

## **Planning Application 251421 (Development of 53 houses off Old Forest Road)**

### **Initial compliance response to application (on behalf of Emmbrook Residents Association)**

I am responding to this application on behalf of the Emmbrook Residents Association, which represents residents of the Emmbrook community, and also having discussed the application at length with residents neighbouring the proposed access route from Old Forest Road. Our principal concerns relate to the decision by the applicant to access the site from Old Forest Road, rather than Toutley Road (NWDR).

We intend to respond more fully on the overall contents of the application in due course, but in the first instance we wanted to raise concerns on the completeness, compliance and accuracy of the documentation provided by the applicant as we consider it is important that officers fully consider whether the documentation provided by the applicant is deemed to be sufficient for consideration of the application by all parties.

Our initial concerns in this respect are as follows:

1. **Compliance with WBC Local Validation List for Development Planning** – The WBC document states *“This is the local validation list for Wokingham Borough Council in relation to planning applications. It should be used to determine what information should be submitted with a planning application to ensure it will be processed and determined correctly. The list is in accordance with The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (DMPO).”*. As such we consider that compliance with this document is a matter of significant importance when considering this planning application.

In relation to the **Design and Access Statement**, we further note the document states *“The [Design and Access Statement] must explain the applicant’s approach to access and how relevant Local Plan policies have been taken into account, any consultation undertaken in relation to access issues, and how the outcome of this consultation has informed the proposed development.”*.

The developer did conduct pre-application consultation with local residents (see attached documents from the applicant), and detailed feedback was provided to the applicant by the Emmbrook Residents Association and neighbouring residents (ERA comments attached). We also note that we requested an opportunity to meet with the applicant’s representative on site, to discuss our concerns. The applicant initially agreed, but then subsequently declined until after the application had been made. The feedback was principally in relation to the decision to access the site from Old Forest Road rather than Toutley Road. Despite the applicant’s acknowledgement of the requirement to detail the consultation carried out (see page 23 of the DAS), we can find no record in the document of what consultation was carried out, with whom, what feedback was received and crucially what account has been taken of that feedback. **We consider this is a material failing in the document, and the DAS should therefore be considered as non-compliant with WBC’s requirements for planning applications to be considered.**

We further note that this failing is particularly relevant to our additional point below regards the **Tree Survey and Arboricultural Assessment**, which it seems is very likely to have been amended following concerns we raised about the affect the access road would have on significant trees (see point below for further detail). We consider it is important to understand what changes, if any, were made as a result of the consultation, why and on what basis (see comment 2 below for more context).

2. **Validity of the Tree Survey and Arboricultural Assessment** – this is obviously a significant document in the context of this development, given the number of trees affected and the presence of tree protection orders on the site.

We note in the table appended to the document (which lists the relevant trees which have been assessed), that 7 trees have the following statement included in the comments column *“Off site – full inspection not possible. Some measurements estimated.”*. 3 of those trees (G17, T28 & T35) are all outside the site boundary, and probably not immediately affected by the works, which likely explains the reason for this. However, the other 4 trees (T18, T19, T20 & T22) are within the site boundary and directly affected by the proposed access road. Two of these trees have been assessed as Category A Oaks, whereas the other two have been assessed as Category B Oak/Ronina. In the report the standard applied to the category assessment is appended (BS 5837) which, for Category B assessment states *“Trees that might be included in category A, but are downgraded because of impaired condition (e.g. presence of significant though remediable defects, including unsympathetic past management and storm damage), such that they are unlikely to be suitable for retention for beyond 40 years; or trees lacking the special quality necessary to merit the category A designation.”*. We consider that BS 5837 requires an on-site inspection to be carried out in order to reliably categorise trees in accordance with that standard, and this is especially important given that the report is recommending the felling of two of the four trees on the access road. We would also highlight, notwithstanding this position, that there is a clear inconsistency in the categorisation of tree T19 with the criteria: T19 is identified with a life expectancy of 40+ years, whereas the criteria suggests category B assessment applies where trees are unlikely to be suitable for retention for beyond 40 years. We would also note from a visual inspection on site (albeit an untrained eye) that T19 is not noticeable different to T18, which has been identified as Category A, and that T19 is surrounded by a number of other trees which would presumably make any reliable off-site assessment very difficult, if not impossible.

