



ADDRESSING THE REASONS FOR REFUSAL

Addendum relating to application for
Land at Broadcommon Road, Hurst, RG10 0RG



LEAPER

INTRODUCTION

Leaper received notification of refusal of planning permission — relating to application number 213378 — on 10 January 2022.

Outline application 213378 was for the proposed erection of up to 33 custom and self-build homes (plots), including 14 affordable homes, on land off Broadcommon Road, Hurst, RG10 0RG.

On considering the concerns of the planning officer and consultees expressed in the Delegated Officer Report Leaper has made improvements to the proposal, including refining the layout and increasing the number of affordable homes.

This improved proposal has been submitted, in agreement with the Planning Authority, to benefit from a ‘free go’ under Regulation 9 of the 2012 Fees Regulations.

This document describes the changes made, as part of the new application, in addressing the previously cited 12 reasons for refusal:

1. Principle
2. Character of the area
3. Landscape and visual impact
4. Site sustainability
5. Traffic and access
6. Pedestrian connections
7. Loss of agricultural land
8. Lack of affordable housing
9. Lack of Employment Skills Plan
10. Lack of infrastructure and open space
11. Loss of hedgerow
12. Harm to ecology and biodiversity of the site.

Leaper is enthusiastic about working with officers and councillors on refining and improving aspects of the proposal further and in agreeing developer contributions and off-site improvements that will benefit existing and future residents. It is an outline application: the exact site layout and appearance of buildings and the detail of technical proposals (such as highways and drainage) will all be considered again by the committee at reserved matters stage.

1. PRINCIPLE

Reason for refusal: The site lies outside of settlement boundaries and represents inappropriate and unsustainable form of development in the countryside with a loss of the separate identity of Hurst and scattered development to the south and harm to the quality of the environment. With the Council able to deliver sufficient housing and self and custom-build housing to meet projected need, the proposal is contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP1, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy 2010 and Policy CC02 of the Management Development Delivery Local Plan 2012.

Location within the countryside

The site is located outside the settlement boundary of Hurst.

The Council's objective in not allowing development outside settlement boundaries is the protection of the separate identity of settlements and maintenance of the quality of the environment.

With regard to the protection of the separate identity of Hurst, the officer's report highlights the apparent harm to the openness of the countryside. The proposal will obviously result in the loss of an undeveloped part of the countryside, but such landscape harm is localised and the perceivable impact limited.

The existing hedgerow and trees on the periphery of the site provide a significant degree of containment which considerably restrict views of the site and reduce the perception of openness, particularly from Broadcommon Road.

To support the new application we've created additional computer generated images (CGIs). A full set of which is submitted as *Additional 3D Model Views* (093-3 Hurst - Additional 3D model views-1.0-.pdf). Figures 1 and 2 (within this report) show views along Broadcommon Road, comparing the current (left) and proposed (right) conditions. As can be seen, any existing perception of 'openness of the countryside' from the only public highway adjacent to the site is largely unaffected.



Figure 1. View north along Broadcommon Road from beside the new pedestrian access: the feeling of openness is largely non-existent in both images. Left: current view taken from Google Earth; right: proposed view CGI.



Figure 2. View south along Broadcommon Road from beside the new proposed main access. Left: current view taken from Google Earth; right: proposed view CGI.

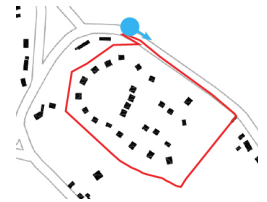
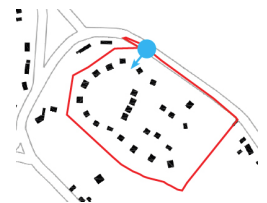


Figure 3. View into the site from the proposed main access. The sense of openness is arguably enhanced, with an improved view through the site, across the new public open space, and to the existing tree-line beyond. Left: current view taken from Google Earth; right: proposed view CGI.



The officer's report also concludes the harm to the perception of openness would be exacerbated by the creation of an opening in the existing hedgerow.

Figure 3 compares the current and proposed views into the site at the point of the new access road. The sense of openness is arguably enhanced, with an improved view through the site, across the new public open space, and to the existing tree-line beyond. New buildings will only be glimpsed, which is a characteristic of existing homes outside the centre of Hurst: set back from the road and partially screened by trees and hedgerows.

The officer's report also states the scale and density of the development — being 33 dwellings in a 2-hectare site (it should be noted the site area is actually 4.6ha) — is inconsistent with and excessive for the limited development location of Hurst (although it later raises no objection to the density).

The officer's report states the density of Hurst to be 7-11 dwellings per hectare (dph). The density of the proposal is 7.16 dph — the lower end of the density range. It is unclear how this could be considered inconsistent or excessive when compared to the rest of Hurst.

A more detailed analysis of density in Hurst is contained within the submitted document *Local Development Form - Precedent Studies* (093-3 Hurst Local Precedent Studies-1.0-.pdf).

Finally, with regard to maintaining the quality of the environment — in landscape terms, the proposal would undoubtedly have a moderate detrimental effect on the landscape character of the local area as defined in the *Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment (2019)* in that it results in the loss of a small scale pasture field.

However, the following is also integral to the proposal benefiting the other listed characteristics:

- ♦ To maintain fauna and flora, protect and retain trees and hedgerow
- ♦ To add wetland features such as a swale, pond with emergent vegetation, and vegetated drainage ditches
- ♦ To incorporate native planting and additional hedgerow
- ♦ To improve grassland management

- ♦ To create new informal recreation, such as footpaths
- ♦ To maintain the wooded rural lanes and low density settlement pattern.

These measures are designed to enhance all other 'valuable landscape attributes' as defined for the 'Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland' character area. They also follow the recommended landscape guidelines, within the *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019)*, for maintaining the quality of Hurst Farmed Clay Lowland. We think this results in an overall enhancement of the character area despite the localised loss of pasture field. This topic is discussed in greater detail in section 2 character of the area, landscape character assessment.

Notwithstanding these points, a recent appeal decision from August 2022 — Appeal Ref: APP/X0360/W/21/3280255 regarding nearby land at the junction of Sawpit Road and School Road in Hurst — found that the so called 'tilted balance' is triggered because of the 5-year housing land position and that the most important policies for determining the appeal are out of date. As a consequence, reduced weight was given to the identified conflict of being a site within the countryside.

For these reasons, we argue that the site is a suitable location for housing having regard to national planning policies, the Council's spatial strategy for new housing and housing land supply.

The issue of encroachment on the scattered development to the south is dealt with in section 2 character of the area, location of development. The appropriateness and sustainability of the proposal is addressed in section 2 character of the area and in section 4 site sustainability.

Self-build development and local need

In the officer's report, the Council claim to be able to deliver sufficient custom and self-build housing to meet current and projected need. For the reasons described by the planning inspector in the appeal decision previously mentioned this is arguably not the case.

The Council should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs, including ensuring that there is sufficient housing for people wishing to commission or build their own homes.

The *Self-Build Needs Assessment* by Icení, submitted with this application, argues there is local demand for custom and self-build housing beyond that on the Council's register. Authorities are required to supplement demand data from their register with additional data from secondary sources.

The report also suggests that the Council is falling short in giving true custom and self-build permissions to enough suitable serviced plots of land to meet the demand.

The benefits of providing custom and self-build housing are recognised as important in the officer's report. There is also a valid argument that it promotes continued social cohesion in the village. This type of development should therefore be encouraged as a positive way to diversify the housing market and increase consumer choice.

The local need for affordable housing is also relevant here. Affordable housing continues to be provided in the Borough though there is proven need for more.

