

4 Consultation, Alternatives and Design Evolution

4.1 Consultation

EIA Consultation

- 4.1.1 In December 2024, Gleeson Land, the University of Reading and Hatch Farm Land Ltd. submitted a joint request for the formal EIA scoping opinion of Wokingham Borough Council. The subsequent opinion was issued in February 2025 (Appendix 5.2). Further details of the formal EIA consultation process is set out within Chapter 5.
- 4.1.2 During the course of the EIA, the project team consulted with WBC to clarify elements of the scope where required. Details of technical consultation directly related to the EIA are provided in the methodology and baseline sections of each topic chapter.
- 4.1.3 Although the joint scoping request was submitted, this EIA relates solely to the Gleeson (Newlands Farm) proposals.

Consultation with Wokingham Borough Council

- 4.1.4 Various pre-application discussions with statutory and non-statutory consultees and the local community all have an influence over the evolution of the design of the Proposed Development and the scope of the EIA. This section summarises the consultation process undertaken with key stakeholders and includes the key issues raised during these discussions.
- 4.1.5 Further details of this are provided within the Planning Statement and Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) submitted as part of the suite of planning application documents.
- 4.1.6 There has been extensive pre-application engagement by the Landowners with Wokingham Borough Council, key stakeholders and local residents over the past 4 years. This extends back to November 2021; the point at which the Council published its Local Plan Update Revised Growth Strategy which proposed the Site for development. This engagement has included the following:

- Project meetings have been held on an approximately monthly basis since January 2022 with lead planning officers from WBC, to address the overall parameters and principle of development, form and delivery of Loddon Valley Garden Village. This has encompassed the proposed draft LPU policy, as well as the evolving planning application matters.
- There have been periodic briefings to senior Members and officers of WBC at key stages in the evolution and preparation of the Local Plan Update.
- Pre-application meetings have been held with WBC planning officers in relation to specific design and masterplanning material submitted by Gleeson at successive stages.
- Topic-specific workshops have been facilitated by WBC on a regular basis, to explore detailed environmental, technical and delivery matters with both planning officers and relevant specialist officers. These workshops have covered a range of topics including masterplanning, ecology, landscape, transport, education, sustainability, and infrastructure.

- Representatives of the University, on behalf of the Landowners, have met with Parish Councils on a regular basis over the past 3 years in relation to the LVGV proposals as a whole.
- There has also been detailed engagement on an individual basis between specialists in the University's and the Landowners consultancy team's, and their relevant counterparts in WBC and other organisations as EIA-related technical work has been undertaken. This has included the Environment Agency, Natural England, Highways England and Historic England. Further details on this process are set out in the relevant chapters of the Environmental Statement submitted with this application.

4.1.7 The Proposed Development has evolved since conception and work has been undertaken by the project design team to address the comments raised during the engagement, where possible. A detailed explanation of how the scheme has evolved to take account of the consultation process is provided in the Planning Statement. Details of how this evolution has been informed by environmental considerations is set out below.

Consultation with Other Landowners

4.1.8 All three Landowners involved in the Scoping process have been in constant communication with one another to ensure a joined up approach for the whole allocation. This has formed part of a much wider ongoing process of co-operation between the landowners, going back to late 2021 when the site was first considered as a potential Local Plan allocation by WBC. Co-operation between the landowners has been extensive, in seeking to ensure a sustainable and comprehensive development for the site allocation as a whole. This has included direct joint working on design, technical and other matters, and a combined approach to public consultation. Regular meetings between the landowners and with WBC on overarching matters have been held for over 3.5 years in relation to the site.

4.1.9 Following receipt of the scoping opinion, it was agreed that the Landowners would submit separate planning applications to WBC whilst also continuing to work closely with, and taking into account the effects of, the neighbouring proposals as they come forward.

Core Phase of Public Engagement, 2025

4.1.10 The Landowners have sought to involve the local community and stakeholders extensively to help shape the proposals.

4.1.11 The most substantial element of public-facing engagement at the pre-application stage has been a phase of consultation undertaken in Spring 2025, comprising a variety of different methods and channels. This allowed the general public to comment on the proposals at a stage at which they had been sufficiently progressed to allow for meaningful comment. This phase of consultation was programmed to take place after WBC's formal submission of the Local Plan Update for Examination by the Secretary of State, as this represented an important milestone in the emerging allocation Policy SS13, and enabled responses from the earlier Regulation 19 consultation (in Autumn 2024) to be taken into account.

