

MEMORANDUM

From:	Catherine Brimble Senior Landscape Officer		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	242421
Address:	School Road, Arborfield Cross.		
Proposal:	Outline application for the proposed erection of up to 95 No. dwellings, together with open space and associated works. (All matters reserved except for means of access).		
Type of Development:	Major Dwellings (10+)		
Site Visit Made:	Yes – 23 rd October 2024		

Summary Of Recommendations

- ☐ No comment
- ☐ No objection
- ☐ No objection subject to conditions (and reasons) **stated below**
- ☐ Request further information before determination as **stated below**
- ☒ Objection due to the reason(s) **stated below**

Comments On Proposal

The site is located in the countryside outside the settlement limits. School Road is designated as a Green Route in accordance with Local Plan policy CC03. Several trees around the farmstead area off School Road adjacent to the southern corner of the site are protected by a TPO (1926/2023).

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Local Planning Context

Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (WBLCA), dated November 2019, identifies a number of different landscape character areas (LCA's) across the Borough and provides key information regarding each of the LCA's. The site falls within landscape character area: J2 – Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay.

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) by CSA Environmental dated September 2024 is provided to support the application. The LVIA provides details of the Key Characteristics, Condition and Guidelines for LCA J2, however I consider it is also important to identify the relevant Valuable Landscape Attributes and Landscape Strategy for this area and these are given in my comments below:

J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay:

Valuable Landscape Attributes

- ***Barkham Brook and associated wetland*** which provide important ecological habitats including wet meadow and BAP priority habitat wet woodland.
- ***Pattern of arable and pastoral fields***, which provides a rural character away from settlement, and creates an important separation between settlements.
- ***Mature hedgerow trees and in-field trees*** which provide a wooded character and visual interest within the landscape.
- ***Historic Second World War pillboxes*** and other defence works, which are now a scenic part of the landscape.
- ***Rural settlement pattern*** of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages outside the urban area which provides a rural character and a link to the past.
- ***Recreational value*** of the network of rights of way between settlements.
- ***Views across the landscape*** to surrounding character areas, particularly across the river valleys to the west and to the wooded hills to the north and south provides a loose sense of enclosure.

Landscape Strategy

To maintain the landscape character of the Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay the following strategy is required: to conserve and enhance the remaining rural character of the landscape.

The key aspects to be conserved and enhanced are the field pattern with mature hedgerow trees, wetland and woodland habitats, rural lanes and historic features.

In terms of development, the aim is to integrate new development into its landscape setting, and retain the open and rural character of the landscape between settlements.

Just to the north of the site the landscape gradually changes and is identified within the WDLCA as being in Landscape Character Area (LCA) L1 – Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills. This landscape is heavily wooded around the Bearwood Estate but to the south the area is more intricate, with coombe woodland valleys and contrasting grazed pasture. It has a strong character which is in good condition because of the absence of roads and settlement in combination with having a distinctive mix of interconnected woodland and pastoral and arable fields bounded by hedgerows. One of the key characteristics associated with this LCA and where there is an interrelationship with LCA J2 is the ‘*Smaller scale rural patchwork of deciduous woodland and sheep pasture associated with the hills and incised coombe valleys in the south.*’ LCA L1 is sparsely populated creating an intimate and secret landscape and a strong sense of place.

Landscape character of site and immediate surroundings

The village of Arborfield Cross is a clear example of a nucleated rural settlement that is separated by farmland from Langley Common, Barkham, and Arborfield Garrison. The village characteristics are identified within the valuable landscape attributes of LCA J2 – Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay as contributing to the rural settlement pattern and link to the past.

Arborfield Cross sits on a high point in this undulating landscape with the roads (and Byway) leading into the village rising to a high point of 66m AOD at the roundabout in the centre of the Arborfield Cross Conservation Area. The majority of routes into Arborfield Cross provide a wooded context to the village characterised by mature hedgerows, hedgerow trees and small blocks of woodland.

