

Design justification and response to the Pre-Application document received from Wokingham Borough Council dated 17th January 2025.

A Pre-Application for the proposed erection of 8 no. detached dwellings with associated access, parking, landscaping following demolition of the existing building was submitted to Wokingham Borough Council on 17th December 2024. A response to this application was received on 17th January 2025. This response was very useful, and since this time the design team have referred to this document in close detail to design the proposed Planning Application.

The design proposals for Brunninghams Farm are the result of a detailed, context-led and environmentally responsible approach, shaped by site-specific analysis, local character evidence, Wokingham Borough policies, and the technical constraints identified through pre-application engagement. The scheme seeks to deliver seven architecturally distinctive family homes that enhance the site's landscape setting, regenerate a long-neglected brownfield plot, and create measurable public and environmental benefits.

1. Statement of Community Involvement.

A Public consultation was carried out with the Local Residents on 3rd June 2025. 125 notices were hand delivered to local homes along Heath Ride. The public consultation was held on the grounds of Brunningham Farm where approximately 50 people attended the meeting. A wide range of comments were received, and a lot of useful information collected. Please see a copy of the first consultation document that was sent out and various photos of the event.

A second informative document was distributed on 19th November 2025 informing a smaller group of immediate neighbours of the latest proposals.

2. Responding to Landscape Character & Rural Context

Heath Ride is defined by a sylvan, enclosed, tree-lined character, with properties set within generous plots and a strong sense of transition between settlement and woodland. The development has therefore been designed as a **low-density woodland cluster**, respecting:

- the **heavily treed boundaries**, which are retained and enhanced
- the **woodland to the south**, forming part of the applicant's wider freehold
- the **rural grain of Heath Ride**, where dwellings are informal, varied in position, and subservient to landscape

The layout is deliberately **organic and non-linear**, avoiding suburban repetition. Building orientations and gaps preserve key green corridors, ensuring the wooded backdrop remains the dominant visual feature. This directly aligns with Policy CP11's requirement that countryside development must maintain high environmental quality.

3. Regenerating a Brownfield Site

Although designated as Countryside, the site comprises **derelict, obsolete agricultural and light-industrial buildings**, extensive hardstanding and unmanaged scrub. The proposals replace these degraded structures with sensitively positioned new family homes, representing:

- a **material uplift in visual amenity**
- removal of unattractive structures and waste
- restoration and enhancement of historic landscape character
- a more appropriate land use than the former piecemeal industrial operations

This directly supports **NPPF paragraph 124**, which encourages optimal use of previously developed land while safeguarding environmental quality.

4. A Landscape-Led Masterplan

Landscape is the primary organising element of the design. The masterplan incorporates:

- **woodland buffers**, retaining all high-quality trees and groups identified in the BS5837 survey
- **new native planting and meadow areas** to reinforce local character
- **habitat corridors** aligned with ecological recommendations
- **SuDS infrastructure** to resolve existing surface-water problems on Heath Ride. Including a total boundary of drainage swales with incorporated planting,
- permeable pathways and a soft-edged access arrangement to ensure minimal intrusion into the rural setting

Built form is deliberately modest, subservient to trees, and visually softened by extensive planting. This responds directly to the pre-app's emphasis on respecting landscape sensitivity and the LPA's Landscape Character Assessment (policy TB21).

5. Architectural Design Rooted in the Local Vernacular

The homes adopt a contemporary but contextual design language, with influences drawn from:

- the historic timber and brick agricultural buildings of the area.
- the muted tones of the woodland.
- simple, steep gables typical of properties along The Rides.
- the architectural roof forms provide a strong sculptural silhouette against the open sky.

Materials include:

- **timber cladding** (sustainably sourced, Grown in Britain compliant)
- **high-quality hand-made brickwork** in local tones
- **standing seam metal roofs** for longevity and low visual impact
- **deep reveals and carefully framed openings** to reduce glare and maintain a natural feel

This combination allows a modern interpretation of rural architecture that avoids suburban character, achieves longevity, and supports the woodland aesthetic.

