

MEMORANDUM

From:	Brigitte Crafer Landscape Architect		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	252257
Address:	Ladds Garden Village, Bath Road, Hare Hatch, Wokingham, RG10 9SB.		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of 19no. dwellings with associated landscaping and access following demolition of existing buildings.		
Type of Development:	Major Dwellings (10+)		
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 northern site boundary faces Bath Road A4 which is a Green Route. The west site boundary is adjacent to 'Hare Hatch Area of Special Character' (ASC), to the southern boundary are buildings associated with a plant nursery/landscaping business to the eastern site boundary is an access to the remaining landscape business.

The site is located in the countryside and the Green Belt,

Landscape Character and Valued Landscapes

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*' WBC September 2024 as part of the evidence studies produced for the current consultation related to the Local Plan Update: Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19).

The application site falls within 'Bowsey Hill' 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. The valued landscape is not so much about character but the attributes of the character area which in this case include; woodland, some listed buildings between garden centres, A4 Green Route – which the scheme must enhance. NB. The location of site in the Valued Landscape is not mentioned.

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 G1 'Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes' a moderate quality landscape of moderate sensitivity and a modest capacity for change.

G1 LCA is summarised as follows; A gently sloping landform supporting a farmed landscape with an intimate mosaic of arable fields and pasture interspersed with small woodland blocks. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of rural hamlets, scattered farmsteads and large manor houses. The limits of the character area have been influenced by human landscape elements and predominantly follow the line of fields and secondary roads.

Key characteristics include the following pertinent to the site;

A scattered rural settlement pattern of small linear villages and hamlets which align roads or form small clusters at crossroads as well as individual farmsteads, stud farms and large manors. These are connected by a network of leafy rural lanes crossing the landscape.

Valuable Landscape Attributes;

- *Distinctly rural farmed and estate character due to the mosaic of irregular fields of varied size, woodland blocks and sparse settlement pattern of hamlets, villages and manors connected by leafy rural lanes.*
- *Numerous mixed and deciduous woodlands including BAP priority habitats and semi-natural ancient woodland, which provides valuable habitats.*
- *Distinctiveness of the historic built form in the villages, farmsteads and manors.*
- *Parkland landscapes and veteran trees of large Georgian and Victorian manor houses which have a localised impact on landscape character and contribute to the sense of place.*
- *Strong sense of intimacy and enclosure due to undulating topography and scattered woodlands which subdivide the landscape.*
- *Occasional views to the prominent wooded horizon provided by F1: 'Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls'.*

LCA G1 Key issues include;

Hedgerow loss associated with the expansion of fields and agricultural intensification due to the declining viability of small farms.

Lack of the recruitment of young trees (through natural regeneration or planting) required to rebalance the age structure of parkland and hedgerow trees is an on-going threat to the character of the landscape.

Demand for new residential expansion, infill and densification of existing settlements, inside and outside the area, eroding the rural character and tranquillity of the area and potentially eroding the historic settlement form of the villages, hamlets, farmsteads and manors.

Commercial development pressure along the A4 Bath Road eroding rural character and settlement form.

The Landscape Strategy for LCA G1 is; 'to conserve and enhance the existing character notable the varied farmed landscape and field boundaries, scattered semi-natural woodlands, and parkland landscapes, the robustness of which has declined. Open views and prominent wooded horizon provided by the adjacent character area F1 Bowsey Hill Wooded Chalk Knolls should be maintained. In terms of development the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern and historic built form of the villages, hamlets, farmsteads and manors.

The Landscape Guidelines include;

Conserve the individual identity of the villages and hamlets, farmsteads and manors through control of new development. In particular, avoid the spread of linear development along the A4.

Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity and intimate character of the landscape through the management of development.

Site Setting

The setting of this previously developed site is along what is known as the 'Floral Mile', a stretch along the A4 between Wargrave Nursery Plant Centre south of Mumbrey Hill extending eastwards to Scarletts Barn which contains several garden centres and business supporting landscaping services. These businesses line the A4 on both sides between which are residential dwellings facing or side onto the road. There are low groupings of dwellings, and often single detached some of which are listed. In some cases are dwellings mixed with commercial business units. There are no examples of residential dwellings in groups of over 10.

In other parts of the settlement such as the Area of Special Character (ASC), dwellings are often set back from the A4 behind garden centres and there are graded dwellings within the mix set including The Horse and Groom pub, and Hillhouse with a couple of listed barns between. North of the A4 are Hare Hatch Grange and Hare Hatch House.

Within the ASC and just set back from the A4 are areas of woodland including ancient, a large area of woodland protected by TPO 2/1967. Just to the SE of the site is an area of Ancient Woodland known as Scarletts Wood. Within the ASC and close to the site are many trees identified as Veteran by the Wokingham District

Veteran Tree Association. The woodland and other trees are important components of the LCA and the site setting.

There are footpaths leading from the A4 to the north and south and although none are very close to the site, there is an extended track within the SW of the site that leads south to Milley Lane and Scarletts Lane. North of the A4 close to the site are footpaths that link Tag Lane with PRoW WARG6 which adjoins Blakes Road.