The landscape around this area supports a comprehensive network of footpaths and byways many of which are historic routes and provide links to the wooded landscape of The Coombes to the north. Cole Lane running along the north-western boundary of the site is a Byway open to all traffic (BOAT) (ARBO09). Wood Lane is also a BOAT (ARBO10) running adjacent to the south-eastern boundary of the site.

The proposed development site consists of two agricultural fields currently in arable production and are bordered by outgrown hedgerows with substantial hedgerow trees and woodland belts. The site forms part of the undulating valley side of Barkham Brook, rising up to the settlement edge of Arborfield Cross which is defined by a reasonably strong tree belt separating the south-western boundary of the site with The Coombes CE Primary School and associated playing field, and which extends beyond the settlement edge along School Road.

The fields to the east of the village provide the important visual and physical separation of Arborfield Cross village with the linear residential dwellings further to the east at Langley Common. When travelling along School Road (designated as a Green Route) there are glimpsed views through the vegetation of the open countryside on either side of the road, including the site which is more visually prominent due to the rising topography. There is a definite sense of arriving in Arborfield Cross only when passing beyond the width restriction into the village, as before this point none of the settlement is visible.

The verdant and quiet character of School Road is important to the setting of this part of Arborfield Cross. Now that the road is a no through road, the only traffic passing the site are those cars parking in the new laybys created for school parking. The trees and overgrown hedgerows on either side of the site encloses the road and forms a green tunnel effect. The vegetation on both sides of this part of School Road create a unique and special character to the south-eastern entrance to Arborfield Cross highlighting the rural characteristics of the setting of this village.

Although the wider landscape character is assessed as being of moderate condition, the area between Arborfield Cross and the adjacent LCA L1 is greatly influenced by the high-quality landscape character area L1 – Bearwood Sands and Gravel Hills to the north, and the site clearly forms part of the shallow valley sides of Barkham Brook which make up this landscape.

Valued Landscape Assessment

In January 2020 Wokingham Borough published a Topic Paper on Valued Landscapes to respond to paragraph 180 (a) of the NPPF and prepared as part of the evidence base for the Emerging Local Plan Update and associated Policy NE6. This initially identified a series of valued landscapes, however since then further work has been undertaken to make refinements to the boundaries of the valued

landscape areas and to update the assessment. The revised document, Valued Landscapes Assessment (September 2024) has now been published as part of the evidence studies produced for the current consultation related to the Local Plan Update: Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19).

The LVIA in paragraph 4.19 indicates that the site was not included in the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape as set out in the 2020 Topic Paper, which was correct at the time, however the recently published and updated Valued Landscapes Assessment indicates the application site is now located within the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape. The document gives clear guidance as to the various changes and boundary reviews that were made to a number of the Valued Landscape areas, and these are listed in section 6.68 Table 2.

With reference to the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape and changes to the south-western area it states:

The area around the Barkham Brook includes: a number of Public Rights of Way; the Barkham Road Green Route; part of a Medieval common (Langley Common); a Second World War pill box; and features shown on the Norden 1607 Map of the Forest of Windsor (including Hazelton's Copse). Barkham Brook, its associated wetland and other habitats provide important ecological habitats and ecosystem services.

And

Annex V of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (2020) identifies important views and vistas which present an exceptional panorama of the landscape. Notable features include views from Arborfield Cross towards The Coombes and views from Barkham Road and Barkham Street.

Paragraph 6.65 of the assessment provides further guidance on the wider assessment:

It should be noted that landscape is a continuum, and boundaries will often represent zones of transition, but to make the valued landscape designation clearer and to simplify its use, the boundaries have been refined so that, wherever possible, they follow identifiable features on the ground such as field boundaries or roads. A consequence of this is that the valued landscapes may, therefore, include some areas that may not 'exhibit any of the demonstrable physical features' but nonetheless form an integral part of the wider valued landscape. This is, of course, consistent with the Aylesbury Road, Wendover decision. (Paragraph 65).

It is therefore essential that in assessing the site as part of this application it is considered as part of the wider landscape in which it is located rather than in isolation.

