

I. Introduction

Introduction

- I.1 Portus + Whitton have been appointed to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for a replacement dwelling, two residential units and a garage at Warren Crest Farm, Finchampstead, Wokingham. The purpose of this report is to assess the landscape and visual effects of the proposals using accepted methodology set out in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (3rd Edition).
- I.2 The results presented within this assessment are based on a combination of desk-based research and field-survey work. The site survey was carried out on 15th December 2023 by a Landscape Architect, in dry but overcast weather conditions.

The Site

- I.3 The application site includes an existing dwelling (Warren Crest Farm) and associated domestic garden, a number of redundant farm buildings and pastoral field. It is located at the southern periphery of Finchampstead, a village in Wokingham Borough in Berkshire (Figure I). The site is accessed via Wick Hill Lane and is a contained parcel of land associated with the farm buildings. The Site lies within the clients wider land ownership (Figure 2), a 27.47Ha small holding of farm building, farmland and woodland.



Figure I: Site Location - not to scale

Approximate site location

Proposals

- I.4 The latest proposals seek to demolish the existing dwelling, garage, an outbuilding and two farm buildings which are to be replaced with a new dwelling and two new cottages. The new house will be located on the footprint of the original dwelling. The proposed main dwelling is to be two storey with single storey elements to either side (with accommodation in the roof space), designed to take on the appearance of a group of farm buildings. Access to the proposed dwellings will be via Wick Hill Lane as is the current arrangement.
- I.5 The replacement of the existing agricultural buildings into three dwellings and one garage was approved in July under planning application no. 233112. An application for extensions and alterations to the existing dwelling, garage and outbuilding has been recently approved under planning application no. 241564. These latest proposals will demolish the existing dwelling and replace the additional 3 No. residential units and a garage with 2 No. residential units and a garage.

Assumptions and Limitations

- I.6 No difficulties were encountered when undertaking the site visit, however, it was not possible to access private land. Consequently, all appraisals and conclusions are based on information obtained solely from publicly accessible locations.
- I.7 As the site survey was carried out in December 2023, the photographs within this LVIA are of winter viewpoints which are representative of worst case scenarios in terms of the viewpoint assessment. Theoretical seasonal variations for summer views are accounted for within the appraisal.

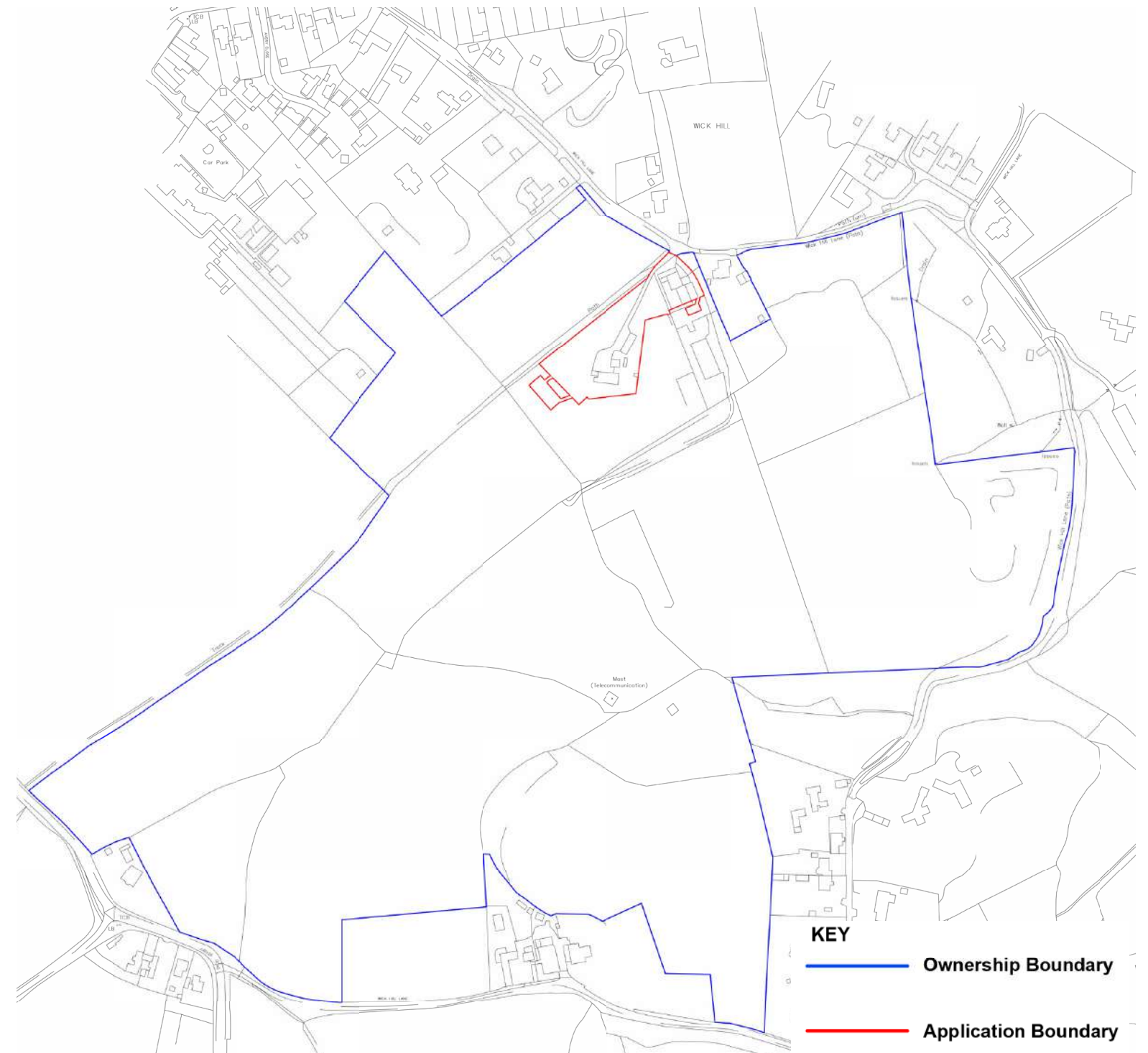


Figure 2: Site Location Plan

2. Approach and Methodology

- 2.1 This appraisal has been carried out using the industry standard accepted methodology set out in 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' 3rd Edition (GLVIA3). The result are based on a combination of desk-based research and field survey work.
- 2.2 While a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment generally applies to all projects which require a formal Environmental Impact Assessment, they can also apply informally. This is the case with this project at Warren Crest Farm.
- 2.3 The Landscape Institute has also produced guidance related to the visualisation of the development proposals in the form of TGN 06/19 Visual Representation of Development Proposals. The photographs within this appraisal are considered Type I Visualisations, comprising annotated photographs developed to *"represent context and outline or extent of development and of key features"*.
- 2.4 While the full methodology is set out in GLVIA3, it may be summarised as follows:
- Identify the study area and its planning context.
 - Assess the landscape character types, landscape features, scenery, land-use, topography and public access.
 - Identify the Constraints and Opportunities likely to influence the design process.
 - Identify, describe and assess the physical and visual impacts that the proposed development would have on the existing landscape and on visual amenity.
 - Propose measures to enhance the setting and the wider landscape.
 - Identify and assess residual impact.
- 2.5 Both landscape and visual impacts have been assessed:
- Landscape impacts result from changes to components and/or character or quality of the landscape. The criteria used to define the magnitude of change include; character and quality of existing scenery, key landscape features, the degree of likely change, and the ability of the landscape to accommodate change.
 - Visual impacts result from changes to the appearance of the landscape as a result of the development proposals either intruding into or obstructing existing views or by the overall impact on visual amenity. The degree of impact depends on both the degree of change and the sensitivity of the affected receptors.
- 2.6 Significance of landscape and visual effects are assessed against the sensitivity of the receptors to landscape and visual change, and the magnitude of the change that they experience.
- 2.7 Terms used in the assessment are defined as follows:
- Landscape receptors: These are elements of the landscape which will be affected either positively or negatively by development. Elements could include natural or man-made features. The effect of the development on the particular character and characteristics of the landscape such as form and scenic qualities or patterns of development are also considered.
 - Sensitivity of landscape: Landscape sensitivity is formed by a combination of the value of the landscape and the degree to which the landscape can accommodate change (otherwise referred to as susceptibility to change).
 - The value of the landscape is judged on a number of factors including its quality/condition, rarity, local /national/ international designations, scenic quality, recreational use and conservation or cultural value. Consideration has to be made for the value of both the landscape as a whole and the individual elements such trees, buildings and hedgerows.
 - Susceptibility to change can relate to both the overall landscape and a particular landscape elements. Its ability to accommodate the proposed development will depend on existing land-use, existing patterns of landscape development, landscape character, degrees of openness or enclosure or how easily mitigation measures can be put in place.
 - Visual receptors: Are people impacted on by the development proposals. Receptors include residents of nearby properties, communities of people who experience a change in their landscape setting, leisure users of rights of way, people engaged in outdoor sport or people at or travelling to work.
 - Sensitivity of visual receptors: Visual receptors will be more or less sensitive to landscape changes depending on their relationship with the landscape in question. In particular, account needs to be taken of the receptors susceptibility to change. For example a residential or leisure user is likely to be more sensitive to landscape impacts than a receptor at a workplace or a commuter. In addition, a judgement has to be made on the value of the view to the receptor, this might be based on its scenic or heritage value.
 - Magnitude of Effect: A combination of the scale of change, degree of contrast with the existing landscape, duration, distance and angle or view from main receptors from the proposed development, the extent over which changes would be visible and the reversibility of the changes.
 - Significance of Effect: The level, or significance, of the landscape and visual effects is determined by considering together the magnitude of the change, the sensitivity of landscape and visual receptors and effects of mitigation.
- 2.8 The nature of effects can be adverse or beneficial. Adverse effect relate to the loss of existing features and/or the introduction of features that are uncharacteristic within the landscape character. Beneficial effects relate to the enhancement of existing features and/or the introduction of features.

3. Designations

Local Designations

- 3.1 The site does not fall within any protected landscape areas.
- 3.2 There are no listed buildings within the vicinity of the site, however a Scheduled Monument lies approximately 1km to the west.
- 3.3 With regards to habitats, an Ancient Woodland is located approximately 120m east of the site and partially lies within the clients ownership. The ancient woodland forms part of a larger area of a deciduous woodland of principal importance which extends close to the northern corner of the site and also away from the site to the south and the east. Within the site itself is a Priority Habitat identified as Traditional Orchard however following the Ecologist site survey they have confirmed that this is not a Traditional Orchard (refer to Ecology Report/ Statement).
- 3.4 There are a number of public rights of way in proximity to the site. Footpath FINC15 runs directly adjacent to the sites northern boundary connecting Wick Hill Lane to Finchampstead Road to the south west. Restricted Byway FINC25 directly north east of the existing house connects Wick Hill Lane to the Bridleway FINC26 which skirts the eastern extent of the applicant’s ownership boundary. There are partial winter glimpses of the existing house and garden from a small section of this bridleway.



Figure 3: Local Designations

- Indicative site boundary
- Public Right of Way
- Bridleway
- Restricted Byway
- Byway open to all traffic
- Ancient Woodland (indicative)
- Priority Habitat Traditional Orchard (designation disputed by Project Ecologist)

4. Policy Context

National Policy - National Planning Policy Framework (December, 2023)

- 4.1 At the heart of the National Planning Policy Framework is a “*presumption in favour of sustainable development*”. A key aspect of this is good design and paragraph 135 of the framework requires that developments:
- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area;
 - b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
 - c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting;
 - d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place [...]
- 4.2 Sections 15 and 16 of the framework promote the conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, respectively. Paragraph 180 requires that policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Paragraph 196 requires that plans should set out a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment.

