

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251135
Site Address:	The Old Thatch, Lower Sandhurst Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3TH
Expiry Date:	7 August 2025
Site Visit Date:	01/11/2024
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of 1 no. detached self- build dwelling and carport with associated landscaping following demolition of the existing dwelling and outbuildings.	

PLANNING POLICY	
National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB07 – Internal Space Standards TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development
Joint Minerals and Waste Plan (JMWP)	DM1 - Sustainable Development DM2 - Climate Change – Mitigation and Adaptation
Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS5 – Development in the countryside CE7 – Low carbon and renewable energy generation CE8 – Protecting renewable energy generation C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design FD2 – Sustainable drainage

(LPU)	NE5 – Landscape and design NE6 – Valued landscapes DH1 – Place making and quality design
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
242731	Pre-application advice for the proposed erection of 1 no. detached dwelling and carport with associated landscaping following demolition of the existing dwelling and outbuildings.	Replied, 28/01/2025
080621	Proposed erection of single storey rear extension, plus demolition of existing single storey extension.	Approved, 07/03/2008
996/71	Single storey extensions.	Approved, 28/09/1967
R/186/67	Alterations and additions to existing private house to provide extra Bedrooms & bathrooms.	Approved, 30/09/1971

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Environmental Health – No objections.
WBC Drainage – No objections, subject to a condition.
WBC Highways – No objections, subject to conditions.
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objections, subject to conditions.
WBC Public Rights Of Way – No comments received.
WBC CIL – No comments received.
WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received.
WBC Ecology Newts – No comments received.
WBC Ecology – No comments received.

External

None consulted.

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Finchampstead Parish Council – No objections, subject to a condition that any damage done to the byway as a result of the proposed works, is restored back to its original state after the works are completed.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	Red Barn House, RG45 6AH - A neighbouring resident has raised concerns that the submitted Location Map is inaccurate. They state that the northern blue rectangle shown on the plan incorrectly suggests that part of the

	property known as <i>Rorkes Drift</i> forms part of <i>The Old Thatch</i> . However, this area is in fact within the ownership of <i>Rorkes Drift</i> , as correctly shown on the submitted Coloured Site Plan. <u>Officer comment:</u> <i>The granting of planning permission would not authorise the applicant to gain access or carry out any works on, over or under their neighbour's land or property without first obtaining their consent, and does not obviate the need for compliance with the requirements of the Party Wall etc. Act 1996.</i>
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APPRAISAL

Site Description and Proposed Development:

The application site comprises a two-storey detached dwelling situated on the eastern side of Drift Lane, within a rural area designated as countryside. The site's location and surroundings are primarily characterised by open fields, dense woodland, and sparse development, contributing to its distinctly rural and secluded nature.

This application proposes the erection of a detached two-storey, four-bedroom dwelling with a carport and associated landscaping, following the demolition of the existing dwelling and outbuildings.

Principle of Development:

Paragraph 12 of the NPPF states that 'the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making.'

Section 70[2] of the TCPA 1990 & 38[6] of the PCPA 2004 establish that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The NPPF is a significant material consideration but it does not displace the primacy of the development plan as the starting point for decision making.

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Policy CC02 of the MDD Local Plan and CP9 of the Core Strategy define development limits across the Borough including a hierarchy of major, modest and limited locations; which typically relates to access to services and the density of the area.

Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy relates to proposals outside such development limits. It is a restrictive policy designed to protect the separate identity of settlements

and maintain the quality of the environment. Additionally, paragraph 180 (b) of the NPPF acknowledges as a core principle the value of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and enhancing the natural environment.

The Council's Emerging Local Plan Update has been submitted to the Secretary of State for examination by an independent Planning Inspector. In accordance with paragraph 49 of the NPPF (2024), emerging policies may be given moderate weight where relevant, particularly where they are consistent with national policy and subject to limited unresolved objections.

Policy SS5 of the Wokingham Borough Emerging Local Plan states that all development proposals within the countryside must take a landscape led approach to development in accordance with Policy NE5: Landscape and design and, where applicable:

- a) Contribute to and enhance the local, natural and historic environment;
- b) Be of a scale, nature and location within the countryside that is appropriate with regard to its use;
Be sited and designed to minimise visual impact;
- c) Be sited and designed to minimise visual impact;

Development proposals in the countryside will in general only be supported for the types of development set out below:

The site is located in the countryside and therefore must be assessed against Policy CP11. The policy states that proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where inter alia:

- 5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i) Bring about environmental improvements; or
 - ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.

