

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	251260
Site Address:	Heathlands Farm, Honey Hill, Wokingham, RG40 3BG
Expiry Date:	10 October 2025
Site Visit Date:	8 July 2025
Proposal: Full application for erection of extension to existing pack house following demolition of existing structures.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

Water Utility Consultation Zones
Contaminated Land Consultation Zone
Affordable Housing Thresholds
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Countryside (CP11)
Farnborough Aerodrome Consultation Zone
Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone – Red Risk Zone
Nuclear Consultation Zone – Special Case Zone
Landscape Character Assessment Area
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Local Plan Update Submitted Sites

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy (CS)	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits CP15 – Employment Development
MDD Local Plan (MDD)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB25 – Archaeology

Wokingham Borough Local Plan Update (LPU)	SS1 – Sustainable development principles SS2 – Spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy SS5 – Development in the countryside SS8 – Meeting our employment needs SS15 – Securing infrastructure SS16 – Safeguarded routes SS17 – Transport improvements CE1 – Design principles for efficient buildings CE2 – Environmental standards for non-residential development CE4 – Supporting a circular economy CE5 – Embodies carbon CE7 – Low carbon and renewable energy generation CE8 – Protecting renewable energy generation C1 – Active and sustainable transport and accessibility C2 – Mitigation of transport impacts and highway safety and design C3 – Active travel C4 – Green and blue infrastructure and public rights of way C5 – Parking and electric vehicle charging ER2 – Employment uses outside of Core Employment Areas ER3 – Supporting the rural economy ER4 – Employment and skills plans FD1 – Development and flood risk (from all sources) FD2 – Sustainable drainage NE1 – Biodiversity and geodiversity NE2 – Biodiversity net gain NE4 – Trees, woodland, hedges and hedgerows NE5 – Landscape and design NE6 – Valued landscapes DH1 – Place making and quality design DH2 – Safeguarding amenity DH6 – Archaeology HC5 – Environmental protection HC6 – Air pollution and air quality HC7 – Light pollution HC8 – Noise pollution HC9 – Contaminated land and water HC10 – Odor, fumes and dust
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
F/2005/4929	Proposed change of use of horticultural packhouse to include handling of horticultural produce and formation of a new farm access from Heath lands Road for HGV traffic.	Approved 13/03/2006
F/2012/0176	Proposed installation of solar PV panels to SSE	Approved

	roof of refrigeration unit.	22/03/2012
192244	Full application for the proposed erection of a single storey extension to the east elevation of the existing soft fruit processing plant to provide additional space for automated processing and packaging.	Approved 17/12/2019
192245	Full application for the proposed erection of a single storey extension to the south elevation of the existing soft fruit processing plant to provide covered storage for pallets and packaging.	Approved 17/12/2019
223019	Application for a certificate of existing lawful development for the use of land for the siting of 41 mobile homes occupied by agricultural workers with associated operational development	Approved 07/12/2022
230627	Full application for the proposed stationing of 12no. 2-bedroom static mobile homes for seasonal agricultural workers associated with Heathlands Farm, June to September inclusive (Part-retrospective)	Approved 06/07/2023
231524	Full application for the proposed installation of no. 1,762 Photovoltaic Panels, each panels mounted on no. 4 concrete footings.	Approved 14/12/2023

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Property Services – No comments received
 WBC Environmental Health – No objections
 WBC Drainage – No objections
 WBC Highways – No objection subject to condition(s)
 WBC Growth & Delivery (Planning Policy) – No comments received
 WBC Economic Prosperity & Place (Community Infrastructure) – No comments received
 WBC Green Infrastructure – No comments received
 WBC Landscape and Trees – Request information on tree belt to south of site
(Officer comment: This tree belt was removed over a year ago and it is not relevant to the application proposals.
 WBC Health and Wellbeing – No comments received
 WBC Community Safety – No comments received
 WBC CIL – Development is CIL liable
 WBC Sustainability – No objection subject to condition(s)
 WBC Ecology – No comments received
 WBC Libraries – No comments received
 WBC Sports Development (Places and Neighbourhoods) – No comments received
 WBC Waste Services – No comments received
 WBC Cleaner and Greener – No comments received