I have undertaken a site visit and assessment of the landscape around the site and consider the following landscape attributes to relate to the site and the surrounding

landscape and that contribute to the inclusion of this parcel of land in the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape:

- The medieval trackway from Swallowfield to Wokingham shown on the Norden map of Windsor Forest (1607).
- The current BOAT, and other PROWs.
- The valley of the Barkham Brook creating an undulating topography / rolling topography and fieldscape.
- Wholly rural site – no sense of any urban area nearby / absence of built development.
- Strong scenic value to the landscape.
- Sense of relative tranquillity with very limited traffic noise especially as School Road is now a no-through road.
- Peaceful walking along BOAT's.
- Perception of the land as quintessential English Countryside.
- Significant views into and across the surrounding countryside and of the wooded hills at Bearwood and the Coombes from PROW and BOATs.
- Significant areas of ancient woodland (including Hazeltons Copse close to site - mapped since at least (Norden 1607, Map of the Forest of Windsor).
- Number of veteran trees on BOAT's adjacent to the site or close to site.
- Significant areas of lowland mixed deciduous woodland (a habitat of principal importance), tree and hedgerow cover.
- Grade II Listed Langleypound Farmhouse (part of which is late 16th Century, so Elizabeth I).

These aspects are reflected in the valuable landscape attributes for LCA J2 previously listed, apart from the Historic Second World War pillboxes. Also due to the close relationship this landscape has with Landscape Character Area (LCA) L1 – Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills the following valuable landscape attributes for LCA L1 also relate to the site.

- ***Elevated wooded hills forming a backdrop to the wider landscape and western settlement edge of Wokingham. The wooded hills provide physical and visual separation between settlements, including Wokingham and Reading, and the future development at Arborfield Garrison (Arborfield SDL) to the south of the area.***
- ***Varied topography which forms an intricate range of landscape spaces and backdrops emphasised by the largely enclosed and wooded nature of the core of the area, with views out over farmland to the wider countryside.***
- ***Large expanses of mature mixed woodland which are designated as BAP priority habitats and LWS and provide important ecological habitats and a sense of place. Stands of Scots pine and beech woodlands on the hilltops provide characteristic landmark features.***
- ***The distinctive mosaic of interconnecting mixed woodland interspersed with small scale pastoral fields in the south of the area which provide scenic qualities and visual diversity.***
- ***Medieval landscape features which survive on the boundary of later historic estates, such as wide tracts of former common land which provide a cultural record of the past and strong time depth.***

- **Recreational value** particularly in *The Coombes* through the presence of byways, footpaths and bridleways which allow enjoyment of the landscape. A golf course and cricket club offer formal recreational opportunities.
- **Peaceful secluded character** with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies, largely unsettled and with limited access, which provides a rural retreat in close proximity to urban areas.
- **Contrast of enclosed views within woodland and long views** across the Loddon Valley towards Reading, and south towards Barkham and beyond.

To conclude, I consider the site does significantly contribute to and is an integral part of the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape as demonstrated by the valuable landscape attributes I have identified.

Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

This section relates to the information within the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) by CSA Environmental.

➤ Landscape policy context

In chapter 2 of the LVIA reference is made to the landscape policy context. The National Planning Context was not identified in the LVIA as it was considered that the site was not identified as a valued landscape therefore reference was not made to NPPF Paragraph 180, however it is referenced in my earlier comments.

The Core Strategy Policy CP3 is outlined in the LVIA however this should also include section c) of the policy which states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses, and in section f) contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping. These parts of CP3 are not identified in the LVIA and specifically relate to this site.

The LVIA refers to Policy CP18, Arborfield Garrison Strategic Development Location. However the site is clearly outside the SDL boundary with a requirement that Arborfield Cross is separated from the SDL, with the policy identifying the need for measures to maintain separation from Arborfield Cross, Barkham Hill and Finchampstead North.

The Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan policy IRS2 is listed in the LVIA, however section e) of the policy also states that development proposals must also have regard to the distinctive character of the varied landscapes of the area and outstanding views, which is not included in the summary of the LVIA paragraph 2.27.

