

Planning and Development
Wokingham Borough Council
Civic Offices
Shute End
Wokingham
Berkshire
RG40 1BN

Our ref: 4237

30 June 2025

Dear Sir/Madam

Permission in Principle – Residential development of 1 dwelling
Site: Land at St Sebastian's Close, Nine Mile Ride, Wokingham, Berkshire
Applicant: Ashridge Land Ltd

We write on behalf of our client Ashridge Land to apply for Permission in Principle (PiP) for residential development for a single dwelling on the above site.

The Site

The appeal site is located to the rear of St. Sebastian Close which is situated off Nine Mile ride, between the settlements of Finchampstead to the West and Crowthorne to the East, on land that was formerly occupied by the Who'd a Thought it Public House and was included within the residential land approved in relation to St. Sebastian's Court. This is outside defined settlement policy boundaries and so is considered as countryside for planning policy purposes.

Whilst outside defined settlement limits, this locality is shown to be in an urban ward within the Wokingham Borough Managing Development Delivery Document (Local Plan) for the application of its parking standards. Indeed, the neighbouring land uses include residential properties, a school, and Crowthorne Cricket and Tennis Club. This includes a car park, a pavilion building, Cricket Ground and Tennis Courts.

Access to the local area is possible via the pavement along Nine Mile Ride, which is lit and a short distance from a nearby bus stop. There are also public rights of way and informal pathways through the nearby woodlands.

A search of the planning history for the site shows that planning permission was recently sought for six units of residential development under application reference 240768. This was refused at appeal.



The Proposed Development

The proposal is for a PiP for a single residential dwelling and detached carport. It therefore differs from the refused proposal and makes use of only part of the site for that proposal. As this application only seeks to agree the principle for a single dwelling, at this stage no further details are required to be provided. Even so, an illustrative layout is included with the application to show that the dwelling and carport fit comfortably within the site. An extract of the site plan is shown at Figure 1, below.



Figure 1 – Indicative Site Plan (DHA Architecture Ltd)

The indicative layout shows the dwelling positioned so that it faces St Sebastian Close with the carport located at the top of the site. The new dwelling would benefit from front and rear gardens, with the two protected trees retained. The layout provides one vehicle access point which would be a private drive with room for on-site car parking and turning area.

Planning Assessment - 'Permission in Principle'

The PiP consent route is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for a housing-led development which separates the consideration of matters of principle for the proposed development from the technical detail of the development.

The permission in principle consent route has 2 stages: the first stage establishes whether a site is suitable in-principle, and the second (technical details consent/ TDC) stage is when the detailed development proposals are assessed.

The Guidance explains that the scope of PiP is limited to:

- Location,
- Land Use, and
- Amount

All other matters should be considered at the technical details consent stage.



Policy Assessment

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

For the purposes of this application the Development Plan comprises of:

- Adopted Core Strategy (CS) Development Plan Document - January 2010
- Adopted Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Local Plan – February 2014
- Policies Map

Regard is also given to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which sets out the Government's planning policy aims and objectives. It sits outside of the statutory development plan but is a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications.

Location of Development

When considering development outside of development limits, Core Strategy Policy CP11 sets out exceptions where proposals will be supported. Whilst the proposed development does not meet these criteria, regard should also be given to the Council's housing land supply position, which is a material planning consideration in determining planning applications.

Indeed, a key driver of the NPPF is of course to significantly boost the supply of homes, stating that:

“To support the Government’s objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.”

At the time of writing Wokingham's housing land supply was reported to be 1.7 years (March 2024) which falls significantly short of the five year supply of deliverable homes that is required under provisions set out in the NPPF. As such the Council's policies for delivering development are out of date and the tilted balance set out under paragraph 11(d) should be applied. This states that:

“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 areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or*
- any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.*



The lack of a five year housing land supply was not disputed by the Council for the appeal scheme and the Inspector found that:

“The proposal would align with the aims of the Framework to significantly boost the supply of housing and that small-scale developments can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement.”

Consequently, all the policies that were referred to in the consideration and refusal of the appeal scheme are out of date, including CP11.

The Inspector went on to comment that:

“Furthermore, it would be a windfall site on at least partly previously developed land. Due to the number of units proposed these benefits would each be moderate. Economic and social benefits associated with the scheme align with those elements of the Framework. I give these [additional benefits] each small weight due to the scale of the scheme as I do resource efficiency.”

The supply of homes was therefore given moderate weight by the Inspector and whilst the Appeal was dismissed in the overall balance, the scheme put forward under this PiP is substantially different and will not result in overall harm.

Indeed, it was noted by the Inspector that Policies CP1, CP9 and CP6 of the Core Strategy seek to minimise emissions, locate development where there will be a choice of modes of transport and be of a scale reflecting accessibility to facilities and services available. Their assessment concluded that:

“The appeal site would exceed the specific distances to different public transport services and the other facilities set out in the SPD3 in many instances. However, there would be schools and bus stops within the walking distances. There would also be other facilities not listed in the policy such as the sports clubs.

Although the width varies in places, there is a footway and lighting along much of Nine Mile Ride. There are also public rights of way and through Bramshill Forest giving access to other facilities, transport options and connections to larger settlements. However, given the distances involved and the lack of lighting in places it is unlikely that future occupiers of the site would walk to facilities, particularly at times of darkness or inclement weather.

The bus service is not to the frequency set out in the SPD and there are no dedicated cycle facilities at the site. There is some bus provision and cycle facilities in the wider area linking the site to a greater range of services and facilities. Bus stops are near to the site and despite not having a shelter or crossing points would still be an option for future occupiers.

The distances to services and facilities involved are not substantial and the range and type of transport options will vary dependant on the user. Nevertheless, there would likely be a reliance on private vehicles.”