The report does not say why on-site assessment was not carried out on these important trees, but we consider it is highly likely that it has been subsequently amended as a result of our representations (without a site-visit) or that the trees were not originally deemed relevant to the development. It is notable that these 4 trees are easily accessible along the track from Old Forest Road. **Whichever position is correct, both are very concerning, and we therefore consider that this report is fundamentally flawed, in relation to these trees in particular, and is not a document upon which the application can be reliably considered.**

We further note that there is another significant tree, located almost opposite T22 on the other side of the proposed access, which has not been shown on the drawings and has not been considered at all (photo attached). **Again, this is another example of where the report is fundamentally flawed, as this tree not shown would almost certainly need to be removed to facilitate the proposed access road.**

3. **Road Safety Audit** – the DAS refers to this road safety audit in the briefest of ways, noting on Page 24 *“An independent Road Safety Audit has also been completed to support the application.”*. We are unable to find any other reference to or comment on the findings of that Road Safety Report, and how they have been addressed in the submission. Two particular concerns arise:

- a. **Section 4.2.1 (Insufficient forward visibility to exiting vehicle Toutley Hall)** – It is noted that the report concludes *“A vehicle approaching from the west, turn left in, can see a vehicle waiting at the proposed drop kerbing East Toutley Hall at a 15m”*, and consequently concludes sufficient forward visibility is achievable. Whilst the distance of 15m for an approaching vehicle is not specifically disputed, the report does not appear to consider visibility from the vehicle exiting Toutley Hall. A vehicle entering the access road from OFR, even if they can see a vehicle at the exit of Toutley Hall, will not necessarily predict them moving out into the access road if they themselves need to do so to have visibility of traffic turning from OFR, which it would appear is a very likely scenario. The report does also not consider the consequences of vehicles turning into the access road and having to stop due to vehicles exiting Toutley Hall. In that scenario, vehicles behind the vehicle turning are unlikely to predict the turning vehicle stopping suddenly whilst still in the carriageway of OFR, again a very

likely scenario given the proximity of the Toutley Hall access. [It is clear to us that the report has not fully considered the potential collision and road safety issues concerning vehicles exiting Toutley Hall access.](#)

- b. **Section 4.4.1 (Steep footway crossfall / vehicular access)** – the report raised concerns about the significant crossfall from the road to Oklea Cottage due to the no-dig requirement around the tree adjacent to the existing property. The report then notes that this has been addressed by “the drawing has been amended to show a continuous section of low height kerbing where the ‘no dig’ section is located to reduce the crossfall. Precise details regarding levels and kerbing information will be provided at the detail design stage.”. As highlighted by the comment in the report, no details of how an acceptable crossfall will be achieved has been provided. It is also apparent that the comments are made in relation to pedestrians only, and no consideration is made on ability for vehicles to access or egress the driveway with a significant crossfall (presumably because of the road safety nature of the report – but for clarity this issue does not appear to be addressed elsewhere). It is evident from a site inspection that a significant raising of the road in this area, where there is already a drop into the Oklea Cottage driveway, is likely to present a significant issue. [Given this issue is one of several issues which has the potential to materially affect the suitability of this access road, we do not consider it is at all appropriate for consideration to be left until the detailed design phase.](#)

[We therefore consider that the Road Safety Report is inadequate in several respects, and not suitable for making a fully informed decision on this application.](#)

**Noting our points above, we consider there a several aspects of the application which are not fully compliant with WBC’s requirements and/or do not enable a fully informed consideration of the application to be carried out. We therefore consider that the applicant should be required to address these shortfalls before the consultation period continues.**

We would of course be happy to clarify any queries you have regarding our comments, and/or discuss the matters further.

