

Land off Reading Road Arborfield

Landscape and Visual Appraisal

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1.Introduction

About this document

- 1.1 This Landscape and Visual Appraisal has been prepared by Green Landscape Studio on behalf of Dandara and Elstree Land for an outline application at Land off Reading Road, Arborfield.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to undertake an objective landscape and visual appraisal to assess the value of the landscape and visual receptors and their ability to accommodate the scale of the proposed residential development. This will include:
 - The identification of a suitable study area and associated landscape planning policies
 - The establishment of the existing landscape and visual baseline conditions
 - The identification of key landscape and visual receptors
 - Advise on landscape strategy for the site where necessary
- 1.3 This appraisal does not form a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, however, can be used to undertake further assessment of the landscape and visual effects when full details of the proposed development are available at the stage of the reserved matters submission. The appraisal will provide mitigation measures that should be taken into account when preparing a reserved matters application with regards to design, layout and appearance to minimise any adverse impact on the existing landscape character and visual amenity.

Site Description & Proposed Development

- 1.4 The application comprises an outline planning application for a residential development of upto 111 dwellings with associated access, open space and infrastructure located to the north of Reading Road in Arborfield. The application has all matters reserved, with the exception of access, which has been proposed off Reading Road. Detailed proposals for this access will be submitted as part of the application.
- 1.5 The appendices also include a landscape strategy setting out any mitigation measures that should be taken into account at a reserved matters stage. The illustrative landscape masterplan, included in the appendices, provides an indication of what the future development may look like.

2. Methodology

Introduction

2.1 The methodology defines the overarching strategy and rationale for the assessment. This chapter sets out the principles of this LVA and outlines the overall process.

Landscape Appraisal Methodology

Landscape Baseline

2.2 Establishing the landscape baseline information has been carried out using a combination of desk-based study and site survey. It includes the identification and recording of the character of the landscape and the elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual factors that contribute to it. It will also identify the value attached to this landscape as a whole, before identifying the landscape receptors and their value.

Landscape Character

2.3 In rural landscapes, Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is the key tool for understanding the landscape. Generally, this information is produced by competent authorities and public bodies, with relevant studies generally including:

- National Character Areas;
- County Landscape Character Areas; and
- Local Landscape Character Areas

2.4 This is followed by a study of detailed site specific information.

2.5 Typical baseline information is then mapped and usually includes the following:

- Aerial imagery
- Topography
- Soils and geology
- Vegetation
- Land use
- Settlement pattern and/or built form
- Protective designations
- Historic features
- Public Rights of Way
- Hydrology

2.6 The aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape, such as its scale, complexity, openness, tranquillity or wildness will be described using a mixture of text and photographic evidence.

2.7 The information above will be collated and critically reviewed through a desktop exercise, followed by on-site verification and refinement, where required.

2.8 Following this review and refinements, key characteristics contributing to the distinctive character of the landscape are then described as well as the condition of the landscape and the condition of elements or features making up this landscape.

Landscape Value

2.9 As part of the baseline description the value of the potentially affected landscape will be established. Landscape value is the value attached to different landscape by society. Value can apply to areas of landscape as a whole or to individual elements, features or aesthetic or perceptual dimensions which contribute to the character of the landscape. These values can apply at a community, local, national or international level. National and international valued landscape are generally recognised by designations, which have a formal statutory bases, such as: National Parks, AONBs/National Landscapes, Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. Local landscape designations are generally identified locally valued landscape which are recognised through local landscape designations, such as Special Landscape Areas or Areas of Great Landscape Value). They are incorporated into planning documents with accompanying planning policies.

2.10 It is important that the baseline study seeks to understand the basis for any designation and why the landscape is considered of value, identifying to what degree the criteria and factors used to support the designation are represented in the study area. Fieldwork will be used to establish how the criteria are expressed in the study area, whilst recognising that every part of a designated area contributes to the whole in some way.

2.11 The starting point in establishing the value of the landscape is looking at the landscape designations associated with the identified landscape receptors; however, it should be noted that GLVIA3 acknowledges that undesignated landscapes do not necessarily have no value and may contain valued elements. Areas of undesignated landscape have been assessed through a combination of desktop and site-based analysis in line with Box 5.1 of GLVIA3 and the range of factor defined (although not exhaustive) in table 1 of TGN02/21. This examines a range of factors as shown in table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Range of factors that can be considered when identifying landscape value

Factor	Definition
Natural Heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape
Cultural Heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to landscape
Landscape condition	Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure
Associations	Landscape which is connected with notable peoples, events and the arts
Distinctiveness	Landscape that has a strong sense of identity
Recreational	Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important
Perceptual (Scenic)	Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense
Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity)	Landscape with a strong perceptual value notable wildness, tranquillity and/or dark skies
Functional	Landscape which performs a clearly identifiable and valuable function, particularly in the healthy functioning of the landscape

2.12 The indicators of landscape value should be revised on a case-by-case basis, taking into account whether and to what extent they contribute (positively or negatively) to a specific landscape. The relative importance attached to each indicated is likely to vary across different landscapes, this will influence the overall 'weight of evidence' in coming to an overall judgement on the landscape value.

2.13 Neither TGN02/21 nor GLVIA3 provide a prescribed range of values to define the landscape value of a site, however, in the interest of robustness and clarity it is suggested a scale of High to very low is used. Table 2.2 provides the definitions associated with each value, taking account of both the scale of the landscape value (identified in paragraph 2.20) and the factors identified in table 2.1 to aid with the value of undesignated landscapes.

Table 2.2: Landscape Value Criteria

Value	Definition
Very High	A very distinctive landscape with strong, widespread and defining characteristics. High quality with no detracting features. Contains features that could be described as unique or are nationally scarce. Considerable conservation and/or recreational/heritage interest. Such areas would generally be internationally or nationally recognised designations, e.g. World Heritage Sites, key elements/features within a National Park or AONB, areas of exceptional remoteness, areas providing a setting for internally valued buildings or cultural features.
High	A distinctive landscape with strong, widespread and defining characteristics. High quality with some minor detracting features. Contains features that are very attractive or have an attractive scenic quality and in part rare. Considerable conservation and/or recreational/heritage interest. Such areas would generally be nationally recognised designations, e.g. National Parks, Areas of Great Landscape Value (or similar designations), AONBS, remote countryside, accessible wildlife areas or national value and areas providing a setting for listed buildings or nationally important cultural features.
Medium	Reasonably distinctive landscape or with some strong contributing characteristics. Average quality with feature that are locally commonplace which may exhibit some detracting features. Intermediate conservation and/or recreational/heritage interest. A strong sense of place. Such areas would generally be local designations.
Low	Relatively bland or commonplace landscape or with limited positive characteristics. Features that make little contribution to local distinctiveness. Some detracting features, Limited conservation and/or recreational/heritage interest. Poor sense of place. Such areas would be commonplace at local level and would generally be undesignated, offering scope for improvement.
Very Low	A degraded featureless landscape with little or no characteristics of quality or interest. Not sense of place. Such areas would generally be undesignated and identified as required recovery.

Landscape receptors

- 2.14 Once the landscape baseline is established it is important that landscape receptors are identified. A landscape receptor is ‘a defined aspect of the landscape resource that has the potential to be affected by a proposal’ in GLVIA3.
- 2.15 The first step is to identify the components of the landscape that are likely to be affected by the scheme, this can be the overall character of the study area or site or individual elements of features and specific aesthetic or perceptual aspects.
- 2.16 The value of each receptor will be identified, following the same criteria as established in table 2.2, not forgetting that all individual elements contribute towards the overall landscape character and value of the study area.

Landscape susceptibility to change

- 2.17 Susceptibility to change means the ability of the landscape receptor to accommodate the proposed development without undue consequences.

