

**Reference:** O/2013/0991  
**Applicant** Thames Valley Housing Association  
**Location** Land east of Blagrove Lane, Wokingham **Postcode** RG41 4WR  
**Proposal** Outline application for erection of up to 140 dwellings. Access alone to be considered.  
**Case Officer** Nick Clark

**SUMMARY**

The application is in outline with access to be considered and proposes 140 dwellings with associated access, open space and infrastructure.

The site is outside recognised development limits and is not allocated for housing delivery under the Core Strategy or the emerging policies of the Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document (MDD).

With the strategy for housing delivery within the MDD having been subject to public examination in May 2013 and supported by the Inspector's interim conclusions, there is no policy support for housing development on the site. In consideration of further impacts as identified in this report the application is recommended for refusal for the reasons set out in the report.

**PLANNING STATUS**

- Countryside
- Thames Basin Heathlands Special Protection Area (7km)
- Tree Preservation Orders
- Adjacent listed buildings
- Archaeological site
- Public Open Space (access from Evendons Lane)
- Watercourses on-site

**PLANNING HISTORY**

O/2001/3308	Outline c. 200 dwellings	Refused	20/06/01
O/2002/7665	Outline 100 dwellings	Refused	12/12/02

**PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE**

The Council advised the applicant in January 2013 that a proposal then outlined for residential development of 150 units on a reduced site area was unlikely to be supportable for a number of reasons.

The site was also put forward by the applicant as an allocated site for housing in the MDD. The site was not considered acceptable however and thus has not been allocated.

<b>SUMMARY INFORMATION</b>			
Site area:	Residential development		4.7 Ha
	Open space		2.5 Ha
	Access etc		0.6 Ha
	<b>Total</b>		<b>7.8 Ha</b>
Density:			29.8 dph
Indicative accommodation			52 x 2-bed houses
			55 x 3-bed houses
			33 x 4-bed houses

<b>CONSULTATION RESPONSES</b>	
<b>Highway Officer:</b>	Objections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate Transport Assessment – unable to assess traffic impacts</li> <li>• Poor sustainability of the location</li> <li>• No details of proposed public transport improvements or pedestrian/ cycle links and access points</li> </ul>
<b>Property department:</b>	Objections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of existing play facilities</li> <li>• Conflict with restrictive covenants on the adjoining Viking Field</li> </ul>
<b>Tree &amp; Landscape Officer:</b>	Objections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detrimental to the rural/ landscape character</li> <li>• Loss of visual and physical separation between settlements</li> <li>• Impact on trees of high quality</li> </ul>
<b>Countryside Officer:</b>	Objection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient information – newts and barn owls</li> <li>• Insufficient information on proposed public open space</li> </ul>
<b>Planning Policy:</b>	Conflict with the development plan No necessity for housing development on the site
<b>Environmental Health Officer:</b>	Objection: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbour noise impact – new access from</li> </ul>

	<p>Evendons Lane</p> <p>No other objection subject to conditions in respect of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contamination assessment</li> <li>• Noise survey and mitigation</li> <li>• Hours of construction</li> </ul>
<b>Housing Officer:</b>	No objection subject to the provision of a minimum 40% affordable housing on-site.
<b>Urban Design &amp; Conservation Officer</b>	Objection – impact on rural character and setting of Grade 2 listed former agricultural buildings adjoining the site.
<b>Archaeological consultant:</b>	Satisfied with the initial archaeological assessment. Archaeological investigation required by condition.
<b>Environment Agency:</b>	No objection subject to conditions in respect of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flood risk</li> <li>• Surface water drainage - SUDS</li> </ul>
<b>Thames Valley Police Crime Prevention Officer:</b>	No objection
<b>Royal Berkshire Fire &amp; Rescue Service:</b>	Provision needed for fire hydrants (currently no available mains sufficient to service the site)
<b>Thames Water:</b>	No objection, but there is insufficient capacity in the local foul waste system to accommodate the development. Improvements would be needed before any development (Grampian condition)
<b>Wokingham Town Council:</b>	<p>Objections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsustainable travel plan</li> <li>• Harm to open and rural character of the area</li> <li>• Cumulative traffic impact with other developments proposed.</li> </ul>
<b>Barkham Parish Council:</b> (neighbouring parish)	<p>Objections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contrary to the Core Strategy and MDD</li> <li>• Exacerbation of existing congestion on Evendons Lane and Barkham Road</li> <li>• Loss of separation between settlements</li> <li>• Poor bus services and no commitment to fund improvements</li> </ul>
<b>Local members:</b>	No written responses received

### REPRESENTATIONS

- c. 118 letters of objection from nearby residents have been received citing principally:
- Width and safety of access onto Evendons Lane

- Loss of on-street parking on Evendons Lane – no alternative provision proposed
- Loss of prominent oak tree along Evendons Lane
- Loss of rural character
- Loss of play area
- Traffic noise for neighbouring residents
- Loss of habitat/ biodiversity
- Urbanisation - Green Gap between Wokingham & Barkham
- Rural character of Blagrove Lane
- Amenity of Viking Field and Leslie Sears Playing Fields
- Insufficient sewer capacity
- Exacerbation of flooding in Blagrove Lane
- Flood risk

#### **APPLICANT'S POINTS**

- Housing need for the development
- High quality design
- Sustainable location
- In accordance with the NPPF and Local Plan

