

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	241881
Address:	Dairy Cottage, Heathlands Road, Wokingham, RG40 3AN.		
Proposal:	Full planning application for the proposed erection of 3 no. detached dwellings with associated access, car ports and landscaping, following demolition of the existing buildings on the site.		
Type of Development:	Minor Dwellings (1-9)		
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
☐ No objection
☐ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
☐ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
☒ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

SITE LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The site is located in the countryside, and in Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment – Area N1‘Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland’ a landscape of moderate quality and sensitivity and a modest capacity for change. The site is not in the Valued Landscape but is influenced by features consistent with the ‘Forest and Rides’ Valued landscape that nestles around the site to the north, south and west. The ‘Valued Landscape Attributes’ are;

- ***The open agricultural land which provides a gap between the settlement edge of Finchampstead and Wokingham.***
- ***Pastoral farmland, paddocks and sparse settlement pattern to the south of the LCA, creating a rustic feel.***
- ***Small areas of valued woodland habitats including narrow wooded tributaries, shelterbelts and a small area of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland near Ludgrove School, designated as an LWS.***
- ***Scattered historic farm buildings and houses, pubs and mansions provide time-depth.***

- ***Rural views over fields and towards Wokingham, given a sense of openness and orientation.***

Key Issues affecting the Character Area relating to the site include;

- *Loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees*
- *Expansion of horticultural polytunnels across the landscape affecting the openness of the landscape.*
- *Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure impacting landscape character.*
- *Rapid rate of change due to future and on-going expansion of South Wokingham including on-going development of 2,500 homes both north and south of the Waterloo rail line as part of the South Wokingham strategic development.*
- *Increased traffic on rural roads leading to erosion of road verges and erosion of tranquillity*

The Landscape Strategy for the N1 LCA is;

..‘to conserve and enhance the existing landscape character. The key opportunities are to improve the condition, intactness and presentation of the farmed landscape – with potential for replanting and management of field boundaries, and enhancement of ecological character. In terms of development, the rural setting of Wokingham should be conserved and management of urban fringe activities on marginal land is also required...’

The site is located just north of a kink in Heathlands Road where it splits at junction with Honey Hill to the east. The site is located on the west side of Heathlands Road and is a triangular shape piece of land of .62 ha. surrounded by trees and hedges on all sides and is well landscaped internally. There are 5 dwelling existing on the site; ‘Dairy Cottage’ and 3 other buildings including 2 within a converted barn and outbuilding, and 2 modified static caravans one that is within a caravan pitch. All of the dwellings have gardens, including the garden associated with Dairy Cottage which together contribute to the internal landscape structure. The internal divisions created by the gardens are what helps to enhance its low key rural landscape character.

The entrance into the site is discreet and located to the south. The front of the site is characterised by a hedgerow, and Dairy Cottage being located close to Heathlands Road is very visible in the views around it however, the mature trees that surround the rest of the site boundaries is what provides an outwardly rural character and screening that is typical of Heathlands Road and the surrounding rural character of area. To the north of the site is a football pitch park which acts as an open buffer between the site and the polytunnels to the north.

ARBORICULTURAL INFORMATION

The Arboricultural Assessment to BS5837:2012 is submitted with the application and includes a Tree Survey and survey schedule and a Tree Protection Plan. There

are 21 trees, 3 hedges and 2 groups surveyed within which there are 8 No. A quality trees, 5No. 'B' and 12 'C' and 1 'U'.

Judging from the Tree Survey Schedule there several trees on site that are displaying characteristics consistent with Veteranisation,

- Trees T12, T20 have the 'A3' BS5837;2012 classification given to trees that have cultural or historical features, or Veteran trees and woodland.
- Trees T14, T15 are notable, possibly veteran, and have high landscape value displaying features of veteranisation.
- T7, T19 and T20 are recognised on the Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Inventory as Veteran trees reference numbers 165046 (T19), 165045 (T20) on eastern boundary, and on SW corner 163683 (T7).
- Trees T14 and T15 have high landscape value as well as displaying features of veteranisation, which also applies to trees T17 and T18, T21.

Veteran trees by definition have a greater protection area than other trees, that is measured at 15 x the tree stem at breast height. The PPG on Ancient and Veteran trees also states that;

A buffer zone around an ancient or veteran tree should be at least 15 times larger than the diameter of the tree. The buffer zone should be 5m from the edge of the tree's canopy if that area is larger than 15 times the tree's diameter.

The diameter of T20 (Veteran) tree is 900mm dbh x 15 results in a buffer zone of 13.50m RPA – only 11.60m is shown on the Tree Protection Plan. The correct RPA for T20 at 13.50m would conflict with the turning head the protrudes northward into the POS .