**Attachments:**

- 1 – Developer pre-application consultation documents
- 2 – ERA response to the pre-application consultation
- 2 – Missing tree in the Tree Survey & Arboricultural study

**Attachment 1 - Developer pre-application consultation documents**

Proposal for circa 55 homes on  
Land off Old Forest Road, Winnersh




Elstree Land are seeking your views on the proposed development of Land off Old Forest Road, Winnersh prior to a planning application. The site forms part of Wokingham's Borough Councils emerging Local Plan as a proposed housing allocation and as such we believe that this site is very suitable to help deliver much needed market and affordable homes.

**Overview of the proposals:**

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|  <p>A residential development of around 55 new energy efficient homes ranging from 1-4 bedroom properties.</p>  |  <p>The mature trees and important landscape features are an integral element of the schemes evolution, with a Biodiversity net gain target of in excess of 10%.</p> |
|  <p>40% of the properties will be affordable housing. This includes a mix of First Homes, Social Rent and Shared Ownership, in line with the Council policy requirements.</p> |  <p>We are undertaking highways analysis to inform if improvements will be required to the local road network to accommodate the proposed development.</p>           |
|  <p>Energy efficient homes including the use of air source heat pumps, electric charging points and integrated building fabric improvements.</p>                              |  <p>Car and cycle parking in line with Wokingham Borough Council's standards.</p>  |
|  <p>Homes are traditionally styled, with the use of feature brick detailing, tile hanging and weatherboarding.</p>   |  <p>Delivery of a new and improved road, footpath, cycle and lighting from Old Forest Road into the development.</p>  |



**Feedback**

We are inviting feedback on our designs for Land off Old Forest Road, Winnersh. Please take a moment to give us your feedback via [danielbradbury@elstreeand.co.uk](mailto:danielbradbury@elstreeand.co.uk)

Our public consultation runs until Thursday 15th May 2025, so please let us know what you think before then. Following consultation, we will use your feedback to help improve our plans as we prepare our planning application.

**Community Benefits:**

Housing being delivered in accordance with Wokingham's emerging local plan, meeting standards in terms of design, sustainability and style.

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|  <p>Local economic benefits, including the creation of jobs and additional expenditure in the local economy to the benefit of local shops and businesses.</p> |  <p>Much needed new private and affordable housing sustainably located close to amenities and services.</p>                    |
|  <p>Proposed contributions to employment, skills plans, travel plans, local open space and play equipment on top of Wokingham's CIL requirements.</p>         |  <p>40% affordable housing including First Home, Social Rent and Shared Ownership in accordance with Wokingham's policies.</p> |
|  <p>New junction and road linking Old Forest Road to the Proposed development.</p>  |  <p>Over £1,500,000 in community payments to the council.</p>  |

## Attachment 2 - ERA response to the pre-application consultation

I am writing in connection with the above proposed development, on behalf of the Emmbrook Residents Association (ERA), and those residents we represent in Emmbrook.

Firstly, thank you for the time you afforded me yesterday to discuss this proposed development, and in particular those matters over which we have some real concerns. We recognise that pre-application consultation is not something mandated by Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), so we do appreciate the opportunity to provide input prior to a planning application being submitted. Thank you also for agreeing to meet us on site in a couple of weeks, when you have more fully established detail concerning the access provision to the site.

As I discussed with you, the ERA has been closely involved in the various developments affecting our village over the past few years, especially the large (c800 units) development in Emmbrook Place and the North West Distributor Road (NWDR) constructed at the same time. We are of course aware that the land related to this proposed development was identified by WBC in their Local Plan Update (initially in 2020/21 and ultimately submitted in 2024). Whilst the local plan refers to this site as being a part of “*Land west of Old Forest Road (OFR), Winnersh*”, it is the case that this land was first included in the local plan as a direct consequence of the construction of NWDR and therefore could be more accurately described as Land off the NWDR. In fact, the principle access provided for maintenance of this land, when the NWDR was built, was from the NWDR.