- 2.18 The nature of the predicted effect should not take account of the value attached to the receptor but should be determined by combining judgements about matters such as the size and scale of the change, the extent of the area over which it occurs, whether it is reversible or irreversible and whether it is short or long term in duration.
- 2.19 GLVIA 3 recommends that judgements about the susceptibility of landscape receptors to change should be recorded on a verbal scale (for example high, medium or low). Table 2.3 provides a definition for each scale.

Table 2.3: Landscape Susceptibility Criteria

Value	Definition
High	Landscape receptor of particular distinctive character susceptible to relatively small changes.
Medium	Landscape receptor reasonably tolerant of changes
Low	Landscape receptor which is potentially tolerant of substantial change

Landscape sensitivity

- 2.20 The sensitivity of a landscape receptor is the combination of its susceptibility to the type of change or development and the value attached to the landscape. The assessment may take place in situations where there are existing landscape sensitivity and capacity studies. These can provide useful background information but are generally not tailored to the site specifically and therefore cannot provide a substitute for the individual assessment in relation to the changes arising from the specific development proposals.
- 2.21 GLVIA 3 does not set out the range of values associated with the sensitivity of the landscape receptor, in the interest of robustness and clarity it is suggested a scale of high to very low is used. Table 2.4 sets out the definitions and typical criteria for the landscape values identified as suitable for this assessment.

Table 2.4: Landscape Sensitivity Criteria

Value	Definition and typical criteria
High	The landscape cannot accommodate any change related to the proposed development without undue consequences arising on the condition or quality of its defining characteristics: • The landscape has a high susceptibility to change and has high value; or • The landscape has a medium susceptibility to change and has a high to very high value.
Medium	The landscape is able to accommodate a small change related to the proposed development without undue consequences arising on the condition or quality of its defining qualities: • The landscape has a high susceptibility to change and has a medium to low value; or • The landscape has a medium susceptibility to change and has a high to medium value; or • The landscape has a low susceptibility to change and has a very high to high landscape value.
Low	The landscape is able to accommodate a medium change related to the proposed development without undue consequences arising on the condition or quality of its defining characteristics: • The landscape has a high susceptibility to change and has a very low susceptibility; or • The landscape has a medium susceptibility to chance and has a low or lower value; or • The landscape has a low susceptibility to change and has a medium or low value.
Very low	The landscape is able to accommodate a large change related to the proposed development without undue consequences arising on the condition or quality of its defining characteristics:

Value	Definition and typical criteria
	The landscape has a low susceptibility to change and has a very low value.

Visual Appraisal Methodology

Visual Baseline

2.22 The visual baseline and associated receptors have been identified using a combination of desk-based and site survey. The visual baseline will establish the area in which the development will be visible. Following this, the visual receptors will be identified with viewpoints chosen to represent certain groups of visual receptors and/or specific viewpoints, such as local visitor attractions.

Zone of Theoretical visibility (ZTV)

2.23 The ZTV mapping is a desk-based study and establishes the theoretical visibility of the proposed development. The ZTV for this report has been produced using a Digital Terrain Model (DTM) of the site and its surroundings. 3 reference points have been used to determine the visibility of the proposed development with a building height of 9m and a viewer height of 1.6m. As recommended in GLVIA3 the ZTV has been carried out treating the world as 'bare earth' without taking account of potential screening by vegetation, buildings, etc. Intervening vegetation and built form will be established through a mix of aerial photography and one or several site visits.

Identification of visual receptors and key viewpoints

2.24 Following the production of the ZTV a desk-based study and site visit will aid in determining the key visual receptors. Visual receptors include people in a specific area who will be affected by the changes in views and visual amenity. They may include the following:

- People living in the area;
- People who work in the area;
- People passing through (Road, rail or other forms of transport);
- People visiting promoted landscapes or attractions; and
- People engaged in recreation (including users of PRow and accessible land)

2.25 People can have differing responses to changes in views and visual amenity depending on their context (location, time of day, season and/or degree of exposure to views) and purpose for being a particular place (e.g. reception, residence, employment or passing through).

2.26 The above information will be used to establish identified groups of visual receptors with key viewpoints selected, falling into the following groups:

- Representative viewpoints – Selected to present the experience of different types of visual receptors, where larger number of viewpoints cannot all be included individually and where the significant effects are unlikely to differ
- Specific viewpoints – Chosen because they are key and/or promoted viewpoints within the landscape
- Illustrative viewpoints – Chosen specifically to demonstrate a particular effect of specific issues, which might be the restricted visibility at certain locations.

2.27 The baseline viewpoints have been taken in line with the latest Landscape Institute guidance, a separate methodology for which can be found in appendix 2 and have been documented in a structured and consistent manner.

2.28 A combination of photographs and a written description have been used to record the visual baseline, including the following:

- Type and relative numbers of people (visual receptors) likely to be effected;
- Location, nature and characteristics of the chosen viewpoint;
- Nature, composition and characteristics of the existing views experienced at these viewpoints, including direction of view;
- Visual characteristics of the existing views; and
- Elements which may interrupts, filter or otherwise influence the views.

Sensitivity of visual receptor

2.29 Each visual receptor should be assessed in terms of both their susceptibility to change in views and visual amenity and also the value attached to particular views. When determining the sensitivity of a visual receptor the following parameter have to be considered:

- Location and context of the viewpoint;
- Expectations and occupation/activity of the receptor;
- Importance or value of the view; and
- Degree of exposure to the view e.g. permanence vs transience

2.30 In accordance with GLVIA3 the visual receptors have been graded according to their sensitivity to change against the criteria set out in table 2.7.

Table 2.7: Visual Receptor Sensitivity Criteria

Value	Definition and typical criteria
High	Receptors with a high interest in the visual environment, e.g. • Occupiers of residential properties (particularly habitable rooms occupied during daylight hours), users of PRow and scenic routes where the focus is on the landscape. • Visitors to heritage assets or other attractions where the landscape setting is an important contributor to the experience
Medium	Receptors with a moderate interest in the visual environment, e.g. • People travelling through or past the affected landscape including pedestrians and cyclists • People engaged in outdoor recreation where enjoyment of the landscape is incidental rather than the main interest
Low	Receptors with passing or momentary interest in the visual environment • People at their place of work or industrial facilities • People driving on minor routes
Very Low	Receptors with limited interest in the visual environment • People driving on fast routes, including major routes and motorways

Mitigation

2.31 For both the landscape and visual appraisal the mitigation will be determined once the sensitivity of the receptors is identified. It is important that the correct mitigation is proposed to ensure any future proposals will have minimal impact, both visually and on the receiving landscape.

3. Planning context

Introduction

- 3.1 This section describes the relevant landscape related planning policy, legislation and guidance applicable to the development site, its context and the proposed land use. The relevant statutory and non-statutory designations are identified on drawing GLS_050_1102 in appendix 3.

National legislation

Town and Country Planning Act

- 3.2 The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 established the principle that development should not proceed in an uncontrolled way but should be subject to official authorisation. It also allowed Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to include green belt proposals into their development plan.
- 3.3 Current planning legislation in England and Wales was consolidated in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, part of which were replaced or amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. Section 106 of the 1990 Act allows for the setting in place of planning agreements and planning obligations that developers must meet in order to secure planning permission. In landscape terms this can apply to areas of public open space and play provision among others.

The Planning Act 2008

- 3.4 The 2008 Act introduced the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which can be used to fund a wide range of infrastructure needed to support the development of the area.

National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949

- 3.5 This Act provided the frameworks for the creation of National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England and Wales, whilst also addressing Public Rights of Way (PRoW) and access to open land.

