



Planning Statement

**Site: Warren Crest Farm, Wick Hill Lane,
Finchampstead**

For: Proposed demolition of existing dwelling and erection of replacement family home, and construction of 2x new dwellings as alternative to 3 new homes permitted by 233112

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This planning statement has been prepared by JPPC on behalf of Mr and Mrs Nasser to support an application for planning permission at Warren Crest Farm, Wick Hill Farm, Finchampstead. The application seeks permission to demolish the existing dwelling at Warren Crest Farm and construct a new family home. It is also proposed to demolish existing agricultural barns to the northeast of the house, permitted for conversion to three dwellings under 233112, and erect two new dwellings in their place.

1.2 This application is made is to provide an improved family home for the landowners Mr and Mrs Nasser in place of the current farmhouse which is in need of renovation. It is also hoped to provide two homes of improved design, layout, and environmental performance in place of the barn conversions already permitted by the Council.

1.2 In this report we introduce the proposals and consider their merits with reference to Development Plan policy, the National Planning Policy Framework, and other material planning considerations.

1.3 This report should be read in conjunction with all plans and other documents which are submitted as part of this proposal. These are listed at Appendix 1 of this document.

1.4 This submission follows pre-application discussions with Wokingham Borough Council under reference 242753.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

2.1 Warren Crest Farm is located to the south of Wick Hill Lane, which at this point is a restricted byway branching in a south-easterly direction from the B3430 within Wick Hill, Finchampstead. The lane serves several substantial detached dwellings, set in generous grounds.

2.2 A public footpath passes to the west of the proposal site, there are though no public rights of way that cross the site.

2.3 The application site is not in an area designated as Green Belt or in a National Landscape.

2.4 The site is not in a Conservation Area and there are no listed buildings or other designated heritage assets on the site or in the near vicinity. Wokingham Borough Council's interactive GIS Map as being within an area where there is high archaeological potential.

2.5 The Environment Agency's online maps for flood risk from rivers and surface water indicate the site to be of low risk. The site is located in Flood Zone 1.

3.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 The relevant planning history of the site is as follows:

250063	Application for a certificate of lawfulness for the proposed erection of an outbuilding (swimming pool outbuilding)	LDC confirming works to be permitted development 26/02/2025
241564	Householder application for proposed single story side extension and single storey front infill extension, following demolition of the existing conservatory, the part raising of the roof to create first floor habitable accommodation, the conversion of the existing garage to create habitable accommodation and the part conversion of the detached store building to create a workshop and garage plus fenestration changes.	Planning permission granted 25/09/2024
233112	Prior approval submission for the proposed change of use and associated building operations to re-use existing agricultural buildings as 3no. dwellings and 1no. garage.	Prior approval granted 09/07/2024
AG/2007/1576	Application for agricultural determination for the erection of new feed and bedding barn (30.48 x 13 metres) associated with an agricultural unit of 28.93 ha	25 th July 2007 – WBC confirm that planning permission is not required.
F/1999/69567	Proposed erection of 20m high lattice mast with 3 dual polar antenna and radio dishes with associated equipment cabins, security fence associated works and alterations to access.	Approved 20 th July 1999
F/1996/64200	Proposed extension to farm office	Approved 5 th September 1996
05206	Detached farmhouse and garaging	Approved 28/10/1976

4.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 This submission relates to a comprehensive development to improve the existing and permitted residential areas of Warren Crest Farm. The proposals can be broadly split into two parts and represent an alternative to developments already allowed.

4.2 Firstly, it is proposed to replace the existing dwellinghouse with a new building of improved design and environmental performance. The existing dwellinghouse is a two-storey detached dwelling with double garage of twentieth century construction built in brick with a tile roof. It benefits from a driveway to the front and private gardens to the side and rear. Alongside the garden is an open fronted building used as a domestic store and car port. The building is not a listed building being of post-war construction and of limited design merit.

4.3 The Council recently granted planning permission under reference 241564 for extension and improvement of the house, including a large conservatory extension, a two-storey extension, and enclosure of the open garage store. The scheme now proposed provides the family living space provided in the approved extensions in a more refined scheme.

4.4 The house also benefits from permitted development rights that allow the erection of outbuildings. The Council have confirmed the right to erect a detached swimming pool outbuilding to the west of the existing dwelling through lawful development certificate ref. 250063. The submitted scheme incorporates a swimming pool within the dwellinghouse avoiding an additional building, reducing the accumulation of buildings on the site and allowing for more efficient operation.