#### **PLANNING POLICY & GUIDANCE**

##### National Planning Policy Framework

South East Plan	<b>NRM6</b>	Thames Basin Heathlands	
Wokingham District Local Plan	<b>WBE4</b>	Landscape & planting	
	<b>WBE5</b>	Trees & new development	
	<b>WHE12</b>	Archaeological sites	
	<b>WR7</b>	Provision Of Public Open Space In New Residential Development	
	<b>WH10</b>	Variety of housing	
	<b>WIC8</b>	Provision of school facilities	
	Wokingham Borough Core Strategy 2010	<b>CP1</b>	Sustainable development
		<b>CP3</b>	General principles of development
<b>CP4</b>		Infrastructure requirements	
<b>CP5</b>		Housing mix, density & affordability	
<b>CP6</b>		Managing travel demand	
<b>CP7</b>		Biodiversity	
<b>CP8</b>		SPA	
Managing Development Delivery Examined DPD	<b>CP9</b>	Scale and location of development	
	<b>CP11</b>	Countryside development	
	<b>CC01</b>	Presumption in favour of sustainable development	
	<b>CC01</b>	Development limits	

(anticipated final adoption February 2014)	<b>CC03</b>	Green infrastructure, trees and landscape
	<b>CC04</b>	Sustainable Design & Construction
	<b>CC05</b>	Renewable and decentralised energy
	<b>CC07</b>	Parking
	<b>CC09</b>	Flood risk
	<b>CC10</b>	Sustainable drainage
	<b>TB05</b>	Housing mix
	<b>TB07</b>	Internal space standards
	<b>TB08</b>	Open space, sport and recreation facilities
	<b>TB12</b>	Employment Skills Plan
	<b>TB21</b>	Landscape character
	<b>TB23</b>	Biodiversity & development
	<b>TB24</b>	Designated Heritage Assets
	<b>TB125</b>	Archaeology
	<b>SAL05</b>	Thames Basin mitigation measures
Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)	<b>BDG</b>	Borough Design Guide
	<b>SDC</b>	Sustainable Design and Construction
	<b>AH</b>	Affordable Housing

## PLANNING ISSUES

### The principle of development – housing supply

1. The Council's strategy for housing delivery is set out in the Core Strategy and emerging policies of the Managing Development Delivery DPD, with new housing to meet the identified need until 2026 to be delivered in the Strategic Development Locations (SDLs) identified in the Core Strategy and smaller sites to be allocated in the Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document (MDD).
2. The site is located in countryside adjacent to the settlement of Wokingham and is not allocated for housing delivery under the Core Strategy or the MDD. The principle of the residential development is thus not supported by the Core Strategy or the National Planning Policy Framework.
3. The application is founded principally on the assertion<sup>1</sup> that the Council is unable to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply.
4. The Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document (MDD) went through an Examination in Public between May 14<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> 2013. The housing supply issues raised by the applicant were fully considered by the Inspector in his Examination. The examination of housing supply was conducted in great depth and

<sup>1</sup> DAS section 2.1 & para's 5.8-5.10 and section 6 of the Planning & Community Involvement Statement

was examined in light of the most up to date information available to developers and the Council.

5. Following the public hearings, and subsequent to submission of the application, the Inspector published his interim conclusions on the MDD on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2013. The Council has been “invited to consider the Inspector’s preliminary conclusions and put forward the necessary amendments to the policies and accompanying text in a schedule of Proposed Main Modifications”.
6. In summary his main findings were that:
  - The MDD Plan complies with all statutory, legal and procedural requirements, including the Duty to Cooperate
  - The Plan is generally consistent with the Core Strategy. The Inspector concludes that the housing target included in the Core Strategy, which was based on the South East Plan requirement, provides the most recent assessment of the overall housing requirement for the Borough and therefore remains the appropriate housing target for the Borough.
  - The Inspector considers that the Council’s Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) (March 2013) provides a credible evidence base to support the process of allocating sites, which “suggests the annual requirement for assessing a 5 year supply is around 900 dwellings per annum (2013-2018) or just over 1,000 dwellings per annum (2014-2019)”. He comments that “the assessment shows sites for around 6,000 in the former case and well over 6,500 in the latter, each equating to around 6-years supply, or providing a 20% buffer” (page 3). Therefore the Inspector is not recommending that any further sites are required to be allocated within the MDD to meet the Borough’s housing need.
  - The Inspector also considers that the number of sites allocated in reserve (Policy SAL03) is adequate to address any further deficiencies in five-year supply and that no further changes, including the allocation of further reserves sites, are required.
7. The Inspector has therefore indicated in his preliminary conclusions that the MDD is broadly sound. He has endorsed the Council’s approach with regard to housing supply and has stated that it is not necessary to find additional sites outside of the previously identified Strategic Development Locations and those already identified within the MDD DPD.
8. Furthermore, in his interim conclusions, the Inspector considers that the risk of harm to the overall strategy for housing delivery attached to the allocation of more sites outside the SDLs outweighs the potential benefit of short term housing delivery.
9. Paragraph 216 of the NPPF states that:

“From the day of publication, decision-takers may also give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:

  - the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced the preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);
  - the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); and

- the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the policies in this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given).”

10. The MDD has been through Examination in Public. The Inspector has indicated in his interim conclusions that it is broadly sound. He has indicated that it is not necessary to modify policies relating to housing supply in order to make them sound, other than a change about the intent of the policies, and further suggests that additional housing outside the identified Strategic Development Locations risks harming the strategy for the delivery of housing within the borough.
11. The MDD is at a very advanced stage as the Council progresses the MDD toward adoption early in 2014. Given the support to the policies afforded by the Inspector’s interim findings, significant weight should thus be given to housing supply policies in planning decisions.
12. Contrary to the applicant’s assertion, housing supply policies can thus be considered up-to-date such that the presumption in favour of the development under the NPPF relied on by the application does not apply. The development proposed would be contrary to the spatial vision and strategy for housing delivery within the borough as set out in the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy.

