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Dear Case Officer

Planning Application 242067, Lane between Lodge Road and Tape Lane, Hurst
Outline Planning Application for the proposed erection of up to 99no dwellings, green infrastructure, open space pedestrian and cycle links, recreational facilities and other associated infrastructure and access points on Lodge Road and Tape Lane with required improvements (All matters reserved except for means of access).

I am a resident of Hogmoor Lane and have lived in Hurst for over 40 years. I am writing to object to Planning Application 242067 for the reasons given below.

1 Planning Principles

1.1 The Application proposes the development of a greenfield site located outside the settlement limit of Hurst in designated countryside. The Application conflicts with Policies in the current adopted Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) Local Plan which remain valid until 2026.

1.2 The Application Site is not an allocated site for development in the WBC Local Plan Update 2040: Proposed Submission Plan. The Regulation 19 Draft Local Plan has significant weight only just short of the full weight of the Adopted Plan. The Application is in conflict therefore with both the current Adopted Local Plan and the published Regulation 19 Submission Plan and Spatial Strategy.

1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 states that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the Local Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Council has acknowledged that currently it cannot demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply and, in these circumstances, Paragraph 11 of the Framework, that carries a presumption in favour of sustainable development, would normally apply however this should now be tempered by the publication and progress of the Regulation 19 Submission Plan.

1.4 The engagement of the 'tilted balance' under the Framework has to be read carefully in the context of case law which establishes that only policies in relation to housing numbers and distribution should be disregarded in planning decisions under the 'tilted balance'. Policies in relation to restrictions such as green gap policies for example, continue to hold weight. That is particularly the case where policies such as CP11 are driven by landscape concerns not the restraint of housing per se. Policies relating to design, flood risk, heritage, agricultural land classification, trees, and wildlife should still be afforded full weight and are not 'tilted out' by the lack of housing supply.

2 Planning History

2.1 The Site has a long planning history of refusals to proposed development and dismissed Appeals. The last Appeal APP/X0360/W/22/3309202 against the refusal of 200 homes was dismissed as recently as March 2023. The Inspector's Decision stated that, amongst other considerations, Hurst is an unsustainable location with few employment opportunities; limited infrastructure, services and facilities; poor public transport; inadequate walking and cycling networks and that residents are heavily reliant upon the private car for the majority of their needs.

2.2 The Applicant now seeks to avoid a refusal of this Application by proposing a range of measures aimed at mitigating the unsustainability of the location and providing public benefit that will outweigh the adverse impact of development of the Site. The proposed measures will be of little public benefit and some may well be unviable as they are reliant upon 3rd party agreements and funding; some are unachievable; others are unsafe and will create negative impacts that currently do not exist.

3. Sustainability, Proposed Pedestrian Footway Changes

3.1 The Applicant's Transport Assessment data underestimates the projected number of traffic movements that will be generated by the development and does not take account of deliveries, contractors and visitors. The location of the proposed development in the countryside will lead to an increased number of journeys by private motor car as Hurst has a poor public transport service and few opportunities for other modes of travel. The Applicant's Transport Assessment Section 6 provides an overly optimistic view of the facilities and services available in the village, for instance the primary school is at pupil capacity, the Post Office has limited opening hours and the trading status of the Bakery is unclear.

3.2 The Applicant proposes alterations to the existing road and footway layouts that are aimed at promoting walking and cycling opportunities in the area around the Site. The Transport Assessment Image 7.6 WBC LCWIP Infrastructure Improvement Plan, illustrates the extent of the proposed alterations, a number of which are unachievable while others are aspirational using terms such as '*investigate the potential for*' or '*consider*' or '*review the potential for*'.

3.3 The A321 is a main arterial route that carries a substantial volume of traffic, approximately 5000 movements per average weekday according to the Applicant's Road Safety Audit by Fenley. Significant changes affecting road layout, traffic flow and priorities require close scrutiny by the Highway Authority and should be subject to public consultation and stakeholder engagement not included as part of an Outline Application process.

3.4 The Road Safety Audit raises several significant safety issues particularly with regard to proposed Advisory Cycle Lanes, Shared Pedestrian/Cycleways and narrowing of the A321 in the centre of the village. It appears that the Applicant has given little consideration to the potential adverse consequences and disruptive nature of the proposed changes.

3.5 It is proposed to widen the pedestrian footway on the northern side of the A321 Broadwater Lane between Hogmoor Lane and Hinton Road and reduce the existing A321 road width to 5.5 metres, this is less than the required 6metres for carriageways carrying bus routes.

