

BLADE

LANDSCAPE STATEMENT

LAND SITUATED AT 178 BEARWOOD ROAD, BARKHAM,
WOKINGHAM, RG41 4SH

ON BEHALF OF

JOE KAY

PLANNING APPL REF: 242719

MARCH 2025

V3

BIODIVERSITY
LANDSCAPE
ARBORICULTURE
DESIGN
ECOLOGY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

- 1.1. This Landscape Statement on Landscape Matters is prepared by James Bullock. My qualifications include a Degree in Landscape Architecture, a Post Graduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture and qualified under the Landscape Institute's Pathway to Chartership as a Chartered landscape Architect in 2009.
- 1.2. I am a Director of BLADE Landscape Architects Ltd ('BLADE') providing independent advice to public and private sector clients in the fields of Landscape Architecture.
- 1.3. The Practice operates throughout the UK from offices in Worcester and Edinburgh representing clients with land and development interests including a number in Worcestershire. BLADE is part of the wider Consultancy Group which also works in the fields ecology, biodiversity and arboriculture. The vast majority of our work is obtained on repeat business and recommendation.
- 1.4. Personally, I have nearly 30 years' experience in the design and assessment of development proposals and land use change from a landscape perspective including development in sensitive landscape settings.
- 1.5. I have extensive experience of the landscape and visual assessment and landscape design of residential developments, as well as the development of employment, industrial, tourism and energy projects.
- 1.6. Since 2009, I have acted as a Landscape Expert for Planning Appeals and Inquiries on behalf of Developers, Planning Authority and Third Parties clients, including recent appeals for development schemes with Nationally sensitive locations, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 1.7. In my career, I have been involved in the landscape assessment of dozens of residential schemes and urban extensions throughout the country.
- 1.8. This statement is true and has been prepared by myself and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution. I also confirm that the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

- 1.9. The evidence that I have prepared and provide for this inquiry is true and has been prepared and is given in accordance with the guidance of my professional Institute. I confirm the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinions.

Appointment and Introductory Remarks

- 1.10. I first visited the Appeal Site and the area to which it is located during daytime hours in February 2025. This visit was during winter-time conditions on a dry, clear day. At this initial time, I was asked to review the Site against the current National and local planning policy, published landscape studies, and also to consider the previously refused planning application. I duly fed back to the Appellant my professional opinion. As part of this work, I reviewed the Appellant's Landscape Appraisal.
- 1.11. The value of the landscape practitioner's involvement is not simply to record outcomes using GLVIA version 3 , some of which may be clear to all. Landscape is "not unchanging" (GLVIA para 2.13); indeed change is necessary if the planning system is to fulfil its purpose.
- 1.12. The more helpful role is to assess the effects 'in response to the particular context in which proposed change takes place' (GLVIA para 2.6), which means focussing not just on the qualities of the site itself, but its appropriateness in context. This must be done having regard to the fact that landscape is not just the open countryside beyond the built-up area boundary (GLVIA version 3 paragraph 2.2), nor is it merely a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity (GLVIA version 3 paragraph 2.4) but includes a consideration of its social function, biodiversity value and heritage interests, amongst others.
- 1.13. It is also essential to address the positive as well as the negative effects of a proposal (GLVIA version 3 paragraph 2.26) because the 'unchanging landscape' creates 'new landscapes' (GLVIA version 3 paragraph 2.13) whose benefits as well as impacts must form part of the balancing exercise when weighing the significance of landscape effects, especially when addressing matters of policy compliance.
- 1.14. The term landscape includes both the built up and open landscapes of the urban, suburban and rural environment. So while we are all inclined to value openness and 'naturalness' over built form (which we presume harmful where it replaces the former), that inclination should not be a blindfold to the prospects for its' re-use in a different form which is sometimes a necessary and inevitable pressure on the landscape resource, subject of course to appropriately sensitive design.

The Appeal Site

- 1.15. The site is well wooded and the access to the site is from Bearwood Road. The site currently comprises an existing semi-detached dwelling and outbuilding/garage which this application seeks to replace. One half of the semi-detached pair would be demolished with the remaining part being the Lawful Annex Dwelling which was granted a certificate of lawful use as an independent dwellinghouse (LPA Ref. 061138). In its current state, the gardens of the site have an abundance of Rhododendrons, which have become abundant to the detriment of the wider garden's planting, and in places, the existing tree stock.
- 1.16. The area is characterised by extensive gardens, mature trees and woodland and there is a scattering of residential properties on the east of Bearwood Road, with the western side of the road comprising the grounds of Bearwood College and golf course, heavily screened from the road.
- 1.17. The site is not located within the Green Belt nor the AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty), however the site does have two area Tree Preservation Orders covering the northern part of the site (87/1978 and 20/1973).
- 1.18. The site is surrounded by woodland, with an area of woodland consisting of hardwoods such as Oak, Chestnut, Birch, in the north of the site and protected by 2 woodland TPOs; 0020/1973 and 0087/1978. Within the site there are 2 areas of Priority Habitat consisting of eutrophic standing water, as well as grasslands and an orchard.
- 1.19. It is not my role to undertake the overall planning balance, but from a strictly landscape perspective my professional opinion, as elaborated in the following sections, is that the proposals as now formulated, will deliver a coherent and logical development of an individual home with a high-quality new landscape with a new social landscape function.
- 1.20. The consequence of the Appellant's scheme will be the adjustment of the previously permitted scheme by circa 5 metres further north into the (already) extensive site area, which is part of a large private garden. However, I do not wish to appear to treat casually the importance of the change, but there would not be an overall loss to the site area within its residential curtilage, and a substantial degree of openness and naturalness will remain outside of the Appeal Site within its receiving environment.
- 1.21. For the reasons set out in the following Sections, I believe this scheme represents a sustainable, well designed re-purposing of the Appeal Site in landscape terms and one which is compliant with relevant guidance and policy when read as a whole.

2.0 BACKGROUND TO THIS APPEAL IN LANDSCAPE TERMS

- 2.1. The Appeal Site is situated at 178 Bearwood Road, Barkham, Wokingham, RG41 4SH. The site of the refused planning application is solely within the control of the Appellant and is located within the Local Planning Authority of Wokingham Borough Council (the 'LPA').
- 2.2. This Landscape Statement concerns itself with the refusal of an Application (LPA ref: 242719) to vary conditions relative to a consented scheme; specifically:

'Application to vary conditions 2 and 8 of planning consent 240665 for the proposed erection of 1 no. four bedroom detached dwelling with associated landscaping following demolition of the existing dwelling and garage. Condition 2 refers to the approved details and condition 8 to landscaping, and the variation is to change the siting of the approved dwelling with accompanying landscape plan, plus a change to fenestration.'