Wokingham Borough Core Strategy Development Plan (Adopted – 29 January 2010)

- 4.3 Adopted in January 2010, “*The Core strategy sets out the vision for how the borough will develop in the period to 2026 and how the council aims to protect and enhance the good quality of life enjoyed in the borough.*” It explains where development will go and includes homes, shops, schools, offices, factories and buildings for health, leisure and faith use. Of particular relevance to this application include:

4.31 Policy CP3 - “General Principles for development”

Planning permission will be granted for proposals that:

- *a) Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life;*
- *c) Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses.*
- *d) Maintain or enhance the ability of the site to support fauna and flora including protected species;*
- *f) Contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping.*

4.32 Policy CP7 - “Biodiversity”

- *Development: (C) That compromises the implementation of the national, regional, county and local biodiversity action plans will be only permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, that no alternative site that would result in less or no harm is available which will meet the need, and:*
 - i) Mitigation measures can be put in place to prevent damaging impacts; or*
 - ii) Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided.*

4.34 CPII – “Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside)”

Proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:

- *2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and*
- *3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement;*
- *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.*

- 4.4 “The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDD) adds extra detail to the policies within the Core Strategy. Together, these two documents set out how the Borough will develop up until 2026 making it an excellent place to live, work and play.”

4.41 Policy CC03: “Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping”

- 2.) Development proposals should demonstrate how they have considered and achieved the following criteria within scheme proposals:
 - c) Promote the integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside
 - d) Protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features
 - e) Incorporate high quality, ideally, native planting and landscaping as an integral part of the scheme.”

4.42 Policy TB21: Landscape Character

- 1.) Proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council’s Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues.
- 2.) Proposals shall retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan (FNDP) 2022-2038 Made Version, September 2023

- 4.5 “The Finchampstead Neighbourhood Development Plan has been developed to establish a guiding vision for the parish and to help deliver the local community’s aspirations and needs for the plan period 2022 – 2036. The plan is a statutory document that will be incorporated into the Borough development plan and will be used by Wokingham Borough Council alongside other policies and guidance to determine planning applications.”

4.51 Policy AHD1

- Development proposals outside the Development Locations will only be supported where they are in accordance with national and Borough planning policies.

4.52 Policy D1 Building Heights

- Building heights should reflect the character and appearance of the parish. The development of 3 storey (and above) housing will generally only be supported within the area of the Strategic Development Location (that part within Finchampstead Parish) and the Gorse Ride regeneration area.

4.53 Policy D2

- As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should be located and designed to maintain the separation of settlements and to complement the characteristics of the landscape in the immediate locality through:
 - 1.) Locating structures where they will be viewed against existing built form and wherever possible, development should deliver enhancements to the landscape character.
 - 2.) Retaining the proportion, scale and the space between the main residential buildings on each residential plot with reference to the built vernacular of the neighbourhood area and conservation of traditional boundary treatments.
 - 3.) The use of appropriate plant species in a comprehensive landscape scheme with appropriate boundary treatments to integrate with the rural character.

4.55 Policy IRS4 Implement strategy to preserve the identity of Finchampstead Parish through informal green spaces.

- As appropriate to their scale, nature and location development proposals should:
 - 1. Preserve the semi-rural look and feel of the Parish with its surrounding natural open environment.
 - 2. Preserve the distinctive character and appearance of the Parish countryside with varied landscapes and outstanding views.
 - 3. Preserve the topological features of the landscape that distinguish it as part of the Blackwater Valley and Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Areas.
 - 4. Protect and where possible, enhance the green spaces of the Parish, both general and specific, through protected special areas, green gaps between settlements, green corridors, diverse flora and community spaces.
 - 5. Specify tree and hedgerow planting to reinforce and reflect local biodiversity in the Parish.
 - 6. Retain informal green gaps along the Parish access roads and other small areas of natural green space, as outlined in Annex S Rights of Way Network with adjoining Parishes.

4.57 Policy IRS6 Trees

- 1.) Development proposals should seek to retain mature or important trees, groups of trees or woodland on site.
- 4.) Wherever appropriate, the planting of additional trees should be included in new developments, particularly local species that are in keeping with the character of the area and appropriate to the site/ground conditions. Planting that contributes to the biodiversity of the area and supports green corridors is particularly encouraged.

5. Landscape Character

National Character

5.1 The application site lies within National Character Area (NCA) 129 Thames Basin Heaths (Figure 4), forming part of Natural England’s National Character Area Assessment 2014.

5.2 The key characteristics of this area are as follows:

- Plateaux of Tertiary sands and gravels in the London Basin, with intervening river valleys floored by London Clay. In the far west, Chalk forms the Hampshire Downs escarpment and the river beds of the Kennet and Pang.
- High woodland cover, offering an array of colour in the autumn. Conifers and large plantations on former heathland are dominant features in the east, while the west is scattered with small, semi-natural woodlands on ancient sites.
- Acid, leached soils mean that farming on the plateaux is limited to rough pasture, and that alternative land uses (such as forestry, golf courses and horse paddocks) have emerged. Heather, gorse, oak and birch all thrive here. Arable land and improved pasture are found in the valleys, on alluvium.
- Beyond the large areas of heathland and woodland, there is a patchwork of small to medium-sized fields with woods. The legacy of historic hunting forests includes veteran trees, ancient woods, ancient hedgerows and parklands. Historic meadows remain as fragments along watercourses.
- Prehistoric earthworks such as barrows and hill forts mark promontories on the plateaux. Archaeology is well preserved on historic heathland. Mosaics of open heathland and grassland with scrub, secondary woodland and plantation. Valley bogs, ponds and streams enhance diversity. Large, continuous mosaics are found in the east: they include Thursley, Ash, Pirbright and Chobham Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Chobham Common National Nature Reserve (NNR).
- Historic commons offer tranquillity and unenclosed views, while other rights of access are enjoyed across farmland, canals and downland. Ministry of Defence ownership restricts (but does not entirely prevent) public enjoyment.

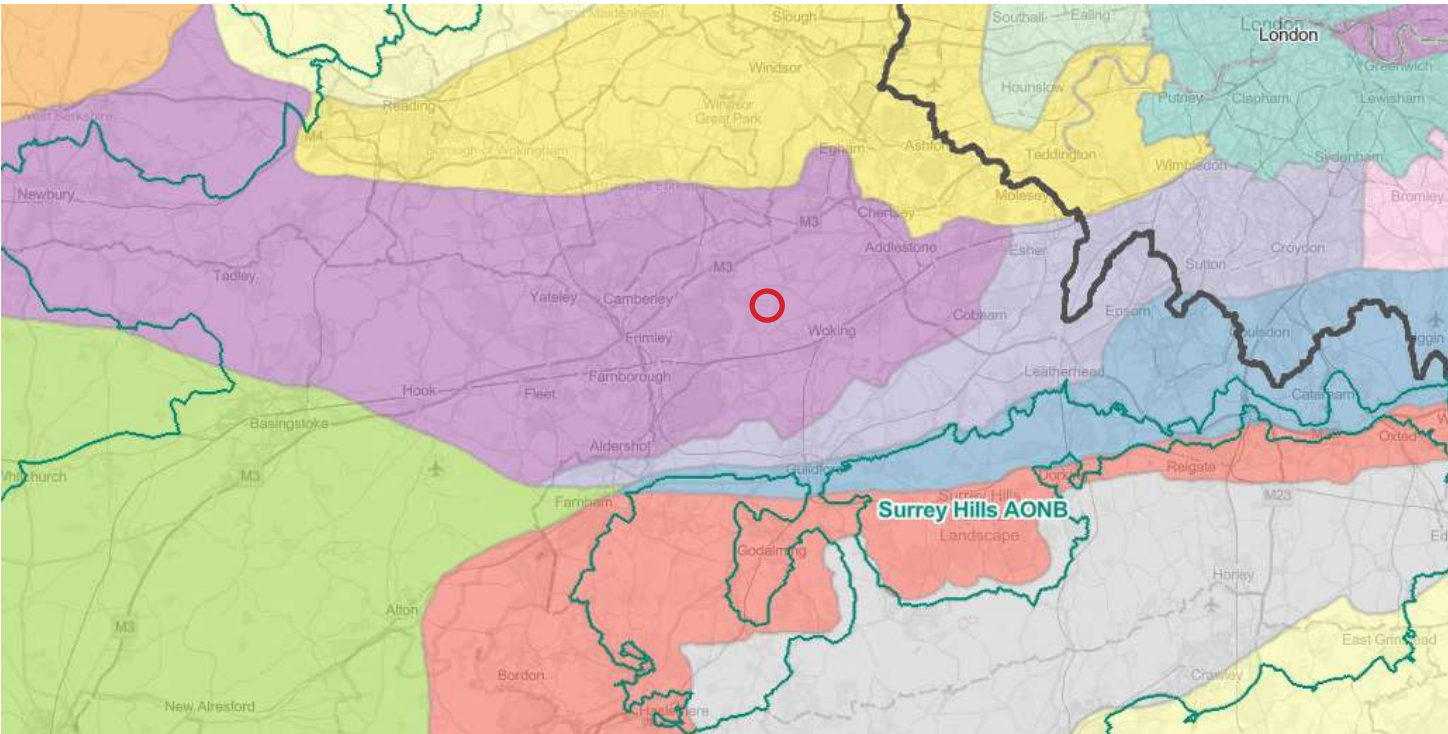


Figure 4: National Character Areas - not to scale

○ Approximate site location ■ National Character Area 129

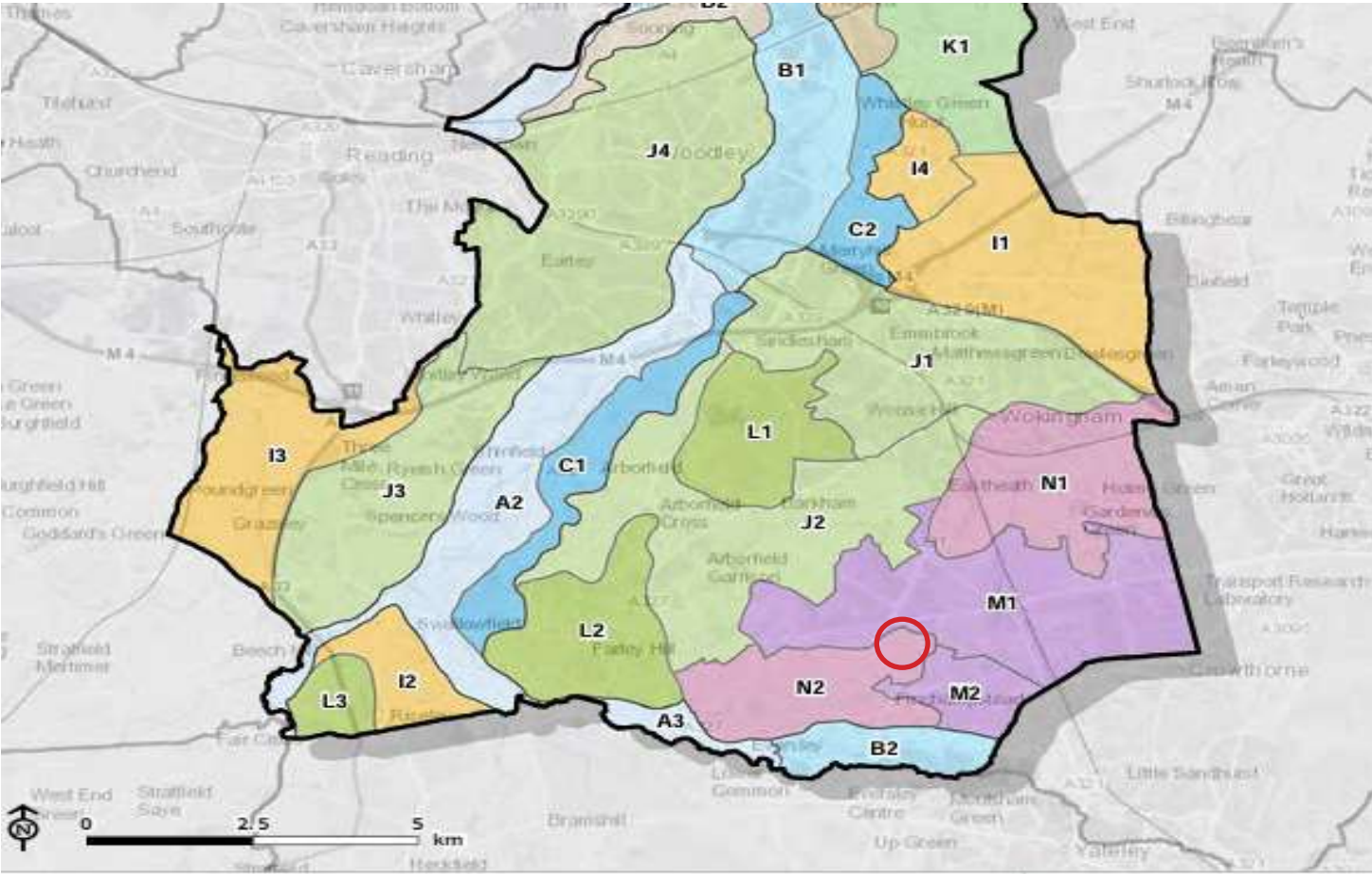


Figure 5: Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment: Landscape character Types and Areas - not to scale

