

MEMORANDUM

From:	Chris Hannington Planning Trees and Landscape Team Manager		
Service	WBC Trees and Landscape	Application No:	240665
Address:	178 Bearwood Road, Barkham, Wokingham, RG41 4SH		
Proposal:	Full application for the proposed erection of 1 no. four bedroom detached dwelling with associated landscaping following demolition of the existing dwelling and garage.		
Site Visit Made:	No – see note below		
Summary Of Recommendations			
☐ Recommend approval but with condition(s) & reason(s) stated below ;			
☐ Recommend approval with no conditions			
☒ Recommend refusal for the reason(s) stated below ;			
☐ Request further information before determination as stated below .			
Comments On Proposal			
Thanks for the consultation. This consultation response represents an update from the Trees and Landscape team and complements the previous consultation response by my colleague Brigitte Crafer. I have not visited the site, but I am familiar with the locality. I have looked at site photographs and discussed the proposals with various officers. <u>The site and surrounding landscape</u> The site sits in the L1: Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Landscape Character Area. It lies in open countryside outside settlement boundaries. The site is well wooded and the access to the site is from Bearwood Road - identified in the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (2020) as a locally valued natural asset. Bearwood Road is a Green Route which here marks the eastern boundary of the grounds of Bearwood House, a Grade II* listed building. Bearwood Park is a Registered Historic Park and Garden of national significance. Parts of Bearwood Park form the Bearwood Estates Woods and Lakes Local Wildlife Site which, here, runs up to the Green Route. 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.			

The woodlands are protected by long-established TPOs 20/1973 and 87/1978.

The site sits wholly within the **Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape** identified in the Council's Valued Landscape Topic Paper (2020).

Landscape strategy

The landscape strategy is described in the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Association (2019):

The key aspects to be actively managed are the mixed woodland and the features associated with the historic landscape. There are also opportunities to strengthen open water, woodland and remnant heathland habitats, and manage the exotic species ...

In terms of development the WBLCA (2019) describes the aim as: 'to conserve the unsettled character of the area'.

The harm

Harm from the increased built form

Whilst the footprint appears to be approximately the same the height of the building would be significantly greater than the existing

This will impact negatively on the character of the countryside in this location.

Harm from the extension of built form into the countryside

The Design Statement states:

3. Proposal sited further away from annexe creating a more distinct separation between the two dwelling houses improving privacy and amenity.

But this is not right. The proposals do not create 'a more distinct space', there is currently no space between the main house and the annexe so the proposals cannot make it 'more distinct'. What the proposals do is extend the built form 25.5m to the north extending into the open countryside and valued landscape. This is a considerable extension particularly given the open countryside and valued landscape location.

Because the proposals extend the built form across a wider area of countryside, valued landscape, the local and the natural environment, it is clear that they do not conserve the unsettled character of the area but rather militate against it.

A useful yardstick which will assist in the determination of this application is the recent appeal at Fairview Farm (Appeal A, APP/X0360/C/22/3300653), concerning development of three small store/office structures which states:

25. The 3 new buildings (either when taken individually or in total) encroach upon and further enclose the open space within the rear part of Fairview Farm near where it abuts an open countryside field. Building 1, indeed, sits hard up to the hedgerow on that boundary and this too in my view has a deleterious effect on the contribution the latter makes to local character.

...

27. This significant harm to the character of the area – and to a Valued Landscape in particular – is not mitigated by the screening around Fairview Farm from views since character has an intrinsic quality which is not predicated on public views.

28. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework, an important material consideration) says that planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by protecting and enhancing Valued Landscapes¹¹. From what I have said, it is plain that I find that the appeal developments have an opposite effect. The appellants have said that the Valued Landscape would be protected and enhanced through landscaping and biodiversity conditions applied to planning consent. But any such conditions would not cause the developments to be acceptable as they would not mitigate the harm caused by the overdevelopment of the land upon the open, rural character of the LCA.

The arguments here, over the extension of development into the open countryside and Valued Landscape, appear to me to be similar to those at Fairview Farm. I consider the harm to the countryside, local environment and the Valued Landscape could be easily mitigated by relocating the proposed new building to the south, much closer to the annexe building that is to be retained. This would also help address the harm to the TPO woodland.

Harm to the woodland TPOs

The proposals bring the built form into the TPO woodland area, albeit this area is temporarily a woodland lawn. Woodland lawns do exist naturally but are sometimes opened up through anthropogenic activities.

The purpose of a woodland TPO being to safeguard the ability of the woodland to self-regenerate all germinating seeds, seedlings and saplings in this area are protected and so any mowing, grazing or other operations in the area of the Woodland TPO that result in destruction of germinating seeds, or regenerating seedlings or saplings, would be contrary to the TPO and therefore would constitute an offence.

If the owner is currently keeping this area open by mowing or grazing, or any other operation then they are strongly advised to cease any management within the area of the Woodland TPO that is harming germinating seeds, or regenerating seedlings or saplings.

Moving the built form closer to the woodland TPO, indeed into the area of the Woodland TPO will increase pressure to extend the garden into the woodland, inhibits its ability to regenerate, and thus undermine the woodland and the amenity it brings to the locality.

Whilst there is currently a woodland lawn adjacent to the proposed site of the replacement dwelling, the climax community in this location will be woodland and so it would naturally be expected that trees will self-seed and grow in the space provided by the woodland lawn.