- 2.3. Essentially, the refused application was for a variation of condition. The Variation of Condition: Section 73 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) allows for the application for planning permission of development of land without complying with conditions subject to which a previous planning permission was granted.
- 2.4. Section 73(2) of the act states: "On such an application the local planning authority shall consider only the question of the conditions subject to which permission should be granted..."
- 2.5. As such the principle of development or any other material considerations in relation to the original application are only to be considered in so far as their relevance to the condition(s) subject to this application.
- 2.6. In preparing my Landscape Statement, I have prepared the following plans which I will reference in my statement. These plans are included within the Appendices of this Statement:
 - Site Context Plan; see Appendix JB 1
 - Plotted Zone of Theoretical Visibility Plan; see Appendix JB 2.

2.7. The principle of development for the erection of a replacement dwelling was already deemed acceptable under the previous planning consent (LPA ref: 240665). Nothing contained within the current application was deemed by the LPA to affect this conclusion, therefore no objections are raised on the principle of development.

2.8. In this instance the application seeks to vary conditions no.2 and 8 to allow for a change in the siting of the dwelling. The design of the dwelling remains the same and retains the same facilities and amenities as the approved application, therefore the following considerations are already acceptable:

- Principle of Development;
- Character of the area;
- Heritage;
- Neighbouring Amenity;
- Amenity;
- Highway Access and Parking Provision;
- Flooding and Drainage; and
- Ecology.

2.9. For point of reference Condition 2 of the approved planning consent (LPA ref: 240665) refers to the approved details of the dwelling, and stated the following:

'2. Approved details

This permission is in respect of the submitted application plans and drawings numbered (640-PL-07 C) (640-PL-11 B) (640-PL-12 A) (640-PL- 10 A) (640-PL-09

A) received by the local planning authority on 13/06/2024, 27/06/2024 & 28/06/2024. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details unless otherwise agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out in accordance with the application form and associated details hereby approved.'

2.10. Condition 8 of the approved consented scheme started:

'8. Landscaping

Prior to the commencement of the development there shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority a scheme of hard and soft landscaping, which shall specify species, planting sizes, spacing and numbers of trees/shrubs to be planted, any existing trees or shrubs to be retained, and means of treatment of hard surfaced areas. The landscaping scheme shall also include the extent of the residential garden and any patio areas of the dwelling hereby permitted. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details, with planting occurring in the first planting and seeding seasons following the occupation of the building(s). Any trees or plants which, within a period of 5 years from the date of the planting (or within a period of 5 years of the occupation of the buildings in the case of retained trees and shrubs) die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species or otherwise as approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: To ensure adequate planting in the interests of visual amenity. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery.'

3.0 THE MAIN MATTERS IN LANDSCAPE TERMS

- 3.1. The Appellant's application for a variation of condition (LPA ref: 242719) was submitted and validated on the 4th November 2024, and in due course the LPA refused the planning on 20th December 2024, citing one Reason for Refusal ('RfR'), which stated:

'The replacement dwelling by virtue of its inappropriate siting and design including the orientation would constitute encroachment of development into the Countryside and Valued Landscape, and have a detrimental impact on the rural character of the area. The associated development, such as residential garden use, hardstanding and other domestic paraphernalia, would have an urbanising effect on the site, which would be considerably harmful to the woodland landscape setting. As such, the proposal is contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy (2010) and policies CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (2014), the Borough Design Guide SPD (2012), the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), and section 15 of the NPPF (2024).'

- 3.2. The foregoing RfR contains a number of different landscape issues which I have underlined above, it thus provides the scope of the main matters that need to be addressed in this statement. They are:

Issue One

Would the relocating of the consented dwelling constitute encroachment of development into the Countryside.....so detrimental so as to justify the refusal of planning permission?

- 3.3. As can be seen between the approved consented scheme (LPA ref: 240665) and the Appeal Scheme, the Appellant is proposed to relocate the dwelling within 5 metres north of the consented location. A copy of the consented scheme is contained within Appendix JB 3 and the Appeal Proposal is within Appendix JB 4. See below extracts from each scheme overleaf Image JB 1 and Image JB 2:

Image JB 1: Extract from the approved consented scheme (LPA ref: 240665)
Proposed Site Block Plan (ref: 640-PL-07-Rev.E) by Artel 31

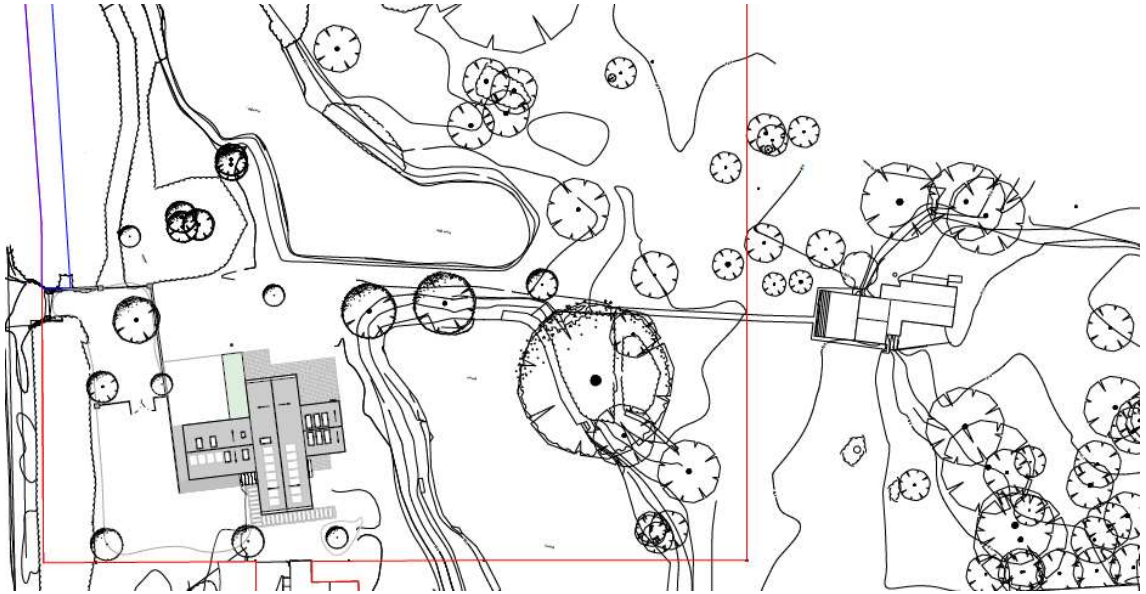
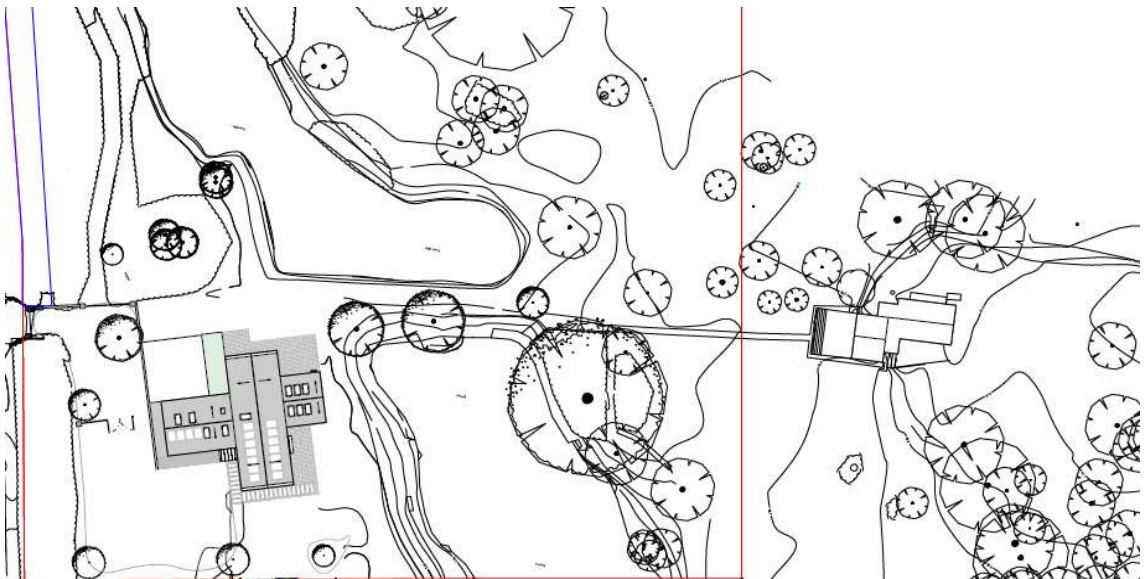