○ Approximate site location

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment, November 2019

5.3 The site is covered by the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) which provides a detailed review of the varied landscapes within the Borough and identifies 14 landscape character types each representing a distinct identity and reflecting the range of contrasting landscapes across the borough. The site can be found within Local Character Area (LCA) N2, although it is immediately adjacent to LCA M2.

5.4 LCA N2 refers to Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland. *“This area is characterised by gently to steeply undulating pastures rising to a gentle ridge and set against the wooded backdrop of the Settled and Forested Sands. Local areas of arable land are also evident.”*

5.5 Key characteristics of the character area include:

- Gently to steeply undulating landform culminating in a prominent ridgeline to the north with views to the surrounding lowlands.
- Poor soil as a result of underlying sandy formations including Bagshot Beds, Camberley Sand Formation and Windlesham Formation with areas of London Clay resulting in a predominantly pastoral landscape.
- Mixed pastoral landscape of open small and medium sized fields divided by post and wire or timber fences with grazing sheep, horses and cattle, following a variety of enclosure patterns.
- Scrubby and overgrown shelterbelts, roadside belts, small farm woods and scattered remnant hedgerow trees enhancing the wooded context created by adjoining Forested and Settled Sands.
- Quiet rural landscape with an unobtrusive network of rural roads bordered by grassy banks with bracken, furze and ash avenues.
- Drainage ditches and small brooks and drainage channels.
- Dispersed settlement pattern excepting the nucleated edge-of-river floodplain village settlement of Finchampstead and small clusters of buildings with characteristic vernacular influences including brick, timber frame and thatch.
- Farmsteads and manors located on elevated areas and following the route of the Devil's Highway former Roman Road creating an illusion of parkland.
- Barrows and former Roman villa complex (SAM).
- Dense network of public footpaths and bridleways.

5.6 The landscape strategy for LCA N2 is to conserve and strengthen existing character including the undulating landform, the coherent pattern of settlement, predominantly pastoral land use and the peaceful rural ambience. There are opportunities to strengthen the hedgerow network and woodland areas.

5.7 According to the WBLCA the main issues affecting or with potential to affect the character of the Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland (N2) are:

- Hedgerow loss - associated with the expansion of fields and intensification of agriculture.
- The declining viability of livestock grazing is resulting in conversion to other land uses and loss of grassland habitats.
- Conversion to equestrian activities, particularly at settlement edges, leading to loss of traditional features such as hedgerows and hedgerow trees and a decrease in rural intactness.
- Loss or changes in native deciduous woodland structure through decline in species diversity in the traditionally coppiced woodlands have occurred in the past through cessation of coppice management. However, there are positive signs that woodlands are being brought back into management.
- Effect on tree health or species composition of woodland as a consequence of pathogens and climate change.
- 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.
- Drainage operations associated with development or agriculture altering ground water levels and affecting small wetland habitats.
- Recreational pressure leading to erosion of special archaeological features, ecological features and other landscape features is a continuing problem in this well-populated borough.
- Pressure for large scale residential development and supporting infrastructure both inside and outside the area impacting on landscape character. Development of a new settlement at Arborfield Garrison SDL in adjoining LCA J2 and associated SANG extending into the north of the character area around West Court will impact the area.
- Increase in traffic on local roads, particularly in relation to the Arborfield Garrison development, leading to pressure for new roads or upgrading of existing roads with new signage, line painting and widening, impacting tranquillity and changing the existing character of the rural road network.
- Pressure for built development on the skyline is leading to loss of wooded ridges which are characteristic of the Wokingham District landscape.
- Increasing demand for communication masts, pylons and poles leading to visual intrusion of these elements in this elevated landscape.
- This character area contains a reservoir of dark skies and light pollution is a key issue affecting the night landscape.

5.8 Landscape Strategy and Guidelines:

To maintain the landscape character of the Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the quiet rural character and dark skies. The key aspects to be enhanced and actively managed are the hedgerow network and the woodland habitats. In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the coherent pattern of settlement, and avoid the spread of urban built form including roads into the area.

- Conserve distinctive wooded ridgelines. Consider the impact of any development on skylines, where it would have the potential to be highly visible from adjacent character areas. Develop sympathetic fell cycles to maintain positive character, particularly phased cycles along sensitive skylines to ensure that the wooded backdrop is maintained.
- Conserve and protect pasture and encourage appropriate restoration and management of grassland to restore lost grassland habitats.
- Manage the integration of equine related activities into the landscape through the maintenance of existing boundaries or restoration of hedgerows and other landscape planting and control of associated built elements.
- Conserve hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features and promote management of woodlands as coppice, with standards left to form future timber trees. Consider opportunities for reinstatement of hedges, particularly where they have been lost from highly visible locations e.g. along roadsides.
- Conserve and increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, including BAP priority habitats, using natural regeneration or by planting native species in order to enhance the wooded character of the landscape. The aim should be to link existing sites without loss of significant views.
- Seek to avoid introduction of coniferous boundaries and shelterbelts.
- Restore, conserve and manage small wetland areas which provide valued habitats and seek to create new areas of wetland.
- Restore, conserve, enhance and manage parkland landscapes associated with history manor houses, planning for the next generation of parkland trees with a programme of tree planting.
- Enhance informal recreational enjoyment of the landscape. But ensure appropriate management of informal recreation to limit negative impacts on landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage, particularly in relation to the Rights of Way network.
- Conserve the rural character of dispersed ridgeline settlement to protect the individual identity of farmsteads and manors and conserve the scenic quality of the nucleated character of Finchampstead through the control of development.
- Integrate new development of the Arborfield Garrison SDL into the landscape through wooded boundaries and tree planting to provide a positive interface between the settlement edge and the rural area. In particular protect the sensitive areas of woodland adjacent to West Court in the west of the area.

- Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes.
- Maintain and enhance the character and tranquillity of rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highways improvements, infrastructure and signage through the use of traffic calming and access restrictions. This would also make the use of rural roads more attractive for cyclists and recreational users.
- Protect the expansive views to the Blackwater Valley and Finchampstead Ridges, including resisting proposals that would introduce extensive or obtrusive elements e.g. pylons on the visually sensitive landscape.
- Protect the strong perceptions of tranquillity in the landscape, including the experience of ‘dark skies’, through the management of development.

6. Site Baseline Condition

Site Description

- 6.1 The Site is located in the village of Finchampstead, a village and civil parish in Wokingham Borough in Berkshire, approximately 3km southwest of Wokingham and 13km southeast of Reading. The Site is situated at the centre of the civil parish adjacent to open agricultural land between the northern urban extent of the parish and the historic core of Finchampstead village to the south. The site is located in an area known as Wick Hill.
- 6.2 The application site is a contained parcel of land adjacent to open pastoral fields close to Finchampstead village at the southern extent of Wick Hill Lane. The local architecture along Wick Hill Lane comprises detached houses with significant setbacks and driveways with numerous mature trees. The area is also characterised by many large dwellings set on generous plots. The application site is unusual in that it lies on the edge of the settlement, yet it is considerably larger than the neighbouring plots. The site benefits from having notable views out to the south and a particularly attractive long ranging view towards St. James Church.
- 6.3 The area around the existing dwelling includes a garage, outbuilding and residential garden associated with the house (photo A) as well as a number of farm buildings and farm track (photo B) at the west and a pastoral field that wraps around the curtilage of the house. The existing dwelling is occupied as a residential property, whilst the other farm related buildings are used for storage and fields for grazing livestock. The Site lies within client's wider land ownership, a 27.47Ha small holding of farmland and woodlands.
- 6.4 The perimeter of the Site is defined by field boundaries of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. The northeast boundary adjoins a residential garden and consists of a clipped hedge and several trees. The northwest boundary comprises an existing native hedge and chestnut pale fencing combined with a number of mature trees mostly good quality oak. The Southeast boundary is an agricultural fence and mature, overgrown hedgerow containing species such as Hawthorn, Holly, Oak, Ash and Field Maple (photo D). This hedgerow links into the surrounding field network. The southwest boundary is open with a large gap along half its length. The northern half of the boundary is enclosed with a shelterbelt of woodland, 13m in width containing a variety of native, mature deciduous species.
- 6.5 Access to the site is via Wick Hill Lane, an existing single track road with the driveway entrance at the northern corner of the site (photo A). A public right of way runs adjacent to the Northwest boundary, along the full length of the site and links Wick Hill Lane at the north to Finchampstead Road.
- 6.6 In general the combined effect of garden and boundary vegetation provides a surrounding screen to the built elements of the application site. This results in the existing house being screened from most public views with only limited visibility to the south west (and at considerable distance) being apparent.
- 6.7 The site is generally flat but has a very gentle slope from west to east with the highest point west of the existing dwelling and land falling away to the north, east and south at about a 1:30 gradient at its steepest point.



Figure 7: Existing site photos



Figure 7: Existing site photos continued



Figure 8: Site Photo Locations - indicative site boundary

Arboriculture

- 6.8 A Tree Survey was carried out by Venners Arboriculture in December 2023. A total of 72 trees (with three category A trees and the others of varying grades B and C category) and 5 tree groups (of B and C category) were identified as within or adjacent to the site.
- 6.9 The three category A trees are all located at the periphery of the Site. T22 is a mature English Oak located within the hedgerow along the Northwest boundary, T54 is within hedgerow on the Southeast corner of the site while T59 is also an English Oak but sits outside the site.

Site History and Land Cover

- 6.10 The application site is within an enclosed field. Historic maps (Figures 9 and 10) indicate that there has not always been a dwelling in this location and that the land was previously an agricultural field.
- 6.11 The map from the 19 century shows a similar field pattern to current times, however within the site itself there have been changes with the loss of one field boundary and creation of a new boundary along the Southwest edge of the site. Additionally, there was a wide woodland belt to the Southeast of the site which has been lost where only a line of trees remains today. Woodland was far more extensive at this time and covered the whole area which has now been urbanised by Finchamstead village.
- 6.12 By 1963, clearance of the Southeast woodland belt has been undertaken and the first farm buildings appear within the Site boundary, however, the dwelling has still not been built. The field patterns have changed and are now true to current times and generally larger than they were in the 19th century. Urbanisation of the woodland has started with substantial development along Nine Mile Ride and Heath Ride.

