | Twyford | Sonning | Woodley | Reading

127
128

Saturdays

	128	128	128	127	128	127	128	127	128	127	128	127
Wokingham Tesco					1107		1307					
Wokingham Broad Street (Westbound)		0827	0924		1121		1321		1536		1706	
Winnersh Crossroads		0834	0931		1129		1329		1544		1714	
Hurst School Road South		0840	0937		1135		1335		1550		1720	
Twyford Burton Close	0748	0844	0941		1139		1339		1554		1724	
Maidenhead Bridge Avenue				1013		1213		1413		1628		1750
Maidenhead Frascati Way				1019		1219		1419		1634		1756
Shire Horse				1025		1225		1425		1640		1802
Knowl Hill Square Deal Café				1029		1229		1429		1644		1806
Upper Wargrave Highfield Park				1035		1235		1435		1650		1812
Twyford Crossroads	0754	0852	0949	1047	1147	1247	1347	1447	1602	1702	1732	1824
Charvil Wee Waif	0757	0856	0953	1051	1151	1251	1351	1451	1606	1706		
Sonning adj Fire Station	0759	0858	0956	1055	1155	1255	1355	1455	1610	1710		
Woodley Chequers	0805	0905	1003	1102	1202	1302	1402	1502	1617	1717		
London Road The Drive	0811	0911	1010	1109	1209	1309	1409	1509	1624	1724		
Reading Friar Street (FC)	0820	0920	1020	1120	1220	1320	1420	1520	1635	1735		

Between Wokingham Tesco and Broad Street, these journeys run as service 121

Services 127/128/129 are provided with financial support from Wokingham Borough Council

Reading | Woodley | Sonning | Twyford | Upper Wargrave | Maidenhead
Reading | Woodley | Sonning | Twyford | Wokingham

127
128

Saturdays

	127	128	127	128	127	128	127	128	127	128
Reading Friar Street (Stop FC)	0825	0925	1025	1125	1225	1325	1425	1525	1640	1740
London Road The Drive	0836	0936	1036	1137	1237	1337	1437	1537	1652	1752
Woodley Chequers	0842	0942	1042	1143	1243	1343	1443	1543	1658	1758
Sonning opp Fire Station	0848	0948	1048	1149	1249	1349	1449	1549	1704	1804
Sonning High Street	0850	0950	1050	1152	1252	1352	1452	1552	1707	1807
Charvil Wee Waif	0856	0956	1056	1158	1258	1358	1458	1558	1713	1813
Twyford Waitrose	0901		1101		1303		1503		1718	
Upper Wargrave Highfield Park	0910		1110		1312		1512		1727	
Knowl Hill Square Deal Café	0916		1116		1318		1518		1733	
Shire Horse	0920		1120		1322		1522		1737	
Maidenhead Frascati Way	0927		1127		1329		1529		1744	
Maidenhead Bridge Avenue	0930		1130		1332		1532		1747	
Twyford Crossroads		1001		1203		1403		1603		1818
Twyford Burton Close		1006		1208		1408		1608		1823
Hurst School Road South		1010		1212		1412		1612		1827
Winnersh Crossroads		1016		1218		1418		1618		1833
Wokingham Broad Street (Eastbound)		1023		1225		1425		1625		1839
Wokingham Tesco		1030		1232		1432		1632		

Services 127/128/129 are provided with financial support from Wokingham Borough Council

Application 242067 Land East of Lodge Road Appendix 4B

30 January 2023

Dear Andrew

Subject Access Request

Thank you for your correspondence of 12 December 2022, in which you asked for some information via our customer service interface about our services:

"I am writing to enquire whether your company is able to provide me with historical daily records showing actual bus arrival and departure timings for service 128/129 at School Road, South, Hurst. I am particularly interested in cancellations and delays, and if possible for a year ending with today's date."

I am pleased to be able to respond with some relevant information and apologise for the time this has taken to be collated.

As you may be aware, School Road South is served by routes 128/129 which run between Wokingham and Reading via Twyford. The route is operated by Thames Valley Buses under contract to Wokingham Borough Council, and we have been running the route since 2016 with some adjustments to the timetable and route over that period in an attempt to improve reliability. However, unpredictable traffic conditions along the A329, and more particularly in Reading and Sonning, does make this route susceptible to being less reliable than many others which we operate, and perhaps more noticeable given it operates broadly hourly.

The request for information at a single stop on a daily basis has some limitations to what we can provide. However, I can give you the overall route reliability for 128/9 as follows:

% of services operated running on time in 2022 (being regarded as between 1 minute early and 5 minutes late, all timing points along the route being referenced)

Jan	93.01	Apr	87.01	Jul	90.33	Oct	87.59
Feb	91.81	May	87.32	Aug	90.83	Nov	76.63
Mar	86.78	Jun	88.51	Sep	86.89	Dec	78.84

The marked reduced reliability in November and December has been attributed to roadworks on Reading Road at Winnersh.

We can give some information about School Road South in particular, but this is an enormous task for a 12-month period, so I have limited it to the last 3 months of 2022:

% of services operated running on time in 2022 (being regarded as between 1 minute early and 5 minutes late, at School Road South)

Oct	Towards Reading	79.45	Towards Wokingham	86.06
Nov	Towards Reading	71.43	Towards Wokingham	75.72
Dec	Towards Reading	69.34	Towards Wokingham	79.35

The second aspect of your request is about cancellation of services along routes 128/129. Occasionally we have to cancel a journey due to congestion or a vehicle defect, but cancellation of journeys due to lack of staff was almost unheard of before 2022. However, in common with many service and hospitality industries, the bus sector has been hit hard by driver shortages and this was an acute problem all last year, and particularly so in the autumn. Recruitment is now much better and our driver position has finally stabilised since mid-December and

Number of journeys or part journeys cancelled on routes 128/129 in 2022 (average number of journeys per month is 706):

Jan	16	Apr	27	Jul	12	Oct	84
Feb	9	May	16	Aug	69	Nov	58
Mar	42	Jun	1	Sep	46	Dec	10
						Jan	4 (to date)

To put these numbers in context, for the 12 months to August 2021 (when the HGV driver crisis began), we lost a total of 13 journeys, none of them being staff related.

Whilst not exactly the details asked for in your enquiry, I hope these statistics, plus the context of the narrative, is sufficient for your needs.

Kind regards