

# CASE OFFICER'S (GEK) REPORT ON APPLICATION NUMBER 24/01214/FUL



**Site: Pine Croft  
St Catherines Hill  
Mortimer  
Reading  
RG7 3UT**

MEMBER EXPIRY DATE - 23rd August 2024

EOT EXPIRY DATE- 11th October 2024

## INTRODUCTION

This application seeks planning permission for the demolition of the existing bungalow and replace with 1 pair of semi-detached dwellings (Use Class C3).

The original proposal sought a pair of half-hip roof dwellings that would be two storey (approximately 9 metres high) and proposed to provide 3 bedrooms. Soft landscaping would be retained and provided on the boundaries, the existing access would be retained, and a new gravel parking area would serve the dwellings.

On 03.09.24 , an amended design for the semi-detached pair was proposed. The amendments included a change in roof form to a pitched roof, with a maximum height of approximately 8.1 metres, and the side elevations would step-in reducing the width of the rear-wall at two stories. Due to the reduction in the bulk of the dwellings two bedrooms are proposed to be provided at each property. Plans also indicated the existing trees for retention. At the same time an opportunity was given to submit drainage and ecology information.

Pine Croft is an existing bungalow located on the east side of St Catherine's Hill. It is within, but adjacent to the settlement boundary of Mortimer. St. Catherine's Hill is characterised by mature trees lining the pavement on the boundaries of residential properties. To the south-west of the application site are several Tree Preservation Order trees. The current site is overgrown and the bungalow is in need of repair. The bungalow is bounded by residential properties to the north, east and south. To the west is an existing woodland plantation.

## PLANNING HISTORY

No recent or relevant planning history.

## PROCEDURAL MATTERS

EIA:

Given the nature and scale of this development, it is not considered to fall within the description of any development listed in Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017. As such, EIA screening is not required.

**Publicity:**

Site notice displayed on 31st July 2024 at the entrance to the site; the deadline for representations expired on 21st August 2024.

**CIL:**

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a levy charged on most new development to pay for new infrastructure required as a result of the new development. CIL will be charged on residential (C3 and C4) and retail (A1 - A5) development at a rate per square metre (based on Gross Internal Area) on new development of more than 100 square metres of net floorspace (including extensions) or when a new dwelling is created (even if it is less than 100 square metres).

The development involves the creation of a new dwelling and therefore CIL liable. However, CIL liability will be formally confirmed by the CIL Charging Authority under separate cover following the grant of any permission. More information is available at [www.westberks.gov.uk/cil](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/cil)

## CONSTRAINTS AND DESIGNATIONS

Within the settlement boundary of Mortimer (Rural Service Centre under Policy ADPP1)  
Historic Environment Record- Grim's Bank  
Tree Preservation Orders to south-west of the site  
Mineral Safeguarding Area

## PLANNING POLICY

Planning law requires that applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant policies of the statutory development plan for West Berkshire are listed below. These policies can be read online at [www.westberks.gov.uk/planningpolicy](http://www.westberks.gov.uk/planningpolicy).

### West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026

Policies: ADPP1 (Spatial Strategy), ADPP6 (East Kennet Valley), CS1 (Delivering New Homes and Retaining the Housing Stock), CS4 (Housing Type and Mix), CS13 (Transport), CS14 (Design Principles), CS16 (Flooding), CS17 (Biodiversity and Geodiversity), CS19 (Historic Environment and Landscape Character)

### Housing Site Allocations (HSA) DPD 2006-2026

Policies: C1 (Location of New Housing in the Countryside), P1 (Residential Parking for New Development)

### West Berkshire District Local Plan 1991-2006 Saved Policies 2007

Policies: TRANS.1 (Meeting the Transport Needs of New Development), OVS.5 (Environmental Nuisance and Pollution Control), OVS.6 (Noise Pollution)

### Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan (SMNDP) 2017

RS1, RS3, RS4, HD2, GD1, GD2, GD3, GD5, GD6, B1, B2

The following are relevant materials considerations:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- National Design Guide
- Quality Design SPD (2006)
- Stratfield Mortimer Village Design Statement (2007)
- Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD (2018)

## CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council: Objection. The height of the building will have a negative visual impact viewed from the street and neighbouring properties, particularly if screening is to be removed. Concerns with roof lights in the rear elevation- will there be a loft conversion and can the Council restrict permitted development rights for this. Proposal does not meet highway's parking standards. Queries regarding whether the development would be self-build.