External

Office for Nuclear Regulation – No comment
Natural England – No comments received
Southern Gas Networks – No comments received
Thames Water Utilities Ltd – No comments received
The Environment Agency – No comments received
Berkshire Archaeology – No objection subject to condition(s)
South East Water – No comments received
Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue – General Fire Safety advice
BOB ICB NHS Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West – No comments received
AWE Burghfield – No comments received
Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust – No comments received
Crime Prevention Design Advisor – No comments received
SSE Power Distribution – No comments received

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Objection due to the excessive damage caused by the HGV lorry movements along country lanes, without any pavements and the impact upon the local environment. This is already a very busy country lane that is the access road to four schools, of which one has 750 pupils. This is a heavily used local lane which was not constructed for a high volume of traffic, which will only increase with future building developments.
Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	One letter of support stating the following: <i>“I fully support this application as I believe it very important to support our farmers especially in the current national governmental environment.</i> <i>Whilst I understand and am sympathetic to local concerns about vehicle movements taking things on balance and that the increase in movements is largely limited to 3 summer months when schools are mostly on holidays - the Hall Hunter Partnership as the largest remaining farming enterprise in Wokingham Without, in my view needs to be supported in its activity.</i> <i>Please note the Hall Hunter Partnership uses very environmentally friendly farming techniques.”</i> Two letters of objection stating the following: - HGV traffic via Honey Hill and Heathlands Road is excessive. - Damage to roads and verges from HGV movements. - Location of site inappropriate for expansion

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The site lies within the Heathlands Farm complex which lies to the east of Heathlands Road and to the south of Honey Hill. Heathlands Farm extends to 82 hectares and produces soft fruit grown mainly in polytunnels. The farm comprises about 50 hectares of polytunnels, cold storage and pack house buildings, staff accommodation and the administrative offices for HHP (Hall Hunter Partnership). The farm is a major producer of blueberries, strawberries and raspberries. More recently the farm has invested heavily in expanding the blueberry crop on the farm. HHP also produce blueberries at Sheeplands Farm, also within Wokingham Borough.

The existing pack house and cold store buildings lie within the centre of Heathlands Farm. To the north of these buildings are HHP's offices and staff parking. To the east are mobile homes which accommodate staff employed on the farm and to the south are recently installed solar panels. Access to the existing pack house is from Heathlands Road.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks approval for the proposed erection of an extension to the existing pack house at the farm, following the demolition of several structures.

It is proposed to extend the existing pack house southwards into the yard area and onto an open grassed area between the existing yard and the solar panels to the south. The existing access and turning area for HGVs would be retained in a central courtyard. One additional HGV loading bay would be formed within the extended pack house. The extension would replace existing temporary covered structures within the yard area used for pallet storage.

The proposed extension would be clad in the same material as the existing building (Kingspan composite panel in light grey). The floor areas existing and proposed are as follows:

- Existing building – 3,434 sq.m
- Existing structures to be removed 548 sq.m
- Proposed extension floor area – 2,982 sq.m
- Net floor area increase – 2,434 sq.m

The accompanying Executive Summary produced by HHP sets out the need for the proposed extension. The main points from this are as follows:

- HHP has invested in increasing its blueberry crop over the last 5 years to meet customer demand (800,000 blueberry plants in total which once fully developed will produce a steady yield of 4000 tonnes per year)
- There is currently capacity for 1,900 pallets and packing facilities for 266 tonnes of blueberries per week
- Capacity would need to increase by 537 pallets and an additional 500 tonnes of blueberries per week next year
- By 2027 there would be a storage deficit of 1403 pallets and a grading shortfall of 1500 tonnes

- Additional refrigerated storage is required to accommodate the increased yield
- The space provided will allow greater automation and operational efficiency, improving health and safety and reducing the requirement for increasing seasonal labour.

To process the growing quantities of blueberries produced by HHP, there is a requirement for an additional grading machine at Heathlands Farm. This would utilise about 1.500 sq.m (50 x 30 metres) in the proposed extension. The remainder of the space would be taken up with internal packaging and pallet storage and would provide additional space to allow automation and use of robots to move pallets within the buildings. These measures would increase capacity and efficiency as well as improving health and safety for workers internally and externally. The automation means that there would be no requirement to increase staffing numbers to cater for the increased throughput and allow HHP to remain competitive in a highly competitive market and in the face of cheaper overseas imports.