➤ Landscape effects

The LVIA has assessed the site as having a medium landscape value for the various reasons listed in paragraph 4.17 of the document. However this assessment has separated the site from the wider landscape in which it is located, only looking at the

individual elements of the site. As previously indicated in my comments, any site needs to be assessed within the wider landscape context and based on my assessment of the site, I consider the site forms part of the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape and consequently will have a high landscape value.

I do not consider the site character is influenced by the Coombes Primary school (para 4.20) nor any other residential development in the village of Arborfield Cross. The reason for this is the settlement is a nucleated settlement built on higher ground and is well contained, i.e. very limited linear development outside the settlement boundary. The northern and eastern boundaries to the settlement are strongly vegetated and limit views to the settlement edge even though on higher ground. There is a clear sense of leaving and entering the village on all routes into the settlement, beyond which is open countryside. The site forms no direct relationship with the existing residential development within the village. The site's only common boundary with the edge of Arborfield Cross is with the school which is set in a wooded context with many of the buildings within the school area visually contained in views by vegetation from School Road or from adjacent public rights of way. The site does not relate to the existing nucleated settlement pattern and nor is it just located on higher ground, as it extends to the lower ground towards Langley Common Farm and Barkham Brook valley. Therefore I consider the site has a high sensitivity to residential development.

In considering the impact of the development on landscape features, the LVIA indicates that the large majority of the trees and hedges can be maintained as part of the development proposals as set out on the Landscape Strategy Plan (para 5.4). I agree that this aspect can be achieved by the layout as shown, however what is not commented on is the loss of the agricultural fields which are features integral and constituent to the valued landscape attributes of the wider landscape character (to be discussed further) nor the loss of trees and hedgerows along School Road to form the new access into the site.

As previously discussed, the rural, verdant and well treed character to School Road is an essential component to the setting of Arborfield Cross which is now enhanced by the lack of through traffic. The new junction into the site as shown in the application will require the removal of a 63m section of vegetation and embankment on which the hedgerow is growing. Although the Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) has assessed the individual trees and group to be removed as Category C trees, their value as a group is far greater than the individual assessments. See photos below indicating the section of hedgerow to be removed within the yellow lines. Photo 1 is taken looking east out of Arborfield Cross with the new junction within the yellow lines. Photo 2 is taken looking west up School Road towards the settlement edge. The new access will remove all the vegetation within the yellow line to the north of the road and will continue slightly beyond the edge of the photo.



Photo 1



Photo 2

The removal of this section of vegetation will have a substantial detrimental impact on the rural character of the road significantly urbanising this Green Route. It is also noted that the roadside vegetation is growing on an embankment adjacent to School Road, and at the point at which the new section of School Road connects back into the existing road, the height of the embankment is approximately 1.5m. This is also likely to require various ground level changes which may further impact on the vegetation beyond which is shown to be removed. So although the LVIA indicates that trees losses will be compensated by new planting within the site, the new access will adversely affect the character of the road which cannot be mitigated by new

planting. This is fundamentally different from the assessment within the LVIA (para 5.8) which states:

The proposal would retain most of the green rural character of School Road east of the school which gives a sense of departure from or arrival to Arborfield Cross for pedestrians and cyclists.

I strongly disagree with this statement.

Paragraph 5.24 suggests that the proposed development will ‘*somewhat extend the built edge of Arborfield Cross to the east*’ and paragraph 5.25 goes on to say, ‘*the development would have a limited impact on the wider landscape, as the new homes would be well related to the existing settlement....*’ I strongly disagree with both of these points. The proposed development would significantly extend the settlement of Arborfield Cross not only beyond the existing extent of the village to the east and away from the high ground that the village is located on, but also way beyond the defined vegetated northern boundary of the settlement into open countryside. As previously described, the village school and associated playing field forms the northern edge to the settlement which is mainly defined by trees and thick vegetation. There are no dwellings backing onto the site so there is no visual or physical reference to existing residential areas along this boundary. Therefore the development site does not in any way relate to the existing settlement either in form or character.

