

MEMORANDUM

From:	Catherine Brimble Senior Landscape Officer
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees
App No:	251310
Address:	Land at Blackcroft Farm, Reading Road, Arborfield.
Proposal:	Screening Opinion application for an Environmental Impact Assessment for the proposed residential development comprising of Retirement village comprising 200 specialist homes, including a community leisure complex and a care home; erection of 450 residential dwellings including 40% affordable homes; local centre; expansion of Blackcroft Farm Industrial Estate; primary vehicular access onto Reading Road, consisting of a new 4-arm roundabout junction; landscaped public open space, and Sustainable Urban Drainage System and wildlife enhancements.
Type of Development:	
Site Visit Made:	Yes/No

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
- ☐ No objection
- ☐ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
- ☐ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
- ☐ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

This application is accompanied by a covering letter by the OG Group with accompanying specialist reports on Highways, Landscape, Ecology and Heritage.

The Landscape and Green Infrastructure Strategy Report identifies some of the relevant planning policies (Local Plan not mentioned), the baseline conditions including landscape character, visual amenity and a preliminary landscape and green infrastructure strategy.

It should be noted that Eversley Road is designated as a Green Route, which is not picked up within the report (Local Plan Policy CC03).

Although the Valued Landscape Assessment (VLA) is mentioned in the documentation, as the main body of the site is located within the Farley Hill Valued Landscape as outlined in the VLA, no further analysis is provided in the document

on this matter. Overall landscape character and value is not assessed at the same level of detail as the visual amenity.

The site is located in countryside identified with the Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment as within character area L2: Farley Hill Wooded Sands and Gravels. This is a landscape identified as being in good condition with the following valuable landscape attributes:

- Distinctive hilly landform and wooded skyline visible and forming a backdrop in the wider landscape.
- Variety and complexity of mixed broadleaved woodland, some of which is ancient in origin, with high biodiversity value reflected in BAP priority habitats and LWS designations.
- Intimate pattern of pastures, woodland and arable farmland provides scenic quality and visual diversity.
- Recreational value of the network of the tree-lined and enclosed byways and footpaths allowing access and enjoyment of the countryside in close proximity to urban areas.
- Rural pattern of farms and hamlets, which are well integrated into the wooded landscape and display a strong vernacular of timber-framed farmhouses and cottages, with polychromatic Reading brick, clay-tiled or thatched roofs.
- Sunken winding rural lanes and tracks with mature hedgerows are visually appealing and add rural character to the landscape.
- Historic parkland landscape associated with the Farley Hill estate, designated as a Registered Park and Garden, provides a cultural record of the past and layers of history within the landscape.
- Contrast between the enclosure created by the woods and framed views across the Loddon, Broadwater and Blackwater river valleys.
- Areas with a strong sense of seclusion and rural tranquillity, with naturalistic perceptual qualities and experience of dark skies due to the lack of settlement.

The Landscape Strategy for L2 is as follows:

To maintain the landscape character of the Farley Hill Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the existing wooded and secluded character.

The key aspects to be conserved are the views, intimate pattern of pastures, tranquillity and dark skies, woodland and arable farmland and rural settlement pattern linked by narrow lanes. There are opportunities to restore and actively manage the historic parkland, ancient woodland coppice and the connecting hedgerows. Marginal farmland and paddocks should also be enhanced.

In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the sparse settlement pattern, and maintain the low density of development avoiding encroachment from the new development at Arborfield.

The visual amenity section considers the existing views to the site but makes no comment at this stage on the effects of the proposed development in these views.

One significant change that will affect openness of the views into the site will be the proposed new roundabout which will not only open up views into the site from one of the viewpoint locations but will also require a substantial amount of vegetation to be removed therefore impacting the character of the Green Route and the Valued Landscape to the west of the road.

Due to the landscape sensitivity of this site as identified in the Landscape Character Assessment (L2), also being identified as being mainly within the Farley Hill Valued Landscape, and the extensive nature of the development proposals, I consider there will be **significant landscape effects** from the proposed development and therefore an **EIA** will need to **scope in Landscape and Visual Effects**.

Date:	27 th June 2025	Signed:	C. Brimble
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