4.5 Secondly, this application proposes two small dwellings in place of the three approved under 233112. The proposal is to remove the current non-vernacular agricultural barns and erect two modest dwellings in place of the three permitted barn conversions.

4.6 The proposed purpose-built dwellings designed to respect local character are considered to offer an improvement over the permitted conversion scheme. As purpose-built dwellings, they should also provide a better living environment and offer far better environmental performance than the permitted barn conversions. The smaller of the units is proposed as accommodation for a farm worker. It is

particularly well suited being proximate to the farm's working buildings and, as a modern home, of reasonable running costs for its occupant.

4.7 This application is made seeking permission for a phased development, namely:

- i) Demolition of existing farmhouse and existing outbuildings
- ii) Demolition of agricultural buildings
- iii) Formation of access and parking areas, etc to dwellings
- iv) Construction of 1x 5-bedroom dwellinghouse
- v) Construction of 1x 2-bedroom dwellinghouse
- vi) Construction of 1x 1-bedroom dwellinghouse

4.8 This submission follows pre-application engagement with the Council (LPA ref. 242753). This confirmed the proposed development could be supported in principle with feedback provided on matters of detail that are duly incorporated in the submitted scheme. Notable amendments included a reduction in height and footprint of the proposed replacement dwelling and containment of the proposed garden to that of the existing residential plot.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY AND OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 Planning law (Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the development plan, including any local and neighbourhood plans that have been brought into force and any spatial development strategies produced by combined authorities or elected Mayors, unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise.
- 5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework must be taken into account in preparing the development plan and is a material consideration in planning decisions.
- 5.3 Planning policies and decisions must also reflect relevant international obligations and statutory requirements. Other statements of government policy may be material when preparing plans or deciding applications, such as relevant Written Ministerial Statements and endorsed recommendations of the National Infrastructure Commission.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (“the NPPF”) was most recently revised in December 2024.
- 5.5 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF outlines the presumption in favour of sustainable development and states that for decision taking this means approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay.

The Development Plan

- 5.6 The development framework for Wokingham Borough comprises the Wokingham Core Strategy (WCS) adopted 2010 and the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDDLDP), adopted in 2014.
- 5.7 The Council has submitted its Local Plan Update (2023-2040) (LPU) for examination; however it is yet to pass examination. Its policies therefore only carry limited weight and the WCS and MDDLDP are the principal documents for consideration of a planning application. Notwithstanding, policies of the LPU are

not substantially altered from the current Development Plan on matters relevant to this application.

5.8 The application site falls within the area of the Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan (FNP), its policies are therefore a material consideration in this application.

5.9 The main Development Plan policies of relevance to the proposed development are set out below:

Wokingham Core Strategy

Policy Ref	Summary
CP1 – Sustainable Development	Development will be expected to attain sustainability objectives; it should maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment, minimise pollutants, provide adequate drainage, minimise the consumption of resources, avoid increasing (and where possible reduce) the risk of flooding, providing attractive, functional, accessible, safe, secure and adaptable schemes. The incorporation of appropriate onsite renewable energy features is encouraged and energy and water consumption should be minimised.
CP3 – General Principles for Development	Proposals will be granted planning permission where development is of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, materials and character. Development must avoid having a detrimental impact upon important ecological or geological features. The ability of the site to support fauna and flora should be maintained or enhanced. Development must not lead to a net loss of dwellings.
CP5 – Housing mix, density, and affordable housing	Contribution to affordable housing (40%) will be sought from developments with a net gain of 5 dwellings or 0.16Ha of residential area
CP7 - Biodiversity	Sites designated as of importance for nature conservation at an international or national level will be conserved and enhanced. Inappropriate development will be resisted.