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (As Amended)

- 3.6 The 2017 regulations are one of the pieces of domestic law that transposed the land and marine aspects of the EU Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) and certain elements of the Wild Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC) into national legislation for England and Wales. A revised draft piece of legislation 'Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019' is currently under deliberation following Brexit, which would ensure the continued operability of the regulations post January 2021.
- 3.7 The EU Habitats and Wild Birds Directives led to the setting up of a network of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Areas (SPA), which together form a network of protected sites across the EU named Nature 2000. It aims to protect species and habitat which are considered to be of European interest. The revised national regulations (once approved) will ensure the continuation of this on a national level, this will be referred to as the National Site Network.
- 3.8 LPAs are required to consider the potential impacts of any development on SPA's and SAC's.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

- 3.9 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is implemented in the UK to give protection to native species (especially those at threat), controlling the release of non-native species and it enhances the protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). It also builds upon the Right of Ways rules in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. It is regulated by Natural England.

The Countryside and Right of Way Act 2000 (CROW Act)

- 3.10 The CROW Act normally gives a public right of access to land mapped as 'open country' or registered common Land. These areas are known as 'open access land'. Most of the coastal margin that is being created as part of the England Coast Path is also open access land.
- 3.11 In addition it includes measures for the strategic planning of rights of way networks and provides improved protection and management of SSSIs.

National Heritage Act 1983

- 3.12 The Act sets up the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, now known as Historic England. Historic England is the Government's statutory adviser on the historic environment. It holds the List of Buildings, the Schedule of Monuments, the Register of Parks and Gardens and the Register of Historic Battlefields.
- 3.13 The 'Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications – notification to Historic England and National Amenity Societies and the Secretary of State (England) Direction 2015' states that LPAs are obliged to consult Historic England on certain planning application and listed building consent applications.

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 3.14 This Act establishes the principles relating to the granting of planning permission for building works, with particular focus on listed buildings and conservation areas and their setting.

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 3.15 The NPPF was first published in March 2012 and last updated in December 2023 and sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

2. Achieving sustainable development

- 3.16 Paragraph 11 states that 'Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development.' It continues that 'for decision-taking this means:
- Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
 - Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:
 - The application of policies in this Framework that protect the areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development propose; or
 - Any adverse impact of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as whole.'

8. Promoting healthy and safe communities

- 3.17 In paragraph 96 the NPPF states that 'Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- a) Promote social interaction [...]
 - i. Are safe and accessible [...] for example through the use of attractive, well-designed, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, and high quality public space [...]; and
 - ii. Enable and support healthy lifestyles [...] for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, [...], allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.'
- 3.18 Paragraph 102 focussed on the provision of open space and their multi-functional benefits relating to health and wellbeing, nature and climate change. Stating that 'information gained from assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreation provision is needed.
- 3.19 It continues in paragraph 103 that 'existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on' unless there is a clear surplus, the loss would be replaced by equivalent or better provision, or the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision with the benefits clearly outweighing the loss.
- 3.20 Paragraph 104 states that 'planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks including National Trails.'
- 3.21 It then continues (paragraph 106-7) to provide detail on the designation of Local Green Space stating that 'policies for managing development within a Local Green Space should be consistent for those for Green Belts'.

12. Achieving well-designed and beautiful places

- 3.22 Chapter 12 of the framework looks at the design of new developments, and states that 'good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and makes development acceptable to communities'.
- 3.23 'Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:
- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
 - 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, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
 - d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
 - e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport
 - f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users (46); and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.
- 3.24 Paragraph 136 emphasises the important of trees and states that they 'make an important contribution to the character and quality of urban environments, and can also help mitigate and adapt climate change.' Continuing that 'planning policies and decisions should ensure that new streets are tree-lined, that opportunities are taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in development [...], that appropriate measures are in place to secure the long-term maintenance of newly-planted trees, and that existing trees are retained wherever possible.'

15. Conserving and enhancing the natural built environment

- 3.25 This chapter covers the protection of the wider landscape, stating that 'planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
 - b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
 - c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
 - d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
 - e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
 - f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.
- 3.26 Paragraph 182 places emphasis on the 'great weight [that] should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.' Continuing that 'the scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and design to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.'
- 3.27 Paragraph 183 states that 'permission should be refused for major development other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.'

Local Planning Policy

Wokingham Borough Council Local Plan

- 3.28 The site is located within Wokingham Borough Council, with the following documents currently making up the development plan:
- Core Strategy Development Plan Document (Adopted January 2010)
 - Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (Adopted February 2014)
 - Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036

Core Strategy Development Plan Document

CP1: Sustainable Development

- 3.29 This policy emphasizes the protection and enhancement of the local environment, including considerations for landscape and biodiversity, alongside other sustainability goals.

CP3: General Principles for Development

- 3.30 This policy highlights the need for development to be sensitive to the local environment, requiring high-quality design and the protection of visual amenity, including green spaces and landscaping considerations. It also stresses protecting local trees and shrubs, which contribute to the area's overall visual character as well as conserving and enhancing heritage assets.

CP7: Biodiversity

- 3.31 This policy focuses on conserving and enhancing biodiversity by protecting key habitats and species, and encouraging biodiversity improvements in new developments. For further information, refer to the ecologist's information.

CP8: Thames Basin Heaths SPA

- 3.32 This policy aims to protect the Special Protection Area (SPA) around the Thames Basin Heaths to ensure that development does not harm its biodiversity. For further information, refer to the ecologist's information.

CP9: Scale and Location of Development Proposals

- 3.33 The policy states that the scale of development proposals in Wokingham Borough must reflect the existing or proposed levels of facilities and services at or in the location, together with their accessibility. It lists there is scope for 'limited development' at Arborfield Cross.

CP11: Proximity to the countryside

- 3.34 This policy limits development in open countryside to protect its character, with strict criteria for when it is permissible.

Managing development delivery local plan

CC03: Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping

- 3.35 This policy protects existing green infrastructure and ensures new developments integrate appropriate landscaping.

TB21: Landscape Character

- 3.36 With the policy the borough aims to maintain its distinct landscape character by ensuring developments are in harmony with the existing local landscape

TB23: Biodiversity and Development

- 3.37 This policy focuses on protecting and enhancing biodiversity including important habitats. As with policy CP7 and 8 further information on this can be found in the ecology information.

TB24: Designated Heritage Assets (Listed buildings, Historic Parks and Gardens, Scheduled Ancient Monuments and Conservation Areas)

- 3.38 This policy states that the Borough Council will conserve and seek the enhancement of designated heritage assets and their setting.

Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan 2019-2036

- 3.39 The neighbourhood plan sets out the vision for Arborfield and Barkham area within which the site is located. It includes planning policies for the development of residential sites. The policies detailed below are applicable to the proposed development.

IRS1: Preservation of Separation of Settlements

- 3.40 The policy states that development proposals outside of development limited will be required to comply with policy CP11 and preserve the character and appearance of the countryside; and not lead to physical, visual or perceived coalescence of existing settlements.
- 3.41 The settlement closest to the site is defined as 'Arborfield Village'. The old village centres around the old St. Bartholomews Church, the remains of which are now a grade II listed building. More recent development is centred around the grade II listed 'new' St. Bartholomews Church off Church Lane.
- 3.42 Policy IRS1 defines Arborfield Village as a separate settlement, although without a defined settlement boundary. The nearest adjacent settlement is Arborfield Cross which is located to the south east of Arborfield Village. This has a defined settlement boundary as set out in the neighbourhood plan, but also in the Core Strategy through policy CP9.

IRS2: Recognise, Respect and Preserve Identity and Rural Setting of Settlements

- 3.43 This policy states that development proposals must recognise, respect and preserve the identity and rural setting of settlements, with regards to:
- Scale and form of the development
 - Density of the development
 - Materials used in the development to reflect local character
 - Tree and hedgerow planting that reinforces and reflects local biodiversity in the parishes; and
 - The distinctive character of the varied landscapes of the area and outstanding views.

IRS3: Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment and Green Spaces

- 3.44 The policy focuses on ensuring any proposed development achieves a biodiversity net gain and takes any opportunity to protect, enhance and extend existing wildlife corridors between open spaces and habitats, including environments for nocturnal species.

