
MEMORANDUM

From:	Lindsey Abbott Tree & Landscape Officer		
Service	WBC Landscape and Trees	App No:	261143
Address:	Land Adjacent to Merchiston, Blakes Lane, Wargrave, RG10 9TA.		
Proposal:	Pre-application advice for the proposed erection of 1no. dwelling with associated landscaping, access and ancillary works.		
Type of Development:			
Site Visit Made:	Yes – 1 June 2026		

Summary Of Recommendations

The Tree and Landscape Officer could support a scheme of this type, in principle, but would require more information.

The Officer was given access to the Site by the applicant and walked the interior and exterior with the Planning Officer on Monday 1 June 2026. The Officer also referred to the following submissions included with the pre-application:

- Cover Letter (Ref: HGH, 11 May 2026)
- Image of Proposed Dwelling
- Plan with location of proposed dwelling, level, and existing trees (Ref: no author or date)
- Proposed Site Plan on aerial base (Ref: no author or date)

The Site is designated Countryside and in the Metropolitan Greenbelt. Contextually, the Site contains a line of protected mature trees along its northern perimeter with Blakes Lane and further north, is a mix of woodland, open pasture, ponds and arable fields. The Site has large, detached dwellings on generous plots on either side to the east and west with residential timber fencing used as the boundary treatment along those borders. Scrubby hedging with protected and veteran trees exists along the Site's southern boundary, creating a green screen between the Site and the arable field further south. Except for neighbouring properties, views into the Site are limited or filtered due to the vegetated boundary screening, making this Site less sensitive and more like an in-fill plot. For this reason, a LVA is probably not required and it seems more reasonable to allow a residential dwelling here. As mentioned, seven mature and veteran trees are protected by TPO-0214-1982 and include:

- T1 – Oak (*Quercus robur*)
- T2 – Oak (*Quercus robur*)
- T3 – Lime (*Tilia*)

- T4 – Lime (*Tilia*)
- T5 – Oak (*Quercus robur*)
- T6 – Oak (*Quercus robur*)
- T7 – Oak (*Quercus robur*)

According to the Woodland Trust Ancient Tree Inventory, two of the protected Pedunculate Oaks (*Quercus robur*) along the rear / southern boundary of the Site are veteran trees with substantial girths (#66271 and #66273). The Inventory also includes a “notable” Hazel tree (#66272). The Officer believes T6 and T7 are the veteran trees on Site however, the Council’s internal mapping system was down at the time of this writing, and the Officer will need to confirm. Buffer zones are required around veteran trees. The buffer zone’s purpose is to protect ancient woodland and individual ancient or veteran trees. A buffer zone around an ancient or veteran tree should be at least 15 times larger than the diameter of the tree. The buffer zone should be 5m from the edge of the tree’s canopy if that area is larger than 15 times the tree’s diameter. It is difficult to ascertain whether the buffer zone of the veteran trees along the southern boundary of the Site have been encroached upon *within* the Site as the Officer does not know what was there before only that substantial clearance has occurred over the last year. (See text on this observation below.) The farming of the arable field beyond is likely to have encroached on the buffer zones of these veteran trees, but the Officer would need to inspect this should a full application be submitted. The Officer includes information about how the buffer zones around veteran trees should be maintained and what they can include. The buffer zone delineation should be included within a Landscape Plan, if an application is submitted.

Where possible, a buffer zone should:

- contribute to wider ecological networks
- be part of the green infrastructure of the area

It should consist of semi-natural habitats such as:

- woodland
- a mix of scrub, grassland, heathland and wetland planting

Buffer zones should include local and appropriate native species. Gardens and access are **inappropriate** within buffer zones and should be avoided as habitat could be harmed by trampling. Sustainable drainage schemes should also be avoided unless:

- they respect root protection areas
- any change to the water table does not adversely affect ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees

When considering ancient and veteran trees it should be noted that they are a material consideration in planning and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) states that they are ‘irreplaceable habitat’. It is important that all applicants are properly advised by an arboricultural consultant who has sound knowledge and experience of ancient and veteran trees and planning.

The Officer observed many piles of wood chips and stumps when she visited the Site. She also examined the Site aerially over time through Google Earth Pro and

notes that an image taken less than a year ago on 17 August 2025 shows the Site almost entirely wooded with tree canopies touching and remanent buildings from a previous plant nursery business covered by tree canopies. This suggests substantial ecological loss, so the buffer zones become ever more important.

The Site sits within the **Bowsey Hill Valued Landscape** and paragraph 183(a) of the NPPF therefore applies.

187. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by: a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

Key points of the Bowsey Hill valued Landscape related to this Site and which the officer would want to see preserved/enhanced include under the Representativeness section:

“The area is predominantly rural with low density development and with high density woodland. ... The high density of broadleaved woodlands in this valued landscape are important for: visual amenity; long distance views into, and framed views out of, the landscape; enclosed space for recreation; and as woodland habitats. The density of ancient woodland coppice sites in the core around Bowsey Hill makes this landscape particularly representative of traditionally managed lowland ancient woodland wooded landscapes.” (p. 89)

The Site is in the **Hare Hatch Farmed Chalk Slopes Landscape Character** of the Wokingham Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment (2019). This landscape character is described as:

“A gently sloping landform supporting a farmed landscape with an intimate mosaic of arable fields and pasture interspersed with small woodland blocks. There is a dispersed settlement pattern of rural hamlets, scattered farmsteads and large manor houses.” (p. 162)

The settlement pattern is of: *“small linear village and hamlets which align roads ... connected by a network of leafy rural lanes crossing the landscape.”* A detached dwelling on this Site would be in keeping with this key characteristic as long as the existing woodland were maintained and enhanced given the “strong sense of enclosure created by ... the scattered woodland blocks,” another key characteristic.

The Officer observed an existing (but deteriorating) hardstanding area / driveway at the northwest corner of the Site and Blakes Lane, possibly related to the former plant nursery business. Any proposed vehicular entry sequence should make use of this existing entrance and compacted area.

Finally, if a full application were submitted, the Officer would expect the applicant to demonstrate that the landscape intentions -- as they relate to existing and proposed trees and vegetation and hard landscaping around the proposed dwelling and any adaptations to the existing cottage -- have been carefully considered. A landscape strategy would need to respond to valued landscape attributes and characteristics of this landscape character area.

Comments On Proposal

Conditions & Reasons (if required)

Date:	05/06/2026	Signed:	L. Abbott