Building on the Core Strategy, Figure 8.19 within Section 8 of the Borough Design Guide offers detailed guidance on development within the countryside, including a recommended volume increase limit for replacement dwellings. It suggests that up to a 50% increase in volume is acceptable for a single-storey development compared to the original building. While this figure serves as a guideline, the submitted planning statement confirms that the proposed dwelling would represent a 154.5% increase in volume - substantially exceeding the recommended limit, even when considering the existing dwelling's two-storey form.

The increase in the ridge height of the building is discussed in detail below, but this would further add to the cumulative increase in size and volume of the dwelling and would therefore result in an inappropriate increases scale and form of the original building.

Consequently, the proposal fails to comply with Policy CP11, which restricts development in the countryside unless specific criteria are met. In the case of replacement dwellings, such proposals must either bring environmental

improvements or avoid inappropriate increases in scale, form, or footprint. The submitted scheme represents a substantial increase in volume - approximately 154.5% - which significantly exceeds the guideline set out in the Borough Design Guide, even accounting for the existing two-storey form. Coupled with the increased ridge height and overall massing, the proposal constitutes an inappropriate escalation in scale and form. As such, the development is contrary to Policy CP11, Policy SS5 and the overarching principles within section 12 of the NPPF which seek to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Character of the Area:

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that 'maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment'.

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that development must be appropriate in terms of its scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area in which it is located and must be of high-quality design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land uses and occupiers.

Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy refers to maintaining the quality of the environment and restricting development within the countryside.

Policy SS1 d) of the Wokingham Borough Emerging Local Plan highlights that development proposals will be expected to maintain, enhance or create a high quality and safe environment which contributes positively to the character and identity of the area.

Policy DH1 of the Wokingham Borough Emerging Local Plan requires new development must be of high-quality design to endure over the lifetime of the development and create a strong sense of place. Specifically, part (d) notes requires that development must respect and enhance the local, natural, and historic character of the area, paying particular attention to siting, layout, urban grain, rhythm, density, height, scale, bulk, massing, proportion, enclosures, materials, and detailing. It should also embrace opportunities for innovative design and new technology.

The application site is situated within a rural setting, predominantly surrounded by open fields and sporadic development. To the south, a relatively formalised row of residential properties along Lower Sandhurst Road is evident. These dwellings are predominantly two storeys in height, set within substantial plots and are arranged in a layout that follows a gently curved yet predominantly linear alignment, contributing to a sense of spaciousness and formality.

In contrast, Drift Lane presents a markedly different character. The lane is largely undeveloped, featuring a mix of open fields and dense woodland. Along its length, only two other dwellings (excluding the application site) front onto the road, reinforcing the lane's more secluded and undeveloped nature. This distinction highlights the site's rural and relatively isolated context.

This application follows a pre-application submission from October 2024 for a similar scheme. It was generally advised that the principle of a replacement dwelling could

be acceptable, provided that the scheme was revised to reduce its scale and bulk, break up the overall massing, and position the building further back from Drift Lane.

The existing dwelling, while two storeys in height and occupying a slightly elevated position, close to the edge of Drift Lane, retains a modest and recessive appearance within the rural landscape. This is attributed to several key design features. The building's form is broken up through a series of projections, recesses, and stepped elements, which help to articulate the facade and reduce the overall visual bulk. The use of a hipped roof, combined with traditional architectural features such as thatched roofing, further softens the massing and integrates the dwelling into its setting.

Additionally, the dwelling is constructed on a sloping gradient, with the northern elevation presenting a modest eaves height of approximately 2.5 metres, gradually increasing to a ridge height of around 6.4 metres. This built form and design contributes to a relatively low profile when viewed from the public realm. Furthermore, mature boundary vegetation along the frontage provides effective screening, reinforcing the building's subdued and unobtrusive character, which sits comfortably within its rural context.