Our resubmission increases the number of affordable homes proposed from 14 to 17, taking the overall percentage to above 50%. The mix of house sizes has also been adjusted to better suit the identified need of the community. This is discussed in more detail in section 8 lack of affordable housing.

2. CHARACTER OF THE AREA

Reason for refusal: The location of the development on the edge of the settlement of Hurst results in encroachment of development into the countryside, harming the rural character and setting of the area. More particularly, there is a merging of development between the southern settlement edge of Hurst and the scattered and historic development to the south east and south west which leads to a erosion in the impression of several small hamlets. There is a merging of development between the Areas of Special Character of Hurst and Wokingham Road which coalesces these identities. The suburban or overly urban appearance, layout and pattern of development, including the siting of a flat building in a visible location on the eastern edge of the site, is of contrast to and at odds with the linear and detached pattern of dwelling houses on nearby roads.

Landscape character assessment

The site falls within character area I4: 'Hurst Farmed Clay Lowlands' as defined in the *Wokingham Borough Landscape Character Assessment (2019) (LCA)*.

The site contributes to some of the identified key qualities of the character area, particularly being within a setting of narrow rural lanes, with rough hedgerow and trees creating an enclosed landscape, and an intimate character of small scale pasture field.

The LCA sets out the relevant landscape strategy for the character area which, amongst other things, seeks to conserve and enhance the rural pastoral intimate character. In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the low-density settlement pattern of farmsteads along rural lanes and the small village of Hurst.

The LCA also provides specific guidelines for conserving and enhancing 'Hurst Farmed Clay Lowlands'. The following is proposed in response:

- ♦ *Guideline: Increase the extent of native deciduous woodland, using locally occurring native species to create a more mixed woodland. Conserve the area of woodland east of Hurst Lodge and create green links to this and other woodland habitats outside the area.*
Response: The landscape strategy proposes extensive new tree and hedgerow planting across the site, of locally native species, to create new ecological corridors and supplement existing habitats.

- ♦ *Conserve remnant standard trees within hedgerows and plan for the next generation of hedgerow trees with a programme of tree planting.*
Where standard trees remain extant within the hedgerows, they will be protected and managed. New hedgerow trees will be planted where gaps occur, to perpetuate the tree-lined lanes character.
- ♦ *Conserve and manage hedgerows as important wildlife habitats and landscape features, as well as the links they provide across the landscape and between areas of woodland. Reinstate or repair hedgerows with native species.*
The existing native hedgerows, which define the application site, are to be retained, gapped-up as necessary and sensitively managed in the 'South of England' style to ensure their health and longevity is retained.
- ♦ *Conserve and protect the small-scale pasture fields, and encourage appropriate management of grassland by grazing.*
As stated in section 1 principle, location within the countryside, the proposal will result in the loss of a small scale pasture field. However, the development is largely screened from the surrounding roads (as per the description of it as an 'enclosed landscape') so such landscape harm would be localised and limited.
- ♦ *Conserve, enhance and manage the small scale wetland habitats particularly from changes in land use and encroachment by secondary woodland and scrub. An appropriate wetland management regime is critical.*
New seasonally wet swales and a wetland area with emergent vegetation provide complimentary wetland habitats across the application site, with foraging and habitat opportunities for wildlife.
- ♦ *Maintain the rural settlement pattern of farmsteads and small villages through control of new development, avoiding linear spread of development.*
The proposal provides a transition between the linear and urbanised form of development to the north and the sporadic and less dense 'farmsteads' to the south. The density of the proposal reduces from north to south, where the new homes are loosely set within very large plots, effectively replicating the low-density settlement

pattern of farmsteads along rural lanes. Linear spread is avoided. Figures 6 and 7 show the sizeable gap between the development and the southern farmsteads ensuring the rural settlement pattern beyond the site is unaffected and well separated.

- ♦ *Maintain and enhance the character of enclosed rural lanes resisting unsympathetic highway improvements, infrastructure and signage.* The proposed development would retain and strengthen almost all of the peripheral landscaping. Although there would be some tree and hedgerow loss in the vicinity of the proposed access off Broadcommon Road, the character of the peripheral narrow rural lanes with rough hedgerow and trees will remain largely intact.

The existing native hedgerow is to be sensitively managed, with new tree planting within the hedgerow where gaps have developed.

Figure 4 is a CGI of the winding narrow lane within the site. It is deliberately unadopted to avoid unsympathetic highway requirements and is designed to replicate the feeling of enclosed rural lanes and avoid an overly engineered highway-led solution.

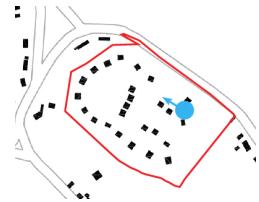


Figure 4. View from northern side of the internal lane looking north west, CGI.

- ♦ *Enhance sense of place through careful design (including siting, massing, scale, materials and landscape – and sensitive lighting to retain dark skies at night) to minimise the impacts of any potential new development on valuable attributes, avoiding the introduction*

of visually prominent large-scale or vertical structures into this intimate scale landscape.

The proposal puts biodiversity at the heart of the development and respects the local landscape character with the palette of hard and soft materials, described in more detail in the Design and Access Statement, Landscape Masterplan, and Design Code. These choices aim to minimise any landscape and visual impacts of the proposed development. Siting, massing, and scale are discussed later in this chapter. Significantly the previously proposed flat block has been removed to avoid any building being too visually prominent.

- ♦ *Protect the perception of rural tranquillity in the landscape, through the management of development.*

The proposal will cause limited and localised effects on the appearance of the countryside and the perception of rural tranquillity because of the contained nature of the site and its surroundings, and the retention of trees and hedgerows along its peripheral boundaries.

Landscape design

Previously there was no objection to the landscape design, subject to the landscaping details that would be forthcoming at reserved matters or individual planning application stage.

Notwithstanding, we have made some improvements to address a couple of minor concerns raised in the officer's report:

- ♦ *"[I]n many cases the dwellings are sited close to the front boundary and the minimal setback minimises the ability to establish any worthwhile planting to soften the built form of the buildings and the street scene"*

The buildings have been set further back within their plots, particularly the semi-detached homes surrounding the new public open space/green. The landscape strategy includes for larger front gardens, defined by hedges, to reinforce the rural character of the development. Figure 5 is a CGI showing the increased set-back of homes from front boundaries along the internal lane. This provides ample room for worthwhile planting to soften the impact of buildings.



Figure 5. View along southern side of the internal lane showing greater set-back and opportunity for planting to the front of dwellings, CGI.

- ♦ *"[T]he development would not sufficiently complement the predominant character of tree-lined streets in this part of Hurst and would instead create a more suburban feel. This would be at contrast with the need to transition from the formal pattern of development in the settlement limits to the scattered settlement pattern of countryside development beyond."*

Figures 4 and 5 show the effect of extensive planting along the lane within the development, closely reflecting the character of tree-lined and gently winding rural lanes in this part of Hurst.

Rather than being suburban, the low density and loose layout of the proposed development is more rural in character and appropriate to its transitional role between the linear, denser, and urbanised form of development to the north and the more sporadic and less dense nature of the dwellings to the south.

A revised landscape masterplan is submitted with this application (CW0144-D-001 C Hurst Landscape Masterplan.pdf).

Location of development

The site is located on the southern periphery of Hurst. It lies very near to but not adjacent to the settlement edge to the north, although there are three dwellings immediately alongside the northern boundary, connecting the site to the settlement.

The officer's report focusses on three concerns relating to the location of the development:

1. Encroachment of development into the countryside, harming the rural character and setting of the area
2. A merging of development between the southern settlement edge of Hurst and the scattered and historic development to the south east and south west which leads to a erosion in the impression of several small hamlets
3. A merging of development between the Areas of Special Character of Hurst and Wokingham Road which coalesces these identities.