#### Housing development in rural areas

13. The Council’s approach to housing delivery as set out in the Core Strategy and MDD is fully supported by the NPPF. At the same time, para 17 of the NPPF acknowledges as a Core Principle the value of the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and enhancing the natural environment. The NPPF does not offer any support for the development of housing as proposed within the countryside.
14. In accordance with this emphasis Core Strategy policy CP11 seeks to maintain the high quality of the rural environment as well as to protect the separate identity of settlements. To this end it advises that housing development such as that proposed will not normally be permitted. The principle of the development is thus contrary to Core Strategy policy CP11 and emerging policy CC01.
15. Notwithstanding the above, if the principal of the development was otherwise considered to be acceptable, the proposal would need to be considered against the impacts considered below.

#### Impact on the character of the area

16. Policy CP11 supports development in the countryside only where it maintains the high quality of the rural environment. Policy CP1(1) similarly only supports development that maintains or enhances the high quality of the environment, with policy CP3 supporting development of an appropriate mass, layout, built form, height and character to the area (CP3(a) and which makes a positive contribution to the sense of place contributes in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (CP3(f)).
17. The Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document provides further guidance for developers with general guidance that development should respond positively to its site and local context (G1), respond positively to the local character of

the area (G2) and provide an attractive public realm that is accessible to all (G5). These principles are repeated in guidance for residential development (R1 & R2).

18. Emerging MDD policy TB21 sets out that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment (LCA), including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues; and where they retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape. This (amended) wording is supported by the Inspector's interim conclusions and must be weighted accordingly.
19. Wokingham District Local Plan policy WLL4 requires all development in the countryside to respect the landscape character of the area, and where appropriate to provide for the protection and enhancement of the landscape character, particularly existing boundary features. Policy WBE4 provides that wherever possible existing natural features should be retained and protected and policy WBE5 provides for the protection of existing trees and woodland.
20. The Landscape Character Assessment for Wokingham (LCA) identifies the Landscape Character Area in which the site is located as J2: Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay. The key characteristics of this area are assessed as including:
  - Large area of rural farmland interspersed with a fairly dense network of mixed traditional and modern settlements.
  - Predominantly flat to gently shelving landform over a simple clay geology with local areas of sandy deposits.
  - Larger geometric fields where arable farming predominates which tends to be on land away from the settlements. The smaller more enclosed irregular fields which are used as paddocks are found close to the settlements.
  - Although there is a declining hedgerow structure, hedgerow trees in field boundaries, along roads, shelterbelts and small farm woods are an important element in maintaining the rural character.
  - Older scattered settlements of farms, hamlets and small nucleated villages of traditional character can be found, whereas modern development varies wildly with no consistent style or form, including the southern edge of Wokingham.
21. The LCA evaluates this landscape as having a moderate quality, character and condition, with some notable landscape features such as the distinctive geometric field system and wide range of habitats. The field system is however fragmented in places due to the declining hedgerow structure. The overall strategy set out for the landscape is for the enhancement of the landscape character area and to include more general improvements to woodland, farmland and habitat management.
22. The landscape is identified in the LCA to be of moderate sensitivity as most elements would be difficult but not impossible to replace or restore. Most of the characteristics are valued at a local scale of importance although the peaceful rural qualities are rare at a regional level.
23. The LCA also sets out a number of key issues that may have the potential to affect the area with an objective of enhancing the existing character by retaining the current positive characteristics and seeking to improve other characteristics that are not in their ideal state. The key issues that relate to this site are the loss and poor management of hedgerows, and pressure of the expansion of built development on



the edge of towns leading to the suburbanisation of the landscape, loss of settlement identity and blocking of views.

24. The site comprises fields and paddocks bounded and divided by hedgerows, trees and watercourses. Open countryside extends westwards from the site from Blagrove Lane, which retains a strong rural character, being a largely sunken lane bordered by mature trees, with a single carriageway width and no street lighting, kerbing or footways. The site is bounded by housing to the north and south, with commercial units to the north east.
25. To the east lies the c. 7 hectares of natural grassland meadows of the Viking Field recreation area and the 3 hectares Leslie Sears Playing Field. These well used public areas both benefit from the rural backdrop of the application site, through which they connect visually with the countryside beyond.
26. Whilst located on the edge of the settlement the site retains a strong rural character through the pattern of hedgerows with mature trees, and the association of the site with open countryside to the west as well as the public open spaces to the east. Boundaries with housing and commercial areas are reinforced by robust planting and mature hedgerows and trees, such that the site is clearly distinct from the adjoining development area, and complements the rural character of Blagrove Lane and countryside to the west, as well as the character and public recreational value of Viking Field and the Leslie Sears playing fields to the east.
27. Clear views into the site are available travelling particularly southwards along Blagrove Lane, in gaps between and beneath the tree canopy and through gateways, with the mature hedgerows and trees on rising ground to the south.
28. The character of the site strongly relates to the positive landscape characteristics as identified within the general Landscape Character Area J2 Arborfield Cross and Barkham Settled and Farmed Clay and has the peaceful rural qualities which are relatively rare in the area. The rural character of Blagrove Lane south of Roberts Grove contributes to the rural character, reinforcing the sense of leaving the settlement and entering the countryside, with glimpsed views to open fields to the west and east. Blagrove Lane adjacent to the northern part of the site is not 'sunken' and there are clear views between the trees into the northern part of the site.
29. This site is also of importance in forming part of the open rural landscape between the settlements of Wokingham, Finchampstead North and Barkham, in relation to which policy CP11 seeks to maintain visual and physical separation between settlements so as to protect their separate identities from erosion by piecemeal infill development.
30. The landscape, and the contribution of the site towards the landscape is thus important locally both in maintaining the separation of settlements as well as a rural interface between the settlements, and in providing a soft edge to the adjoining settlement of Wokingham.
31. The application outlines housing development on the northern majority of the site. Existing housing to the north of the site provides a relatively soft edge to development limits in terms of the character of listed converted barns at Blagrove Farm (which in turn are enhanced by their relationship with the adjoining countryside) and the relatively low density of housing in Roberts Grove (c.15dph), and the strong boundary vegetation which frames the area of countryside. Buildings in the Mulbery Business Park in Oatlands Road only border a relatively small part of the site, but are generally well screened from the surrounding countryside by mature trees.

