

PLANNING REF : 261825
PROPERTY ADDRESS : 1 Dene Cottages
: Blakes Lane, Hare Hatch, Berkshire
: RG10 9TB
SUBMITTED BY : Mr Calrton and Mrs Samantha Barnard
DATE SUBMITTED : 31/08/2026

COMMENTS:

We are writing to object to planning application 261825.

We have lived on this road for 17 years and know this site and the surrounding area extremely well. Our main concerns are the environmental impact of this proposal, the way in which the site's current condition is being presented following substantial recent clearance, and the potential gradual erosion of the Green Belt in this area.

We understand that national planning policy has changed and that some Green Belt land can now be considered "grey belt". However, we do not believe that describing this site as grey belt should in itself

justify building an exceptionally large house on it. We would like Wokingham Borough Council to properly examine whether this particular site meets the current criteria and make the reasoning behind that decision clear.

****The established character of the site**

We are concerned about the way the application presents this land as degraded or having an "urbanising influence".

Having lived here for 17 years, that is not how we recognise this site.

Until its recent clearance, it was a green, heavily vegetated site which blended into the surrounding countryside. Although the land was historically associated with a nursery, that was many years ago. What remained were remnants of that horticultural use rather than anything resembling a residential or urban site.

Interestingly, the applicant's own Arboricultural Impact Assessment describes it as "a parcel of undeveloped land" and says that it contained "no permanent structures", with only a small number of lightweight polytunnels present.

We therefore question the impression given elsewhere in the application that this was already a developed or urbanised site.

****Recent clearance, wildlife and the timing of the surveys** This is one of our greatest concerns about the application.

Before the clearance, this was not simply an unused piece of land. During the 17 years we have lived here we have regularly witnessed wildlife on and around this site, including roe deer, muntjac and fallow deer, nesting birds, other small mammals and a wide variety of insects.

The vegetation on this site, together with the surrounding fields, hedges and woodland, forms part of a wider habitat through which wildlife moves.

A substantial amount of vegetation was cleared from the site on 5 March 2026. We witnessed the change first-hand. It made a very noticeable and sudden difference to both the appearance of the site and the amount of vegetation and habitat present.

We are therefore particularly concerned about the timing of the environmental surveys subsequently relied upon in support of this application.

The Arboricultural Impact Assessment states that the detailed tree survey was undertaken in March 2026, but does not give the actual date.

Given that clearance began on 5 March, this is important.

****Was the tree survey carried out before or after the clearance? If it was carried out afterwards, the survey would necessarily record the trees remaining after the site had already been substantially cleared, rather than providing a baseline of its condition beforehand.**

We also understand that the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Roost Assessment was not undertaken until 7 July 2026, approximately four months after the clearance.

As residents who have personally witnessed wildlife using this area over many years, we find this particularly concerning.

We struggle to understand how an ecological survey undertaken months after substantial vegetation and potential habitat had been removed can, on its own, provide a reliable picture of the ecological value of the site before those works took place.

It seems to us that the environmental value of a site should be properly understood before significant clearance, particularly where development of Green Belt land is being contemplated, rather than relying principally on a survey of what remains several months afterwards.

We would therefore ask the Council to establish the exact date of the March arboricultural survey, whether it took place before or after clearance began on 5 March, what information exists about the vegetation and habitat present immediately beforehand, and whether the July ecological assessment provides a sufficiently reliable baseline from which to assess the environmental effects of this development.

Our concern is that otherwise the site's post-clearance condition effectively becomes the baseline against which the proposed development is judged.

That would bear little resemblance to the site and wildlife habitat we have known during our 17 years living on this road.

****The scale of the proposed house**

This is not a modest dwelling making sensitive use of a small part of the site.

The proposal is for a six-bedroom house of approximately 734 square metres, extending over three floors and reaching approximately 9.3 metres in height.

That represents a very substantial and permanent introduction of built development into this Green Belt setting.