When considering seeding or planting trees on a development site the relevant British Standard (BS5837 – 2012) states:

5.6 New planting design and associated landscape operations

COMMENTARY ON 5.6

All new tree planting proposals are an essential consideration in the layout, design and future use of a development site, the local landscape character and the contextual surroundings. As trees generally form the dominant elements of the long-term landscape structure of a site, careful consideration needs to be given to their ultimate height and spread, form, habit and colour, density of foliage and maintenance implications, in relation to both the built form of the new development, and the retained landscape features.

Trees, either individually or as formal or informal groups, perform a variety of functional roles that can be exploited by a well-designed landscape. These include:

- a) contributions to green infrastructure networks, of particular importance in built-up areas;*
- b) the inherent aesthetic attractiveness of trees as prominent landscape architectural features;*
- c) screening of undesirable views and provision of privacy;*
- d) articulation and definition of spaces;*
- e) definition and direction of routes and views;*
- f) introduction of natural character and seasonal change that can relieve or complement artificial environments;*
- g) reflection of local landscape character and providing a sense of place, sometimes as significant landmarks;*
- h) control of soil erosion, attenuation of surface water run-off and mitigation of flood risk, through root system reinforcement and canopy interception of precipitation.*

Many of these factors can provide a significant enhancement to the value of property. This is reflected in research carried out by CABI [7] and in anecdotal evidence of high property values in well-treed areas.

It is important, therefore, that ‘careful consideration needs to be given’ to the ‘ultimate height and spread’ etc. of any new trees. This applies to the likely height and spread of trees self-seeding, and regenerating in the area of the Woodland TPO including the lawn. In consequence the location of the proposed replacement dwelling is far too close to the protected woodland to allow for the ultimate height and spread of new trees naturally regenerating in the woodland. From the perspective of the trees the built form should be no closer than the root protection area of ‘future trees’ in the Woodland TPO.

Location of proposed replacement dwelling

The previous landscape report (15/4/2024 CRAFER B) requested further information and, in particular:

In terms of the proximity of the dwelling to the northern scrape and woodland edge, I would like to have seen a greater transitional area between than is currently shown. A balance between a suitable garden space needs to be married with the ecological enhancements.

In terms of species there is evidence no clear information submitted how the site will be managed for Rhododendron. A small extension of the driveway goes beyond the edge of the extent of the TPO – being a woodland TPO the area below the surface is protected as well as that above. Although there are no trees present in this area it would be preferable to extend parking areas to the south if this is really required, which would help to create more of a transitional space between the site and the woodland edge.

The large area of northern terrace (which may be overshadowed from the building) and asphalt utility space for hard ball games could be located on the south side of the building allowing more of a transitional space. between the house and the woodland/nature space. Having an expanse of hard landscape against the woodland edge seems wrong location.

And:

On the whole I support the landscape proposals which seem to be informed by the L1 LCA as well as the PEA. I have some queries regarding the edges of the driveways / planting beds will be and the location of the building /hard spaces in relation to the woodland edge. I can see that locating the larger building further away from the retained /improved annexe building may distance the total contrast between built form, but there is also the possibility that providing the new living space further away from the woodland edge and close to the annex allows for an improved transition between the 2 buildings than the current arrangement shown. This is in relation to Policy CP3 that requires *development being of appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users, including open spacesand has no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, to support flora and fauna, or geological features or watercourses, and maintain or enhance the ability of the site* . In addition, and most importantly, the policy cites the importance of *creating a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and the way they integrate with their surroundings.*

Policy CC03c includes: 'Promote integration of the scheme with any adjoining public open space or countryside'.

Please review my comments regarding the proposed site layout

Please review the siting of the development in relation to the woodland edge as queried above.

I agree with my colleague's assessment but would go further. The proposed location takes the development 25.5m into the open countryside, a considerable amount for a replacement dwelling, and brings the proposals into conflict with the priority habitat and the protected woodland.

I cannot see that it can be supported and I consider there to be a good possibility of winning this argument at appeal.

Harm to the priority habitats

The extension of the proposed built form takes it to a site immediately adjacent to the northern pond. This is a priority habitat and I consider it would be prudent to seek the opinion of the ecology officer on this issue as it is likely to undermine important characteristics of the habitat particularly through disturbance and light and noise pollution.

Harm from increased pollution

The proposals significantly increase and extend the built form on the site it is likely, therefore, that light and noise pollution will increase. Given the more extensive site plan proposed this means that harm is extended into the open countryside and Valued Landscape

Not exceptional design in the countryside

There is no claim that the built form is of exceptional quality, and I would agree that it is not and there cannot, therefore, be any NPPF paragraph 84 exception to the default position which is that *'Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside'*.

Policy reasons for refusal

I do not consider the proposals meet planning policy criteria for approval under the following: the National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs: 84, 135(c), 136, and 180, MDD Local Plan policies CCO3 2 a), c), and d); TB21 (1) and (2); Core Strategy CP1 (1); CP3 a), c), d) and f).

Because of the failure to meet policy requirements for approval, and also the harm that I note here, it is clear that the proposals do not meet the Framework paragraph 180(a) requirement to 'protect and enhance' the valued landscape. **I therefore strongly recommend refusal.**

A way forward?

I can see that the applicant may wish to create the feel or genius of a lakeside residence. However, moving the dwelling to the lake does seem to fall foul of several policies (see above). A way forward would be to relocate the proposed replacement building much closer to the footprint of the building it replaces.

Thanks for the consultation

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

N/A

Date:

21st May
2024

Signed:

Chris Hannington
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Planning Trees, and Landscape
Team Manager