32. A density of c. 30 dwellings per hectare is proposed, suggested in a layout predominated by terraces, with semi-detached pairs and detached dwellings. A buffer strip of amenity land/ footpath would be maintained parallel to Blagrove Lane and similarly around the north and east boundaries of the site, with an area of open space providing segregation from dwellings along Evençons Lane. A central area of open space within the site would provide for retention of some of the existing trees within the site.
33. A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been submitted in support of the application which suggests that:
- the development is broadly consistent with the existing landscape character,
  - potential visual effects will be very localised and mitigation can be provided as part of the scheme to mitigate these impacts,
  - the design of the development prepared to a high standard and will create a distinctive edge to this part of Wokingham, and that
  - the scheme is compliant with the relevant landscape policies of the Core Strategy.
34. The Council's Tree & Landscape Officer is unable to agree with the conclusions of the assessment, and considers that the effect of development of up to 140 dwellings will be to reduce the open rural landscape between settlements with the resulting spread of urbanisation being visually and physically detrimental to the rural character of the area as a whole. Although the visual effects of the development will be only localised, as highlighted in the LVIA, the Officer considers that this is an important landscape locally due to the intact landscape features it contains such as large mature oak trees, historic field patterns and hedged bank particularly along Blagrove Lane, and due to limited urbanising influences such as 'horsiculture' generally found close to settlements, in association with the lack of open views to the edge of settlement. The Officer considers the area to be unique and special in such proximity to the settlement edge and as such to be of high value to the amenity and character of the local area and of value to local residents because of its distinctive qualities. As such the Officer is unable to support the proposal.
35. The development would also necessitate alterations to part of Blagrove Lane, with widening works, loss of established boundary hedgerows & mature oak trees, extension of streetlighting, widening of the carriageway and speed limit signage, which would all combine to have a further urbanising impact that would erode the rural character of the lane, and its contribution to the wider rural character of the area.
36. In consideration of the above it is concluded that the development would be contrary to Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 and CP11, as well as emerging policy TB21.
37. Notwithstanding the above, the submitted details warrant additional comment as follows in respect of tree and landscape issues:
38. The tree survey identifies trees within and adjacent to the site but there are concerns regarding the significant number of locations within the site where the development encroaches into the root protection areas of category A trees including a Veteran tree. Only one tree has been identified in as a Veteran (T45<sup>2</sup>), however there are a number of large significant oaks within and on the site boundary which could also be classed as veteran and have been classified as such by the Wokingham Veteran Tree

<sup>2</sup> Submitted tree survey reference

Association. Veteran trees are much more sensitive to changes within their root protection area than younger trees and therefore will need to have root protection areas left undisturbed unless it can be demonstrated otherwise that the works would have no adverse impact on the trees.

39. In some locations especially along Blagrove Lane the proposed development shown on the Indicative Layout is very close to the existing mature trees and in some case will require the reduction of the trees canopies (G22, G18 & G10). This will create a poor relationship with the mature trees which could then become a recurring issue for future residents who purchase dwellings in these locations, and lead to pressure to remove the trees.
40. The proposed site entrance off Blagrove Lane is located between two TPO oaks one of which is considered by the Tree & Landscape Officer to be clearly a veteran tree (T30). The proposed road comes well within the root protection areas of both trees and is likely to also require the cutting back of the trees canopies. Road widening indicated may necessitate the loss of trees and hedges bordering the west side of the road, although no details of this have been provided. The engineering works required to gain access to the site will thus have a detrimental impact on the protected and other trees which is unacceptable. (Please note; the tree numbers on the engineering drawings do not correspond to the tree identification numbers within the tree survey.)
41. The mature oak adjacent to the proposed site entrance off Evendons Lane is an important tree of very high amenity value within the street scene. The proposal will require the removal of this tree which again is unacceptable.
42. Whilst only indicative at this stage, it is noted that within the site, the layout includes significant areas of hard surfacing close to the existing vegetation on the site boundaries which include turning heads, car parking spaces and drives.
43. In relation to the proposed access arrangements into the site and the Indicative Site Layout it is thus concluded that the proposal is contrary to Core Strategy Policies CP1 & CP3, Wokingham District Local Plan policies WLL4, WBE4 & WBE5 as well as emerging policy CC01 & CC03.

#### Heritage assets

44. The site is to the east of Hutt's Farm an historic farmstead comprising early C 16th Hall House, late C 16th Barn and late C 17th Cattle Shelter (all Grade 2). The farmstead is currently experienced in a rural context, with the surrounding trees and open fields of the application site to the east and northeast providing an effective green buffer between the farm and Wokingham town suburbs beyond and an appropriate rural setting for the farmstead. This farmstead is typical of the historic, isolated farms that characterise this part of Berkshire, and the rural setting is an important part of its character and significance.
45. The development of the application site would erode the rural character of the area and the Urban Design & Conservation Officer considers that this would be to the extent that the setting and significance of this historic farmstead would be unacceptably harmed. In consideration of the expert advice of the Urban Design & Conservation Officer it is concluded that the development would be unsustainable in terms of heritage assets, and contrary to the provisions of NPPF Chapter 12 and to conflict with emerging MDD policy TB24.