Undeniably, the proposal would represent the encroachment of development into the countryside with a consequent erosion of its rural character and appearance. However, the development will be largely screened from the surrounding roads. Although it would nonetheless result in a permanent and obvious loss of an undeveloped part of the countryside, such landscape harm would be localised and limited.

The figure-ground plan at figure 6 clearly shows how the development is contiguous with the built form of Hurst to the north and a distinct separation is maintained between the new development and the scattered and historic development to the south east and south west. From nowhere would the impression of several small hamlets to the south east and south west be negated by the proposal.

The plan also demonstrates how the spatial arrangement of the proposal is not out of character with the more recent developments on the urban fringe of Hurst. This is discussed in greater detail in layout and pattern within this chapter.



Figure 6. A figure-ground plan showing the relationship between built and unbuilt space. The plan shows distinct separation between the development and the scattered and historic development to the south east and south west.

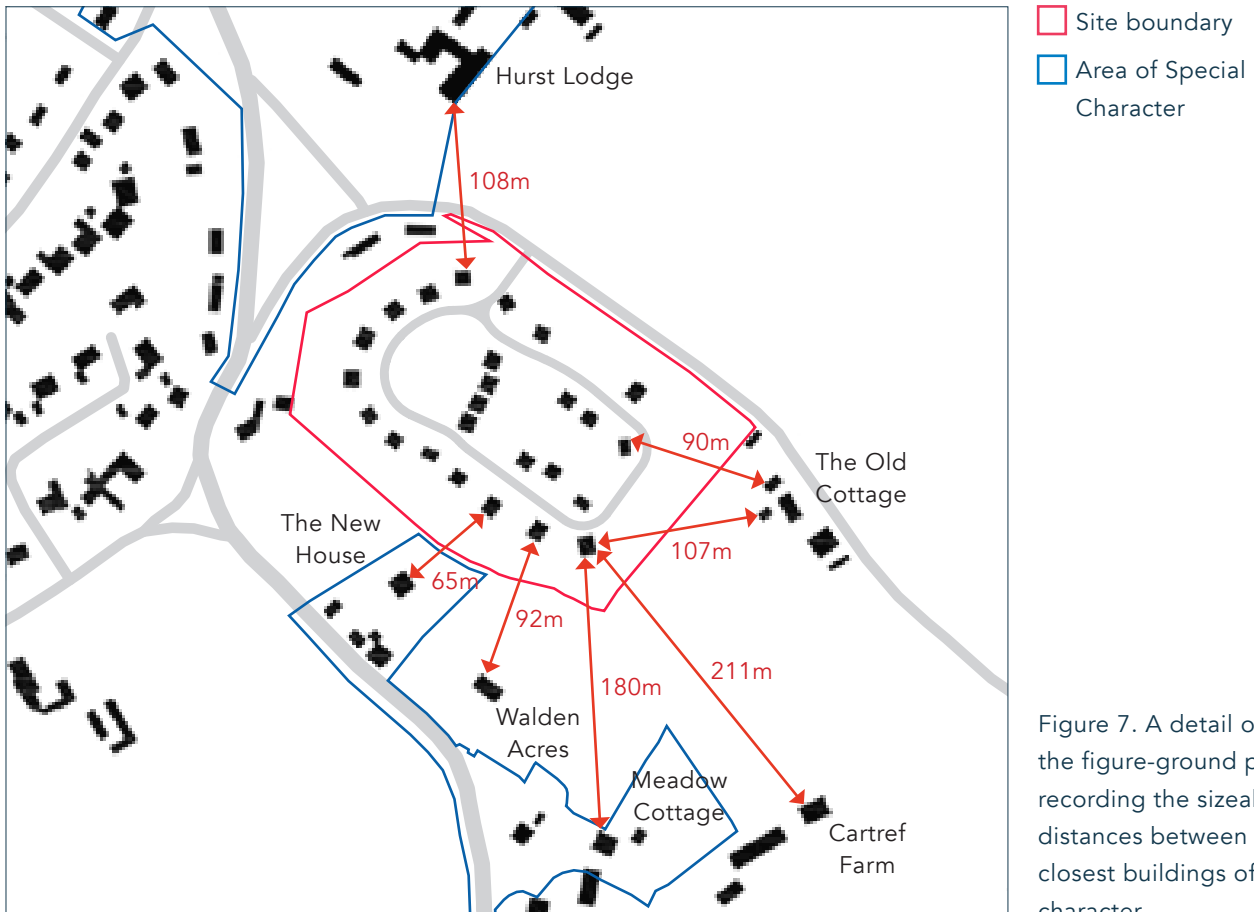


Figure 7. A detail of the figure-ground plan recording the sizeable distances between the closest buildings of character.

Lastly, figure 7 shows how the proposal site sits between two Areas of Special Character (ASC). A short boundary is shared between the proposal site and the Wokingham Road ASC to the south. There is 65m between the nearest buildings with many large mature trees in between. This provides clear separation and precludes views of the development from the ASC so that it's not visually detrimental in any way.

The site is separated from the Hurst ASC to the north by several existing properties. There is 108m between the northern extent of development and the listed building within the ASC (Hurst Lodge), with hedgerow and trees along both sides of Broadcommon Lane screening any impact. The proposal will arguably have no affect on this ASC.

The Council's Conservation Officer reviewed the previously submitted documentation and the proposal in general and raised no objection.

There appears to be no evidence that the proposed development would cause the coalescence of the identities of these two ASCs.

Layout and pattern

The officer's report states that the suburban or overly urban appearance, layout and pattern of development is of contrast to and at odds with the linear and detached pattern of dwelling houses on nearby roads.

The proposed layout has been carefully considered to avoid looking like suburban infill and is an extension of the cul-de-sac form of development which is very typical of the edge of Hurst. Figure 8 highlights the prevalence of this layout in Hurst.

The planning inspector, in the recently upheld appeal for Sawpit Road and School Road in Hurst, also did not consider the cul-de-sac form and relatively low density development would unacceptably contrast with the pattern and form of development in the village. Rather, that the layout is included in other layouts in Hurst.

The submitted document *Local Development Form - Precedent Studies* (093-3 Hurst Local Precedent Studies-1.0-.pdf) provides a more detailed analysis of Hurst's urban form, density, per household share of green open space, distance between houses and their relationship with streets.