Amended Plan Consultation: Objection. The height is still too high (a precedent for lower roof heights set under 05/00628/RESMAT or 05/01997/REM), the application changes the street scene. The Ecological Appraisal still shows the rooflights now proposed to be removed. Who owns the trees, and can these be removed?

Adjacent Authority: Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council: No objection raised.

Highways Authority: Acceptable to utilise existing access. Access is required to be re-surfaced with bonded surface 3 metres back from the carriageway. An amended parking plan is required to demonstrate 3 parking spaces in accordance with Policy P1 and also demonstrate on-site turning- what parts of the driveway are shared access (concerns with conflict with sharing the access). Electric vehicle charging point required. Cycle parking is required to be provided.

Amended Plans: Driveway with permeable parking is acceptable, informative suggested. With the number of bedrooms reduced the number of parking spaces required is reduced 2. 2 are shown for each dwelling with on-site vehicle turning. Electric vehicle charging point should be conditioned. Cycle parking acceptable. Conditions recommended.

Local Lead Flood Authority: Evidence is required to demonstrate that soakaways are a feasible solution because the site is underlain with clay. It is expected all new development to utilise SuDs features where feasible.

Amended Plan Consultation: A drainage strategy and associated calculations have not been provided to demonstrate how surface water will be managed and integrated within the site. The photographs have not been accompanied by infiltration rates. Not clear if testing has been carried out in accordance with BRE365. Evidence still required. Requirements for a full application are set out in the Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD (2018).

Ecology Officer: Sufficient ecological information has been provided. If planning permission is granted we advise conditions securing ecological avoidance and mitigation measures and the implementation of ecological attachments are attached.

Archaeological Officer: The site is immediately adjacent to an ancient monument Grim's Bank. This section is not a scheduled monument (other parts are). However, it is considered a non-designated heritage asset of archaeological interest. No objection in principle to the development but would like to ensure any archaeological information relating to Grim's Bank is not lost. It is requested a condition is applied for a programme of archaeological monitoring and recording is submitted prior to development commencing.

Tree Officer: The application does not include an Arboricultural Method Statement even though there are trees within and next to the site. However, no objections subject to the submission of an Arb Method Statement is secure by way of condition.

Thames Water Utilities: No comments received at time of writing the report.

## PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Total received: 18

Object: 17

Support: 1

Summary of representations:

- Character, Design and Appearance: Height and bulk not in-keeping with area, loss of semi-rural character and overdevelopment of the site. Light pollution from windows above ground floor.
- Housing Mix: bungalows are needed.
- Neighbouring amenity: Height, bulk and windows will impact dwellings adjoining the site in terms of outlook, overbearing, light and privacy impacts. Noise, disturbance and pollution due to position of car parking.
- Highways: Insufficient space for parking and turning, concerns with use of access.
- Ecology & Trees: Clarification on the loss of vegetation and future pressures on trees, concerns with impact to wildlife as a result of loss of vegetation.
- Future development: setting precedents and potential for loft conversion.
- Conflicts with local and national policy.
- No information on archaeological conservation (Grims Bank).
- Plans do not sufficiently demonstrate impact to all neighbours.
- Amendments Suggested: reduce to 1.5 storeys, remove roof lights, obscure glass to landing windows, retention of vegetation and improve biodiversity.
- Support: current eyesore would improve appearance and secure the site.
- Amended Plans (03.09.2024): still too high and bulky (with new ridge line at rear) that would impact on neighbouring amenity and character of the area, concerns with a potential loft conversion, TPOs, concerns with safety at access. References made to a precedent being set by 2005 applications (now Wood View and Sweetzers Lodge)

## PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

Policy ADPP1 states that most development will be within or adjacent to settlements included in the settlement hierarchy. The application site within the settlement boundary of Mortimer a Rural Service Centre. It is identified that Rural Service Centres will have development opportunities to strengthen role in surrounding communities and that development varies depending on the character and function of the settlement. Policy ADDP6 identifies Mortimer as a focus for development within the East Kennet Valley spatial area. RS3 in the SMNDP advises there is a presumption in favour of new residential development within the Mortimer Settlement Boundary as defined by RS1.