### Residential amenities

46. Policy CP3(a) only supports development that is without detriment to the amenities of adjoining residents and their quality of life. The access from Evendons Lane would result in a high level of vehicular activity in close proximity to the rear gardens of the neighbouring 111 & 113 Evendons Lane. The plot of land through which the access is proposed is c.11m wide, shown to accommodate a footway only along one side. Traffic generated by 140 dwellings would have a significant impact on the amenities currently enjoyed by the occupants of the properties, both in terms of the peaceful enjoyment of back gardens and in terms of the impact on side-facing windows across the proposed access. The application includes a Noise Impact Assessment but it considers only the proposed properties and no assessment is made in respect of no 111 & 113 Evendons Lane. In the absence of any such assessment to demonstrate otherwise it is concluded that the development would be detrimental to the residential amenities of No's 111 & 113 Evendons Lane, contrary to Core Strategy policy CP3(a).
47. The housing suggested in the indicative layout would retain sufficient separation from neighbouring properties to avoid any direct material impact on residential amenities – impacts being more in terms of the wider public amenities of the area as considered above.
48. The number of dwellings proposed on the site, and as suggested on the Indicative Layout would be capable of being provided with adequate private amenity space and meeting the Internal Space Standards recommended by the Borough Design Guide and emerging policy TB07.
49. Conditions recommended by the Environmental Health Officer in respect of noise, contamination and hours of construction are considered to be both reasonable and necessary to protect the amenities of future occupants of the development and neighbouring residents.

### Drainage and flood risk

50. The site slopes downhill south to north and includes a number of watercourses. The site is within Flood Zone 1 and in itself is not subject to a known flood risk, although a number of residents report flooding incidents along Blagrove Lane adjacent to the site during periods of heavy rainfall.
51. The application includes a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) that identifies no effective ground permeability for drainage of the site. The FRA recognises that ditches have the potential to overflow within the site and concludes that this is the principle flood risk to the site itself.
52. The proposals would include diversion and some culverting of part of the existing ditches on the site. The roadside ditch on the west side Blagrove Lane at the north end of the site is also proposed to be diverted to accommodate road widening.
53. The FRA compares run-off rates following the development with existing run-off rates and concludes that attenuation is required to regulate run-off from the site. The FRA suggests further site investigations to explore options for attenuation, but initially proposes the use of an attenuation basin and ditch.
54. The Environment Agency accepts the findings of the FRA and recommends that flood

mitigation measures be secured by way of planning conditions. This would be in accordance with policy CP1 and emerging policy CC09.

### Highways and access

55. Vehicular access is proposed from Blagrove Lane at the north of the site and Evendons Lane at the south, with a route through the site.

56. The application includes a Transport Assessment (TA) that provides details of the proposed accesses, junctions and highway alterations.

#### North Access

57. Appendix F of the TA includes a drawing of proposed widening to 6m of Blagrove Lane and plans suggest that the works required to the lane are within the 'red line' of the site.

58. The highway authority comments on the north access as follows:

- Drawing X-212127/100 does not show the full extent of works proposed, which continue beyond the edge of the drawing
- The current 6'6" width restriction TRO will need to be amended
- The 30mph speed limit TRO will need amending
- Street lighting will need extending along Blagrove Lane
- Road widening works and ditch realignment will necessitate loss of established roadside vegetation
- Swept path analysis is required to demonstrate suitability for regular bus use.

59. The highway authority is nonetheless satisfied that in highway terms there is sufficient land available for satisfactory access to be secured by way of conditions and further details.

#### South Access

60. The highway authority comments on the southern access as follows:

- It is unclear why Evendons Lane is proposed to be barrowed to 5.5m.
- Sight lines will require removal of a mature tree
- Swept path analysis is required to demonstrate suitability for regular bus use.

61. The highway authority is satisfied that in highway terms, satisfactory access could be secured from Evendons Lane by way of conditions and further details.

#### Junction between Blagrove Lane and Barkham Road

62. The highway authority does not consider that changes proposed at this junction are necessary.

#### Pedestrian and cyclist access

63. Although the application seeks approval of accesses, no details have been provided

of cyclist and pedestrian access, which are shown indicatively only on the suggested layout. Pedestrian and cycle links are suggested to the east through Leslie Sears Playing Fields and Viking Fields. The applicant has no control over these routes however, and the Council's property department raises objections in terms of a conflict with restrictive covenants on the land. The TA also indicates that a shared pedestrian/cycle path is proposed through Leslie Sears Playing Field to Crail Close, but there is nothing available to suggest the feasibility of this. Similarly, an upgrade of the path from Roberts Grove to Leslie Sears Playing field as suggested is also outside the application site. It does not have the benefit of a public right of way and there is no evidence to suggest that such a right could be secured and the improvements implemented.

64. Link paths are also proposed from Blagrove Lane into the site, but no detail drawings are available of this so as to demonstrate that 3<sup>rd</sup> party land is not involved or to show the extent of trees and hedgerow that would need to be removed.

65. In consideration of the above, the access arrangements cannot be supported, and the application as submitted is contrary to Core Strategy policies CP1 & CP6.

#### Traffic Impact

66. The TA concludes that 74 vehicle movements can be expected in each peak hour with appendix H showing the distribution of traffic. The highway authority comments that it is unclear how the distribution between the north and south accesses have been derived. On the basis of the distribution the TA assesses the impact on local junctions. The highway authority highlights a number of additional problems with the data used and the resulting analysis and concludes that it is not possible from the submitted assessment to identify the cumulative impact of the development on nearby junctions when considered alongside development planned within the area under the Core Strategy and MDD.

