

PLANNING REF : 251486
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Elrig
: 358 Barkham Road, Wokingham, Berks
: RG41 4DL
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Stuart Yemm
DATE SUBMITTED : 20/08/2025

COMMENTS:

I would like to object to the 16 home proposal.

The site is outside the settlement boundary and sits in the Green Wedge that keeps Barkham and Wokingham separate. Building here would harm the countryside and reduce the gap between settlements. Access is unsafe, walking and cycling links are poor, and the bus service is limited. The scheme would increase car use. The design does not reflect local character. There are unresolved issues with drainage, sewage capacity, and possible land contamination. Although 16 homes would add to housing numbers, the harm clearly outweighs the benefits.

If the Council is minded to approve, strong conditions should be added to fully investigate and deal with any contamination before work starts.

Site history

There have been many planning applications and appeals on this land since the late 1990s. Most were refused, and all appeals were dismissed.

Inspectors consistently found that housing here would:

Be outside the settlement boundary and in the countryside.

Harm the Green Wedge and reduce the separation between Barkham and Wokingham.

Damage the rural character and the pattern of development.

Later refusals (for 8 and 5 homes in 2016/17) confirmed that even small schemes here cause significant harm. That conclusion does not depend on the exact number of houses.

A recent appeal at Blagrove Lane has already reduced the Green Wedge nearby, so protecting what remains is even more important.

This new scheme (16 homes) is larger than previous proposals and would increase the identified harms.

Relevant policies

The proposal conflicts with adopted policies in the Wokingham Core Strategy (CP1, CP3, CP4, CP6, CP11), the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (CC02, CC04, CC09, TB21), and the Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (IRS1, IRS2, IR2, GA1, GA2, AD4).

It also conflicts with the emerging Local Plan Update (SS5, DH1, C1, C2, FD1, HC9). These carry only limited weight at this stage, but they point in the same direction as the adopted plans.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance are material considerations.

Key issues

A) Highways and access

Vehicle access would be from Edney's Hill, a narrow, winding rural lane with no pavements, blind bends, pinch points, and a 60mph limit. It is not suitable for serving 16 new homes.

A 2022 application for a single dwelling's rear access to Edney's Hill was refused for poor visibility, even though it had better

sightlines than those now proposed. This shows how sensitive and constrained the road is.

The new access visibility is worse, with sightlines blocked by bends and vegetation. This fails NPPF paragraph 115 on "safe and suitable access," and conflicts with local transport policies (Core Strategy CP3/CP6, MDD, ABNP GA1/GA2, LPU C1/C2).

Walking and cycling conditions are not as good as claimed:

Barkham Road carries high traffic volumes, has no cycle lanes and higher speeds. It does not provide safe everyday cycling for most people.

A promoted byway link is blocked at one end and in poor condition.

There is no footway on Edney's Hill. The single crossing refuge on Barkham Road is close to a roundabout and is not a safe route to the site.

Bus services are infrequent and indirect (typically every 30 minutes, slow to Reading).

The site is not within easy, safe walking distance of most everyday services (schools, health, shops), so most trips would be by car. Overall, the proposals would create unsafe access and encourage more car use, contrary to local and national policy.

B) Design

Local policy requires good design that fits its context (Core Strategy CP3, MDD CC04, ABNP IR2, LPU DH1; NPPF paragraph 139). Nearby homes are typically chalet-style with varied, softer roof forms and red tile roofs. The proposal includes bulky, long ridge roofs, narrow window proportions, and materials (such as slate and black-stained weatherboarding) that do not reflect the nearby vernacular.

The scheme would look out of place and would harm the area's rural character. It therefore conflicts with adopted and emerging design policies and the Barkham Village Design Statement.

C) Housing land supply

Wokingham Borough Council only has about 1.7 years of housing land supply. The 16 homes would help, but the benefit is small.

Inspectors have repeatedly said that small housing gains do not outweigh serious harm, especially in unsustainable countryside locations. Recent appeals in the Borough have reached the same conclusion.

This site is outside settlement limits, in the countryside, car dependent, and within the Green Wedge. The harm remains greater than the limited housing benefit.

The proposal conflicts with Core Strategy CP1/CP11, MDD CC02, ABNP IRS1, and LPU SS5, and does not meet the NPPF test where harms significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

D) Green Wedge (settlement separation and landscape)

The site lies in the Green Wedge between Barkham and Wokingham. Its openness helps keep the two places separate and protects rural character.

Building here would erode this openness and the perceived separation. It risks further infill along Edney's Hill.

Inspectors have already found that new homes here would "erode the open character and quality of the area" and cause "significant harm to the rural character."

The scheme conflicts with Core Strategy CP11, MDD TB21, ABNP IRS2, LPU SS5 and relevant NPPF aims to protect countryside character. The harm would be permanent.

Other matters

A) Drainage and sewage

The site slopes steeply (about 9m fall) and has high groundwater (recorded at 0.7m below ground in places). This increases runoff and flood risk downhill.

The site is in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone, with a higher risk of water quality impacts if drainage is not managed well.

No infiltration testing has been provided to prove a workable sustainable drainage system. The applicant's own reports warn of difficult conditions in winter.

There is no clear evidence that the foul sewer network can take the extra flows without causing flooding or pollution. Local experience suggests the network is already stressed.

This conflicts with Core Strategy CP4, MDD CC09, ABNP AD4, LPU FD1, and NPPF requirements for safe, sustainable drainage and flood risk management.

If the Council approves the scheme, a Grampian-style condition should prevent commencement or occupation until any sewer capacity upgrades are in place.

B) Contamination

The applicant's own reports identify a low to medium contamination risk. Historic aerial images and local accounts suggest a hole was dug and filled with mixed building waste around 2003-2004, possibly including asbestos sheeting.

The Phase 2 work has not targeted this specific risk. National guidance (LCRM) expects intrusive investigation where a credible risk is identified.

Policies (Core Strategy CP3/CP4, LPU HC9) and the NPPF require that sites are made safe for their intended use.

If the Council approves the scheme, a robust pre commencement condition should require:

Detailed contamination risk assessment to the relevant standards.

Agreed remediation, implementation, and verification before development proceeds.

Further investigation and remediation if unexpected contamination is found during works.

Conclusion and requested decision

The proposal conflicts with the development plan because the site is outside the settlement boundary, within the Green Wedge, and in the countryside where new housing is strictly limited (Core Strategy CP1/CP11, MDD CC02, ABNP IRS1/IRS2).

It would:

Harm the rural character and reduce the separation between settlements.

Provide unsafe and unsuitable access, with poor walking and cycling links and limited bus services.

Deliver a design that does not reflect local character.

Leave drainage and foul sewer capacity issues unresolved and fail to show a safe, sustainable drainage strategy.

Leave contamination risks insufficiently investigated.

While 16 homes would add to housing supply, this benefit is limited and does not outweigh the clear harms. Under the NPPF, the harms significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Planning permission should be refused.

If the Council is minded to approve, please impose:

A stringent pre commencement contamination condition requiring full investigation, remediation, and verification.

A Grampian style condition to ensure any required sewer capacity upgrades are delivered before works start or homes are occupied.

Note on the Neighbourhood Plan

Work on the Neighbourhood Plan and settlement spatial planning is ongoing. Although "prematurity" under NPPF paragraph 50 is not engaged, the proposal would undermine the spatial strategy in the adopted plan and in emerging policies.