4.1.12 Full details of this process are set out in the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), prepared by Meeting Place Communications, which accompanies this application. In summary, the major elements of this process have been as follows:

- 11 March: Formal launch of consultation, including publication of press release, and distribution of newsletter
- 17 March: Webinar for Stakeholders;

- 27 March: Shinfield public engagement event, Shinfield School Green Centre;
- 28 March: Earley public engagement event, Meadow Suite, University of Reading, White Knights Campus;
- 29 March: Arborfield public engagement event, Arborfield Village Hall;
- 3 April: Arborfield and Barkham area stakeholder meeting, Arborfield Village Hall;
- 3 April: Earley area stakeholder meeting, Radstock Lane Community Centre; and
- 23 April: Winnersh area stakeholder meeting, Crone Plaza, Winnersh Triangle.

4.1.13 Feedback was received in multiple ways, including:

- feedback form (paper and online);
- an interactive map;
- emails to comments@meeting-place.uk;
- Freephone calls to 0800 148 8911;
- letters to Freepost, Meeting Place Consultation; and through the stakeholder engagement meetings and public events.

4.1.14 Over the six-week consultation period written feedback was received from over 400 people, via 376 feedback forms, 14 comments on interactive map, ten emails and two letters. Around 350 people attended the meetings and events, with:

- over 274 at the three public consultations;
- a total of 45 attending the four area stakeholder group meetings; and
- 34 the webinar for Stakeholders.

4.1.15 At the public engagement events there was praise for the quality of consultation, especially the range of specialist consultants present to answer questions at events.

4.1.16 The theme that generated the most feedback and concern from residents and stakeholders was transport, because of the perceived impact on everyday lives. Existing traffic congestion across the local area was mentioned frequently, the common concern being whether this would worsen with further development, despite proposed road upgrades. Concern over ongoing disruption during construction was also a common concern.

4.1.17 Flooding, drainage and sewage concerns were raised many times, as well as for healthcare provision. There was a strong desire for stewardship over the planning application process and the delivery of wider infrastructure. People were keen to see a mix of housing, with truly affordable housing and provision for key workers.

4.1.18 Part 2 of the SCI provides responses to the key issues raised during the consultation and engagement process,. The key themes responded to including:

- Housing;
- Community facilities;

- Employment and education;
- Sustainability and space;
- Transport; and
- Vision and values.

4.1.19 The Landowners are grateful to all those who participated in the consultation process, particularly local residents giving up their time to provide their input, which has been very helpful in shaping the proposals ultimately applied for in this application.

4.2 Alternatives and design iteration

Alternative Sites

4.2.1 The Local Plan Update (currently under Examination) includes the Site within a Strategic Development Location proposed allocation under Policy SS13 – Loddon Valley Garden Village (LVGV - full policy wording is provided in Appendix 6.1). In summary, this policy allocates for the whole of the LVGV for:

- Residential Development: Approximately 3,930 dwellings will be constructed, with a minimum of 2,700 expected by 2040, including 40% affordable homes, custom self-build plots, Gypsy and Traveller pitches, and specialist accommodation.
- Employment: 100,000m² of research and development floorspace or equivalent trip generating activity within the use class E(g), B2, B8 and other complementary uses,.
- Educational Facilities: The development will provide two primary schools and one secondary school.
- Community Services: A district centre will provide various services, alongside two local centres and a country park for recreational use, ensuring accessibility to all residents.
- The Environment: Provision of a multi-functional country park and a sufficient Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG).

4.2.2 The Site was initially identified in the Revised Growth Strategy Document (November 2021) for a minimum of 4,500 dwellings with expansion of the Thames Valley Science Park.

4.2.3 An extensive evidence base has informed the Local Plan Update and included technical assessments on sustainability appraisal (SA), strategic environmental assessment (SEA), habitats regulations assessment (HRA), housing, economic development, placemaking and design, infrastructure, transport, viability, landscape and Green Belt, green spaces, heritage, climate change, flood risk and environmental sustainability. This included reviewing the most sustainable potential sites within the Borough.

4.2.4 Following this assessment, as part of the Local Plan preparation, the Site was proposed to be allocated in the Wokingham Local Plan Update which was submitted for Examination on the 28th February 2025, following a Regulation 19 consultation in Autumn 2024.