According to Policy CS1, there should be no net loss from the existing housing stock and that new homes will be located in accordance with the Spatial Strategy and Area Delivery Plan Policies. New homes will be primarily located on suitable land within the settlement boundaries, and other land

allocated for development within the Local Plan. In this context, Policy C1 of the HSA DPD gives a presumption in favour of development and redevelopment within the Mortimer settlement boundary.

The development would sub-divide the existing plot replacing the bungalow with a semi-detached pair. This would increase the number of dwellings of a site within an established settlement boundary. The general principle is acceptable however, the proposal is subject to other material and development management policy considerations which are considered below.

## DESIGN, CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE

Policy CS14 advises that development must demonstrate high quality design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area. Design must make efficient use of land whilst respecting the density, character, landscape, and biodiversity of the surrounding area. Policy CS4 seeks that residential development will contribute to the delivery of an appropriate mix of dwellings having regard to the character of the surrounding area, accessibility of the location and evidence of housing need. Policy CS19 requires development to have particular regard to ensuring new development is appropriate in terms of location, scale and design in the context of the existing settlement form, pattern and character.

Policies RS4, GD1 and GD5 of the SMNDP seek homes of good design, in-keeping with the character of the surrounding area and village. The Village Design Statement provides recommendations and guidelines for development.

The proposed housing mix of 2-bed dwellings would be appropriate in Mortimer, where Policy HD2 of the SMNDP does seek this type of housing within its mix. Within the surrounding area there are mix of styles including flats to the north and larger detached dwellings to the south. Further, north on St. Catherine's Hill there is a semi-detached pair. The housing type and mix are therefore considered to be appropriate.

Due to concerns with the scale of the dwelling and impact upon the character of the area amendments were sought to the original proposal. The amendments sought to reduce scale, mass and bulk by reducing the height, bulk of the roof and footprint of the semi-detached pair.

It is considered when read in the street scene of St. Catherine's Hill (to which the site belongs) the amended design would respect the existing street scene as the form of the semi-detached pair appears as one dwelling retaining the semi-rural character of the site by retaining a space on the boundary and plans indicating the retention of the Category B trees on the front boundary and to the rear of the site. The reduction in the scale of the dwellings results in the proposal not appearing as overdevelopment of the site in terms of parking and paraphernalia that would be required for two 3-bed dwellings. The design and vernacular on St. Catherine's Hill do vary and the dwellings would not appear incongruous. It is also recognised that there would be some benefit to improving the current condition of the site.

It is noted that objections remain with the amendments as it is considered by objectors and the Parish Council that the height is incongruous, and the design should better reflect those on Sweetzer's Piece. Reference is made to decisions made in the period of 2004-2007 for the two dwellings to the south (Wood View and Sweetzers Lodge). However, it is considered that Pine Croft belongs to a different street scene than the two dwellings' comparisons are drawn from; these both front Sweetzer's Piece where neighbouring dwellings were chalet bungalows. The height when viewed from St. Catherine's Hill does not appear to be overly dominant to warrant refusal when considering the flats to the north which also front St. Catherine's Hill. Furthermore, since the decisions made in 2004-2007 there has been updates in local and national policy where the NPPF supports new well-designed residential development within the settlement. Well-designed buildings do not necessarily need to copy their surroundings but should consider their context and identity. It is considered that whilst there are

differences; the design has still taken cues from the context and identity of the area in terms of landscaping, roof form and the architectural detailing on the front elevation.

Concerns with light pollution were raised. However, windows at first floor would be not different than that already in the surrounding area and would not have such an impact to warrant refusal of the application.

If the application is recommended for approval, it is recommended conditions are applied to secure the ground and floor levels to ensure that the height would not exceed that proposed. A condition to agree final materials would also be necessary to ensure the material palette was in-keeping with the area.