IRS4: Protection and Enhancement of the Historic Character of the Area

- 3.45 In keeping with policy TB26, this policy aims to protect the historic assets of the neighbourhood plan area, including:
- Arborfield Cross Conservation Area
 - Chamberlain's Farm Area of Special Character
 - Listed buildings (including their setting), Scheduled monuments and other historically significant buildings

It also includes specific locally valued heritage assets including:

- The historic Chestnut Avenue in Arborfield, linking The Old Rectory and the remains of the old Church

AD3: High Quality Development with Generous Open Space, Properly Landscaped

- 3.46 This policy states that all new developments must reflect the rural character and historic context of existing dwellings within the plan area as well as deliver good quality design.
- 3.47 All relevant statutory and non-statutory designations are identified on drawing GLS_050_171_1102 in appendix 3.

Sites of Special Scientific Interests

- 3.48 SSSIs are a formal biodiversity designation and encompass areas that are of particular interest to science due to the rare species of fauna or flora it contains and therefore carry a strict level of protection, as reinforced by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, CROW Act 2000 and chapter 15 of the NPPF. In England SSSIs are designated by Natural England (NE).
- 3.49 SSSIs form a national network of sites which underpin the SACs and SPAs set out in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.
- 3.50 Development within these areas is not allowed, unless it cannot be avoided. SSSIs also include 'impact risk zones' which are applied around the designation. Development within these areas will be subject to examination at a level of rigorousness in correlation to its proximity to the designation. This is reinforced by policy CP7 of the Wokingham BC Core Strategy, as well as TB23 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan.
- 3.51 There are no SSSIs within close proximity to the site, the following SSSIs are located within a 5km radius:
- Longmoor Bog SSSI – 3km to the southeast
 - Bramshill SSSI – 4.1km to the south
 - Standford End Mill and River Loddon SSSI – 3.9km to the southwest
- 3.52 Whilst SSSIs are mainly an ecological designation, they often aid in defining the landscape character of an area as well and are therefore included in this assessment. For further detail on the ecological aspects of this designation, please refer to the ecologist's information.

Special Protection Area

- 3.53 An SPA is a formal designation and protects sites with the aim to conserve rare, vulnerable, or migratory bird species. SPAs are part of the Natura 2000 network, created under the Birds Directive (Directive 2009/147/EC), which requires EU Member States to safeguard important habitats for birds.
- 3.54 The Habitats Directive (Directive 92/43/EEC) complements this by establishing Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), working alongside SPAs to protect Europe's biodiversity. SPAs are designated based on scientific criteria, such as the presence of rare or migratory bird populations.
- 3.55 Once designated, SPAs receive legal protection to prevent harmful activities, with regulations often implemented through national laws. In the UK, this protection is upheld by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, even after Brexit.
- 3.56 Within Wokingham's administrative area, SPA's are further protected under policy CS8.
- 3.57 The site falls within the 5km buffer of the Thames Basin Heath SPA, which is located 4.1km to the south.
- 3.58 As with SSSIs, SPAs are mainly an ecological designation. They, however, often aid in defining the landscape character of an area as well and are therefore included in this assessment. For further detail on the ecological aspects of this designation, please refer to the ecologist's information.

Ancient Woodland

- 3.59 Ancient woodland is defined as an area that has been continuously wooded since at least 1600AD and includes:
- Ancient semi-natural woodland, which is mainly made up of trees and shrub native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration
 - Plantations on ancient woodland sites, which have been replanted with conifer or broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi

- 3.60 Both types have equal protection in the NPPF. With guidance produced by Natural England and the Forestry Commission (known as 'standing advice'). This guidance is a material planning consideration which sets out, amongst others, the protection measures required for Ancient Woodland in relation to proposed development. This is reinforced by chapter 15 of the NPPF and policy CP7 and TB23 in the adopted Wokingham Borough Council local plan.

- 3.61 There is no designated ancient woodland within the site.

- 3.62 The proposed development site is in close proximity (within 250m) to the following areas of ancient woodland:

- Brick Kiln Coppice – 240m to the northeast
- Furzen or Parsons Coppice – 120m to the north
- Pound Copse - 160m to the southwest

Public Rights of Way

- 3.63 PRoWs are linear routes over land which can be legally accessed by the public at all times, notwithstanding the land being owned by a private individual or body. These routes are listed and described in Definitive Maps and Statements, generally held by the county council.

- 3.64 The measures for the strategic planning of the PRoW network is set out by the CROW Act 2000.

- 3.65 There are no public rights of way running through the site or immediately adjacent to the site boundary

- 3.66 Other PRoWs in close proximity to the site are as follows:

- Footpath ARBO1 running from Church Lane towards the 'Old Church' and beyond – 120m to the north west
- Footpath ARBO2 running from ARBO1 near the 'Old Church' towards Barretts Lane – 590m to the north west and north
- Byway ARBO3 running from ARBO2 to Church Lane – 330m to the north east and north
- Footpath ARBO16 running from Church Lane to Sindlesham Road – 270m to the north east
- Byway ARBO19 running from Reading Road to Shallowfield Road – 100m to the south east
- Footpath ARBO22 running from Greenswards Lane towards the south and west to ARBO20 – 170m to the south west
- Footpath ARBO20 running from ARBO22 to Reading Road - 750m to the south west

- 3.67 Distances are measured at their closest point to the site boundary.

Conservation Area

- 3.68 A conservation area is defined as an area of 'special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which is desirable to preserve or enhance' by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

- 3.69 Conservation areas are protected from development which is deemed harmful through the NPPF and are also protected through policy CS3 and TB24 in the adopted Wokingham Borough Council local plan.

- 3.70 The proposed development site is in close proximity to the Arborfield Cross conservation area, which is located approx. 450m to the south east of the site and was designated in 1998. The conservation area boundary is focused upon the cross roads (Reading Road, School Road, Eversley Road and Swallowfield Road) and the area around the roads, rather than encompassing the whole of the settlement boundary area.

Listed buildings

- 3.71 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 protects buildings of special architectural or historic interest via a statutory national list. The effect of a proposed development on the setting of a listed building is a material consideration in determining a planning application. Setting is defined as "the surroundings in which a heritage is experienced". It is also protected by Policy CS3 and TB24 in the adopted Wokingham Borough Council local plan.
- 3.72 The following listed buildings are located in close proximity (within 500m) from the proposed development site:
- The Old Rectory Grade II listed building – located approx. 100m to the north west of the site
 - The Church of St. Bartholomew Grade II listed building – located approx. 260m to the north east of the site

4. Landscape Baseline

Introduction

- 4.1 The landscape baseline establishes the proposed development site in its context (i.e. the study area), with the survey carried out on 4th October 2024. This forms the starting point against which any potential changes that may result from the new development will be assessed.
- 4.2 The study identifies and records the character of the existing landscape and the elements, features and aesthetic and perceptual factors which contribute to it, followed by the value attached to the landscape.
- 4.3 The site and surrounding study area are located in Wokingham Borough Council in the county of Berkshire. The site consists of several small sized pastoral fields. The fields are generally irregular in shape and bound by a mix of hedgerows and tree lines, as well as agricultural fencing. It also contains some dilapidated buildings and a drainage ditch.
- 4.4 The site is accessed off Reading Road, which makes up the majority of the southern site boundary, except where it wraps around the existing dwellings to the east. There is also a narrow gap between the site boundary and Reading Road to the west. The western site boundary abuts Church Lane. The northern boundary backs onto existing rear gardens associated with properties off Church Lane. The eastern site boundary abuts further agricultural fields.