4.2.5 The Local Plan process assessed alternatives sites as part of a comprehensive site selection and Sustainability Appraisal process considering potential development options (and combinations of options) around Wokingham Borough as a whole. From this process, WBC concluded that the Site was suitable for development and that its allocation via a strategic Local Plan policy (along with other sites) would represent a sustainable approach in order to fulfil identified housing needs. This process took into consideration an array of social, environmental and economic factors, and the consideration of reasonable alternatives.

4.2.6 Hence alternative sites have not been considered further by the Applicant or assessed in the EIA as these would not be deliverable and would contradict the spatial strategy and related allocations in the Local Plan Update.

Alternative development scenarios and design iterations

4.2.7 Schedule 4, paragraph 2 of the EIA Regulations requires Environmental Statements to include:

'A description of the reasonable alternatives (for example, in terms of development design, technology, location, size and scale) studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed project and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects.'

4.2.8 Given the nature and purpose of the Proposed Development, the assessment of reasonable alternatives to the development presented in the ES considers options within the following categories.

- **Do Nothing:** under this scenario no development is implemented at the Site and baseline conditions continue in their current trends. This option would not result in the delivery of a substantial part of the LPAs emerging housing need in a sustainable location thereby contradicting emerging planning policy and the benefits from the Proposed Development would not be realised.
- **A Different Design:** under this scenario the Proposed Development is realised with alternative scales and layouts, often in the context of developmental constraints present at the Site. This option is discussed further below.

4.2.9 The design of the Proposed Development has been developed to minimise the environmental impact and, where possible, deliver environmental enhancements.

Summary

4.2.10 The Illustrative Masterplan and the parameters of the Proposed Development—such as building layout, height, and land use—were refined through an iterative design process. This evolution was guided by emerging WBC policy and informed by consultation with key stakeholders. A series of consultation events, as outlined above, helped shape design objectives and embed key principles within the Masterplan. Technical input from the project team ensured that, wherever possible, environmental mitigation measures were integrated into the design.

Design Evolution

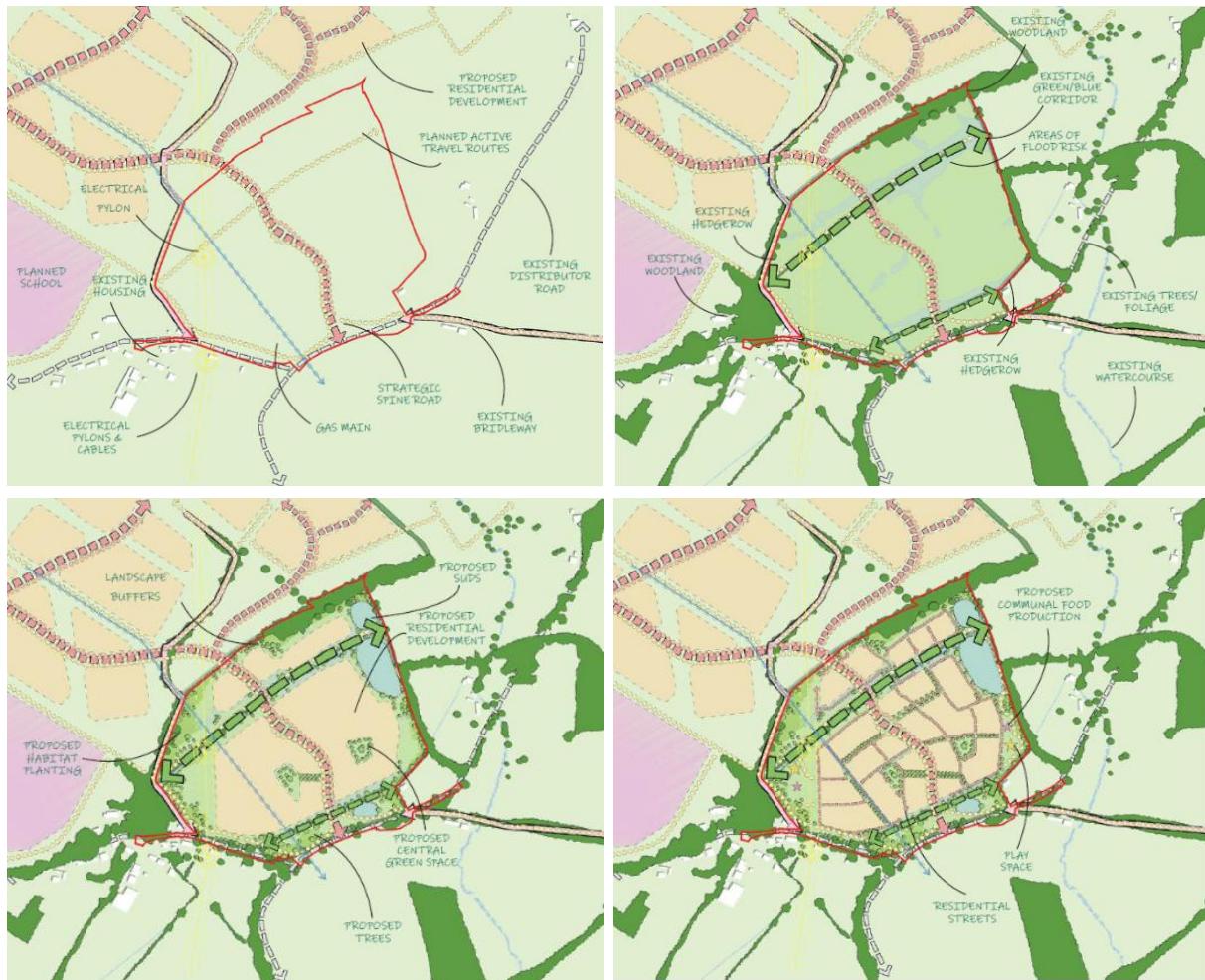
4.2.11 The first set of land use and masterplan proposals for Loddon Valley Garden Village was set out by Wokingham Borough Council in November 2021 as part of an early consultation on the Local Plan Update. From that starting point, the Landowners and their consultant team have developed and refined the Illustrative Masterplan for the Proposed Development based on technical studies and design development, culminating in the plans for Newlands Farm set out in the DAS and the supporting Parameter Plans.

