



Earley Town Council

Consultation Response to planning applications 252498 (University of Reading) and 252769 (Gleesons) on the Loddon Valley Garden Village site at Hall Farm, Arborfield.

The comments from Earley Town Council (ETC) include the wider effects on Earley of these applications, whether they are or are not strictly “planning matters” within the red lines. It is important to the residents of Earley that these matters are raised and noted.

Summary

We are considering outline/hybrid applications for 2800 dwellings (University of Reading application ref 252498) and 450 dwellings (Gleeson application ref 252769) although the proposed Local Plan site is larger with a total of 3930 dwellings. The balance of the allocation is the Hatch Farm land at the eastern end of the site, which includes self-build opportunities and a travellers’ site, but for which a planning application has not yet been submitted

Overview

Councillors agreed that development will happen and that there are some positives to the proposed development such as schools, shops, sports and community facilities and the Eco Valley and SANGs, eventually linking to a wider Country Park. These will create a self-contained community reducing the need to travel further afield. These facilities will also be available to other nearby communities, such as Earley

However, Councillors raised several concerns: -

Design and Character

Although described as a “Garden Village”, the proposals include a substantial amount of **four and five storey development**, which is urban in character and not reflective of accepted Garden Village principles. ETC’s view, is that this scale and form of development is **inappropriate in a rural setting** and fails to respect the character of the surrounding area.

There are no images of how the skyline, viewed from Earley, will be affected. It is surprising that for a Garden Village, only the principle through routes appear to be tree lined.

Infrastructure and Viability

ETC are concerned that the cumulative cost of on-site infrastructure, off-site highway works, and community facilities may place undue pressure on the viability of the scheme. This raises serious doubts as to whether policy-compliant planning obligations can be delivered in full.

In particular, **foul water drainage capacity** has been identified as a significant constraint, and it is unclear whether the necessary upgrades can be delivered in a timely manner aligned with the development programme.

Community provisions

With plans to include shops, schools, health care and community facilities, the issue is that these provisions will be built after properties on the development are occupied. This will mean that residents will need to access things such as schools, doctor surgeries etc. until such time provisions are available within the development. Therefore, residents will have no option but to use provisions outside the development, which will impact on resources in other local areas. ETC expects that the phasing of these facilities will be agreed and strictly managed by the planning authority.

Affordable Housing

The emerging Local Plan Update seeks **40% affordable housing**, while existing adopted policy requires **35%**. The applicants' submissions refer only to "40% affordable housing for sale and rent" without clarity on tenure. This lack of detail is of concern, particularly regarding the delivery of **social rent**, and we fear that viability arguments may be used to reduce affordable housing provision below policy requirements.

Ecology and Open Space Management

While ecological impacts appear capable of being mitigated through planning conditions, ETC are concerned about the **long-term management and funding** of the Eco Valley and SANG areas. It is important that ongoing management costs do not fall unfairly on future residents through excessive estate or management charges.

Flooding

The flood modelling of the River Loddon is comprehensive, but has the same attention been paid to the Barkham Brook, which runs through the site? This stream rises quickly after prolonged rain. The residents in the Carters Hill area of the site are vulnerable to flooding from this stream and any changes to the way this catchment operates would have adverse effects on them

Flooding at the Showcase Roundabout is a regular occurrence. ETC hope that the various attenuation and other water management features on the LVGV site will reduce these flooding events.

Burial Ground

Opening a burial ground is more complicated than just allocating a piece of land. Various specialist surveys are required to see if a site is suitable. Coping with groundwater pollution is critical for a burial site.

Highways and Transport

The following significant highway changes are proposed that directly affect Earley.

- Link to Lower Earley Way (LEW) via River Loddon and M4 bridges.
- To the Northeast the distributor road links to Mill Lane on the south side of the M4 overbridge
- New link from Mill Lane, under the M4, to Hatch Farm Way (includes the closure of Mill Lane to through traffic past The Poachers PH). Is the span of the M4 overbridge wide enough for the proposed traffic flows?
- Link via route through Thames Valley Science Park to the Shinfield East Relief Road, and on to the Black Boy roundabout.
- Additional eastbound lane from Meldreth Way roundabout to the Mill Lane roundabout, with an additional westbound lane from the Hatch Farm Way junction to the Mill Lane roundabout.
- Improvements to the Black Boy roundabout (gyratory) to improve capacity and the flow of traffic seeking to access Junction 11 of the M4.
- There are also some works at the M4 Junction 11 gyratory to improve access to the B3270, Whitley Wood Lane, with an additional westbound lane approaching the M4 gyratory and an additional short length of eastbound lane exiting the gyratory, reducing to one lane eastbound.
- The westbound exit from the Black Boy roundabout will have its two-lane section lengthened to improve capacity and flows, but no other widening is proposed to the westbound B3270, Whitley Wood Lane
- Alternative proposals for the Paddick Drive and Barn Croft Drive junctions. The basic proposal is a left turn in and left turn out only, with a central island to prevent illegal manoeuvres. Two further options include, keeping the current additional lane to facilitate right turns, although the length of the turning lane may need to be increased to accommodate the extra traffic on LEW; the second option also retains the existing right turn lane, but with traffic light control, again the turning lane may need to be lengthened.

