

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect	To (Case Officer):	Adriana González
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	241567 – Rev. B
Address:	Land East of Longwater Road, Longwater Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3TS.		
Type of Development:	Major Dwellings (10+)		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of 40no. dwellings (Use Class C3), together with associated outdoor space and landscaping, drainage infrastructure, hard and soft landscaping, parking, access, and associated works.		
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ Recommend approval but with condition(s) & reason(s) **stated below**;
- ☐ Recommend approval with no conditions
- ☒ Recommend refusal for the reason(s) **stated below**;
- ☐ Negotiate the amendments **stated below**; or
- ☐ Request further information before determination as **stated below**.

Comments On Proposal

Final Landscape comments regarding PA 241567 – Land east of Longwater Road

Response to applicants letter Ref. MWB/HM/31048 – 5.2.2025 regarding the response to Tree and Landscape comments 20.1.2025

1. The development would highlight a further expansion beyond the settlement edge into the countryside well beyond the village hub.

Response: The site extends into the countryside and is within the River Blackwater Valued Landscape. The site not identified for development in the Local Plan. The site and the site adjacent to the east represents a buffer to the River Blackwater flood zone. It has been noted on site visits that the southern half of the site becomes very wet during the winter months and at other periods of peak rainfall.

There is no village hub within walking distance, (this is principally a sustainability issue) the nearest being located at California Crossroads 2km to the north, and the route between is not always paved / safe for pedestrians or cyclists. The lack of a

good public transport link means that cars will be the principal means of transport to access even the most basic of services.

2.The site contributes to the sense of separation between the settlements of Finchampstead and Eversley Cross to the south.

Response: The site is within 1km of Eversley Cross which is divided from the site by the River Blackwater and Flood Zones 2 & 3 which inhabits the land between the site and Eversley Cross. There is a smaller area between the site and the identified edge of Flood Zone 3 at 35m distance from the site and within 20m of Flood Zone 2.

There will be a major/adverse landscape and visual impact from loss of trees and hedgerow that provides a screening function and enhances the landscape character of the site setting. The addition of houses as a result of the considerable widening of the site entrance from 3m access to the PROW to a 22.5m wide access results in the erosion and resulting urbanisation and the sense of separation from the extension of the settlement edge which will be clear in views whilst travelling along Longwater Road in both directions.



Fig. 1 – shows the extent of the tree / hedge removals along Longwater Road

3.Impact on Scenic Quality and Naturalistic Character of the Remote River Corridor

I disagree that the proposal will ..*'form a proportionate extension of an existing settlement and would not affect the sparser development pattern of the open countryside side beyond the immediate vicinity of Finchampstead'*.

The site is within the countryside on the edge of the settlement, and acts as a buffer between Wood Moor estate and the flood zone of the river. The development would extend the settlement area further to the south and the flood zone, whereas on the west side of Longwater Road a similar site is used as a meadow and visual buffer setting for a linear development at Burnmoor Meadows and to the east a similar

sized field with trees that forms a continuation of the northern green edge next to the country park and Lower Sandhurst Road creating a continuation of the countryside.

The proposed development takes the southern edge of Finchampstead well beyond that of the established settlement edge of nearby Burnmoor Meadows and well beyond Moor Green Estate. The proposals fail to meet the Landscape Strategy for B2 LCA which is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern.

Built development would be extended into an important Valued Landscape (VL) and represent an incursion around the edges of the country park.

4. River Blackwater Valley Valued Landscape (VL)

The landscape addendum (edp4070_r016)...confirms that the landscape of the site does not contain any physical or perceptual qualities that take it out of the ordinary, beyond 'mere' countryside. Therefore, the site's contribution to the attributes of the proposed RBVL is limited, as it does not form an integral part of the wider proposed Valued Landscape.

