

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Application Number:	250785
Site Address:	Newlands, Mole Road, Sindlesham
Expiry Date:	5 June 2025
Site Visit Date:	22 April 2025
Proposal: Full application for the change of use of land and 3no. buildings to equestrian, erection of 1no. stable building and creation of a riding arena with associated engineering works (Retrospective).	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Bat Roost Habitat Suitability

Scale and Location of Development Proposals – Countryside (CP11)

Great Crested Newt Consultation Zone – White Risk Zone

Tree Preservation Orders

Landscape Character Assessment Area

SSSI Impact Risk Zones

Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones

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 CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
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 TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

PLANNING HISTORY		
Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
081887	Proposed erection of one dwelling with garages and staff accommodation.	Refused 07/08/2008
201458	Full application for the proposed erection of an equestrian facility for training and livery purposes including fifty horseboxes, foaling yard, indoor and outdoor riding arenas, lunge ring and horse walker, reception, office, members clubhouse with bar, parking for 25 cars, three parking areas for HGV horse lorries, and three units of residential accommodation comprising managers three-bedroomed house, staff two-bedroomed flat and staff five-bedroomed flat, with access via Gravel pithill Lane and Ellis Hill.	Refused 07/10/2020

CONSULTATION RESPONSES	
Internal	
WBC Drainage – No objections	
WBC Highways – No objections subject to conditions	
WBC Landscape and Trees – No objection subject to conditions	
External	
None consulted	

REPRESENTATIONS	
Parish/Town Council	<p>Arborfield and Newlands Parish Council wishes to object to this retrospective planning application for the practise area and change of use categorisation of the land.</p> <p>The previous larger planning application (201458) was refused by WBC on substantive and firm grounds based on local and national planning policy and legislation. This application (250785) could be construed as a deliberate attempt by Sillett Equestrian to manipulate the planning system retrospectively.</p> <p>The current application hinges on the change of use from agricultural to equestrian and is unclear whether this is intended for personal private use or will be for business use as both are used in the planning statement.</p> <p>The planning statement outlines that this is a private development and change of use for the purpose of exercising the owner's horses but the planning statement</p>

goes on in paragraph 5.7 to state that it should be an exception to CP11 as 'sustainable rural enterprise'; therefore, is it for personal use or an enterprise/business?

As the planning application states it is to exercise the owner's horses on site then, under CP11, the application must be refused (i.e. it is not for commercial use). It is also unclear as to which 'original' buildings on-site already have the necessary planning permission to be referenced under CP11.

If the site is indeed to be used commercially, as suggested by the reference to compliance with CP11, vehicular traffic is a significant concern. The access and egress routes to the site lead directly onto Mole Road and any large vehicles would create dangerous situations for drivers as they attempt to turn into or out of the entrance. No traffic assessment has been submitted to address the impact of this.

This is a development in the Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills Character Area and would change the nature of the fields abutting The Coombes ancient woodland. An elevated arena would be detrimental to this valued and historic landscape. The addition of the double gates and removal of hedgerows to facilitate the new gates has already left a scar on the landscape and shows prior intent to develop the land before any planning application was submitted. The double gates are adequately wide for HGVs and it is concerning that such traffic may be considered suitable for a designated Green Route.

Sillett Equestrian would have been very aware of the need for planning approval before they changed the wooded area into a practise area and have deliberately tried to manipulate the planning process. The planning statement provided states that it is using the previous refusal of planning permission as a basis for this retrospective application of change of use.

It would appear that this application is misleading in its purpose – citing initially personal use but referencing compliance with CP11 for commercial enterprise. It is concerning that this retrospective planning application does not dispel any of the fundamental reasons for refusal cited in the officer's report on 201458.

On the above grounds, Arborfield & Newland Parish Council object to this planning application and would like to see the site reinstated to its former condition.