Image JB 2: Extract from the Appeal scheme (LPA ref: 240665) Proposed Site
Block Plan (ref: 640-PL-07-Rev.C) by Artel 31



Issue Two

Would the relocating of the consented dwelling constitute encroachment of development into theValued Landscape so detrimental so as to justify the refusal of planning permission?

- 3.4. I would consider the likely effect of the Appeal Proposal relative to the open countryside setting of the site and that of the Valued Landscape. I will also consider what role the Appeal Site would play relative to the Valued Landscape. So, what role does the Appeal Site play in contributing to the understanding and appreciation of the Valued Landscape setting and how will the Valued be affected by the proposal?

Issue Three

Would the residential garden use, hardstanding and other domestic paraphernalia, would have an urbanising effect on the site, which would be considerably harmful to the woodland landscape setting?

- 3.5. I will consider the level of residential garden use, hardstanding and other domestic paraphernalia between the approved consented scheme (LPA ref: 240665) and that of the Appeal Proposal and determine any difference in terms of quantum of location. This will enable an appropriate level of effect to be determined.

4.0 THE CASE FOR THE APPELLANT

Main Matter One

Would the relocating of the consented dwelling constitute encroachment of development into the Countryside.....so detrimental so as to justify the refusal of planning permission?

- 4.1. I acknowledged that a degree of harm is unavoidably incurred whenever new development is undertaken, but I also emphasise that the appropriateness of the new home as previously consented by the LPA (LPA ref: 240665).
- 4.2. In the past, at a time when the Appellant's previous proposals (LPA ref: 240665), the Council raised no significant concerns about the effects of the consented proposal on the setting of the site; whether that being Countryside of the Valued Landscape, and found no material harm to recommend the refusal of the scheme in landscape terms.
- 4.3. The LPA's concerns now relate to more localised effects; specifically, the alleged harm which will accrue to the visual openness and encroachment into the open countryside. In this instance, we refer to the unsettled character beyond the site, and which forms the host landscape character area of L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Landscape Character Area.
- 4.4. The Appeal proposal has to be considered in its landscape context. As GLVIA version 3 advises, the receiving landscape hereabouts is more than the open farmland, with the following typical noted as common to the site's location (N.B. Emphasis added by me):
 - *'Largely unsettled, with most buildings relating to the estate, and occasional farmhouses. Roadside ribbon development extends from Wokingham along the boundaries of the area and at Barkham Hill.*
 - *A secluded landscape with access restricted in the north of the area around Bearwood College and the buildings are largely screened by woodland. The south of the area is particularly tranquil with an experience of dark skies despite the close proximity to Wokingham town and the localised visual and audible instruction of the M4.*
 - *Area provides a wooded backdrop to views from the surrounding landscape and screens the western boundary of Wokingham town.*
 - *Views are enclosed by the extensive woodland, but open out on the edge of the woodland across the Loddon Valley towards Reading.'*

- 4.5. I consider that this Appeal Site is situationally appropriate, physically well contained, visually contained, contains no landscape features that preclude its proposed use and is entirely well suited to deliver a well-conceived, coherent new development of one, individual dwelling, which was also the finding of the LPA in their decision-making for the previously consented scheme (LPA ref: 240665).
- 4.6. The situational appropriateness of the Appeal site, and the Appeal Site would consider to have the same spatial equivalence as it has had for a significant time – that being a private garden (amenity) for a large detached dwelling. This space is set within domestic curtilages and is managed for private garden space, driveway and patio area. This land use remains the same from the previously approved and consented scheme (LPA ref: 240665).
- 4.7. I note from my above reference to the host landscape character (L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills) which is typically *‘largely unsettled’ ‘occasional farmsteads’* in a ‘secluded landscape’ with *‘buildings are largely screened by woodland’* and *‘views are enclosed by the extensive woodland.’*
- 4.8. Additionally, I note that the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) also recognises the following typical features (N.B. Emphasis added by me for features common to the Appeal Site’s location):
- ‘There are few roads through the estate area, just the Bearwood Road which forms a boundary to the parkland. The verge has been expanded to a wide grassed roadside edge with a deep ditch and mature conifers, and is lined by mature rhododendron. At the south end of Bearwood Road there is settlement along the road forming part of Barkham Hill, with detached, executive style houses further to the north.’*
- 4.9. Additionally, the published landscape character assessment also highlights a number of ‘valuable landscape attributes’, which include *‘large expanses of mature mixed woodland’, ‘peaceful secluded character with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies, largely unsettled and with limited access’* and the *‘contrast of enclosed views within woodland and long views.’*
- 4.10. These qualities and values are found within the context of the Appeal Site, and on part of the Appeal Site is extensively tree’d, rather than being a woodland feature itself, the site is visually and physically contained by tree components within its quantum, as well as along the Bearwood Road which form part of the curtilage to the road along the site’s western edge.

