

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	260439
Address:	Land at Range Road, Range House, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3NR.		
Proposal:	Full application for the change of use of land to provide one gypsy/traveller pitch, including the stationing of a mobile home and touring caravan, erection of a day room, formation of a new vehicular access and associated parking, landscaping and ancillary works		
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

SITE AND SETTING

The site is in the countryside, located set back from the north side of Nine Mile Ride (a non-designated Heritage Asset), deep within a woodland which is protected by an 'Area' TPO Ref. 1083-2005. The protected woodland is adjacent to the rear garden boundaries of a number of dwellings that face Nine Mile Ride. The woodland consists of Scots Pine, Oak, Silver Birch, Holly.

The protected woodland that surrounds the site and stretches beyond it is almost contiguous where only Range Road separates it from other woodland parcels to the east and west including; TPO 0555-1992 on the northern and eastern boundaries, TPO2013/2026 on the west side opposite the woodland in which the site is located.

The site is accessed via Range Road a Byway Open to all Traffic (BOAT) which stretches from Nine Mile Ride to the south and to Sandhurst Road in the north. Nine Mile Ride, Range Road and Sandhurst Road are historic rides and non-designated heritage assets. Range Road has the characteristics of a minor ride, being both

straight and extending through a wooded landscape. Both Nine Mile Ride and Sandhurst Road are Green Routes – see Policy CC03 and the Policies Map.

It appears the site entrance has been made fully accessible by felling of existing trees.

The drawing 'Site Layout as Proposed' – Ref. 2025-58/501 B – 8.12.25 does not show the actual boundary treatment - although a site boundary within which a permeable surface is shown is included.

As observed in the Site Visit images a close board fence is set back behind trees, although undoubtedly in the root protection areas of the boundary Oaks. The Arboricultural Method Statement includes a section on Boundary Treatments at paragraph 8.2 – which says *new fence post installation must be done by hand after trial digs ensure there are no major roots present*. I cannot see any fencing to the site boundaries on any of the drawings.

Development is located within the wooded site and within a glade of open space and outside of tree root protection areas. New planting is shown on a key but I cannot identify any on the plan.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

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.

A number of Valued Landscapes within Wokingham Borough were initially identified through a Topic Paper on Valued Landscapes by WBC dated January 2020 to respond to paragraph 187 (a) of the NPPF and prepared as part of the evidence base for the Emerging Local Plan Update and associated Policy NE6. Further work has recently been undertaken to make refinements to the boundaries of the valued landscape areas to update the assessment and this has now been published in the Valued Landscapes Assessment dated September 2024 as part of the evidence studies produced for the Local Plan Update: Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19).

It is noted the application site falls within 'Forest and Rides' Valued Landscape. The NPPF indicates that these landscapes will need to be protected and enhanced, so therefore we will need to understand how development on this site can address this aspect.

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 LCA M1 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands' a High quality landscape of high sensitivity with the lowest capacity for change.

The site contains a number of the Valuable Landscape Attributes for the M1 LCA;

- *Large expanse of woodland containing mature trees which provide a sense of place*
- *Distinctive pattern of interconnected woodland and forestry, interspersed with wet woodland*
- *Distinctive long straight historic roads following the route of rides through former Royal Forest of Windsor*
- *Localised areas of tranquillity and remoteness*
- *Continuous network of woodland and forestry which helps to provide physical and visual separation between settlements*
- *Settlement pattern of low density post war properties in large plots along straight rides and notably the occasional wooded gaps between areas of settlement*

Key Issues affecting the M1 LCA include;

- *Changes in deciduous woodland structure through loss of species diversity*
- *Continued pressure for expansion, infill and densification within existing settlements, leading to loss of woodland habitat*
- *Pressure for backland development at the rear of properties of Nine Mile Ride*
- *Increasing suburbanisation and use of close boarded fencing along the rides which is incongruous to the character of the area and also leads to tree losses which themselves harm the character of the area and the Green Route.*

NB Underlined sentences are where issues are applicable to the site.

The Landscape Strategy to LCA M1 is to **conserve and enhance** existing character of 'Finchampstead Forested and Settled Sands'. The key aspects to be conserved and actively managed are *the characteristic forestry and woodland*; rarer open landscapes of heath, mire, lakes and pasture, important wildlife habitats, historic landscape features associated with the Royal Forest and recreational use. In terms of development the aim is to conserve and enhance the rural setting and gaps between settlements and maintain the low density domestic character of development.

Landscape Guidelines applicable to the site include;

- *Conserve distinctive wooded skyline*
- *Conserve and enhance the wooded character of the landscape, continuing to promote appropriate management through natural regeneration*
- *Use appropriate tree planting to help integrate roads*

ARBORICULTURE

Policy CC03/2d require that trees, hedges and other landscape features are protected and retained through development. Policy CC03/3 also states that 'Development proposals which would result in the loss, fragmentation or isolation of areas of green infrastructure will not be acceptable.

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment report and drawing are submitted with the application.

The report states at paragraph 6.1;

The proposed site layout and all of its associated structures allow for the healthy retention of all the trees on the site itself, and within nearby adjacent sites; therefore, the arboricultural landscape character of the site will be retained

It goes on to say;

The implementation of the proposal does not lead to the requirement to prune any of the retained trees. There is no part of the new structure which will have tree canopies (from trees to be retained) overhanging it and the building works can progress safely without the need for any facilitation pruning

The Tree Survey Schedule identifies many 'A' category Oaks and Scots Pine. Tree species within the site also include Willow and Birch.

SUMMARY

As it stands the development is within an area of woodland continuously protected since 2005 (the time the TPO was made) It appears there is a high possibility that recent tree clearance within the site has already had an adverse impact on the integrity of the woodland and a resulting impact on the landscape character, and the Valued landscape, which includes from the fenced boundaries.

The proposals fail to protect and enhance the valued landscape or preserve the intrinsic beauty and character of the countryside, wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem... and of trees and woodland and is therefore contrary to NPPF 187a and b.

The development fails to comply with Policies TB21 of the Local Plan as the proposals have not demonstrated how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment including *landscape quality, landscape strategy, landscape sensitivity and key issues*.

It is clear that the development proposals fail to enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

Despite the AMS saying that all existing trees can be protected and retained, it is not clear from the plans that a sustainable relationship between the future site residents and the preservation of the remaining woodland can be achieved, see G11 (group G11 of trees).

In addition, how the site entrance/ threshold to the site will preserve the integrity of the 'A' quality Oaks T5 and T6. There is no information on the Proposed Site Layout to indicate how the root protection areas of T3, T4, T8 will be protected within the site entrance / open space /driveway, or indeed protected from increased activity on site from human habitation and wear and tear.

The proposals clearly do not address the key issues identified in the M1 LCA, or meet with the landscape strategy for M1 LCA which is to 'conserve and enhance the existing character' key aspects of which is the management of forestry and woodland. In terms of development the landscape strategy states the aim is to conserve and enhance the rural setting and gaps between settlements....

The proposals fail to meet with local and national planning policy, therefore I am unable to approve this application.

My understanding is the removal of the trees on the site is still being investigated and it would pre-emptive to approve this application until the investigation completed.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)			
N/A			
Date:	16.7.26	Signed:	BRC