Objections have been noted; however, it is considered that the proposed dwellings would not be harmful to the character of the area.

## NEIGHBOURING AMENITY & FUTURE OCCUPIER AMENITY

Securing a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings is one of the core planning principles of the National Planning Policy Framework. This is supported by local plan policies CS14, OVS.5, OVS.6 and GD1.

Due to the location of the plot, the proposed dwellings would be adjoined by 4 buildings (one of these buildings contains flats). Objections were received during the application raising concerns that as a result of the design of the proposal there would be a harmful impact to neighbouring amenity. Amendments were requested because the design required to be sensitive to neighbouring amenity impacts. It is acknowledged that objections still consider that the amendments have not resolved the impact to neighbouring amenity.

It is recognised by the nature of replacing a bungalow with a two storey semi-detached pair of dwellings there would be a change in outlook to both Wood View and Sweetzers Lodge to south of the application site. However, the proposed dwellings would be positioned 5 metres from the boundary of Wood View and due to the roof design, the eaves would be approximately 5.8 metres with the highest point of the roof at 8.1 metres set even further in from the boundary (approximately 8.40 metres away). From the rear windows of Wood View the highest point of the dwelling would be approximately 20 metres away. As a result of the position of the dwelling and new roof design it is considered that there would not be harm to outlook for Wood View. For Sweetzers Lodge this impact is mitigated further with the step-in of the two-storey built form at the rear the highest part of the rear ridge line would be approximately 10.8 metres from the rear boundary of Sweetzers Lodge and the dwellings would not be directly opposite the rear windows of the main dwelling. Therefore, it is not considered there would be harm in terms of outlook and overbearing impact to these properties both in the rear garden and from the properties. Due to the position of Glangarth and 1-4 The Flats it is considered there is sufficient separation distances to not result in harm to outlook to these properties.

Regarding daylight and sunlight impacts it is considered that the position, orientation and design ensure that the impact would not be significantly harmful. Sweetzers Lodge, Wood View are positioned to south and therefore this mitigates the impact along with the position away from the boundary. There may be some loss of evening sun within the rear garden of Glangarth, however this would be at the very rear of the garden and due to the position of the dwelling approximately 14.3 metres from this boundary it is considered that the loss of light would not be significant. Regarding, Flats 1-4 these do sit to the north of the proposed development. However, the separation from the boundary, the design of the dwelling and the existing vegetation all result in the impact not being significantly harmful to light for the property and garden area.

It is considered that the amendments have reduced the impact on privacy. The windows on the rear elevation have been reduced by 4. It is considered that with this reduction that the privacy impact to Glangarth would not be significantly harmful. Views into the dwelling would be difficult due to the orientation of the properties and the length of the rear gardens for the new dwellings would mitigate the impact into the rear garden. The trees to be retained within the rear garden would also assist in mitigating the impact. It is not considered that the front and rear windows would result in harmful overlooking to Wood View, Sweetzers Lodge or Flat 1-4. The first-floor side elevation windows are proposed to be fitted with obscure glass, fixed shut below 1.7 metres and serve a landing, therefore the overlooking to these windows is not considered to be significantly harmful. It is recommended a condition be applied for this.

Concerns were raised regarding the parking location in proximity to the boundary of Wood View and Sweetzers Lodge. These concerns are recognised regarding parking adjacent to the rear garden of these 2 dwellings. It is proposed for the driveway to be a bonded material to assist with the noise impact. It is also suggested that an acoustic fence could be used on this boundary to mitigate the impact. Proposed landscaping is proposed and would be secured by a condition to further assist in mitigating the impact to the rear garden of these two properties.

Regarding the impact on the future occupiers of the dwellings it is considered that the outdoor amenity space would accord with the standards of the Quality Design SPD. It is also considered that the dwellings would provide with quality internal space. There would be some overlooking of amenity space for plot b. However, Sweetzers Lodge main dwelling is set approximately 10.5 metres from the boundary which would ensure the impact would not be significantly harmful.