- 4.11. In the contemporary landscape, the Appeal Site and the wider wooded landscape and occasional open field of the L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Landscape Character Area are separate, owned and managed entities with different characters through their land use i.e., open countryside verse the private garden of a large individual, detached dwelling.
- 4.12. The only connection relevant to today's planning decisions is the degree to which the woodland landscape of the L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills are inter-dependently part of a perceived whole.
- 4.13. Overall, the visual links between the existing residential dwelling and its private garden are heavily filtered, enclosed (rather than long range views) and uncelebrated in either direction. The discernibility of the proposed scheme would not be so evident – especially to the uninitiated – that the new development would represent a significant harm to the visual character of the area or material harm to the landscape character of the countryside.
- 4.14. It is necessary to retain well tree'd and wooded character of the landscape in order to preserve the character of the L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills, which is derived principally from its arboricultural value and ecological interest, by far the greatest part of which can only be experienced from within individual woodland blocks (where public access is permitted) or from travelling along the small number of roadways passing through this area such as Bearwood Road (which adjoins the site's western edge).
- 4.15. With reference to the published landscape character assessment, the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019), I note a number of landscape sensitivities are highlighted. Many of the listed sensitivities do not directly relate to the Appeal Proposals, but the following are pertinent for consideration as part of my statement:
- *'Demand for residential development and supporting infrastructure inside and outside the area impacting on landscape character, including the spread of ribbon development along the periphery of the area and expansion of the urban edge of Wokingham town.'*
 - *'Pressure for built development on the wooded skyline leading to visual intrusion in the elevated landscape and in views to the wooded backdrop from elsewhere.'*
- 4.16. It is considered that these are relevant factors in the consideration of the effects of the proposal on the site and the area local to the site (the 'receiving environment') in terms of its landscape dimension.

- 4.17. It is clear that the Appeal Proposal would utilise the existing access to the site and would not enforce the provision of associated engineering and infrastructure on the wider landscape (i.e., new roadways and pedestrian pathways which could 'urbanise') – it is felt that the site can accommodate the charge of the new development as approved and consented previously (LPA ref: 240665).
- 4.18. Additionally, the Appeal Proposals, and that of the approved consent scheme (LPA ref: 240665) demonstrate that the vast majority of the Appeal Site (26.58ha) would remain open, and utilised as part of a private amenity garden which is not considered by the LPA to be 'not inappropriate' and any effects is considered to be benign to the landscape character of this area. Even this is land that the Council has previously concluded could accommodate the consented building without detrimental harm to the landscape.
- 4.19. Further to this, I also note that the site is situated within some of the lower lying landform within this landscape character area, and given the wooded context, and then relative minor geographical area of the Appeal Site, the site is not found to be prominent with local views.
- 4.20. It is considered from my field-based assessment, that even during winter-time conditions (February 2025), that the Appeal Site is not founded on a 'wooded skyline' and not in an 'elevated landscape' position.
- 4.21. As a result, it is judged the role of wooded backdrop in views from the wider area will not be materially affected by the Appeal Proposal; especially given the proposed dwelling (Appeal Proposals) would be constructed at the same FFL height proposed for the consented scheme, and it is clear there would be no perceptible difference between the two schemes.
- 4.22. Further to this, travelling along Bearwood Road, it is logical that dwellings are scattered along this road and isolate, often filtered from view. Along Bearwood Road, the published landscape character assessment (2019) notes that along Bearwood Road, the verges have 'been expanded to a wide grassed roadside edge with a deep ditch and mature conifers, and is lined by mature rhododendron.'
- 4.23. I also note that development is frequently experienced along such a route in this landscape character area as 'largely unsettled, with most buildings relating to the estate, and occasional farmhouses, roadside ribbon development' as well as 'detached, executive style houses'.

4.24. Whilst the concerns of the LPA are appreciated, it is my professional opinion that the Appeal Proposal strike a better balance of arranging built form relative to the road corridor of Bearwood Road, as well as enhancing the wider openness of the site, and the countryside situated outside of the site. We are reminded by GLVIA version 3, that the benefits to other dimensions of the landscape resource, are to be considered. This has a beneficial effect which the LPA appear to have not considered.

4.25. Additionally, I also note the following landscape sensitivity:

'Changes in deciduous woodland structure through loss of species diversity and the spread of sycamore, rhododendron and other invasive/exotic species are threatening the locally distinctive species composition of these woodlands.'

And also:

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

And also:

'Pressure for alternative land uses within the woodlands leading to the erosion, clearance or inappropriate management of woodland areas.'

4.26. It is worthwhile highlighting that the Appeal Proposal would implement, as well as manage and maintain in perpetuity a number of arboricultural, landscape and ecology enhancements.

4.27. Whilst not developed by myself, rather through the close working of the Arboriculturists and Ecologist for the scheme, they evidently promote those 'management guidelines' for the L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills of the published assessment as far as possible. The creation of new habitats and the planting of trees and the conservation of existing features and their enhanced future management (given there is no evidence that the current regime is engaged in positive environmental repair and investment) also ensure an Bio-diversity gain.

- 4.28. The qualities and benefits of the 'new landscape' proposed therefore need to be given weight in the assessment of overall landscape effects as GLVIA version 3 advises. The LPA's case to date, read as a whole, focusses on the negative effects of change at the expense of a balanced approach to weighing the minor adjustment of an already consented new home and its fabric of trees and habitats and contribution to Green Infrastructure.
- 4.29. So I disagree with the Council that the appeal site's qualities and value are so great that they preclude the grant of planning permission, especially when giving due weight, as one should, to the merits of the new landscape created, the appropriateness of the situational context and the ability to deliver a new home within a logical environmental location, which delivers wider openness to the site, and responds progressively to the landscape sensitivities of the landscape character area to conserve and enhance its overall characteristics.
- 4.30. I cannot concur with the LPA that the relocating of the consented dwelling constitute encroachment of development into the Countryside and Valued Landscape so detrimental so as to justify the refusal of planning permission.

Main Matter Two

Would the relocating of the consented dwelling constitute encroachment of development into theValued Landscape so detrimental so as to justify the refusal of planning permission?

- 4.31. Valued landscape is that which is ‘out of the ordinary’, rather than designated or simply popular (Stroud District Council v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin)).
- 4.32. Following the Stroud Judgement, other High Court judges have similarly concluded that:
- A valued landscape need not be formally designated,
 - A valued landscape is not merely one that is popular, and
 - A landscape was only a ‘valued landscape’ if it had physical attributes which took it ‘out of the ordinary’.
- 4.33. It has been well established in appeal decisions and case law that ‘valued landscape’ does not mean ‘designated landscape’ and that landscapes can be valued despite not being designated. There appears to be less case law considering this the other way round; the extent to which a local landscape designation indicates that a landscape is a ‘valued landscape’. However, it is clear from appeal decisions that locally designated landscapes are not necessarily valued landscapes.
- 4.34. Therefore, a local landscape designation can indicate that an area is likely to be a ‘valued landscape; and evidence behind the designations can support the case, but it is necessary to evaluate the landscape on a case by case basis as a local designation does not necessarily mean that landscape is a ‘valued landscape’.
- 4.35. The Appeal Site is within the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape. Whilst at the time of the original application this was undesignated, WBC have recently published their Regulation 19 Submission Plan (‘LPU’). Whilst this can only be afforded limited weight, it provides relevant policies in NE5: Landscape and Design and NE6: Valued Landscapes.
- 4.36. It should be noted a ‘Valued Landscape’ as designated by a Local Plan is a local designation and as per paragraph 187 of the NPPF is to be distinguished as a ‘locally designated site’. It does not attract any great protection from the Framework.

