



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Written Representations Appeal Statement by the Local Planning Authority

Appellant:	Mr & Mrs D Drew
Site:	Land North of The Vale, Forest Road, Wokingham, RG40 5QY
LPA Reference:	250632
Planning Inspectorate Reference	APP/X0360/W/25/3366261

8 July 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This appeal statement relates to the decision notice issued by the Council on 12 May 2025 in respect of application ref 250632 relating to Land North of The Vale, Forest Road, Wokingham, RG40 5QY. See **Appendix 1** for a copy of the Decision Notice.

1.2 The outline planning application was for the proposed erection of 1no. dwelling and associated works. The Council refused to grant planning permission for the following reasons:

“1. Principle of Development - The proposed development will introduce a new unsustainably located residential dwelling in countryside that would be outside, and unrelated to, any defined settlement boundaries and is contrary to the spatial objectives of the development plan and policies CP1, CP3, CP6 and CP11 of the Core Strategy (2010), CC01, CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014), Paragraph 83 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2025) and the guidance contained within the Borough Design Guide SPD.”

“2. Unsustainable Location - The application site is within a poorly accessible location that would fail to encourage a modal shift towards sustainable modes of transport, by reason of its countryside location outside of settlement limits, the absence of nearby facilities and services, lack of good public transport links and poor quality of the walking/cycling environment contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (2025), policies CP1, CP2, CP3, CP6 and CP11 of the Core Strategy (2010) and

CC01 and CC02 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014)."

"3. Landscape Character - The proposed development fails to retain or enhance the condition, character and features that positively contribute to the Landscape Character Area I1: Ashridge Farmed and Clay Lowland and would result in an urbanising encroachment within the countryside contrary to sections 12 and 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2025), policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy (2010), CC02, CC02 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) and the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019)."

A copy of the Officer's Report for the planning application is attached in **Appendix 2**.

1.3 A full description of the site and its surroundings is provided within the Officer's Report (see **Appendix 2**).

1.4 The basis of the Council's contentions is contained in the Officer's Report (see **Appendix 2**) in addition to commentary in this statement and a response to the appellant's documentation, where relevant.

2. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

2.1 Information relating to the site's planning history is provided within the Officer's Report (see **Appendix 2**). It is noted that the planning history relates to the wider site, not just the appeal site. However, the Appellant does not make this distinction in their Statement.

3. PROVISIONS OF THE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

3.1 The development plan for the Borough comprises the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy 2010 and the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan 2014. Policies and guidance of relevance are listed in the Officer's Report (see **Appendix 2**) and the relevant sections have been sent to the Inspectorate.

3.2 The site's planning constraints are listed in the Officer's Report (see **Appendix 2**).

4. STATEMENT OF CASE

Principle of Development (Reason for Refusal 1)

4.1 This reason for refusal concerns the principle of development. Paragraphs 5.4-5.6 of the Appellant's Statement refers to the Council being unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land. As such paragraph 11 of the NPPF (the 'tilted balance') is engaged within the assessment of this appeal and the most important policies relating to housing delivery are considered out of date.

Development Plan and Weight

4.2 The starting point for decision making is the development plan. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.3 As stated in the Officer's Report (see **Appendix 2**), it is acknowledged that the Council are unable to demonstrate 5 years' worth of deliverable sites to meet housing needs ("5YHLS"). Therefore, the relevant Development Plan policies are considered out-of-date in accordance with paragraph 11 of the NPPF and the presumption in favour of sustainable development, the 'tilted balance', applies.

4.4 The Council has published an updated Five Year Housing Land Supply Statement at 31 March 2024 (published 30 January 2025) which establishes that the Council can demonstrate 1.7 years' worth of deliverable sites against the Local Housing Need of 1,336 houses per annum, attached in **Appendix 3**.