In contrast, the proposed manor house-style dwelling would introduce a significantly larger and more imposing built form in a similarly prominent – only 8 metres from the highway, along this rural stretch of Drift Lane. While the architectural style itself is not necessarily out of keeping, given the range of dwelling designs in the wider area, the scale, height, and proportions of the proposed development would result in a dwelling that appears overly dominant in this sensitive countryside setting. The proposed building would feature an unbroken facade extending approximately 19.4 metres in width, and a ridge height reaching around 8.6 metres - both of which markedly exceed the scale of the existing dwelling.

Furthermore, the submitted drawings indicate the proposal seeks to level the naturally sloping site which would introduce an engineered and formal ground profile, eliminating the subtle variations in height that help integrate the built form into the setting. The effect would be to raise portions of the building above existing ground levels, particularly at the lower end of the slope, thereby increasing its perceived height and bulk when viewed from the road. This would further erode the site's rural character and intensify the dwelling's visual prominence, ultimately resulting in a development that would jar with the informal character and appearance along this rural stretch of Drift Lane.

The supporting planning statement has drawn references to several recently constructed properties within the surrounding area, including 'Broomfield' approved in 2018 under planning ref.173566 located south-west of the application site some 50 metres away. Under application reference 173566, a two-storey replacement dwelling was approved in February 2018, replacing a one-and-a-half-storey house. The new dwelling taller 8.9 high dwelling that was 212% increase in volume compared to the original dwelling.

Each application is assessed on its own merits and despite the proximity of the sites, the character of the application site is distinctly different from that of the Broomfield site, which contributed to the case officer's justification for the larger dwelling in the

earlier application. Consequently, the differences in site characteristics must be carefully considered when evaluating the acceptability of the proposed increase in scale and volume.

Although Broomfield is accessed via Drift Lane, the site is positioned at the junction of Drift Lane and Lower Sandhurst Road, occupying a prominent location that is clearly read within the context of Lower Sandhurst Road. This is further emphasised by the orientation of the dwelling, which faces directly onto Lower Sandhurst Road. As noted previously, dwellings along Lower Sandhurst Road are typically two storeys in height, set well back from the highway, and occupy substantial plots with considerable footprints. These characteristics informed the justification provided by the previous case officer for approving a larger replacement dwelling at Broomfield, exceeding the guideline volume increases.

The previous Case Officer's report highlighted that the original dwelling at Broomfield was modest in scale compared to other properties along Lower Sandhurst Road. In this specific instance, it was considered that a strict application of countryside policies would have resulted in a replacement building that appeared disproportionately small relative to neighbouring dwellings. The approved dwelling was therefore considered more in keeping with the scale and character of similarly sized developments on Lower Sandhurst Road, aligning well with the established pattern of development. Additionally, the approved dwelling was centrally located within the plot, maintaining a significant separation from both Lower Sandhurst Road and Drift Lane, further contributing to its compatibility with the area.

In contrast, the application site under consideration is located approximately 100 meters away from Lower Sandhurst Road and adopts a distinctly more rural character. Unlike Broomfield, which is prominently positioned and visually tied to the character of Lower Sandhurst Road, the application site is situated along Drift Lane - a much quieter, less formal road with sparse development.

As such, the specific circumstances and context of Broomfield do not provide a suitable basis for justifying a significant increase in size and scale at the application site.

The supporting Planning Statement also refers to two other replacement dwellings located within designated countryside - namely, Barn Farm in Hurst (planning ref: 221221) and Foxley Farm in Binfield (allowed on appeal under APP/X0360/W/20/3252719). However, both sites are located in separate villages, outside of Finchampstead, and are not in close proximity to the application site. Each is subject to its own unique context, landscape character, and site-specific planning considerations. As such, they do not carry material weight in the assessment of the current proposal.

It is acknowledged that two-storey dwellings of comparable footprint and scale exist further along Drift Lane, north-east of the application site, notably at Hilton House and Red Barn House. However, in both cases, these properties are set significantly back from the lane within their respective grounds and are well-screened by mature landscaping. As a result, they have very limited visual presence in the street scene, with only their gated accesses being readily visible from the public realm. Their

discreet siting and screening ensure that their scale does not intrude upon or dominate the rural character of the lane, unlike the current proposal, which would occupy a more visually prominent position closer to the highway.