- 4.37. Draft policy NE5 advocates for a landscape-led approach and seeks for proposals to demonstrate an understanding of valued characteristics, features and quality of local landscape character areas. It states several attributes that development proposals should have regard to and that Development Proposals affecting Valued Landscapes will only be supported where they are protected.
- 4.38. Notably, sub-paragraph 14.59 of the DLP states that it pertains to development proposals impacts affecting their landscape and visual impact. Sub-paragraph 14.60 continues development proposals within or otherwise affecting valued landscapes must carefully consider and take account of the important landscape attributes and characteristics. As such, it is emphasised it is the visual impact that largely comprises the assessment of impacts to Valued Landscapes.
- 4.39. The above is in accordance with Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA) and emphasises the fact that the assessment of landscape impact is in relation to viewpoints and identified characteristics.
- 4.40. Turning to the Appeal Site, the Landscape Institute have published their technical guidance note on 'Assessing landscape value outside national designations'. It is clear that this helpful guidance doesn't tell us how much value a landscape should have before it's important enough to be protected as a 'valued landscape' under 187(a) NPPF. However, their definition is as follows:
- 'A 'valued landscape' is an area identified as having sufficient landscape qualities to elevate it above other more everyday landscapes.'*
- 4.41. The guidance also notes that (a) 'everyday' landscapes may nevertheless have value to people, and (b) the identification of landscape value needs to be applied proportionately ensuring that identification of 'valued landscape' is not over used.
- 4.42. The aforementioned technical guidance note TGN 02/21: Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations identifies a range of factors that can be considered when identifying landscape value. The Table overleaf is derived from TGN 02/21 and provides a description as to the extent the valued factors are present within the Site based upon both the published landscape character and Site specific character; see Table JB 1:

Table JB 1 - Site Specific Landscape Appraisal (late February 2025/Wintertime conditions)

Aspect	Definition	Observations
Natural Heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of ecological, geological, geomorphological or physiographic interest which contribute positively to the landscape.	There are Priority Habitats on the site including, importantly, the two ponds which area categorised as eutrophic standing waters, as well as grassland and orchard. Parts of Bearwood Park form the Bearwood Estates Woods and Lakes Local Wildlife Site, which are outside of then site and form part of the Appeal Site's setting. Woodlands are protected by long-established TPOs 20/1973 and 87/1978. The position of the proposed relocation of the dwelling (as per LPA ref: 242719) is that of grassed/lawn area with trees. Across the wider site area, there are a mixture of native and non-native/ornamental tree and shrub planting, including Rhododendrons and other 'Victorian Exotica'. There are areas of hedgerow degradation with gappy and outgrown sections. The natural heritage of the Site is therefore considered to be medium to high.
Cultural Heritage	Landscape with clear evidence of archaeological, historical or cultural interest which contribute positively to the landscape.	Neighbouring the site (to the west) is the Bearwood House, a Grade II* listed building. Bearwood Park is a Registered Historic Park and Garden. There are no designated heritage assets within the Site, the Site is not situated within a Conservation Area, Registered Park or Garden, Registered Battlefield or World Heritage Site. To the best of my own research, I cannot find any cultural connection to the Appeal Site The cultural heritage of the Site is therefore considered to be low.
Landscape Condition	Landscape which is in a good physical state both with regard to individual elements and overall landscape structure.	The Site is managed for as a private garden associated with a private dwelling, and is not the typically found historic parkland, heavily wooded landscape, Beechwoods characteristic on the higher slopes of the LCA, or the smaller scale rural patchwork of deciduous woodland and sheep pasture, and unlike the LCA does not afford 'well used for formal and informal recreation' for the general] public. The Appeal Site is managed a garden to a private dwelling, and within the quantum of the site, whilst there is a good coverage of trees, its utility as a private garden means it does not wholly reflect the LCA and has a limited level of intactness which influences the condition of its landscape in terms of judgement. The condition of the Site is therefore considered to be medium to low.

Associations	Landscape which is connected with notable people, events and the arts.	Whilst the wider setting of the site is as aforementioned within cultural connections, the Appeal Site itself has no known notable cultural associations with art, literature or events in history. Associations are therefore considered to be low.
Recreational	Landscape offering recreational opportunities where experience of landscape is important.	Whilst the site does provide amenity for residents, there is no Public Access to the site or a Public Right of Way ('PRoW') within or passing along the Site's boundaries. There is a limited network of PRoW routes which are situated a good distance away from the site's location – circa 0.6km north and south of the site's location (at their closest point). The recreational value of the Site is therefore considered to be very low to nil.
Perceptual (Scenic) and Distinctiveness	Landscape that appeals to the senses, primarily the visual sense. Landscape that has a strong sense of identity and whether it contains rare character or features which are considered particularly important examples.	The character of the Site is influenced by its surrounding context, being a location on the edge of extensive woodland which forms a key character of the wider L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Landscape Character Area. When on site, even during winter-time conditions, one is aware of the unsettled nature/sparse number of dwellings within the setting of the site in the wider area. However, within the quantum of the site, whilst there is a good coverage of trees, its utility as a private garden means it does not wholly reflect a 'heavily wooded landscape.....mixed deciduous woodland interconnected with blocks of coniferous planting' or 'smaller scale rural patchwork of deciduous woodland and sheep pasture' as the site is managed as a private garden with grassed lawn, native and ornament shrub and tree planting. Nor does the character of the site actually resemble that of parkland, as noted that the 'Historic parkland of the Bearwood estate (Grade II* Registered Park and Garden) forms the core of the area', nor is the site found within a 'rolling hill' setting. Previously, the tree cover of the site has been harmed by the over-run of Rhododendron in the past. Through the development of the site its landscape would be appropriately managed for longevity to ensure that the previous infestation of Rhododendron are managed so as to not be invasive and detrimentally impact the structure of the tree planting, and the structural and physiological condition of existing trees. The perceptual quality of the Site is therefore considered to be medium. The distinctiveness of the Site is therefore considered to be medium.

- 4.43. Given the foregoing, I judge that whilst the area surrounding the Appeal Site is set within a Valued Landscape, that being the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape, I am not persuaded that the Appeal Site would be judged to be a Valued landscape individually.
- 4.44. This is an inevitable judgement when considers the weight of the site's utility as a garden to a private dwelling. In this case, I recognise that the Appeal Site is situated within the setting to the Valued Landscape.