T14 (offsite trees but material to the application) is classified as 'A2' for its landscape value – and although not classified as a 'Veteran' tree it is showing characteristics of Veteranisation. The dbh measures 1200mm x 12 is 14.4m RPA although 14m is shown on the Tree Protection Plan. The RPA of T14 extends into well over half of the rear garden of Plot 3. There is no knowing if a garden office or additional development in the future would further impact the RPA of this tree. The PPG states that Veteran tree buffer zones should not be located in gardens to protect its environment. Although T14 has not been classified as A2, there is a case for it being a Veteran tree and future proofing its environment, and therefore the site layout should be reconsidered.

All of the other trees except T16 (and their root protection areas) along the northern boundary are within the POS which could be extended to include that of T14, and T12 which is a recognised Veteran. For more detailed information regarding the PPG on Ancient and Veteran Tree buffer zones see excerpt below;

RPA should be applied in this case, to be devoid of built development – as the PPG states buffer zones should;

- *contribute to wider ecological networks*
- *be part of the green infrastructure of the area*

- woodland
- a mix of scrub, grassland, heathland and wetland planting

You should plant buffer zones with local and appropriate native species.

You should consider if access is appropriate and can allow access to buffer zones if the habitat is not harmed by trampling.

You should avoid including gardens in buffer zones.

As it stands the information provided does not comply with NPPF-2023 paragraph 186c which states;

‘development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons⁶⁷ and a suitable compensation strategy exists.’

The impact from development is on T11 classified ‘U’, H9 and H10 that are high hedges, and H22 hedge that borders Dairy Cottage cannot be retained with the layout, which also applies to G23 and G26. There is no impact on any of the remaining trees, all of which will be retained. The boundary hedge with Heathlands Road is not included as an item in the tree survey or schedule.

The hedge appears to be of Laurel, with native plants growing within it and is poorly maintained. The hedge to the north is shown as retained in the ‘Detailed Planting Plan’ drawing and the ‘Landscape Surface Finishes Plan and Boundary Treatments’ drawing, but the hedge to the south is removed to be replaced by new hedging. The existing and proposed hedging and retained trees all appear to be located within the ‘visibility splay’ which means that all new hedging will be maintained no higher than 600mm, and trees may be felled which conflicts with Policy CC03d.

A grass verge between the hedge and the road varies in width and the level reduces down along part of the boundary into a shallow depression, and there is no footpath either side of Heathlands Road, which is a straight road from the junction with Nine Mile Ride to the junction with Honey Hill a distance of just over a kilometer where cars naturally gather speed.

SITE LAYOUT

Although the existing site has a sporadic layout, the single storey buildings with their small footprints and internal visual screening set to the rear of the main 2 storey Dairy Cottage ensures that the site retains a low key provenance and rural character that blends into the surrounding countryside.

The proposed development consists of 3 large dwellings arranged in a cul de sac formation and the access perpendicular to Heathlands Road, where there will be much more visible view of the additional built development, heightened as the existing southern hedgerow is proposed for removal and the impact of the visibility splays that will change the character of the boundary vegetation to a much smaller and more urban feature and overall will cause harm to the rural character. The

proposals are contrary to Policy CP3 as the proposed dwellings are not of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height and quality of design that is not detrimental to the adjoining land users and the quality of life. As it stands the proposals fail to protect important heritage landscape where the layout is conflicting is posing a risk to notable and veteran trees, and directly impacts the ability of the site to support biodiversity. As such the proposals do not contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces proposed and the way they integrate with their surroundings, and appropriate landscaping is compromised by the layout.

The proposals conflict with Policy CC03 as they cannot promote the integration of the scheme with the countryside sufficiently or fully protect the Borough's green infrastructure. The proposals do not fully protect retained trees, some of which are Veterans. The full quality of the landscaping proposed is compromised by the position of the entrance and the impact from visibility splays on the boundary character.

The proposals do not comply with Policy TB21 as the proposals do not address the landscape strategy which is to *conserve and enhance the existing landscape character or conserve the rural hinterland of Wokingham*. The key issue of protecting *Loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees*, is only partially addressed. Although the content of the proposed landscaping does go some way to enhancing the condition of the site the key issue – that of large dwellings in an urban style cul de sac does not.

The proposals do not comply with NPPF 2023 paragraph 180b;
180. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

or paragraph 186

When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:

b. development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons⁶⁷ and a suitable compensation strategy exists;

I am unable to support the proposals.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)			
Date:	9.9.24	Signed:	B. Crafer