3.6 It is also proposed that in addition to widening the footways up to 1.5 metres there will be two build-out pavements of 2.7 metres where the road will be reduced to a single carriageway. These will form 'gateway' features with pedestrian crossings and possibly bollards, one will be situated to allow pedestrians to cross from Tape Lane and the other will be outside the Village Shop. This scheme will have a number of negative impacts on motorists, residents and the Village Shop.

3.7 The Road Safety Audit by Fenleys states, "*It is recommended that measures are provided to deter large vehicles from attempting to pass along Broadwater Road simultaneously.*" It is proposed that priority Give Way markings at the gateway features will encourage traffic to slow and require large vehicles to wait for other vehicles to pass before proceeding, this will have a number of negative impacts as outlined below:

- The build-out pavements and narrowed road will cause difficulty for residents accessing and egressing their driveways
- The scheme will require parking restrictions to be introduced particularly close to the build-out pavements. This section of the A321 already has intrinsic speed limits for motorists caused by the need to avoid parked cars.
- Accessing and egressing the Village Shop car park is already problematic and the majority of customers park on the A321. The Shop is also reliant upon passing trade, the scheme proposes that parking will be actively discouraged close to the Shop, this will have a direct impact on footfall and its continued financial viability
- There will be congestion at peak times which will have a negative impact in terms of noise and pollution on residents of Broadwater Lane and the village centre where many of the dwellings are close to the road
- This section of the A321 is unlit and the scheme could cause serious road safety issues after the hours of darkness
- The proposed scheme could impede the progress of emergency vehicles

3.8 The Applicant proposes to extend the pedestrian footway along Lodge Road however certain sections are too narrow to accommodate wheelchair users or those with pushchairs who will have to wait at wider passing points, this is contrary to design principles in the Department for Transport's policies on *Inclusive Mobility for Pedestrians*.

3.9 The proposal to extend the footway from the development to the north of Tape Lane requires that on-street parking in the area should cease in order to provide adequate pedestrian sight lines, this will affect delivery, contractor and visitor parking for existing residents.

4 Sustainability, Proposed Cycling Network Changes

4.1 The Applicant proposes to introduce changes to the carriageway between Hurst and Twyford in an effort to present cycling as an attractive mode of transport. The Transport Assessment proposes a combination of Advisory Cycle Lanes and Shared Cycleways/Footways between Hurst and Twyford along the B3030 Lodge Road, the A321 Broadwater Lane and Hurst Road.

4.2 Advisory cycle lanes are not enforceable as vehicles can still travel and park in them and they will be of little benefit to cyclists on narrow sections of road, rather the opposite, as road signage and symbols can cause confusion particularly in unlit areas. The Road Safety Audit notes that there is a risk of collision from vehicles passing close to cyclists on narrow sections of the road. The Applicant's response is unclear and ambiguous as it states *'Confirmation that the advisory cycle lanes have been removed from the proposal, addresses the road safety concerns raised at this stage. The proposed cycle symbols that are to be highlighted with a contrasting, coloured surface should encourage motorists to proceed appropriately.'*

4.3 The Transport Assessment, Section 7 also proposes the introduction of Shared Footway/Cycleways along some sections of the A321. The shared routes are 3metres in width to allow a 2-way flow of cyclists. The Hurst/Twyford section of the A321 would not normally be considered appropriate for a shared use route as there are numerous frontages with dropped kerb driveways; side road entrances; telegraph poles; lamp posts; guard rails and other obstructions along the proposed route and the road is poorly lit or unlit in Hurst. The construction of a shared pedestrian/cycling path will require extensive engineering works particularly with the suggested realignment of the highway in some sections.

4.4 The Department for Transport's *Shared Use Routes for Pedestrian and Cyclists* outlines some of the issues that can arise from shared routes and these will apply to the A321:

- Shared use routes in rural areas can have a detrimental visual impact on character, lead to a loss of wildlife habitat, cause light pollution and cluttered signage
- The loss of path width for pedestrians can lead to difficulties for those using wheelchairs or pushchairs, those with reduced mobility or other disabilities and pedestrians with pets.