Landscape character

National Landscape Character

- 4.5 The site and part of the study area are located within the National Landscape Character Area (NCA) 129 Thames Basin Heath, which is characterised by the following key characteristics:
- 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.
- 'Churring' nightjars, dragonflies and purple heather are all readily identified with heathland. The Thames Basin Heaths SPA protects internationally important populations of woodlark, nightjar and Dartford warbler.
- Valley floors are wet with ditches, numerous watercourses, ponds, waterfilled gravel pits, reedbeds and carr. Historic features include mills, relict water meadows, and canals such as the River Wey Navigations.
- 20th-century conurbations, including Camberley, sprawl along the Blackwater Valley, with associated roads (including the M3) dissecting heathland and woodland into blocks. Elsewhere, there are winding lanes and historic dispersed villages and farmsteads of traditional, locally made brick and tile.

- 4.6 The northern part of the study area is located in the adjacent NCA 115 Thames Valley, which is characterised by the following key characteristics:

- Flat and low-lying land, rising to low, river-terraced hills, which include the prominent local outcrop of chalk on which Windsor Castle sits.
- The underlying geology is dominated by the London Clay which, over much of the area, is overlain by river-lain sands and gravels.
- The numerous hydrological features provide unity to an area which otherwise lacks homogeneity; these features include the River Thames and its tributaries, streams, lakes, canals and open waterbodies (the result of restored gravel workings).
- Woodlands characterise the north-western area, with the wooded character extending up to the southern edge of the Chiltern Hills.
- Farming is limited. Where it survives, grazed pasture is the major land use within a generally open, flat and featureless landscape. The field pattern is medium-scale and irregular, with smaller fields to the west. Localised areas of species-rich hay meadows provide a splash of colour in summer.
- Although densely populated and developed, pockets of woodland, open grassland, parkland, wetlands and intimate meadows provide escape and tranquillity, and include a variety of habitats supporting important populations of many species, notably stag beetle, shoveler, gadwall and other invertebrates and wildfowl.
- Towards London in the east, the natural character of the area is overtaken by urban influences: a dense network of roads (including the M25 corridor), Heathrow Airport, railway lines, golf courses, pylon lines, reservoirs, extensive mineral extraction and numerous flooded gravel pits.
- There are small but biologically important areas of lowland heathland – especially on higher sandy ground in the north – and a small area to the south falls within the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA) buffer zone.
- To the south, the open Thames flood plain dominates, with its associated flat grazing land, becoming characterised by a number of formal historic landscapes on higher ground. Between Hampton and Kew, the River Thames forms the focus of a series of designed landscapes.
- The area has an urban character, and there are very few villages of more traditional character, although almost half of the area is greenbelt land and development has been restricted in areas like Crown Estate land and Eton College grounds.
- The river is closely associated with numerous historic places and cultural events, such as the signing of Magna Carta at Runnymede. Tourists from all over the world are drawn to the rich heritage of the area, flocking to attractions like Hampton Court Palace and Windsor Castle.
- The area is important for recreation, both for residents and visitors. Historic parkland and commons provide access to green space, the Thames Path National Trail runs the length of the NCA, and a variety of activities are enjoyed on the river and other waterbodies.

Local Landscape Character

4.7 Locally, the study area is located within the Wokingham landscape character study prepared in November 2019 as part of the evidence base for the emerging local plan. The site falls within the C1 and J2 character study, C1 Arborfield River Terrace which makes up the western part of the site is characterised by the following key characteristics:

- Gently undulating river terrace landform between 45-50m AOD to the east of the River Loddon floodplain. The area is underlain by London Clay and river terrace gravels which give rise to loamy soils which are better drained than the floodplain, and therefore intensively farmed.
- Small water features including tributary stream running through the Holt and drainage channels and ponds.
- Intensive arable farmland with medium to large fields bound by indistinct boundaries, mainly post and wire fencing, with occasional gappy remnant hedgerows. Some horse paddocks present, and cattle grazing at the University of Reading farm and Centre for Dairy Research.
- Small woodland and copses break up the agricultural plain. BAP priority habitat mixed lowland deciduous woodland dominates, with some wet woodland designated as LWS (Cuckoo Pen, Gravel Pit Wood/The Holt, Loaders Copse, Winnersh Woodland). Pound Copse and Great Wood LWS also contain small areas of ancient and semi-natural woodland.
- Remnant historic parkland associated with the former Arborfield Hall. The presence of mature oaks provides a strong silhouette against the open sky.
- Low-density settlement of farmsteads (typically red brick with weather boarded barns), manor houses and hamlets, except for the area north of the M4 where development has extended onto the river terrace on the edge of Winnersh.
- Large, modern agricultural buildings are prominent features of the landscape.
- Tree-lined narrow lanes, tracks, byways and footpaths allow recreational access to the river terrace, and access to the Loddon floodplain, as well as the Blackwater Valley Path.
- Clear long-distance views across the adjacent floodplain due to the unvaried topography. The spire of Arborfield Church provides a landmark feature in distant views.
- Rural character and sense of remoteness, due to the predominance of narrow lanes and tracks and very low density settlement. This is interrupted by the transport corridors in the north of the area, the M4, and new Winnersh Relief Road, as well as the proposed Arborfield Cross Relief Road in the centre of the area.

4.8 The eastern part of the site falls within character area J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay. This character area is defined by the following key characteristics:

- A gently undulating landscape between 50m and 65m AOD, underlain by London Clay with localised areas of River Terrace Gravels. Shallow wooded valleys follow the course of the Barkham Brook, which is geologically marked by areas of alluvium.
- Consistent pattern of water bodies including streams, drainage channels, ditches and open water bodies of various sizes resulting from the clayey and loamy soils which impede drainage.
- Wooded context provided by characteristic mature hedgerow and in-field trees, combined with woodland belts, with BAP priority habitats and ancient woodland, and the wooded horizons of the surrounding hills. This creates a loose sense of enclosure.
- Arable farming dominates, with pasture on higher ground and horse paddocks near settlement. Fields are large and geometric, bound by fragmented hedgerows supported by post and wire. Fields used for paddocks are often subdivided with horse tape.

- Small-scale wet woodland and wetland habitats scattered on the edge of the area, often designated as LWS. BAP priority habitat wet woodland is found at Bottle Copse and The Moors, with wet meadow and wet grassland found at Brook Farm Meadow LWS.
- A dense settled character influenced by modern development including the new garden village on the site of Arborfield Garrison and the southern edge of Wokingham which incorporates an industrial estate. There is little consistent style or form.
- Older scattered settlement of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages at Barkham and Arborfield Cross. The buildings have traditional vernacular of timber framing and clay tiles, exemplified by the Conservation Area at Arborfield Cross. A number of farmhouses are listed, including Grade II* Barlett's Farmhouse.
- A network of busy local roads cross the area. They tend to be rural in character, with ditches, hedges and hedgerow trees, sometimes opening directly onto the arable fields. The A327 adds noise and movement to the area.
- Public rights of way run between the settlements and provide access for recreational use.
- A rural character away from development and roads, with views across to adjacent character areas including across the Loddon Valley.
- A historic road, now represented by footpaths, lanes and Victorian carriageways, that appears on Norden's map of 1607, connecting Swallowfield Park via Arborfield Cross and the Coombes (in LCA L1), with Wokingham.

4.9 The wider study area includes the following local character areas:

- A2 Loddon River Valley
- J3 Spencers Wood Settled and Farmed Clay
- J4 Woodley-Earley Settled and Farmed Clay
- L1 Bearwood Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills
- L2 Farley Hill Wooded Sands and Gravel Hills

Description of the study area landscape character

Physical Influences

4.10 The main watercourse within the study area is the River Loddon, a tributary of the river Thames. There are several smaller drainage channels, ditches and ponds which are associated with the river Loddon. The site itself includes ditches which bound the eastern site boundary as well as the eastern boundary of the triangular field aligning Church Lane.

4.11 The western part of the site is relatively flat with levels ranging from 47.50 to 48.25m AOD. Moving further east the site rises more steeply from 48.25 to 57.50m AOD. This is reflected in the wider study area, with the relatively flat ground associated with the River Loddon floodplain, which rises to the east and south to form the river valley.

