

LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

prepared on behalf of

Mr T Roberts



**Proposed demolition of existing buildings, installation of 35no Park Homes
and construction of a communal building with parking and landscaping**

Land at

31 BARKHAM ROAD – FINCHAMPSTEAD - RG40 4EU

Report prepared by

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 My name is Adrian Draffin. I am a chartered Landscape Architect and have over forty years experience with landscape planning and related issues. My company - Draffin Associates Limited, Landscape and Environmental Planning Consultancy – was initially instructed by the applicant, Mr T Roberts at land at 31 Barkham Ride Finchampstead in May 2023 to prepare a landscape visual assessment based on *The Landscape Institute Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment 2013*. Observations with regard to visual boundary screening were also given with regard to the potential landscape mitigation measures to accommodate the proposed residential redevelopment. The document formed part of the supporting information for the outline planning application for 26 dwellings approved to Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) on behalf of the applicant in September 2024. (**App ref no. 230791**)
- 1.2 Subsequently this revised document has now been prepared in support of a full planning application for 35no. Park Homes and a new communal building to be submitted to WBC on behalf of the applicant.
- 1.3 The site lies immediately north of Barkham Ride, Finchampstead adjacent Rooks Nest Wood Country Park. The purpose of the report is to identify the special characteristics of the existing landscape, to assess the likely impacts of the proposed development and to consider the most appropriate mitigation measures and their residual impact to integrate the proposal with the local context.
- 1.4 An initial site walkover and visual appraisal was undertaken during May 2023 with subsequent visits in 2024. Reference is made to the base OS contour map data and to the indicative layout supplied by the applicant. Reference (Paul Edwards Architecture dwg no. 2680/06 site plan)
- 1.5 A desk study was also undertaken of the Development Plan policy and map data available from the WBC website. Local landscape protection issues were also reviewed.
- 1.6 This document includes a landscape strategy and a photograph appraisal including the eastern boundary with Victoria Gardens.

2.0 Assessment methodology

- 2.1 This assessment will consider the existing landscape character and any potential sensitivity to change. This will include a landscape resource description and evaluation.
- 2.2 The nature of the proposal in terms of location, scale and type of development will then be reviewed.
- 2.3 A landscape and visual appraisal of the site is included to identify areas of particular visual impact and the scale of visual impact with reference to *The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment* criteria (Version 3 published by LI 2013) (GLVIA). (**Appendix C**)

3.0 Existing site (see Appendix A - base OS site plan)

- 3.1 Site location
The study site extending to approximately 1.48 ha, lies north of Barkham Ride adjacent Rooks Nest Wood Country Park.
- 3.2 Land Use
The largely level site lies in an edge of settlement location. The site consists of a private dwelling, detached garage, access driveway and hardstandings with enclosure fencing.
- 3.3 Settlement
The site is bordered by existing housing scattered along Barkham Ride as well as settlement to the east beyond Victoria Gardens mobile home park. Finchampstead North (known as California Crossroads) settlement lies approximately 1km southeast of the study site.
- 3.4 Topography
The site lies across the 60m contour AOD with a small crossfall to the lower northern boundary. The local high ground is provided 3km to the south at 100m AOD at Finchampstead Ridges.
- 3.5 Drainage & Vegetation
The clay and greensand site has restricted permeability with a ditch network around the northern edge of the application site connecting to local drains at Arborfield and the Loddon catchment to the northwest.

The northern, western and southern boundaries have a mature tree screen and hedgerows. The site contains a hedgerow and woodland trees including *Oak, Poplar and Sycamore*. The remaining vegetation is rough grassland and marginal wetland species along the outer ditches to the northwest of the main site.

3.6 Landscape

The existing site can be divided into two existing landscape zones. The centrally located dwelling is served by a macadam access driveway in the southern corner. To the south an open grass area is enclosed by mature hedgerow to the west adjacent the Country Park and to the south along the Barkham Ride frontage. A similar open grass zone to the north is enclosed by mature woodland beyond the northern boundary and hedgerow to the west. Victoria Gardens mobile homes park defines the eastern boundary.