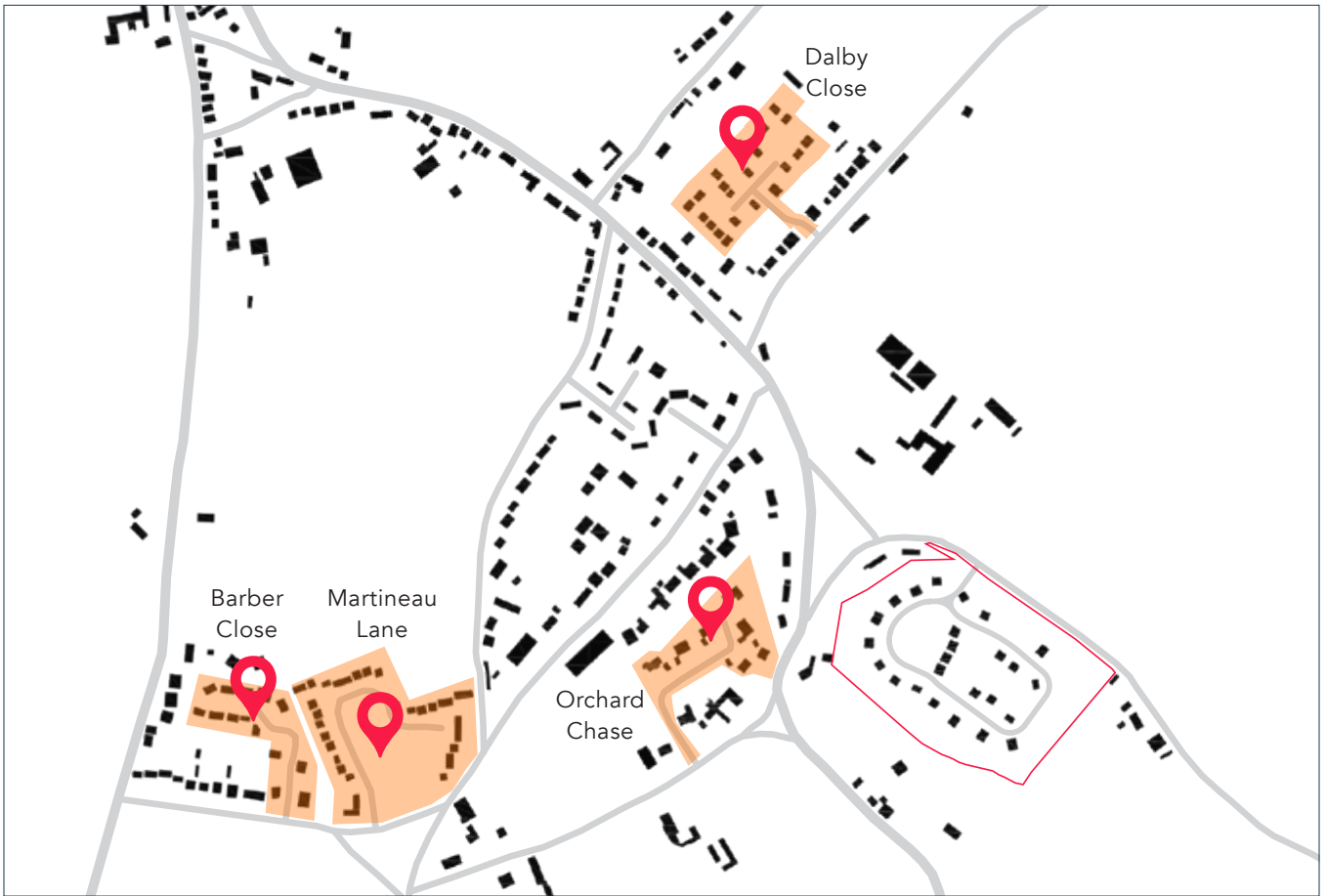


Figure 8. Figure-ground plan highlighting the urban form of more recent developments on the edge of Hurst.

Furthermore, the internal road is designed to be rural and lane-like in character. It's relatively narrow, bound by grass verge with rough hedgerow and trees, ditches, and a footpath on one side only. Surface materials will be chosen to reflect rural lanes and tracks. Images within the submitted document *Additional 3D Model Views* (093-3 Hurst - Additional 3D model views-1.0-.pdf), and figures 4 and 5 within this document, demonstrate the rural, rather than suburban, feel to the internal road.

Form, scale, and siting

The officer's report raised concerns about the siting of a flat building in a visible location on the eastern edge of the site. The officer's criticism of the flat block is accepted and this has been removed. The flat building has been replaced by more typical semi-detached houses, reminiscent of smaller Victorian-style dwellings in the village, such as Diamond, Cornwall, and Caversham Villas on Broadwater Lane. The new layout can be seen in figure 9, with the 'villas' defining one of edge of the public green.



Figure 9. Illustrative layout showing the revised submission.

The location, scale, and massing of the buildings and open space is designed to enable occasional views out into the rural landscape and into and through the development. The spacing of plots and buildings has been adjusted to allow greater distance between the development and existing buildings to the south. A larger green space, acting as a buffer, to the south is also created.

The other area of concern in the officer's report was that buildings were built too close to the street, limiting the potential for landscaping and tree planting to the street verge. This has already been addressed in character of the area, landscape design: all buildings have been moved further from the street to allow greater scope for landscaping.

3. LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT

Reason for refusal: The proposed development would have a major adverse visual impact on the landscape character of the area and the increase in the amount of activity and magnitude of change to the landscape is unacceptable, contrary to Paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy 2010, Policies CC01, CC02, CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 and Section 4 of the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2012.

Landscape and visual impact assessment

The Council's Tree Officer reviewed the previously submitted *Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)* and disagrees with the conclusions drawn in relation to assessed sensitivity and the magnitude of change on the landscape character area.

The landscape character assessment is discussed in section 2 character of the area, landscape character assessment. The assessment of sensitivity on the borough character area considers the impact of the development on the scale and character of the borough landscape as a whole rather than just the immediate area around Hurst. The development of an individual field within the overall character type of I:Farmed Clay Lowlands LCT/I4: Hurst Farmed Clay Lowlands LCA is less than the effects of the development upon the immediate landscape.

The LVIA acknowledges that, at the immediate landscape setting scale, there will be a loss of a key element which is characteristic of the landscape character: the small scale pasture field. The LVIA predicts the resulting magnitude of change at the site will be high, with a major to moderate impact upon both local landscape character and close proximity visual amenity.

Mitigation to reduce the predicted high landscape and visual impact has been incorporated into the design, by following the provided guidelines and enhancing the other key qualities of the character area as described in section 2.

The Design Code, Plot Passports, and Landscape Strategy set out a framework of large gardens, defined by soft hedgerow boundaries, which respect and enhance the local ecological networks and

strengthens landscape character, through extensive tree and hedgerow planting. The documents set out where trees are to be incorporated into domestic gardens and will provide a palette of appropriate species to be used. Focusing upon landscape character and respecting the soft landscape setting of Hurst, trees planted within the front garden hedgerow boundaries will also be encouraged.

4. SITE SUSTAINABILITY

Reason for refusal: The site is not within convenient walking distance of day-to-day facilities and services, public transport and schools and would not encourage a mode shift towards more sustainable modes. This will result in high dependence on private vehicle use, increased carbon emissions and an unsustainable development, contrary to Paragraphs 79 and Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policies CP1, CP6, CP9 and CP11 of the Core Strategy 2010.

Although the site is physically separated from the main body of the residential area to the north it is nonetheless geographically close to it.

Hurst has a number of facilities including a Post Office and village store, primary school, pre-school, pubs, church, and village hall. Secondary schools and medical surgeries are located further afield. Given the close proximity to the existing settlement, future residents of the proposed development would experience a similar degree of accessibility to local facilities as those residents of the surrounding existing residential areas.

There are several bus stops near the site serving two bus routes which provide services to the larger settlements of Reading and Wokingham.

The nearest railway station is at Twyford, which is approximately 2.7km north of the site and is accessible by bike and bus.

The site is also close to promoted 'quiet links' suitable for cycling which provide connecting access south to Winnersh and Wokingham, and north to Twyford.

The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) *Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on Foot* (CIHT Guidelines) sets out some parameters for appropriate walking distances. The guidelines suggest that the preferred maximum walking distance for commuting/schools/leisure is 2km with 1km being acceptable and 500m being preferred. The preferred maximum distance to walk to town centres and journeys elsewhere is 800m and 1.2km respectively. 1.95km is stated to be the distance up to which people are prepared to walk as their main mode of transport.

The village facilities are located well within 1.95km of the site, suggesting most people will walk. Many of Hurst's facilities can be reached within a much shorter 5-10-minute walk, including the post office and store (400m), village hall (850m), pre-school (850m), primary School (650m), recreation ground (350m), pubs (650m, 1.1km, 1.1km), and bus stops (350m).