- 4.45. The value of the landscape practitioner's involvement is not simply to record outcomes using GLVIA version 3, some of which may be clear to all. Landscape is 'not unchanging' (GLVIA version 3, para 2.13), indeed change is necessary if the planning system is to fulfil its purpose.
- 4.46. To assess the effects 'in response to the particular context in which proposed change takes place' (GLVIA version 3 para 2.6), which means focussing not just on the qualities of the site itself, but its appropriateness in context.
- 4.47. Given this, and the analysis I have provided above, and within Main Matter One, I conclude that whilst there would be direct effects within the site, these landscape effects would be experienced within the site, and not within the wider Valued Landscape setting, and not physically encroaching into the Valued Landscape directly.
- 4.48. Furthermore, looking well beyond the immediate 'receiving landscape' of the Appeal Site itself, the wider landscape context is one of strong containment with limited PRoW or locations promoted for views. The Appeal Site is a small, enveloped locations within the wooded landscape; see Appendix JB 1.
- 4.49. It is my professional opinion, that there would little to no visual change from the Bearwood Road and the PRoW situated to the north and south of the site; see Appendix JB 1 and 2. Following my recent field-based assessment, I make the following comments:
- 4.50. **Bearwood Road:** For most road users, views east towards the Appeal Site will be closed down in summer by the roadside verges, hedgerows and expansive woodland components. Winter views will be more filtered (than spring-summer time) but most road users will be travelling at speed on a road that is not a defined tourist route. The extent of landscape fabric along this road corridor would remain consistent between the consented, approved scheme and the Appeal Proposals.
- 4.51. Because of the low level of view of the average driver and passenger, the roadside hedgerows and woodland trees provide significant screening, though with some effort there would be filtered views of the site in winter months, but these would be fleeting, glimpsed and oblique to the direction of travel, from which the casual observer is unlikely to observe. Given this, I judge that the effect of the Appeal Proposals would remain similar to that of the consented scheme, and there would be no perceptible difference from the roadway, and so no change in views from the roadway.

- 4.52. ***Public Right of Way North (LPA PRow ref: 3 and 14) and South (LPA PRow ref: 17)***: These are all situated circa 0.6km from the site (at the closest point). However, these route pass through extensive woodland blocks including Rob's Copse to the north and Round Hill Wood to the south. From our own field-based assessment, even in winter-time conditions, there was no discernibility of the Appeal Site (February 2025).
- 4.53. Given that the inherent mitigation is demonstrably effective, and the Appeal Proposals would conserve and enhance the existing tree'd landscape of the site, I find no reason to agree with the LPA that the Appeal Proposal would lead to a direct, or perceived encroachment of development into the Valued Landscape to the degree to refuse planning permission. It is clear that this matter, like the sensitivity of the Appeal Site has been over-asserted.

Main Matter Three

Would the residential garden use, hardstanding and other domestic paraphernalia have an urbanising effect on the site, which would be considerably harmful to the woodland landscape setting?

- 4.54. The concept of 'landscape', embraces much more than openness and appearance. The European Landscape Convention (ELC), defines landscape as '.... an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors'. The GLVIA version 3, paragraph 2.4, reminds us that the importance of the ELC definition is that it '...moves beyond the idea that landscape is only a matter of aesthetics and visual amenity'.
- 4.55. When reaching overall judgements about the effect on the (multi-dimensional) concept which we call 'landscape', it is important that there is not a disproportionate focus on aesthetics and visual amenity and that the relevance of change is evaluated in terms of all dimensions of the landscape resource. Those other dimensions include whether the site has historical or cultural relevance, its habitats, its landscape fabric and its long-term management and use.
- 4.56. The Appeal Site is a location for an existing residential dwelling and the land within the site's quantum is managed for, and experienced as private gardens to this dwelling. This is a long-established land use at this location. Consequently, and with consideration of the foregoing, it is judged that the Appeal Site is experienced differently to the wider landscape beyond its domestic curtilages.
- 4.57. Insofar as the on-site character is concerned, the published landscape character assessment is helpful in some respects, but caution should be adopted as the Appeal Site is a domestic garden; albeit a large area. Nonetheless, the site has been managed for a long time period as a domestic garden, which does contain a significant number of tree components giving it a well tree'd context.
- 4.58. Therefore, the Appeal Site has intrinsic value commensurate with its utility as a large domestic garden, rather than the wider countryside of the host landscape character area (L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills). This judgement is reflective of the Appeal Site's situational context in terms of the on-site land use and character.
- 4.59. To judge, as the LPA has done, that the very minor reconfiguration of the approved and consented scheme to locate the hardstanding and other domestic paraphernalia to within a very similar location, but would now have an urbanising effect appears to be an over-assertion, and a far too strong a statement to make.

