

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	261850
Site Address:	8 Pitts Lane, Earley, Wokingham, RG6 1BT
Expiry Date:	30 September 2026
Site Visit Date:	6 August 2026
Proposal: Householder application for the erection of the fence (Retrospective).	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Major Development Location – Earley
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Tree Protection Order

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC07 – Parking TB21 – Landscape Character
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
28514	Single Storey Rear Extension	Approved 2 nd September 1987

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Landscape and Trees – Objection raised.

External

N/A

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Refusal is recommended because the approximately 1.8m-high front fence and gates conflict with the generally open character of Pitts Lane, where boundaries typically comprise hedges or walls and fences up to about 1m high. The development creates an undue sense of enclosure, harms visual amenity and is inappropriate in scale, height and form. It therefore conflicts with Policies CP1 and CP3 and the Borough Design Guide, particularly sections 4.5 and R12, which require boundary treatments to respect local character and contribute positively to the public realm. This objection is also supported by the recent appeal decision under DCS Reference 400-077-005. <i>Officer comment: The development's effect on local character is addressed in the main report. The Borough Design Guide accords with the Inspector's comments in appeal 400-077-005 that "boundaries seen from the public realm should be of a high-quality design and fit in with the street scene and the character of the wider area". However, that appeal concerned a solid wall and tall, solid, black-painted gates and is therefore not directly comparable to this proposal.</i>
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	ACER, The Whitegates Residents Association, objects because the approximately 1.8m high illuminated close-boarded fence replaces boundary hedging, exceeds the permitted 1m height and is out of keeping with the area. Its prominent position on a bend and illumination increase its visual and highway impacts. Vegetation on highway land was reportedly removed during the works and should be reinstated. The application's statement that no hedge was removed is disputed by Street View evidence. ACER therefore requests refusal and reinstatement of the highway hedging. <i>Officer comment: The development's effect on local character and loss of the boundary hedge is addressed in the main report.</i>

APPRAISAL

Site Description: This retrospective application seeks permission for a 1.8m-high timber fence with concrete posts, erected along the front boundary adjacent to the public highway following removal of the boundary hedge.

Principle of Development: The national decision-making policies within the August 2026 NPPF took effect on 17 August 2026. The relevant national decision-making policies have been considered alongside the development plan, with the weight afforded to existing development plan policies reflecting their consistency with the

Framework. The application has been determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. No material consideration has been identified that justifies departing from the relevant development plan policies in this case.

The site is located within settlement limits and as such the development should be acceptable providing that it complies with the principles stated in the Core Strategy. Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high-quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.

Proposal: Figure 1 shows the fence in situ spans the front boundary and comprises 2 sections measuring approximately 10m and 8.4m in width respectively, with returns measuring approximately 4m in depth either side of the vehicular entrance. The entrance is 5m in width adjacent to the highway, reducing to 3.2m at the rear. The fence panels supported on a concrete base are 1.8m in height and there are 12 no. concrete posts.

Character of the Area: Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy requires development to be of an appropriate scale, form and character to its surroundings, whilst Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan seeks to retain and enhance landscape features that contribute positively to the local environment. The Borough Design Guide SPD further advises that boundary treatments should contribute positively to the character of an area and the quality of the public realm. Policy DP3 of the NPPF (2026), requires development to add to the overall quality of an area, be visually attractive and sympathetic to local character, and respond appropriately to the prevailing built and landscaped context.

Figures 4 and 5 show that front boundary treatments along Pitts Lane are mostly low brick walls with hedges and trees. The front boundary to the neighbouring property at no. 10 Pitts Lane is a low brick wall with brick pillars and railings approximately 1.5m in height.



Figure 1 8 Site photographs Pitts Lane supplied from enforcement visit dated 7 July 2026



Figure 2 2024 Google Street view shows a section of front boundary at 8 Pitts Lane

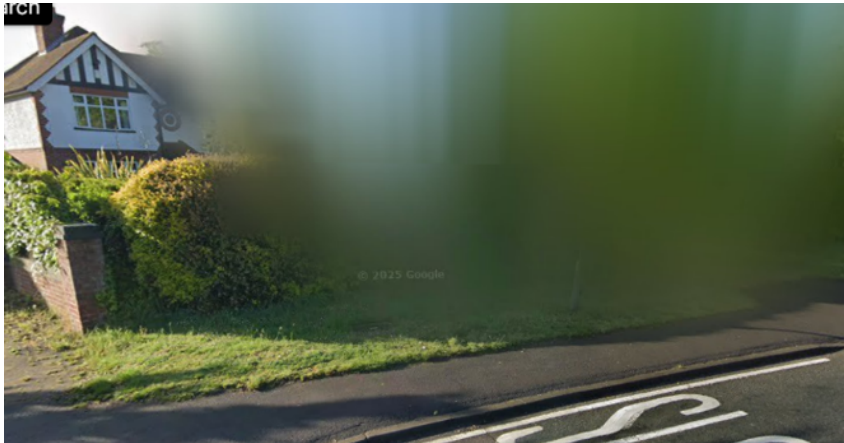


Figure 3 2023 Google Street view shows a section of front boundary at 8 Pitts Lane