Despite vehicle speeds in the vicinity being low (85th percentile speed at the site access is under 30mph) due to the nature of the roads, it is acknowledged that the walking environment can be improved. To this end we've explored, in some detail, the provision of improved footways into Hurst as part of the application. This is covered in greater detail in section 6 pedestrian connections.

The National Travel Survey (2019) demonstrates that the average distance per journey by cycling is approximately 4.4km, with the current average length of an employment and leisure cycle trip being 5.2km.

The evidence also demonstrates that all facilities in Hurst are located within a short cycle journey of generally less than 5 minutes. Twyford railway station is approximately an 11min cycle.

Further essential facilities and services including railway stations, local and supermarket shopping, a GP surgery, and employment, are provided in Twyford, Reading, Winnersh and Wokingham which are accessible from the bus stops in close proximity of the site.

Future residents of the proposed development would benefit from realistic and viable opportunities to reach key local services and facilities on foot and by cycle, including employment, primary education, retail and leisure facilities, without the need to wholly rely on the private car.

The development would bring economic short-term advantages in respect of construction jobs and expenditure on materials. In the longer term it would increase household spending within the locality and support the vitality and growth of nearby shops and services.

A revised *Residential Travel Plan Statement* (216150-P4 TP.pdf) and *Transport Statement* (216150-P5 TS.pdf) have been submitted which addresses these points in more detail.

5. TRAFFIC AND ACCESS

Reason for refusal: Due to a lack of adequate information, the Council cannot be satisfied that the proposal makes satisfactory provision for safe and accessible vehicular, cycle and pedestrian access into and within the site, including clarification of the road safety audit, location of the traffic counter potentially influencing vehicle speeds and the required visibility splays, road widths that enable unimpeded movement of refuse and emergency vehicles and pavements to both sides of the internal road. This is contrary to Paragraphs 110-112 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP1, CP3 and CP6 of the Core Strategy 2010 and Section 5 (including S11) of the Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document 2012.

The issues addressed in this section are described in more detail, with supporting technical information, in the updated *Transport Statement* (216150-P5 TS.pdf). We believe the changes made and additional information should be sufficient for the Highways Officer to conclude the proposal makes satisfactory provision for safe and accessible vehicular, cycle, and pedestrian movement into and within the site.

Car parking

The officer's report concluded there is sufficient on- and off-street car parking but raised concerns over the lack of on-street spaces at the southern end of the site and found no reference to electric vehicle charging points.

Submitted drawing 'Car Parking Strategy Parameter Plan' (HUR-PTE-ZZ-00-DR-A-10011-B-Car Parking Strategy Parameter Plan.pdf) now shows four (increased from two) unallocated, on-street parking spaces at the southern end of the site, representing a more balanced distribution of spaces across the site (six to the north; four to the south). There will be two accessible visitor parking spaces, one at each end of the site.

We can confirm each plot will have an electric vehicle charging point, secured by planning condition. At reserved matters stage we would like to discuss acceptable arrangements for providing charging points to the visitors spaces.

Traffic

An Automatic Traffic Count (ATC) was undertaken between 14-20 May 2021 on Broadcommon Road. The officer's report states the location of the ATC was not provided, resulting in the Council's Highways Officer questioning the suitability of the results in informing the design of the access, adding to reason for refusal 5.

A map showing the location of the ATC, immediately adjacent to the proposed site access, is now included in the *Transport Statement*.

In terms of additional traffic, the officer's report suggested there would be 150 new residents. In our view this is excessive: there are likely to be 2-4 residents per house on average, totalling a maximum of 132 people.

Vehicular access

A single vehicular access point is still proposed onto Broadcommon Road. Previously, this was 4.8m wide, which is not in line with the Highways Design Guidance of 5m. The width of the access road has now been increased to 5m in line with the guidance.

Previously there was no issue with the technical design of visibility splays. Issues raised were to do with the a lack of clarity over the loss of hedgerow and the legitimacy of the speed data. The location of the ATC is now confirmed and loss of hedgerow is addressed in section 11 loss of hedgerow. A visibility splay plan is shown in appendix F of the *Transport Statement*. This plan also shows the pedestrian splays.

New swept path analysis for the access and movement within the site has been provided as appendix G of the *Transport Statement*. This has been updated with the Council's preferred sizes for a refuse lorry and fire tender and demonstrate other vehicles will not be impeded.

Detail on the proposed adoption of the roads has now also been provided in the *Transport Statement*. All roads are to be retained as private. Leaper is happy to agree this within a s106 and provide details of the proposed management company in due course. Confirmation of the management company could be set by condition.

Pedestrian access

Three pedestrian access points are proposed: one in the form of a pavement to the vehicular entrance and two solely pedestrian accesses along the new footpath (which is within the site boundary), parallel to Broadcommon Road. The middle pedestrian access is the current gated entrance to the site.

This approach was previously supported in principle (despite the report referring to only two pedestrian access points) although the visibility splays provided were inadequate. These splays have now been redrawn at 2.4m x 43m and are shown in appendix F of the *Transport Statement*.

The new footpath, parallel to Broadcommon Road, which extends along the inside north eastern boundary is now drawn at 3m wide as suggested in the officer's report.

The officer questioned the relevance of this route but we feel strongly that it provides a much safer public route along Broadcommon Road than the highway itself.

Another issue which contributed to reason for refusal 5 was that a pavement was provided only to the outside perimeter of the road around the site. This is of concern because it is the longer route and pedestrians are likely to cut across the road. The footway that follows the lane now traces the shorter, inside route. A double footway has been avoided in order to maintain the rural, lane-like character and avoid an over-engineered solution.

Typical tactile paving and dropped kerb construction details have been provided as suggested in the report. They form part of appendix H of the *Transport Statement*.

Off-site works

The officer's report states that issues raised in the submitted Road Safety Audit (RSA) of the proposed access have not been addressed. The access proposals have been updated to incorporate outstanding issues from the RSA.

The RSA notes potential future loss of visibility with verge and trees obscuring visibility. The proposed landscaping plan ensures that suitable

vegetation is planted and maintenance occurs to ensure suitable visibility splays.

Another comment was that the 'pedestrian in road ahead' warning signs were not in the driver's vision in some locations. This can be addressed at detailed design stage, with the signs relocated to a more appropriate location. Further detail is provided in the *Transport Statement*.

Finally, this application is supported by more proposed off-site improvements in addition to the three new passing places proposed previously. Feasibility work has been undertaken for a new off-site footway which provides a continuous, safer walking route between the site and the village. Indicative plans are shown in figure 10 and discussed in more detail in section 6 pedestrian connections.

Construction

A framework construction method statement was requested in pre-application comments relating to the previous application. It was an oversight that this was not provided and we include one as part of this application: *Draft Construction Traffic Management Plan* (216150 - Draft CTMP.pdf).

Waste

The officer's report identifies that the incorrect dimensions for a refuse vehicle were used when tracking movements within the previous application. This has now been addressed so the Council's Highways Officer can be satisfied that refuse vehicles can service the site without disruption to normal vehicle flows.

Updated drawings are available within appendix G of the *Transport Statement*.

Figure 10. Accompanying proposal for a new off-site footway, creating a continuous footway from the site in to Hurst.

6. PEDESTRIAN CONNECTIONS

Reason for refusal: The proposed site does not have access to a safe and accessible pedestrian connection to the village of Hurst, with increased traffic arising from the development posing safety risks for future users, including school children. This is contrary to Paragraphs 92 and 112 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy 2010.

We agree the walking environment around the site can be improved and made safer.