CP11 – Proposals outside Development Limits	In order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where: 1. It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the Borough or, in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and the enjoyment of the countryside; and 2. It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and 3. It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or 4. In the case of residential extensions, it should not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building. 5. In the case of replacement dwellings, the proposal must bring about environment improvements or not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building. For the purposes of the Council's Proposals Map, the site is located outside of Development Limits for the settlement of Finchampstead.
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Managing Development Delivery Local Plan

- 5.10 The Council's Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDDLDP) seeks to add extra detail to the policies contained within the Core Strategy to ensure that development takes into account the impacts of issues such as flooding. The most relevant policies are set out below:

Policy Ref	Summary
Policy CC01 – Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development	Planning applications that accord with the policies in the development plan

	for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay. Where there are no relevant policies or where policies are out of date, then permission should be granted unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
Policy CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping.	Development proposals are required to demonstrate how they have protected and enhanced the Borough's network of Green Infrastructure, how existing trees are retained and how high quality, ideally native planting and landscaping are integrated into the new scheme.
Policy CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction	All new homes should seek to achieve the requirements of Level 4 of the full Code for Sustainable Homes. All development shall incorporate suitable waste management facilities, including onsite recycling.
Policy CC07 – Parking	Proposals should demonstrate how the proposed parking provision on the site meets the appropriate standards at Appendix 2 of the MDDDL. Base upon these standards, and given the location, an allocation of between 2 and 3 parking spaces per dwelling would be considered adequate.
Policy CC09 – Development and Flood Risk	All sources of flood risk are to be taken into account in the planning application process.
Policy CC10 – Sustainable Drainage	All development proposals should ensure that surface water is addressed in a sustainable manner. All development proposals must reproduce greenfield runoff characteristics, incorporating sustainable drainage systems where practicable.
Policy TB07 – Internal Space Standards	Proposals for new residential units, including changes of use or conversions should ensure that the internal layout and size are suitable to serve the amenity requirements of future occupiers. The policy sets out specific space standards that residential accommodation is required to meet.
Policy TB21 – Landscape Character	Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues.

Policy TB23 – Biodiversity and Development	Planning permission will only be granted where it is shown how opportunities have been provided to incorporate new biodiversity features. All existing and new developments must be ecologically permeable through the protection of existing and the provision of new continuous wildlife corridors.
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Finchampstead Neighbourhood Plan

- 5.11 The FNP was adopted with the objective: *“to avoid unplanned speculative development with no infrastructure improvements and instead, to deliver development in a structured and planned manner through which the community has made a positive, proactive and meaningful contribution and around which infrastructure can be proactively planned and delivered”*. The following policies are of particular relevance to this application.

Policy Ref	Summary
Policy ES1- Environmental standards for residential development	Seeks enhanced standards for new residential developments and requires provision for electric vehicle charging from dwellings with car parking
Policy D1- Building heights	Requires building heights to reflect the character and appearance of the parish.
Policy D2- Preserving the rural character of the parish	Requires development proposals to be located and designed to maintain the separation of settlements and to complement the characteristics of the landscape in their immediate locality.
Policy GS1- Key local gaps and green wedges	Identifies key local gaps and green wedges- the application site is not in an identified gap/wedge
Policy IRS1- Protection and enhancement of local green spaces	Designates and protects local green spaces- the application site is not in a designated local green space
Policy IRS2- Protection of outstanding views	Identifies outstanding views in the parish and affords protection from harmful development- the application site is not identified as being in an outstanding view
Policy IRS4- Implement strategy to preserve the identity of Finchampstead Parish through informal green spaces.	Requires development proposals to preserve the semi-rural look and feel of the parish with its surrounding natural environment encouraging new hedge planting

Policy IRS5- Ecologically important areas and Biodiversity	Development proposals should conserve and enhance the natural environment and green spaces of the area, specifically biodiversity areas identified within the FNP- the application site is not in an identified area.
Policy IRS6- Trees	Seeks to protect trees, where development would result in tree loss the quality of those trees must be assessed. New planting should be included in developments
Policy GA1- Improve environment and health from traffic pollution	Seeks safe and sustainable access for proposals including parking standards
Policy GA2- Reduction in car usage with safe personal mobility options	Seeks to protect options for sustainable travel including protection of public rights of way

Other Material Considerations

- 5.12 The NPPF, reflecting planning legislation, requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan “*unless material considerations indicate otherwise*” (NPPF, para. 2).
- 5.13 In this case development opportunities afforded by extant planning permissions and permitted development rights are material considerations. The opportunity to extend the house under 241564 is a material consideration in assessment of the proposed replacement dwelling, as is the opportunity to construct substantial permitted development outbuildings (confirmed by LDC 241564).
- 5.14 The planning permission to convert the agricultural barns to three dwellinghouses confirmed by approval 233112 is of particular relevance to the proposed two new dwellings in their place. The relevance of these permissions is discussed in more detail against the relevant planning consideration below.