Settlements

- 6.13 Although the village of Finchampstead has been established for a long while and is illustrated on the 19th century maps, it was previously a small cluster of dwellings and Parish Church 1.5km South of the site. Finchampstead has increased substantially over the years but the more contemporary development is located remotely from the original village, creating a separate urban cluster. Houses start appearing on maps along the woodland rides within Wick Hill to the North of the Site from the 1930s. This development continues until today and has gradually replaced the woodland which had been a prominent landscape feature, with housing.

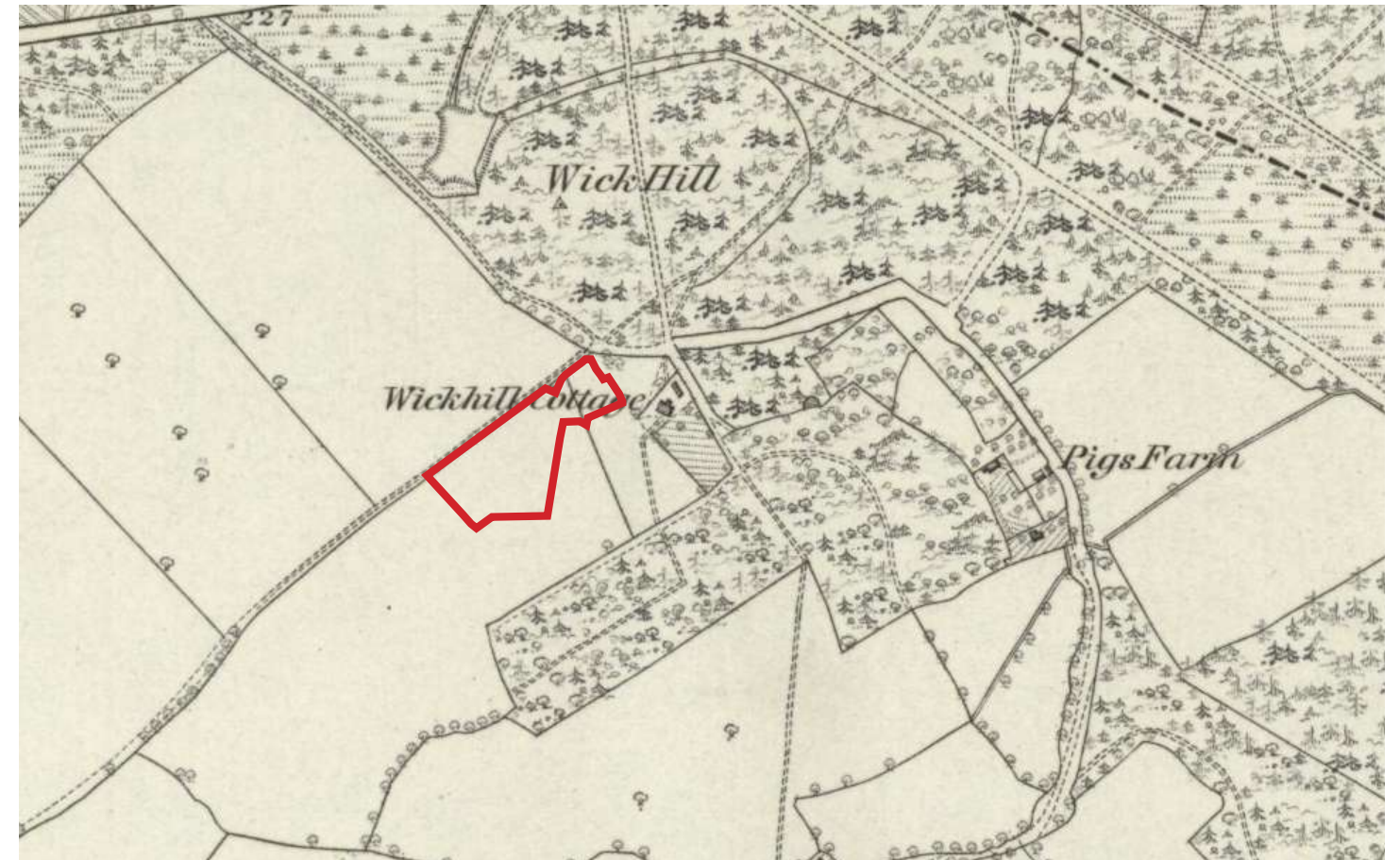


Figure 9: Historic map from the late C19th (indicative site boundary shown)



Figure 10: Historic map from 1963 (indicative site boundary shown)

Topography

- 6.14 The site is generally flat but has a very gentle slope from west to east with the highest point west of the existing house at +87.18m AOD. The house itself sits at +86.75m AOD with land falling away to the north, east and south at about a 1:30 gradient at its steepest point. The lowest point of the site is the eastern corner at +83.65m AOD.
- 6.15 In context to the wider landscape the Site sits at a relative high point to the south of main urban centre, providing views toward to the village settlement in and around Church Farm.

Hydrology

- 6.16 The site doesn't contain any hydrological features itself and due to its slightly elevated location there are none close to the site.

Dark Skies

- 6.17 Whilst the site is identified as being within a character area within which the experience of "Dark Skies" is possible, the actual location of the site sits within an area of relatively high radiance as shown by the CPRE map showing light pollution and dark skies.

7. Development Proposals

Development Proposals

7.1 A summary of the development proposals are as follows:

- Existing planning consents allow for extensions and alterations to the existing dwelling and outbuilding (as approved under planning application no. 241564). This includes a consent to extend the existing dwelling, construct a new swimming pool outbuilding and to convert existing farm buildings to residential use. A further consent exists for the conversion of the existing agricultural buildings into three dwellings (as approved under planning application no. 233112).
- This proposal is for the demolition of the existing dwelling including the outbuildings, and their replacements with a new detached dwelling. It is also proposed to replace the three residential units (as converted from the existing agricultural buildings) with two residential units and a garage.
- The combined footprint area of the recently approved schemes totals 873m². In comparison the combined footprint of these latest proposals is 773m² representing a reduction of 100m². This is provided within a more compact building arrangement as illustrated in figure 11. Overall, the proposal represents reduced built area in comparison to current approvals and offers a more compact building arrangement on site.
- The proposed dwelling follows the orientation of the existing property with elements of the building arranged in order for openings to frame long distance views of the surrounding countryside and to improve visual connectivity including the view towards St. James Church.
- The overall massing of the building components follows the concept of a farmstead. The original house or barn is the principal living structure, which has been adjoined to secondary subservient structures. The composition of the dwelling gives the impression of a collection of rural buildings.
- The building forms of the dwelling are arranged in a traditional composition with simple rectangular plans and pitched roofs. The proposals are designed to create an aesthetic based on traditional building proportions and roof pitches inspired by rural architectural forms in farmland settings.
- The building materials have been selected to follow the local vernacular of Finchampstead and agricultural buildings within the local context. The mixture of materials designates the different building elements and their uses; this creates the impression of a slow, organically developed farmstead. The dwelling has been designed to combine both residential and agricultural materials to reflect its semirural setting.

Landscape and Ecological Proposals

7.2 A summary of the proposed ecological and landscape proposals to support this new development are as follows:

- All existing landscape elements of value will be retained and enhanced.
- Native hedge and tree planting for biodiversity and to soften the house overall setting.
- Additional tree planting along the northern boundary of the application site which will assist in screening the replacement buildings.
- Introduction of a ha-ha along the southern boundary to create an unobtrusive boundary.
- Ornamental garden areas (including lawns) will be restricted to small areas directly adjacent to the dwelling.
- The remainder of the site will be composed of informal landscaping incorporating the existing retained trees and newly created wildflower meadow(s).
- Strengthening of the existing vegetated boundaries with under-storey and hedgerow planting.
- The ongoing conservation of existing and proposed features through regular management interventions.
- To enhance and positively contribute to the biodiversity on the site to support a variety of flora and fauna.

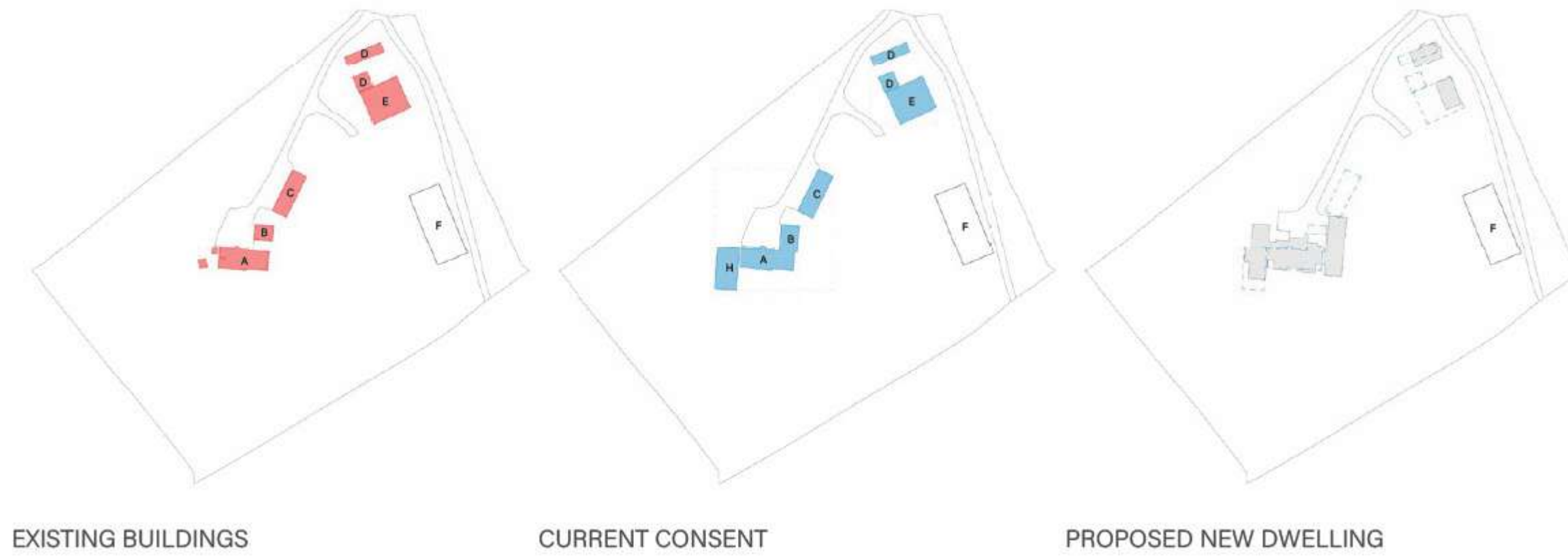


Figure 11: Site coverage analysis showing existing situation vs current consent vs latest proposals



Figure 12: Comparison of the existing situation with a visualisation of the proposed new dwelling as seen from the adjacent junction of Wick Hill Lane and the adjacent footpath (FINC 15).
 Left: Existing buiding with outline of permitted development overlaid to show potential extent of the fall back situation.
 Right: The proposed new dwelling set within newly landscaped grounds with fall back permitted development shown with blue outline.



Figure 13: Comparison of the existing situation with a visualisation of the proposed new dwelling as seen from the adjacent footpath (FINC 15).
 Left: Existing buiding with outline of permitted development overlaid to show potential extent of the fall back situation.
 Right: The proposed new dwelling set within newly landscaped grounds with fall back permitted development shown with blue outline.



