

PLANNING REF : 243188
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Rectory Close
: Church Lane, Arborfield, Berks
: RG29HZ
SUBMITTED BY : Mrs Sarah Jones
DATE SUBMITTED : 13/01/2025

COMMENTS:

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach to development, designed to ensure that habitats for wildlife are left in a measurably better state than how they were before the development. In England, BNG is mandatory from 12 February 2024 under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021). Developers must deliver a BNG of 10%. This means a development will result in more or better-quality natural habitat than there was before development.

It is difficult to see how the proposed Hall Farm ("Loddon Garden Village") development will achieve this legally required 10% BNG, considering that the area proposed to be developed is currently entirely either natural habitat or managed agricultural land which, by its nature, provides extensive wildlife habitats and biodiversity. This is something that any Environmental Impact Assessment needs to address in full. In particular how will the current marshland grazing habitat be preserved and enhanced?

As the owners of a property which borders the proposed new development, we are in a position of decent knowledge regarding the wildlife species currently living on Hall Farm. The woodland which is owned by Old Rectory Close, and which stretches between the building of The Old Rectory/Old Rectory Close and what is currently agricultural land, and also stretches alongside the Rectory, contains a vast number of animal, bird and plant species. These include (but are not limited to): badgers, foxes, hedgehogs, nesting buzzards, shrews, voles, mice and many other rodent species, at least two species of owl, many species of birds (including song birds, garden birds and two types of woodpecker), bats, deer (roe and muntjac), different species of newts, grass snakes, frogs and toads, myriad invertebrates and insects. Plant species are also extensive but include a seasonal carpet of bluebells.

I would request that this EIA look extensively at protecting the area of woodland mentioned above, along with any other areas of particular biodiversity importance, should the development of Hall Farm go ahead. This should include creating extension "buffer zones" to these areas to protect and support the current wildlife biodiversity present.

We are happy to allow your environmental surveyors access to our property to see for themselves the abundance of biodiversity that the land supports, but please note that we will also be commissioning our own professional, independent survey.

FLOOD RISK / SURFACE WATER

We note that, currently, the concept map shows that a school will be built next to the aforementioned property (Old Rectory Close) and woodland, with the playing fields/sports pitches up to the boundary. At many times of the year (including last week) this field is saturated due to high groundwater tables in the local area and would

be inappropriate for the suggested use.

Water flows are already in a very delicate balance in this area. Many comments note the regularity and extent of flooding on the lower regions of the Hall Farm. I note much of this is currently designated as "green space" in the proposed development, but I would be concerned that (as with Shinfield's Langley Mead) this would be under water for a great deal of the year and therefore inaccessible for people or animals.

The scale of development planned, combined with the inevitable removal of trees, hedgerows and grassland, will make this massively worse. Even if there are no plans to build houses on the actual floodplain, building higher up will inevitably change the speed and scale of water running off into the Loddon. This is highly likely to cause serious issues downstream (the Showcase roundabout area and adjacent cinema car park already flood periodically without any urbanisation of Hall Farm).

IMPACT ON LISTED BUILDINGS / NOTABLE LANDSCAPES

Listed buildings in the area (including the Old Rectory and Old Rectory Close, as well as the ruins of the old Arborfield Church and the historic tree-lined avenue linking the two) need to be suitably protected from any potential development. This landscape is specifically mentioned in the Arborfield and Barkham local plan, and yet is ignored in the scoping documentation. This needs to be properly taken into account given it was a document that was extensively

consulted on before being put into place. The site concept plan currently shows an access road cutting across the tree lined avenue, damaging this important local heritage asset.

TRAFFIC

This is already a huge issue in the area. A local WBC survey into the level of traffic on Church Lane showed worryingly high numbers of

vehicles going up and down the lane (exacerbated by the closure of School Road and the erection of the "traffic calming" measures around the village). Given that there is a church and church hall (with already inadequate parking), an equestrian livery yard, and a number of houses, and as this road has zero form of pavement or pedestrian safety, it is essential that an even greater traffic burden isn't pushed onto an already dangerously overloaded road.

Proper traffic surveys, not computer models, need to look at Mole Road which is already at capacity. Recent closures of Mill Lane (due to flooding!) bring the area to a complete standstill in peak times and there is simply no scope to cope with thousands more cars that would result from this development. The assertion that a significant number of residents will walk or cycle to work at the film studios is a fanciful and baseless assumption with no evidence to support it.

Please also note that the vast amount of both residential and commercial development that has already taken place in the Arborfield area in the last decade has already led to the blurring of village boundaries and that the creation of the proposed "Loddon Garden

Village" at Hall Farm will serve to make Arborfield merge indistinctly into Shinfield, which in turn has already been swallowed up by Reading. There is already severe strain on local services as a result of these developments, with the housing coming first and very poor provision of facilities many years after housing has started to be built.

OTHER AREAS TO BE CONSIDERED IN AN EIA REPORT:

- Comparison with other potential sites for development in Wokingham (including a collection of smaller pockets of development / brownfield sites)
- Assessment of the phasing of development, and in particular whether a bridge over the M4 should be a key pre-condition before any houses start to be built (not the case in the current plans)
- Proper traffic assessment based on actual surveys done at peak times and not vague modelling using off-peak/holiday flows to obtain favourable results
- Assessment of the site in the context of public transport options and proximity to rail links in comparison to other potential sites
- Better timings for future consultations to allow local residents adequate time to read and understand the proposals. This exercise was sneaked out before Christmas with a short deadline, no doubt aiming to minimise the number of comments received.