6.0 Planning Considerations

6.1 The key issues for consideration in this case include:

- Principle of development
- Landscape and visual impact
- Environmental performance/impact
- Trees and ecology
- Highways
- Drainage
- Residential amenity

Principle of Development

6.2 The application site is located outside of the settlement limits as defined in the Wokingham Core Strategy (WCS) where there is a general presumption of development restraint as set out by policy CP11. However, the development proposals are considered to comply with the policy or be justified by material circumstances that justify departure as discussed in detail below.

6.3 Each component of the development is capable of support, however there are greater benefits in combining proposals to offer a comprehensive scheme for the site. They are therefore proposed as a single scheme as a phased development.

Replacement dwelling

6.4 WCS policy CP11 allows the replacement of existing homes on in the countryside subject to qualifying criteria. It states such developments will not be supported unless they:

- i) Bring about environmental improvements; and
- ii) Do not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.

6.5 The proposed dwelling is considered to satisfy these requirements.

6.6 The existing home is of 1970s construction falling well short of current environmental performance standards. The proposed replacement dwelling built using modern technologies will be of greatly improved environmental

performance including regarding energy and water efficiency. This is explained in detail in the accompanying statement prepared by Anderson Orr Architects.

- 6.7 The proposed development will also provide a building of greatly improved design that better responds to its surroundings, particularly its role as the principal building on the farm. The existing house is not of any special design quality nor is it of a vernacular characteristic of the area; it can be improved upon. The proposed home designed to respond to the village edge site and landscape is considered to offer material improvements.
- 6.8 The proposed building is of a scale appropriate to the site. The site is not in a location with a presumption against larger buildings as a matter of principle (i.e. in the Green Belt), the acceptability of the building must be considered based on its specific impact. This is reflected in the wording of CP11 that only resists *inappropriate* increases to buildings, i.e. those increases that give rise to demonstrable harm rather than assuming development to be harmful simply because it is large.
- 6.9 In considering the proposed development it is important to note the permitted extensions to the dwelling and opportunity for a permitted development swimming pool outbuilding. Although CP11 refers to the 'original dwelling', extant planning permissions (including PD rights confirmed by 250063) to enlarge the dwelling and provide outbuildings are a material consideration as a 'fallback position'. The status of fallback options in planning decisions is well established and discussed below in relation to the proposed new dwellings.
- 6.10 In this case it is considered preferable to provide the proposed new home in a consolidated single building of better design than extend the existing home which is of poorer design, environmental performance, and results in a greater spread of building.
- 6.11 This application is made to offer a home of improved design when compared to the existing house and consolidated scale when viewed against approved extensions. The proposed new dwelling contains development to a reduced area when compared with the existing house with approved extensions. The proposed scheme has a footprint of 773sqm, 100sqm less than the existing house with approved extensions (873sqm). The more compact arrangement also significantly reduces sprawl, particularly to the north of the site. For ease comparative site plans are provided below:



- 6.12 The design of the proposed home is also considered to offer improvement over the existing dwelling, particularly when the existing house is considered with permitted additions.
- 6.13 The applicants have chosen to pursue a home in a barn style to reflect the countryside setting and better reflect the traditional rural vernacular than the current post-war dwelling. The barn form is also one in which a certain scale is expected; a barn (or home in a barn style) is less intrusive than a conventional house of the same size. Although a larger building in volumetric terms the improved design results in a building more comfortable in its rural surroundings, and thus more in keeping with its setting. This is demonstrated in the above comparative site layouts that show the house contained to the south of the site, compared with the approved domestic sprawl to the north.
- 6.14 The site is in the Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland that is characterised by undulating pastures and is set against the wooded backdrop of the Settled and Forested Sands. The site has no close neighbours being separated from nearby properties on Wick Hill Lane by farmland and buildings.
- 6.15 Although the application site is not seen in the immediate context of any neighbour it is also relevant to note the proposed home is not of a size uncharacteristic of the area.
- 6.16 The position to the south of Wick Hill Lane places the house in the loose cluster of homes consisting of former farms, lodges, etc to the settlement fringe. The area is characterised by farmland and large detached houses in substantial plots. The footprint of the proposed dwelling, 610sqm, is in keeping with other dwellings in the area, several of which exceed 600sqm. Officers will note the

proposed house is reduced from that previously submitted for pre-application discussion with a smaller footprint and lower roof height. Considered in the context of the Warren Crest Farm holding, the largest in the vicinity, the size of the house is appropriate and in keeping with its surrounds.