- Routes that have numerous frontages with dropped kerb driveways can lead to conflict between motorists and cyclists. Differences in gradients and uneven surfaces can cause instability issues for cyclists
- Priorities at side road entrances can cause confusion and road safety issues on 2-way flow routes

4.5 The Applicant's *Proposed Cycle Improvement Scheme Plan Image 7.7*, illustrates the increased complexity of the journey that cyclists will face when travelling to Twyford using the proposed scheme:

Cyclists travelling from Hurst to Twyford Station will have to proceed on the left-hand side of the road along the Advisory Cycle Lane from Wards Cross to Whistley Green; at the junction with Lodge Road they will have to cross over to the right-hand side to join the Shared Pedestrian/Cycleway and travel along the Hurst Road; they will then have to cross over again to the left hand side of the road at Loddon View to move into the Advisory Cycle Lane on the main carriageway; they then proceed up to Orpington Close after which they move to the left onto the Shared Pedestrian/Cycleway before reaching the Station. This will be a confusing and unattractive journey for any cyclist and will certainly not accommodate groups of cyclists. The Lodge Road Junction with Broadwater Lane is already difficult for motorists to negotiate and is an unsafe crossing for pedestrians and cyclists.

4.6 The proposal does not enable safe cycling connections to other routes as the 'Quiet Links' are via muddy paths that are unusable in winter months or after heavy rainfall and lead onto heavily trafficked main roads.

5 Sustainability, Public Transport Proposals

5.1 Hurst is currently served by the 128/129 bus service delivered under tender by Thames Valley Buses, the service is limited and faces a number of constraints. It is not currently commercially viable and relies on Wokingham Borough Council to subsidise 50% of its running costs. The passenger uptake in Hurst is lower than the national average, probably due to the inadequate timetable.

5.2 The Applicant proposes to improve the current service by the provision of a bespoke minibus service that will run for a limited number of hours between the Site, Twyford and the Wargrave Piggott CofE School. The minibus is aimed specifically at commuters and secondary school pupils and the limited morning and afternoon timetable from Monday to Saturday means that there will be no improvement to Wokingham and Winnersh routes or to evening or Sunday timetables.

5.3 It is expected that approximately £10,000 of funding for the minibus service will come from existing fare-paying residents. The minibus will run in direct competition with the TVB bus service which will also have to cover the less well-subscribed routes and timetables. It is obvious that this scheme will have a direct impact on the current service, making it less commercially viable and posing a serious threat to its continued existence. Development proposals in rural areas are expected to seek ways to support existing local services and facilities, not to enter into direct conflict with them.

5.4 It is proposed that the minibus service will be provided at a cost £173,000 per annum, it will be funded by a 50% contribution from the developer for 10 years and a 45% service charge contribution from occupants of the development at approximately £770 per annum per household. Service charges for occupants of the proposed development will include, amongst other costs, the Mobility Hub and a Travel Plan Coordinator and are likely to be considerable. They will increase exponentially after 10 years and there is no guarantee that the minibus service will continue to be financially affordable in the long-term for residents of the development.

5.5 The Applicant proposes to create an on-site Mobility Hub that will include a Community Car Club with an electric vehicle to promote sustainable travel as defined by CoMoUK. The Transport Assessment Paragraph 7.6.2 states, '*A car club gives members the flexibility of driving a car without the costs of ownership. The club covers the cost of insurance, tax, servicing and fuel from membership fees.*' It is unlikely that this proposal will be successful. A large number of Community Car Clubs are closing nationally owing to rising costs and difficulty in obtaining insurance cover. Richard Dilks of CoMoUK stated in a Guardian report on 17 March 2024 that the sector was '*facing an existential crisis*' and as many as 40 car clubs had already closed while others could no longer operate. There is no

evidence that the proposed incentives in the Framework Travel Plan will be deliverable or effective in reducing dependency on car travel.

5.6 The road layout changes, pedestrian and cycling schemes proposed by the Applicant do little to overcome the unsustainability of the Site in travel and transport terms. They do not promote long-term solutions of an adequate standard that would benefit the community. They will threaten the commercial viability of the existing bus service and Village Shop; the proposed cycle routes will create road safety issues for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists and the alterations in road layout will introduce congestion and cause difficulties for existing residents. The Application is contrary to Chapter 9 of the Framework and WBC Policies CP1, CP3, CP6 of the Core Strategy.

6 Housing Density

6.1 The WBC Settlement Hierarchy designates Hurst as a Tier 3 Limited Development Location where it is expected that proposed schemes will not exceed a total of 25 dwellings. Appeal Decision APP/X0360/W/22/3309202 was critical of the scale of the impact that 200 dwellings would have on Hurst. The current Application reduces the proposed number of dwellings to 99 however this still represents a significant increase of 22% in size and population. The village has continued to grow and thrive in recent years and there is no evidence that a development of this scale is required. The minimal contributions proposed to community facilities, support and infrastructure are not in accordance with WBC Policy CP2 regarding sustainable and inclusive communities.