Therefore, as part of this proposal we include feasibility work undertaken for the submission and implementation of off-site highway works, including new footway, passing bays, and other improvement works. These are detailed in the submitted *Transport Statement* (216150-P5 TS.pdf), including draft general arrangement drawings within appendix H showing off-site highway works and passing bays, and the proposed new footway.

The proposed new footway — shown in figure 10 — will ensure a continuous footway between the development site and Hurst. We have commissioned design work from civil engineers Canham Consulting, an specific Arboricultural Impact Assessment by Aspect Arboriculture

a specific Road Safety Audit (appendix I within the Transport Statement) to demonstrate this is a feasible and deliverable solution. Issues raised in the Road Safety Audit can be addressed at the detailed design stage.

We welcome further discussion with the highway authority to find an agreeable solution to providing a safer pedestrian route and delivering these off-site improvements.

7. LOSS OF AGRICULTURAL LAND

Reason for refusal: Due to a lack of adequate information, the Council cannot be satisfied that the proposal does not involve the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. This has implications for food production and the retention of the agricultural industry, contrary to paragraph 174 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 and Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy 2010.

The site is greenfield and is used as grazing land.

Agricultural land is classified into five grades. Grade 3 is subdivided in to 3a and 3b. Grade 1 is best quality and grade 5 is poorest quality. The best and most versatile agricultural land (BMV) is land graded 1 to 3a.

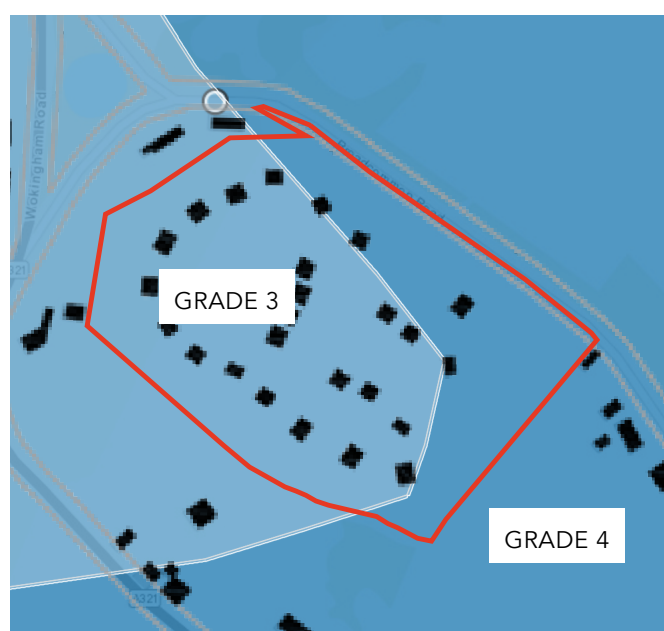


Figure 11. ALC Grades, Natural England Open Data Publication and Defra group ArcGIS Online organisation

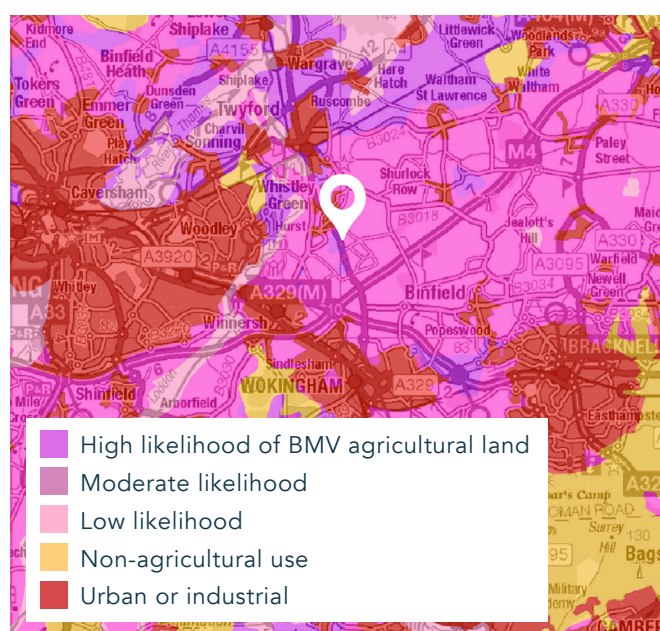


Figure 12. Likelihood of BMV Agricultural Land - Strategic scale map London and the South East, Defra

The Defra ArcGIS Online map (figure 11) (digitised from the published 1:250,000 Regional Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) Map for London and the South East) show the site is roughly divided in half with the north western side being grade 3 (good to moderate - with moderate limitations that affect the choice of crops, timing and type of cultivation, harvesting or the level of yield) and the south eastern is grade 4 (poor - with severe limitations which significantly restrict the range of crops or level of yields).

Grade 3 land is not divided into subgrades 3a and 3b on the 1:250,000 scale regional ALC maps (on which figure 11 is based). In the absence of a detailed assessment, it is not possible to determine whether the Grade 3 land is Grade 3a (best and most versatile land) or Grade 3b (not best and most versatile land).

However, Natural England's 'Predictive Best and Most Versatile (BMV) Land Assessment' for the South East region (extract shown in figure 12) show the site is within a large area of only moderate likelihood of BMV (20-60% chance).

The National Soil Map of England and Wales categorises the soilscape as 'slowly permeable seasonally wet slightly acid but base-rich loamy and clayey soils', also classifying it as having only moderate fertility, mostly suited to grass production.

Given much of the site is grade 4 (poor) and the remainder has only moderate likelihood of being grade 3a and moderate fertility it is a reasonable assumption the proposal does not involve the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land. The prevailing use, limited scale, and secluded configuration of the site confirms that it serves little agricultural function. This is supported by the fact that the previous application received 'no objection' from Natural England.

8. LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Reason for refusal: In the absence of a satisfactory legal agreement, the proposal does not make adequate provision for affordable housing and the proposed mix, tenure and split of affordable housing does not suit the identified needs of the locality and the borough. This is contrary to Section 5 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP1 and CP5 of the Core Strategy 2010, Policy TB05 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 and the Affordable Housing SPD.

The proposal will contribute to the provision of affordable housing in the Borough for which there is an undisputed local need. The delivery of affordable and market housing will contribute towards the social dimension of sustainability through the provision of dwellings to meet the needs of present and future generations.

	1-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed+	TOTAL
Required (Berkshire SHMA Feb 2016)	934	3,488	5,605	2,862	12,889
	7.2%	27.1%	43.5%	22.2%	100%
Previous application	2	10	7	14	33
	6%	30%	21%	42%	100%
This application	0	12	7	14	33
	0%	36%	21%	42%	100%

Table 1. Dwelling mix

Dwelling mix

The mix of homes has been changed to better meet the types, tenures, and sizes of dwelling needed by the community. The proposed mix remains broadly consistent with *The Berkshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment* (February 2016) (SHMA) as can be seen in table 1.

The proposal has a larger proportion of four-bedroom homes than required by the SHMA, however this was not previously opposed because the larger dwellings are consistent with the setting of Hurst, and the Council's own self-build register indicates a strong preference for three-plus bedroom homes.

Affordable housing

Leaper is committed to providing ample affordable homes and is keen to secure these through a satisfactory legal agreement.

The Council's Housing Officer previously sought 14 on-site affordable homes. Leaper has increased the number of affordable homes in this application from 14 to 17, which represents over 50% of the total number of homes and the size of homes provided has been adjusted to better reflect the requirement of the Local Plan and Affordable Housing SPD. The breakdown of affordable homes is shown in table 2.