- 6.17 These factors combined serve to ensure the dwelling will not appear unduly large, or an *inappropriate* increase over the existing dwelling. It is therefore a development that complies with policy CP11 and is supported by the Development Plan. Furthermore, the proposal is part of a wider development with developments in the agricultural yard that serve to reduce the impact on the area.

- 6.18 The visual impact of the proposed dwelling on its surroundings and landscape are further discussed below under Landscape and Visual Impact and also in the dedicated LVIA assessment that accompanies the application.

- 6.19 Finally, in applying policy CP11 it is essential to have regard to the rationale for the policy's limitation on the size of replacement dwellings. This is principally to limit increases in population in the countryside where there are fewer services and facilities, rather than any resistance to larger buildings based on landscape, visual impacts, or other considerations (WCS para. 4.57).

- 6.20 In this case it is relevant that the application site is to the edge of the settlement. In practical terms services and facilities are no less accessible than from areas not classified as countryside to the north. Notwithstanding, the proposed house is replacing a family home and will not increase households, the additional bedroom (increase from 4 to 5) will not materially increase occupancy on the site.

- 6.21 Furthermore, the increase of a single bedroom in the replacement dwelling is more than offset by the reduction in households proposed in this application compared with the approved fallback scheme. Taken as a whole the development now proposed provides one less dwelling or counted as bedrooms 3 fewer.

- 6.22 Therefore, having regard to the objective of WCS policy CP11, to limit development outside of settlements the development proposed offers material benefits. It is supported, indeed encouraged, in principle by WCS policy CP11.

New dwellings

- 6.23 This proposal also includes the construction of two new dwellings in place of the three permitted under 233112.
- 6.24 The extant planning permission 233112 allows the creation of 1x one-bedroom home, and 2x three-bedroom homes through conversion of existing farm buildings. This submission proposes erecting 1x one-bedroom, and 1x two-bedroom dwellings in their place. In short, the scheme involves the creation of one less dwelling in the countryside.
- 6.25 It is acknowledged Development Plan policy CP11 does not ordinarily support the provision of new homes in the countryside. However, in this case the extant permission for the building conversion is a material consideration as a 'fallback position'.
- 6.26 The weight to be attached to a 'fallback' option has been well-defined by court cases including, inter alia, *Spackman v SOS & Thamesdown BC*, *Snowden v SOS & City of Bradford MC*, *Gwinnell v SOS & LB Islington etc*, *Simpson v SOS and Medway Council and R (on the application of Zurich Assurance Ltd (t/a Threadneedle Property Investments) v North Lincolnshire Council*.
- 6.27 In short, these cases identify that the weight to be attached to a fallback option increases commensurately with the likelihood of that scheme being implemented if an alternative option, requiring planning permission, is refused. In addition, the caselaw also identifies that any alternative application option should result in no greater harm, from a planning perspective, than would result from the implementation of the fallback alternative.
- 6.28 These issues are encapsulated in the comments of Mr George Bartlett QC regarding the Simpson case, where he stated thus:
- 6.29 *'The essence of any fallback position is that although the proposed development might have an adverse effect, if planning permission were withheld, other uses or operations with adverse effects but not requiring planning permission could also be carried out, so that in the final evaluation the proposed development ought to be judged acceptable in view of what might occur if permission for it was refused (see Snowden v Secretary of State for the Environment). A fallback position has two elements that need to be established before it can be brought*

into the evaluation and used to justify the grant of permission. The first is the nature and content of the alternative use or operation. The second is the degree of likelihood of the alternative being carried out’.