4.5 Notwithstanding the above, the contents of the relevant policies are otherwise consistent with the NPPF and should be afforded full weight. Paragraph 232 of the NPPF clarifies that *"existing policies should not be considered out-of-date because they were adopted or made prior to the publication of this Framework. Due weight should be given to them, according to their degree of consistency with this Framework (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)."*

4.6 Additionally, a recent appeal (Lodge Road, a copy of the decision is attached in **Appendix 4**) where the Council's policies were examined in detail at Public Inquiry concluded:

"In summarising the matters set out above, the starting point is the fact that the proposed development would be in conflict with key policies in

the development plan. These policies have to be considered out-of-date, because the Council cannot demonstrate a deliverable 5-Year HLS and, as a result, the 'tilted balance' detailed in paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the Framework comes into play. However, notwithstanding this point, I have found that the policies which are most important for determining this proposal accord strongly with the requirements of the Framework, especially with regard to the need to promote and secure a sustainable pattern of development..." (Paragraph 137)

4.7 Local development plan policies which are of key relevance to this appeal scheme were also found to be consistent with the aims of the Framework in a more recent appeal decision (Brockendene, a copy of the decision is attached in **Appendix 5**) and as such the identified conflict was afforded substantial negative weight:

"For the reasons given above, the proposal would not accord with the Development Plan strategy for housing and would harm the character and appearance of the area. As such, it would conflict with WBCS policies CP1, CP3 and CP11; MDD policies CC03, TB21 and TB26; and the SPD. These seek to maintain the high quality of the environment, retain features that contribute to the Special Landscape Area, and have an acceptable layout, design and scale. As these policies are consistent with the aims of the Framework, including paragraphs 135, 139 and 187, I give this conflict substantial negative weight." (Paragraph 11)

4.8 Regardless of the Council's 5YHLS position, the development plan policies have a high degree of consistency with the Framework and therefore the weight afforded to these policies should not be reduced.

The Case

4.9 There is no disagreement that the appeal site lies outside of any defined settlement boundary within designated countryside. The proposal does not fulfil any of the exceptions listed in policy CP11 nor is it considered to support its overriding objective of protecting the separate identity of settlements and maintaining the quality of the environment. Therefore, the scheme is unacceptable in principle.

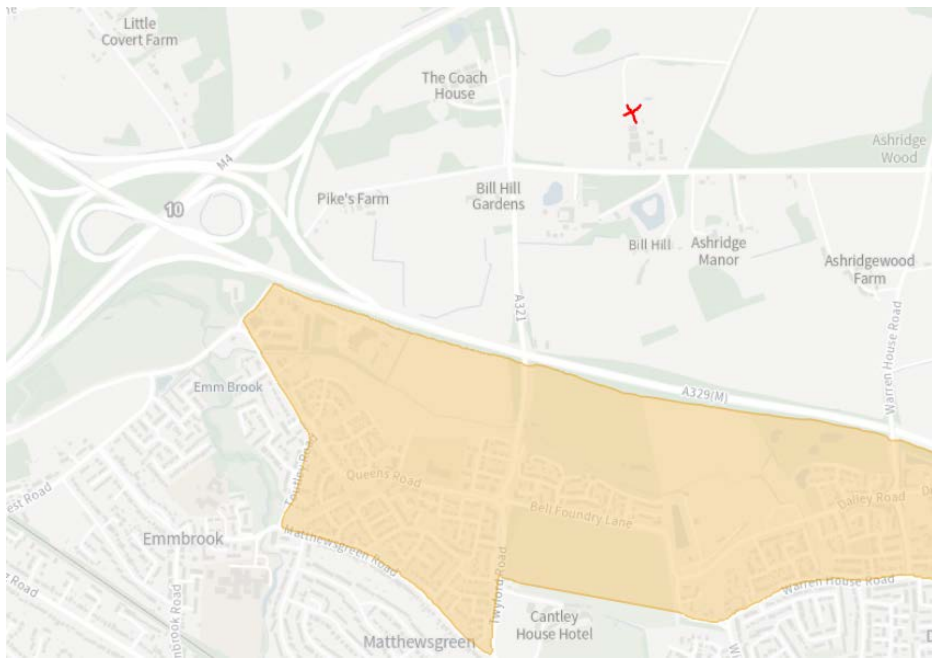
4.10 Paragraph 5.7 of the Appellant's Statement discusses the appeal site's relationship with neighbouring residential development and that this area is already served by functions including deliveries and refuse collection. While it is acknowledged within the Officer's Report that the proposed development would not result in 'isolated dwellings' in its spatial context, these functions are not considered to be day to day services which would demonstrate whether the site is any more or less suitable for residential development.