Figure 4 Street scene looking south from 8 Pitts Lane



Figure 5 Street scene looking north from 8 Pitts Lane

The 1.8m-high close-boarded timber fence has replaced the former low, landscaped boundary treatment, which included low open post and rail fencing, hedging and other vegetation, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Although timber fencing is commonly used to enclose rear gardens, Policy R12 of the Borough Design Guide does not support its use along boundaries with the public realm: *“boundaries to the public realm should relate to the character of the area. They should be clearly delineated, robust and high quality, so that they last over time. A full height close boarded fence is unlikely to meet these criteria.”*

The erection the fence has fundamentally altered the appearance of the site. Rather than providing a soft and verdant transition between the dwelling and the public realm, the fence introduces a stark, solid and visually dominant feature that encloses the frontage and creates a harsh and overly engineered appearance. The Borough Design Guide expressly advises that full-height close-boarded fencing is unlikely to be an appropriate boundary treatment adjacent to the public realm, recognising that such fencing rarely contributes positively to local character or the quality of the street scene.

Furthermore, the site occupies a slight bend in Pitts Lane, making the fence prominent in views from the north and south. The former low, vegetated boundary treatment created a soft, verdant boundary, enhanced the street scene and screened the dwelling from nearby roads and footways. By contrast, the long fence is visually dominant and engineered in appearance, replacing the landscaped frontage with a more enclosed, urbanised and visually sterile boundary that harms the character and appearance of the street scene.

Having regard to the immediate surroundings of the application site, the proposed 1.8m-high fencing would appear as an incongruous feature that would not reflect the prevailing character of the site's immediate setting. There are no other comparable examples of extensive 1.8m high fences enclosing a prominent plot in the immediate locality, and it is considered that the proposal would appear unduly prominent when viewed from the public highway.

Furthermore, the loss of the existing hedge erodes an important green feature within the street scene, and its loss diminishes the visual contribution previously made by the site to the character of the area. The in-situ fencing fails to provide the same landscape value, visual softness or sense of openness previously experienced along this section of Pitts Lane and instead creates a sterile frontage where a former low, vegetated boundary treatment existed.

The proposal conflicts with Policy DP3(1), (2) and (3) of the NPPF. The development fails to respond positively to the character and appearance of the area and does not integrate with, or enhance, its surroundings. As a result, it would not create a visually attractive form of development and would cause harm to the character and appearance of the street scene and the wider sense of place. The proposal is therefore contrary to the design objectives of the NPPF, the Borough Design Guide, and Policy DP3. Furthermore, Policy DP3(3) states that: *“Development proposals should be refused if, without clear justification, they conflict with paragraph 1 of this policy or relevant aspects of the principles in paragraph 2, or with any explicit design standards set out in the development plan (including those in locally-specific policies, guides, codes or masterplans).”* The proposal conflicts with Policy DP3 and should be refused.

For these reasons, it is considered that the boundary treatment is out of keeping with the established character and appearance of the immediate area and causes unacceptable harm to the visual amenities of the street scene. Accordingly, the proposal is contrary to the NPPF DP3 and Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010), Policies CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014), and the design objectives of the Borough Design Guide SPD.

Neighbouring Amenity: Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy seeks to ensure that development does not result in undue harm to the amenities of adjoining occupiers.

The proposal comprises the replacement of an existing hedge with a 1.8m high timber fence along the front boundary adjoining the public highway. Having regard to its location, scale and relationship with surrounding properties, it is not considered that the development would result in any material harm to neighbouring residential amenity in terms of overlooking, loss of light, or overbearing impact. The proposed fence would principally adjoin the public realm and would not unacceptably affect the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to accord with Policy CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010).