3.7 Public access

There are no public footpaths on the application site. There are local public footpaths in Rooks Nest Wood Country Park to the west connecting with the wider network.

3.8 Visual context and existing views (**see Appendix D**)

Outward views to the north are restricted by mature offsite woodland. Mature trees and hedgerow filter views to the west and south. Victoria Gardens are visible along the eastern boundary.

3.9 Inward views – Barkham Ride (**Appendix D – sht 1 photos 1-4**)

The views along Barkham Ride show the site entrance gateway with brick piers and walling adjacent screen hedging and under the mature street tree canopy. The site is very enclosed visually.

3.10 Inward views – Western boundary Rooks Nest Wood (**Appendix D – sht 2 photos 5-8**)

The western boundary mature hedgerow is visible beyond the public car park. Skyline trees dominate the view with limited inward glimpses above the hedgerow/ boundary fencing.

3.11 Inward views – NW corner at Rooks Nest Wood (**Appendix D – sht 3 photos 9-12**)

The existing ditch and public footbridge is evident beyond the north west corner of the study site. The northern boundary consists of a leaning timber fence and overgrown conifer screen.

The public footpath network is evident in the views from the Country Park with established birch woodland adjacent the northern boundary and emerging woodland clumps within the meadow grassland elsewhere. The skyline treeline of the study site is visible in the background.

3.12 Inward views – E boundary with Victoria Gardens (**Appendix D – shts 4 & 5 photos 12a-h**)

The front eastern boundary comprises mixed age existing evergreen hedging along the existing Victoria Gardens driveway. The rear common boundary is between open amenity grass and the driveway and mature skyline trees are evident throughout.

3.13 Site/ Outward views – (**Appendix D – sht 6 & 7 photos 13-20**)

The inner entrance driveway with centrally located dwelling and forecourt lie beyond the front grass area set behind the mature boundary hedgerow and tree screen (v13-16). Similarly the rear site is open grass set within mature boundary hedgerow with Victoria Gardens visible to the east. (v17-20).

3.14 **Visual appraisal - summary**

Visually the study site is largely enclosed by mature vegetation to the north, west and south.

There are filtered views into the southern section of the site from Barkham Ride at the entrance.

There are filtered local views of the site from Rooks Nest Wood. These are largely framed by mature boundary vegetation and existing screen fencing.

4.0 Planning Policy

Landscape Designations

4.1 The study site lies at the edge of Finchampstead settlement. It has been put forward by WBC for residential development and this land use is supported in the emerging Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan. The NPPF policy is discussed in detail in the Planning Statement prepared by the Jo Tasker Planning Consultancy.

4.2 Landscape Character

4.3 The site lies within “Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands” M1 landscape character area of the WBC LCA 2019. Key characteristics states:

- *A landscape dominated by interconnected forestry and woodland.*
- *Strong settlement character largely aligned along long linear rides.*
- *A landscape offering a sense of remoteness and solitude.*

4.4 Under the guidance section recommendations are made for landscape management and built development.

- *Conserve and maintain the hedgerow field boundaries and the connectivity and quality of the network.*
- *Ensure new development respects existing landscape characteristics and conserves distinctive green space retaining the separation of existing settlements.*

5.0 **Assessment of Landscape Character**

5.1 The study site contains landscape features that are typical of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment area M1.

5.2 The landscape quality is described as high. This relates to the mature vegetation mosaic in the character area. The study site is contained by mature green infrastructure and has a particular sensitivity because of the edge of settlement location. The existing site makes a *moderate* contribution to the overall character with few discordant features. The existing landscape resource is visually intact and guidance recommends that the character should be enhanced where appropriate.

5.3 Positive change by appropriate sensitive development is encouraged. This should include the restoration and enhancement of existing landscape features and the creation of new managed green infrastructure.

5.4 The LCA area is classed as having moderate sensitivity because of the location at edge of settlement. The capacity for change of land use can be described as low.

