

Tel: +44 1182378651 (Direct Line)
Email: tariq.bailey-biggs@wokingham.gov.uk
Date: 08.10.2025

Our ref: 251135
Pins Ref: APP/X0360/W/25/3372519



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN

Environment
Development Management Team
P.O. Box 157
Shute End, Wokingham
Berkshire RG40 1WR
Tel: (0118) 974 6000
DX: 33506 - Wokingham

Dear Sir(s)

Site Address: The Old Thatch Lower Sandhurst Road, Finchampstead, Wokingham, RG40 3TH

Introduction

The case for refusing the proposed development is set out in the officer's report and decision notice (Appendix 1 and 2). The Local Planning Authority however wish to make the following additional comments in response the Appellant's Statement.

Site description

The existing dwelling is an attractive thatch roof building along a quite rural lane within the countryside. The original building first appears on the historic 1900 map and was therefore built in the late Victorian period. The thatch roof and diminutive proportions are characteristic of rural cottage of that period. The overall vernacular and proportions of the dwelling, along with landscaping of the plot, result in rustic cottage appearance appropriate for the quite rural lane.

Whilst sections of the building are two storey, it has a low ridge height that varies between 6m – 6.7m due to the sloping land. It also has a low eaves height that varies between 3.3m – 3.9m. The low profile and small proportions of the existing dwelling can be seen from the photograph below, taken from Drift Lane – as can the single track and rural character of the lane itself.



Fig 1 – Existing dwelling from Drift Lane.

Principle of development – Countryside

The site lies outside of defined development limits within the countryside and is therefore subject to Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy, which seeks to protect the quality of the countryside environment. Policy CP11 states that proposals outside settlement limits will not normally be permitted, except in specific circumstances. Exception 5 allows for replacement dwellings only where the proposal:

- i) Brings about environmental improvements; or
- ii) Does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.

The proposal fails to satisfy either criterion.

The replacement dwelling would represent a significant and disproportionate increase in scale, bulk, and massing compared to the existing cottage that is inappropriate for the context. The overlay comparison (Figure 2) illustrates the magnitude of this increase, which would be visually intrusive and inappropriate within this narrow rural lane.



Fig 2 - Overlay of existing and proposed dwelling.

The proposed two storey form would extend across most of the building's footprint, eliminating the variation in storey height and breaking up of form. Substantial regrading and earthworks to create a level platform would further formalise the site, eroding its organic, rural character.

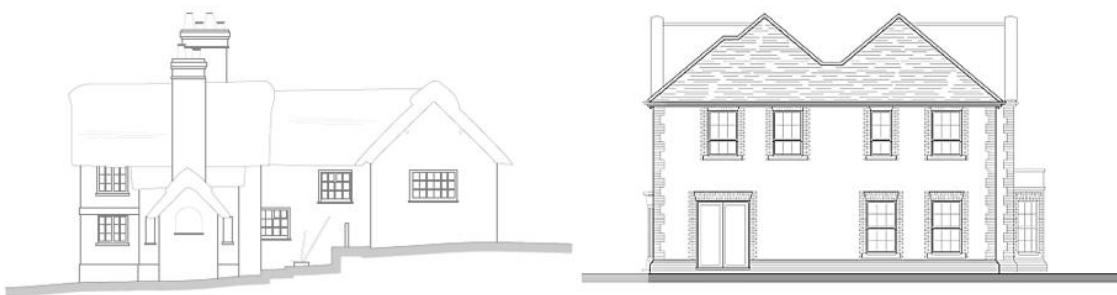


Fig 3 - Existing and proposed side profile.

Considering these factors in three dimensions and visualising the replacement dwelling on site against the existing property, there would be a significant increase in scale of built form that would be inappropriate for this narrow rural lane in the countryside. When considering the view in the photograph below (fig 4), the increased height, size and massing of the building would loom above the existing thatch roof cottage creating a more suburban and formalised appearance that is inappropriate for the immediate context of the site.



Fig 4 - View of existing dwelling from Drift Lane.

Whilst a qualitative comparison highlights the significant increase in scale and massing from the original building, a quantitative assessment also highlights this.

The development would result in a significant increase in volume of 154.5% when compared to the original building. It would be appreciably higher with a ridge height 1.9 - 2.3m greater and a notably higher eaves height by 2m. Furthermore, as stated it is not clear how the proposal would address the change in levels across the site and would require substantial earth works that would result in a more formalised character and appearance to the site. All of these factors combined result in a significantly greater visually imposing building along a quiet rural lane in the countryside that is inappropriate to its context.

Section 8 of the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (BDG) states that a 50% increase in volume for a 1 storey development is acceptable when compared with the original building. The proposed dwelling would substantially exceed this by than doubling the size of the original building by a significant amount. Whilst the guidance refers to a single storey building, the volume increase is a universal metric irrespective of height. Furthermore, the small historic proportions of the original dwelling result in the replacement dwelling effectively being a storey greater in height.