Response: the site is located in the River Blackwater Valued Landscape

Valued Landscape Assessment

In January 2020 Wokingham Borough published a Topic Paper on Valued Landscapes to respond to paragraph 180 (a) of the NPPF and prepared as part of the evidence base for the Emerging Local Plan Update and associated Policy NE6. This initially identified a series of valued landscapes, however since then further work has been undertaken to make refinements to the boundaries of the valued landscape areas and to update the assessment. The revised document, Valued Landscapes Assessment (September 2024) has now been published as part of the evidence studies produced for the current consultation related to the Local Plan Update: Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19).

Paragraph 6.64 of the assessment provides further guidance on the wider assessment;

It should be noted that landscape is a continuum, and boundaries will often represent zones of transition, but to make the valued landscape designation clearer and to simplify its use, the boundaries have been refined so that, wherever possible, they follow identifiable features on the ground such as field boundaries or roads. A consequence of this is that the valued landscapes may, therefore, include some areas that may not 'exhibit any of the demonstrable physical features' but nonetheless form an integral part of the wider valued landscape. This is, of course, consistent with the Aylesbury Road, Wendover decision. (Paragraph 65). See excerpt below;

... The small site itself may not exhibit any of the demonstrable physical features but as long as it forms an integral part of a wider 'valued landscape' I consider that it would deserve protection under the auspices of paragraph 109 of the Framework. To require the small site itself to demonstrate the physical features in order to qualify as a valued landscape seems to me to be a formulaic, literal approach to the

interpretation of the question and an approach which could lead to anomalies. It could lead to individual parcels of land being examined for physical characteristics deterministic of value.'

The site was originally identified in the 'Blackwater River Valley' VL. The recent VL update includes the site within what is now known as the 'River Blackwater' VL. It is important to reiterate that there are indeed valued landscape features on the site in the Veteran trees. The B2 LCA identifies Valued Landscape Attributes for the majority of which relate directly to the site;

- *Rural riverine character of the Blackwater River and restored floodplain provide a sense of space.*
- *Ecologically valuable wetland habitats including BAP priority habitat eutrophic standing waters, lowland mixed deciduous woodland and floodplain grazing marsh, as well as remnant wet meadow and ancient woodland e.g. at Longwater Lane Meadow and Fleet Copse not affected by mineral extraction, which provide an important environment for flora and fauna.*
- *Restored gravel pit lakes which provide important ecological habitats and support a diverse range of birds, as well as opportunities for recreation.*
- *Undeveloped character of the valley, particularly in the floodplain, which provides a sense of naturalness and remoteness.*
- *Quiet rural lanes bordered by hedgerows which provide access to the area and enjoyment of the countryside.*
- *Recreational value of the Moor Green Lake Nature Reserve and the public rights of way including the promoted Blackwater Valley and Three Castles Paths which give access to the area and enjoyment of the river valley. Localised areas of tranquillity and peacefulness, with an experience of dark skies, particularly around the restored lakes, and away from the B3016.*
- *Views to the wooded backdrop of Fleet Copse and Finchampstead Ridges create an enclosed and secluded character, particularly around the Moor Green Lakes*

The applicant notes;

'Within the Valued Landscape are buffer zones. The buffer zones are determined by distance (100m, 50m within the Valued Landscape and 50m outside). The mapped boundaries of proposed Valued Landscapes include land within the buffer and policy acknowledges that the buffer zones may not exhibit all the attributes of the Valued Landscape or be inter-related physically or visually with the Valued Landscape. The buffer zone therefore acts as a transitional landscape.

Therefore, it is considered that the conclusions of the landscape addendum still apply. The value of the site has been assessed and remains consistent with these conclusions, irrespective of the location and extent of the identified buffer zones.

Please note within the Valued Landscape Assessments 2024 Section 6, the following;

6.65 The buffers that had been previously identified for each valued landscape in the Draft Plan Consultation (2020) have been removed following ground truthing by

council officers, as a more tightly defined boundary is considered more practical for implementation in decision taking.