67. The highway authority also notes that the application site is in an unsustainable location, which will result in an unacceptable level of car travel/dependency. Walking and cycling distances to many local facilities, services and state schools are not within convenient range and existing public transport facilities (bus stops and railway station) are not within normally acceptable walking distances. Improvements and re-routing of the 144 bus service are suggested in the TA, but no details of the funding and practicality of this have been provided. The highway officer notes a number of practical difficulties in implementing the outlined bus service improvement such that in the absence of detailed feasibility and funding proposals, there is nothing to suggest a likelihood of it being realised. The highway authority also considers that measures proposed in the submitted Travel Plan are insufficient to address the needs for sustainable transport options given the location of the site.

68. Policy CP6 only supports development where it does not cause highway problems or lead to traffic related environmental problems, and where mitigation is provided against adverse impacts. In the absence of a cogent assessment of traffic impacts and proposals for any necessary mitigation measures, it is concluded that the development would be contrary to policy CP6 in these respects, and that the location of the development would remain poor in terms of sustainable transport options, contrary to the Spatial Vision and policies CP1 & CP6 of the Core Strategy.

69. Biodiversity & Thames Basin Heathlands

70. The application includes an ecological appraisal based upon a walkover survey of the site and a desk-top appraisal based upon existing records for the area. A reptile survey was also undertaken in selected areas of habitat potential.

71. The appraisal suggests that there would be no direct impact on protected species or habitats, but acknowledges the ability of the site to support breeding birds and provide for roosting bats within trees, and recommends measures such as additional planting and the use of bird and bat boxes in order to maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the site.

72. The Council's Biodiversity Officer objects to the application for the following reasons:

- Need for a hedgerow mitigation strategy
- Insufficient information in respect of newts and barn owls

73. The Officer identifies that the site provides suitable breeding habitat for newts and that given the scale of development proposed, limited survey based upon the Habitat Suitability Index is unacceptable. The Officer concludes that a full reptile survey of the site carried out by a licenced ecologist is required in order to fully assess the impact of the proposal on reptiles. Given the undeveloped rural nature of the site and scale of development proposed, this is considered to be necessary before any proposal for the site can be considered positively, in order that the full impact upon reptiles can be taken into account. In the absence of such a survey the proposal is contrary to Core Strategy policies CP3 & CP7.

74. The Officer also identifies the extensive network of native hedgerows on the site. The development would result in breaks in some of the hedgerows and development in proximity to hedging also has can have an adverse impact on their health and value to wildlife. Policy CP3 requires proposals to demonstrate that they maintain or enhance the ability of a site to support flora and fauna. In the absence of a hedgerow mitigation strategy the development would be contrary to policy CP3.

75. The Officer also reports that an adjacent site is known to support breeding barn owls for which the site provides suitable foraging habitat. The loss of this habitat is likely to impact on the local barn owl population. In order to assess and mitigate against impacts, a barn owl survey and mitigation strategy drawn up by an appropriately experienced and qualified ecologist is thus required before the impact of the development in this respect can be considered. In the absence of such a survey and mitigation the proposal is contrary to Core Strategy policies CP3 & CP7.

76. The development would be within 5km of the Thames Basin Heathlands Special Protection Area, where in accordance with the European Habitats Directive, advice from English Nature and policy CP8, the development would need to demonstrate that it would mitigate against adverse impacts. In accordance with the adopted Planning Advice Note: Infrastructure Impact Mitigation Contributions for New Development (November 2010), mitigation can be achieved by way of contributions towards SPA Access management & monitoring (per dwelling) and delivery & management of Rooks Nest Farm SANG. Contributions relate to the likely number of residents by way of dwelling sizes as follows:

<u>Unit size</u>	<u>SPA monitoring</u>	<u>Rooks Nest Farm</u>	<u>Total SPA</u>
1 bed	£101.69	£423.35	£525.05
2 bed	£132.93	£553.39	£686.32
3 bed	£174.52	£726.55	£901.07
4 bed	£230.03	£957.65	£1,187.68
5 bed+	£275.03	£1,144.97	£1,419.99

77. The application makes clear at Para 7.24 of the Planning Statement that the applicant is willing to contribute accordingly. This could be secured by way of s.106 agreement. Given the other difficulties with the proposal as identified in this report, this has not been pursued. In the absence of a binding obligation to make appropriate contributions, the development would be contrary to policies CP8 & NRM6.

#### Affordable housing

78. Under policy CP5 residential development on 'greenfield' land within the countryside would be expected to provide 40-50% as affordable housing. Para 3.6 of the Planning Statement set out the applicant's intention to provide a range of affordable housing with a mix of 2, 3 and 4 bedroom properties and a mix and tenure to be provided either as affordable rented or shared ownership properties.

79. Provision would need to be in accordance with the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document which includes that a maximum of 12% would be considered at affordable rent, and the supporting text of the Core Strategy which sets a starting point of 70% social rent and 30% shared ownership.

80. Due to other difficulties with the proposal this has not been progressed or secured by way of s106 agreement, and as such the development would be contrary to Core Strategy policy CP5.

#### Infrastructure, amenities and local services

81. In accordance with Core Strategy policy CP4 new development is expected to make arrangements for the improvement or provision of infrastructure, services, community and other facilities.

#### Public open space

82. The application proposes 2.5 Ha of public open space within the site and paras 3.7 of the Planning Statement suggest that this would be in accordance with policy CP3 and emerging policy TB08 which requires 2.47Ha comprised as follows:

<u>Typology</u>	<u>MDD DPD standard</u>	<u>140 dwellings</u>
Parks and Gardens	1.1ha/1000	0.370ha
Amenity POS	0.98ha/1000	0.329ha
Children's Play	0.25ha/1000	0.084ha
Natural Greenspace	2.84ha/1000	0.954ha
Playing pitches	1.66ha/1000	0.558ha
Allotments	0.52ha/1000	0.175ha
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7.36ha</b>	<b>2.47ha</b>



83. Whilst the layout plan at this stage is indicative, suggested areas of public space are fragmented and dictated by site constraints rather than being designed to provide usable areas of public space. The usable areas are thus likely to be less than suggested by the area of 2.5Ha. The Countryside Officer objects to the application on the grounds that insufficient information has been provided in respect of the types of open space to be provided. Whilst such information need not be provided at outline stage, the Council must be satisfied that the site has the ability to accommodate necessary amenities for the number of properties proposed.