Figure 14: Constraints and Opportunities Plan



- General Notes**
1. Scaled dimensions must not be taken from this drawing
 2. This drawing must be read in conjunction with all relevant drawings, documents and information prepared by the Landscape Architect, other consultants and specialists
 3. Any discrepancy on this drawing must be referred to the Landscape Architect and clarification obtained prior to any works commencing
 4. All dimensions must be checked on site before commencing works or prior to the preparation of drawings by other consultants

KEY

Soft landscape

- Existing trees retained
Refer to Tree Survey and Report by Venners Arboriculture
- Existing tree removed
Refer to Tree Survey and Report by Venners Arboriculture
 - B grade tree: 1 no (T32)
 - C grade trees: 6 no (T27, T28, T29, T33, T34 and T35)
 - Partial removal of T61, Leylandii hedge, C grade
- Proposed trees
- Existing hedgerow
- Proposed native hedgerow
- Proposed shrub and screen planting
- Proposed ornamental planting
- Existing grass retained
Retain existing grass sward and repair where required following construction
- Proposed amenity grass

Hard landscape

- Existing surfacing retained
Existing macadam retained and repaired
- Proposed driveway surface
Macadam
- Proposed driveway and parking area
Resin bonded gravel in buff colour or similar with self edging
- Proposed paving
Natural sandstone slabs
- Proposed access paths
Loose or self binding gravel in buff colour
- Proposed gravel to building edge
Loose gravel in buff colour
- Proposed compost
- Boundaries**
 - Existing fences and gates
Agricultural fencing to be repaired where required
 - Proposed he-ha wall
Natural stone facing in buff colour
 - Proposed fence and gates
Agricultural style fence, Timber post and wire fence 1100mm high
- Levels**
 - Existing contours

P07	Compost removed at arb request	RS	09.09.25
P06	T30 and T36 shown retained, 4 new trees added. Response to LIA comments	RS	08.09.25
P05	Hedge moved east. Client name updated. Existing hedge added. Proposed trees to cottages.	RS	18.05.25
P04	Ha-ha alignment revised	RS	15.05.25
P03	Ha-ha alignment revised	RS	12.05.25
P02	Updated to new building footprint and location	RS	03.04.25
P01	First Issue	RS	07.03.25

REV	DESCRIPTION	BY	DATE
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Portus + Whitton
landscape architects

Portus + Whitton Landscape Architects
58 Ashurst Road, Cirencester,
Gloucestershire, GL7 1GX
T: 01286 644336
E: contact@portusandwhitton.co.uk

CLIENT: T&R N

PROJECT: Warren Crest Farm
Finchampstead
TITLE: Landscape Plan

SCALE AT A1: 1:250	DATE: 07.03.25	DRAWN: RS	CHECKED: SW
PROJECT NO: 1822	DRAWING NO: PWL-ZX-XX-DR-L-1001	REVISION: P07	

STATUS: For Planning

Figure 15: Proposed Landscape Plan

8. Landscape Effects

Assessment of Landscape Effects

- 8.1 The sensitivity of landscape receptors are judged by combining their susceptibility to change and their perceived value attributed by designation, policy or publications. Magnitude of effect is determined through a combination of factors such as size and duration of effect, geographical extent and reversibility. These conclusions are combined to determine the resulting degree of landscape effects. The following considers the above in the context of the landscape resource (the individual components of the landscape) and the landscape character (the wider context in which the site can be found).

Landscape Character

- 8.2 Value: The application site is considered in its context of being within Local Character Area (LCA) N2 of the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment which is assessed as being a “high quality landscape” which is brought about by the combination of a good condition and strong character. The strong character results from characteristics including the distinctive undulating landform which rises to a locally-prominent ridgeline enclosing the Blackwater valley; the coherent pattern of settlement, predominantly pastoral land use and the peaceful rural ambience. The application site is largely representative of the LCA and is therefore assessed for the purposes of this report as having a high value.
- 8.3 Susceptibility: The architectural quality of the existing house and the general condition of its immediate domestic curtilage are assessed as poor. As a consequence the existing site makes a negative contribution to the over quality of the local landscape and its character. The recent consent for extensions and alterations (planning application no. 241564) would go some way to improving the sites contribution to local character. These latest proposals generally represent a significantly more holistic approach to the design of the site and will provide a high quality scheme which significantly improves the sites contribution to landscape character. It is, however, highly localised and changes to the site brought about by either the consented scheme or these latest proposals would bring about relatively minor changes in the context of the LCA. The ability of the LCT to accommodate this development without undue consequence for the baseline situation is high & therefore has low susceptibility to change.
- 8.4 Sensitivity: Considering the above, the landscape character of the application site is assessed as having a moderate sensitivity to change in line with the WBLCA.
- 8.5 Magnitude of Change:
- The proposals represent the replacement of existing buildings in the context of the edge of settlement location. They would be in keeping with the existing character of Wick Hill Lane and would be no more intrusive into the more rural landscape to the south than the existing situation. Indeed the improved

architectural quality re-introduces a rural design language, a distinct improvement over the suburban character of the existing low quality house.

- The proposals also provide an improvement over the recent consent for extensions and alterations bringing about a positive contribution to local landscape character.
 - The strengthening of existing structural landscape around the new building(s) would contribute positively to the landscape character, especially when considered in combination with the other landscape wider landscape interventions in the overall land holding.
 - Overall, the magnitude of change for the already consented extensions and alterations is assessed as negligible - there would be a minor alteration to some of the key characteristics of the baseline but these would not be seen as uncharacteristic with the surrounding landscape. The magnitude of effect of these latest proposals is assessed as negligible in comparison to the existing baseline and neutral in comparison to the consented development.
- 8.6 Landscape Character Effects: Based on the above assessment and considering the impact on the LCA, the proposals would result in a slight degree of effect on the landscape character which would be no greater than the likely effect of the already consented proposals, Indeed, the more holistic approach to development of the site will likely improve landscape character when compared to the consented development (i.e. a slight beneficial level of effect).

9. Visual Baseline and Effects

Representative Viewpoints

- 9.1 A visual survey was undertaken in December 2023 in overcast conditions. Public vantage points with relevant views of, or towards, the application site were considered and a total of 10 different representative viewpoints chosen. These have been selected in order to take into consideration a number of different factors including visual receptors as well as viewing distances.
- 9.2 The photographs within this LVIA represent winter viewpoints. Therefore, any views of the proposed development would be of a worse case scenario. During spring/summer months, potential views of the site would have greater screening and would likely have a significantly reduced visual presence.

Survey Summary

- 9.3 Warren Crest Farm, Finchampstead, is served by several public footpaths and bridleways, both within the immediate context and surrounding landscape. Bridleway FINC26 (viewpoints 1 and 2) runs north-south connecting Finchampstead's northern extremity to its south. Along this bridleway, views of the site are heavily screened by the surrounding woodland. Snippets of the site are visible from viewpoint 2, however during the spring/summer months, once the trees are in leaf then this view would become non-existent.
- 9.4 Viewpoints 3 and 4 are along Wick Hill Lane, a private road between B3348 and Bridleway FINC26. Views of the site are not visible from this road due to the level changes, the site lies over the ridge line.
- 9.5 Public Right of Way FINC18 (viewpoint 5) connects Church Lane to B3348, to the south-east of the site. The footpath shows mid-distant views of the site, however due to the distance, views of the site are hard to distinguish between other building formats along the horizon. The site is also heavily screened by existing vegetation.
- 9.6 Viewpoint 7 is taken from Finchampstead Road/B3016, a busy road that comes from Wokingham through Finchampstead. The B3016 turns into Jubilee Road/B3348 at the intersection with Church Lane. Viewpoint 6 was taken just off this road where Public Right of Way FINC18 joins. Both viewpoints have either no or negligible views of the site.
- 9.7 Viewpoints 8, 9, 10 and 11 were taken along Public Right of Way FINC15, the northern end of the footpath runs parallel to the site. Viewpoints 10 and 11 have the most views of the site due to their close proximity. There are views directly through the site's boundary from the footpath. Given the proximity of the footpath directly adjacent to the property, views of the house are to be expected especially along the open driveway. Landscape proposals will be able to frame views of the proposals from these viewpoints to the extent that new buildings will have no greater visual impact than the current situation.

Visual Receptors

- 9.8 There are a number of visual "receptors" whose visual amenity is potentially affected by the proposed development. These include:
- Residents - of neighbouring properties along private roads
 - Users of Public Right of Ways and Bridleways
 - Users of highways, pedestrians and vehicle drivers.
- 9.9 A total of 11 viewpoints have been chosen as they are representative of the receptors above, however only 4 have potential views of the application proposals. (viewpoints 2, 5, 10, and 11). For all other views, the baseline photographs confirm that the site is not visible either in winter or summer.
- 9.10 The table below summarises the findings of the visual appraisal on the viewpoints. It demonstrates that from mid-distance views, despite the high sensitivity of the receptor, the significance of the visual effect is generally neutral to low adverse during construction, resulting in a neutral residual impact.
- 9.11 For closer range views, as is to be expected, the significance of the visual impact is likely to be greater. Consequently, a small number of local viewpoints directly adjacent to the site will have views of the proposed development. As a result, our assessment is that in absolute terms the visual impacts will be moderate to major adverse during construction, transitioning to low adverse over time and the regrowth and establishment of the mitigation vegetation.
- 9.12 It is necessary, however, to consider any visual impacts in relative terms. The application site already has existing planning consents to extend the existing dwelling and to convert existing farm buildings to residential use. These will bring their own visual impacts which are likely to be moderate adverse during construction with a neutral longer term impact. It can therefore be concluded that these latest proposals would have a similar level on visual amenity as those elements already consented.