➤ Visual Effects

The LVIA has identified a number of viewpoints to assess the site’s visibility. What seems to be most noticeable from the photos is that they show very well the rural character of the site and the surrounding area, with very few urban influences within the photos including along School Road. I am in some agreement that the site is relatively well enclosed by existing vegetation, however this doesn’t mean that there will not be views of the proposed development from some locations especially during the winter months when there are no leaves on the hedgerows and trees. As I have already established the site doesn’t sit in isolation to its surroundings regardless of the relatively strong landscape structure on the site boundaries, but forms part of an interconnected landscape incised by streams and ditches with associated vegetation with views across the landscape from higher ground, where vegetation allows.

Paragraph 4.8 starts by stating ‘*From our assessment, the Site is well contained against the existing built edge of Arborfield Cross, with only glimpses of the Site available from the majority of public vantage points.*’ The first part of this statement needs to be clarified. It is not clear what is meant by ‘*well contained*’ as I have already established that in my assessment, the site has no direct relationship with the existing settlement of Arborfield Cross. The school site is mostly visually and physically contained by vegetation as shown in Context Photos 4 & 5 in Appendix C of the LVIA which clearly defines the edge of the settlement beyond which is open countryside. A very small length of the western boundary of Parcel B of the site (30m) adjoins the settlement boundary to the east of the school site, therefore this field has no meaningful relationship with the existing edge of Arborfield Cross other than where it adjoins the school boundary. Photo 3 below, taken from the eastern corner of the site, clearly shows the well treed boundary of School Road when

viewed across Parcel B and the overgrown hedgerow between Parcels A & B of the site on the right-hand side of the photo. The building just seen to the right-hand side of the photo is part of a small disused farmstead which originally consisted of a number of stables. These buildings can be seen in Photograph 18 of the LVIA, but are defined as a commercial premises in the LVIA which I consider to be not representative of the buildings or the original use of the area.



Photo 3

The main change in view will be from School Road where in order to gain access into the site at least 63m of hedgerow and hedgerow bank will be removed opening up views into the site. As already discussed the effects on the character of the road will be significant adverse not only due to the removal of the vegetation but also in terms of the formalisation and urbanisation of this stretch of road due to the new road junction, engineering works to accommodate the change in levels, new lighting and increase in width of existing footway.

Paragraph 5.13 of the LVIA recognises there will be a change in the character of this part of School Road, and considers that due to its location close to the school and settlement boundary the impacts on rest of School Road will be minimised *‘.....retaining most of the wooded character of the route in and out of the village.’* I disagree with these findings as this part of School Road has very special landscape qualities which I have previously discussed, and therefore contributes to the Green Route designation and rural context of the village and which will substantially impacted by these changes.

The LVIA also indicates that the buildings within the site will be set back in the site which along with additional planting will reduce visibility from the new site access. Although this is noted, I consider there will be views of a number of dwellings within the site from this part of School Road which will now be on the skyline so will be a significant contrast to the existing views along this road.

The LVIA also acknowledges in paragraph 5.12 that there will be views into the southern corner of the site from School Road (Photograph 18 Appendix C), however it concludes this will be seen in the context of the commercial premises and filtered

by vegetation. Photo 4 below is taken from the footway close to the bollards preventing through traffic, with a direct view into Parcel B between the tree and the discussed farm building on the farmstead. From this view the land rises up to the central treed belt between Parcels A & B. There will be views of the proposed development from this location with dwellings rising up the slope and this will become more visible during the winter months. This extension of development into the countryside away from the nucleated form of the village will extend the visual envelope of the village considerably. The visual envelope of the village is currently only perceived just inside settlement boundary when adjacent to the school, whereas the proposed development will move the perceived visual envelope of the village this much further east along School Road to where the bollards close off the road as demonstrated in Photo 4. This will have significant adverse effect on visual receptors (pedestrians) and substantially change the perception of where the village starts, i.e. over 200m further to the east.