6.0 Proposals (Appendix E)

- 6.1 The proposed residential layout is shown on the attached indicative landscape strategy. **(Appendix E)** The proposal includes the demolition/ removal of the existing buildings and the installation of 35 Park Homes with associated parking and amenity green space sharing the existing Victoria Gardens access. The proposed homes layout will contain a mix of Omar Heritage/ Ikon/ Image units together with a new community building/ Park office. They will be sited within the outer mature tree screen and hedgerow allowing the retention of the key mature trees within communal management areas. New landscape elements are incorporated into the landscape strategy with sensitivity to enhance site character and improve bio-diversity.
- 6.2 The existing landscape fabric of the site will be retained and managed. The existing ditch and related boundary wetland habitats will be adapted to offer improved ecological benefits in conjunction with the adjacent Rooks Nest Wood Country Park management.
- 6.3 The outer landscape boundary elements will be largely retained, managed and enhanced as an appropriate setting for the proposal. This includes the southern and western tree screen and boundary hedgerows. The boundary landscape zones treatment will be designed to provide the appropriate visual amenity to accommodate new built form into the sensitive edge of settlement context. Consideration will be given for views from Barkham Ride and the Country Park. External lighting will be designed to minimise light pollution with controlled LED operation and fittings positioned and selected to reduce unwanted light overspill and impact on adjacent wildlife habitats.
- 6.4 The existing site can be divided into two proposed landscape areas including the outer landscape envelope and the inner Park Homes layout. The outer landscape mature tree canopy will be managed and infilled as appropriate to create a mixed-age linked boundary habitat. Together with the marginal meadow grassland improvements will be made to enhance site biodiversity. The new inner dwelling layout including siting, footprint, massing and materials have been designed to fit the context and local landscape character. The layout is based around the retained and enhanced landscape structure with new pedestrian links to the Country Park and Victoria Gardens.
- 6.5 The existing entrance driveway on Barkham Ride will be removed and new inner driveway connections will be made with the adjacent Victoria Gardens access.

Driveways will consist of permeable macadam and footpath leading to inner permeable paved parking and shared surface zones. Plots will include low clipped hedging/ fencing and enclosure. The central communal building will include an enhanced tree canopy and garden with hedging enclosure.

- 6.6 New landscape works will be included within the proposed layout with further boundary enhancement to the outer buffer zones as required to provide an appropriate setting to development. The recommendations of the project ecologist will be followed to enhance marginal hedgerow, boundary areas and links to local habitats (see detailed ecology report). The existing ditches and new pond will also provide further opportunity for marginal habitat creation and bio-diversity enhancement, subject to drainage engineer advice.
- 6.7 The main components of this proposal that will have a landscape and visual effect will be the installation of the new dwellings with inner driveway connections, parking, landscape buffer and boundary treatment. The associated infrastructure SUDS landscape works and the creation of the enhanced green space network will be included in the drainage design within the long-term landscape management plan. In order to safeguard the outer boundary landscape tree screen and ditch / pond margins it is appropriate to establish a residents management company to support the landscape management regime to enhance the communal green space.

7.0 Visual Receptors

- 7.1 The term ‘receptors’ is used in landscape and visual impact assessments to mean an element or assemblage of elements that will be directly or indirectly affected by the proposed development. Physical landscape receptors including vegetation and landform are not directly affected by the proposal and my assessment has thus concentrated on *visual receptors*.

- 7.2 Visual receptors include:

- Public Footpath and Country Park users
- Local Residents
- Users of the roads in the vicinity.

8.0 Impact of Proposals

- 8.1 The study site has an edge of settlement character set between countryside and adjacent local housing. Natural features dominate built form. The main site is generally level apart from a local fall to the rear northern boundary ditch. The key public views are to be found from Barkham Ride at the existing site entrance. The few properties along Barkham Ride beyond the southern boundary have limited views. The receptor groups include pedestrians, motorists and local residents.
- 8.2 Pedestrians will have filtered views from Barkham Ride including at the proposed vehicle entrance. Here an improved landscape treatment will be created by replacing the existing entrance with landscape screening and sharing the existing Victoria Gardens access driveway for the new proposal.
- 8.3 Passing motorists will already be aware of the Victoria Gardens access from Barkham Ride.
- 8.4 Local residents lie adjacent to the study site to the east and south along Barkham Ride. Existing residents will have restricted views to the proposed development through any gaps in the existing boundary hedgerow and tree screen. The proposed common boundary landscape treatment will therefore require review.
- 8.5 There will be disturbance from construction traffic and ground engineering works during building works but once complete the proposed dwellings will have a new inner driveway layout visually containing vehicle movement with outer structural landscape features.
- 8.6 Residents will have access to the local footpaths within Rooks Nest Wood Country Park and the wider network. A separate site landscape management programme will be drawn up for the proposed improvements with the project ecologist to encourage bio-diversity in the area. This is normally conditioned.

