

Land to the rear of Langley Common & School Road, Barkham

Application Reference: 252595

Landscape Application Response drafted by Landscape Officer, Brigitte Crafer, Landscape Architect, Woking Borough Council, dated 2nd February 2026

Landscape Issues raised and The Richards Partnership Comments/Response:

Principle Concerns Raised:

Principle Concern 1: Development will be in the countryside is therefore contrary to Core Strategy Policy CP11. (page 1)

This point is acknowledged in the LVIA. It is our understanding that any scheme of a similar size would entail use of green field land around the edge of the settlement.

Principle Concern 2: Coalescence of, and harm to the setting of Langley Common and Arborfield Cross:

Introduction of development will:

- “*substantially erode the physical gap between the existing villages*” separation of Arborfield Cross and Langley Common (summary on page 8, sixth para).
- “*it would fail to maintain the separation of settlements*” (page 7, first para)

The matter of coalescence of settlements is frequently broken down into the following three considerations:

1. **Physical Gap:** Currently the physical gap between Langley Common and Arborfield Cross rises and falls as you travel along both settlements urban edges. At its closest the gap between the settlements is c. 320 metres between houses along Link Way in Arborfield Cross and Oaklands residential park in Langley Common. With regards School Road the western most house on the road (Greenbank) is c. 400 to 460 metres (400m to the school and 460m to the houses on Embley Crescent in Arborfield Cross. The introduction of the proposed development would result in a physical gap of c.375 metres. This is broadly consistent with the existing gap.
2. **Perceived Separation:** School Lane is now closed off to through vehicular traffic. The lane does provide pedestrian and cycle connection between the settlements but as the road is closed off to vehicular traffic most people experience the gap between the two settlements travelling along Eversley Road. As a result of intervening vegetation, topography and built form there are no views of the site from Eversley Road and there are no locations along School Road in which the site plays a role in views to the southern edge of Arborfield Cross. During our site work no public viewpoints were found where both settlements and the gap in between them could be seen.
3. **Visual Separation:** In walking the site and the lanes of the two settlements there are no views of Arborfield Cross from Langley Common or vice versa. In addition, in walking along School Road alongside the site there is no awareness, and/or views of, Arborfield Cross.

In consideration of these findings it is clear the introduction of the development would not “*substantially erode*” the physical, perceived and visual gap between the settlements.

The introduction of development on the two fields would change the setting of Langley Common as experienced along a relatively short stretch of School Road. As noted by the landscape officer there are filtered views from School Road into the site, but most importantly the vegetation and fencing around the site does not allow views beyond the site to the wider landscape, thus the change is focused on the site and its immediate environs. The introduction of the development would not be apparent from Arborfield Cross nor would it impact on the first views of Arborfield Cross which are only available some distance further west along School Road.

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The Land west of Limmerhill Road, Wokingham Appeal Decision

Appeal reference: APP/X0360/W/25/3361360 (dated 8th March 2026)

This decision is in relation to a site on the south-western edge of Wokingham. It is considered of some relevance as the site is situated within a relatively small gap between Barkham and Wokingham. The inspector noted six 'Main Issues' and found:

- 'Moderate harm & weight' to the areas character and appearance, including landscape and visual effects
- 'Moderate harm & weight' to the effect on the existing pattern of settlement
- 'Moderate weight and Neutral consideration' to the separate identities of Barkham and Wokingham

The inspector refused the scheme with regards Issue 6 as he considered it,
"would fundamentally fail the ambition of a 'well-designed place'".

Issue 2 is of particular relevance to Principle Concern 2 as it considers

'The effect of the proposal on the existing pattern of settlements; and the separate identities of Barkham and Wokingham'.

The inspector noted the principle policy applicable to this issue as Core Strategy **Policy CP11**. The inspector noted at Para 50,

*"Moving on to Core Strategy Policy CP11, its principal focus is to protect the separate identity of settlements and to maintain the quality of the environment. The Council acknowledges that the policy does not seek to protect openness between settlements for its own sake. In effect, **the policy is a spatial tool to prevent coalescence and has to be considered in the context that settlements in the immediate and wider locality are frequently close to each other.**" (Author's highlighting)*

This point is considered of some relevance to the School Lane site as the School Lane site forms a notably smaller part of a notably larger gap than the appeal scheme. In considering the appeal scheme the inspector noted the public open space put forward in the appeal scheme,

*"albeit of different land cover, (the POS) would provide **meaningful physical separation between the western edge of the development and Barkham itself.**(Para 57) and **Whilst it (the site) would no longer be open countryside, the green edge setting and separate identity of Barkham would remain sufficiently apparent.** (Para 58) (Author's highlighting)*

The Proposal does not respect Langley Common's Settlement Character:

The proposed development would not respect/reflect existing settlement pattern and character of School Lane. BC notes:

- The development behind School Lane *"extends in a pattern that is not recognised as being typical of the settlement pattern in this area. It is urban in character and has no affinity with settlement along Langley Common Road or countryside meaning it will fail to integrate"* (page 6 last para & page 7 first para)
- *"The urbanising grain is uncharacteristic and layout of the indicative plans are contrary to the character and appearance of the locality"* (page 9).