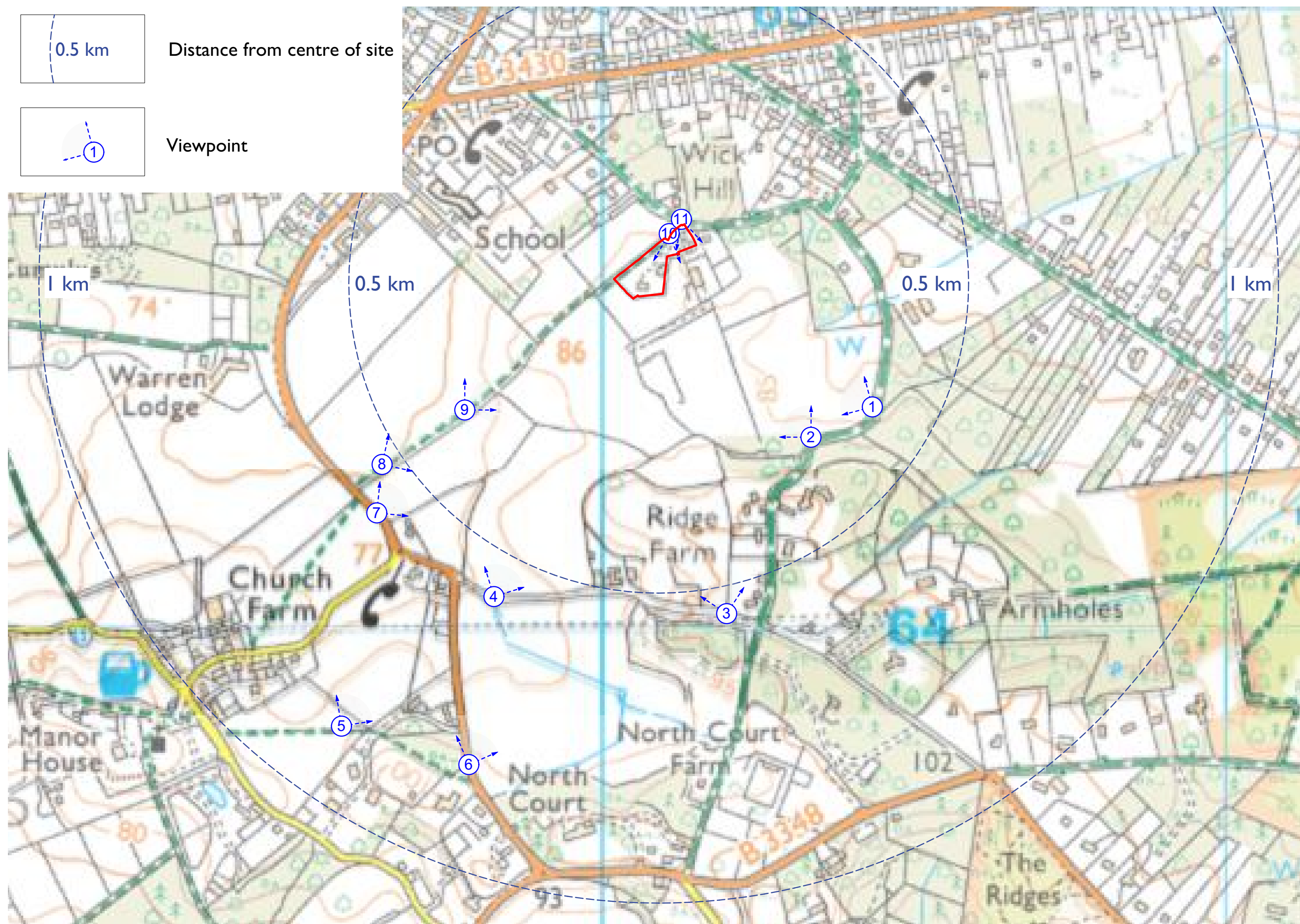


Figure 16: Viewpoint Location Plan

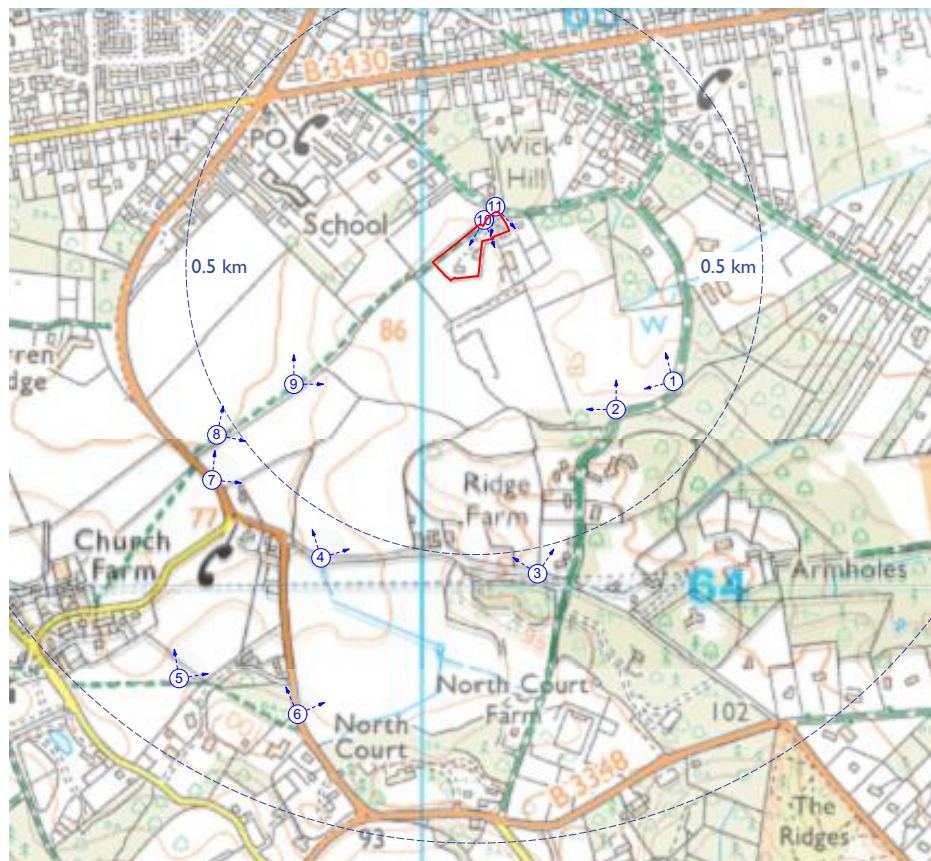
Viewpoint	Distance from Site (m)	Direction from Site	Receptor(s)	Receptor Sensitivity	Magnitude of Change	Visual Impact at Construction	Visual Impact in comparison to existing consent.	Residual Visual Impact
I	340	ESE	Bridleway Users	Medium/High	~	~		~
2	350	SE	Bridleway Users	Medium/High	Low	Slight Adverse	Neutral	Neutral
3	550	S	Private Road Users	Medium	~	~		~
4	570	SSW	Private Road Users	Medium	~	~		~
5	880	SW	PRoW Users	High	Low	Slight Adverse	Neutral	Neutral
6	830	SSW	Pedestrians and Road Users	Low/Medium	~	~		~
7	590	SW	Pedestrians and Road Users	High	~	~		~
8	510	SW	PRoW Users	High	~	~		~
9	400	SW	PRoW Users	High	~	~		~
10	40	N	PRoW Users	Medium/High	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Neutral to slight adverse	Neutral
11	40	N	PRoW Users	Medium/High	Medium	Moderate Adverse	Slight beneficial	Neutral

Figure 15: Summary of Visual Effects by Viewpoint

Approx. extent of site, not
visible from this viewpoint



Viewpoint I



Description of Viewpoint: Bridleway FINC26. Viewpoint is ESE and approximately 0.35km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Bridleway Users, Medium/High

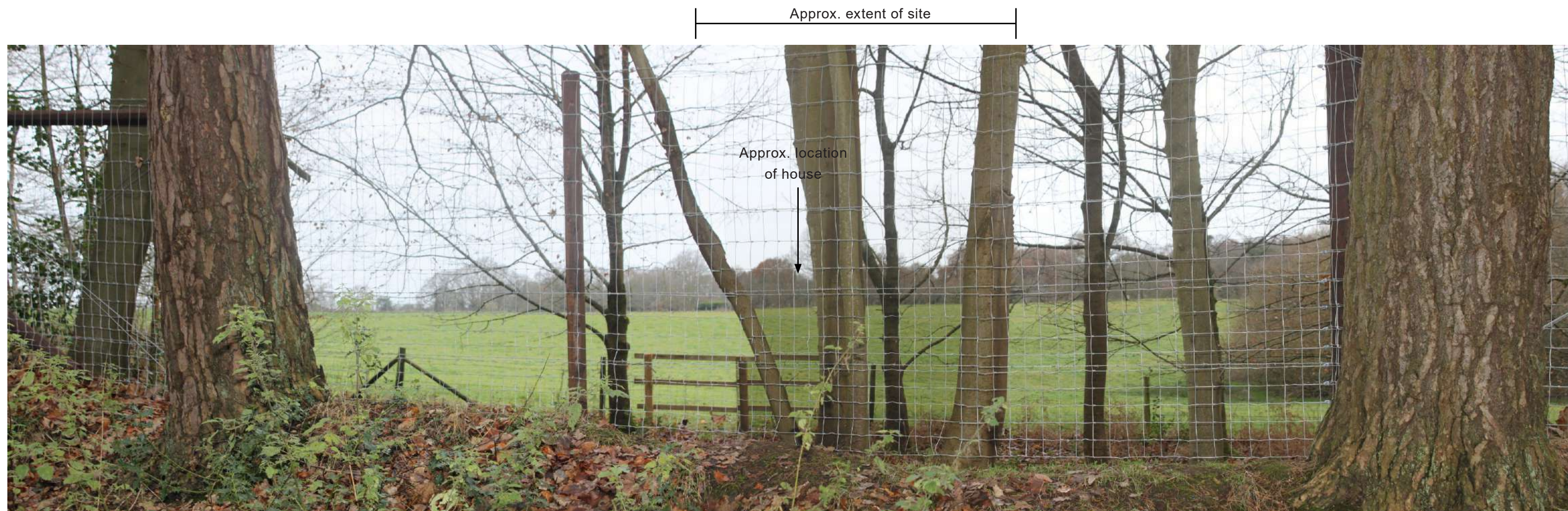
Site Visibility: The site is not visible from this viewpoint due to the density of the intervening vegetation during both winter and summer.

Mitigation: None required

Magnitude of Change: None

Visual Impact at Construction: Negligible

Residual Visual Impact: Negligible



Viewpoint 2



Description of Viewpoint: Bridleway FINC26. Viewpoint is SE and approximately 0.35km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Bridleway Users, Medium/High

Site Visibility: The site is marginally visible from this viewpoint, however, during the summer months when the trees are in leaf then the view of the site would be screened completely.

Mitigation: Management of existing boundary and structural planting only.

Magnitude of Change: Low

Visual Impact at Construction: Slight adverse (winter), Neutral (summer)

Visual Impact Relative to Consented scheme: Neutral

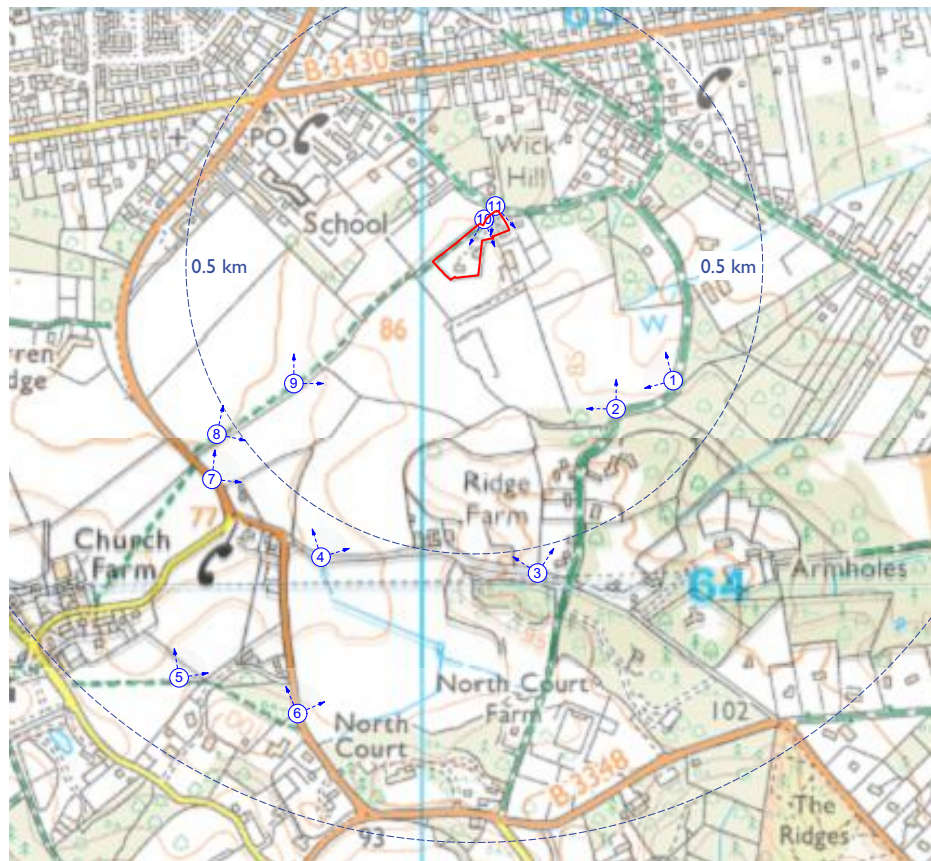
Residual Visual Impact: Neutral

Discussion: Elements of the existing buildings can only be viewed during the winter months and therefore the slight adverse impact on visual amenity would only be present during the period when trees are out of leaf. It should be noted, however, that this identified impact applies equally to both these proposals and the scheme already consented. As a consequence, the additional identified impact brought about by these proposals would be **Neutral**.