Ward Member(s)	No comments received
Neighbours	<p>Nine representations received from residents raising the following concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impact on rural character of the area. - Previous refusal on site means permission should not be given. - Ecological concerns - Harm to environment - Highway safety concerns due to increase in traffic - Lack of need for equestrian facility (Officer comment: There is no policy requirement to justify need.) - Removal of vegetation - Stables are not lawful by the passing of time - Impact on Valued Landscape - Inconsistent with previous decisions - Concerns about creation of new access (Officer comment: This is not proposed under this application and cannot influence its determination.) - Unclear whether the development would be personal or commercial. - Loss of woodland. - Impact on Bearwood Estate and The Coombes Local Wildlife Sites. - Impacts on PROWs, in particular ARBO9 along Ellis's Hill (Officer comment: This PROW would be unaffected by the proposals; no development is proposed in close proximity to it, nor are vehicle movements associated with it.)

APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site consists of a large area of agricultural land accessed via a long winding vehicular access from Sindlesham Road to the north-west. The land is surrounded by undulating fields and hills and enclosed by dense vegetation, some of which is protected by an area-wide Tree Protection Order (TPO-1825-2021).

To the south of the site are 3no. stable buildings and an informal parking area which according to historic aerial mapping have been in situ since at least 2018. From an operational development perspective, they are considered lawful by the passing of time (substantially complete at least four years prior to 24th April 2024), however their associated equestrian use is not.

The riding area is located immediately north-west of the 3no. stable buildings to the south. Further north-west is the new stable building proposed for regularisation under this application.

The site is also located within the designated Countryside, plus the Barkham and Bearwood valued landscape area. Bearwood College, a Grade II* National Historic Park and Garden, is located 150 metres to the east.

Proposal Description:

This application seeks retrospective approval for the change of use of land and 3no. buildings to equestrian, erection of 1no. stable building to the north-west and the creation of a riding arena with associated engineering works.

This application has undergone a reconsultation in May 2025 as it was discovered by the LPA that there were commercial elements to the proposals, despite the initial description submitted outlining that it was a private riding area. The applicant has clarified that they are Olympic Showjumping trainers who provide a full livery service on site for horse owners.

Operating hours are generally 07:00-18:00, with the exception of a few early morning departures from the site for international competitions. The site employs 4 people full time and 6 others part time.

Daily movements in and out of the site would be generally limited to employees entering and exiting the site at the start/end of the day. Delivery of supplies, hay/haylage/feed and muck removal is done weekly, as are Vet/farrier appointments. Occasionally clients attend the site to see their horses, this is limited to a handful of times a week.

The site does not provide DIY or half livery services, nor are there any intentions to run a riding school, and no interest in running/hosting any shows.

It should be noted that this application is a technical resubmission of application 201458 that was refused in October 2020. There are however substantial differences between the scales of the development and their location, namely:

- The only operational development proposed under this application is the riding area/menage and the new stable block. Application 201458 proposed substantially more operational development (indoor and outdoor riding areas, horse walker, HGV parking, 50 horseboxes, residential accommodation, clubhouse/bar etc).
- The scale of equestrian activities associated with application 201458 are much more substantial and intense than that currently proposed (training and riding schools, livery, clubhouse, grooms accommodation etc)
- The development now proposed is in a completely different location to the 201458 proposals, and no access onto Ellis's Hill is proposed.

Principle of Development:

Policy Context:

Local Plan Update (LPU):

The Council are 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. The Inspectors appointed to examine the LPU have now published notification of the examination hearing sessions, including the draft programme, guidance note and the Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) to be considered.

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 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 policies, meaning weight attracted to these policies is limited.

Core Strategy 2010:

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 exceptions are:

- 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 (MDDLP) 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.

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 states that planning policies and decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, including the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.

Paragraph 89 of the NPPF states 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:

Criterion 1 of CP11 requires development to contribute 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.

The proposed development involves a commercial equestrian livery. Equestrian uses are considered rurally appropriate and a form of sustainable rural enterprise that contributes and promote recreation in, and enjoyment of, the Countryside. Compliance with criterion 1 is therefore achieved.