We will of course provide more detailed commentary on the numbers, layout and design of the housing, as and when a planning application is made. At this stage, in principle we note as a positive the intention to incorporate 40% provision of affordable housing. We do highlight that whilst your proposal includes c55 properties, the local plan we understand had identified the full site (of which your proposal only relates to a part of – i.e. excludes the site to the southeast bordering OFR) as being suitable for c50 properties. Therefore, subject to reviewing the application in more detail, we query whether the proposal complies with the WBC planning guidance on property density.

At this stage our views are more specifically focused on the access arrangements to the site, which is proposed from OFR. We would like to raise the following concerns:

- 1) **Why has access from OFR been chosen for this site? We consider access from the NWDR clearly represents a more sustainable and compliant option.** We are now aware that the local plan expresses a preference for access off OFR, but provides no reason for this. In our discussions you helpfully shared with me the thoughts of WBC highways team, raised during your discussions with them, more specifically that they considered the road speed limit was too high and the space for constructing a new junction was too limited. The NWDR at this point is a 40mph road. Many other 40mph roads in the area have similar access points, some with and some without right-turn filters. It is clear that a right turn filter could easily be accommodated on the NWDR for an access point, just as one is provided for the junction with OFR itself. It is also clear that there is significant distance between any other junction on the NWDR and the point at which access could be provided for this development. We do not therefore see any obvious justification for such a stance from the WBC highways team.

The NWDR was specifically constructed to take traffic, generated by new developments, away from existing residential areas. Access onto OFR clearly runs counter to this objective and would inevitably increase traffic movements through Emmbrook seeking to access routes towards Wokingham, when the most sustainable (and quickest) routes would be using the NWDR. For this reason we consider the preference and most sustainable option should clearly be for access from NWDR rather than from OFR, especially as we see no other obvious practical reason for not doing this.

**2) Does an access provided from OFR comply with highways planning guidance? For the reasons noted below, we consider it is unlikely to comply.** We refer to the WBC “*Highways design guide for developers - 2019*”. We assume the access road proposed for this site would be classed as a “*Tertiary Road*”. The guidance calls for a minimum road width of 5m plus 2m footways on one or both sides. Noting that this access route has properties fronting onto both sides (including an access gate from Toutley Hall side), we consider that the only viable option would be for footways to be provided on both sides. When we spoke yesterday you mentioned footways were only planned on one side, and this seems to be reflected in the layout visuals provided for the consultation, which also appears to show similar sized verges adjacent to the boundaries on both sides. In any case we consider that the access road would therefore require a minimum width of c9m. Whilst this would appear to be just feasible for part of the access, there is a mature tree part way down the track on the right which narrows the width to c4.5m, and at the point the track currently accesses the field there are two significant mature oak trees where the width is c7m. It would therefore seem that the only way to facilitate a compliant access road width would be to remove a number of mature trees, which we do not consider is acceptable, noting there is clearly an alternative access as highlighted above. I would also highlight your consultation makes much of the mature trees being an integral part of the development.

We do have further concerns about compliance where the new road would join OFR. The Highways Design Guide calls for Junction Radii (priority to non-priority) of 6m. We do not see how this can be achieved, noting the proximity of the Toutley Hall entrance boundary. We also note that the proximity of the Toutley Hall entrance/exit to the junction must surely present a significant risk of collision for vehicles exiting Toutley Hall and those turning in left from OFR, with restricted visibility for those leaving Toutley Hall.

I would like to conclude by noting that we are keen to provide constructive input to the proposed development, and hope the comments will be taken in that light. We recognise that the site is included for potential development in the WBC local plan, and our input is therefore to assist in ensuring that any development is delivered in the most sustainable manner, considers the impact on existing residents affected by the development, and ultimately complies with WBC adopted planning guidance and the wider policies on sustainable transportation.

If you have any queries concerning our comments, we would of course be happy to discuss further, and as noted would be keen to meet on site once you have further detail of access arrangements.

**Attachment 3 - Missing tree in the Tree Survey & Arboricultural study**

