

PLANNING REF : 252769
PROPERTY ADDRESS : The Pightle
: Church Lane, Reading, Berkshire
: RG2 9JA
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Vincent Nash
DATE SUBMITTED : 17/01/2026

COMMENTS:

Dear Planning Officer,

Please accept this email as the formal objection of the Church Lane Collective to Planning Application 252769.

This objection is made on material planning grounds and must be considered in full as part of the determination of the application.

Essential Statement

The proposal cannot be lawfully, transparently, or reasonably determined on the information currently before the Local Planning Authority. Taken as a whole, the application gives rise to unacceptable cumulative harm, demonstrable flood risk, irreversible countryside loss, harm to heritage and community assets, and serious governance and site-selection concerns.

Fundamental Inadequacy of Information

The submitted plans and supporting material do not provide sufficient detail to enable a proper assessment of impact.

In particular:

- There is no adequate or detailed information relating to access arrangements, traffic generation, or operational impacts associated with the proposed municipal cemetery, despite its clear relevance to cumulative movement, servicing, and visitor traffic.
- The absence of this information prevents residents, statutory consultees, and decision-makers from understanding how access would operate in practice or how impacts would be mitigated.
- Determination in the absence of such critical detail would be premature, procedurally unsound, and contrary to good planning practice.

Where essential information is missing, the application cannot be said to be capable of lawful determination.

Flood Risk - Material, Observable, and Insufficiently Assessed

There are clear and demonstrable flood risks associated with development on and adjacent to low-lying land in this location.

Recent local conditions have shown:

- Rapid surface water accumulation
- Overwhelmed drainage routes

- Flooding of low-lying land and access points

These real-world observations materially contradict assumptions relied upon within the submitted Flood Risk Assessments. Where technical modelling fails to reflect observable and recurring conditions, its robustness must be questioned.

Approving development in these circumstances would expose future residents, neighbouring properties, and community infrastructure to foreseeable and avoidable flood risk, contrary to sound planning practice and the precautionary principle.

Irreversible Loss of Countryside, Foresight, and Community Value

Once countryside is lost to development, the harm is permanent.

There is no mechanism by which rural character, ecological value, or village setting can be restored once urbanisation has occurred. Effective planning requires foresight and restraint to protect what cannot be replaced.

In this case, planning appears to default to short-term expediency rather than long-term stewardship, failing to safeguard countryside, wildlife, and village identity. Mitigation measures and conditions cannot undo permanent land-use change.

The planning system exists to prevent irreversible harm, not to rationalise it after the fact.

Garden Village Strategy - Strategic Claims Versus Lived Reality

The proposal must be understood within the wider strategy of concentrating large-scale growth into so-called "garden village" or strategic expansion areas.

While such developments are often promoted as comprehensive, sustainable, and infrastructure-led, the lived experience of surrounding rural communities is frequently the opposite. Housing delivery proceeds in advance of infrastructure, promised schools, healthcare, and transport lag behind occupation, and traffic and service pressures are displaced onto existing villages and rural lanes.

In practice, these developments are not self-contained. Surrounding communities absorb the impacts while bearing none of the strategic benefit. This proposal exemplifies that imbalance.

Car Dependency and Rural Lane Harm

Despite references to sustainability, development in this location would be inherently car-dependent.

Rural lanes are already constrained and unsuitable for increased volumes of commuter, service, and visitor traffic. Increased traffic would undermine pedestrian safety, equestrian use, agricultural access, and the rural character of the area.

Sustainable transport assumptions that are not deliverable in practice should not be relied upon to justify development.

Biodiversity, Wildlife Displacement, and Net Gain Failure

The proposal fails to demonstrate how biodiversity will be genuinely protected or enhanced.

- Wildlife displacement has not been properly or credibly assessed
- Biodiversity Net Gain is asserted in principle but not convincingly demonstrated in practice
- Habitat loss at this scale represents permanent ecological harm, particularly when considered cumulatively with other developments

Once habitats are lost and ecological corridors severed, they cannot be recreated through landscaping or future policy commitments.

Impact on the Reading Room and Monks Cottage

The proposal would result in the Reading Room and Monks Cottage becoming effectively enclosed by surrounding development, leading to:

- Loss of rural setting and outlook
- Increased traffic and noise on constrained rural lanes
- Harm to residential amenity and community function.

Meaningful impact assessment cannot occur where valued community and heritage buildings are progressively surrounded without full consideration of access, drainage, cumulative pressure, and lived experience.

Site Selection, Spatial Inequity, and Governance Failure

A fundamental and unresolved issue is the disproportionate concentration of unwelcome development within a single rural corridor, while other areas of Wokingham Borough remain relatively unaffected.

Growth is not being distributed equitably across the Borough. Instead, development pressure has been repeatedly directed toward the same communities, landscapes, and constrained rural routes, irrespective of cumulative harm, environmental limits, or sustained resident objection. Other settlements experience little or no comparable growth, yet no transparent or evidence-based justification has been provided to explain this imbalance.

This pattern of saturation is not accidental. It reflects a planning approach that prioritises perceived deliverability, institutional convenience, and developer-led proposals over spatial fairness, environmental capacity, and community resilience. Where one area is repeatedly expected to absorb housing, traffic, infrastructure strain, countryside loss, and urbanisation while others are

effectively protected from such impacts the planning system ceases to operate as a fair balancing exercise and instead becomes extractive.

Such an approach undermines public confidence and conflicts with the fundamental purpose of planning: to act in the public interest and to protect those least able to absorb harm. Wildlife, ecological networks, vulnerable residents, and small rural communities cannot relocate, adapt, or recover once their environment and identity are eroded.

A more sensitive, creative, and genuinely balanced approach would allow the Council to demonstrate leadership rather than expediency. By distributing growth more fairly, respecting environmental constraints, and placing equal weight on social, ecological, and human considerations, Wokingham Borough has the opportunity to set a nationwide example of intelligent planning in practice.

Planning should not favour financial gain whether of developers, institutions, or organisations where that gain is achieved through the disproportionate sacrifice of a single community or the irreversible degradation of countryside and wildlife. Decisions taken now will define not only this place, but the credibility of the planning system itself.

Cumulative Impact

Taken together with other existing and proposed developments, this application places an unacceptable and disproportionate burden on a single rural community.

Assessing the proposal in isolation masks the true scale of harm and defeats the purpose of cumulative impact assessment. When considered properly, the cumulative effects on traffic, flooding, countryside loss, biodiversity, heritage assets, and community cohesion are severe.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above including inadequate information, demonstrable flood risk, irreversible loss of countryside and biodiversity, harm to community and heritage assets, strategic and cumulative impacts, and failures of site selection and governance this proposal conflicts with the Development Plan and should be refused.

Please confirm receipt of this objection and ensure it is reported in full to the case officer, planning committee, and any subsequent decision-making body.

Yours faithfully,
Church Lane Collective