84. Core Strategy and MDD requirements for playing pitches, allotments & cemeteries could be met by way of contributions towards off-site facilities. The indicative layout also suggests that the site would be capable of accommodating sufficient amenity open space and children's play area to meet the requirements of policies CP3 and TB08.

85. The loss of the play area on Evendons Lane would be unfortunate, but it is noted that a replacement is proposed more centrally within the site. This would not be as conveniently located for existing users, but the existing use of the play area is subject to a lease with relatively short notice period such that notwithstanding the development proposed, its continued presence cannot be relied upon. Relocation of the play facilities however would further reduce the area available for 'new' public open space within the site.

86. It is unclear however whether or not the site could at the same time provide an adequate level of natural green space or formal parks and gardens. The Design & Access Statement makes reference to the proximity of Leslie Sears Playing Field and the Viking Field recreation area but it is unclear at this stage whether direct access from the site into these areas would be feasible, or whether the areas have capacity to provide for the recreation of the occupants of the 140 dwellings proposed. In consideration of the above it is concluded that the Council cannot be satisfied as to the ability of the site to provide for an adequate level of on-site public amenities, contrary to Core Strategy policy CP3, Wokingham District Local Plan policy WR7 and emerging policy TB08

#### Other amenities and infrastructure

87. Section 106 obligations to contribute towards off-site infrastructure and services agreed at this stage are formulaic so as to provide flexibility in the event of the number and size of properties to be considered at reserved matters stage differing from the current indicative accommodation schedule.

88. Catchment primary and secondary schools are currently over-subscribed and the development thus needs to contribute towards additional mainstream primary education in the area. The level of contribution secured by the formula is in accordance with the Planning Advice Note: Infrastructure Impact Mitigation Contributions for New Development (November 2010) (PAN) as follows:

Contribution per dwelling:

2-bed dwellings:	£4,142.00
3-bed dwellings:	£12,439.00
4+-bed dwellings:	£13,412.00

89. The development would result in increased vehicle movements above traffic movements associated with the existing use of the site and demand for improved public transport facilities and pedestrian and cyclist facilities. A contribution towards local highway and transport schemes in the region of £546,000 (depending on final number and size of properties) is likely to be required.

90. Contributions per dwelling towards countryside, sports, leisure and libraries would also be in accordance with the PAN as follows:

	£
Children's play*	1,899.20
Pitches & Rec. Grounds*	206.68
Amenity open space*	47.47
Country parks	348.00
Biodiversity	56.00
Country access	174.00
Swimming pools	257.11
Sports halls	483.48
Libraries	229.27

*\*not needed if satisfactorily accommodated on-site*

91. The contributions above could be secured by the s106 agreement, but this has not been pursued, and in the absence of which the development would be contrary to policies CP4, CP10, WR7 & WIC8.

#### Sustainable Design and Construction and renewable/ low carbon energy

92. At outline stage, the Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document (SDC) requires applications to include only a framework to identify the approach to be taken towards sustainable design and construction, with full details to be submitted at reserved matters stage. The development is also expected to provide for 10% of energy to be from on-site renewable or low-carbon sources.

93. Section 4.6 of the DAS considers issues of sustainability and energy, setting out preferences for photovoltaic panels and heat pumps and for the development to achieve the 'required' level of the Code For Sustainable Homes.

94. Policy CC04 and the Sustainable Design and Construction seek compliance with Code Level 4, and whilst the DAS is not clear as to measures to achieve this, and whilst there is no correlation between the indicative layout and the requirements of sustainable design and orientation of buildings, the DAS is considered sufficient at outline stage to demonstrate that the development would be capable of compliance with policy CP1, the Sustainable Design and Construction SPD and emerging policies CC04 & CC05.

#### Crime prevention

95. The Crime Prevention Officer raises no objection to the indicative layout submitted.

#### Employment skills training

96. Emerging policy TB12 requires major development to provide opportunities for

training, apprenticeship or other vocational initiatives. The Application includes no such proposals but it is considered that this could readily be secured by way of a planning obligation.

#### Archaeology

97. The site is of known archaeological interest. And the Council's archaeological consultant agrees with the recommendation of the submitted archaeological assessment that archaeological investigation is required. This would be in accordance with policy WHE12 and emerging MDD policy TB25 and could be secured by condition on an approval.

#### Fire hydrants

98. The Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service reports insufficient water mains in the vicinity of the site to service fire hydrants. A Grampian condition requiring provision of suitable hydrant facilities prior to the occupation of the development could secure appropriate provision.

#### Other matters

99. A resident in Evendons Lane considers that part of the application site required for visibility splays falls within his ownership. Details provided by the applicant, including Land Registry documents and plans appear to demonstrate that the claim is incorrect, and that the visibility splays are either within the control of the applicant or part of the adopted highway.