4.12 The topography of the study area can be found on drawing GLS_050_171_1104 in appendix 3.

Land Cover and use

4.13 The study area consists of a mix of agricultural land with associated large scale agricultural buildings, scattered residential dwellings and larger clusters of dwellings associated with the villages of Arborfield and Arborfield Cross. On the edge of the study area the landcover changes to become more suburban with larger scale development associated with Shinfield and Arborfield Green. Remnants of a historic parkland associated with (the demolished) Arborfield Hall are present to the west of the site adjacent to the Loddon.

- 4.14 The site is bound by rear gardens associated with large, detached properties off Church Lane to the north. To the west large, detached properties off Church Lane face onto the western site boundary. The southern site boundary is bound by Reading Road, with some smaller detached properties siding and backing onto the site. Immediately opposite there is a cul de sac development (Walden Avenue) adjacent to the dwellings and farm buildings associated with Cross Lanes Farm. The eastern site boundary is more rural with adjacent pastoral fields and associated farm buildings as well as a plant nursery.
- 4.15 Agricultural fields surrounding Arborfield are large to medium in scale and are generally irregular in shape. Fields were historically bound by hedgerow and tree planting; however, many have been lost over time, this is more prevalent to the north of the site with hedgerows more intact to the south. The site itself consists of 5 separate fields. The field sizes are significantly smaller than those found in the wider study areas. The majority of the site is underused pastoral land, with the remaining fields in use as horse paddocks. Hedgerows and tree planting are generally present to the site boundary which are gappy in places. Sections of internal hedgerow and tree planting remain, but the majority is currently fenced. Some tree are protected by a TPO, refer to the arboricultural report for further information
- 4.16 There are several smaller areas of woodland scattered throughout the study area. Larger strips of woodland are generally associated with the river Loddon. Larger areas of woodland area also present on the higher ground, particularly to the east of the study area. Church Lane to the west and north of the site has a wooded character, due to the hedgerow and tree line bounding the narrow lane on both sides. The character becomes more open to the east of the church and Brick Kiln Copse. Even though Reading Road to the south of the site is similarly bound by hedgerow and tree planting it feels much more suburban in nature. Due to it being an A-road, with associated road width and pavement, providing the main connection between Arborfield Cross and Shinfield, it feels much more suburban in character. The frequent presence of residential paraphernalia, such as fences, driveways and general built form adds to this character.
- 4.17 The landcover and use of the site can be seen on the aerial photograph on drawings GLS_050_171_1101 in appendix 3, as well as the baseline photographs in appendix 4.

Aesthetic and Perceptual Aspects

- 4.18 The mix of large areas of open agricultural land, mixed with small areas of woodland as well as tree lines and hedgerows (where intact) create a mix of an open landscape, as well as areas with a much more intimate feel. Within the study area the land to the north of the site feels very open with wide views across the landscape, this is mainly due to a relatively flat topography, as well as lack of intervening vegetation and built form. The landscape is less open to the south, even though still very much agricultural in nature, the intervening vegetation provides frequent visual barriers within the landscape.
- 4.19 The landscape associated with the site and its immediate surroundings feels much more intimate, with a lack of views across the wider landscape, due to the hedgerows and tree lines framing the site as well as the surrounding roads. The scale of the field pattern, being much smaller than those to the north and south of the site, add a feeling of intimacy as well.
- 4.20 Noise levels within the site are higher towards Reading Road, due to the nature of this road being the main route from Arborfield Cross to Shinfield. Church Lane is quieter, however, it still has frequent vehicular movement. Additional noise is associated with the general residential character of Church Lane.

Historic and cultural Aspects

- 4.21 The site historically consisted of 2 fields, the smaller triangular field along the western boundary has remained unchanged, bound by Church Lane and the ditch. The other fields formed part of one large field bound by Church Lane to the North, Reading Road to the south and a ditch along the eastern boundary. This field was eroded post WWII when dwellings were built along Church Lane and Reading Road. This is when the larger field in the centre was sub-divided into smaller fields/paddocks.
- 4.22 St. Bartholemew's Church and the associated rectory, both grade II listed buildings, in close proximity to the site north of Church Lane.
- 4.23 The remains of the 'Old' St. Bartholemew's Church also grade II listed, are located within the remnants of the parkland associated with the demolished Arborfield Hall to the north east of the site. This site, and its associated parkland form part of a locally valued heritage asset. The Arborfield Cross conservation area is located to the east of the site.
- 4.24 There are some heavily filtered views through the vegetation bounded Church Lane from the Locally Valued Heritage Asset. There are no views from the site towards any of the other heritage features, however, the church spire of Bartholomew's Church is visible within the wider landscape.
- 4.25 The location of the heritage features can be found on drawing GLS_050_171_1102 in appendix 3.

Landscape Value

- 4.26 The site is not located within a formal designated area. It has been included in the Valued Landscape Assessment 2024, part of the emerging local plan evidence base. Within the report the site is surround by, but not included as a ‘valued landscape’. Page 13 of the report refers to GLVIA3 and more specifically box 5.1 (table 2.1 in this report) in its consideration of what defines a Valued Landscape. The study was carried out at a much larger scale, so the sections below will be specific to the site itself.
- 4.27 Table 2.1 in the methodology identifies the range of factors that can be considered when identifying landscape value, many of which have been discussed under the previous ‘Landscape Character’ sub-heading. Table 4.1 below identifies how the site contributes to these factors.

Table 4.1 Landscape Value Indicators and the Site’s Contribution

Factor	Contribution
Natural Heritage	Positive - The hedged and tree lined site boundaries as well as the ditches associated with these boundaries reflect the historic field pattern associated with the site.
Cultural Heritage	Some – There are aspects of cultural heritage within the study area with the inclusion of listed buildings and a conservation area, however these are not directly related to the site. The western site boundary provides some cultural heritage due to the adjacent Locally Valued Heritage Asset associated with Arborfield Hall and there are some views of the top of the listed church.
Landscape condition	Negative – The site currently consists of a mix of underused pastoral land as well a horse paddocks. Hedgerows are present, but gappy in places.
Associations	None – there are no knows associations with the site
Distinctiveness	Limited – The site boundaries and topography add some distinctiveness to the site.
Recreational	None – The site is not in use for recreational purposes and is not publicly accessible
Perceptual (Scenic)	Negative – The site is not perceived as scenic and is relatively enclosed
Perceptual (Wildness and tranquillity)	Negative – The site is bound by built form and roads on most of its boundaries minimising any perceptual feeling of wildness and tranquillity.
Functional	Limited – The boundary vegetation forms part of the wider green infrastructure network.

- 4.28 Overall, the site is of low landscape value, which aligns with the Valued Landscape Assessment (2024) as it has limited connectivity with the adjacent landscape due to the enclose nature of the site, it also has a limited sense of place. There are some positive contributions towards cultural heritage, however these apply more to the study area than the site itself, which has some, but limited interaction with any heritage features. Positive factors associated with the site and its character are limited to the boundary vegetation and topography.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 4.29 Table 2.4 in the methodology sets out the definitions and criteria for assessing landscape sensitivity, where the susceptibility to the type of change or development for each of the landscape receptors is combined with the value attached to the landscape. Table 4.2 below identifies the landscape receptors and their associated susceptibility resulting in the landscape susceptibility using a landscape value of medium as concluded above.