HHP are one of the largest berry producers in the country and supply many of the leading supermarkets. The farm employs about 120 full-time and 400 seasonal staff (April to October). HHP operate the following farms:

- Heathlands and Birchin Inghams Farm, Wokingham - 82 hectares (205 acres)
- Sheeplands Farm, Wargrave - 85 hectares (210 acres)
- Tuesley Farm, Godalming - 178 hectares (463 acres)
- Eashing Farm, Godalming – 26 Hectares (65 acres)

In total HHP employs about 300 full-time and 1200 seasonal workers.

Principle of Development:

Policy Context:

Core Strategy 2010:

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for development proposals that avoid areas of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land. Paragraph 187 of the NPPF refers to the natural environment and recognising the natural and capital benefits of BMV land.

Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that:

- Are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high quality of design without detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users including open spaces or occupiers and their quality of life;
- Have no detrimental impact upon important ecological, heritage, landscape (including river valleys) or geological features or water courses.
- Contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings (especially existing dwellings) including the use of appropriate landscaping;

The site lies within the Countryside as designated in the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy. Core Strategy policy CP11 states, in order to protect the separate

identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except in certain circumstances. These criteria are as follows:

- 1) It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and
- 2) It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and
- 3) It is contained within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement; or
- 4) In the case of residential extensions, does not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building;
- 5) In the case of replacement dwellings the proposal must:
 - i) Bring about environmental improvements; or
 - ii) Not result in inappropriate increases in the scale, form or footprint of the original building.
- 6) Essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits or through the re-use/replacement of an existing building;
- 7) Affordable housing on rural exception sites in line with CP9.

Managing Development Delivery Local Plan (MDDLDP) 2014:

Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan aims to protect green infrastructure networks, promote linkages between public open space and the countryside, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping.

Local Plan Update (LPU):

The Council are also progressing with their Local Plan Update (LPU) which has progressed beyond the Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19) stage, with representations received on the plan's legal compliance and soundness between 30 September and 13 November 2024.

The Proposed Submission Plan (Regulation 19) consultation has now closed, and the Council have now analysed the representations received. The Regulation 22 plan was submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination in February 2025, and two Planning Inspectors have been appointed to examine (EiP) the plan. The examination of the local plan is ongoing, and the council responded to initial questions and requests from the Inspectors in May 2025.

As seen in High Court judgements, even when an emerging plan is at an advanced stage, it may still attract limited weight if further consultation and modifications are required, and the Inspector has yet to issue a final report. Wokingham's LPU has several stages yet to be completed, including and the examination hearings and main modifications stages, which restricts the weight that can currently be afforded to non-substantive.

The Council however acknowledge that there are unresolved objections on substantive grounds pursuant on the majority of relevant conditions listed above,

meaning weight attracted to these policies is limited.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Paragraph 88 of the NPPF titled 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy' states that planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) *the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) *the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;*
- c) *sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) *the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.*

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF follows on from this by stating that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

Assessment:

With regards to criterion 1 of CP11, the proposals would involve an expansion of the farm's existing facilities to help aid its expansion in blueberry growing and production. The farm is considered a sustainable rural enterprise and as such, the proposals are considered to comply with criterion 1.

Turning to criterion 2, the proposals would nearly double the footprint of the existing pack house building. Notwithstanding this substantial increase in development on site, the main southern extension would abut immediately the solar panel array to the south (replacing a large area of discarded rubble and materials), polytunnels to the west and the mobile home park to the east. Its northern elevation would create an extension to the existing courtyard, enclosing it within its elevations. Whilst a notable addition to the site, the extension would be well enveloped by existing development/structures on the farm and is not considered to represent excessive encroachment in the context of the site.

Further to the above, the eastern infill extension would be enveloped by the packhouse to its immediate west and the mobile home park to the east. This element is a modest addition to the building that would not represent the excessive encroachment of development on site. Overall, the proposals would comply with criterion 2 of CP11.

Turning to criterion 3, the proposals would involve the removal of several structures to facilitate the extensions proposed, namely 2no. polytunnel storage areas and some mobile storage units. Criterion 3 requires replacement buildings to bring about environmental improvements and in this regard, whilst increasing the quantum of development on site, the proposals would replace underused and generally unattractive structures with extensions that would form a more coherent spatial layout to the rear HGV courtyard. Criterion 3 is therefore complied with and as such, the development is considered acceptable as per CP11 of the Core Strategy.

In terms of BMV agricultural land, the proposals occupy a small area of Grade 4 agricultural land that formed part of the application for the solar array to the south (231524). BMV land is classed as grades 1 – 3a. Grade 3b is considered moderate quality while grades 4 and 5 are deemed poor and very poor quality. The permanent loss of this Grade 4 land does not raise any objections as it would facilitate additional expansions to the farm.