Approx. location of
house behind ridge line



Viewpoint 3



Description of Viewpoint: Private Road, Wick Hill Lane. Viewpoint is S and approximately 0.55km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Private Road Users, Medium

Site Visibility: The site is not visible from this road due to the level changes, the site lies over the ridge line.

Mitigation: None required

Magnitude of Change: None

Visual Impact at Construction: Negligible

Residual Visual Impact: Negligible



Viewpoint 4



Description of Viewpoint: Private Road, Wick Hill Lane. Viewpoint is SSW and approximately 0.57km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Private Road Users, Medium

Site Visibility: The site is not visible from this road due to the level changes, the site lies over the ridge line.

Mitigation: None required

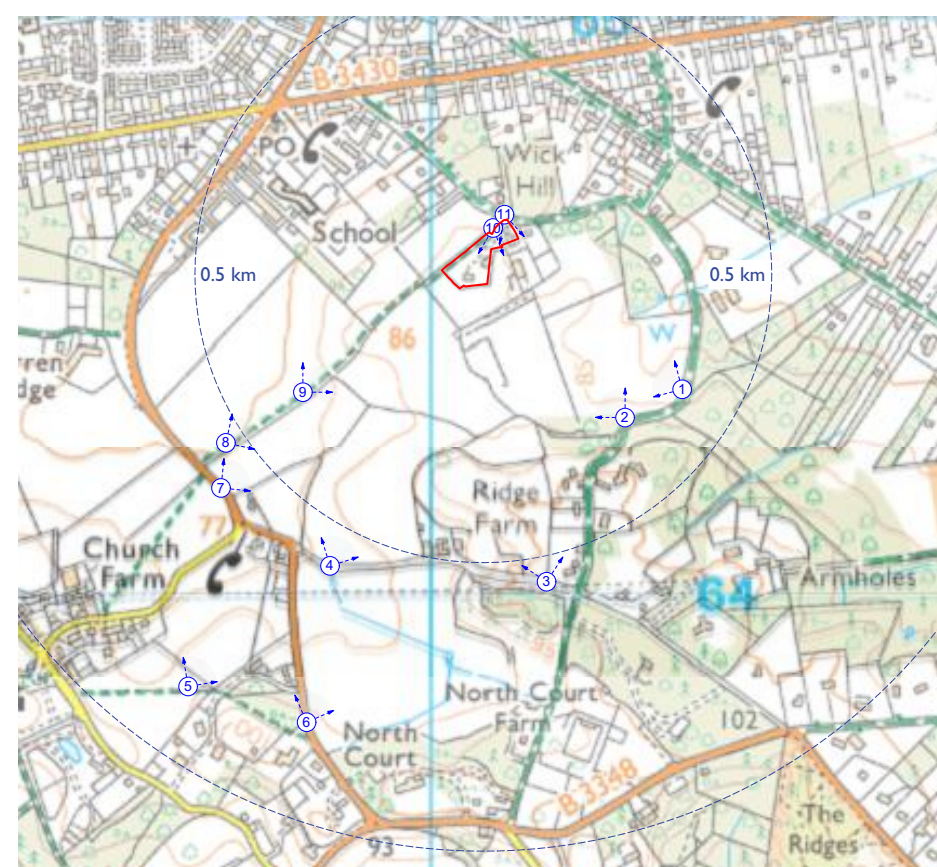
Magnitude of Change: None

Visual Impact at Construction: Negligible

Residual Visual Impact: Negligible



Viewpoint 5



Description of Viewpoint: Public Right of Way FINC18. Viewpoint is SW and approximately 0.9km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Public Right of Way Users, High

Site Visibility: The footpath shows mid-distant views of the site, however due to the distant, views of the site are hard to distinguish between other building formats along the horizon. The site is also heavily screened by existing vegetation.

Mitigation: Management of existing boundary and structural planting only.

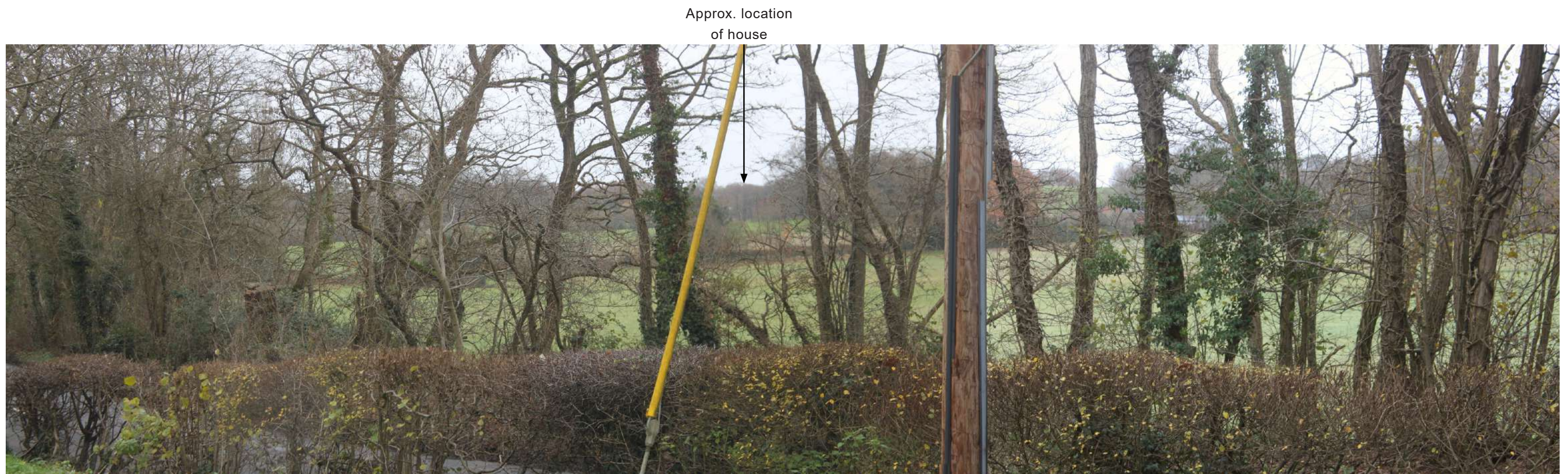
Magnitude of Change: Low

Visual Impact at Construction: Slight adverse (winter), Neutral (summer)

Visual Impact Relative to Consented scheme: Neutral

Residual Visual Impact: Slight

Discussion: The roofline of the existing dwelling can only be viewed during the winter months and therefore the slight adverse impact on visual amenity would only be present during the period when trees are out of leaf. It should be noted, however, that this identified impact applies equally to both these proposals and the scheme already consented. As a consequence, the additional identified impact brought about by these proposals would be **Neutral**.



Viewpoint 6



Description of Viewpoint: Public Right of Way FINC18 where it joins road B3348. Viewpoint is SSW and approximately 0.8km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Pedestrians and Road Users, Low/Medium

Site Visibility: The site is not visible from this viewpoint due to the density of the intervening vegetation.

Mitigation: None required

Magnitude of Change: None

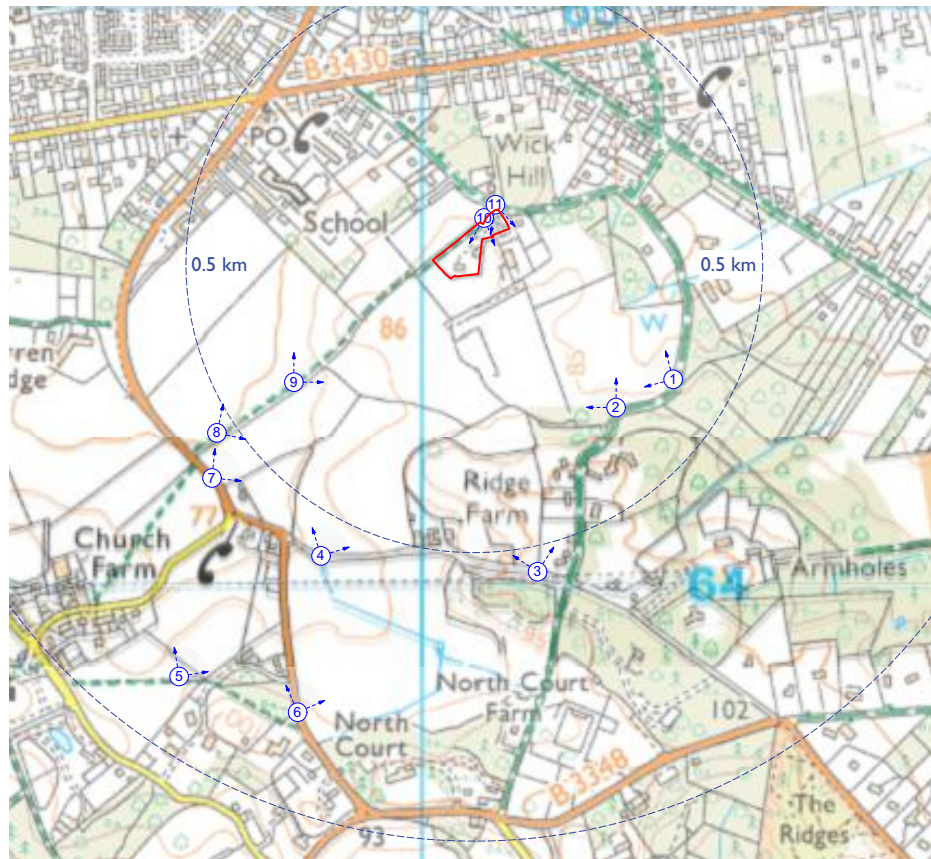
Visual Impact at Construction: Negligible

Residual Visual Impact: Negligible

Approx. location
of house



Viewpoint 7



Description of Viewpoint: Road B3016. Viewpoint is SW and approximately 0.6km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Pedestrians and Road Users, Low

Site Visibility: The site is not visible from this viewpoint due to the density of the intervening vegetation.

Mitigation: None required

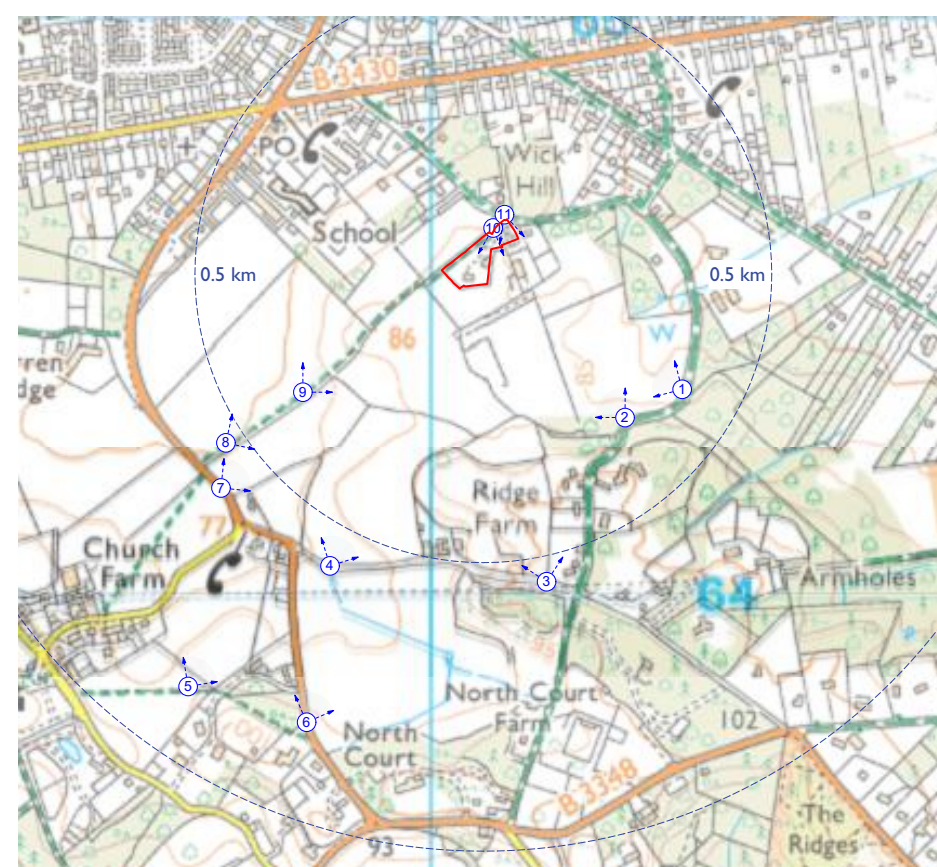
Magnitude of Change: None

Visual Impact at Construction: Negligible

Residual Visual Impact: Negligible



Viewpoint 8



Description of Viewpoint: Public Right of Way, FINCI5. Viewpoint is WSW and approximately 0.51km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Public Right of Way Users, High, Medium

Site Visibility: The site is not visible from this footpath due to the topography of the land, the land slopes upwards towards the site and the density of the intervening vegetation.