Photo 4

The tree belt along Cole Lane (BOAT ARBO9) along the north-western boundary of the site will restrict the majority of views in the summer months, however during the winter there will be filtered views into the site of the development. At present filtered views are of a continuation of the agricultural landscape on either side of the BOAT where walkers using the PRoW gain a sense of quickly leaving the settlement edge at Arborfield Cross and entering the rural countryside with qualities as set out in the valued landscape description and with the absence of any development related to the village. The proposed development will therefore also change the perception of settlement extent from the west.

Views from the BOAT (ARBO10) to the north-east of the site are limited due to intervening vegetation on the field boundaries. However there are views gained across the Barkham Brook valley from a high point along this byway to the wooded edge of Arborfield Cross with the field of Parcel A being partially visible in this view, this is shown in Photo 5 below taken from field gate on ARBO10. Although parts of the Sewage Works are just visible just beyond the field in the foreground, the settlement of Arborfield Cross is not visible as it is contained by a strong vegetated boundary, and which contributes to the wooded skyline. Development within the site

will form a small part of the view, but the change to that view will have a detrimental effect on the Bearwood and Barkham and valued landscape. I am therefore unable to agree with the findings in the LVIA that views from this part of the PRow will have a neutral visual effect. I consider housing development on the site will have moderate / slight adverse effect on these views, but should be considered in the context that this area is identified as a valued landscape.



Photo 5

The other location where there will be views into Parcel B of the site is from Wood Lane (BOAT ARBO10) where it runs adjacent to the site. The LVIA indicates there will be glimpses into the site from this part of the PRow due to the gaps in the vegetation, however both Photographs 15 & 16 in the LVIA clearly show the vegetation along this part of the byway is sparse. Much of the vegetation on the south-eastern boundary of Parcel B consists of thin line of elm, (dead elm), elder, brambles, willow species with the occasional hawthorn, oak and sycamore tree, therefore, will not restrict views to the proposed housing. I note that the landscape proposals will include new planting along this boundary and the dwellings will be set back beyond the SuDS feature, however there will be a clear and perceptible change in the views so that I consider the magnitude of change will be moderate leading to a moderate adverse visual effect in Year 1 from this location.

The conclusion of the landscape assessment section including comments on the LVIA is that I find the site does contribute to and forms part of the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape and therefore Paragraph 180 of the NPPF does apply. This requires development to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment, and to protect and enhance valued landscape, which this proposal does not do by virtue of the type of development proposed.

ARBORICULTURAL INFORMATION

An Arboricultural Implications Report by SJA Trees and dated September 2024 is provided with the application. This document sets out the proposed tree removals as a result of the proposed development and which is shown on the Tree Protection Plan. Tree removals relate to the new site access off School Road, which has been

discussed in terms of landscape character earlier in my comments, and a section of the narrow tree belt / overgrown hedgerow between Parcels A & B in order to get vehicular access into Parcel A. No further tree removals are required although some minor clearance of undergrowth will be required to create two pedestrian links as shown on the TPP.

Although in terms of the tree resource within and adjacent to the site only four category C trees and partial tree groups are to be removed, there are greater implications of these removals especially along School Road in terms of degrading the character of the area which has been discussed within the Landscape Character section.

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

Design and Access Statement

The application is accompanied by a Design and Access Statement (DAS) by Marrons for Croudace Homes dated August 2024.

The vision outlined in DAS states that the proposed development will *‘....create a new neighbourhood that compliments and respects the existing Local Character of Arborfield Cross.’* I cannot agree with this as Arborfield Cross is a small, nucleated settlement which has strongly defined vegetated settlement boundaries especially on the northern side of the settlement which visually and physically contains the limited existing development on the northern side of School Road. This is clearly shown on the Character Analysis plan in section 3.4 and accurately states that *‘the rural setting of Arborfield Cross defines the character of the village.’* However it is disappointing that the DAS does not describe in its Character Analysis section (page 14) any features in relation to the existing development off School Road where the new access will be taken from. This is a clear omission from the document.

