

Brigid Taylor MRTPI PISEP MIEEnvS
Summary Proof of Evidence: Planning Matters

Introduction

- 1.1. The Planning Proof of Evidence is prepared by Brigid Taylor MRTPI PISEP MIEEnvS. Relevant qualifications and experience are set out at the start of my full proof of evidence.

Appeal Site and Appeal Scheme

- 1.2. Sections 2 and 3 of the Appellant's Planning Proof of Evidence set out details on the Appeal Site and the Appeal Scheme proposals respectively. The proposals for approval via this appeal are set out on the following plans:
- Site Location Plan No. 052403-DAN-LOC01 (CD01.05)
 - Emergency Access Plan No. 147.0017.0009 Rev P01 (CD1.28)
 - Refuse Vehicle and Fire Appliance Tracking – Proposed Site Access Drawing No. 147.0017.0006 Rev P02 (CD1.29)
 - Proposed Site Access General Arrangement Plan No. 147.0017.0001 Rev P07 (CD1.30)
- 1.3. In addition to those application plans, additional supporting plans have been submitted for illustrative purposes only/ background information to aid in the assessment of the scheme. This list includes versions as updated during the application/ appeal process in response to ongoing discussions regarding arboricultural considerations:
- Access Details and Tree Removal Plan (Milestone Dwg Ref: 25103-006 Rev C) (as requested by the Inspector at the CMC and subsequently submitted to the Inspector in hard copy 29.01.2026 and electronically to the LPA on that same date)
 - Topographical Survey No. 052403-DAN-TOPO1 (CD01.08)

- Illustrative Masterplan No. 052403-DAN-MP04 (CD23.01) (as submitted 04.02.2026) (in response to the ongoing discussions with the LPA regarding tree impacts and the assessment thereof)
- Indicative Land Use Plan No. 052403-DAN-MP04-ILUP (CD23.02) (as submitted 04.02.2026) (in response to the ongoing discussions with the LPA regarding tree impacts and the assessment thereof)
- Tree Removal Plan 052403-DAN-MP04-TRP (CD23.03) (as submitted 04.02.2026) (in response to the ongoing discussions with the LPA regarding tree impacts and the assessment thereof)
- Illustrative Parking Plan and Accommodation Schedule (Drawing Ref 052403-DAN-IPP (contained within Highways Response Note CD01.22 submitted during the course of the application).
- Illustrative landscape Masterplan (Drawing Ref GLS_050_171_1201) (CD01.19)

- 1.4. Section 3 of the Planning proof details how the masterplan was developed with regard to analysis of site constraints and opportunities. The proposed land uses on this 6.4ha site include approximately 3.888ha for residential use and associated infrastructure (roads/drainage features) and approximately 2.5ha of open space and green infrastructure. The net density is therefore 28.5 dwellings per hectare (gross 17.3).

Decision Making Framework

- 1.5. Section 4.4 of the Planning Proof sets out a summary of the specific Development Plan policies which are considered relevant, and most important for the determination of this Appeal. It also summarises those which are considered to be out of date, and those which are considered to be complied with (or otherwise).
- 1.6. Wokingham is a borough with only 2.3 years' housing land supply (2.5 years' by the Council's estimation) and significant levels of unmet need for both market and affordable housing. There is a shortfall of 3,733 dwellings in the 2025-2030 five-year period with a deliverable supply of only 3181 dwellings against a requirement for 6914.

Freedom of Information Act request responses show that there are 669 requests for an affordable home in Arborfield. There is significant unmet and growing demand for affordable housing in Arborfield & Newland parish, and there is very significantly greater demand for affordable homes in Arborfield & Newland Parish compared to the Borough as a whole.

- 1.7. This appeal proposes the delivery of up to 111 dwellings in a sustainable location, in Arborfield, which benefits from access to a range of services and facilities within walking/cycling distance and also via the good quality existing bus service which serves the Site. The Site represents an ideal opportunity for reducing the significant scale of the housing (including affordable housing) shortfall.
- 1.8. Furthermore, it is clear that in order to meet identified housing needs, there will be a need to breach current settlement boundaries and bring forward greenfield sites. The Council proposes the allocation of a large strategic site (Loddon Valley Garden Village) in close proximity to the Site. Live applications propose to deliver the majority of this proposed allocation. If approved, the sustainability of this Appeal Site will be further strengthened via the creation of new schools and employment in close proximity to the Appeal Site.

