

PLANNING REF : 251310
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Castle Cottage
: Bunces Shaw Road, Farley Hill, Berkshire
: RG7 1UU
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Richard Roberts
DATE SUBMITTED : 20/06/2025

COMMENTS:

In writing, I express my unequivocal opposition to the proposed development. This project perpetuates the excessive development of the local area, causing irreparable damage to the local ecosystem and the hamlet of Farley Hill. Numerous factors render this development unsuitable for this location, particularly considering the substantial and detrimental impact of the previous building programme on the area.

The proposed site is greenfield land, a resource of immense value and necessity for the well-being of the local fauna, flora, and existing community. Such a development would be utterly incompatible with the local character and would be susceptible to flood risk, as well as exacerbating the already strained traffic load on the overburdened infrastructure.

The area has already ceded a significant portion of its land to development, necessitating a point at which we cease eroding the remaining pristine landscape. There are numerous other reasons why I believe the environmental impact study should unequivocally conclude that this land is simply not suitable for development, including:

Unsustainable Development in a Hamlet Setting

Farley Hill is a small, rural hamlet, a sensitive environmental area, designated as an Area of Special Character, comprising farm fields and areas of woodland.

The development of 650 homes, encompassing a retirement village and a care home, would irrevocably alter the hamlet's character. This transformation would significantly diminish its rural identity and substantially strain its infrastructure.

The scale of the proposed development and the infrastructure necessary to support it are wholly out of character with the hamlet and countryside setting.

The increase in traffic, noise and light pollution would permanently damage the rural character and value of the area.

The site itself is not connected to safe walking or cycling links, thereby increasing car dependency - something which is openly acknowledged by the Council in previous similar proposals.

Duplication of Facilities

The leisure and community facilities outlined in the proposal are already situated less than a mile away, adjacent to Bohunt School. Consequently, the proposed sacrifice of greenfield land to recreate

what already exists lacks logical justification.

Destruction of Wildlife Habitat

Farley Hill boasts a remarkably diverse ecosystem, home to great spotted woodpeckers, nuthatches, water voles, and even red squirrels. Given the substantial amount of farmland in the vicinity that has already been encroached upon by development, this project poses a significant threat to the preservation of the last remaining contiguous habitat we possess.

Ecological surveys referenced by the developer themselves indicate the necessity of further assessments of breeding birds and other species, underscoring the heightened sensitivity of this site.

The loss of valuable agricultural land and meadows would diminish the foraging habitats for mammals and birds.

Habitats of paramount significance, such as these ancient woodlands and hedgerows, would be adversely affected, notwithstanding the proposed measures of 'retention' outlined in the plans.

Threat to Birds of Prey and General Biodiversity

Farley Hill is home to a substantial number of birds of prey, such as red kites and buzzards, whose presence is a testament to years of successful conservation efforts. However, the proposed development poses a direct threat to their habitat:

Suitable Habitat: This area encompasses ancient woodlands, such as Westwood Copse and Claypits Wood, hedgerows, and open fields, which are pivotal in sustaining local raptor and owl populations.

Food Availability: The local food chain, encompassing populations of rodents and rabbits, sustains the bird of prey communities. Disruption of these ecosystems will have detrimental ecological consequences.

Conservation Success: The resurgence of red kites stands as one of the most celebrated conservation achievements in the United Kingdom. Farley Hill plays a pivotal role in providing essential nesting and foraging habitats for these magnificent birds. The success of this initiative is facilitated by the protection of woodlands and open countryside, which serve as vital resources for the red kite population.

The magnitude of this development, spanning over 38 hectares of rural land, presents a significant challenge to these established populations, directly opposing national biodiversity objectives.

Increased Pollution

This development will result in the increase of light and noise pollution and an increase of emissions in a sensitive ecological area.

Over-development of the Surrounding Area

To this point, 97% of Wokingham developments have occurred in the south of the borough (Arborfield, Shinfield, and Barkham), adding significant stresses to the local landscape and impacting the lives

of the existing communities.

A total of 899 houses were needed/planned up to 2036, yet already 3,500 are in process which has resulted in a huge environmental impact on the area already.

With all of this context, and in light of the significant over-development of the local area, it is difficult to appreciate why there is an urgent need for this project when the price to be paid by the existing communities, landscape and ecology is so significant. We risk losing something that can never be recreated, when the local area has already borne much more of the development load that would be fair and appropriate. There is also clear precedent for refusal of such developments in the Arborfield area, such as:

In May of this year, a proposal was refused on the grounds that the proposed development site was a greenfield in open countryside, and the character and scale of the development was 'out of keeping'.

This objection also cited the unsustainable reliance on cars and the risk of flooding due to the proximity of the river concerns that were echoed in relation to the Blackcroft Farm proposal.

I believe that the current proposal would contravene the local planning policy of protecting agricultural land and rural settlement boundaries.

In summary, the landscape, ecology and character of Farley Hill would be dramatically impacted were this proposal to be approved.

The development we have seen and are continuing to see across this local area has already changed the landscape irrevocably, and this project threatens to remove one of the very few areas of green space so important to the wellbeing of the community and the varied wildlife ecosystem it supports. The area has taken a significant hit with the many developments that have added several thousand new homes in a very short period of time - surely there needs to be a re-assessment of the true sustainability of new developments otherwise we risk negatively impacting the lives of all who live in this area. Surely, enough is enough - though even if it were necessary to continue the building, there are a multitude of reasons outlined above why this should not happen at Blackcroft Farm.