As the landscape officer notes/recognises the existing development along School Road has developed in a 'linear' or ribbon form with some infill development in the later part of the Twentieth Century. This point is noted within the LVIA and Figure 6 which provides Historical Maps of Langley Common showing how development has extended in a linear/ribbon form along Langley Common Road and School Road. BC refers to linear form and character on page 6, second para and again on page 7, fifth para. Should this linear growth pattern be adopted/supported going forward it is self-evident that this would lead to an incongruous and undesirable extension/'finger of development' extending out in to the countryside, whereas the approach taken in the development proposals is more akin to a nucleated and more condensed and focused development pattern. Whilst not wholly consistent with the historical linear/ribbon pattern of development along both Langley Common Road and School Road this approach is considered far more sensitive and respectful of the adjoining countryside's character.

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With regards settlement pattern it should also be noted that a valued 'Key Characteristic' of Landscape Character Area J2 (Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment) is the **"nucleated pattern"** of settlements within the character area.

We concur with the landscape officer that the introduction of the development will bring about an irreversible and 'substantial adverse' change to the character of the site. However, it should also be noted/recognised that the layout has been crafted to:

1. Wherever possible retain the most valued trees;
2. The layout has been crafted so as to retain valued features within meaningful corridors of open space; and
3. Wherever possible the layout has orientated houses and roads to ensure green corridors/spaces are overlooked.

This adverse change would, most likely, be consistent with any green field site put forward around the edges of Langley Common.

Principle Concern 3: The development would harm the setting of Arborfield Cross:

- *"Any development on this site will extend into the open rural countryside that not only makes a significant contribution to the setting of Arborfield Cross village".*
- *"Development will undermine a key issue identified within the Landscape Character Assessment which is to protect the individual identity of settlements" (page 6, third Para)*

As noted above under the consideration of coalescence of the two settlements and the setting of Langley Common there are no public locations along the edges of the two settlements where the other settlement is visible.

Principle Concern 4: Harm to the character of the surrounding countryside:

"The development will have the effect of urbanising the character and appearance of the area by reason of its location and layout which will be detrimental in this rural environment". (page 8, 7th para)

The LVIA identifies notes that the site,

"would experience a significant and irreversible adverse change from an agricultural field to an area of built form. However, all but four of the trees would be retained and there would be a modest improvement in the character of the western field which would be managed for biodiversity net gain (BNG) nature conservation value."

The LVIA records a **substantial adverse** effect at year 1 extending in to the long term. The LVIA also notes that the LVIA fieldwork was undertaken in February 2025, when the trees and hedgerows were without leaf, i.e. when the landscape is the most open. The fieldwork established that as a result of built form and trees to the west, the site is not readily visible from Langley Common and as a result of topography, trees and hedgerows the site has a very weak interrelationship/intervisibility with the countryside to the west and north of the site. Public views are only available along a relatively short stretch of School Road which runs alongside the site's northern boundary. The physical and visual containment of the site means the influence of the proposed development would not extend out in to the wider landscape. In consideration of this whilst the site would experience a **substantial adverse** effect and the nearby, adjoining School Lane would experience a **short term moderate adverse** effect the effects fall to **minor adverse** beyond the site's immediate environs.

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Points of Information (POI):

POI 1: The landscape officer notes on page 7, fifth para, that the site, *"is surrounded on all sides with landscape of fields and trees"* (author's highlighting) As can be seen in LVIA Figure 5 – Existing Site Conditions, this isn't quite correct.

- Field/Parcel B has existing gardens along large parts of its northern, eastern and southern boundaries
- Parts of Field A/Parcel A have existing gardens along its southern and western boundaries

POI 2: The landscape officer notes the adjoining field to the west, *"is not actually part of the outline application"* (page 1)
The land to the west is safeguarded/shown for offsite BNG.

POI 3: The landscape officer refers to the land on the opposing northern side of School Lane, *"are open fields"* (page 1, second para).
We would note the two relatively smaller parcels of land to the north of School Lane are a combination of garden and paddock/s associated with Langleypound Farm (single residential property). Access to this property is opposite the site and sits on the southern edge of the larger eastern paddock.

6th May 2026