6.2 The methodology for calculating village densities in Section 02 of the Access and Design Statement is flawed in that it extrapolates the densities of small areas of houses and attached gardens to produce results that are inaccurate and fail to differentiate between net and gross site areas. The full Illustrative Master Plan shows that the proposed two groups of houses have far higher densities than surrounding areas and are not in keeping with the grain of the existing settlement pattern. Dwellings on the neighbouring Martineau Lane site for instance are not clustered but set around a communal green space. The proposed density of 25 dwellings per hectare on a greenfield site next to the settlement boundary represents overdevelopment and overbearing suburban encroachment into the countryside.

7 Landscape Character and Rural Identity

7.1 Hurst is essentially a small village in a rural parish set in an agricultural landscape. The proposal will introduce urbanisation that will have an immediate negative physical and visual impact on the existing development form, pattern and character of the rural village landscape.

7.2 The Application Site has enhanced significance in that it is an area of physical and visual separation of the two settlements of Whistley Green and Hurst that is recognised as requiring protection from development in the WBC C2 Hurst River Terrace Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) Key Guidance, Page 111, *'To conserve the peaceful and open rural character of the open landscape between adjacent village centres to protect the individual identity of settlements and retain their sense of physical and visual separation in particular protect the sensitive areas of open land remaining between Hurst and Whistley Green.'* The proposed 'naturalistic common' between the two groups of suburban housing does not represent true separation of the historic settlements. The loss of this area of separation will encourage future applications from owners of the land between the development and Valley Gardens that will be difficult to refuse.

7.3 The location and form of the proposed development is also contrary to the Key Guidance and Strategy in the LCA aimed at preserving the low-density pattern of development around the settlements of Hurst and Whistley Green.

7.4 The WBC Borough Design Guide refers to the settlement pattern in Hurst as a specific example of the Loose Village Form that typifies a small number of villages in the Borough (Page 26 Figure 3b12, Broadwater Lane). Paragraph 2.3 states *'The character of these villages is defined by a dominance of landscape. Landscape and the rural hinterland penetrate into the village with trees and vegetation between buildings and along boundaries. These villages generally consist of housing areas that have*

been built at various times with the landscape creating a consistency in character.' The Design Guide recognises that the intrinsic character of the Loose Village form relies upon the open, green fields that permeate the housing, these should not be regarded as 'infill opportunities' in planning terms.

7.5 The loss of hedgerow and grass verges required for vehicle, cycle and pedestrian access will increase the suburban appearance of the development that will not be mitigated by design. The location and form of the proposed development is contrary to the Framework, Paragraph 174(b) that *"Planning decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside."* It is also in conflict with Key Issues, Strategies and Guidelines of the WBC LCA C2 Hurst River Terrace and does not accord with the WBC Borough Design Guide SPD and Policies CP1, CP2, CC02 and TB21.

8 Flooding and Drainage

8.1 The Application Site is situated in a low-lying area that is known to have a high seasonal groundwater level at or near the surface and there is ponding on the Site in winter months. The Applicant proposes to raise the finished floor levels of the dwellings to avoid on-site flooding and to construct a Sustainable Drainage Scheme of swales and attenuation basins to deal with the considerable surface water run-off from the development which will then drain into the Hatchgate Ditch. It is also proposed that foul drainage will be directed to the Broad Hinton pumping station via the Tape Lane connections.

8.2 It is recognised that there is a worsening flooding and drainage situation in Hurst (8 flooding incidents since 2003 and 2 in the last 4 years). Tape Lane and Sawpit Road have flooded after heavy rainfall and Broadwater Lane was seriously affected by flooding incidents in 2014 and 2021 when the road had to be closed to stop sewage splash and sandbags were issued to residents to prevent internal flooding. Hogmoor Lane was impassable and had to be closed in 2023 when residents had difficulty accessing and egressing their homes, there was internal flooding of one of the properties.

8.3 A WBC Section 19 Report published in March 2024 describes Hurst as *"the main hotspot for flooding due to the extensive river and ditch network around the settlement."* The causes of flooding noted in the Report are:

- The low topography of Hurst compared to the surrounding area. The Groundwater Flood Risk Map on Page 20 of the Report shows clearly that the land in the north of Hurst, Whistley Green and including the Application Site are all in the area at maximum risk from groundwater flooding with water levels at or very near the ground surface
- Climate Change resulting in weather events of increasing severity and frequency. The naturally high groundwater levels and low infiltration capacity in Hurst mean that all water has to be drained away from the area via water channels
- Inadequate channel capacity. Maps on Pages 15 and 17 indicate the high number of larger watercourses in Hurst. Many of the 'assets' in the area around the Application Site are in poor condition and do not drain effectively and a number of the ditches are not maintained and also do not drain effectively
- Inadequacy of the Broad Hinton pumping station which is described as *'woefully inadequate.'* The A-57 Map on Page 3 demonstrates at Point A the importance of the pumping station at Broad Hinton on the A321. The pumping station cannot deal with the increased flow of water after heavy rainfall and sewage backs up in the foul waste system. The accumulation of water that overwhelms the pumping station also causes flooding on Broadwater Lane and in residents' gardens, the flood water has been found to contain sewage waste from the obstructed foul water pipe system. The pumping station in Hogmoor Lane is also affected when the Broad Hinton pumping station is compromised and the result is that sewage emerges from the foul manhole cover at the upper end of the Lane and runs down to mix with the flood water in the Lane.

8.4 WBC's Water Cycle Strategy 2019 identifies Hurst as one of the settlements in the Wargrave Wastewater Catchment Area that has the least capacity in wastewater treatment. The Wastewater Network Assessment Map: Headroom Concern Page 5, rates Hurst as of High Concern with very limited

capacity. Paragraph 6.5 identifies Hurst and Twyford south of the railway line as “*Areas where the current sewerage network is more constrained and consequently requires more extensive upgrades/reinvestment.*” Since the study was completed in 2019 a further 44 dwellings have been constructed in this area in Wellington Close, Nursery Gardens and Little Acre. The addition of another 99 dwellings on the Application Site will mean that the sewerage network in the Whistley Green and northern Hurst areas will be operating at the very edge of capacity and at the highest level of risk of failure particularly in winter months. This will have direct consequences not only for existing residents but for occupants of the new development.

8.5 The Section 19 Report suggests that some measures might reduce flooding in the area, in summary, better maintenance of drainage ditches; a request to Haines Hill Estates not to clear the Estate’s ditches so that less water flows down to Hurst; a request to Thames Water to upgrade the Broad Hinton pumping station however this would require major capital investment which Thames Water acknowledges it is financially unable to provide.

8.6 The Report is helpful in that it defines the local problems in Hurst but at the same time it does indicate that there are no effective solutions to the topographical and hydrological problems that are now part of this local environment. It is inappropriate to direct largescale development towards areas with recognised significant flooding and drainage problems and is contrary to WBC Policies CC09 and CC10 and to Paragraphs 165 to 170 of the Framework in particular that ‘*When determining planning applications, Local Planning Authorities should ensure that flood risk is not increased elsewhere.*’

9 Risk of Contamination

9.1 The Application Site is approximately 200 metres from the Whistley Court and Lea Farm Landfill Site. The landfill site was granted a Licence for Commercial and Hazardous Waste in 1988 and a variation was granted in 2016 (EPR/BV72221V) to permit the ongoing management of toxic leachate and methane production. The landfill site continues to generate 80 cubic metres of toxic leachate daily which enters the public wastewater drainage network in Lodge Road. The management of methane gas must be taken into consideration when creating Sustainable Drainage Schemes and installing underground services in accordance with Environment Agency Guidance.

10 Biodiversity Net Gain

10.1 Although it is proposed that 11% on-site biodiversity net gain will be achieved, there will be significant harmful impacts to biodiversity, wildlife habitat networks and corridors that will not be adequately mitigated.

10.2 The Applicant’s Bat Survey data is incomplete and is not in accordance with the recommendations required in Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines (Collins 2023). Previous Bat Surveys of the Site have identified the presence of 7 different species including Serotine. A neighbouring site approximately 100 metres to the north on Broadwater Lane has been classified as one of County Importance for Bat Assemblage according to Table 3.3 of the Bat Mitigation Guidelines (Reason & Wray 2023) with nine different species of bat recorded including the Annex II species of Barbastelle. The Applicant’s Bat Survey data should be complete and robust in order to establish the levels of activity and the importance of the Site to foraging and roosting bats. The overall urbanisation of the Site and in particular the introduction of street lighting, will have a negative impact on bat activity that will not be easily mitigated.

Conclusion

The Application is contrary to the Adopted and emerging Local Plans and Spatial Strategy. It represents unsustainable development in a rural area and the mitigating measures proposed by the Applicant in terms of transport, travel networks and infrastructure are not of an adequate standard to overcome the negative impacts that will be created. The proposal will overwhelm the village community; will not enhance existing services and facilities; it will cause significant harm to the rural landscape character,

biodiversity and wildlife habitat and will significantly increase the flooding and drainage risks in the area. The limited public benefit of the proposal does not outweigh the significant and demonstrable harm that it will cause and I trust that the Council will be minded to refuse this Application.

Yours sincerely

Annette Lade