- 6.30 The Zurich case (and the judgement of Justice Hickinbottom) has refined the second of these considerations – i.e. relating to the likelihood of the alternative development taking place – and makes clear that such prospect only needs to be more than ‘merely theoretical’ to be given weight as a material consideration, as demonstrated below:
- 6.31 *‘The prospect of the fallback position does not have to be probable or even have a high chance of occurring; it has to be only more than a merely theoretical prospect. Where the possibility of the fall back happening is “very slight indeed”, or merely “an outside chance”, that is sufficient to make the position a material consideration...’*
- 6.32 In this instance, as far as the likelihood of the fallback development being implemented is concerned, the applicants have a desire to create new dwellings as demonstrated by their persistence in obtaining permission 233112, including contributions to the Thames Basin Heath SANG to do so. While by no means their principal priority there is a clear financial incentive to implement the conversion consent providing three valuable homes in a desirable location.
- 6.33 However, they are keen to improve the environment around Warren Crest Farm and so look to provide something of better design and performance. The existing modern barns are non-vernacular buildings, while functional for agriculture they contribute little to the area in visual terms. The proposed homes are in a traditional style of rural dwellings more in keeping with the village-edge location.
- 6.34 Having regard to the purpose of Development Plan policy CP11, to limit households in the countryside, the proposal offers a tangible benefit over the fallback in creating one less new household. The proposed homes are also smaller and designed to be efficient homes with lower running costs. Consequently, they are of a type more suited to rural workers with a lower income, a type of housing for which there is particular need. In brief, it is a development better suited to the location.

6.35 Considered on its own merits in the context of the adopted Development Plan the proposed erection of two homes is clearly preferable to the fallback scheme to provide three new dwellings. The fallback is a material consideration and, having regard to the preferable development proposed in this scheme, justifies departure from the ordinary position of CP11 as set out by paragraph 2 of the NPPF. We believe development of the proposed development should be supported and welcome your feedback to guide the scheme.

6.36 The homes are sufficiently removed from neighbours that they will not harm amenity. They are provided with gardens, parking, and meet the amenity standards expected of new dwellings.

Agricultural worker's dwelling

6.37 It is acknowledged that the existing dwelling at Warren Crest Farm is subject to a condition limiting its occupation to a farm worker. Condition 8 of planning permission 05206 which allowed construction of the house states:

“The occupation of the dwelling shall be limited to a person solely or mainly employed, or last employed in agriculture as defined in Section 290(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971 (including any dependants of such a person residing with him) or a widow or widower of such a person”.

6.38 The condition was imposed as the Council's Local Plan policies at the time did not support the provision of new-build dwellings outside of settlements. The house was only permitted as the applicant demonstrated an exceptional need for a worker to reside on site.

6.39 However, since the farmhouse was permitted things have changed significantly in farming. While the house permitted in 1976 was (presumably) suited to a farm worker in 1976 it is not a realistic home for a worker in 2025. The house is large and owing to its aged construction has substantial running costs. The existing house is not realistically affordable for a worker to run on an average wage¹, it is certainly not affordable to rent/purchase on agricultural income alone.

6.40 The disparity in costs associated with the house and likely salary of the intended occupant means the condition could now be regarded as unreasonable. On this

¹ Average farm worker wage May 2025- £25,949- www.indeed.com

basis the applicants could seek its removal, however, they are keen to find a solution which is more positive for the area. Therefore, they seek to transfer the occupancy from the farmhouse to the proposed one-bedroom cottage overlooking the farmyard. This means a home is retained on the site for a rural worker, however it will be one that is realistically affordable and so more useful to the housing stock.

- 6.41 In practical terms the proposed cottage is also better placed to supervise agricultural activity at Warren Crest Farm. It is alongside the entrance to the working buildings to oversee comings and goings and is closer to the working farm buildings.
- 6.42 The proposed transfer should not have any material impact in amenity terms. It should not introduce additional traffic, noise, or other activity as there remain only three households across the site rather than the four that are already permitted.
- 6.43 In summary, the proposed transfer of the occupancy restriction from the existing farmhouse to one of the permitted cottages should not cause detriment to the area nor conflict with the aims of the Local Plan. A home will remain available for a rural worker which is equally well positioned to supervise the farm. The proposal will not introduce any additional households to the countryside or cause harm to amenity in any other regard.
- 6.44 The proposal also offers tangible benefits in swapping an unaffordable home for one which is suited to a far broader range of rural workers, thus increasing the likelihood of it being occupied and remaining available for local farm workers. This is in line with the Development Plan's aspiration to provide homes which are affordable to local people and maintain vibrant rural communities.

Affordable housing

- 6.45 The proposed development is for three homes, one of which is a replacement dwelling meaning a net-gain of two dwellings. The proposal is not therefore one which should attract a contribution to affordable housing.