Highway Access and Parking Provision: The Highways Officer raises no objection to the proposal. The fence is set back from the carriageway and rear of the footway by the highway verge and is not considered to materially reduce the existing vehicular or pedestrian visibility. The Highway Officer has separately identified possible disturbance of the highway verge and deposited construction material. As these matters concern land outside the application site and potential control under highways legislation, they do not provide a reason to withhold planning permission and have been referred to the relevant highway team.

Landscape and Trees: Section 197 of the Town and Country Planning Act sets out the importance of trees within the planning process: *'Planning permission to include appropriate provision for preservation and planting of trees. It shall be the duty of the local planning authority— (a) to ensure, whenever it is appropriate, that in granting planning permission for any development adequate provision is made, by the imposition of conditions, for the preservation or planting of trees.'*

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that *'maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species.'* Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan states that development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieve to *'protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features.'*

NPPF Policy N2 sets out that development should Conserve and enhance existing natural features of visual, historic or nature conservation value. DP3 refers to maintaining existing tree cover.

The British Standard BS5837 advises at paragraph 4.4.1.3 that where development is subject to planning control a tree survey should be regarded as an important part of the evidence base underpinning the design and access statement. Accordingly, it advises that local planning authorities should not rely on conditions to secure a tree survey as by this stage its findings might not be capable of influencing the design, potentially resulting in uncontrolled arboricultural impacts. This advice is expanded at Annex B *'Trees and the planning system'* where it states that *'The nature and level of detail of information required to enable a local planning authority to properly consider the implications and effects of development proposals varies between stages and in relation to what is proposed'*. It then sets out in table B.1 advice to developers and local authorities on the appropriate amount of information. In this regard it notes the minimum information required at the planning application should include a tree survey, tree retention plan, Root Protection Areas (RPAs) shown on the proposed layout and an arboricultural impact assessment.

The Council's Tree and Landscape (T&O) Officer objects to the proposed erection of the fence (retrospective). The T&O Officer notes that the site is located on a residential street in the parish of Earley with dwellings that are set back from the road with low brick walls or low timber fencing, hedging or other vegetated trees and shrubbery that act as boundary treatment between the road and front gardens.

The T&O Officer considers that the boundary treatment is out of keeping with the existing street scene, therefore detracting from the existing landscape character of the area. The T&O Officer also commented that according to a September 2024 Streetview image, where this new fence appears to have replaced a low two-rail timber estate-style fence on top of a sloped mound with groundcover/low shrub planting and contrary to Core Strategy CP3.

Additionally, the T&O Officer is concerned that the foundations for the new fencing may have caused harm to retained trees along the Site's frontage. Especially concerning is any impact on the protected Lime tree in the southwest corner of the Site, identified as T2 in TPO-1152-2006. It appears from the Site photos, taken 7th

July 2026, that the ground level within the Site has been reduced and will therefore have had a detrimental impact to the TPO tree. The Officer recommends that the applicant seek advice from a qualified arboricultural consultant to rectify damage that may have been caused from lowering the ground level near the TPO tree. The Officer also reminds the applicant that works within the root protection area of TPO tree require a tree works application.

Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that the development has not cause harm to the long-term health and vitality of the TPO protected Lime Tree which is of significant amenity value and contributes positively to the character of the area and the wider landscape. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy N2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2026), policy CP3 of the Core Strategy (2010), policies CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014).

Planning Balance/Conclusion:

The proposed development is contrary to the Development Plan, the Borough Design Guide SPD and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). It would result in unacceptable and material planning harm for the reasons set out below. NPPF Policy D3 states that development, which is not well designed should be refused, particularly where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design. Accordingly, planning permission is refused for the following reasons:

1. The 1.8-metre-high continuous close-boarded timber fence, by reason of its height, substantial extent, solid appearance and prominent position along the highway frontage on a bend in Pitts Lane, creates an incongruous, visually dominant and enclosed form of boundary treatment that fails to reflect the predominantly low and landscaped character of boundaries in the immediate street scene. The development therefore causes unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the site and surrounding area, contrary to Policy CP1 and CP3 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (2010), Policies CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014), Policy DP3 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2026), and the Wokingham Borough Design Guide SPD.
2. Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that the development would not and will not cause harm to the long-term health and vitality of the TPO protected Lime Tree which is of significant amenity value and contributes positively to the character of the area and the wider landscape. The proposal is therefore contrary to policy N2 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2026), policy CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy (2010), policies CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014).

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION	
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Conditions agreed:	Not Applicable
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Recommendation:	Refuse
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Date:	29 September 2026
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Earliest date for decision:	27 August 2026
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Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	<i>MC</i>
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Date:	29.09.2026
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