## HIGHWAY MATTERS

Policy CS13 and Saved Policy TRANS.1 relate to access, parking and turning and highways impacts of development. Policy P1 of the Housing Site Allocations DPD sets out relevant residential parking standards. Policy GD2 of the SMNDP requires the consideration of parking and access.

The increase in vehicle movements as a result of additional dwelling on the site is not considered to have a significant impact on the highway.

Whilst objections are noted with the access, the Highways Officer was satisfied that the existing access would be utilised for both dwellings. A bonded surface was indicated for the driveway it is recommended that this is agreed by way of condition.

The original proposal required additional parking spaces to be provided because for each 3-bedroom dwelling because 3 parking spaces were required according to Policy P1. The amended scheme proposing 2-bedroom dwellings reducing the parking requirement to 2 parking spaces which are indicated on the plans with a turning area. The Highway Officer considered that this was acceptable and could be secured by way of condition. Electric vehicle points would need to be provided and can be secured by condition. Cycle parking and implementation is recommended to be secured by condition.

The Highways Officer also seeks a condition to secure a construction method statement to protect highway safety during construction. This would also protect neighbouring amenity during construction.

## FLOODING AND DRAINAGE

Policy CS16 requires a sequential approach in accordance with the NPPF is applied across the district with regard to flooding. Development within areas of flood risk will only be accepted where it is

demonstrated that it is appropriate at the location and there are not suitable alternatives in lower flood risk zones.

The application site is Flood Risk Zone 1 and according to mapping not subject to surface water flooding or high groundwater levels. The location of the development in a low flood risk area is in accordance with Policy CS16.

However, Policy CS16 also seeks that on all development sites surface water will be managed in a sustainable manner through the implementation of SuDs measures. Policy GD6 of the SMNDP also seeks an integrated SuDs strategy to be implemented into developments. Integration of SuDs is also sought in the Stratfield Mortimer Village Design Statement. The application form indicates the use of a soakaway to discharge surface water. The Lead Local Flood Authority required evidence to demonstrate that the soakaway would be feasible due to the site being underlain with clay. With the set of amendments, photographs of trial pits undertaken on 29/08/2024 and 30/08/2024 were submitted. However, the Lead Local Flood Authority considered this was insufficient information because a drainage strategy with associated calculations had not been provided to show how the management of surface water was integrated into the scheme. It was considered that information was still required to demonstrate that the chosen method of surface water management was feasible. It had not been demonstrated that a 1 metre clearance between the peak groundwater level and the base of proposed infiltration devices can be achieved. Part 4 of the Quality Design SPD provides advice and the Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD sets out requirements for a drainage strategy to be accompanied with a full application which the Lead Local Flood Authority considered had not been followed.

It is therefore considered there is insufficient information to determine that the proposal accords with the NPPF, Policies CS16, GD6, the Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD and the Stratfield Mortimer Village Design Statement.

## ECOLOGY

Policy CS17 advises that biodiversity across the District will be conserved and enhanced. Policy GD6, B1 and B2 of the SMNDP seek no deterioration of habitats and the use of ecological enhancements on sites.

The application was originally accompanied by a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment. Within the document was reference to a preliminary survey, this was requested with the set of amendments.

The Ecology Officer reviewed the documents and was satisfied with the information provided to assess the impact on biodiversity. It was recommended conditions to secure ecological mitigation and enhancements were applied to any recommendation for approval this included works being carried out in accordance with precautionary method statements, the submission of lighting strategy and that the dwellings should provide a list of 7 enhancements within the site.

The applicant is advised that the current strategy to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain is currently not acceptable. The current information indicates that the site would not achieve the mandatory 10% required by the legislation. Furthermore, it is required to exhaust all on-site options before using off-site measures in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy. An application cannot be refused on the information provided at this stage not being able to achieve the 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. However, with the grant of permission a condition would be applied to achieve the mandatory target, this would be pre-commencement and the applicant could not commence works until a plan is agreed. The applicant is advised to consider a revised scheme that reflects the amendments proposed.

## TREES



Policy CS14 and CS19 support the protection of trees in terms of their contribution to the character of the area. Policy CS17 seeks the protection of trees due to their biodiversity value. Policy GD6 of the SMNDP also seeks landscaping to reflect the local pattern of trees and hedgerows with natural boundaries preferred.