Landscape impact assessment

- 8.7 The magnitude of the landscape ‘effect’ from the proposal should take account of the existing land use on this site. Existing natural features including the mature tree screens and other boundary habitats, should be protected and enhanced.

Noting the rural location and site topography, the proposed building height and massing will require careful design. The Park Home siting, height, footprint and landscape treatment will be designed to integrate the proposal with the local setting.

- 8.8 The proposal is located at the edge of settlement and will be set within the managed mature tree and hedgerow envelope. Site management by the new residents management company will include the new and existing landscape features including buffer boundary enhancement and other green areas to ensure full establishment within the proposed landscape communal areas. The cumulative effect will deliver a proposal of **short term moderately adverse** landscape impact particularly at the entrance to the proposed residential development. This will diminish with the new landscape structure establishment and provide a **long-term beneficial** landscape impact with consistent landscape management.
- 8.9 The impact of external lighting will need careful consideration noting the proximity of adjacent residents and the wider edge of settlement context.

Visual impact assessment

- 8.10 The assessment of the visual impact of the proposal is taken by selecting the key viewpoints into the study site as set out in sect 3.9-3.12. I describe the likely degree of visibility of the proposal and assess their impact against the GLVIA criteria (**Appendix C**).
- 8.11 My selected viewpoints are indicated on the attached OS reference plan with the visual appraisal (**Appendix D**).
- Viewpoints 1-4 – Entrance area - Barkham Ride.*
- In my opinion the proposal would have a **short-term moderately adverse** effect on this view. The viewer is level with the study site located in the background behind the mature hedgerow and tree screen. Approximately 20% of the view will be altered until infill planting establishes chiefly around the outer boundary envelope and former entrance treatment including visibility splays.
- 8.12 *Viewpoints 5-8 – Southwest corner- Rooks Nest Wood Country Park*
- In my opinion the proposal would have a **short-term moderately adverse** effect on this view. The viewer is adjacent the south-west corner of the development to be located in the background beyond the retained skyline trees and hedgerow.

Approximately 10% of the view will be altered until the modified boundary landscape treatment with footpath links and infill enclosure planting establishes.

8.13 *Viewpoints 9-12 - Northwest corner- Rooks Nest Wood Country Park*

In my opinion the proposal would have a **short-term slightly adverse** effect on this view. The viewer is level with the rear boundary of the development to be located in the background beyond the grass meadows and retained hedgerow and mature tree screen. The tree-lined skyline will remain visible post development. Along the common boundary once safety tree management works have been completed and new pond installed infill mixed age marginal and boundary planting will be undertaken. Approximately 5% of the view will be altered while the new planting establishes beside the new footpath links to create enhanced boundary enclosure. There will be a **short-term slightly adverse** effect on this view.

8.14 *Viewpoints 12a-h – Eastern boundary – Victoria Gardens*

In my opinion the proposal would have a **short-term moderately adverse** effect on this view. The viewer is adjacent to the proposed development. The enhanced landscape boundary treatment will include low plot fencing softened by mixed hedging and tree planting. The average new building outer boundary set back is 10m with skyline trees retained. Approximately 20% of the view will be altered, particularly at the rear of the study site, until the new landscape treatment establishes.

9.0 Mitigation

9.1 Taking account of the existing planning policy and landscape constraints, if the study site were to be developed sensitively for the new dwellings then **localised moderate landscape mitigation** would be necessary. This would be concentrated principally on the southern section of the site bordering Barkham Ride with the works connected to the former vehicle access landscape buffer treatment.