Overall, the proposed replacement dwelling, by virtue of its increased scale, height, and expansive unbroken frontage, along with the levelling of the sloping site, would result in a visually dominant and overly engineered form of development. This would appear incongruous and intrusive in its rural setting, eroding the informal and natural character of this part of Drift Lane. The proposal would therefore fail to respect the character and appearance of the countryside, contrary to Policies CP1, CP3, and CP11 of the Core Strategy (2010), Policies CC01 and CC02 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014), section 8 of the Borough Design Guide SPD, and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

The proposed replacement dwelling, by virtue of its increased scale, height, and expansive unbroken frontage, along with the flattening of the natural slope to create an engineered ground level, would result in a visually dominant and overly formal form of development. This would appear incongruous and intrusive in its rural setting, eroding the informal and natural character of this part of Drift Lane. The proposal would therefore fail to respect the character and appearance of the countryside, contrary to Policies CP1, CP3, and CP11 of the Core Strategy (2010), Policies CC01 and CC02 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014), Policies SS1, SS5 and DH1 of the Wokingham Borough Emerging Local Plan (2025), section 8 of the Borough Design Guide SPD, and Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024).

Separately, the proposed carport is modest in both size and scale, designed with an open structure that minimizes visual intrusion. Given its transparency and lightweight appearance, it would preserve the openness and rural character of the surrounding countryside.

Housing Amenity:

Internal amenity

Policy TB07 of the MDD and R17 of the SPD require adequate internal space to ensure the layout and size achieves good internal amenity. A minimum standard of 97m² applies for a four-bedroom, two storey dwelling. The internal gross floor area would comply with this requirement, and as such there is no objection in terms of adequate internal space.

In terms of bedroom sizes, the Technical Housing Standards requires that a dwelling with more than one bedroom should have a main bedroom (double), which is to have a minimum area of 11.5sqm. Secondary of single bedrooms should have a minimum area of 7.5sqm and living spaces should have a minimum area of 27sqm. There should also be provision for storage. Based on the submitted floors plans, the proposed bedrooms would comply with the national space standards for double occupancy and single occupancy rooms. The living spaces would also comply with the above requirements.

R18 of the Borough Design Guide SPD also requires sufficient sunlight and daylight

to new properties, with dwellings afforded a reasonable dual outlook and southern aspect. The proposed dwelling would include sufficient openings to the front and rear elevations which will provide natural light into the habitable rooms

External amenity

R16 of the SPD requires a minimum depth of 11m for rear gardens and a 1m setback on the site boundary to allow access thereto. The proposal would meet the above requirements; therefore, no objections are raised.

Neighbouring Amenity:

The proposed dwelling would be suitably located away from any neighbouring residential properties not to pose any overlooking, overbearing or loss of light concerns.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Vehicle Parking

This proposal will replace the existing dwelling and outbuildings with the proposed dwelling with 10 habitable rooms and a new carport of dimensions 6.75m x 6.75m. The Council's Highways Officer has reviewed this application and considers that the four off-street parking spaces would be sufficient for a dwelling of this size, and in accordance with the council's Parking Standards. As such, there are no highways issues.

Access and Manoeuvring

The existing site access via Drift Lane is retained. As the access point will be retained and the proposed turning area will likely be sufficient for emergency vehicles to manoeuvre, the Highways Officer assumes the existing services to be retained, which is acceptable.

Meanwhile, as Drift Lane is not adopted highway, the applicant shall include the access to Drift Lane in the proposed red line.

Sustainability

In view of the site is already in use for the existing dwelling, the Highways Officer would have no objections on site sustainability for the replacement dwelling.

No additional traffic impact will be anticipated from the replacement of dwelling.

Cycle Provisions

According to the WBC Parking Standards, three cycle parking allocation will be required per dwelling with 6+ habitable rooms. The Highway Officer advises that details of secured and covered cycle store of appropriate sizes should be provided. A suitable condition will be attached to any approval.

Waste collection

No information has been provided on refuse collection. However, it has been assumed that refuse would be collected from Nash Grove Lane as is the current arrangement. Each dwelling is within acceptable carrying distance has set out in

Manual for Streets which is welcome.