4.2.12 The proposals are consistent with the indicative Concept Plan for the LVGV published by WBC in the Regulation 19 Local Plan Update and are based around an Illustrative Masterplan that has been developed to take account of technical site assessment and the extensive pre-application engagement.

4.2.13 The Proposed Development is an integral part of the 'Loddon Valley Garden Village' development. As such the design vision for this Site align with that of the wider allocation in that it will positively contribute to the creation of Wokingham's exemplar resilient and sustainable Garden Community. It will promote wellbeing by integrating contemporary living, heritage, active travel and community facilities, with landscape and green-blue infrastructure at the heart

of this development. It will create opportunities for work, innovation, education and play on the doorstep, to attract investment and provide a thriving local economy for residents and wider communities.

Figure 4.1 Framework Principles and Design Evolution



4.2.14 Figure 4.1 illustrates the evolution of the design. Existing landscape features, including trees and hedgerows, will be retained and enhanced within a comprehensive network of public open spaces. These formal and informal areas will be evenly distributed throughout the site, complemented by designated zones for productive landscaping and children's play.

4.2.15 The landscape strategy incorporates a carefully planned network of blue infrastructure, including rain gardens, planted swales, and SuDS drainage features, ensuring these spaces are both visually appealing and technically robust. A key element of the scheme is the enhancement of the northern field's existing hedgerow and its associated deep, linear ditch. Proposals aim to strengthen existing vegetation and create an accessible blue corridor that delivers ecological benefits while serving the local community.

4.2.16 Enhanced landscaping is proposed along the development edges, alongside multifunctional spaces that bring residents closer to nature while offering opportunities for recreation, play, exercise, food production, and relaxation. The scheme will also feature a network of formal green corridors integrated with the blue and green infrastructure described above.

4.2.17 Table 4.1 outlines further how environmental constraints and consideration of potential impacts have influenced the design of the Proposed Development.