The significant increase in volume conflicts with the BDG SPD and para 139 of the NPPF is clear that 'development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes'. The proposal fails to meet the guidance in Borough Design Guide by a significant margin, and this provides a strong indication of the inappropriateness of the development.

The proposed development would also result in a significant increase in footprint from the original dwelling and this can be seen on the plan below. This is combination with the increase in scale, height and massing describe above result in significantly larger and more imposing building.

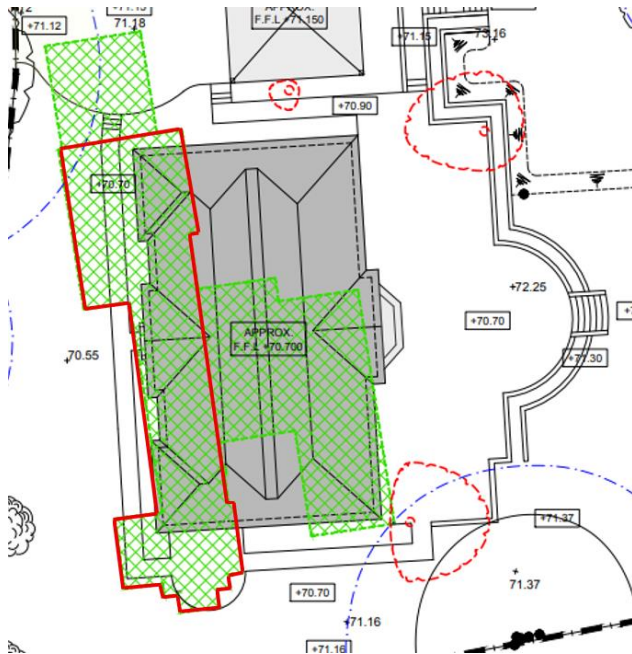


Fig 5 - Remaining original footprint is outlined in red and overlaid with the proposed footprint. The lean-to garage to the north has been excluded from the original footprint as it is of modern construction, while the extensions to the east, added in 1967, are also not included

Clarifications on Dimensional Comparisons

In paragraphs 5.8 and 5.9 of the appellant's Statement of Case, comparisons are drawn between the existing and proposed dwelling, with the appellant noting a maximum ridge height of 7m and a total width of 29m for the existing dwelling, and a proposed ridge height of 8.6m and overall width of 19.4m for the replacement dwelling.

The council's officer report (Appendix 1) contains a comparative assessment, and it is not necessary to repeat that analysis in full here; however, the following technical clarifications are provided for the Inspector's assistance. The ridge height of the existing dwelling quoted by the agent (7m) is not consistent with the submitted existing elevational drawings. Measured from the lowest part of the sloping ground to the highest roof point, the existing ridge height is approximately 6.7m. More significantly, taking account of the site's sloping ground level, the two-storey portion of the existing building has an average height of approximately 6.3m. On that basis the change in ridge height to the proposed 8.6m results in an increase of between 1.9 to 2.3m.



Fig 6 – Existing west (front) elevation (Drawing 104), indicating ground-to-ridge height measurements.

Although the appellant notes that the proposed dwelling would be narrower (19.4m versus 29m), this comparison is misleading: the existing width includes single-storey and one-and-a-half-storey elements that visually reduce its mass. The continuous two-storey portion of the existing house is around 20.25m wide - essentially equivalent to the proposed dwelling. When this is combined with a higher ridge, eaves height, two storey depth and engineered level ground, and simplified two-storey frontage, the proposal would have a much greater visual mass than the current dwelling

The appellant also highlights that the proposed dwelling would be set further back from Drift Road than the existing dwelling (paragraph 5.11). However, the degree of repositioning is modest and does not materially alter the building's visual presence. The existing dwelling is set at an angle, with its northernmost section - comprising the single-storey garage and one-and-a-half-storey snug/hall - positioned approximately 1.5m from the front boundary. As these are the lowest elements of the building, their proximity to the road contributes minimally to its overall street presence. The principal two-storey element is positioned around 3.6m from the boundary.

Against this context, the proposed dwelling's increased minimum setback of approximately 6.3m is modest and does not compensate for its greater ridge height (approximately 1.9m higher at the highest ridge point and approximately 2.3m higher on average across the two-storey element), engineered level platform, and an overall 154.5% volume uplift. Combined with a more continuous two-storey frontage, these factors materially increase the building's massing and visual prominence. In short, the additional set-back does not mitigate the increased bulk, formalisation and dominance that the proposal would introduce, and therefore does not address the harm identified under Policy CP11 and the Borough Design Guide.

Environmental Improvements

The appellants accompanying Sustainability & Energy Statement (By Bluesky Unlimited, dated April 2025) concludes that the replacement dwelling would deliver environmental improvements through enhanced energy efficiency and reduced carbon emissions when compared with the existing dwelling. Reference is made to EPC data indicating that, even with all recommended measures implemented, the existing house would continue to generate higher emissions than the proposed replacement dwelling.

