



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 12 August 2025

by Martin Allen BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 28 October 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/W0340/W/24/3353739

Land North of Theobald Drive, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire RG31 6YA

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr D Wakefield of Donfield Homes Ltd against the decision of West Berkshire District Council.
 - The application Ref is 23/02770/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as “Planning Application for Four Detached 3 Bedroom Houses with Covered Parking; Improvements to Theobald Drive; Hard and Soft Landscaping; Woodland Enhancement and Management; and Other Works”.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. Since the appeal was submitted the Council has adopted the West Berkshire Local Plan Review, which replaces the previous development plan. The main parties have had the opportunity to comment on the newly adopted plan, and I have had regard to it when making my decision.
3. The appellant has submitted a signed and completed Unilateral Undertaking. The Council has been given the opportunity to comment on this. I have had regard to this document when making my decision.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:
 - The effect on the character and appearance of the area, including the effect on protected trees,
 - Whether the proposal accords with the spatial strategy of the development plan, and
 - The effect on biodiversity, including whether the scheme would deliver the required Biodiversity Net Gain.

Reasons

Character and appearance

5. The appeal site comprises a parcel of land positioned between Oxford Road and Theobald Drive. The site is heavily covered in trees and is the subject of a Woodland Tree Preservation Order, protecting all trees present. There is a distinct

level change across the site, with levels dropping towards Oxford Road. The dense tree cover within the site is a shared characteristic with other nearby wooded areas and as such the appeal site forms part of the attractive and verdant environment within the vicinity. It comprises an important natural visual element within the built development that is present and positively contributes to the area, notably due to the depth of the site and the number of trees that are present within it. The area forms a small woodland and as is highlighted by the Council, the overall value of such areas is often greater than the individual trees within it, which I consider to be the case in this instance.

6. The proposed scheme would result in the addition of four new dwellings into the site; these would be positioned alongside Theobald Drive, with a belt of trees remaining along the extremity adjacent to Oxford Road. The presence of the new dwellings, inserted into an attractively wooded area, despite the surrounding built development, would appear as incongruous features. In particular, there would be a loss of around 30% of the area of the woodland, unacceptably diminishing the positive contribution of the woodland to both the character and appearance of the locality. Moreover, the development would result in the loss of a significant area of Leylandii trees that border Theobald Drive, and which provide a significant visual contribution to the verdant and green appearance of the site.
7. The removal of these trees would unacceptably diminish the currently sylvan appearance of the site, which is a desirable positive feature of the area. While I note comments in respect of the condition of these trees, they do provide a positive contribution. Moreover, the submitted arboricultural survey assesses them as category C meaning that they will contribute for at least a further 10 years. As such, their loss is not justified by the development. The addition of any replacement planting within the retained area would also not compensate for their loss.
8. I note the intention of the appellant to retain trees to the rear of the proposed dwellings, but it also appears that some of the retained trees would be positioned in close proximity to the dwellings and their garden areas, and despite being located to the north, they may be considered to be overbearing and a future risk by the occupiers of the properties. In this respect, I find that there is likely to be future pressure to significantly prune or remove these retained trees, which would further diminish the positive contribution that the woodland makes to the area.
9. Given that the appeal site comprises an area of woodland within a built-up area, it can be considered to be green infrastructure (GI). The development would result in the loss of a significant part of this GI and while there is the offer by the appellant of seeking to improve the remaining part of the site, there is no compensation proposed in terms of a replacement area of GI. Thus, there would be a net loss in the area covered by GI within the locality.
10. As mentioned, the appellant has offered through a unilateral undertaking that a programme of woodland enhancement and management would be secured on the remaining part of the woodland. This is noted and would be a benefit of the development. Nonetheless, it would not compensate for the loss of the area that would be taken up by the buildings but would simply improve that which remains. I am also conscious that, despite the woodland appearing to have been unmanaged previously, it would be possible for the site to be managed in the future to ensure that all of the area is improved, and this should not just be a result of losing part of

the woodland. The appellant contends that the “do nothing” scenario would lead to further decline of the woodland, however it is not necessary for the development to take place in order for management of the wooded area and trees to occur. As such, the offer to manage the remaining part of the woodland does not dissuade me from my findings above.

11. Accordingly, the proposal would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the area, including an unacceptable harmful effect on protected trees. Thus, the proposal conflicts with policies SP8, SP10 and DM15 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review (adopted June 2025) (the Local Plan). Together, and amongst other things, these seek to ensure that development is appropriate in terms of its location in the context of the character and appearance of an area, that the district’s GI is protected and enhanced including the replacement of any loss of GI, and that the loss of TPO trees must be justified.

Spatial strategy

12. Policy SP1 of the Local Plan sets out the spatial strategy guiding where development will be located in order that development is sustainable and meets the needs of the district. The overarching strategy is to, amongst other things, direct development to areas of lower environmental quality, and optimise the use of previously developed land.
13. In light of my findings above, in terms of the contribution that the appeal site and its surroundings make to the character and appearance of the area, which is supported by the presence of trees subject of a TPO, I find that the site cannot be described as being of lower environmental quality. Rather, the development would result in the loss of an area that can be considered to be of higher environmental quality. Moreover, the site is not previously developed land. Thus, the scheme conflicts with the overall spatial strategy of the development plan.

Biodiversity

14. The appeal site and adjacent land is classified as Deciduous Woodland Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat and therefore comprises a habitat of principal importance under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (the NERC Act). However, the ecological appraisal submitted by the appellant indicates that despite this classification, that the existing woodland is ecologically in poor condition, and given the specifics of the woodland it is of conservation value only at a local level.
15. The appellant has also submitted information to show that the development of the site would result in a biodiversity net gain of just over 30% and the appellant has submitted a Unilateral Undertaking that would secure this enhancement. As such, while there would be some loss of habitat, the development would result in an overall betterment in terms of an enhancement to biodiversity.
16. Therefore, the proposal would accord with policy SP11 of the Local Plan, insofar as it requires development to seek to contribute to the favourable management of sites of local importance in the long term.

Other Matters

17. I note that there has been a previous appeal decision on the site, which was for a different number of dwellings and that the appellant has sought to address the

reasons for that appeal being dismissed. Nonetheless, I have found that the current scheme would result in harm as I have set out above.

18. The appellant has referred to the delivery of highways improvement to Theobald Drive, including the enhancement of the existing turning head and the installation of a new service strip. While these are noted, there is nothing before me to suggest that the current layout of the road results in any harm to highway safety. As a consequence, these proposed improvements have little bearing on my decision.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

19. The scheme would result in harm to the character and appearance of the area and would conflict with the spatial strategy of the development plan. While I have found no harm in respect of the effect on biodiversity, this is a neutral consideration.
20. I have had regard to the limited benefits that would arise from the development, which include the enhancement to biodiversity and the arboricultural management of the remaining area of trees. There would also be social and economic benefits resulting from the development of this windfall site. However, in this case given the scale of the development these would be limited. Overall, I find that any benefits would be insufficient to outweigh the harm that I identify.
21. Notwithstanding the lack of conflict with policy in respect of the effect on biodiversity, the development conflicts with the development plan as a whole. There are no material considerations sufficient to indicate that a decision should be taken otherwise than in accordance with it.
22. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

Martin Allen

INSPECTOR