

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

14/03/2026

Proposed New Detached Dwelling

Land at Oxford Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 6TH



Trees, Woodland, Visual Amenity & Site Context:

The application site forms part of a wider area of woodland subject to a Woodland Tree Preservation Order (TPO). The woodland is a defining feature of the site and the Oxford Road corridor, and its retention, continuity and long-term health have been treated as primary design parameters from the outset. The purpose of the TPO is to safeguard the overall character and amenity value of the woodland, rather than to preclude all forms of management, or selective removal where this is demonstrably limited, justified and appropriately mitigated.

The proposed development requires the selective removal of six trees in total, comprising two Category B2 trees and three Category C1 trees, one of which is located on the site boundary to facilitate a safe vehicular access. The proposal also involves the removal of one Category U tree, which is of poor quality and would be recommended for removal irrespective of the development. The removal of the boundary tree will result in a localised and carefully managed change to views from Oxford Road at the access point. However, the access opening is limited in extent, measuring approximately five metres at the site boundary, and is framed by retained woodland on either side, such that the overall perception of a wooded frontage is maintained. This ensures that the site continues to read as a visual break within the Oxford Road streetscape, rather than as part of a continuous built frontage.

A tree-led design approach has informed the final siting of the access and driveway, allowing the retention of Trees T4 and T16 through repositioning of the site entrance and a reduction in driveway length.

The tree removal does not result in a continuous break in the woodland edge, nor does it materially diminish the sense of green enclosure along Oxford Road. Views into the site would remain filtered and transient, and the

development would not appear visually intrusive when experienced from the public realm, as the new house is located away from the road and closer to the existing flats.

In longer views along Oxford Road, the retained woodland would continue to dominate the street scene, with the access opening perceived as a minor interruption within an otherwise continuous wooded frontage.

The access opening would be visually softened through new native hedge planting along the house frontage opposite the access, with replacement tree planting set back within other areas of the site. While the access would remain visible to allow vehicular movement, these measures would reduce its visual prominence and ensure that the wider wooded character of the site frontage and street scene continues to be perceived.

An independent Arboricultural Assessment confirms that the proposed tree removals would not compromise the overall health, structure or continuity of the woodland as a whole. To mitigate the limited loss, the proposal includes the planting of seven new native trees and approximately twelve metres of native hedgerow, along with some infill native planting to an existing non-native hedgerow. This planting strategy would maintain canopy continuity and, in the medium to long term, enhance biodiversity value.

The new house is sited on a flat and more open part of the site. The overall area of woodland affected by the new house and driveway represents approximately 34% of the internal woodland area, with all perimeter woodland, apart from the required access otherwise retained. The affected area does not comprise a discrete or self-contained block of woodland, and the retained boundary vegetation ensures that both visual and ecological continuity are preserved.

It is noted that widely available aerial imagery (including Google Earth and similar platforms) presents the site as appearing more densely wooded than is experienced on the ground. This is primarily due to the use of leaf-on summer imagery, combined with image stitching and colour enhancement, which can visually exaggerate canopy continuity when viewed from above. In reality, the woodland within the site is characterised by variable canopy cover, areas of natural thinning, and a comparatively open understory in parts, particularly within the footprint of the proposed development.

To provide an accurate and up-to-date representation of existing site conditions, recent drone photography is appended to this statement. These images clearly illustrate the true distribution and density of tree cover and demonstrate that the proposed development is located within a less densely wooded area, thereby minimising tree loss and impacts on the wider woodland structure.

Permeable 10-14mm angular black basalt gravel with a cellular confinement system (as per Arboricultural report) and non-excavated, non-bedded timber sleeper kerbs are proposed to help absorb light, sit behind the vegetation and read as a shadow rather than a feature so that the access remains visually recessive when viewed through the retained trees.

The dwelling has been designed to be unobtrusive and responsive to its context, with materials and dark finishes selected to reduce visual prominence and integrate with the surrounding woodland and railway corridor. The overall objective is to create a sustainable and sympathetic home that respects the character of the site and its surroundings while ensuring the land is minimally managed and contributes positively to the local environment in the long term.