Table 4.1 Key Design Changes/Influences

Environmental Topic	Change and influence on Environmental Impacts / Effects.
Air Quality	Provision of sustainable transport through the Travel Plan embedded and promoted through the design of the Proposed Development will result in a reduction in the number of external vehicle trips that are made during the operational phase of the Proposed Development and therefore air quality impacts related to transport emissions.
Archaeology	As there are no sensitive archaeological receptors on Site, no inherent mitigation is required for archaeology.
Built Heritage	<p>Development has been drawn back from the western, southern and eastern boundaries to account for the Proposed Development's proximity to BH1, BH2, LB1 and LB2.</p> <p>Additionally, the Proposed Development allows for the retention of areas of existing undergrowth, vegetation and large trees as well as including new tree planting and biodiversity planting to assist in reducing the impacts of the Proposed Development on the settings of built heritage receptors.</p>
Climate Change & GHG	<p>Habitat creation will counterbalance environmental impacts for vegetation and soil carbon lost during construction.</p> <p>By promoting sustainable travel measures, the operational phase of the development will contain embedded mitigation through car clubs, mobility hubs, EV charging, cycle hire, cycle parking, electric bicycle charging infrastructure, dedicated pedestrian and cycle routes within the Site.</p> <p>Portable water efficiency and flood risk management / SuDS will be incorporated.</p>
Ecology	<p>The delivery of habitats and ecological buffers would ensure habitats of ecological value are present post-development and reduce adverse ecological effects.</p> <p>Retained habitats will be buffered during construction to prevent damage with semi-natural buffers created during operation. For example, ancient woodlands will be subject to 15m buffer zones. Tree Root Protection Zones of a radius 15 times the diameter of the tree or an area reaching 5 m beyond the tree's outermost canopy to avoid compaction and other adverse impacts.</p> <p>A Lighting Strategy during construction will mitigate impacts of artificial lighting which will take into account ecologically sensitive areas.</p> <p>The Proposed Development will contribute to and benefit from the Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) on the wider Loddon Valley Garden Village development thereby mitigating adverse impacts on the Thames Basin Heaths SPA. Additionally, attractive alternative recreational spaces will also be provided for new and existing residents in the local area. Both methods will draw visitors away from potentially sensitive sites.</p>

	Provision of greenspaces are incorporated into the Proposed Development including natural greenspace and amenity greenspace.
Human Health	The provision of new housing, and new public open spaces will allow for improved human health outcomes.
Hydrology (Flood Risk & Drainage)	<p>A sequential approach to the layout was applied during Masterplanning the Site such as avoiding indicative surface water flows, floodplain areas and setting back built development from Main Rivers and Ordinary Watercourses.</p> <p>A surface water drainage strategy incorporating SuDS will include infiltration and conveyance, attenuation and controlled discharge of surface water runoff. Additionally, finished floor levels (FFLs) will be above the design flood event including an appropriate allowance for climate change.</p> <p>The Drainage Strategy will prevent pollutants and sediments travelling off-Site and maintain volume of discharge at current greenfield runoff rates.</p>
Landscape & Visual Impact	<p>The Illustrative Masterplan incorporates all existing hedgerows with the only loss of hedgerows to allow for highways cut throughs and visibility.</p> <p>The retention of all existing TPO trees and ancient woodland, together with a 15m buffer of semi-natural land to protect root systems and canopies.</p> <p>A network of open spaces shown within the parameter plans to provide multi-functional green spaces incorporating existing vegetation as well as new tree planting to screen / soften views of new properties.</p> <p>SuDS basins designed to be positive landscape features.</p> <p>The majority of development parcels to accommodate no more than 2 to 3 storeys in height. With the tallest buildings of no more than four storeys along the proposed Spine Road through the centre of the Site.</p>
Noise & Vibration	No embedded mitigation, with the exception of the wider buffer to the M4, is included within the design of the development.
Socio-economics	The provision of new housing, and new public open spaces will allow for improved socio-economic outcomes.
Transport & Access	The Proposed Development will provide a network of walking and cycling routes which divert active travellers / equestrians into the Proposed Development and connect to the wider LVGV project. Other measures include the promotion of sustainable travel options including by bus, cycling and walking, which will have the effect of reducing impacts on the surrounding road network, whilst contributing towards high quality of life.

Summary

4.2.18 The Illustrative Masterplan for the Proposed Development focuses on creating a well-connected and sustainable community as part of the wider Loddon Valley Garden Village. Key features include a multi-modal Spine Road network to support a diverse range of transport modes. Building densities are highest along the main road and decrease towards the edges to ease transitions with neighbouring areas. Surface water mitigation uses nature-based solutions like rain gardens and SuDs to enhance biodiversity. Wider ongoing community engagement and stewardship models are being considered to ensure local involvement and social value in the development's future management.

4.2.19 The technical work undertaken as part of EIA process has identified key environmental constraints which has fed into the design seeking to avoid and reduce adverse environmental impacts.