Character of the Area:

Policy Context:

Paragraph 187(b) of the NPPF requires that planning applications enhance the natural and local environment by 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services - including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.'

Policy CP11 supports development in the countryside only where it maintains the high quality of the rural environment. Policy CP1(1) similarly only supports development that maintains or enhances the high quality of the environment, with policy CP3 supporting development of an appropriate mass, layout, built form, height and character to the area CP3(a) and which makes a positive contribution to the sense of place contributes to the buildings and spaces themselves and in the way they integrate with their surroundings CP3(f).

The Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document provides further guidance for developers with general guidance that development should respond positively to its site and local context (G1) and respond positively to the local character of the area (G2).

The National Design Guide section B1, paragraph 67 also states that the built form of well-designed places should relate well to:

- the site, its context and the opportunities they present;
- the proposed identity and character for the development in the wider place;

Assessment:

As outlined above, the proposed extensions, whilst substantial in footprint, would be well enveloped by existing structures and buildings. The appearance of the extensions would adopt that of the existing pack house and its siting within the landscape would mean that little to no public viewpoints of the development would be available.

The immediate context of the extension is relatively commercial by reason of the HGV courtyard and existing buildings, and the proposed development would remain in-keeping with this. There would be a minor loss of open grassland (Grade 4 agricultural land) that formed part of the application for the solar array to the south (231524), but the visual impact of this would be negligible in the context of the wider landscape where mitigation can also be sought in the form of additional necessary landscaping.

Overall, it is likely the proposals would have an acceptable impact on the character of the farm and the prevailing rural landscape.

Neighbouring Amenity:

Loss of light, Overlooking and Overbearing:

The closest residential properties are the 53no. mobile homes within the adjacent caravan park, occupied by employees of the farm. The eastern infill extension would be within proximity to 3no. of mobile homes on the western edge of the caravan park but a separation distance of approximately 3.9 metres from the nearest home.

By reason of the modest single storey nature of the extension proposed and the slightly higher ground level the homes are sited upon, there are no anticipated adverse impacts on these grounds.

Noise:

Despite the proximity of the mobile homes to the pack house extension proposed, these homes are occupied by workers of the farm who experience notable levels of noise emissions from the existing use of the site. It is not anticipated that the extension proposed, providing it is adequately insulated for noise purposes, would harm the amenities of the occupiers.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

Policy Context:

Policy CP6 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for schemes that:

- a) Provide for sustainable forms of transport to allow choice;
- b) Are located where there are or will be at the time of development choices in the mode of transport available and which minimise the distance people need to travel;
- c) Improve the existing infrastructure network, including road, rail and public transport, enhance facilities for pedestrians and cyclists, including provision for those with reduced mobility, and other users;
- d) Provide appropriate vehicular parking, having regard to car ownership;
- e) Mitigate any adverse effects upon the local and strategic transport network that

- arise from the development proposed;
- f) Enhance road safety; and
- g) Do not cause highway problems or lead to traffic related environmental problems.

Policy TB20 (Deliveries for Employment and Retail Use) of the Managing Development Delivery (MDD) Framework states that:

'Planning permission will only be granted for commercial development proposals that demonstrate there is no significant impact on highway safety.'

Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that in assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, it should be ensured that:

- a) sustainable transport modes are prioritised taking account of the vision for the site, the type of development and its location;
- b) safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;
- c) the design of streets, parking areas, other transport elements and the content of associated standards reflects current national guidance, including the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code⁴⁸; and
- d) any significant impacts from the development on the transport network (in terms of capacity and congestion), or on highway safety, can be cost effectively mitigated to an acceptable degree through a vision-led approach.

Paragraph 116 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.

Paragraph 117 states that within this context, applications for development should:

- a) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport, with layouts that maximise the catchment area for bus or other public transport services, and appropriate facilities that encourage public transport use;
- b) address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport;
- c) create places that are safe, secure and attractive – which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter, and respond to local character and design standards;
- d) allow for the efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles; and
- e) be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.

Assessment:

The Transport Statement confirms that majority of the employees will be living on-site and there will be no additional travel demands from staff, it is anticipated that the daily

HGV movements will increase from 50 movements to 60 movements per day between June to August.