4.11 Notwithstanding the 5YHLS position, the 'tilted balance' assessment requires, planning permission to be granted, any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, this is set out in the Planning Balance and conclusions of the Officer Report. The Appellant has not identified any harmful impacts of a new dwelling in an undeveloped site

which clearly cannot be correct, let alone assessed whether these adverse impacts outweigh any benefits.

Unsustainable Location (Reason for Refusal 2)

- 4.12 The main concern behind this reason for refusal is the failure of the proposal to encourage a modal shift towards sustainable modes of transport due to the site's location outside of settlement limits with poor access to good public transport links and the poor quality of the walking/cycling environment.
- 4.13 The Council's Highways Officer's appraisal of this appeal, including their response to the Appellant's Statement is attached at **Appendix 6**. This appraisal includes a re-examination of the walking distance and time to access the closed local services and facilities as well as the route environment for pedestrians and cyclists.
- 4.14 Paragraph 5.12 of the Appellant's Statement compares the appeal site to the recent development within the North Wokingham Strategic Development Location in terms of accessibility to services and facilities. It is not considered that the strategic site, located circa. 1.1km from the appeal site segregated from the Countryside by the A329(M), is of any relevance to the appeal given that the strategic site is located within the defined settlement of Wokingham and is in closer proximity to the facilities and services referred to. The site is marked by an X below and the north Wokingham SDL is shown highlighted in brown.



4.15 In response to paragraphs 5.19-5.20 of the Appellant's Statement, while it is acknowledged that the appeal site is located in close proximity to Ashridge Manor Garden Centre to the south-west, it is not considered that the level of services or amenities within the garden centre would sufficiently meet the needs of future occupants and they would still have to travel further afield for their shopping.

4.16 The Inspector at paragraph 26 of appeal decision APP/X0360/C/22/3294935 The Vale, Forest Road, Binfield RG40 5QY (**see Appendix 7**) acknowledges that the site is in an unsustainable location: "*The National Planning Policy Framework (2021)(the Framework) seeks to ensure that appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport modes can be taken up. However, the location of the appeal sites limit opportunities to minimise the need to travel by private car, contrary to policy CP1 of the*

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2010)(the CS), which supports proposals which demonstrate how they support opportunities for reducing the need to travel, particularly by private car and policy CP3 of the CS, which seeks to ensure that proposals are, amongst other things, accessible and the advice contained within the Wokingham Borough Design Guide (2012)(WBDG), which seeks to encourage walking, cycling and public transport use.” (paragraph 26) but acknowledged that there were personal circumstances surrounding the retrospective construction of the dwelling that outweighed the harm arising from the location. These circumstances do not exist in this case.

Impact on Landscape Character (Reason for Refusal 3)

4.17 The main concern behind this reason for refusal is the detrimental effect upon the character and appearance of the site’s countryside setting that would result from the proposed development, in particular the encroachment of built form beyond the established built line within this section of Forest Road, and the failure of the scheme to retain or enhance the condition, character and features that positively contribute to the Landscape Character Area 11: Ashridge Farmed and Clay Lowland.

4.18 Paragraph 5.23 of the Appellant’s Statement refers to the 2015 appeal decision for the dwelling to the south of the appeal site now known as “The Vale” (ref APP/X0360/W/15/3005714). While all matters including appearance, landscaping, layout and scale are reserved at this stage, it is clear when assessing the submitted indicative drawings that the view taken by the

Inspector is not directly of relevance to this scheme. In comparison to “The Vale”, the proposed dwelling would be clearly positioned north of the building established by the neighbouring development on an undeveloped parcel of land. The development would not be contained by the structural landscape as argued by the Appellant.

4.19 This is reiterated by the Inspector’s comments in relation to character of the area at paragraph 52 for the commercial building previously sited in a similar location north to The Vale (**Appendix 7**): *“Despite its relatively modest height, the garage building projects well above the surrounding hedgerows and is clearly visible from a number of vantage points along the road leading to Warren Farm. When viewed from these vantage points, the building appears to project further into open countryside. This is harmful to the character and appearance of the area, contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the CS, policy TB21 of the MDD and the Framework, the requirements of which are set out above”*. A dwelling is likely to be taller than a garage building. A similar approach is taken by the Inspector at APP/X0360/W/24/3336959 (the change of use of paddock to private equestrian space and erection of stable building) paragraphs 14 and 15 (copy attached in **Appendix 8**).