### **CONCLUSION**

In consideration of the above it is concluded that the development would be contrary to the Local Plan both in principle and in its impact. The supply of housing land within the borough, as affirmed in the interim conclusions of the MDD Inspector is such that there are no circumstances favouring the development against the Local Plan. Accordingly the application is recommended for refusal for the reasons set out below.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

REFUSAL of planning permission for the following reasons:

- 1) The site is not allocated for the delivery of housing and associated infrastructure in the Spatial Vision and policies of the Core Strategy and emerging policies of the Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document. Any short term benefit from delivery of 140 dwellings on the site would not outweigh the risk of harm to the overall strategy for sustainable housing growth within the borough. As such the development would be contrary to the Core Strategy for development within the borough until 2026 and emerging policies of the Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document.
- 2) The urbanisation of the site resulting from the development, both in itself and in terms of the loss of continuity of the rural landscape through the site and the relationship with Leslie Sears Playing Field and the Viking Field recreation area would be detrimental to the character and quality of the landscape and rural character of land between the settlements of Finchampstead North, Barkham and Wokingham and the amenities of the local area, contrary to Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 and CP11, Wokingham District Local Plan policy WLL4 and

emerging MDD policy TB21.

- 3) The development would result in the direct loss and impacts upon a number of trees that are of high amenity value to the character of the local area, and would have an indirect impact on other trees also of high amenity value in terms of a poor relationship between the development and the trees, with development taking place within root protection areas and buildings located close to tree canopies such that there would be on-going pressure for reduction or removal of the trees. As such the development would be contrary to Core Strategy policies CP1 & CP3, Wokingham District Local Plan policy WBE5 and emerging MDD policy CC03
- 4) The development would erode the rural character of the area to the detriment of the setting of the Grade 2 Listed Buildings at Hutt's Farm to the west contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and Core Strategy policies CP1 & CP3.
- 5) Use of the new road into the site from Evendons Lane would result in noise and disturbance that would materially impact on the amenities enjoyed by the occupants of 111 & 113 Evendons Lane, contrary to Core Strategy policy CP3.
- 6) The application fails to include a satisfactory assessment of the transport impact and it has thus not been demonstrated to the local planning authority's satisfaction that the local highway network is capable of operating adequately and safely with the additional traffic and increase in pedestrians and cyclists likely to be generated by the development. As such the proposal is contrary to Core Strategy Policy CP6.
- 7) The application fails to demonstrate that the development would be sustainable with regards to its location and access to services, with no feasibility study or funding details given in respect of suggested public transport improvements, and with no details having been given of proposed connections into the site for pedestrians and cyclists.. The application thus fails to demonstrate sufficient provision of, or support for, sustainable transport options. Given the out-of-settlement location, occupants of the development would have a high dependency on the use of private cars, contrary to the sustainable transport goals of the NPPF and Core Strategy policies CP1, CP3 and CP6.
- 8) The proposal fails to make satisfactory provision of adequate services, amenities and infrastructure needs and consequently would have an unacceptable adverse impact upon the amenities of the area. As such, the development would be contrary to Wokingham Borough Core Strategy policies CP1 & CP4 and Policies WIC8, WR7, of the Wokingham District Local Plan.
- 9) The application does not include sufficient information in respect of the types, amounts and specification of public open spaces to be provided on site to demonstrate to the reasonable satisfaction of the local planning authority that the development would provide for sufficient public amenity space for the occupants of the development, contrary to Core Strategy policy CP3 and emerging MDD policy TB08.
- 10) Insufficient information has been provided to demonstrate to the reasonable satisfaction of the local planning authority that the development would have an acceptable impact in terms of protected species (Great Crested Newts and Barn Owls). As such the application is contrary to Core Strategy policies CP3 & CP7.
- 11) In the absence of a hedgerow mitigation strategy the local planning authority cannot be satisfied that the development would maintain the ability of the site to

support flora and fauna, contrary to Core Strategy policy CP3(d).

- 12) The proposal fails to demonstrate adequate measures to avoid and mitigate against adverse effects upon the Thames Basin Heathlands Special Protection Area. As such, and in accordance with regulation 48(5) of the 1994 Regulations and Article 6(3) of Directive 92/43/EEC and the advice from Natural England, the development would be contrary to South East Plan policy NRM6 and Core Strategy policy CP8.
- 13) The proposal fails to make adequate provision for on-site affordable housing contrary to Core Strategy policy CP5 and the adopted Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document.

#### INFORMATIVES

- 1) Further information on the reasons for the above decision may be found in the officer report that will be available to view on the Council's web site shortly after the date of this decision, along with copies of all consultee responses.
- 2) You are advised, in compliance with The Town & Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2010, that the following policies and/or proposals in the development plan are relevant to this decision:

South East Plan: policy NRM6

Core Strategy: policies CP1, CP3, CP4, CP5, CP6, CP7, CP8, CP9 & CP11

Wokingham District Local Plan policies WBE4, WBE5, WHE12, WLL2, WR7 & WIC8.

Emerging policies of the Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document: CC01, CC03, CC04, CC05, CC07, CC09, CC10, TB05, TB07, TB08, TB21, TB23.

- 3) This refusal is in respect of the application and the drawing numbered SK11 received by the Local Planning Authority on 23rd May 2013 and the associated Planning and Community Involvement Statement, Design and Access Statement, Air Quality Assessment, Arboricultural Report, Phase 1 Geo-Environmental Site Assessment, Ecological Appraisal, Flood Risk Assessment, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Noise Impact Assessment, Archaeological Assessment, Transport Assessment and Travel Plan.

Case Officer: NC




Date: 19/08/2013

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Following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee:

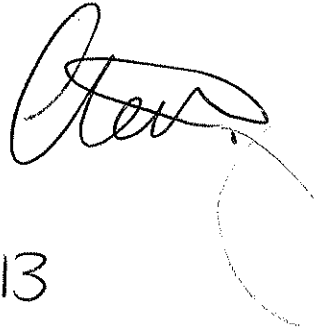
Recommendation agreed by:



Team Leader – Development Management:

Date: 21/8/13

Head of Development Management:



Date:

21 / 8 / 13