WBC Highways do not anticipate that an increase of 10 movements per day between a 3 month period of the year would have any adverse traffic impacts on the wider highway network. The continued utilisation of the access from Heathlands Farm to the west is still considered acceptable and there is sufficient space on site for vehicles to turn, allowing them to exit the site in forward gear.

The LPA are aware of concerns from neighbouring properties to the site about HGV movements through both Honey Hill and Heathlands Road, with reports of damage to roads, verges and street infrastructure raised. Whilst it is not anticipated that the additional HGV movements would exacerbate this issue, it is considered necessary to condition a delivery and servicing plan to reduce the impacts on surfaces unsuitable for HGV use, plus any residual impacts from HGV movements onto neighbouring properties. The plan will be required to include:

- i. Management details of proposed delivery activities (Trained banksmen to be used)
- ii. Including HGV booking system (such as Fulcrum or similar).
- iii. Anticipated daily HGV nos. expected,
- iv. Routing plan for HGVs (avoiding any schools and weight/height restrictions on the surrounding road network);
- v. Accreditation Schemes in use (E.g. FORS and CLOCS)
- vi. Parking and Turning areas for HGVs. Turning areas to be demonstrated by swept path analysis of the largest vehicle.

Further to the above, it is important to note that HGV movements remain subject to an s106 agreement dated 10 March 2006 (in relation to F/2005/4929) which includes a lorry routing plan and prohibits the use of Honey Hill for HGV access. This will be included as an informative.

Flooding and Drainage:

The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 and at low risk of surface water flooding. WBC Drainage have reviewed the revised drainage strategy (received 3rd September 2025) and have no objections to the approach proposed.

Subject to compliance with the aforementioned strategy, WBC Drainage have no objections to the proposed development.

Landscape and Trees:

Arboricultural Matters:

Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan aims to protect green infrastructure networks, promote linkages between public open space and the countryside, retain existing trees and establish appropriate landscaping and Policy TB21 requires consideration of the landscape character.

The pack house extensions would be sited on existing hardstanding and would not impact any nearby vegetation. There are no objections on these grounds.

Landscape Character:

The Wokingham Landscape Character Area Assessment (LCA) 2019 shows the site falling within the landscape area N1 Holme Green Pastoral Sandy Lowland which is described as of moderate character with moderate capacity for change. The landscape strategy for the area includes:

“to conserve and enhance the existing landscape character. The key opportunities are to improve the condition, intactness and presentation of the farmed landscape – with potential for replanting and management of field boundaries, and enhancement of ecological character.”

The proposed development is, subject to conditions, unlikely to have any adverse impacts on the prevailing landscape character. Whilst the proposals would result in additional building footprints on the farm that cannot be reasonably viewed as conserving or enhancing the existing landscape character, the proposals would improve the farm’s layout overall and the visual harm to the wider landscape would be considered limited.

Ecology:

Bats:

This application is supported by a preliminary ecological appraisal (John Wenman Ecological Consultancy, April 2025).

With regards to bats, the report concludes that the records of bats locally show that it is likely that bats are active on-site and within the surrounding area, however, the buildings on site provided no potential features for roosting bats. Furthermore, the habitats onsite were primarily species-poor and of limited suitability for foraging bats. Overall, in the context of the parcels of woodland within the ownership boundary and in the local area, the application site is considered unlikely to be of value to local populations.

As such, no impacts are anticipated on this protected species.

Great Crested Newts (GCN):

The desk study data included no great crested newt records within a 1 kilometre radius of the application site, with two records of common toad (*Bufo bufo*) – a priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principle importance) and common frog (*Rana temporaria*) – approximately 1000m from the site. There are eight waterbodies within 500 m of the site, with the closest being 132m north of the boundary of the application site. The application site itself had a deep sided drainage well that was considered sub-optimal for use by amphibians and therefore it is considered that the site is unlikely to offer breeding opportunities for amphibians, such as GCN.

The site falls inside the red risk zone (from NatureSpace modelling for GCN district licensing) but the modified grassland, bare ground and developed land offers unsuitable terrestrial habitat for GCN and other amphibians to move across. The report indicated that no mitigation licences or GCN Class Survey Licence returns within a 1km radius. However, there is still a possibility for GCN and other amphibians to be present within the piles of rubble along the bank to use it for sheltering and

hibernating.