We are unconvinced by the reliance placed on existing trees and vegetation to reduce its impact. Trees may screen a building from certain viewpoints, but screening a building does not remove its physical presence or its effect upon the character of the land.

There is a considerable difference between the remnants of lightweight horticultural structures and a permanent three-storey, 734m² family home, together with the vehicles, lighting, hard landscaping, gardens and general domestic activity that would inevitably accompany it.

****Is this really grey belt?**

We understand that Wokingham indicated at pre-application stage that it considered the site to qualify as grey belt.

However, the pre-application advice and the detailed reasoning

behind that conclusion do not appear to be included with the published application documents.
That concerns us because the classification is fundamental to whether development here is acceptable in principle.
Furthermore, a new National Planning Policy Framework was published on 17 August 2026, after the applicant's Planning Statement was prepared.
We therefore ask Wokingham to assess this application against the current NPPF and clearly explain how this particular site meets the current grey belt criteria.
We do not think an unpublished conclusion reached during pre-application discussions under the previous national policy should simply be carried forward without proper scrutiny.

****The bigger picture - gradual loss of our Green Belt**
This is perhaps our greatest concern for the future.
This site does not exist in isolation. It forms part of the much larger green landscape around Blakes Lane, Blakes Road and Highfield Lane.
Wokingham's own previous Green Belt assessment recognised the role of land north-east of Wargrave in preventing encroachment into the wider countryside and identified this edge of Wargrave as being vulnerable to incremental change.
That seems particularly important now.
We are aware that other fields between Blakes Road and Highfield Lane are currently undergoing ecological surveys, including vertebrate and invertebrate surveys, together with traffic and ground investigations.
We appreciate that these surveys do not necessarily mean that planning applications will follow, and we are not suggesting that they do. However, they make it even more important that Wokingham considers this application in the context of the wider Green Belt, rather than looking only at this individual application boundary.
Our concern is not simply about setting a planning precedent. It is about incremental loss.
One site is considered in isolation and developed. Then another site is considered individually. Then another.
Each individual development may appear relatively limited when viewed on its own, but collectively they have the potential to permanently change the rural character of this area and reduce the amount of undeveloped land available to wildlife.

Once countryside has been cleared and built upon, that change is extremely difficult to reverse.

****Protecting the environment**
Green Belt should not be viewed simply as empty land waiting for another use.
The trees, hedges, vegetation, fields and undeveloped spaces in this area collectively provide habitat and routes for wildlife as well as creating the rural landscape surrounding our villages.
Having lived here for 17 years, we have been fortunate enough to regularly see deer, birds and other wildlife moving through this landscape. That is part of what risks being gradually lost if individual areas are cleared and developed one by one.
The substantial clearance of this site earlier this year demonstrates how quickly the character and ecological value of an area can be altered.
we am particularly concerned about a situation in which land is substantially cleared and its post-clearance condition then becomes

part of the justification for subsequent development.
We would ask the Council to consider the established character and environmental condition of this land before the March clearance, rather than simply what remains today.

****Conclusion**

We appreciate that Wokingham needs new homes and that national planning policy now allows development on some grey belt land.

However, that should not mean accepting the gradual loss of Green Belt countryside through a series of individual developments. This application proposes an exceptionally large permanent dwelling on land which, until its recent clearance, formed part of the green and wildlife-rich character of this area. We remain particularly concerned about the timing of the clearance and subsequent environmental surveys; whether the current condition of the site provides a fair baseline for assessing its environmental value; whether this site genuinely meets the current grey belt criteria; the scale of the proposed development; and what development here could mean for the remaining Green Belt around Blakes Lane, Blakes Road and Highfield Lane.

For these reasons, we object to planning application 261825 and ask Wokingham Borough Council to refuse planning permission. If the Council nevertheless concludes that the site qualifies as grey belt and is minded to approve the application, we would ask that the officer's report clearly explains how that conclusion has been reached under the current National Planning Policy Framework and how the Council has taken account of both the site's pre-clearance environmental condition and the potential effect of incremental development on the remaining Green Belt across the wider area.