However, such improvements are a baseline requirement of modern construction under the Building Regulations (notably Part L) and are therefore expected of any new dwelling. Policy CP11 is clear that development outside of settlement limits will not normally be permitted, except where a replacement dwelling brings about clear environmental improvements or avoids inappropriate increases in scale, form or footprint. To meet this exception, any environmental gains must be demonstrably exceptional and proportionate to the policy conflict.

In this case, no whole-life carbon assessment or evidence of embodied carbon impacts has been provided to demonstrate a genuine net reduction once demolition, site clearance, material production, and the extensive earthworks required to level the ground across the site are taken into account. These processes would generate substantial upfront emissions that would likely negate much of the operational carbon savings claimed.

The appeal site's existing sloping ground contributes to its informal and rural character. The proposed levelling works would formalise this natural landform to create an engineered platform for the new dwelling, introducing a more suburban character to the plot. Such intervention would diminish the site's natural topography and cannot reasonably be regarded as an environmental improvement; rather, it would result in the loss of a key characteristic that currently reinforces the site's rural setting and visual relationship with its surroundings.

Similarly, the appellant's *Ecological Assessment* (Pro Vision, July 2025) proposes bat and bird boxes and the use of native planting. However, these are generic forms of ecological enhancement that could readily be implemented as part of routine maintenance or minor landscape management, irrespective of the proposed redevelopment. As such, they do not amount to an environmental improvement of a scale or nature sufficient to justify an exception under criterion 5 (i) of Policy CP11.

Impact on character, appearance and landscaping

The harm arising from the proposal is not limited to numerical measurements. The excessive scale, bulk and massing would materially diminish the rural character of Drift Lane, contrary to policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy.

- Policy CP1 requires development to maintain or enhance environmental quality.
- Policy CP3 seeks design that is of an appropriate scale, form, and character, integrating sensitively with surroundings and contributing to local distinctiveness.

The proposed dwelling would fail on all counts. Its engineered formality, height, and continuous two-storey massing would introduce a suburban character wholly at odds with the informal, verdant qualities of the lane.

The Borough Design Guide (RD.11) further emphasises that in the countryside, "the form or massing of a replacement dwelling should relate well to its context and to local character, with particular regard to topography and landscape." The proposal would not achieve this.

Landscape Character Area Context

The southern part of the site lies within Landscape Character Area (LCA) B2 – Blackwater River Valley with Open Water (Appendix 3), which identifies:

- “Quiet rural lanes bordered by hedgerows providing access to and enjoyment of the countryside” as a valued characteristic; and
- Guidelines to “maintain and enhance the character of rural lanes” and “maintain the sparse, low-density pattern of small-scale dwellings set within large plots.”

The proposed large, formalised replacement would undermine these objectives, eroding the loose, informal settlement pattern and tranquil rural character. The appellant’s assertion that Drift Lane shares a similar character to Lower Sandhurst Road is not accepted. While both fall within the same broad LCA, landscape character assessments operate at a strategic scale and encompass local variations.

- Lower Sandhurst Road exhibits a more suburban, linear development pattern with regular plot spacing and greater visual coherence.
- Drift Lane, by contrast, has a distinctly rural and looser grain, characterised by sporadic dwellings softened by vegetation and topography.

The appeal site lies within this more sensitive rural context. Here, restraint in scale and design is essential to conserve the intrinsic rural character that Policy CP11 seeks to protect. The proposed increase in size and scale would appear more formal, suburban, and overly dominant and detracting from the informal and natural organic character of the lane. The context of the appeal site is materially different to the other applications cited in the appeal statement which were considered on their individual merits. Whilst the council’s landscape officer has not objected, the case against the application is not about wider harm to the landscape – the impact of the development would be localised and be detrimental to the setting of the lane.

Accordingly, the development would conflict with the landscape strategy for LCA B2, and with Policies CP1, CP3, and CP11 of the Core Strategy, which collectively aim to safeguard the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above and in the Officer’s Report, the proposed replacement dwelling would:

- Result in a disproportionate and excessive increase in scale, height, and volume in comparison to the original dwelling.
- The significant increase in scale and massing would introduce a formal and suburban form of development at odds with the rural character of Drift Lane;
- Fail to reflect or respect the design guidance in the Borough Design Guide SPD; and
- Harm the intrinsic character and visual quality of the countryside, contrary to Policies CP1, CP3, and CP11 and paragraph 139 of the NPPF.

The case for the development is largely predicated on the comparing the proposal to previous applications rather than a positive response to the context of the application site. As stated, the context of this site is materially and notably different and has been assessed on its individual merits.

The Inspector is therefore respectfully requested to dismiss the appeal. Should the Inspector be minded to allow the appeal, a list of suggested conditions is provided in (Appendix 4)