The Main Issues

- 1.9. Each of the Main Issues is addressed as follows:

Whether the proposed development is in a suitable location having regard to local and national policies in relation to the location of housing:

- 1.10. It is accepted that the proposal conflicts with the Development Plan's spatial strategy (Policies CP9, CP11, CC02 and AD1), but this conflict is afforded only **limited weight** as these policies are manifestly out of date. The proposal accords with national policy supporting delivery of development which addresses an acknowledged unmet housing need and boosting supply of housing in a location with suitable location (in sustainability terms) regardless of the breach of out-of-date settlement boundaries. The Appeal Scheme accords with Policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6, CC01 and NPPF paragraphs 7 and 8 (achieving sustainable development) on sustainable development and indeed NPPF policies regarding sustainable locations, making efficient use of land, securing well designed places and providing affordable homes (as set out in

NPPF footnote 9: 66 and 84 of chapter 5; 91 of chapter 7; 110 and 115 of chapter 9; 129 of chapter 11; and 135 and 139 of chapter 12.). I afford **significant weight** to the delivery of sustainable development; and substantial weight to the delivery of housing to address the shortfall; the Appeal Scheme provides 40% affordable housing (consistent with paragraph 66), would not result in isolated homes in the countryside (consistent with paragraph 84), is in a sustainable location and prioritises sustainable modes of transport with a vision led approach (consistent with paragraphs 110 and 115), makes efficient use of underutilised land (paragraph 129), delivers high quality design (paragraph 135) and reflects local guidance (paragraph 139).

The effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area.

- 1.11. The Site is not a valued landscape and there are limited and localised views. The localised change in landscape character is in conflict with Policies CC03, TB21 and IRS2 (which seek to avoid loss of any green infrastructure and preserve the rural setting of settlements), which attracts **moderate negative weight**. However, the proposal delivers additional green infrastructure and preserves /enhances the Green Route along Reading Road with supplemental planting.

Whether the quantum and scale of development is acceptable.

- 1.12. The proposed density makes efficient use of the Site. Whilst the proposed density differs from the very low density housing the north and west, it is considered that the proposal will still relate to the surrounding built form. The Council has accepted that development of the School Lane site at Arborfield Cross could rightly come forward at higher density than the surrounding area, in order to make efficient use of that site. I conclude a similar conclusion is warranted here. The requirements of CP1, CP3, Policy CC03, Policy TB21 and AD3 NHP, as referenced in the decision notice and relation to questions of scale/massing and the quantum of development, are met. In conclusion, the scale and quantum of development is considered appropriate on this Site.
- 1.13. Based upon the proposed maximum quantum of development, there are opportunities to bring forward a high-quality design and layout at Reserved Matters stage consistent with the NPPF's stated 'fundamental' aim of creating "high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places." (NPPF paragraph 131). In accordance with NPPF paragraph 135, the proposed quantum is such that the Site can accommodate a design

which will function well and add to the quality of the area, and which will be visually attractive with good architecture, layout and effective landscaping. The scale is sympathetic to local character and the landscape setting/ environment and the arrangement of streets can establish a strong sense of place. The layout optimises the potential of the site whilst supporting the creation of a high-quality development which promotes health and wellbeing. As such, I afford **significant weight** to the ability to bring forward high quality design.

Whether the proposal would be sustainable development, having regard to its location and the opportunities for sustainable travel.

- 1.14. The Site is a sustainable location for development given the regular bus service and walkable/ cyclable access to services and facilities (including primary school) at Arborfield Cross and Arborfield Green (including secondary school). It is considered that the Appeal Scheme meets the requirements of Policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6, CC01. It accords with NPPF policies 110, 115 and 117 -118 and brings forward sustainable development.

The effect of the proposed development on the nearby watercourse with particular regard to flooding and water quality. In relation to this matter the parties should base their evidence on the Environment Agency's most recent advice and flood maps.

- 1.15. The proposal is safe for its lifetime, and there was no objection from the Council's drainage officer subject to detailed design of the drainage strategy at Reserved Matters stage. The need for a ST is not triggered. Concerns around the capacity of local sewage treatment infrastructure have been addressed (confirming sufficient capacity) and the recommended pre-occupation condition is unjustified. The Site access will cross an existing culvert such that no additional culvert is required in the Main River. No conflict arises in respect of Development Plan Policies CP1, CP3, CC10, AD4 nor section 14 of the NPPF. This issue is satisfactorily addressed.

Whether any potential adverse effects on the integrity of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA would be adequately mitigated.