Mitigation: None required

Magnitude of Change: None

Visual Impact at Construction: Negligible

Residual Visual Impact: Negligible



Viewpoint 9



Description of Viewpoint: Public Right of Way, FINCI5. Viewpoint is WSW and approximately 0.4km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Public Right of Way Users, High, Medium

Site Visibility: The site is not visible from this footpath due to the topography of the land, the land slopes upwards towards the site and the density of the intervening vegetation.

Mitigation: None required

Magnitude of Change: None

Visual Impact at Construction: Negligible

Residual Visual Impact: Negligible



Viewpoint 10



Description of Viewpoint: Public Right of Way, FINCI5. Viewpoint is NW and approximately 0.04km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Public Right of Way Users, Medium/High

Site Visibility: The footpath runs directly adjacent to the garden boundary and therefore direct views of the existing house are evident particularly at the point where the footpath passes the driveway entrance to the property. From this location a framed view of the existing house can be gained - significantly softened by the existing trees of various species within the garden.

Mitigation: Creation of new boundary treatments, hedge planting along drive and new trees to assist in framing the proposed built form.

Magnitude of Change: Medium

Visual Impact at Construction: Moderate adverse

Visual Impact Relative to Consented scheme: Slight beneficial

Residual Visual Impact: Neutral

Discussion: From this adjacent viewpoint the existing house is easily viewed and consequently there will be a moderate adverse impact during construction. It should be noted, however, that this identified impact would apply to both these proposals and the scheme already consented for extensions and alterations. The latest proposed scheme will see a building with a higher ridgeline. As a consequence, the additional identified impact brought about by these proposals would be **Slight Adverse**.



Viewpoint II



Description of Viewpoint: Public Right of Way, FINC15. Viewpoint is NW and approximately 0.06km from the centre of the site.

Receptor and Receptor Sensitivity: Public Right of Way Users, Medium/High

Site Visibility: The footpath runs directly adjacent to the garden boundary and therefore direct views of the existing barns and working buildings are evident particularly at the point where the footpath passes the entrance to the property.

Mitigation: Creation of new boundary treatments, hedge planting along drive and new trees to assist in framing the proposed built form.

Magnitude of Change: Medium

Visual Impact at Construction: Moderate adverse

Visual Impact Relative to Consented scheme: Slight beneficial

Residual Visual Impact: Neutral

Discussion: From this adjacent viewpoint the existing buildings are easily viewed and consequently there will be a moderate adverse impact during construction. It should be noted, however, that this identified impact would apply to both these proposals and the scheme already consented. Indeed, the latest proposals for the proposed cottages reduce the number of buildings. As a consequence, the additional identified impact brought about by these proposals would be **Slight Beneficial**.

10. Summary and Conclusions

Site Description

- 10.1 Portus + Whitton have been appointed to undertake a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) for a replacement dwelling at Warren Crest Farm, Finchampstead, Wokingham. The purpose of this report is to assess the landscape and visual effects of the proposals using accepted methodology set out in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment' (3rd Edition).
- 10.2 The results presented within this assessment are based on a combination of desk-based research and field-survey work. The site survey was carried out on 15th December 2023 in dry but overcast weather conditions.

The Site

- 10.3 The application site includes an existing dwelling (Warren Crest Farm) and associated domestic garden, a number of redundant farm buildings and pastoral field. It is located at the southern periphery of Finchampstead, a village in Wokingham Borough in Berkshire (Figure 1). The site is accessed via Wick Hill Lane and is a contained parcel of land associated with the farm buildings. The Site lies within the clients wider land ownership (Figure 2), a 27.47Ha small holding of farm building, farmland and woodland.
- 10.4 The application site is a contained parcel of land adjacent to open pastoral fields close to Finchampstead village at the southern extent of Wick Hill Lane. The local architecture along Wick Hill Lane comprises detached houses with significant setbacks and driveways with numerous mature trees. The area is also characterised by many large dwellings set on generous plots. The perimeter of the Site is defined by field boundaries of hedgerows and hedgerow trees many of which link the site to the surrounding network of hedgerows and woodland. . The northeast boundary adjoins a residential garden and consists of a clipped hedge and several trees. A public right of way runs adjacent to the Northwest boundary, along the full length of the site and links Wick Hill Lane at the north to Finchampstead Road.
- 10.5 In general the combined effect of garden and boundary vegetation provides a surrounding screen to the built elements of the application site. This results in the existing house being screened from most public views with only limited visibility to the south west (and at considerable distance) being apparent.

Proposals

- 10.6 Existing planning consents allow for extensions and alterations to the existing dwelling and outbuildings (as approved under planning application no. 241564). This includes a consent for a substantial sized swimming pool outbuilding. A further consent exists for the conversion of the existing agricultural buildings into three dwellings (as approved under planning application no. 233112).

- 10.7 This proposal is for the demolition of the existing dwelling including the outbuildings, and their replacements with a new detached dwelling. It is also proposed to replaced the three residential units (as converted from the existing agricultural buildings) with two residential units and a garage. This will result in the combined footprint of this latest scheme being a considerable reduction over what has previously been consented. The proposed dwelling follows the orientation of the existing dwelling and will take advantage of long views toward the countryside to the south.

- 10.8 The scale and massing of the proposed buildings gives the concept of a farmstead and the building materials have been selected to follow the local vernacular of Finchampstead and agricultural buildings within the local context.

Landscape Character

- 10.9 The site is covered by the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA) which provides a detailed review of the varied landscapes within the Borough. The site can be found within Local Character Area (LCA) N2, although it is immediately adjacent to LCA M2.
- 10.10 LCA N2 refers to Finchampstead Pastoral Sandy Lowland. *“This area is characterised by gently to steeply undulating pastures rising to a gentle ridge and set against the wooded backdrop of the Settled and Forested Sands. Local areas of arable land are also evident.”* Key characteristics of the area are
- Gently to steeply undulating landform culminating in a prominent ridgeline to the north with views to the surrounding lowlands.
 - Poor soil as a result of underlying sandy formations including Bagshot Beds, Camberley Sand Formation and Windlesham Formation with areas of London Clay resulting in a predominantly pastoral landscape.
 - Mixed pastoral landscape of open small and medium sized fields divided by post and wire or timber fences with grazing sheep, horses and cattle, following a variety of enclosure patterns.
 - Scrubby and overgrown shelterbelts, roadside belts, small farm woods and scattered remnant hedgerow trees enhancing the wooded context created by adjoining Forested and Settled Sands.
 - Quiet rural landscape with an unobtrusive network of rural roads bordered by grassy banks with bracken, furze and ash avenues.
 - Drainage ditches and small brooks and drainage channels.
 - Dispersed settlement patter excepting the nucleated edge-of-river floodplain village settlement of Finchampstead and small clusters of buildings with characteristic vernacular influences including brick, timber frame and thatch.
 - Farmsteads and manors located on elevated areas and following the route of the Devil's Highway former Roman Road creating an illusion of parkland.
 - Barrows and former Roman villa complex (SAM).
 - Dense network of public footpaths and bridleways.

- 10.11 The local character area is assessed as being a “high quality landscape” which is brought about by the combination of a good condition and strong character. The application site is largely representative of the LCA and is therefore assessed for the purposes of this report as having a high value.
- 10.12 The existing house makes a negative contribution to the over quality of the local landscape and its character. The recent consent for extensions and alterations (planning application no. 241564) would go some way to improving the sites contribution to local character. The latest proposals generally represent a significantly more holistic approach to the design of the site and will provide a high quality scheme which significantly improves the sites contribution to landscape character. The ability of the LCT to accommodate this development without undue consequence for the baseline situation is high & therefore has low susceptibility to change. The landscape character of the application site is assessed as having a moderate sensitivity to change in line with the WBLCA.
- 10.13 Magnitude of Change:
- The proposals represent the replacement of existing buildings in the context of the edge of settlement location. They would be in keeping with the existing character of Wick Hill Lane and would be no more intrusive into the more rural landscape to the south than the existing situation. Indeed the improved architectural quality re-introduces a rural design language, a distinct improvement over the suburban character of the existing low quality house.
 - The proposals also provide an improvement over the recent consent for extensions and alterations bringing about a positive contribution to local landscape character.
 - The strengthening of existing structural landscape around the new building(s) would contribute positively to the landscape character, especially when considered in combination with the other landscape wider landscape interventions in the overall land holding.
 - Overall, the magnitude of change for the already consented extensions and alterations is assessed as negligible - there would be a minor alteration to some of the key characteristics of the baseline but these would not be seen as uncharacteristic with the surrounding landscape. The magnitude of effect of these latest proposals is assessed as negligible in comparison to the existing baseline and neutral in comparison to the consented development.
- 10.14 Landscape Character Effects: Based on the above assessment and considering the impact on the LCA, the proposals would result in a slight degree of effect on the landscape character which would be no greater than the likely effect of the already consented proposals, Indeed, the more holistic approach to development of the site will likely improve landscape character when compared to the consented development (i.e. a slight beneficial level of effect).

Visual Effects

- 10.15 A total of 11 viewpoints have been chosen as they are representative of the receptors above, however only 4 have potential views of the application proposals. (viewpoints 2, 5, 10, and 11). For all other views, the baseline photographs confirm that the site is not visible either in winter or summer.
- 10.16 The table below summarises the findings of the visual appraisal on the viewpoints. It demonstrates that from mid-distance views, despite the high sensitivity of the receptor, the significance of the visual effect is generally neutral to low adverse during construction, resulting in a neutral residual impact.
- 10.17 For closer range views, as is to be expected, the significance of the visual impact is likely to be greater. Consequently, a small number of local viewpoints directly adjacent to the site will have views of the proposed development. As a result, our assessment is that in absolute terms the visual impacts will be moderate to major adverse during construction, transitioning to low adverse over time and the regrowth and establishment of the mitigation vegetation.
- 10.18 It is necessary, however, to consider any visual impacts in relative terms. The application site already has existing planning consents to extend the existing dwelling and to convert existing farm buildings to residential use. These will bring their own visual impacts which are likely to be moderate adverse during construction with a neutral longer term impact. It can therefore be concluded that these latest proposals would have a similar level on visual amenity as those elements already consented.

Conclusion

- 10.19 In conclusion, it is clear that the proposed dwelling will be largely an improvement over the existing consented scheme in terms of its character and will be only marginally more visible from public viewpoints.
- 10.20 The landscape proposals aim to provide an appropriate setting to the new development within the local and wider landscape that provide both landscape and biodiversity enhancements. Overall, the architectural and landscape proposals could be expected to result in a neutral to slight effect on the local landscape character type.
- 10.21 As a consequence, the proposals are assessed as being consistent with the aims of national and local planning policy.