ETC has serious concerns regarding the impact of the development on the existing highway network, particularly **Lower Earley Way (B3270)** and the surrounding road network:

- Lower Earley Way already experiences regular congestion at peak times, and ETC is not convinced that the proposed mitigation measures are sufficient to accommodate the additional traffic generated.
- The proposals rely on assumptions that development traffic will preferentially use routes to M4 Junction 11 via the Thames Valley Science Park and Black Boy

Roundabout. We do not consider this assumption to be robust.

- There is a significant risk of **roads through Earley becoming rat-runs**, particularly if congestion or incidents occur on the M4 or at key junctions.
- Insufficient consideration appears to have been given to the role of Lower Earley Way as a **designated diversion route when the M4 is closed**.
- Concerns also arise regarding resilience of the network should LEW be blocked, for example by flooding near the Showcase roundabout, and the consequential impact on access to essential services, including the police station accessed via Rushey Way.
- Concerns that Earley residents will be further disadvantaged in accessing Lower Earley Way. The current configuration of the roundabouts on LEW, with arms from Earley from the north, while the main flow of traffic at the morning peak is eastwards, already creates long queues of cars from Earley trying to get on to LEW. Adding a southern arm at the Meldreth Way roundabout, will give an unfair advantage to drivers from LVGC over those in Earley. For roundabouts to work fairly, the traffic flows need to be balanced in all directions, which is not the case on LEW.
- There is already the practice of cars moving west through Lower Earley, on residential roads such as Chatteris Way and Beeston Way, to access LEW at a more westerly point, where there are shorter queues. This non-optimal behaviour will increase with the traffic from LVGV getting preferential access at Meldreth Way.
- There is already a crash blackspot at the roundabout junction of Meldreth Way, Carshalton Way and Cutbush Lane due to the very poor sightlines for traffic existing Cutbush Lane from the eastern arm. With Meldreth Way being directly connected to the LVGV road at LEW, this will generate more traffic cutting through Earley and increasing the number of crashes at this junction.
- Earley residents in Barn Croft Drive and Paddick Drive will be severely disadvantaged if they are restricted to a “left turn only” configuration of their access roads with LEW.
- The “Quiet Route” for walking and cycling, connecting Earley and Shinfield across the Cutbush Lane bridge over the M4 motorway, will be severely compromised if Cutbush Lane becomes not just an exit from the Science Park, but a major route into LVGV.
- The M4 overbridge on Mill Lane was designed to accommodate a rural lane. Is it wide enough for the proposed traffic flows from the LVGV and will it be able to also accommodate an Active Travel footway and cycle way?
- The local road that has already been widened to accommodate extra traffic is the M4, with its “Smart” motorway configuration. The traffic from LVGV should be encouraged to use this existing facility instead of making worse the congestion on LEW.

Overall, ETC is not satisfied that the proposed highway improvements adequately mitigate the transport impacts of development at this scale.

Recommendations

Highways and Transport

1. Given the unfair access to LEW for Earley residents at the morning peak, that will be increased by the connection on to the Meldreth Way roundabout from LVGV, this junction and the junction of Rushey Way with LEW at the Moat House hotel, should be signalised. Given that the junctions at Hatch Farm Way, The Showcase and the Black Boy roundabout are already controlled by traffic lights, this won't have a significant effect on traffic flows but will ensure fairness to drivers from all directions. It will also reduce the westward migration of traffic through Lower Earley trying to find a shorter queue to join.
2. The proposed "left turn only" design for Barn Croft Drive and Paddick Drive is a massive restriction on those residents and should not be considered. Having to perform, what is recognised as an "unexpected manoeuvre", a 180° turn at a roundabout, is known to increase crashes. Every journey from both of these estates, will result in this action being performed, either at Meldreth Way or the Moat House roundabout. Bearing in mind the Climate Emergency, it will also result in pointless extra fuel consumption. These junctions should both be signalised.
3. Given the location of the Loddon Valley Police Station and the changes to traffic flows on LEW, Thames Valley Police should be consulted about these traffic proposals.
4. Given that the M4 motorway has already been widened, traffic from LVGV should be positively encouraged westwards, to use Junction 11 of the M4, rather than LEW.
5. Although not wanting to contradict the transport modellers, the widening of LEW sounds like an expensive way of not achieving much. ETC recommends that it is investigated how this money could be better spent to improve transport in the Earley/Winnersh/Shinfield areas.
6. Taking into account points 1 – 5 above, ETC objects to the bridge over the M4 and its connection to LEW at Meldreth Way, due to its impact on Earley residents.
7. ETC recommends that the crash blackspot at the roundabout junction of Meldreth Way, Carshalton Way and Cutbush Lane is addressed, perhaps by removing the roundabout so that the give-way line is brought forward and sightline along Carshalton Way improved.
8. ETC notes that the accessibility rating of the three railway stations closest to LVGV are not good. Winnersh Triangle has the lowest rating of "C" – no step-free access, and Winnersh and Earley are rated "B" – partial step-free

access. ETC would like to see some of the money for transport projects being spent on accessibility to public transport.

9. ETC notes that CIL contributions to Town and Parish Councils (15% basic, rising to 25% if a council has a Neighbourhood Plan) for Earley, from the LVGV will be minimal, as the majority of the site is not within the Earley parish boundary, but that the main road connections are within Earley, along with the associated, major traffic impacts.

ETC asks for WBC to review their CIL policy, to ensure a fair distribution of CIL receipts

10. ETC requests that the required capacity of the foul water infrastructure is in place prior to development, to ensure that this utility does not create unpleasant, knock-on effects for Earley residents.

Submitted to Wokingham Brough Council 16.01.2026