6. Environmental Performance & Climate Resilience

Brunningshams Farm is designed as a **planet-positive, climate-resilient development**, meeting and exceeding Wokingham's environmental expectations. The proposal includes:

- **Passivhaus-informed fabric first principles**
- SIPs/MMC construction for low embodied carbon
- **ASHPs**, MVHR, and electric battery storage
- extensive **solar PV integration**
- fully **permeable hard surfaces**
- raised building platforms to minimise ground disturbance, maximise ground water percolation and allow biodiversity to move and habitat beneath the buildings.
- **10%+ Biodiversity Net Gain**, with on-site delivery supported by long-term habitat management. This directly addresses the Council's comments regarding proximity to a Local Wildlife Site, lighting impact mitigation, and ecological constraints.

7. Addressing Locational Sustainability Concerns

While Wokingham's pre-application response highlights concerns regarding the sustainability of Heath Ride, the design incorporates practical measures to reduce reliance on private vehicles and improve modal choice, including:

- secure cycle storage for every dwelling
- EV charging infrastructure
- A landscaped internal shared surface that prioritises pedestrians
- **home-working spaces** in each dwelling, reducing trip generation

Additionally, the scheme delivers significant local benefits—flood alleviation, biodiversity enhancements, and remediation of dereliction—that weigh positively in the planning balance under NPPF paragraph 11.

8. Highways & Access Design

Responding to technical guidance from the transport consultant and the pre-app, the scheme includes:

- a compliant access design with appropriate visibility splays
- low-speed internal movement
- turning provision for service and emergency vehicles
- retention of the rural lane character through consistent permeable shingle road surfaces, planting, and minimal granite block kerbing. This ensures that

the rural qualities of Heath Ride are preserved despite the introduction of a new pedestrian access.

9. Respecting Neighbour Amenity

Homes are positioned carefully to:

- avoid overlooking
- preserve generous separation distances
- maintain green buffers
- ensure rooflines sit below key tree canopies

This layout maintains the quiet, low-density residential character of the area without creating any adverse amenity impacts.

10. Community Engagement & Responsive Design

In line with the Council's recommendation for early public involvement, the design has been structured to be clearly explainable and responsive. We have had two opportunities to date for community comment as noted in the introduction above:

- feedback on landscape proposals and pedestrian links
- input on flood alleviation measures
- review of woodland management principles
- input into habitat enhancement opportunities (e.g. bird boxes, walking routes)

We found the community engagement useful and this, we feel, demonstrated a commitment to evolve the design collaboratively, while referring often back to the pre-application advice to steer the design.

11. Delivering Positive Planning Outcomes

Taken together, the proposals achieve:

- regeneration of an unattractive, underused brownfield site
- significant landscape, ecological and drainage betterment
- high-quality, sustainable family housing
- enhancement of the rural character and woodland setting
- a sensitive transition between settlement edge and countryside
- compliance with national guidance on brownfield redevelopment and sustainable placemaking

The design represents a carefully considered, landscape-first response to the unique qualities of Brunninghams Farm and the constraints identified by Wokingham Borough Council.

12. Planning Balance - Significant Benefits

1. Regeneration of Underused Brownfield Land

Although located in designated Countryside, the site is **functionally brownfield**, containing derelict agricultural/light industrial buildings, widespread hardstanding, unmanaged scrub, and historic waste disposal areas. Redevelopment will:

- remove deteriorating, unattractive structures
- remediate degraded land
- improve the appearance and environmental condition of Heath Ride
- optimise land previously occupied by disused non-residential activity

This aligns with NPPF paragraphs 119 and 124, which prioritise brownfield regeneration and effective use of land.

2. Housing Delivery in an Area Without a 5-Year Supply

The proposal contributes seven high-quality family homes, supporting local housing needs in an authority that **cannot meet its statutory requirement** for deliverable supply. The development is modest in scale yet meaningful in contributing to Wokingham's shortfall, directly supporting NPPF paragraphs 60–78 on boosting housing supply.

3. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Through woodland enhancement, species-rich grassland creation, bat and bird provision, ecological corridors and long-term habitat management, the scheme delivers a **6.72% on site BNG** net gain with further enhancement being proposed to further land to the rear of the current freehold area. This delivers meaningful ecological betterment adjacent to a Local Wildlife Site, supporting NPPF Chapter 15 and the Environment Act 2021.

4. Landscape and Woodland Enhancement

The proposals are landscape-led, retaining the verdant, tree-lined setting of Heath Ride while:

- enhancing existing woodland

- removing invasive species
- protecting high-quality trees identified in the BS5837 survey
- strengthening the rural character with extensive native planting
- creating soft edges and minimal engineered surfaces

This provides environmental uplift and aligns with Policy TB21 (Landscape Character) and the Borough Design Guide.

5. Flood Risk Betterment and Local Surface Water Management

Heath Ride suffers from existing surface-water flooding. The proposal introduces:

- interconnected boundary swales
- completely permeable hard surfaces
- naturalised drainage routes
- re-graded landform to slow and store overland flow

These measures provide a **net betterment to the local drainage network**, benefiting neighbouring residents as well as the site itself, meeting NPPF requirements for climate resilience.

6. High Environmental Performance and Low-Carbon Construction

The development delivers exemplary sustainability credentials:

- Passivhaus-informed design
- SIPs/timber-frame construction using MMC
- very low embodied carbon materials (including Grown in Britain timber)
- ASHPs, MVHR, solar PV capability and EV charging
- energy-efficient orientation and optimised glazing-to-wall ratios
- significantly reduced lifetime carbon emissions
- minimal ground disturbance via raised building platforms and screw pile foundations.

These measures represent a substantial public benefit, directly supporting NPPF paragraphs 152–158 on climate change mitigation.

7. Amenity, Design and Character Improvements

The proposal replaces visually harmful buildings with a **contextual, low-density woodland cluster** of homes that:

- respond to the rural vernacular
- maintain generous tree buffers

- preserve privacy and separation distances
- enhance views from Heath Ride
- reinforce the character of The Rides area

This represents a clear uplift in design quality consistent with the National Design Guide and local policies CP1, CP3 and CC02.

8. Economic and Social Benefits

The development will:

- support local construction and supply chain jobs
- increase local spending in Finchampstead, Crowthorne and Wokingham
- create long-term stewardship of woodland and open spaces
- contribute CIL/S106 as applicable
- introduce high-quality housing attractive to families, supporting local schools and services

These economic and social contributions weigh positively in the planning balance.

9. Accessibility and Locational Sustainability

The Council's principal concern is that the site is not within a 10-minute/800m walking catchment for key services, and that bus services are limited. This is acknowledged.

However, the NPPF (para. 85) recognises that some rural housing sites will inevitably be less accessible by non-car modes. In this case, the following measures meaningfully reduce transport impacts:

- secure cycle storage for each home
- EV charging for all units
- home-working spaces to reduce trip generation
- improved pedestrian links into the applicant's wider woodland holding and rights of way network
- high-speed broadband provision
- a low-density scheme generating minimal traffic compared to a commercial or agricultural fallback

Given the strong environmental and regenerative benefits of the proposal, and the tilted balance engaged, these accessibility concerns do **not** outweigh the benefits.

10. Conclusion: Benefits Substantially Outweigh the Adverse Impacts

The redevelopment of Brunninghams Farm delivers a wide ranging suite of social, economic and environmental benefits, including:

- brownfield remediation
- high-quality, sustainable architecture

- significant biodiversity uplift
- flood alleviation benefits for the wider area
- enhanced woodland character
- energy-efficient, low-carbon housing
- meaningful contribution to housing supply
- removal of dereliction and visual blight
- ecological and landscape betterment
- long-term stewardship of natural habitats

When assessed against the NPPF as a whole—particularly in light of the **presumption in favour of sustainable development**—the adverse impacts identified, do not significantly and demonstrably outweigh these benefits.