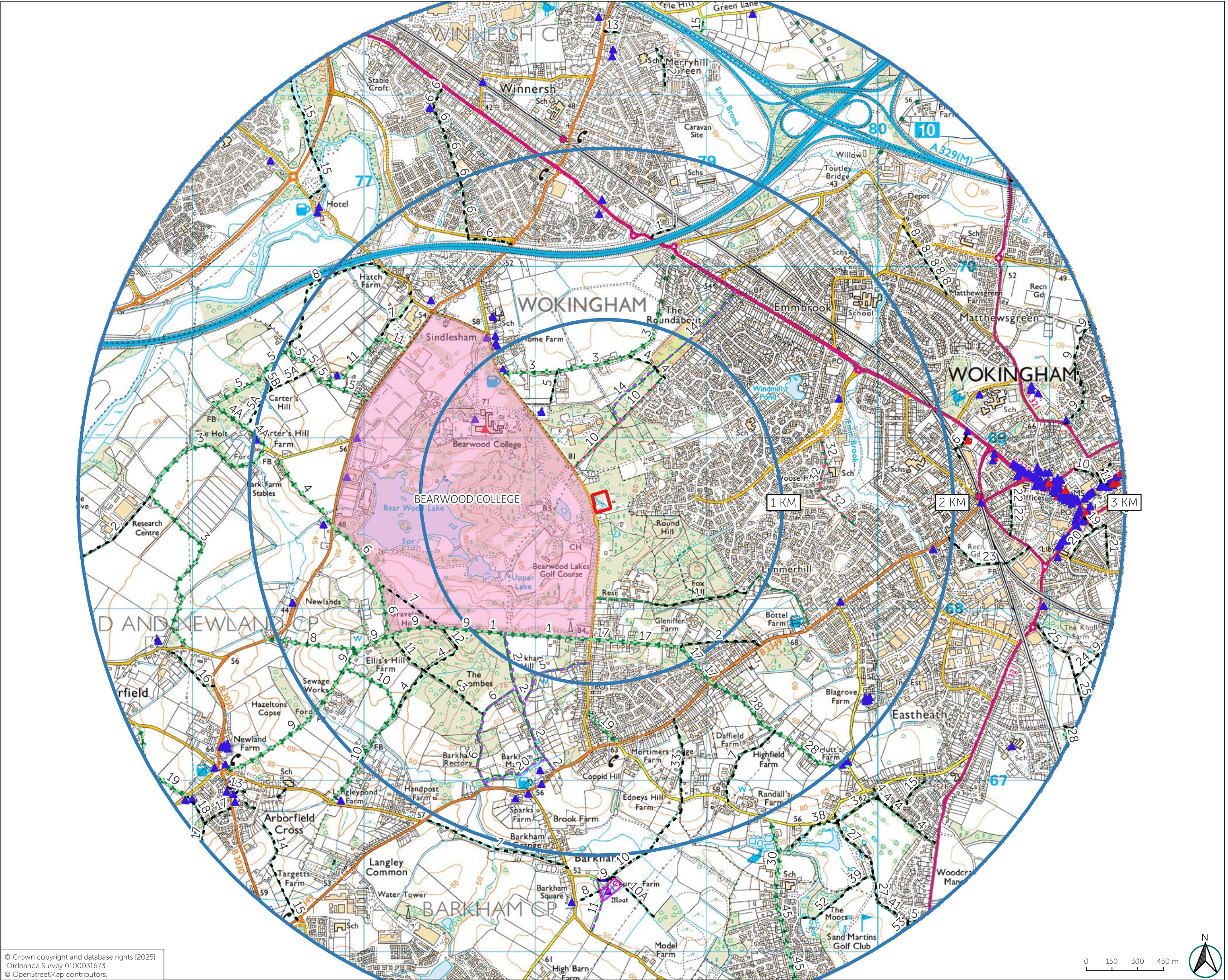
- 4.60. In terms of the Appeal Site, there is no hinterland or threshold within the site that could be identified as 'heightening' one's experience of the proposed elements – such an example would be a noticeable change or level, higher ground or water body. The Appeal Proposals are similar to those of the approved consented scheme (LPA ref: 240665) – and the experience of the same hardstanding, patio, pathway and associated domestic elements as previously proposed (LPA ref: 240665), would not be detrimentally effect by the proposed alteration.
- 4.61. I do not wish to appear to treat casually the importance of changes to the setting of the site. However, the situational appropriateness of the Appeal Site has already been recognised by the LPA through their consent of the approved scheme and the location of this single new home (5 metres south). While there may not be any 'significant' residual landscape effects, there will not be 'no effects', yet the Appellant is continuing the proposed scheme of domestic landscaping as previously consented by the LPA (LPA ref: 240665).
- 4.62. There remains no difference in scale, design, materials of quantum, only a minor adjustment associated with the individual dwelling, whilst the Appellant would manage the existing Rhododendron planting, which has become invasive and has previously overtaken the garden and threatening the psychological conditions of exiting trees. As part of the wider measure, this action would afford a betterment to the site through managing the gardens and providing new tree planting for arboriculturally continuity.
- 4.63. The context suggests that the Appeal Site represents a logical and synergistic location for the continued use of the site for a residential development – an individual, detached dwelling with a large domestic garden setting.
- 4.64. For the reasons I have provided in this sections, as well as the above analysis for main Matter One and Two, I consider that the LPA has overstated the urbanising effect of the scheme, and find no reason to agree with their position which I judge to be unsubstantiated and contrary to their own previous judgement for the approved consented scheme (LPA ref: 240665) where this effect was never judged to be so substantial it warranted the refusal of planning permission.

5.0 SUMMARY

- 5.1. For all the above reasons, as amplified in my main evidence Section 4, I find no basis on which to refuse planning permission in landscape terms. I respectfully recommend that insofar as landscape matters pertain to the determination of this appeal, that planning permission should be granted.

APPENDIX JB 1

Site Context Plan



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KEY

- Application Site
- Distance Intervals (1km)
- Scheduled Monuments

Public Rights of Way

- Bridleway
- Byway open to all traffic
- Footpath
- Restricted Byway
- Bearwood College Registered Park and Garden

Listed Buildings

- I
- Grade II
- Grade II*



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CLIENT
Mr Kay and Mrs Williams

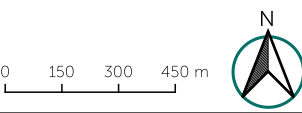
PROJECT
178 Bearwood Road, Wokingham

DRAWING TITLE
Site Context

DRAWING STATUS
Planning

DRAWING NO. 1762-L-RP-LVA-PL-101	REVISION V1
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SCALE @ A3 1:20,000	DATE MAR 2025
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APPENDIX JB 2