Table 4.2 Landscape sensitivity

Landscape Receptor	Receptor Susceptibility	Landscape Sensitivity
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER		
C1 Arborfield River Terrace	Medium	Low
J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay	Medium	Low
INDIVIDUAL LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS		
Trees & Hedgerows (Natural Heritage)	High	Medium
Topography & Drainage	High	Medium
Cultural Heritage	High	Medium

Landscape Baseline Conclusion

- 4.30 The study area has some characteristics in common with the national character areas within which it falls, however, associates much more closely with the local character areas defined in the Wokingham Landscape Character Study. Whilst the site itself is does not reflect the relatively open character of the surrounding landscape, it still reflects the key characteristics of the associated local character areas, such as the mention of smaller horse paddocks closer to existing development, which indicates the different types of landscape that make up the character of the study area. This applies mostly to local character area J2, and less so to character area C1.
- 4.31 It can therefore be concluded that the site is seen as partially characteristic to the local character area, but less so of the national character area.
- 4.32 The local landscape character areas in relation to the site have been assigned a low sensitivity, which means that the landscape is able to accommodate a medium change related to the proposed development without undue consequences arising on the condition or quality of its defining characteristics. This is due to a combination of the enclosed nature of the site within the confines of the character area, as well as the relative poor landscape condition associated with the site.
- 4.33 There are, however, individual elements, which make up the character of the site and its immediate surroundings. These have been assigned a medium sensitivity and are able to accommodate a small change related to the proposed development without undue consequences.

5. Visual Baseline

Introduction

- 5.1
- The aim of the visual baseline is to establish the area in which the development may be visible, the different groups of people who may experience views of the development, the places where they will be affected and the nature of the views at those points.
- 5.2
- The visual baseline study identifies and records the visibility of the site from the surrounding environment, which forms the baseline against which any changes can be assessed.
- 5.3
- The establishment of the visual baseline uses a combination of desktop survey and field survey. A field survey was conducted on 4th October 2024.

Visual Receptors & Key Viewpoints

- 5.4
- Following review of the landscape baseline data, the Preliminary Landscape and Visual Appraisal, and the ZTV mapping exercise provide a representational coverage of potential visual and landscape effects of the proposed development which can be assessed from the positions as described in table below. Locations of these can be found on drawing GLS_050_171_1106 in appendix 3, with annotated baseline views included in appendix 4.
- 5.5
- The viewpoints in table 5.1 will be assessed within this report. For each viewpoint the location and receptor have been identified along with a short description of the viewpoint.

Table 5.1 Viewpoint and receptor summary table

No.	Location	Receptor Type (Sensitivity)	Description/Comments
1	View from Reading Road/Walden Avenue crossing	Road users (Low) Residents (High)	Close distance view from the entrance into Walden Avenue, immediately opposite the site boundary, looking north towards the site. The site boundary vegetation is relatively dense and tall at this point. There might be views of taller elements within the site, if immediately adjacent to the boundary. Glimpsed views of lower elements within the site might be available during winter months when there are no leaves on the trees and hedgerows. The view is very suburban in feel with several manmade elements forming a dominating factor within the foreground.
2	View from Reading Road/PRoW ARBO19 crossing	Road users (Low) Users of PRoW (High)	Close distance view from the main road at the starting point of ARBO19 looking north towards the site. This view is part of a sequential view. There are views of the eastern site boundary vegetation through the gap in the hedgerow aligning Reading Road. This hedgerow, as well as trees and the hedgerow along the site boundary minimise any views further into the site. Glimpsed views of the overhead powerlines running through the site are visible from this viewpoint, indicating that taller elements within the eastern part of the site will be visible over the hedgerows. The western part of the site is not visible from this viewpoint.

No.	Location	Receptor Type (Sensitivity)	Description/Comments
3	View from Reading Road	Road users (Low)	Medium view from the main road running to the south of the site looking north west. The view feels very suburban with dominating traffic management in the foreground. There are views of the eastern site boundary vegetation through the gap in the hedgerow aligning Reading Road. This hedgerow, as well as trees and the hedgerow along the site boundary minimise any views further into the site.
4	View from PRoW ARBO19	Users of PRoW (High)	Medium distance view from the PRoW running from Reading Road to Arborfield Cross Recreation Ground, looking north west towards the site. This view is part of a sequential view. The view shows the enclosed nature of the site and is dominated by the hedgerow and tree planting making up the site's immediate surroundings. Glimpsed views of the overhead powerlines running through the site are visible from this viewpoint, indicating that taller elements within the eastern part of the site will be visible over the hedgerows. The western part of the site is not visible from this viewpoint.
5	View from PRoW ARBO19	Users of PRoW (High)	Medium distance view from the PRoW running from Reading Road to Arborfield Cross Recreation Ground, looking north west towards the site. This view is part of a sequential view. The view shows the enclosed nature of the site and is dominated by the hedgerow and tree planting making up the site's immediate surroundings, with the top of St. Bartholemew's Church Spire visible over the trees. There is a glimpsed view of the top of one of the dwellings off Church Lane visible above the hedgerows. There may be glimpsed views of taller elements within the eastern part of the site. Views during winter are unlikely to change, due to several layers of vegetation between the viewer and the site.
6	View from Reading Road near Cross Lanes Farm	Road users (Low) Residents (High)	Close distance view looking from Cross Lanes Farm looking north to the current field gate entrance into the small horse paddock within the site boundary. The photograph shows a funnelled view into the site where the gap in the vegetation is present. The site boundary hedgerow provides a visual screen for the remainder of the site, except where it has deteriorated and old agricultural buildings are visible. Several manmade elements are visible on the periphery, including overhead cables, general debris, as well as Reading Road and associated traffic management. Further filtered views into the site are likely to be available during winter months
7	View from Greensward Lane	Road users (Medium)	Medium distance view from Greensward Lane looking north towards the site. The Lane is bound by dense hedgerows along its full length, the photograph shows a small gap in the hedgerow with glimpsed views of greenhouses associated with the adjacent garden centre. The site is not visible from this viewpoint.
8	View from PRoW ARBO20	Users of PRoW (High)	Medium distance view from the PRoW looking east towards the site. The view shows arable land in the foreground with a wooded backdrop. The site is not visible from this viewpoint.

No.	Location	Receptor Type (Sensitivity)	Description/Comments
9	View from Reading Road/Church Lane crossing	Road users (Low)	Close distance view from the crossing of Reading Road and Church Lane immediately adjacent to the southwestern corner of the site. Heavily glimpsed views of the site are visible through the tall hedgerow bounding the site. During winter months views may be clearer, but still glimpsed.
10	View from PRoW ARBO2	Users of PRoW (High)	Medium distance view from the PRoW leading from the 'Old' St. Bartholemew's Church to Hall Farm. The view shows large pastoral fields in the foreground with woodland making up the background. The top St. Bartholemew's Church's Spire is visible above the treeline. The site is not visible from this location.
11	View from PRoW ARBO3	Users of PRoW (High)	Medium distance view from the PRoW looking south towards the site. The view is taken from a gap in the hedgerow. It shows a stretch of pastoral fields, with St. Bartholemew's Church's Spire visible above the trees in the background. The site is not visible from this location.
12	View from PRoW ARBO3	Users of PRoW (High)	Medium distance view from the PRoW near Hall Farm, looking south towards the site. The view shows the rear garden associated with the dwelling opposite Hall Farm with St. Bartholemew's Church's Spire visible above the trees in the background. Pastoral fields make up the middle ground. The site is not visible from this location.
13	View from PRoW ARBO16	Users of PRoW (High)	Medium distance view from the PRoW running to the east of the site, looking west towards the site. The PRoW is bound by tall hedgerow planting on both sides. There are very limited heavily glimpsed views of the site from the full length of the PRoW, the site may be more visible during winter months, although views will still be filtered.
14	View from Church Lane near St. Bartholemew's Church	Road users (Medium) Listed building (High)	Medium distance view from St. Bartholomew's Church, a grade II listed building, looking south towards the site. Church Cottage and associated driveway and garden dominates the view with Apple Tree Cottage adjacent. Together they create a visual barrier towards the site. The site is unlikely to be visible from this view.
15	View from Church Lane near Lavender Cottage	Road users (Medium)	Close distance view looking south towards the site. Lavender Cottage and its associated garden makes up the majority of the view. There may be glimpses of taller elements within the site boundary from this view, particularly in the western parts of the site. Due to dense vegetation and built form, views are unlikely to change substantially during the winter months.
16	View from Church Lane near Merrie Bells	Road users (Medium) Residents (High) Arborfield Hall Locally Valued Heritage Asset (High)	Close distance view looking east from Church Lane towards the western site boundary. It shows generally dense boundary vegetation, with relatively limiting urbanising elements. During winter months views are likely to be available, albeit filtered.
17	View from Reading Road by current site entrance	Road users (Low)	Close distance view looking north to the current field gate entrance into the site. The photograph shows a funnelled view into the site where the gap in the vegetation is present. The site boundary hedgerow provides a visual screen for the remainder of the site, except where it has deteriorated, allowing short, glimpsed views into the site. Several manmade elements are visible on the periphery,

No.	Location	Receptor Type (Sensitivity)	Description/Comments
			including overhead cables, hard surfacing by the entrance and general debris, as well as Reading Road and associated traffic management. Further filtered views into the site are likely to be available during winter months.