Criterion 2 of CP11 requires development to not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings. In this instance, the 'original buildings' can reasonably be viewed as the stables to the south of the riding area proposed as prior to this, this area of land was undeveloped.

The riding area has a footprint of approximately 1300sqm (38 x 35 metres) which is of a standard size for professional riders; the Council are aware that the applicant has involvement in international riding events. Whilst sited a generous distance from the road, its scale is not considered excessive in the context of its surroundings and public viewpoints of its form would be very minimal due to its location in the landscape. The new stable building to the north-west of the riding area shares a

coherent relationship with the rest of the main development envelope and is acceptable from an encroachment perspective.

The commercial nature of the site would also mean an increase in vehicle movements to and from the site in this countryside location. Neither the Case Officer nor WBC Highways consider that the number of movements would be notable from a visual amenity or highway safety perspective; conditions will be imposed restricting certain equestrian activities to limit further vehicle movements.

Overall, the scale of the development is considered proportionate to its surroundings and compliance with Criterion 2 is achieved.

Exception 3 requires development to be within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of replacement buildings would bring about environmental improvement. The proposals involves predominantly new structures (except for the stables that have been in situ since 2018) so does not technically qualify to be assessed under this criterion.

The wording of Policy CP11 requires compliance with criteria 1, 2 and 3. Compliance with criterions 1 and 2 are noted and criterion 3 does not apply to the proposal. The proposed development is therefore acceptable in principle.

Further to this, the NPPF requires planning policies and decisions should enable the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, which the proposals would facilitate. Whilst paragraph 89 states 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, a Countryside setting for an equestrian use is extremely common/appropriate.

Character of the Area/Landscape Character:

Policy Context:

With regards to well-designed places, paragraph 135 of the NPPF states planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);

Paragraph 187(a) of the NPPF requires planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes.

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).

Policy CC03 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan required development proposals to provide new or protect and enhance the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks, including the need to mitigate potential impacts of new development. The Countryside is identified as one of the Borough's Green Infrastructure networks.

Policy TB21 of the Managing Development Delivery Local Plan states that proposals must demonstrate how they have addressed the requirements of the Council's Landscape Character Assessment, including the landscape quality; landscape strategy; landscape sensitivity and key issues. Proposals should retain or enhance the condition, character and features that contribute to the landscape.

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;

Site Context

The application site is within the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape, which is wholly within the landscape character area (LCA) L1 known as 'Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills'. The valued landscape takes and its demonstrable physical attributes which would take this site beyond "*mere countryside*" and should be considered as more important than Countryside falling outside of this Valued Landscape designation as stated in the in the Valued Landscapes Topic Paper (2020).

The valuable landscape characteristics of the LCA include;

- Elevated wooded hills
- Varied topography which forms an intricate range of landscape spaces and backdrops
- Large expanses of mature mixed woodland
- The distinctive mosaic of interconnecting mixed woodland interspersed with small scale pastoral fields
- Peaceful secluded character
- Contrast of enclosed views within woodland and long views

The landscape condition is considered to be good. The main landscape strategy for the LCA is to conserve and enhance the existing wooded and parkland character of the landscape and its biodiversity. In terms of development, the aim is to conserve the unsettled character of the area.

Assessment:

As outlined above, equestrian uses are considered rurally appropriate. Therefore, in principle, the use would not be detrimental or out of keeping with the rural visual amenities of the surrounding locale, nor the Valued Landscape.

Turning to the operational development, the riding area has a notable footprint, but this is to be expected due to the requirements of such a use. The riding area is slightly raised in level from the adjacent access track but otherwise it lies low in the landscape, with minimal public views available of its form. Some vegetation has been removed from the site to facilitate the construction of the riding area, but these elements were unprotected and was removed without the need for permission.