9.2 In order to maintain and enhance the existing site character, natural landscape features would need to dominate and enclose the Park Homes installation. The existing outer boundaries of the site would require appropriate landscape protection, management and enhancement. The inner site will require green infrastructure improvements by considered landscape drainage including linked ditches, pond and swales with the new inner vehicular access layout.

- Once established this feature will then provide a long-term all year-round transition zone between the local settlement and wider countryside. **(This should include a long-term management plan including a suitable SUDS drainage system, native mixed-age screen planting and improved marginal ditch/ pond habitat.)**
- 9.3 The outer boundaries and associated marginal habitats will require routine management and appropriate access. This will be undertaken by the new residents management company. Landscape mitigation will include **tree and hedgerow buffer planting management and margin reinstatement with new stock fencing** to maintain the site character. **Ecological management proposals will also be adopted for the marginal ditch, pond and hedgerow habitats to improve site bio-diversity.**
- 9.4 The site will require appropriate landscape enclosure along Barkham Ride including the modified vehicle entrance treatment to mitigate views from existing highways. This treatment will include **new mixed-age native screen planting, boundary hedging, fencing and tree management.** Entrance highway, external lighting and services design will be appropriate to the location of the site to minimise impact on retained natural features and habitats.
- 9.5 The north section of the site will require landscape proposals to enhance and reinforce the existing marginal wooded ditch habitat. This treatment will include **new mixed-age native screen planting, boundary hedging, fencing and tree management. Ecological management proposals will also be adopted for the ditch margins to progress natural colonisation.**
- 9.6 The new development layout will include a landscape strategy to link and integrate the new dwellings with the existing outer landscape framework/ green infrastructure. A combination of boundary enhancement together with structural inner planting within appropriate hard and soft landscape design will form the basis of the new dwellings setting.
- 9.7 The following mitigation measures form an integral part of the development in order to limit landscape and visual impacts.
- Retention of key existing vegetation in the vicinity of the site (outer boundaries)
 - Retention of key existing habitats in the vicinity of the site (outer boundaries)
 - Special consideration/ treatment of the new dwellings layout (central site)
 - The adoption of a landscape strategy and long-term Landscape Management Plan
 - Sustainable drainage landscape design to ensure water quality and cost-effective site management

- Agreement with key stakeholders on an enabling works programme for the landscape management plan (WBC/ Applicant)

10.0 Assessment of Effects

- 10.1 **Landscape Impacts** - Overall there would be landscape and visual impacts as a result of alterations to the landscape during the development period. These have been described as **short-term moderately adverse** in sect 8.11-14.
- 10.2 As the proposal site is within an edge of settlement location it has the potential to result in moderate landscape impact resulting from the construction works and new land use. This would include the construction phase, landscape management and related engineering works.
- 10.3 The application site works will involve the removal of some low value trees as recommended by the project arborist. All treeworks will be in accordance with the agreed arboricultural method statement to be conditioned.
- 10.4 The construction phase will involve construction traffic, site setup and the normal construction site activity.
- 10.5 The landscape management plan will include an enabling works programme to ensure an appropriate SUDS drainage scheme is installed to limit and filter any surface water runoff before any discharge into the local system and compliance with all EA requirements.
- 10.6 A key element in the drainage scheme will be the porous hardstanding/ driveway design to be used throughout the proposed development. Care will be taken in detailed drainage engineering design to minimise the impact on existing tree root protection areas along the outer boundaries.
- 10.7 Soil levels to be reviewed subject to drainage requirements (see the detailed engineering report).
- 10.8 **Visual Context and Existing Views** - Existing mature vegetation and settlement obscure wider views of the site, but the site is partially visible locally from the immediate roadside boundary and adjacent housing.
- 10.9 The proposal site and the mature existing tree screen and hedgerow to the outer boundaries mean that, apart from the adjacent housing and sections of Barkham Ride, existing direct views into the site are limited to the vehicular entrance. Potential views of the proposals are described below.
- 10.10 *Barkham Ride entrance* – The existing entrance driveway will be removed and infilled by an extended landscape roadside buffer to alter the immediate streetscape to the southern boundary.