	Flats		Houses			
	1-bed	2-bed	2-bed	3-bed	4-bed	TOTAL
Required: Local Plan and Affordable Housing SPD	3	2	4	3	2	14
Previous application	2	4	6	2	0	14
This application	0	0	12	3	2	17

Table 2. Affordable homes

There is a requirement for 70% social rent and 30% intermediate. Previously, a split of 57% and 43% was proposed; the split is now 70% (12 homes) social rent and 30% (five) intermediate homes (proposed as discount market plots). The location of the affordable homes is shown on submitted drawing HUR-PTE-ZZ-00-DR-A-10010.

The officer's report stated that the number of two-bedroom flats was too high, and that most residents seek the outside space that comes with houses. The flat block has been removed (see also section 2 character of the area; form, scale, and siting) meaning all the flats have become houses with the benefit of the additional private outdoor amenity space this brings. The two one-bed flats have become two-bed houses.

The officer's report also stated there was an under provision of three- and four-bedroom affordable homes. This has also been addressed with two additional three-bed affordable homes and two additional four-bed affordable homes which better reflects the requirement in the Local Plan and the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Leaper is keen to work with the Council to secure this provision through a legal agreement.

9. LACK OF EMPLOYMENT SKILLS PLAN

Reason for refusal: In the absence of a satisfactory legal agreement, the proposal does not make adequate provision for employment skills generation associated with the construction and delivery of housing, contrary to Policy TB12 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014.

Leaper is keen to work with the Council and the economic sustainability team to agree a draft Employment Skills Plan or in lieu financial contribution to secure training and apprenticeship opportunities associated with the development. This was also offered in the previous application.

Like the Council, Leaper is committed to encouraging both the training and use of local labour and supply chains in construction. Custom and self-builders are more inclined than typical developers to use local builders and tradesmen. 'Laying the foundations: A Housing Strategy for England' (HM Government, 2011) highlights how the custom and self-build sector is particularly effective at safeguarding and creating new jobs and strengthening the construction supply chain within local economies. A thriving self-build sector brings employment and business opportunities to the local area and supports communities to flourish.

10. LACK OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPEN SPACE

Reason for refusal: The proposal does not make adequate or appropriate arrangements for the improvement or provision of infrastructure, services, community and other facilities, contrary to Policy CP4 of the Core Strategy 2010. More particularly, in the absence of a satisfactory legal agreement, the proposal does not make adequate provision for public open space, parks and gardens and community facilities, contrary to the Paragraph 93 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP3 of the Core Strategy 2010 and Policy TB08 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014.

The officer's report makes several references to there being no Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) associated with custom and self-build development and this threatening the delivery of infrastructure to support the increased population.

We wish to stress it's not our choice not to pay the levy and we're not trying to avoid it. Exemption from the levy is given by the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 set by government with the objective of encouraging the custom and self-build sector and opening up custom and self-build to lower income households. This should not weigh against the proposal.

It's also important to note that there is a three-year 'clawback' arrangement, so if a custom or self-build property is sold within the first three years the full CIL levy becomes payable. Failure to notify the Council of this will result in enforcement action and surcharges. This will be the case on this project.

Leaper understands the additional pressure new housing puts on already strained services and we are willing to work with the council to agree ways in which we can make adequate and appropriate arrangements for the improvement or provision of infrastructure, services, community and other facilities.

Infrastructure

Leaper is happy to enter into a legal agreement for this development, should it be approved, which commits to a sum for the provision of infrastructure, services, community and other facilities, subject to the Council making a case for such provisions.

A MyJourney contribution is also proposed to allow for travel information packs, dedicated travel webpages, contact pages, and information on travel options.

As already detailed in section 6 pedestrian connections, we would also like to explore, with the Council, the delivery of off-site footway and highway improvements to and from the village to create a safer environment for pedestrians and other road users.

Open space

The officer's report on the previous application states, excluding sport facilities the total provision of 0.68ha of open space is 0.04ha below the minimum requirement.

We have redesigned the layout to provide more open space. The revised proposal provides 0.85ha of open space — a significant increase of a quarter (0.17ha) and 0.13ha above the minimum open space provision given the estimated population.

There remains 0.33ha of open space in the centre of the site serving a general purpose as a green. This space includes children's play equipment. The open space in the south eastern corner, intended as semi natural green space, has been made significantly larger (now 0.52ha, compared to 0.41ha in the previous application). This also serves as a bigger buffer between the development and dwellings to the south. The proposed green spaces can clearly be seen in figure 9.

Finally, the officer's report also states the central green open space or 'village green' is not large enough for a development of 33 dwellings. There is no evidence to support this claim nor a universally accepted method for calculating the correct size of a village green. We feel the size is ample given the multitude other green open spaces available in the vicinity. It provides a more maintained green open space with opportunity for formal and incidental play and other forms of recreation. It also provides a pleasant outlook for the 21 properties that border it.

11. LOSS OF HEDGEROW

Reason for refusal: Due to a lack of information relating to the significance of the hedgerow to Broadcommon Road and a lack of certainty relating to the extent of hedgerow loss to facilitate the vehicular and pedestrian accesses and required splays, the Council cannot be satisfied that the proposal does not result in the loss of an irreplaceable habitat of principle importance. Further, there is also a lack of detail pertaining to the significance of the ridge and furrow field and the proposal has the potential for the loss of an irreplaceable landscape feature of national importance. This is inconsistent with Section 13.92 of the Wokingham Landscape Character Assessment 2004 and contrary to Paragraphs 174 and 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP1, CP3 and CP11 of the Core Strategy 2010 and Policies CC03 and TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014.

Loss of hedgerow

The proposal is to retain and strengthen most of the peripheral landscaping of rough hedgerow and trees. Although there would be some degree of hedgerow loss, at the proposed new access off Broadcommon Road and the proposed passing bay on the road frontage, the character of the narrow rural lanes will remain.

The correct management — including methods, recommended heights and spreads, and timing of operations for all boundary hedgerows — will be set out in a Management Strategy. With the correct management, in the ‘South of England’ style, the new and existing native, species-rich hedgerows will support a wide variety of flora and fauna, ensuring ecological connectivity across the site and within the wider habitat network and will retain and enhance landscape character.

The officer’s report makes frequent reference to ‘ancient hedgerow’ and the loss of an irreplaceable habitat of principle importance. With regard to ‘ancient hedgerow’, this is not a designation within the Framework or Standing Advice linked to ancient trees and woodland. The hedgerow has been assessed in the previous Arboricultural Impact Assessment and the parts which will be removed on Broadcommon Road were deemed to be ‘low quality’ having been left unmanaged and become leggy.

To accommodate the proposed development the extent of tree and hedgerow loss is detailed within the submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment by agb Environmental.