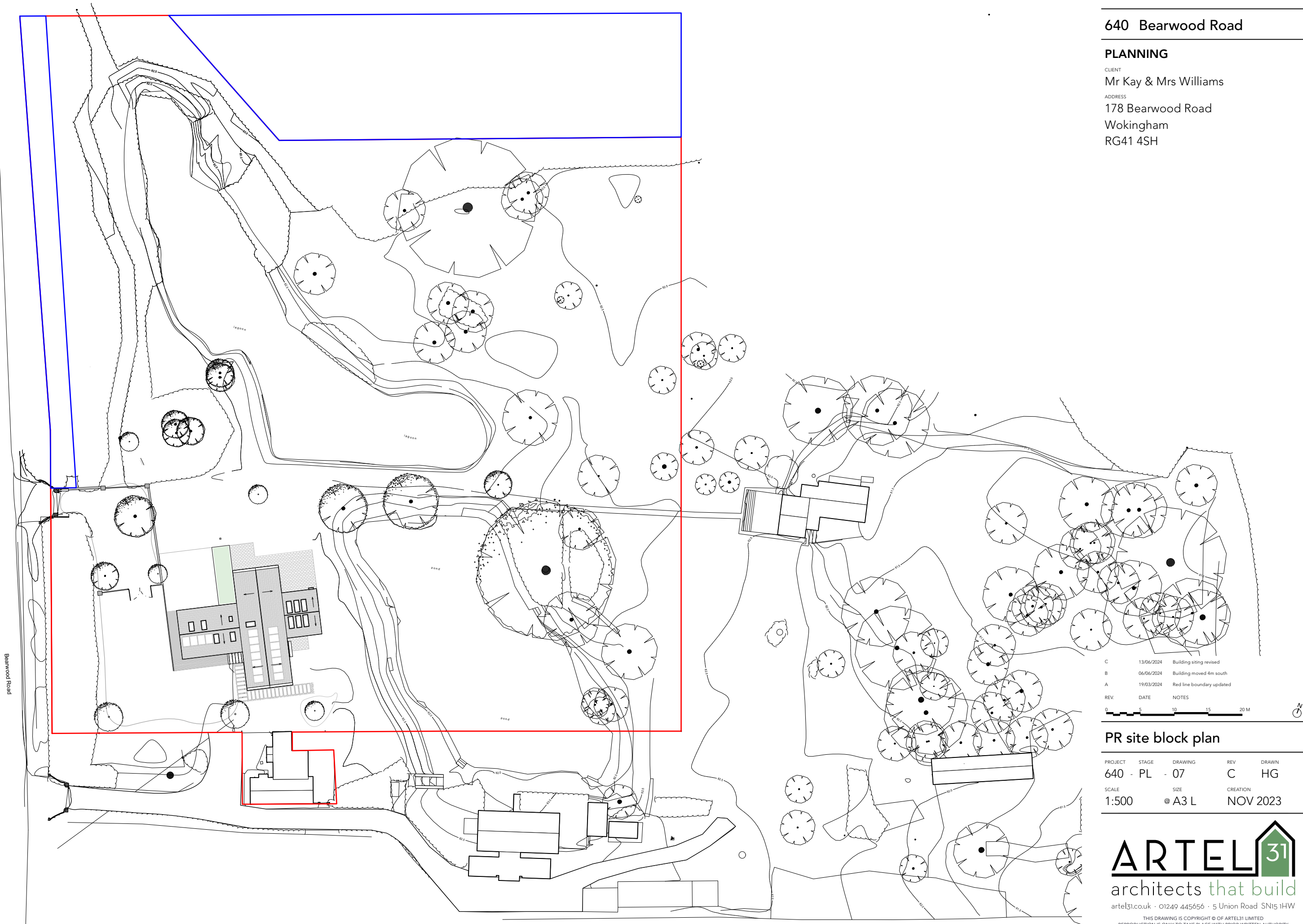
Plotted Zone of Theoretical Visibility

APPENDIX JB 3

Approved Site Block Plan (LPA ref: 240665)

PLANNING

CLIENT
Mr Kay & Mrs Williams
ADDRESS
178 Bearwood Road
Wokingham
RG41 4SH



REV.	DATE	NOTES
C	13/06/2024	Building siting revised
B	06/06/2024	Building moved 4m south
A	19/03/2024	Red line boundary updated

PR site block plan

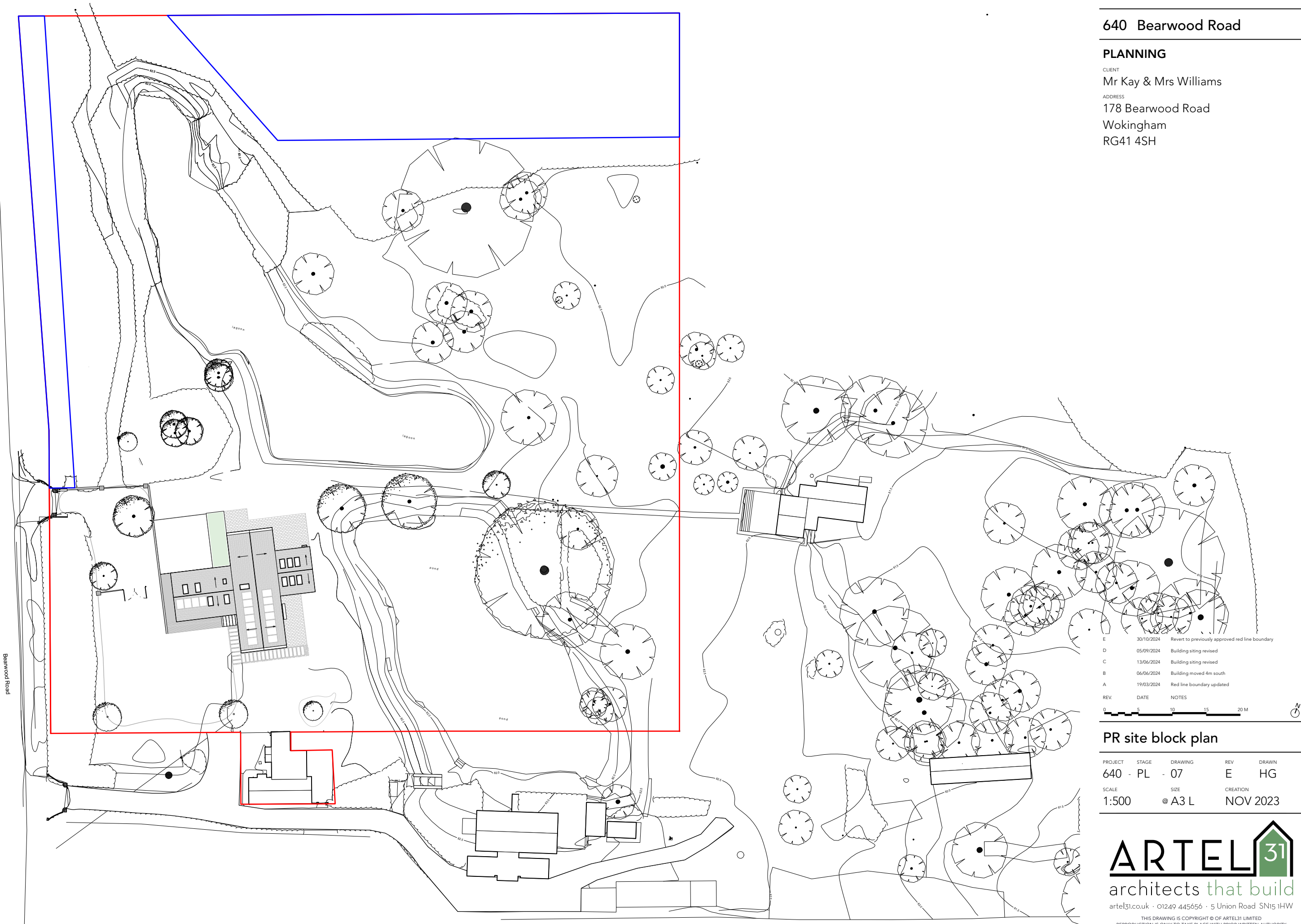
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640	PL	- 07	C	HG
SCALE	SIZE	CREATION		
1:500	@ A3 L	NOV 2023		

APPENDIX JB 4

Appellant's Site Block Plan (LPA ref: 242719)

PLANNING

CLIENT
Mr Kay & Mrs Williams
ADDRESS
178 Bearwood Road
Wokingham
RG41 4SH



REV.	DATE	NOTES
E	30/10/2024	Revert to previously approved red line boundary
D	05/09/2024	Building siting revised
C	13/06/2024	Building siting revised
B	06/06/2024	Building moved 4m south
A	19/03/2024	Red line boundary updated

PR site block plan

PROJECT	STAGE	DRAWING	REV	DRAWN
640	PL	- 07	E	HG
SCALE	SIZE	CREATION		
1:500	@ A3 L	NOV 2023		

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