Visual Sensitivity & Conclusion

- 5.6 As described in the landscape baseline, the site is relatively enclosed, which is carried over into the visual baseline. Views from the east are heavily filtered by the hedgerows and tree lines bounding the site and the surrounding fields and roads. Where there are gaps in the hedgerows, glimpsed views of the site are available. These are generally limited to taller elements within the site, such as the overhead powerlines. The spire of St. Bartholemew's Church is visible over the tree line from the south east.
- 5.7 Views from the south, even when in close proximity to the site, are generally limited due to the dense boundary vegetation associated with the site. Taller elements within the site might be available above the hedgerow. The view, particularly from Reading Road, feel suburban due to the nature of the A-road. Filtered views of the site may be more available during winter months when the hedgerows have lost their leaves.
- 5.8 Due to the wooded nature of Church Road and its surroundings, views from the west towards the site are very limited, even when immediately adjacent to the site. Winter may offer filtered views through the hedgerow, but visibility remains restricted.
- 5.9 Views from the north are very limited due to intervening vegetation and built form along Church Lane.
- 5.10 Whilst not assessed as part of the viewpoints, private dwelling backing onto the development may have views across the site. These views will generally be from upper storeys or occasionally from ground floor windows, particularly where there is limited intervening rear garden fencing or vegetation.
- 5.11 The site is largely obscured from all direction by dense vegetation, hedgerows and built form, with only occasional glimpses of taller elements like powerlines or rooftops visible. In winter months, some filtered views may be possible, due to the lack of leaves, however the site remains well-screened by its surroundings, maintaining a predominantly enclosed character. Any views of the site are limited to close distance views and a handful of medium distance views, mainly from the south east. There are no long distance views of the site.

6. Landscape Strategy and Mitigation

Introduction

- 6.1 The landscape strategy shows the opportunities and constraints of the site. This follows a preliminary review of the desktop study as well as the site visit in relation to potential adverse landscape and visual effects, with the aim of minimising these potential effects. The mitigation measures will be discussed in detail below.

Mitigation

- 6.2 The following elements have been included in the illustrative design of the development with the aim of minimising the potential adverse landscape and visual effects, the illustrative masterplan has been included in appendix 3:
- Retention of existing landscape structure, particularly around the site boundary. Internal vegetation should be retained where feasible to do so.
 - Existing vegetation around the site boundary should be supplemented to create a strong feature. Additional planting should be native and include 50% evergreen species.
 - A landscape buffer to the northern site boundary (which currently has no existing vegetation) should be introduced including hedgerow/scrub and tree planting. Planting should include native species in the form of hedgerow and tree planting. Shrub and hedgerow planting should contain at least 50% evergreen species.
 - Allow for sufficient space for tree planting within the residential parcels to reflect the wooded character of the surrounding and aid with blending the built form with the surrounding landscape.
 - Footpath links should be included within the site connecting to the wider landscape to create sustainable connections to local facilities and the existing PRoW network.
 - Views of the Church spire from the wider landscape should be retained through the site, this will require careful consideration of development along the eastern side of the site.
 - Dwellings should be offset from Reading Road and Church Lane to minimise built form immediately adjacent to the site boundary, this will minimise visibility of the built form, as well as retain the wooded character (particularly that associated with Church Lane).
 - Vehicular access should be limited to access of Reading Road.
 - Development should be maximum 2.5 storeys to tie into the surrounding built form.
 - POS should be located to the eastern side of the site, to create a softer transition to the adjacent countryside.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 The site aligns with some characteristics within the national character areas within which it falls, however, associates much more closely with the local character areas defined in the Wokingham Landscape Character Study. Whilst the site itself does not reflect the relatively open character of the surrounding landscape, it still reflects the key characteristics of the associated local character areas. The site does not include any formal designations and is considered to have a low landscape value.
- 7.2 The local landscape character areas in relation to the site have been assigned a low sensitivity, which means that the landscape is able to accommodate a medium change related to the proposed development without undue consequences arising on the condition or quality of its defining characteristics. This is due to a combination of the enclosed nature of the site within the confines of the character area, as well as the relative poor landscape condition associated with the site. There are, however, individual elements, which make up the character of the site and its immediate surroundings. These have been assigned a medium sensitivity and are able to accommodate a small change related to the proposed development without undue consequences.
- 7.3 In terms of visual sensitivity the site is largely obscured from all direction by dense vegetation, hedgerows and built form, with only occasional glimpses of taller elements like powerlines or rooftops visible. In winter months, some filtered views may be possible, due to the lack of leaves, however the site remains well-screened by its surrounding, maintaining a predominantly enclosed character. Any views of the site are limited to close distance views and a handful of medium distance views, mainly from the south east. There are no long distance views of the site.
- 7.4 Any residential development will change the character of a location to some degree. However, with the correct siting, design and landscape treatment, the visual and landscape character impact of a development can be significantly reduced. To some extent the implementation of landscape mitigation measures can even provide an opportunity to enhance and improve the existing landscape.
- 7.5 Any future reserved matters application should take account of the mitigation measures set out in chapter 6, to ensure that the development does not cause any unacceptable effects on the visual and visual baseline of the site. It would be advised to carry out a detailed Landscape and Visual Assessment at this stage.

Appendices

1.List of abbreviations

1.1	AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (also known as National Landscape)
1.2	CEMP	Construction Environmental Management Plan
1.3	DTM	Digital Terrain Model
1.4	GLVIA 3	Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (Third Edition)
1.5	LPA	Local Planning Authority
1.6	NE	Natural England
1.7	PRoW	Public Right of Way
1.8	SAC	Special Area of Conservation
1.9	SPA	Special Protection Area
1.10	SPD	Supplementary Planning Document
1.11	SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
1.12	ZTV	Zone of Theoretical Visibility

2. Photography Methodology

- 2.1
- Photographs have been taken in accordance with the Landscape Institute’s Technical Guidance Note 06/19 – Visual Representation of Development Proposals. The photographs have been presented as type 1 annotated baseline visualisations.
- 2.2
- The baseline photographs have been taken using a Canon EOS 1300D camera with a fixed 35mm lens.
- 2.3
- Photographs have been taken as panoramic shots, where a single image did not capture the extent of the site and surroundings sufficiently. The panoramic images have been taken sequentially from the same vertical angle as a series of images suitable for merging. A generous overlap of approximately 50% has been allowed for. Images have been combined into a panoramic using the photoshop ‘Photomerge – Reposition’ option and checked for accuracy.
- 2.4
- Photographs have then been scaled and presented in line with the technical guidance and will therefore present an accurate depiction of the site on that day and time when printed to scale and held at arm’s length (approx. 500-550mm).
- 2.5
- Every photograph has been annotated to provide reference points/key features and the extent of the site.
- 2.6
- For every photograph the following information has been recorded:
 - Location;
 - Camera type & lens type;
 - Camera height
 - Visualisation type;
 - Time and date; and
 - Display size

3. Drawings

4. Baseline views



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