The use of dark, matte materials has been selected to reduce visual prominence and allow the building to recede into the wooded backdrop when viewed through retained trees.

While the woodland meets the broad classification of lowland mixed deciduous woodland, its condition and functionality are limited. It is characterised by secondary or self-seeded growth with limited structural diversity and does not exhibit the full range of characteristics typically associated with higher-value examples of this Priority Habitat. This assessment is consistent with the submitted Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

In accordance with paragraph 180 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the proposal follows the mitigation hierarchy by minimising habitat loss, providing compensatory planting, and delivering enhancement measures. These measures have been integrated into the layout and landscape strategy to ensure that ecological considerations inform the design, rather than being treated as an afterthought.

The proposed planting and habitat improvements are expected to result in a neutral to positive ecological outcome, with biodiversity enhancements delivering localised net gains, consistent with Core Strategy Policy CS36 and the Council's Biodiversity Action Plan objectives.

Most of the retained woodland on site boundaries ensures continued canopy cover and ecological connectivity, and the proposal does not sever or isolate habitats within the wider green network, as no fencing or formal lawned areas are required.

Relationship to Pedestrian Route and Safety Considerations:

The proposed dwelling would be located adjacent to an existing pedestrian route serving neighbouring residential properties. The route is currently unlit and has limited active frontage. The introduction of a sensitively designed dwelling in this location would provide a degree of passive presence and informal surveillance, contributing to an improved sense of safety and security for users of the route, particularly during evening and night-time periods.

This benefit would arise without the need for additional lighting or physical intervention and would not detract from the character of the area. The proposal therefore aligns with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework to promote safe, inclusive and accessible environments.

Planning Balance:

The proposal represents a small-scale, carefully considered form of development shaped by the site's woodland context and environmental constraints. The removal of a limited number of trees, including a single Category C boundary tree required to facilitate safe access, results in localised and manageable impacts which are adequately mitigated through replacement planting, habitat enhancement and sensitive design.

The development would maintain the established wooded character of Oxford Road, improve the management and appearance of the site, deliver biodiversity enhancements, and contribute to housing delivery in a sustainable location. When assessed against the Development Plan as a whole, including Core Strategy Policies CS1, CS28, CS36 and CS38, and Local Plan Policies DM17 and DM18, the proposal is considered to accord with the aims of these policies. Any minor adverse effects are outweighed by the environmental and planning benefits of the scheme.

The site lies within the existing urban area and benefits from proximity to public transport infrastructure, including the adjacent railway corridor, and therefore represents an efficient use of land in a sustainable and accessible location, consistent with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework.

CIL/Section 106:

The proposed development comprises a single self-build dwelling which, by virtue of its scale, is not expected to give rise to Section 106 obligations. The applicant intends to claim self-build exemption from the Community Infrastructure Levy in accordance with the CIL Regulations.

Personal Statement – Applicant Context:

The applicant has lived in Tilehurst for most of their life and has a longstanding connection to the local area and its environment. The site lies within a distinctive setting shaped by the relationship between Oxford Road, the adjacent railway corridor and surrounding woodland, which together contribute to the character of this part of Reading.

The applicant has a particular interest in railway history and is a keen train spotter, with an appreciation of the role that the railway and its associated infrastructure have played in shaping the local landscape. This interest has informed the applicant's approach to the proposal, with the intention that the development should sit quietly within its setting and respect the established relationship between the railway corridor, the woodland and nearby development.

The proposal is not a speculative development, but a small-scale, personal project intended to provide a modest dwelling for the applicant. The development would enable the applicant's existing three-bedroom property to be released back into the local housing stock, contributing to housing availability within the area.

The applicant is committed to the long-term care and responsible management of the site and its woodland setting. The site would be managed on a **minimal-intervention basis**, with the primary objective of retaining the existing woodland character. Any future works would be limited to essential safety, access and replacement planting in accordance with approved plans. The intention is to retain the majority of existing trees and vegetation, with no proposals for formal lawns or boundary fencing. Instead, the site would continue to function as an informal urban woodland environment to maintain ecological value and visual character.