- 6.46 WCS policy CP5 is clear that contributions will only be sought from developments with a net gain of 5 or more dwellings, or where the residential area is increased by more than 0.16Ha, neither of which is proposed here.

Landscape and visual impact

- 6.47 The site is not in a protected landscape, nonetheless the applicants are mindful of the attractiveness of the site surroundings and have taken care to propose a scheme in keeping with its setting.
- 6.48 This proposal has been informed by landscape assessment undertaken by Portus and Whitton Landscape Architects to ensure harm is avoided to the area, including important viewpoints and characteristic features. The proposals are also supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) undertaken that confirms the proposal to offer improvement over developments already permitted at the site. The LVIA concludes:
- 6.49 *“In conclusion, it is clear that the proposed dwelling will be largely an improvement over the existing consented scheme in terms of its character and will be only marginally more visible from public viewpoints.*
- 6.50 *The landscape proposals aim to provide an appropriate setting to the new development within the local and wider landscape that provide both landscape and biodiversity enhancements. Overall, the architectural and landscape proposals could be expected to result in a neutral to slight effect on the local landscape character type.*
- 6.51 *As a consequence, the proposals are assessed as being consistent with the aims of national and local planning policy”* (Portus and Whitton LVIA, May 2025 paras. 10.19 - 10.21).
- 6.52 Accordingly, the proposal is considered to have taken account of the landscape’s sensitivity and provide a development suitable for its surroundings as required by MDDL policy TB21.

Environmental performance

- 6.53 This proposal is submitted as the applicants are eager to provide homes that meet modern performance standards. The current dwelling is a building of its time falling well short of current standards with an EPC rating of D. The proposed replacement dwelling is planned to provide an A rating.

- 6.54 Similarly, despite best endeavours the permitted homes to be provided by conversion of the cattle sheds cannot meet the highest standards being compromised by their orientation and basic fabric which are fixed in the existing buildings.
- 6.55 The proposed development ensures long-term environmental benefits and a carbon life cycle by replacing the inefficient 1970s house and farm barns with a highly insulated, airtight dwelling constructed from durable materials.
- 6.56 The purpose-built cottages provide clear environmental benefits over converting the existing agricultural structures, enabling modern, energy-efficient materials and systems tailored for sustainable residential use, alongside possible dismantling and reuse of the concrete-framed farm building.
- 6.57 The project incorporates renewable technologies, including high-performance Air Source Heat Pumps connected to underfloor heating, and emphasises water conservation through features like rainwater harvesting and permeable landscaping.
- 6.58 In construction, waste from existing structures will be reused from materials from the existing building, such as processing masonry rubble for on-site use. These integrated strategies collectively reduce the carbon footprint and promote a sustainable living environment.
- 6.59 The proposed development should therefore provide environmental benefits over the lifetime of the homes and is encouraged by Development Plan policies CC04 (MDDL), ES1 (FNP) and guidance R21 of the Borough Design Guide.

Trees

- 6.60 The proposed development has been informed by assessment of trees on and around the site by Venners Arboriculture. The development retains all important and/or significant trees will be lost and the development should not harm the area.
- 6.61 Trees on the site range from low to moderate quality with only nine grade C and on grade B to be removed. The tree removals are to be offset with new planting which will enhance the site's landscape and give greater longevity. The assessment concludes:

- 6.62 *“The surveyed trees range from a low to moderate quality and whilst they contribute to the character of the immediate local landscape, many are situated mainly internal to the site and not visible from the wider locale.*
- 6.63 *The removal of nine C grade trees and one B grade tree (mainly fruit trees) is preferred as part of the future landscaping of the site. Visually, these trees are internal to the site and their removal would not have a negative effect upon the vista from outside the plot. All tree work is to be carried out in line with the current British standard for Tree Work BS 3998 by qualified Arborists.*
- 6.64 *If the proposal is implemented in accordance with the recommendations laid out in this report, neither the trees nor wider landscape will be adversely affected. This is an arboriculturally defensible scheme and it is considered that there are no arboricultural reasons why planning consent should not be granted”.*
- 6.65 The proposal will not result in the loss of any important trees and provides suitable replacement for specimens that will be removed, it is therefore supported by FNP policy IRS 6 and MDDL policy TB23.