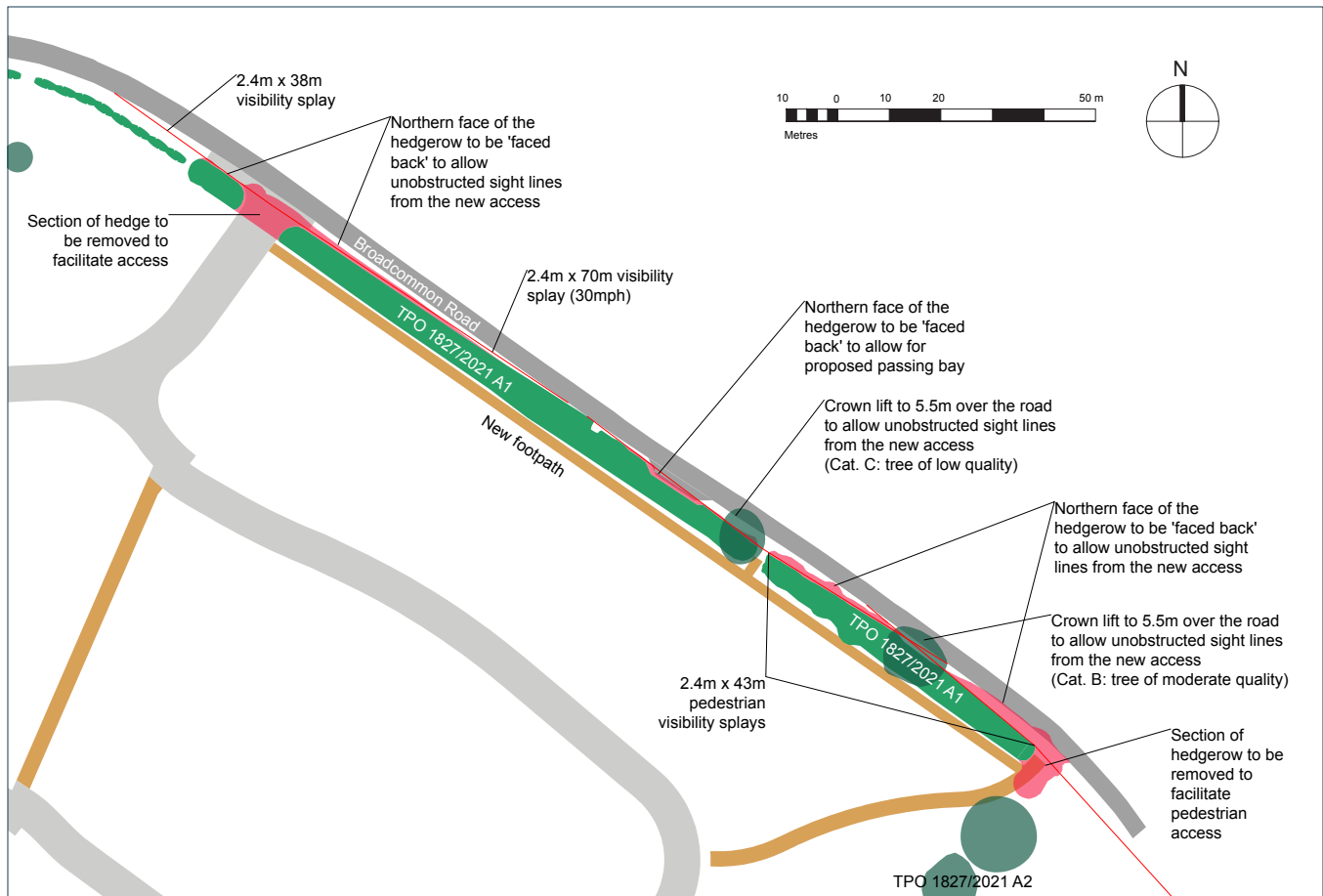


Figure 13. Illustration showing extent of hedgerow loss along Broadcommon Road.

To address the lack of, and inconsistent, information a new topographical survey was undertaken by Midland Survey in June 2022 and a new drawing is submitted — *Broadcommon Road Hurst AIA - Plan Addendum* by Harrison Arboriculture (Broadcommon Rd AIA plan addendum.pdf) — showing, in greater detail, the proposed loss of hedgerow to accommodate the site access. Figure 13 is a simplified drawing showing where the loss occurs.

Trees

The hedgerow around most of the boundary of the site and two sycamore to the northern boundary have been protected under Tree Preservation Order TPO-1827-2021-A1 relating to T53 and H3, dated 20 October 2021. This was allocated since the submission of the first planning application.

No protected, or unprotected, trees will be affected as a result of the development. A considerable buffer zone is provided between the two sycamore and the rear gardens of new properties by an area of safeguarded land to be offered to the neighbours.

Effective strategies to safeguard trees and hedgerows during construction have been proposed to mitigate the effect on root systems where encroachment is unavoidable. Appropriate safeguards are illustrated in the Tree Protection Plan (appendix 5 of the Arboricultural Impact Assessment).

The facing-back of protected roadside hedgerow will not detract from the value held by the area's principal assemblage. In fact, the landscape proposal presents an opportunity to introduce arboricultural benefits through replacement planting, including hedgerow reinforcement.

When subsequent Reserved Matters applications are submitted, a detailed Arboricultural Method Statement and Tree Protection Plan will be provided when more technical concerns can be addressed.

12. HARM TO ECOLOGY AND BIODIVERSITY OF THE SITE

Reason for refusal: Due to a lack of adequate and reliable information, the Council cannot be satisfied that the proposal will not have a harmful impact upon Great Crested Newts, bats (both protected species), reptiles (species of principle importance) and breeding birds. Further, there is a lack of detail, inconsistency across the documentation and a lack of justification to support the habitat survey and the conclusion that the proposal will result in a biodiversity net gain.

The harm to protected and principal species and the likelihood that the proposal will lead to a significant (proportionally) net loss of biodiversity is contrary to Section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, Policies CP1, CP3 and CP7 of the Core Strategy 2010 and Policy TB23 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014.

Our ecology consultant Bombus Ecology has had several conversations with the council's ecology officer and we have submitted additional information, in the form of a letter to the Council's ecologist (V4 Further Information as Requested by Council Ecologist.pdf) which attempts to addresses their concerns. The letter includes additional information on grassland classification and the potential impact on newts, bats, reptiles, and birds, none of which are likely to be affected by the scheme. The proposed planting and hedgerow improvements along with the new wetland area will produce biodiversity gains.

Great crested newts

The submitted letter contains additional detail regarding the survey methods for assessing the populations of great crested newts. Bombus Ecology confirms that samples were taken during the month of May 2021 from various ponds in the locality. Only one of the ponds (pond 1) showed potentially positive results. A subsequent Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) assessment found that none of the ponds would be able to sustain newt populations. The pond with the highest HSI contained sticklebacks which eat newt larvae, so this rules it out as a potential newt habitat.

Bombus Ecology conclude the field is sub optimal for great crested newts due to short sward and predation pressure and as such a destructive search is the optimal method.

Bats

The officer's report raised a number of concerns about the methodology used to identify and record bats. The justification for the methods used and conclusions drawn have been explained with greater clarity in the letter from Bombus Ecology submitted with this application.

The evidence provided by our ecologist confirms only a limited number of bats use this site as a transitional feeding site.

Reptiles

Additional information has been provided as to the nature of the walkover surveys when looking for reptiles. A short sward grazed pasture such as the subject site is sub optimal for reptiles due to the enhanced predation risk. The only reptile species noted from species records was a grass snake almost a kilometre away from site. The mitigation will be part of the destructive search associated with great crested newts.

Breeding birds

The Council's ecologist noted previously that the field looked large enough for skylarks to breed in. In response, Bombus Ecology carried out pre-dawn surveys looking for skylarks but found none.

The ecologist did not carry out a full breeding bird survey as this was not advised though they noted the presence of some birds passing across the field, and found robins, great tits and blackbirds on site.

Habitat survey

The officer's report stated the Ecological Impact Assessment provides very little information in respect to the survey method for the grassland habitat.

The submitted document provides additional evidence and explanation regarding the classification of the field as modified/improved grassland and not semi improved species rich.

Biodiversity net gain

We have re-run the calculations for Biodiversity Net Gain in line with the request in the officer's report. The result shows that there are net gains of 12.63% as a result of the development. This is above the policy requirement of 10%.

In the Landscaping Plan a new ecological habitat is proposed in the rear gardens of the houses but BNG calculations cannot take this fully into account given the risk of the retention of the habitat in the long term. Similarly, the proposed hedges between plots are not given much value as they are designated as a domestic hedges, despite the proposed species rich planting. Nevertheless, there is still a significant improvement in biodiversity, which meets with policy requirements.



L E A P E R

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