The site was once part of a garden centre. It consists of a large area of tarmac parking with some tree planting between and either side of the main access. Trees line the northern site boundary and there is planting either side of the entrance, the density of the trees and landscaping does not screen the site from view. There is a pond just set back from the road, and roadside ditches.

Arboricultural Information

A report titled BS5837:2012 TREE SURVEY AND ARBORICULTURAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT- Ladds Garden Centre, Bath Road, Hare Hatch, RG10 9SB, tree report dated 28.7.25 Ref. GHA/DS/160923:25 and an Arboricultural Impact Assessment Rev. A – September 2025 a drawing showing the location of existing trees to be retained and those to be felled overlaid with the proposed site layout for 19 dwellings.

A total of 32 individual trees and groups of trees are surveyed including 1 'A' category, 10 'B' category, 19 'C' category, 2 'U' category. Of this there are 11 individual and groups of trees are proposed for removal and a section of a tree group G31.

The report states that no part of the development will have tree canopies overhanging and there is no need for facilitation pruning. All of the proposed dwellings are outside of tree root protection and there are no below ground constraints.

The proposed LAP play area is within the RPA of T2 'A' quality Lime tree. It is advised that porous materials must be used to ensure that rainwater can penetrate the soil beneath the new surfacing – whatever that might be. Play equipment must be installed in locations away from significant roots that might be present. No advice regarding service routes with no information available at the time.

It is stated that all the trees lost to development will be replaced.

Tree species on the site include mostly native; Sycamore, Lime, Pine , Ash, Horse Chestnut, Hazel, Hawthorn, Cedar, Hornbeam, Poplar, Elm, and exotics including Eucalyptus, Thuja, Leyland Cypress.

Around the pond trees include a group of Sycamore G31 located in front of the Cypress hedge G32 will be retained. In addition, T29 Ash and T28 Cypress will be removed to facilitate development.

Boundary vegetation is offsite but contributes to the setting; Willow and Poplar scrub (G24) will be retained along the western boundary and they form a backdrop to Plots 15-19. The RPAs of these trees extend into the rear gardens of these plots beyond a close board boundary fence.

Eastern boundary vegetation G20 described as scrub/hedge is outside the site boundary and consists of Laurel, Cypress, Hawthorn, Willow, Birch. G22 is offsite from the southern boundary. A 4m high Cypress hedge is included along the eastern boundary providing screening to the gardens of Plots 1 and 3, very small gardens associated with the flatted block, and Plot 9. The current size of the hedge is unknown. Cypress hedging can become overgrown if not managed frequently.

Boundary screening and the species providing the screening should be assessed against long term sustainability and maintenance e.g the Leyland cypress hedges their height and breadth is important as this species cannot tolerate being pruned back to the 'wood' as it loses the power to replace the vegetation. There is also the issue of the vegetation that is contributing to the setting is outside of the control of the site and cannot be relied upon indefinitely.

With the Willow and Poplar screening it will be important to understand whose responsibility they are. These 2 species are known for their rapid growth, and may need to be pruned back every year, which in itself will cause them to regrow with much vigour. The retention of certain tree/scrub groups for boundary screening need to be assessed in more detail and in relation to the site layout.

Many of the retained trees to the front of the site (north) are within linear groups reflecting the layout of the existing car park and been growing in restrained conditions, therefore it would be beneficial to these trees to be incorporated within an area of soft landscape, although trees T15-T17 will need to be removed due to disease. NB trees to the east of the site boundary have also been included in the survey but are outside of the site boundary.

The retained trees to the northern boundary adjacent to Bath Road provide some screening to south that help to form a buffer and setting for housing, but enhancement planting will be required, which should be included in the Landscape Strategy. A ditch to the northern boundary and the verge/road appears to be partly included within the site boundary – *please confirm*.. The ditch is prominent and needs to be factored into the scheme as a whole because it will need kept accessible and be cleaned out regularly, any enhancement planting will need to consider this.

Unfortunately, the Tree Survey showing the existing site layout and tree and hedge features is not submitted with the application.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – D3478 0001

The report assesses the landscape planning context, character and visual, and summarises the baseline condition. A series of photographs A-J are included in the LVIA which illustrate the current character and appearance of the site. The images highlight some of the constraints;

Photograph A – shows the nature of the variety of existing building on the site

Photograph B – shows the entrance into the site from A4.

Photograph C – shows the access to the east of the site and a cypress hedge which is alongside the greenhouses not cutting across as the arrow shows.

Photograph D - shows the western site boundary to tree groups G32 and G24 which is clearly showing a 2m high close board fence to the vegetation.

Photograph E – shows the pond and the surrounding planting and fence in the background

Photograph F – shows the track between the southern site boundary and the view towards a partially constructed dwelling on the adjacent site. The overhead shot of these 2 views shows some vegetation in the southern half of the site that will be removed but no vegetation to the boundary.

Photograph G shows the access track to the south of the site and the vegetated boundary of the Hollies dwelling to the southern boundary of the track.

Photograph H – shows the garden of the Hollies in more detail.