Ecology and biodiversity

- 6.66 The proposed development has been guided by assessments undertaken by Ecology by Design with their preliminary ecological assessment submitted with this application.
- 6.67 The assessment considers the likely impacts of the proposed development on habitats and species, along with protected areas in the wider setting notably the Thames Basin Heath Special Area of Conservation. The assessment also considers biodiversity net gain concluding the required gain can be provided within the land holding at Warren Crest Farm.
- 6.68 The proposal concludes that as bats are likely to be absent it is reasonable for works to proceed under a non-licensed method statement. Precautionary working methods can provide necessary protection to nesting birds, reptiles, badgers, hedgehogs, and other wild mammals during site clearance.
- 6.69 Enhancements are recommended for species in the form of two woodcrete/woodstone bat boxes, two woodcrete/woodstone bird boxes, and two bat access tiles will be integrated within the new buildings.

- 6.70 Considered in the context of the permitted scheme for the provision of 3 new dwellings through conversion of the cattle sheds (233112) the scheme now proposed results in one less household (3 vs 4) at Warren Crest Farm. The reduction in households is beneficial to the Thames Basin Heath Special Area of Conservation.
- 6.71 The proposal is of a type that requires a net gain in biodiversity. The assessment establishes that a biodiversity offset of 6.34 habitat units (1.25 units of individual trees) and 0.091 hedgerow units is required. The applicant is committed to meeting this requirement within their land holding (blue line land). The assessment identifies that this is feasible and can be successfully achieved.

Drainage

- 6.72 The application site is in Flood Zone 1, the area at lowest risk of flooding. The proposed development is to incorporate SuDS principles which can improve site drainage when considered against current areas of impermeable surface.
- 6.73 This application includes a preliminary drainage strategy confirming the proposed scheme to comply with relevant Development Plan policies related to drainage including MDDL policies CC09 and CC10.

Transport and highways

- 6.74 The proposal should not give rise to objection in relation to parking or traffic. The proposals are modest and represent a net reduction in households when assessed against the fallback planning application from 4 to 3. It should therefore provide a reduction in traffic in relation to Warren Crest Farm.
- 6.75 The site benefits from existing access to Wick Hill Lane. This is to be retained with gates. The proposals do not impact on public rights of way passing the site which remain open for free passage. As noted above, the reduction in traffic on Wick Hill Lane offers a benefit to the right of way network.
- 6.76 The farm is laid out to accommodate farm vehicles and affords sufficient space for turning all vehicles that might reasonably be expected to visit the site. The proposed development provides space for parking in line with local standards in terms of dimensions and quantity of bays.

- 6.77 Facilities for charging electric vehicles can be provided in line with FNP policy GA1.
- 6.78 The proposals do not impact on public rights of way passing the site which remain open for free passage. As noted above, the reduction in traffic on Wick Hill Lane offers a benefit to the right of way network.

Residential amenity

- 6.79 The proposal site is sufficiently removed from neighbouring dwellings that the works will not overshadow, overlook, or have an overbearing impact on any neighbour. Notwithstanding, the applicants are mindful of their neighbours and will undertake all works in a considerate manner.
- 6.80 All proposed dwellings meet the Council's adopted standards in relation to internal and external space and light as required by the MDDLDP.

Conclusion

- 6.81 This application seeks planning permission for an alternative proposal to improvements permitted to the existing farmhouse at Warren Crest Farm and the permitted conversion of former cattle buildings under planning permission 233112.
- 6.82 The development is pursued to provide buildings of improved design and environmental performance to the benefit of the site and local landscape, and the occupants of the proposed dwellings. Considered in its own right the proposed development is supported in principle by Policy CP11 of the Wokingham Core Strategy. Against the extant permission and permitted development rights that allow for extension of the dwelling, and extant permission 233112 for the conversion of barns the scheme is expected to offer tangible gains.
- 6.83 The proposed replacement dwelling is of better design and environmental performance to the existing dwelling. The new homes will result in one less household in the countryside than currently permitted, provide buildings of higher quality design, and homes better suited to rural workers.
- 6.84 In short, this proposal offers benefits to the area when considered against relevant Development Plan policies and alternative fallback developments. It is

considered to comply with relevant policies of the Development Plan including CP11. There are not considered to be any material considerations that would justify refusal of planning permission, we therefore request that planning permission be granted without delay in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development expressed at paragraph 11 of the NPPF.

- 6.85 We look forward to receiving the acknowledgement letter soon and will be pleased to discuss this submission further.