The Valued Landscape Topic Paper 2020 and the recent update Valued Landscape Assessments and Policy NE6 from the LPU are in direct response to NPPF (what was paragraph 180a) and superseded by NPPF Dec. 24 paragraph 187a;

Planning Policies and decisions 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.*

5. Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan

This is a matter for the Planning Officer to address

6. Removal of Trees adjacent to Longwater Road



Fig. 2 – Extent of tree loss heading north along Longwater Road.

Loss and trees and hedgerow creates a significant break in the vegetated roadside character and will be obvious in the view. The development results in a Substantial/Major Magnitude of change on Medium/High sensitivity resulting in a Major/Moderate Adverse effect on the landscape character at Year 1. The development will have a Major/Adverse visual effect on the key receptors.

The applicant says its possible that one of the Oak trees to be removed along Longwater Lane could be retained – however it is not confirmed whether this is the case or not at the present time. The retention of one of the Oaks would clearly be

an advantage – although the impact of the tree and hedge removal would be such that it would take some time to reinstate the mature and overgrown native hedgerow.

It is difficult to see which tree could be retained – a cross reference to the Tree Protection Plan would be useful. The Engineer's drawing lacks clarity and it is very difficult to see the visibility splays and identify the actual trees in relation to the tree survey details. It looks as though 2 trees could potentially be retained.

The impact of the removals will be stark and particularly adverse in the setting of the green tunnel effect for vegetation whilst travelling along both directions of Longwater Road as can be seen in Figs. 1 and 2 of this document.

7. Tree Protection Plan – Please refer to drawing reference edp4070_d034d

If a tree will be retained then the Tree Protection Plan would need to be updated.

8. Views – North / South Routes, Public Right of Way and Neighbouring Dwellings

There are but a few views from the south side of the riverside path, of a few existing dwellings during the summer with more overt views during the winter. The southern part of the development will be screened by some of the existing vegetation, but any proposed landscape mitigation of the screening to the south of the site will be far outweighed by obvious and overt views from the northern PRoW that traverses the site east to west.

There is little in the way of proposed planting due to the presence of the significant easement to the south of the site and the need for visibility splays to be maintained with a clear view, meaning no landscape enhancements beyond 60cm height. It will not be possible to plant trees close to the northern verge along the PRoW due to overshadowing into the rear gardens of Moor Green estate and there are few trees along the south side of the PRoW.

It is not clear how much usable public open amenity space will be provided on the southern part of the site due to the location of the riparian buffer, the attenuation basin, and on the east side to the Veteran tree buffers. The photo on page 3 clearly shows that the view of the proposed dwellings will remove the perceived buffer between the site and Moor Green estate and be more prominent in the view.

9. Pumping Station – Access Treatment

In response to my previous comments the use of grasscrete to access the pumping station is accepted .

10. Proposed Access – Impact of Urbanisation, Loss of Trees, Lighting and Vehicular Activity

A significant increase in activity from the existing low key (unused?) farm gate to formation of the new entrance and the engineering, hard landscaping, installation of services and lighting, all this in close proximity to the access/egress points from Moor Green estate. The removal of a section of hedgerow and trees – the screening effect of which cannot be immediately replaced, will cause a noticeable change of use and urbanisation in the countryside and the Valued landscape.

11. Replacement Native Hedgerow

- *A Post-Development Habitat Plan (reference edp4070_d037d) – see Annex 2 - has been submitted which show the habitats to be lost within the site and the habitats to be created.*
- *Lost habitats are identified as being the trees and partial removal of the native hedgerow required to create access into the site and the required visibility (Red dots and dashed line).*
- *These trees will be replaced within the site (purple dots)*
- *native hedgerow will be reinstated to the south and north of the access and along in various locations within the development, including the edge of internal roads, on the corner plots fronting onto the public open space and along the edge of the pumping station – check visibility when proposed along internal roads. Can hedges line the back of visitor parking bays to create a less urban character – this is countryside.*

Please ensure that the development is as rural in character as possible – these are still large dwellings – but ensuring touches of cottagey rural character included will help the development to settle into its setting.