In describing the elements of the site in the DAS on page 18, it is important to note that the description of the topography of the site is not as suggested i.e. rising slightly from the northeast to southwest. The high point of the site is actually adjacent to the eastern boundary of the school site with the land falling away to the northern, western and eastern boundaries of the site, with a change in level of approximately 12m between the highest and lowest points of the site. This is important to understand as the undulating landform of the site, is interrelated to the wider landscape characteristics and views into and towards the site from public viewpoints.

Section 3.7 of the DAS lists a number of design cues which are taken from the existing settlement to inform the proposed development *‘.....making sure that the development integrates and responds to the grain of the rural village setting.’* This is then considered as part of the design proposals relating to local placemaking where one of the elements is to create *‘.....a new neighbourhood that responds to the local character and feels rural.’* As previously discussed as part of the landscape assessment of the site and surrounding character including the form of the village, I consider the site extent and location does not relate to or responds to the grain of the rural village setting or local character in any way but forms a separate and

isolated estate type development extending way beyond the current settlement boundaries to the north and east.

Layout

A concept masterplan is provided in the DAS with further detail given on the Illustrative Masterplan drawing (Rev C) and the Landscape Strategy Plan (Rev C). Even though the design cues provided in the DAS are taken from the existing built development of Arborfield Cross I find it difficult to see how these are interpreted within illustrative layout and comment as follows:

- The layout appears to be typical of a standard 'estate' type development with very regular setbacks, standard and regular forms of dwelling on regular plots creating a town type sub-urban development rather than a loose, rural mixed development which is implied in the DAS that will be provided.
- The design proposals indicate that the scheme will include a network of open space and green corridors / links though the site. However the proposal mainly consists of the existing hedgerows surrounding the site and the one hedgerow separating the two parcels. Although there are street trees shown along the main street into the site this is very formal in character and not reflective of the rural context. The development parcels themselves include little or no incidental open space to allow for green spaces and tree planting that will help to provide the green blue infrastructure and connection with the existing rural landscape structure, which is disappointing.
- A looser form of development would provide significantly more informal green space throughout the scheme which would allow more tree planting to the fronts of dwellings to improve urban cooling and create recognisable streets with high quality green space, as listed in the design proposals. The green space should not just be pushed to the edges of the development as shown on the Illustrative Layout.
- Blue infrastructure is mentioned as part of the design proposals however it is not clear how these will be integrated into the housing layout to form the integrated green blue infrastructure required by good SuDS design. Although I understand this is an outline application, what is implied by the details shown on the Illustrative Masterplan and on the Drainage Strategy drawing (Appendix 3 of the Flood Risk Assessment and Drainage Strategy document) is the drainage solution will be an end of pipe solution with two very large, heavily engineered attenuation basins at the two low points on site. We should be expecting an integrated and multi-functional approach to ecosystem services and SuDS for both amenity and biodiversity, in accordance with the CIRIA guidance and the Wokingham SuDS Strategy (January 2017). Both guidance documents advocate that a SuDS train should start within the development parcels themselves with on plot or very locally based treatments (site control), such as rain gardens, filter strips or swales for example which then lead to regional control features. What is shown as part of this application is not acceptable and if SuDS are incorporated in accordance with best practice this will also provide the fully integrated green blue infrastructure and incidental open spaces within the site which would relate better to the rural context.
- A pedestrian connection onto Wood Lane (BOAT) should be included as part of the illustrative layout to enable pedestrian links into the PRoW network to the east of the site.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion the proposed development will cause significant harm to the Bearwood and Barkham Valued Landscape, the open rural countryside that makes a significant contribution to the setting of Arborfield Cross village and the rural character of School Road which is identified as a Green Route where there will be major changes to the road layout, including formalisation of the road and removal of vegetation.

In my opinion the impact to the landscape would be significant adverse. Therefore, the proposal would be at odds with NPPF paragraph 180, and contrary to Core Strategy Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11, Local Plan Policies CC03 and TB21, and Policies IRS1, IRS2 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan.

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

N/A

Date:

6th November 2024

Signed:

C. Brimble