Consequently, whilst the conclusion was that there would be a reliance on private vehicles, it was also recognised that the site does have access to some transport options and local facilities. What the Inspector did not acknowledge was that the NPPF also states that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport



solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in decision-making. In any event, it is evident that the site is not wholly in an unsustainable location, and this should be considered within the planning balance. Indeed, during discussions held with the Council following the refusal of the previous application, they advised that they did not rule out some development on the site.

Furthermore, given that the relevant policies set out in the Development Plan are out of date, they do not provide a strong reason for refusing an application on locational grounds. The NPPF instead focuses on boosting the supply of homes and in rural areas (i.e. outside of settlement boundaries) avoiding isolated homes, other than in some exceptions including where:

- a) *there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;*
- b) *the development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets;*
- c) *the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting;*
- d) *the development would involve the subdivision of an existing residential building; or*
- e) *the design is of exceptional quality, in that it:*
 - i. *is truly outstanding, reflecting the highest standards in architecture, and would help to raise standards of design more generally in rural areas; and*
 - ii. *would significantly enhance its immediate setting and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the local area.*

The application site is not isolated in this instance, although it is conceivable that a dwelling of exceptional quality could be provided.

It should also be noted that the site is on land that was previously approved as residential amenity land associated with St. Sebastian's Court. That development has now long been established and whilst the land is not kept as managed lawn it retains this use. Given the housing land supply position, the fact that the proposal would not be isolated development, with some access to local services and facilities, and the residential status of the land, the provision of a single residential dwelling would not conflict with the NPPF.

Living Conditions/Neighbouring Amenity

This would need to be considered at the TDC when the proposed development scheme is fixed. However, as an informative, the indicative scheme would conform with the Council's standards, as set out in the Borough Design Guide:

Minimum Garden Length = 11m

Separation Distances: Flank to boundary = 1m

Separation Distances: Flank to Rear = 12m

Separation Distances: Front to Front Elevation = 10m

The indicative proposal would have a rear garden length of 10.6m (measured between the main rear façade and nearest boundary) or 19.5m (measured from the north elevation to opposite boundary), a distance of 4.75m to the boundary, a front separation of 27m (between facing dwellings), and a flank to rear separation to the neighbouring flats of at least 12m.

The new home will also confirm to internal space standards.



Biodiversity and Trees

This is another matter for the TDC stage, but it also formed a significant reason for the refusal of the appeal scheme. The reasons for refusal related primarily to trees outside the new site boundary and so become irrelevant to the assessment of this case. The two significant trees within the site are two Oaks, previously referenced as T1 and T2. Both are subject to a Tree Preservation Order (TPO)

These two trees would be retained under the proposal and as shown on the indicative site plan would be positioned to the north and east of the dwelling. Consequently, their presence would not interfere with shading within the rear garden (a concern raised by the Council in the refused scheme), ensuring adequate usable private amenity space. It would be closer to the house at the front but would not overlap and due to the dwelling's orientation would be on the part of the site that is in shadow from the house for most of the day, including the evening. The shown canopy for the tree in the front garden is also a worse case, so there is likely to be more separation than shown.

In relation to Biodiversity, the reason for refusal related to technical matters, so did not provide an outright position that would exclude development from occurring. At the TDC stage a full ecological appraisal will be provided and will fulfil the necessary statutory requirements in relation to protecting and important species or habitat. This will include setting out how obligations in relation to Biodiversity Net Gain is to be achieved.

Highway Safety

As shown on the indicative layout, the access to the site would be via St Sebastian's Close. This is the same as the Appeal scheme whereby the Inspector found that:

"Use of St Sebastian's Close and the access onto the main road would increase. However, given the number of properties proposed, the extent of existing properties nearby and the adjacent car park, the traffic generated would not be significant. Therefore, it would not disrupt the flow of traffic in the area.

Swept path analysis demonstrates that vehicles could turn within the site. Vehicles within the appeal site and along St Sebastian's Close would likely be travelling at low speeds given the alignment and width of the roads and distances involved.

Visibility on to St Sebastian's Close and the main road is sufficient for drivers and other road users to see those emerging from appeal site, adjust accordingly and vice versa. Moreover, there is no compelling evidence that the existing arrangements cause any danger to highway safety.

Parking is provided within the site for each dwelling. My observations on site, while only a snapshot in time, were that there are spaces in the nearby area for parking off the main road. Consequently, although there are some parking restrictions nearby, even if there were a small amount of additional parking required such as for visitors, there would be space nearby. This would prevent any dangerous parking near or at junctions or where they would obstruct the flow of traffic.

As such, the proposed development would not harm highway safety."



Whilst the specifics will need to be agreed at the TDC stage, the PiP seeks consent for only one dwelling and so it is reasonable to conclude that the proposal would also be acceptable in this regard.

Conclusion

In having regard to the above, the PiP seeks to secure consent for the principle of development for one dwelling only. Whilst this application follows a refusal on a larger area incorporating the application site for the PiP, this current application is materially different and sets out why the proposed development for a single home accord with the aims of the Development Plan and the NPPF.

Particular regard should be given to the Council's housing land supply which means that all the policies relevant to determining the application are out of date. In this case, there are no strong reasons to refuse the PiP on the grounds that it would not result in isolated development. It also has some access to local services and facilities, is on existing residential land, and the provision of a single residential dwelling would make a meaningful contribution to housing provision. It is therefore in suitable and sustainable location for the single home.

Kind Regards

BELL CORNWELL LLP

Jonathan Jarman

JONATHAN JARMAN BA(Hons) DipTP MRTPI

Associate

01256 766673

jjarman@bell-cornwell.co.uk