12. Boundary Treatments – Urbanisation Concerns

See drawing BDML01 B – see Annex 3.

- *Close board fencing would only be used between the rear gardens of the proposed dwellings. – Please include trellis tops of 300mm over 1.5m c/b fence between gardens and to front between houses to appear more open in the narrow space between dwellings and resemble cottages rather than urban style homes.*
- *Publicly visible boundaries will comprise either hedgerow planting or 1.8m high boundary walls with either a buff multi-stock brick with a light mortar or a red multi stock brick. The use of brick will be appropriate to an edge of settlement site and would be softened with trees and vegetation as shown on the Landscape Strategy plan (reference edp4070_d005L). – No objection but note my comments on cottagey feel to the place – lots of roses on outside of brick walls etc. No extended blank walls – half planted as a minimum.*
- *The applicant would be amenable to trellis tops on close board fencing between the garden areas – Good ! see above*

13. Drainage Easements – Tree Planting

In response to my query regarding the required distance for tree planting in relation to the easement – as I suspected this is a key constraint to planting medium, and large scale native trees to the southern and western boundaries, where only small fruit trees can be planted at 3m from the pipeline, and larger native trees at least 6m from the pipeline. This may affect the ability to provide more screening/tree planting enhancements particularly screening development from views to the southern riverside path.

As there is a lack of space for native trees to the south of the site more native trees should be used to the north of the site replacing non-native trees specified, and trees

can be planted on the south side of the access road. I don't understand the use of 'native hedgerow poor condition' and 'native hedgerow moderate condition' on Dwg. BDML01B – Annex 3 – which is a proposed planting drawing. I suggest non-native trees and cultivars be placed within the development, – and in gardens although its possible that these trees will not be retained. All street tree planting should be outside front gardens and in the public realm within a planted strip and managed by a management company to assure their longevity. There is surely scope for a few more street trees in N-S routes?

14. Pumping Station – Appearance and Size

It is noted that the majority of equipment will be located below ground with only a small cabinet structure(s) visible, to be screened by native hedgerow planting shown on the Landscape Strategy. Details of the final appearance of the pumping station perimeter and equipment could be secured via condition.- Noted

15. Riparian Zone and Tree Buffers

In response to my query regarding the 5m riparian buffer.

The tree and riparian zones are not proposed to be fenced off following completion of the development as we are not aware of any requirement for these areas to be fenced off under national or local planning policies, with the exception of appropriate protection during the construction phase – No objection

16. Size of the Attenuation Basin and Usability of Public Open Space

The proposed layout includes a large area of shared open space for the benefit of future residents and those already living in the local area, accommodating almost half of the development area (excluding the right of way).

It is not uncommon for seasonal ponds to form part of the landscaping strategy for a development site as they are considered to add interest to what would otherwise be open grassland which characterises the remainder of the open space. –

Concerns over the amount of space the basin covers compared to the amount of available amenity space.

I am unable to support the application due to the adverse impact on the countryside, and the River Blackwater Valued Landscape.

CONDITIONS

CL 5 – Hard and Soft Landscaping Condition - which must allow for the Veteran tree Buffer Zones to be planted and managed in a way that is in accordance with the **Government Standing Advice on Veteran Trees**. The Landscape Proposals shall also include detailed design proposals (cross sections) for the Attenuation basin no steeper than 1:3, and planting proposals.

CL6 – Retention of existing trees and shrubs – to include Veteran trees on the site and their appropriate Buffer Zones

CL8 - Protection of Existing Trees – Major Sites

CL9 – Landscape Management and Maintenance – including management of the Veteran trees and their Buffer Zones, the Attenuation basin and the on site ditch and Riparian Zone.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Date:	13. 2.25	Signed:	B. Crafer
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