4.20 As discussed within the Officer’s Report, visibility from public vantage points is not the only consideration when assessing the effect of a scheme on the character and appearance of the area as well as the wider landscape. While views into the appeal site are restricted, this does not negate the need for the proposed development to conserve and enhance the existing rural character in

accordance with policy TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014) and the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019).

4.21 Ultimately, the encroachment of built form beyond the established building line on an undeveloped parcel of land would fail to, at the least, conserve the existing rural landscape character which the appeal site contributes to. In this respect it is not all reserved matters are capable of satisfactory resolution in accordance with the development plan as argued by the Appellant.

Other Matters

4.22 The appeal scheme has been submitted as a self-build development. However, without a mechanism to ensure that the development is delivered as a self-build dwelling the support for such schemes within the NPPF does not weigh in favour of the proposal.

4.23 Nonetheless, the Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Act 2015 (amended by the Housing and Planning Act 2016) states local authorities must give suitable development permission to enough serviced plots of land to meet the demand for self-build and custom housebuilding in the area arising in each base period. At the end of each base period, relevant authorities have 3 years to approve an equivalent number of plots of land, which are suitable for self-build and custom housebuilding, as there are entries for that base period.

4.24 Further to the above, the Council has recently published a Topic Paper on Self-build and custom housebuilding (**Appendix 9**) that accompanies the Emerging Local Plan Update which has now been submitted for independent examination (Regulation 22 stage). Table 1 of the paper lists the number of people who joined Part 1 of the self-build register between 1st April 2016 and 30th October 2023, which totalled 97.

4.25 In comparison, Table 2 of the paper highlights that within the same period 250 self-build CIL exemptions were granted by the LPA. The comparisons for each year are detailed in the table below.

Base Period	Total joining Part 1 of the Register	CIL Self Build Exemptions Granted
01/04/16 - 30/10/16	N/A	19
31/10/16 - 30/10/17	N/A	33
31/10/17 - 30/10/18	10	35
31/10/18 - 30/10/19	18	35
31/10/19 - 30/10/20	15	39
31/10/20 - 30/10/21	39	34
31/10/21 - 30/10/22	9	21
31/10/22 - 30/10/23	6	34

4.26 The table above clearly demonstrates that the LPA has exceeded the required number of plots of land in comparison to the number of individuals or associations on Part One of the register.

4.27 Notwithstanding the figures above, the scheme ultimately only involves the provision of 1no. self-build dwelling. Such limited provision can only be attributed limited weight in the planning balance.

4.28 It is also noted in the Officer's Report that this will affect Biodiversity Net Gain, as self-build dwellings are exempt therefore a robust mechanism to deliver the Self Building dwelling, contrary to need, would need to be put forward by the Appellant and no legal agreement has been forthcoming.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 The benefits of the proposed development would be the residual impact of any new housing development, however the introduction of a single dwellinghouse to the Council's Housing Land Supply position would be negligible. In respect of the overall balancing exercise, taking account of the reasons discussed in this Appeal Statement and the Officer's Report (see **Appendix 2**), it is considered that the adverse impacts of granting outline planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

5.2 The appeal scheme would be located within an unsustainable location with limited sustainable transport options. As such, future occupiers would be reliant on private motor vehicles to access basic amenities and services. This clear conflict with key policies for directly development to sustainable locations within the local development plan and the NPPF holds significant weight against the proposed development in the balance.

5.3 The scheme would also result in adverse environmental harm due to encroachment into the open countryside and the introduction of built form which would fail to relate well with the neighbouring development and fail to conserve

and enhance the existing rural landscape character, in particular the rural ribbon pattern of development in this location.

5.4 The Local Planning Authority respectfully asks that the appeal is dismissed. In the event the Inspector is minded to allow this appeal, the LPA has suggested a number of conditions in **Appendix 10**.