

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	261171
Address:	Charlton Lane, Swallowfield, Berkshire.		
Proposal:	Full application for the change of use of land to a caravan site for the proposed erection of 5no. gypsy and traveller pitches, each incorporating a static caravan, touring caravan, single-storey day room, bin store, associated parking, access, boundary treatment, hardstanding and hard and soft landscaping.		
Type of Development:	Minor Gypsy and traveller pitches (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

The site is located in the countryside close to the junction of Trowes Lane, Charlton Lane in Swallowfield. Nearby to the SE of the site are 2 PROWs; SWAL16 and 17 which connect to Swallowfield through countryside to the SE. There are no protected trees on the site but the existing trees and vegetation are important characteristics of the site and its setting.

The site is .3 ha and has a perimeter (250m) which is surrounded with vegetation comprising of trees, hedges/shrubs and scrub. The interior has some low mounds (see Eco Report) covered with bramble. Not clear what the mounds consist of. The existing area of woodland to the north also extends into the north and east of the site. In order to fully understand the impact of development on the existing trees and landscape features, an Arboricultural Impact Assessment to BS5837:2012 is required in accordance with Policy CC03/2d, please submit asap.

Recently, permission has been granted for development of 81 houses on land to the north of Charlton Lane and west of Trowes Lane, in addition another development for up to 79 dwellings is proposed for the site to the east of Trowes Lane and to the north of the application site.

To the western site boundary there is an entrance marked by a double field gate, and this entrance is at a confluence of where Trowes Lane and Charlton Lane meet broadly south of the woodland that covers the southern part of the 2 development sites adjacent and to the NW of the site.

Charlton Lane in particular is a narrow country lane, whilst Trowes Lane is narrow in places, the closer it gets to Swallowfield and the development site to the NW Trowes Lane widens around the site entrance to accommodate the additional traffic the development will bring.

The confluence of Trowes Lane and Charlton Lane also represents a small change in the landscape character where Trowes Lane extends southwards to Riseley through agricultural fields.

The impact of residential development may effect the peaceful character of the lanes used for walking and cycling, that are easily accessible from Swallowfield, so good for families. The lanes also are typical of I2 LCA in that they have wildflower verges, water filled ditches and mature hedgerows both sides. They are peaceful and tranquil with a sense of remoteness, although that may be tempered by development. Into the mix now is the application site – which is for a different type of residential development but will also impact the landscape character and setting of the site.

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA), dated November 2019, identifies a number of different landscape character areas (LCA's) across the Borough and provides key information regarding each of the LCA's. The site falls within Area I2 'Riseley Farmed Clay Lowland', a modest quality landscape.

Paragraphs 187(a) and (b) of the NPPF state that development should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- a) Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
- 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.

Any application will need to be accompanied by a landscape and visual assessment carried out in order to assess the proposals; how they relate to the wider landscape character as required by Policy TB21. This should also identify what landscape mitigation will be required as part of the proposals to support new development within the countryside as required by the planning policies CC03 and TB21. The LVA will need to fully consider how the proposals address the key characteristics of this landscape character area and specifically how the impacts of the development can be reduced and mitigated by sympathetic and appropriate design principles.

Key characteristics of the I2 LCA pertinent to the site include;

- *Limited woodland with only small blocks of BAP priority habitat lowland mixed deciduous woodland east of Charlton/Trowe's Lane*
- *Arable farming in large irregular fields dominates, with open pasture and horse and pony paddocks on settlement edges. Fields are bound by gappy overgrown hawthorn hedgerows with veteran trees, often oaks, with some post and rail and post and wire fencing.*
- *Rural lanes bounded by wide grassy verges, banks with wildflowers and overgrown mixed hedgerows. The busy A33 cuts through the northwest of the area, bringing noise and movement to the area*

It is clear that the site benefits from woodland in an area where woodland is scarce overall, this along with the landscape character of the lanes are recognised as valuable landscape attributes – see below – and arguably raise the value of character of the immediate site setting to moderate-high.

Although the site is not located in a valued landscape, it has valued landscape attributes and most of those listed apply to the site setting. There are key issues affecting the I2 landscape pertinent to the site which include;

- *Hedgerow loss and soil erosion associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture*
- *Past use of fertilisers affecting water quality and biodiversity of water filled ditches*
- *Lack of recruitment of young trees through natural regeneration or planting required to rebalance structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an ongoing threat to the character of the landscape.*
- *Introduction of non-native shelterbelts that are visually dominant in the flat landscape*
- *Demand for housing and pressure for expansion within existing settlements leading to linear spread of development leading and loss of individual settlement identity and potential amalgamation of adjacent settlements.*

The Landscape Strategy for LCA I2 is to conserve and enhance the existing remote character of the agricultural landscape, in particular there is an opportunity to strengthen the hedgerow and restoration of pollarded willows, and native shelterbelt planting. In terms of development the aim is conserve the rural settlement pattern.

Landscape Guidelines include;

- *Conserve open and rural qualities of farmed landscape, reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species*
- *Increase the extent of BAP priority deciduous shelterbelts and woodland using locally occurring species*
- *Maintain and enhance the character of the rural lanes and their roadside verges and water filled ditches*

- *Protect open views to adjacent areas*
- *Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and remoteness of the landscape*

Site Layout - Drawing No. 2026-17/501 15.5.26 is indicative of the surrounding landscape of trees and hedges, is graphic not literal. In order to comply with Policy CC03 of the Local Plan we need to understand the relationship between the existing vegetation and the proposed layout and the potential impact on the landscape features from layout, services and visibility splays. In order to comment on the proposals we require an Arboricultural Impact Assessment to BS5837:2012 asap.

In order to assess the impact of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the site and its surroundings, we require a Landscape and Visual Appraisal to comply with Policy TB21 of the Local Plan.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)			
Date:	29.6.26	Signed:	BRC