- Inner boundary fencing appropriate to the setting will be installed including close mown verges, meadow with native trees and hedging. A programme of tree management inspections will be agreed.
- 10.11 Mixed-age native buffer tree planting to encourage early establishment, bio-diversity gain and visual containment will also be adopted. Sensitive controlled low level LED lighting design will limit any light overspill.
- 10.12 *Rooks Nest Wood Country Park* – The indicative layout includes the combination of careful and considered Park Home siting and external permeable hard landscape finishes with appropriate landscape framework planting. This approach will integrate the proposal with the existing landscape character. Views into the development site will be well screened by existing mature vegetation reinforced by new mixed-age thicket and boundary screen planting managed for conservation.
- 10.13 *Victoria Gardens* – The new eastern boundary treatment will be softened by the combination of clipped driveway hedging and communal centre tree planting.
- 10.14 The long-term management plan proposed will continue to improve the setting by the management of boundary and ditch/ pond marginal vegetation, by reinforcing the tree screening element in the new landscape strategy and improving the bio-diversity value of the ecological setting. In addition, the applicant will adopt an ecological management regime that will create an appropriate transition zone between the development, amenity space and wider countryside. The overall principle of restore, manage and enhance is encouraged by WBC and an enabling works landscape programme for this site will be agreed as part of the planning proposal.
- 10.15 To summarise, the proposed development will have a **short-term moderately adverse impact** on the character of the site. This is largely on account of the visual impact of the proposed dwellings and new access layout during construction while the reinforcement mixed native screen planting and boundary enhancement is undertaken. In the long term there will be a **‘moderate beneficial impact’** effect to the majority of my selected views. Once the long-term management plan takes effect, then a richer habitat will be created which will enhance the character of the local area as set out in the *‘Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands’* WBC 2019 landscape character area M1.

11.00 Residual Impacts

- 11.01 Once constructed to the agreed site layout and architectural/ landscape specification, the key ongoing element affecting the landscape impact will be the Landscape Management Plan. The main features of this plan will include:

- the site improvements comprising mature boundary tree, hedgerow and undergrowth management with arboricultural, drainage and ecological issues addressed.
- the improved green infrastructure scheme managed locally to promote marginal species, bio-diversity and ecological benefits with wildlife corridor and potential footpath links.
- the new dwelling landscape treatment designed to link the grounds, parking and access into the wider local context.
- management operations to be agreed with the applicants and any special landscape drainage features including ditches, pond and swales necessary to maintain the optimum soil quality and growing conditions to support the native habitat and improve green infrastructure.

12.00 Conclusion

- 12.01 The assessment identifies that the development will be visible from limited public locations to the south and west of the proposal. The impacts resulting have been classed as **short-term moderately adverse** during installation. These will revert to a **no-change** effect as the mitigation proposals establish and eventually have a long-term **moderately beneficial impact** especially with sustained landscape management. Close views are limited to the properties bordering the southern section of the site.
- 12.02 With sensitive architectural and landscape design the character of the site is respected with built form contained visually by strong landscape enclosure with mixed age tree screening and new mixed-age framework planting. The Park Homes layout will create the basis for an accessible, manageable landscape subject to detailed agreement.
- 12.03 The proposal offers landscape opportunities for visual integration and long-term management benefits.
- 12.04 The long-term Management Plan will guide the establishment of the reinforced landscape screen and improved boundary habitat. With the inclusion of appropriate surface water drainage the landscape framework/ green infrastructure will provide a practical transition zone that allows new species to establish. In combination this proposal effects a positive transition between the study site, Rooks Nest Wood Country Park and the wider countryside.
- 12.05 The proposal will initially have a moderately adverse impact on the edge of settlement character of the site. However once the long-term management plan is implemented then there is a vision for the successful integration of the proposed development within the local context and an enhancement of the ‘*Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands*’ Landscape Character Area M1.

Appendix

- A Location Plan – OS plan incl topography
- B Aerial photograph
- C Criteria for visual impact assessment (GLVIA v3 2013)
- D Landscape Photographic Appraisal
- E Indicative landscape strategy