Spatially, the riding area does cause some harm to the landscape as it technically disrupts the unsettled character of the area through the introduction of development onto greenfield land. That said, the visual harm would be negligible in the wider context of the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape and can be mitigated/enhanced through landscaping provision which will be secured via condition. Furthermore, its appearance in the landscape would not be alien as such facilities are prevalent across Wokingham Borough's rural landscape.

The use of the barns to the south raises no visual concerns as they have been in situ since 2018. Similarly, as outlined above, the new barn building to the north-west of the riding area shares a close and coherent spatial relationship with the riding area and has a modest single storey form that is well screened by dense vegetation from any public viewpoint.

Vehicle movements associated with the site are not substantial and third party visits (not employees) are irregular. As they would be associated with a rurally appropriate business and subject to restrictions in terms of use, this change in character would have a negligible impact on the wider countryside.

Turning to the Valued Landscape, whilst it is acknowledged that the development does not technically enhance the existing rural character by reason of the introduction of additional built development in the Countryside, it is not considered that the development would cause unacceptable harm to the landscape subject to conditions. The development is also considered to adequately meet the aims of the Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills LCA, insofar that the unsettled character of the area would be sufficiently conserved.

No impacts are also anticipated on the Bearwood College National Historic Park and Garden; the site is sufficiently distanced away from its boundary and the scale of the development is modest as to not dominate its setting.

To preserve the rural character of the surrounding Countryside, conditions will be imposed for additional landscaping provision, plus restrictions on lighting, working

hours and a limit on the equestrian operations permitted on site (commercial livery only).

Neighbouring Amenity:

Neighbouring properties are sited a sufficient distance away from the application site to ensure no adverse neighbouring amenity concerns.

It is acknowledged that there would be a handful (approximately six) sets of vehicle movements between the hours of 04:00-07:00 each year for international competitions; the house known as Newlands Lodge lies adjacent to the application site's vehicular access. The irregularity of these movements would not adversely harm the occupiers of Newlands Lodge, subject to a condition limiting such movements.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

WBC Highways have reviewed the vehicle movements associated with the livery use and do not anticipate any impacts on highway safety.

As vehicle movements would be limited to taking horses off site for events and health purposes and there are no commercial elements proposed, WBC Highways have no objections on highway safety grounds; there is sufficient space within the site to park private vehicles and horse boxes, and the existing access is considered sufficient to serve the use.

Subject to a Delivery and Servicing Plan, WBC Highways raise no objections to the proposals.

Flooding and Drainage:

The site is located within Flood Zone 1 and at low risk of surface water flooding. The applicant has clarified that underneath the riding surface, there are drains and crushed stone that filters the water to the pond of the original house that burnt down in the 1980s.

WBC Drainage have no objections to this approach due to the low risk of flooding in the area.

Arboricultural Matters:

WBC Landscape and Trees have reviewed the Arboricultural Survey submitted (Land Arb Solutions, LAS_939, 17th July 2025).

The riding arena does conflict with an Oak (T13) which is protected by TPO 1825/2021 a woodland TPO. The incursion into the RPA of T13 is within the BS5837:2012 tolerance of 20% which is acceptable.

Overall, upon review of the riding area's construction, Landscape and Trees do not anticipate any long-term harm to the trees or vegetation on site. Subject to an appropriate landscaping scheme, no objections are raised.

Ecology:

There are no concerns about potential impacts onto Great Crested Newts as the site

is located within a White Risk Zone, the lowest risk zone possible.

Similarly, the development would have no notable impact on bats as no lighting is proposed, nor are any existing buildings within roosting potential proposed to be demolished/ altered.

The presence of the Bearwood Estate and The Coombes Local Wildlife Sites to the east of the application site are acknowledged. The site falls outside of their consultation zones and are considered a sufficient distance away from them to avoid any harm to the protected species that inhabit them.

Conclusion:

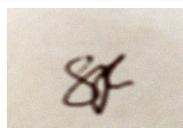
Overall, the proposed development complies with the development plan. Subject to appropriate conditions, this application is recommended for approval.

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:	8 May 2025
Earliest date for decision:	3 May 2025

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	17.10.25