The existing vegetation on the site and within the boundary provides a valuable contribution to the character of the area. Whilst these trees are not covered by TPO they are in-keeping with the area and semi-rural character.

It is noted that objectors raised concerns with the removal of trees which appeared to be indicated by visuals of the site. However, the arboricultural report and the updated Site Plan all indicate the retention of the Category- B trees within the site. This is supported. It is noted it is proposed to remove 1 Category U tree and 1 category C hedge containing cherry laurel and forsythia. This is not objected to as these are lower categories in terms of quality and additional landscaping is proposed on the site to compensate for their loss. A condition securing details of a soft landscaping scheme would be required.

It is noted that the Tree Officer notes the trees within and next to the site. Whilst, further information is requested in the form of a Arboricultural Method Statement the Tree Officer did not raise any objections and therefore it is considered that the development would be acceptable in terms of tree impact with the use of the suggested condition.

## PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT

According to paragraph 54 of the NPPF, planning conditions should not be used to restrict permitted development rights unless there is clear justification to do so. It is recommended if planning permission was granted that permitted development rights were restricted for additional windows on first floor and above on the east (rear) and south (side) elevation to protect overlooking in to the neighbouring properties. It is also recommended that permitted development rights are removed for extensions and outbuildings for Plot A as there are concerns with the number of trees within the plot and additions to the dwelling could impact on the trees or reduce the garden size that would result in insufficient amenity for future occupiers of this dwelling.

It is noted that there are requests to remove permitted development rights for loft conversion. However, this would not be possible to remove permitted development rights as if only internal works took place this would not be development that requires planning permission. It is considered that the removal of permitted development rights for windows at first floor and above would sufficiently protect neighbouring amenity.

## OTHER MATTERS

Archaeology: Concerns were raised regarding ecology. The Council's Archaeologist was satisfied that a condition for an archaeological programme for monitoring would be sufficient to manage the impact on archaeological features. Historic England were not consulted on this application as it was not considered that the development would likely affect the site of a scheduled monument.

Mineral Safeguarding Area: Due to the current and proposed use of the site and the proposed scale it is not considered that there would be an impact on the Mineral Safeguarding Area.

Plans: It is noted that concerns were raised that the plans did not accurately reflect the impact on neighbouring amenity. It was considered that an assessment could be made on the amended plans and with the Officer's site visit regarding neighbouring amenity.

## PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

The net gain of one dwelling on this site would deliver both social and economic benefits by improving the housing stock and investment through the construction phase. Furthermore, the principle of the development is supported by the development plan due to the location within a settlement boundary. However, only limited weight is attached to this benefit due to the scale of the development.

It is considered using conditions impacts to trees, character of the area, neighbouring amenity, highways and biodiversity could be mitigated. Neutral weight is given to these environmental impacts.

However, it is identified that the development conflicts with Policy CS16 of the Core Strategy because there is insufficient information to ensure surface water will be managed in a sustainable manner. The current proposal has not demonstrated that the proposed drainage measures are feasible, after an opportunity to provide additional information. It is not considered that this can be dealt with by a condition as the drainage strategy influence the site layout if a new strategy is needed. It also does not comply with the NPPF, Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD, Policy GD6 of the Stratfield Mortimer NDP and the Stratfield Mortimer Village Design Statement.

The conflict with policy as a result of insufficient drainage information is given more weight than the minor benefits of the proposal. Therefore, having taken into account the relevant policy and material planning considerations the proposal is found to be unacceptable. The application conflicts with the NPPF, Policy CS16 of the West Berkshire Core Strategy (2006-2026), Policy GD6 of the Stratfield Mortimer Neighbourhood Development Plan (2017), Part 4 of the Quality Design SPD (2006), the Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD (2018) and Stratfield Mortimer Village Design Statement (2007).

The application is recommended for REFUSAL.

Copy for Stratfield Mortimer Parish Council  
Parish Council Office  
Mortimer Library  
27 Victoria Road  
Mortimer  
Reading  
RG7 3SH