- 1.16. The Appellant anticipates that this matter could rightly and fairly be resolved via the s106 process. Subject to securing the necessary mitigation, the Appeal Scheme is

compliant with Policies NRM6 South East Plan, CS CP8 (Thames Basin Heaths SPA); and CS CP4 (Infrastructure Requirements). This issue is satisfactorily addressed.

Whether the proposal would prejudice the delivery of Loddon Valley Garden Village for reasons of highway capacity

- 1.17. As set out in the evidence of Mr Matthew Stevens, the Appeal proposal will only have a negligible effect on the strategic traffic modelling undertaken in the context of the Local Plan Update (“LPU”); as part of the assessment of LVGV. As such the Appeal Scheme would not prejudice the delivery of LVGV nor would it give rise to any unacceptable impacts on highway safety or severe residual cumulative effects on the network. Accordingly I conclude that the Appeal Scheme will not prejudice the delivery of the LVGV SDL site. This issue is resolved.

Loss of Agricultural Land

- 1.18. The proposal does involve the use of a small area of BMV, in conflict with Policy CP1 of the Development Plan and NPPF. However, due to the very small quantum of land involved, its lack of agricultural use and low proportion of wider BMV resources, this conflict is afforded **very limited weight**.

Protected Species

- 1.19. The evidence of Mr Mark Rose concluded that direct impacts of the s278 proposed footway improvements will result in no significant ecological effects, with the scheme designed to allow for retention of all existing mature trees along the highway boundary. The minor loss of roadside grassland verge will, in Mr Rose’s professional opinion, have no appreciable effect on the local habitat resource. He also concludes that the proposed installation of new artificial lighting along Reading Road between the Appeal Site and Arborfield Cross is unlikely to significantly alter the local diversity, distribution or abundance of bat species. As such, indirect impacts are unlikely to constitute a significant negative effect on local bat populations

Irreplaceable Habitats

- 1.20. The Appeal Scheme can be delivered without negatively impacting on the longevity and biodiversity value of existing veteran trees on the Site. Accordingly, there will be

no loss of irreplaceable habitat and indeed there is potential for betterment and a positive impact on veteran trees. Accordingly, impacts on irreplaceable habitats does not constitute a 'strong reason for refusal' for the purposes of NPPF paragraph 11(d)(i) and footnote 7.

- 1.21. Mr Wilkins confirms, in his evidence, that the Updated Indicative Land Use Plan (052403-DAN-MP04-ILUP) makes clear that up to 111 dwellings can be delivered on the Site without impact to the RPAs of veteran trees, with no private gardens or developable area encroaching into these. Mr Wilkins' evidence also identifies that the current waterlogging on the Site is not good for trees and the proposal has the potential to improve growing conditions for existing trees on the Site.

Scheme Benefits

- 1.22. Overall, the benefits of the Appeal Scheme should be accorded substantial weight. The table below summarises the above findings in the Planning proof of evidence.

Scheme benefit	Weighting
Delivery of up to 111 homes	Substantial
Delivery of up to 44 affordable homes	Substantial
Economic benefits	Substantial
Delivery of sustainable development	Significant
Avoiding pressure on other valued landscapes	Significant
High quality development and environmental improvements	Significant

Overall Planning Balance

- 1.23. There is no "strong reason" for refusing the Appeal Scheme under paragraph 11(d)(i) to the NPPF. No footnote 7 matters (including the issue of veteran trees/ irreplaceable habitat or indeed flood risk) give rise to any 'strong reason for refusal'. As such, the tilted balance is not disengaged. It is therefore necessary to turn to the tilted balance under paragraph 11(d)(ii).

- 1.24. The identified landscape and visual harms are only of **moderate weight** and the loss of 0.7ha of BMV attracts only **very limited weight**. The conflict with the spatial strategy attracts **limited weight**. By contrast the package of benefits attract **substantial weight**.
- 1.25. Applying this test, the identified adverse impacts of granting planning permission would not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole (quite the opposite). As directed by paragraph 11(d)(ii), particular regard is to be given to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes). The Appeal Scheme will deliver housing to address an acknowledged shortfall, including 40% affordable housing (consistent with NPPF paragraph 66), would not result in isolated homes in the countryside (consistent with paragraph 84), is in a sustainable location and prioritises sustainable modes of transport with a vision led approach (consistent with paragraphs 110 and 115), makes efficient use of underutilised land (paragraph 129), will deliver high quality design (paragraph 135) and reflect local design guidance (paragraph 139).
- 1.26. As such, the adverse effects do not significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the NPPF as a whole, having particular regard to those policies. The Appeal Scheme benefits from the presumption in favour of sustainable development and the grant of permission is justified.