Photograph I – partially shows the collection of buildings typical of the existing site

Photograph J – ditto above

The southern site boundary is adjacent to an east-west track that then turns southwards to connect with Scarletts Lane. The area of land to the south of the site and west of the Hollies are more sheds and structures which will be perceived from the proposed development.

The visual survey includes 7 viewpoints which illustrate the contained nature of the site which is not in dispute. A mitigation strategy is provided following the landscape and visual assessment which includes;

- Incorporate recommendations with the WBLCA
- Retain and strengthen existing mature trees and hedgerows particularly along the W and E boundaries
- Supplementary planting along the A4 corridor with hedgerows and native trees to screen views of entrance and built form using a layered structure of shrubs and small trees
- Enhance and expand pond and area around it to design as a Public Open Space incorporating a Local Area of Play (LAP), as a landscape focal point.
- Dwellings to be designed and built using natural materials to visually integrate with ASC.

- Implement visual buffers of tree belts, native hedgerow and shrubberies.

I have no objection to the site being redeveloped for housing, however there are some practical issues that need to be addressed in order for the site to function holistically with a landscape led approach, which essentially revolves around the design and management of the boundaries in order to comply with Policies CC03 TB21 of Local Plan and Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy.

1. Site boundaries and the existing vegetation

Currently, the east and west boundary vegetation is offsite and includes Leyland cypress a fast growing conifer. The eastern site boundary is located west of an access road leading from the site entrance on A4 to the southern part of the site. The only existing vegetation on the actual boundary is a Cypress hedge of which there is no information in the tree report. Photograph C does include the hedge which looks high hedge and could be quite wide. It backs onto small gardens from the flatted blocks, as well as Plot 9. It may be impractical to retain this hedge due to maintenance requirements.

2. The enhancement of the trees to the northern boundary and the Green Route – Proposed Public Open Space (POS)

Enhancement is to the north-west side of entrance only and confined to the pond area and the LAP which is acceptable but to achieve the layering of vegetation proposed in the mitigation would reduce the space available around the pond and the LAP, which are also proposed as Public Open Spaces. There are opportunities to enhance the eastern side of the site access but this is offsite although included in the Tree Survey. If this surveyed area were included in the red line boundary (it is included in the tree survey) it would provide more flexibility in terms of enhancement and screening of the site and more available space to create a thick buffer to A4 and larger public open spaces.

3. The treatment of the southern boundary / responding to existing landscape

The track which leads along the eastern site boundary turns the corner travelling westwards past the extended garden of The Hollies and onwards past a collection of sheds and activity associated with the landscaping business which is to be retained. The site layout shows rear gardens of dwellings backing onto this boundary where there is little existing screening. The Site Layout includes tree planting to the rear garden boundaries adjacent to the track, however it is difficult to say if located within the rear gardens the trees will be retained by the owners, especially as they will cast shade within the gardens. The same is true of the eastern site boundary with rear gardens backing onto the access track. The scheme needs to provide screening that is sustainable and long lasting which means public realm landscaping that would be cared for by a management company. Allocation of minimum 2m wide verge is required for this purpose to provide adequate buffering from neighbouring uses and to ensure sustainability of planting.

4. Landscaping of the western boundary

As mentioned previously the western boundaries consist of Willow and White Poplar at the end of plots 15-19 and a Cypress hedge to rear of Plot 19 and the pond area. All 3 species are rapid growers, and although they are growing off site they influence it. Offsite vegetation is not managed by the site although it might be by future occupiers. Currently the G24 vegetation is kept offsite by a 2m high close board fence, but this is visually unattractive. This is the boundary adjacent to the ASC so the boundary treatment needs to be sympathetic to that. Again, a verge against the boundary could contain the vegetation and also provide enhancements within the site, if the dwellings were set back from this boundary or flipped to face it.

5. The emergency flood exit to the SW corner how will it function?

This is an asset to the site as it connects with Scarletts Lane, and where there are few footpaths close to the site, this could provide continual access southwards towards Ruscombe and Hurst as a cycle route/pedestrian route. The arrangement of the access to the path through the site will need to be reviewed in relation to Plot 14.

6. Management of existing vegetation

The retention and management of on and offsite vegetation must be considered e.g. should the Leyland Cypress hedge adjacent to the flatted block and Plot 9 be removed in view of its size and potential size/ issues with pruning into greenwood.

The management of Willow and White Poplar offsite and adjacent to the west side of the site. These are fast growing trees with roots in the rear gardens of plots along the western boundary and are 12m in height. How will the western boundary accommodate these trees? Would they be better off out of rear gardens and within a planted verge that would be easier to maintain ?

7. Regarding boundary vegetation and its enhancement –

The creation of adequate buffer zones / verges can accommodate more enhancement planting, screening of development to neighbouring activity and contain existing vegetation and be more manageable.

8. Review lengths of driveways

Particularly Plot 9, Plot 11, Plots 1-4 which can be reduced

The question of the treatment of the boundaries is a fundamental issue that is felt has not been fully considered against the constraints. A review of the boundaries and how they function is important and improve the scheme.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Date:	25.11.25	Signed:	B. Crafer
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