Flooding and Drainage:

The proposed development is in Flood zone 1 according to the Environment Agency mapping with a low risk of surface water flooding. The Council's Drainage Officer has reviewed the application and has noted that the drainage details have not been provided and the existing drainage details has not been mentioned. The Drainage Officer has subsequently recommended a condition be implemented which secures details of the surface water drainage system of the site prior to the commencement of development. A suitable condition would be attached to any approval.

Landscape and Trees:

The site is located in the countryside, set back from Lower Sandhurst Road which is set back from Moor Green Country Park, a series of lakes associated with historic gravel pit restoration and the flood plain of the river Blackwater. There are trees within and close to the site, and to the NW boundary is an area of BAP priority broadleaved and wet woodland.

Where trees are present on the site, Policy CC03d requires that they are retained and protected. Policy TB21 also states that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Councils Landscape Character Assessment, and shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

The site spans two moderate-quality landscape character areas (LCAs): the northern part lies within LCA M1 (Finchampstead Ridges Forested and Settled Sands) and the southern part within LCA B1 (Blackwater River Valley with Open Water). Both areas have moderate sensitivity and limited capacity for change. Key valued attributes include woodland, traditional pasture, wetland habitats, recreation opportunities, and areas of tranquillity. The site is also within the 'Forest and Rides' Valued Landscape, where development must carefully consider landscape quality, scenic value, rarity, conservation, recreation, and perceptual qualities. Proposals are only supported if they protect, integrate with, or enhance these special landscape features, unless overriding benefits justify harm.

The Trees and Landscape Officer has reviewed the application and provided the following observations:

The site, accessed via Drift Lane and set back north of Lower Sandhurst Road, features mature trees typical of Drift Lane's character, which extends into the site. While no trees within the site are protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) and the site is outside the Conservation Area, it lies within a Valued Landscape where trees are a key element.

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) and supporting plans - including a Tree Constraints Plan, Tree Protection Plan (TPP), and Arboricultural Method Statement (AMS) - have been submitted. The AIA identifies numerous mature, high-quality trees along Drift Lane that may be at risk during construction traffic movements. However,

the report lacks details on tree canopy heights over the lane, which is necessary to assess whether pruning will be required to protect trees from vehicle strikes.

The AIA confirms the proposed felling of five category 'C' trees (T16 Beech, T17 Apple, T18 Fig, T38 Hazel, T40 Holly). Development incursions affecting trees are noted: reconfiguration of the driveway impacts T34 (category 'A' Oak), and the patio encroaches on G2 Beech. No mitigation details are provided. The Officer expects the use of Cellweb or similar ground protection under the driveway, with gravel surfacing preferred over block paving to respect the rural context. Further clarification is needed on the patio's construction, including retaining walls, edging, and any proposed level changes.

No information is provided regarding surfacing or ground protection along Drift Lane itself.

The AIA/AMS includes details of demolition and construction phases, with tree protection fencing shown for both.

While overall tree impacts are expected to be minimal, the Officer requests updated Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan documents (to be secured by condition CL7) addressing:

- Proposed driveway and patio surfacing and installation methods
- Potential canopy lifting/pruning for high-quality Drift Lane trees
- Designation of materials storage and chemical mixing areas

Additionally, a detailed Landscape Scheme is required, illustrating hard and soft landscaping and replacement planting for trees lost through development, in accordance with Policies CC03e and TB21 of the Local Plan. It is considered that appropriate conditions can be imposed on any approval to satisfactorily address the above comments.

Ecology:

The site is located in habitat which matches where bat roosts have previously been found in the borough and is surrounded by a habitat suitable for use by foraging and commuting bats including large, connected trees that border Drift Lane.

The supporting Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Pro Vision Ecology, March 2025, ref: 8780) identified bat droppings in the roof void of the main dwelling, confirming it as a bat roost requiring further surveys. A follow-up Ecological Assessment (July 2025) confirmed soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared bats roosting in the building. Demolition will destroy these roosts, so a Natural England Mitigation Licence is required before work commences. A condition requiring this licence would be attached to any approval.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):

When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010):

In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Refusal
Date:	4 August 2025
Earliest date for decision:	5 June 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	07.08.25