Whilst the anticipated impact on this species is low, the risk zone of the site indicates that it is necessary to condition a precautionary works method statement should the application be recommended for approval.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

As of 2nd April 2024, a 10% Biodiversity net gain (BNG) for minor developments is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). This can be achieved through either on-site or off-site mitigation.

Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, subject to some exceptions, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that the biodiversity gain objective is met ("the biodiversity gain condition").

"The biodiversity gain condition is a pre-commencement condition: once planning permission has been granted, a Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted and approved by the planning authority before commencement of the development."

The habitat baseline for the existing site is 0.75 habitat units. The number of units required to achieve a 10% gain would be 0.06 habitat units. As per the conclusions of the report, this cannot be achieved through on-site mitigation and will have to be secured through off-site mitigation.

On the other hand, the BNG metric provided with this application outlines that a 10.29% gain in hedgerow units can be achieved on site.

Final details of the BNG mitigation off-site will be secured within the Biodiversity Gain Plan, automatically applied to the permission if approved.

Sustainability:

Section 12 of Policy CP1 requires development to contribute towards the goal of reaching zero-carbon developments as soon as possible by:

- a) Including appropriate on-site renewable energy features; and
- b) Minimising energy and water consumption by measures including the use of appropriate layout and orientation, building form, design and construction, and design to take account of microclimate so as to minimise carbon dioxide emissions through giving careful consideration to how all aspects of development form

Policy CC04 of the MDDLDP states that all new non-residential proposals of more than 100 sq m gross non-residential floorspace shall at least:

- a) Achieve the necessary mandatory Building Research Establishment Assessment Method (BREEAM) requirements or any future national equivalent
- b) Meet or exceed statutory requirements for water resource management.

This application is supported by a Sustainability and Energy Statement (BlueSky Limited, 4th September 2025). The WBC Sustainability Officer has reviewed this report and overall, has no objections to the proposed development on sustainability grounds.

In particular, the benefit of the solar array adjacent to the extension is significant and allows the development to operate at net zero regulated emissions. This is very positively viewed.

The Sustainability Officer recommends the imposition of a condition related to non-domestic water consumption, namely the acquisition of BREEAM WAT-01 Level 3 for water efficiency. This condition will be imposed on the decision notice as a pre-commencements requirement.

Berkshire Archaeology:

There are potential archaeological implications with this proposed development as demonstrated by Berkshire Archaeology's Historic Environment Record. The proposal lies within an area where Prehistoric settlement and activity sites have been evidenced. A crop mark, c.350m to the south of the proposal area, shown on aerial photographs, suggests a possible ring-ditch. C.330m northeast another Prehistoric site has been identified during field survey. Further aerial photographs show enclosure crop marks c.700m to east.

The wider area also evidences Mesolithic flintwork c.1.9km northeast, Neolithic worked flint c.1.6m southwest and southeast, a prehistoric burnt mound 2km east, along with an Iron Age settlement 1.3m to the north at Brittons Farm, all suggesting a landscape heavily exploited during Prehistory.

As shown, the application site falls within an area of archaeological significance and archaeological remains may be damaged by ground disturbance for the proposed development. It is therefore recommended that the following condition is applied, should permission be granted, in order to mitigate the impacts of development. This is in accordance with Paragraph 218 of the NPPF(2025) which states that local planning authorities should *'require developers to record and advance understanding of the significance of any heritage assets to be lost (wholly or in part) in a manner proportionate to their importance and the impact, and to make this evidence (and any archive generated) publicly accessible'*.

Employment Skills Plan:

Policy TB12 of the MDD Local Plan states that proposals for major development should be accompanied by an Employment and Skills plan to show how the proposal accords opportunities for training, apprenticeship or other vocational initiatives to develop local employability skills required by developers, contractors or end users of the proposal.

The applicant has outlined that despite the increase in floorspace at the packing house, the nature of the expansions results in no further need for additional employment at the farm. Therefore, it is not considered that an Employment Skills Plan would be required.

Conclusion:

Overall, the application is considered compliant with the development plan. Subject to conditions, this application is recommended for approval.

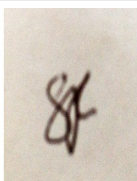
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL):

When planning permission is granted for a development that is CIL liable, the Council will issue a liability notice as soon as practicable after the day on which the planning permission first permits development. Completing the assumption of liability notice is a statutory requirement to be completed for all CIL liable applications.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010): In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Yes
Recommendation:	Approval
Date:	6 October 2025
Earliest date for decision:	5 August 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	6.10.25